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The Social Production of Unequal Development: A Structuration Analysis of Tourism in Mandalika Special Economic Zone

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Abstract

Tourism-led development can expand employment and business opportunities while simultaneously producing uneven social outcomes. This study examined how institutional rules, access to resources, and community agency shaped differentiated development outcomes in Kuta Village within Indonesia's Mandalika Special Economic Zone. An interpretive qualitative single-case study was conducted with ten participants. Community members' and business actors' perspectives were collected through semi-structured interviews, while institutional and local elite perspectives were obtained through an online qualitative questionnaire containing open-ended questions. Nonparticipant observation and documentary materials provided additional contextual evidence. Data were analyzed using abductive thematic analysis informed by Giddens' Structuration Theory. The findings showed that tourism development expanded employment, entrepreneurship, market access, and opportunities for livelihood adaptation; however, participants differed in their capacity to convert these opportunities into secure and sustained benefits. Unequal access to land, capital, commercial space, markets, strategic information, institutional networks, and decision-making authority contributed to differentiated economic outcomes and varying levels of community influence. Residents exercised agency through entrepreneurship, trading, skills development, and livelihood adaptation, while participation was stronger in economic activities and program implementation than in strategic decision-making processes. The findings indicate that more equitable development requires broader access to resources, substantive participation in decision-making, and differentiated capacity-building strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Global tourism has returned to a trajectory of sustained growth, with international tourist arrivals reaching an estimated 1.52 billion in 2025—approximately 60 million more than in the previous year—and international tourism receipts rising to a record USD 1.9 trillion. This expansion reflects a broader development paradigm in which tourism is increasingly positioned as a catalyst for regional economic transformation, particularly in developing economies seeking to attract investment, generate employment, and diversify local livelihoods. However, the relationship between tourism growth and equitable development remains contested. A growing body of scholarship demonstrates that tourism expansion can coexist with insecure employment, unequal access to productive assets, changes in land control, and limited community influence over development decisions. The central sociological issue is therefore not merely whether tourism creates opportunities, but how differently positioned actors gain access to and convert those opportunities into secure and sustained benefits.

This issue is particularly relevant to Kuta Village in Central Lombok, which is located within the Mandalika Special Economic Zone. Rapid tourism development associated with Mandalika has transformed the local economic and social landscape through infrastructure development, the expansion of accommodation and service industries, international events, new employment opportunities, and the increasing commercial value of land. Existing research has documented several positive outcomes, including employment growth, entrepreneurship, improved tourism facilities, greater destination visibility, and expanded economic activity (Pattaray et al., 2025; Yuli et al., 2023; Zitri et al., 2025). At the same time, studies have identified modest community incomes and limited public facilities, uneven village characteristics, restricted access to capital, cultural transformation, land-use changes, barriers to livelihood adaptation following relocation, unequal access to tourism benefits, and persistent limitations on community influence within tourism governance (Chaniago et al., 2024; Imran & Wijaya, 2025; Putra Kumara Dewa et al., 2024; Rani et al., 2024; Sayuti et al., 2023; Suleman et al., 2023). Mandalika therefore presents a development paradox in which rapid economic transformation and expanding opportunities coexist with differentiated capacities among local residents to benefit from these changes.

This local paradox reflects a broader problem in Indonesian development. Improvements in poverty reduction and other aggregate development indicators do not necessarily eliminate structural and institutional inequalities. Economic progress may coexist with livelihood insecurity, unequal opportunities, limited control over productive assets, and differentiated access to institutional representation (Salsabila, 2026). Kuta Village provides a local setting in which this broader paradox can be examined through everyday livelihood practices, resource relations, and different forms of participation in tourism development.

Research on tourism-led development has approached this issue from several perspectives. Pro-poor tourism scholarship shifted attention from aggregate sectoral growth toward the capacity of tourism to generate economic benefits for poorer communities through employment, microenterprises (Gascon, 2015), market access, and participation in local supply chains (Ashley et al., 2001; Ashley & Roe, 2002)). Nevertheless, the extent to which tourism contributes to poverty reduction and inclusive growth is shaped by ownership structures, employment conditions, local economic linkages, market access, and the position of local actors within tourism supply chains (Spenceley and Meyer 2012; Hampton, Jeyacheya, and Long 2018). Tourism opportunities therefore do not operate within a socially neutral environment. Actors enter the tourism economy with different assets, capabilities, market connections, and institutional positions.

Community empowerment scholarship extends this discussion by arguing that tourism development should expand not only economic benefits but also communities' capacity to shape the development process. (Scheyvens, 1999) distinguishes economic empowerment from psychological, social, and political empowerment. This distinction indicates that increased employment or income alone is insufficient to establish that a community has become empowered. (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018) further argue that inclusive tourism depends not merely on the presence of marginalized groups in tourism activities but also on the quality of their participation, the benefits they receive, and their capacity to influence the conditions of development. Empirical research in Indonesia nevertheless indicates that participation in tourism does not automatically produce substantial improvements in household welfare when productive assets, business capacities, market access, and livelihood resources remain limited (Veriasa et al., 2023). The availability of tourism opportunities and the capacity to convert them into sustained benefits are therefore analytically distinct.

A relational perspective further suggests that exclusion is not the only mechanism through which development can produce disadvantage. Through the concept of adverse incorporation, du Toit (2004) argues that poorer and marginalized actors may be incorporated into markets and development institutions while remaining positioned within insecure or disadvantageous relations. Hickey and du Toit (2007) similarly show that economic and institutional incorporation may reproduce vulnerability when participation is not accompanied by secure assets, bargaining power, or meaningful influence. This perspective is particularly relevant to tourism development because employment, trading, program participation, and market involvement do not necessarily provide actors with equivalent control over the material and institutional conditions of their participation.

A related body of research focuses on participation and tourism governance. (Jamal & Getz, 1995) distinguish collaboration involving joint decision-making from forms of participation that primarily incorporate stakeholders into the implementation of decisions already formulated by more powerful actors. (Tosun, 2000) similarly identifies institutional, operational, and structural constraints affecting community participation in tourism development. More recently, (Reindrawati, 2023) shows that community participation in tourism planning in developing countries can be constrained by unequal access to information, limited institutional capacity, weak deliberative mechanisms, and unequal decision-making power. Participation must therefore be examined not simply by asking whether communities are involved, but by identifying the forms of involvement available to different actors and the degree of influence those forms provide.

Political economy approaches place these inequalities within broader relationships among capital, the state, land ownership, and tourism development. Hall (2007) questions the assumption that tourism growth automatically produces proportional benefits for poorer communities. Bianchi (2018) conceptualizes tourism as an arena shaped by capital mobility, state intervention, ownership, and class relations. (Devine & Ojeda, 2017) further demonstrate how tourism expansion can transform control over land and productive space. These perspectives establish that tourism opportunities are produced within unequal structures. However, further explanation is needed regarding how differently positioned local actors mobilize resources, interpret institutional arrangements, and exercise agency within those structures.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory to explain the mechanisms through which unequal development is produced and potentially reproduced within a tourism Special Economic Zone (SEZ). (Giddens, 1984) conceptualizes structure as rules and resources that constitute both the medium and the outcome of social practices, distinguishing allocative resources, which concern control over material objects and productive capacities, from authoritative resources, which concern the organization and coordination of social relations. Applying this framework shifts the analytical focus from asking whether tourism generates benefits to examining how institutional rules, differentiated access to resources, and community agency shape actors' capacities to convert tourism opportunities into livelihood security and institutional influence. This approach enables an analysis of how repeated practices undertaken from unequal positions may contribute to the reproduction of differentiated outcomes, a mechanism that remains underexplored in existing scholarship on Mandalika.

Other studies of Mandalika have highlighted the unequal institutional and livelihood conditions surrounding these opportunities. Irwan et al. (2022) distinguish community involvement from substantive control over development decisions. Rasyid and Darumurti (2022) identify complex relationships among actors, land-related issues, and collaborative governance. Chaniago et al. (2024) situate local communities within broader relationships between state intervention and capitalist development. Rani et al. (2024) show that vulnerable coastal communities affected by relocation may experience difficulties in adapting their livelihoods despite the availability of new economic opportunities. (Imran & Wijaya, 2025) also identify persistent asymmetries between institutional actors and community members in tourism governance. These studies demonstrate that tourism benefits, livelihood constraints, land-related changes, and unequal participation in Mandalika have already received scholarly attention.

The research gap therefore does not rest on the claim that tourism inequality, vulnerable communities, or community participation in Mandalika have never been studied. Rather, the unresolved issue concerns how these dimensions are interconnected. Previous studies have frequently examined economic benefits, community readiness, land-use changes, livelihood adaptation, participation, or governance as discrete outcomes or sectoral issues. Less attention has been given to the social mechanisms linking institutional rules, differentiated access to material and organizational resources, and community agency within the same village. Consequently, it remains insufficiently explained why actors exposed to the same tourism-led transformation experience different levels of livelihood security, market access, program participation, and decision-making influence.

This gap also raises a problem concerning the treatment of "the local community" as a relatively homogeneous category. Local actors may live within the same village and encounter the same tourism development, but they do not occupy equivalent material and institutional positions. Property owners, established business actors, informal traders, workers, institutional actors, women engaged in small-scale enterprises, and older residents may participate in the tourism economy through different resources and under different conditions. Explaining differentiated outcomes therefore requires attention to the relationship between the structural conditions of tourism development and the situated practices through which actors engage with those conditions.

This study addresses the gap through Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory. Giddens (1984) conceptualizes structure as rules and resources that constitute both the medium and the outcome of social practices. Structures do not simply constrain actors from outside; they also provide the conditions upon which actors draw when pursuing strategies, organizing activities, adapting livelihoods, and potentially maintaining or modifying existing arrangements. The relationship between structure and agency is therefore recursive: actors act through existing rules and resources, while their repeated practices may contribute to the continuation or modification of those structural conditions.

Giddens distinguishes allocative resources, associated with control over material objects and productive capacities, from authoritative resources, associated with the organization and coordination of social relations. This distinction is relevant to tourism-led development because actors' economic participation depends on access to land, capital, productive assets, commercial space, and markets. These material conditions can be examined as allocative resources. Strategic information and institutional networks can function as authoritative resources when they enable actors to coordinate programs, mobilize other actors, organize participation, or influence decisions. Formal and informal arrangements governing land use, commercial space, assistance, program access, consultation, and market participation can be examined as rules that structure local practices.

Skills and language competence are better understood as capabilities that affect actors' capacity to mobilize available resources rather than as allocative resources in themselves. Agency, in this perspective, refers to actors' capacity to act within structural conditions, but it does not imply that all actors possess equivalent capacities to achieve their intended outcomes. Community members may exercise agency by establishing businesses, entering tourism employment, supplying tourism enterprises, acquiring new skills, maintaining informal trading activities, using social networks, or adapting existing livelihoods to new markets. The consequences of these practices may nevertheless differ according to the allocative and authoritative resources available to them.

Applying Structuration Theory therefore shifts the analytical focus from asking whether tourism produces benefits to examining how institutional rules, differentiated access to resources, and community agency shape actors' capacities to convert tourism opportunities into livelihood security and institutional influence. Repeated practices undertaken from unequal positions may contribute to the reproduction of differentiated outcomes. However, because the present research employed a cross-sectional design, it identified mechanisms through which inequality may be reproduced rather than claiming to have directly observed its long-term reproduction.

METHOD

This study employed an interpretive qualitative single-case study design to examine how tourism-led development in Kuta Village, Pujut District, Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, produced differentiated social outcomes through the interaction of institutional arrangements, resource distribution, and community agency. Kuta Village was selected because it had undergone rapid economic, spatial, and social transformation following the development of the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, making it an information-rich setting for examining differences in local actors' capacities to access tourism-related opportunities.

The study involved ten participants selected through purposive and opportunity-based sampling, including village government and local elite actors, tourism business actors, local community members, and participants from vulnerable groups. Data were collected between May and June 2026 through semi-structured interviews and an online qualitative questionnaire, supported by nonparticipant observation and documentary materials. Interviews were conducted primarily in Indonesian, with Sasak used when preferred by participants. Relevant quotations were subsequently translated into English while preserving their substantive meaning.

Data were analyzed using an abductive thematic approach that moved iteratively between the empirical material and Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory. The data were coded, compared across participants, and organized into broader categories and themes. Contradictory accounts were retained through negative-case analysis and interpreted as evidence of differentiated structural positions rather than as mere inconsistencies. The resulting themes were subsequently interpreted through the concepts of allocative resources, authoritative resources, rules, and agency.

Credibility was strengthened through cross-participant comparison, triangulation of data sources, repeated verification of interpretations against the original records, and the retention of contradictory evidence. Dependability and confirmability were supported through systematic documentation of research instruments, interview records, field notes, participant codes, and analytical categories. Transferability was addressed through contextual description of Kuta Village without claiming representativeness beyond the case. Informed consent was obtained before data collection, and participant identities were anonymized using participant codes. The study focused on explaining social mechanisms within the Kuta case rather than making statistical or population-level generalizations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tourism-led Development and the Uneven Transformation of Kuta Village

Tourism-led development has substantially transformed the economic, spatial, and social organisation of Kuta Village. The main finding is that this transformation has simultaneously expanded economic opportunities and altered the material conditions under which local residents sustain their livelihoods. Tourism growth therefore cannot be understood solely as an increase in employment, businesses, or visitor activity, because the same process has also increased land values, transformed the use of village space, and created new pressures on household economic security.

This transformation was clearly described by local community participants. LC1 recognised the rapid physical development associated with Mandalika, but simultaneously observed a decline in the amount of land retained by local residents:

> *"Development has progressed rapidly, but sometimes our people's land is depleted. Some of it is leased and some is sold. Many Kuta residents eventually move outside the village." (Interview with LC1, May 2026).*

The account indicates that tourism development has changed the meaning of land within the local economy. Land that previously functioned primarily as residential or livelihood space increasingly became a commercially valuable asset. The conversion, lease, and sale of land could provide immediate economic returns while potentially reducing residents' longer-term control over productive space.

This finding was reinforced by LC2, who connected the expansion of hotels and cafés with changes in residential space:

“Income has increased, and there are many hotels and cafés now. But residents have also been displaced, and community land has been leased and turned into buildings.” (Interview with LC2, May 2026).

This quotation represents LC2’s reported experience and should not be read as evidence of the prevalence of displacement across the village. Considered alongside LC1’s account, it nevertheless shows how some participants connected tourism expansion with declining household control over residential and livelihood space.

From the business perspective, BA1 described the expansionary dimension of tourism. The development of Mandalika and the arrival of major events generated larger consumer markets and additional labour demand:

“Mandalika is very beneficial because it brings both domestic and international visitors. This increases the number of consumers and creates employment, especially for daily workers when there is an event.” (Interview with BA1, May 2026).

However, the experience of BA2 demonstrates that larger visitor numbers did not necessarily generate stable income for every business:

“Even when it is crowded like now, sometimes we do not earn much. The income depends on luck and is not always stable.” (Interview with BA2, May 2026).

The open-ended questionnaire response from LE1 provided a broadly convergent institutional and local elite perspective. LE1 identified increasing employment, household income, and new businesses as major outcomes of tourism development, while simultaneously acknowledging rising land prices and living costs. This account indicates that tourism-generated growth has been accompanied by new economic pressures rather than constituting an unambiguously positive transformation.

Non-participant observations of tourism business areas, informal trading locations, and residential-commercial spaces provided spatial context for these accounts. They documented the coexistence of established tourism premises and small-scale livelihood activities operating under different spatial and material conditions. The observations were used to contextualise participants’ experiences rather than to estimate the prevalence of particular outcomes.

The findings both support and qualify earlier studies of Mandalika. (Yuli et al., 2023) reported improvements in local economic activity and community welfare, while Pattaray, Satiadji, and Lantang (2025) identified employment, entrepreneurship, and community participation as important outcomes of the Mandalika tourism economy. The present study does not contradict those findings. Instead, it demonstrates that aggregate growth and individual livelihood security do not necessarily move in the same direction. Suleman et al. (2023) similarly found that economic transformation in Mandalika occurs alongside changes in local social and cultural practices.

From the perspective of Structuration Theory, the coexistence of opportunity and pressure reflects what Giddens (1984) describes as the duality of structure. Tourism infrastructure, investment, markets, and institutional programmes constitute structural conditions that enable residents to work, establish businesses, supply tourism industries, and develop new livelihood strategies. At the same time, the same transformation restructures land values, business requirements, and access to space in ways that constrain other actors.

Structure therefore does not operate simply as either an opportunity or a barrier. Its consequences depend on the social and resource position from which actors encounter it.

In summary, participants described substantial economic and spatial transformation in Kuta, but they experienced its consequences from different social and resource positions. Growth expanded the structure of economic opportunity without ensuring that the participants possessed equivalent capacities to convert those opportunities into secure and sustainable livelihoods.

Unequal Access to Allocative Resources and Tourism Benefits

The second major finding is that unequal tourism outcomes are strongly associated with differences in access to allocative resources. Residents did not enter the expanding tourism economy from equivalent material positions. Ownership of land, capital, business premises, strategic locations, and access to markets shaped the capacity of different actors to transform tourism opportunities into sustained economic benefits.

This mechanism is particularly visible in the experience of VG2. Although tourism created new business opportunities, she observed that benefits were more easily captured by actors who already possessed productive assets:

> *"Those who really feel the benefits are mostly certain groups, especially people who already have capital and businesses." (Interview with VG2, May 2026).*

This observation suggests that tourism did not create economic differentiation entirely from the beginning. Rather, tourism growth interacted with pre-existing differences in resource ownership. Actors who already possessed capital, property, or businesses were better positioned to convert growing visitor demand into income accumulation.

The experience of LC2 illustrates the opposite position. Despite remaining economically active, her access to tourism depended on insecure trading space:

> *"I still want to trade. Even if it is only like this, the important thing is that I can continue trading." (Interview with LC2, May 2026).*

Her persistence demonstrates economic participation, but also reveals its precarious material foundation. Having access to a tourism market is not equivalent to controlling the conditions under which participation takes place. A trader without permanent space remains structurally different from an actor who owns a building, land, accommodation facility, or established commercial outlet.

LC1 further illustrated the importance of land as a differentiating resource. The participant reported that some families had leased or sold land and subsequently moved to other locations. This account suggests that tourism-generated increases in land value could create immediate financial opportunities while potentially altering some households' longer-term control over productive and residential space.

Market access provides another example. BA2 explained that tourists were frequently directed towards larger souvenir businesses because of commission arrangements with guides:

> *"Guides usually take tourists to larger souvenir shops because they receive commissions there. If tourists shop at our place, the guides receive no commission." (Interview with BA2, May 2026).*

This evidence shows that the ability to sell tourism-related products does not automatically translate into equal market access. Customer flows are partly organised through commercial relationships between tour guides and souvenir businesses, particularly where commission arrangements influence purchasing destinations. Businesses embedded in these relationships are consequently better positioned to attract customers and generate sales, whereas smaller traders outside such networks face more limited opportunities. The resulting income differences therefore reflect not only individual entrepreneurial capacity but also unequal access to the relational and institutional resources through which tourism markets are organised.

BA1 provided an additional perspective from the formal business sector. The participant acknowledged that some workers and suppliers continued to be recruited from outside Kuta when local suppliers could not fulfil requirements relating to quality, price, readiness, or continuity of supply. This account demonstrates that access to the tourism value chain depends not only on the existence of local demand but also on the capacity to meet market standards.

LE1's open-ended questionnaire response provided a convergent institutional and local elite perspective. LE1 identified capital and assets as among the strongest determinants of access to tourism resources and noted that residents with fewer networks or those located farther from the tourism centre had greater difficulty accessing development benefits. The convergence across VG2, LC2, BA2, BA1, and LE1 indicates that unequal access was described from several materially different positions rather than appearing only in one participant's account.

Table 2. Differentiated Conditions Shaping Access to Tourism Opportunities

Resource/ condition	Enabling effect	Constraining mechanism	Empirical evidence
Land and property	Rental income, accommodation, business location	Sale, lease, displacement, loss of long-term control	LE-1, LC-1, LC-2, VG-2
Financial capital	Establishing and expanding businesses	Limited scale and vulnerability among actors without capital	LE-1, VG-2
Commercial space	Enables trading and stable customer access	Temporary or insecure trading location	LC-2, BA-2
Market networks	Customer flows, supplier access, tourism connections	Commission systems and unequal customer routing	BA-1, BA-2
Skills and language	Access to formal tourism work and foreign customers	Exclusion from higher-value opportunities	BA-1, VG-1
Institutional programmes	Training, volunteering, bazaars and business support	Uneven access to information and participation	LC-1, LC-3, LC-4

Source: Primary Data, 2026

This finding extends previous research. Veriasa et al. (2023) demonstrate that participation in community-based tourism does not necessarily translate into substantial household welfare improvements when productive assets and livelihood diversification remain limited. In Mandalika, Rani et al. (2024) identify prolonged relocation, limited compensation, weak livelihood restoration, and a mismatch between available employment and the needs of vulnerable coastal groups as barriers to livelihood adaptation. (Putri et al.,

2026) likewise identify a dual outcome of agricultural land conversion in Kuta: expanded access to non-agricultural employment and business opportunities alongside livelihood change and risks to social and environmental sustainability. Chaniago et al. (2024) similarly show that state-led tourism development can expand infrastructure and economic activity while positioning local communities within unequal institutional and economic relations. Gascón (2015) and Devine and Ojeda (2017) further show that tourism development can reshape control over land, productive space, and local livelihoods. Meanwhile, Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) emphasise that inclusive tourism must be evaluated not simply through participation but through access, ownership, opportunity, and the position of marginalised groups.

In Giddens' framework, land, capital, property, infrastructure, business equipment, and commercial space constitute allocative resources, meaning material resources that provide capacities for action (Giddens 1984). The Kuta case demonstrates why unequal distribution of allocative resources matters sociologically. Tourism opportunities may formally be available to many residents, but actors with stronger resource positions possess greater capacity to make use of those opportunities. Repeated practices of property ownership, investment, market exchange, land leasing, and informal trading may consequently contribute to the reproduction of the differences from which actors initially entered the tourism economy.

This also qualifies individualistic explanations of economic success. Motivation and entrepreneurship matter, but their consequences are conditioned by actors' capacities to mobilise resources. Across the dataset, capital, assets, commercial space, market access, skills, language competence, and networks operated as conditions through which tourism opportunities were filtered.

Thus, the uneven distribution of tourism benefits in Kuta is better understood as unequal capacity to convert opportunity rather than unequal availability of opportunity alone. Tourism expands economic possibilities, but allocative resources determine how effectively different actors can transform those possibilities into durable economic benefits.

Authoritative Resources: Participation without Equivalent Decision-making Power

The third finding concerns the character of community participation. Local residents were not absent from tourism development. They participated as workers, traders, suppliers, trainees, volunteers, entrepreneurs, and cultural actors. However, the evidence shows that participation was considerably stronger at the level of programme implementation and economic involvement than at the level of strategic decision-making.

The clearest account comes from LC2, who distinguished sharply between being affected by decisions and participating in their formulation:

> *"There has never been deliberation. We simply receive what has already been decided." (Interview with LC2, May 2026).*

The same participant described her position as an informal trader in similarly constrained terms:

> *"The government determines most things. We are simply grateful that we are still allowed to trade." (Interview with LC2, May 2026).*

These statements indicate that residents can be incorporated into tourism economies while retaining little authority over the rules governing that participation.

LC3 reported an even lower level of institutional involvement:

“I have never been involved in programmes organised by either the village government or ITDC.” (Interview with LC3, May 2026).

Evidence from participants occupying vulnerable positions reinforces this interpretation. VG2 described the involvement of women and older residents as largely implementative:

“Women and older people are not involved in decision-making. We are only followers, carrying out programmes and policies that have already been made.” (Interview with VG2, May 2026).

VG1 similarly stated that older people were more frequently present as participants than as actors influencing decisions. These accounts suggest that participation in activities did not automatically translate into political or institutional influence. Because VG1 and VG2 represented particular vulnerable positions, their accounts are treated as illustrations of differentiated experience rather than as representative of all women or older residents in Kuta.

However, cross-participant comparison also revealed a significant divergent case. LC4 reported having been invited to discussions and having received information before certain activities:

“We have been invited to discussions, and information was given from the beginning.” (Interview with LC4, May 2026).

Similarly, LC1 described multiple channels of local participation:

“Whenever volunteers are needed, local residents are prioritised. If people are interested in culinary businesses, they can be placed in the Mandalika bazaar so that they can work and earn income.” (Interview with LC1, May 2026).

These accounts prevent an overly categorical conclusion that local communities were completely excluded from tourism governance. The empirical pattern is more accurately described as differentiated participation.

The open-ended questionnaire responses from the institutional and local elite participants reflected the same ambiguity. LE1 stated that community members commonly operated within existing rules rather than determining them and identified government institutions and ITDC as actors possessing stronger decision-making authority. LE2 recognised channels through which community criticism and input could be expressed but also acknowledged that institutional responses were not always consistent. These accounts suggest that government institutions, ITDC, investors, and institutional elites possessed stronger capacities to organise programmes, coordinate actors, and shape decisions, while community participants were more frequently positioned as implementers.

The evidence therefore indicates that community participation in tourism development occurred at different levels of influence. For some residents, participation was limited to economic involvement through employment, trading, or other livelihood activities. Others gained access to tourism programmes as volunteers, trainees, or programme participants. A smaller number reported being invited to consultations or receiving information before activities were implemented. However, opportunities to exercise substantive influence over strategic decisions remained more limited and uneven. Participation in Kuta should therefore be understood as a differentiated process in which greater involvement in tourism activities did not necessarily correspond with greater authority in decision-making. In this sense, increasing participation did not automatically imply a redistribution of authoritative resources.

This finding is consistent with Jamal and Getz (1995), who argue that collaboration involves joint decision-making rather than merely participation in activities determined by stronger institutional actors. Tosun (2000) similarly identifies institutional and political limitations that frequently restrict substantive community participation in tourism development in developing countries. Reindrawati (2023) further demonstrates how information asymmetries, institutional capacity, and unequal deliberative power constrain meaningful participation. More specifically in Mandalika, Imran and Wijaya (2025) identify persistent problems of top-down governance and limited community influence.

From Giddens' perspective, these differences concern the distribution of authoritative resources, namely capacities through which actors organise social relations and influence the actions of others (Giddens 1984). Government agencies and tourism institutions possess authority to formulate programmes, organise infrastructure, regulate spaces, and coordinate actors. Strategic information and institutional networks function as authoritative resources when they enable actors to mobilise participants, coordinate programmes, or shape decisions. Community participants possess agency but do not necessarily possess equivalent authoritative resources. Participation can therefore occur without redistributing the capacity to determine the rules of participation.

This distinction is crucial because it changes how empowerment is evaluated. A village can exhibit high levels of economic participation while maintaining relatively unequal distributions of institutional authority.

The central conclusion of this subsection is therefore that Kuta is characterised neither by complete community exclusion nor by full participatory empowerment. Instead, tourism development has generated partial incorporation: residents are substantially integrated into tourism activities, but their influence over the institutional rules and strategic decisions governing those activities remains differentiated and comparatively limited.

Adaptive Agency and Unequal Capacities to Benefit

The fourth finding is that unequal structures did not eliminate local agency. Community members actively adapted to tourism transformation through entrepreneurship, livelihood diversification, learning, informal negotiation, and the strategic use of available resources. However, the effectiveness of these adaptive practices differed according to actors' initial resource positions.

LC2 provides one of the clearest examples of this adaptive capacity. Despite relocation, limited facilities, and uncertainty over trading space, she continued to maintain her livelihood:

> *"I still want to trade. The important thing is that I can continue trading." (Interview with LC2, May 2026).*

Her action should not simply be interpreted as passive acceptance. Continuing to trade represents a deliberate livelihood strategy under constrained conditions. At the same time, her agency does not eliminate the structural insecurity of the trading space.

LC1 described another form of adaptation through the integration of older livelihoods into new tourism markets:

"Residents who work as fishers can supply fish to restaurants. Local people can also supply young coconuts. In that way there are mutual benefits." (Interview with LC1, May 2026).

Rather than completely abandoning existing livelihoods, some residents developed hybrid strategies that connected fishing, agriculture, trading, and tourism demand.

LC4 emphasised learning and capacity development:

"ITDC became the leading actor in providing training. After the circuit was built, it became much more active in improving local people's capacities and skills." (Interview with LC4, May 2026).

The research therefore contains clear evidence that residents responded actively to structural transformation rather than functioning merely as passive recipients of development.

The experience of VG2 adds another dimension. Increased tourism demand created opportunities for household-based businesses such as accommodation and laundry. Such businesses allowed women to participate economically by mobilising existing household assets. VG1 similarly observed that women were active in food, souvenir, and other tourism-related businesses.

However, the same participants also identified limits to agency. VG2 associated her experience as a woman in small-scale enterprise with insufficient capital and business capacity, while VG1 identified language competence and physical capacity as obstacles affecting older residents' access to particular opportunities. These accounts illustrate how economic involvement may occur without equivalent political inclusion and how age-related conditions may restrict access to tourism labour markets and decision-making. They do not establish the prevalence of these experiences among all women or older residents in Kuta.

The business perspective provides an important competing explanation. BA1 initially attributed difficulty in obtaining tourism employment partly to individual unwillingness or laziness. Yet the same participant subsequently identified lack of skills and English-language competence as barriers and explained that some workers and suppliers were sourced from outside Kuta when local productive capacities did not meet business requirements. This account is consistent with (Jumrah & Imran, 2024), who found that hawkers in Mandalika experienced difficulties communicating with foreign tourists and required context-specific English conversation skills.

This account introduces an individualistic interpretation of unequal outcomes, but BA1's own subsequent explanation also identified structural and capability-related barriers. When compared with the wider dataset, individual effort appeared to operate within differentiated conditions of skills, language competence, capital, land, location, physical capacity, networks, and institutional access.

LE1's open-ended questionnaire response provided a convergent institutional perspective by identifying capital, assets, skills, and networks as factors differentiating residents' access to tourism opportunities. Unequal outcomes therefore cannot be adequately explained through motivation alone.

These findings are consistent with Pattaray, Satiadji, and Lantang (2025), who emphasise technical competence, soft skills, leadership, and capacity development in Mandalika. (Rahmat et al., 2023) similarly identify creativity and innovation as important elements in rural transformation. The Kuta case, however, adds an important qualification: creativity and skills do not operate independently from material and institutional resources.

Research concerning empowerment provides a similar caution. Scheyvens (1999) distinguishes economic empowerment from broader social and political empowerment. The accounts of VG1 and VG2 illustrate this distinction: economic or community involvement did not necessarily provide equivalent influence in decision-making, while age, physical capacity, language competence, and capital shaped the range of opportunities that could be pursued.

This finding is particularly relevant to Giddens' concept of agency. Agency refers to actors' capacity to act otherwise, but it does not imply equal capacity to produce desired consequences (Giddens 1984). Actors continuously monitor their conditions, draw upon practical knowledge, and adjust their strategies. Skills and language competence can support this practical capacity, but they are not allocative resources in the same sense as land, capital, buildings, or equipment. The consequences of agency depend on how actors mobilise their capabilities alongside available allocative and authoritative resources. The critical analytical issue is therefore not whether community participants possess agency, but whose agency becomes consequential and under what structural conditions.

In summary, the participants demonstrated adaptive agency through trading, entrepreneurship, livelihood diversification, supply-chain participation, and learning. Yet agency did not dissolve structural inequality. Unequal access to allocative and authoritative resources conditioned the range of strategies available to different actors and the extent to which those strategies could generate secure and sustainable outcomes.

Mechanisms through Which Unequal Development May Be Reproduced

The preceding findings reveal a broader pattern: unequal development in Kuta is not produced by tourism growth alone, nor can it be explained simply through differences in individual capability. It emerges recursively through the interaction between tourism-generated opportunities, unequal resource positions, institutional rules, and the everyday practices through which residents participate in and adapt to the tourism economy.

This interpretation becomes particularly visible in the contradictory assessments of tourism benefits. LC3 acknowledged increasing economic activity but rejected the view that benefits were universally experienced:

> *"Overall, income has increased, but only some people feel the benefits. There is still considerable poverty here." (Interview with LC3, May 2026).*

VG2 similarly argued that those already possessing capital and businesses obtained greater benefits. BA2 described unstable income despite increasing visitor numbers, while LC2 experienced continued livelihood insecurity despite remaining active as a trader.

At the same time, other community participants gave considerably more positive accounts. LC1 regarded tourism opportunities as relatively widely accessible through work, volunteer activities, bazaars, local supply chains, and other economic activities. VG1 similarly perceived substantial community benefits from tourism.

The open-ended questionnaire responses from LE1 and LE2 reflected the same contrast. Both assessed tourism development relatively positively and associated it with increasing businesses, employment, programmes, and income. At the same time, they acknowledged barriers involving limited resources, networks, uneven access, and institutional constraints.

These contrasting assessments reflected the different positions from which participants encountered tourism development. Institutional and local elite actors tended to assess development through employment, programmes, investment, and aggregate activity, whereas small traders and participants occupying vulnerable positions described it through daily income, access to commercial space, capital, programme accessibility, and decision-making power. The differences are therefore sociologically meaningful rather than merely inconsistent.

Previous studies provide support for both sides of this contradiction. Yuli et al. (2023) document improvements in community welfare associated with Mandalika tourism, while Pattaray, Satiadji, and Lantang (2025) identify expanded community economic participation. Conversely, Veriasa et al. (2023) demonstrate that tourism participation does not automatically translate into substantial household welfare improvements where productive assets remain limited. Scheyvens and Biddulph (2018) likewise argue that inclusive tourism requires attention not merely to access but also to ownership, representation, and the ability of marginalised groups to benefit.

The coexistence of aggregate economic expansion and differentiated social outcomes echoes the broader development paradox identified by Salsabila (2026), in which improvements in conventional development indicators do not necessarily translate into substantive equality when inequalities in access to resources, opportunities, and political representation persist.

The contribution of Structuration Theory is to explain how both sets of observations can coexist. Structures consist of rules and resources that are both the medium and outcome of social practices (Giddens 1984). Tourism investment expands markets, employment, infrastructure, programmes, and commercial opportunities. Residents repeatedly draw upon these structures through work, trading, entrepreneurship, supply activities, participation, and training. Those practices reproduce tourism as an increasingly dominant economic structure in Kuta.

However, actors enter this potentially recursive process from unequal positions. A property owner can transform tourism growth into rental or business income, while a small trader may respond to the same growth through insecure informal trading. A business with stronger market networks can access organised tourist flows, whereas another remains outside the relationships through which customers are directed. Community members may repeatedly participate in programmes without acquiring equivalent authority to modify programme rules. These repeated practices may therefore contribute to the reproduction of the resource differences that initially shaped participation.

The findings consequently suggest a potentially recursive relationship in which tourism-led transformation reshapes institutional rules and the distribution of allocative and authoritative resources. Local actors encounter these structural conditions from different positions and possess unequal capacities to mobilise opportunities, adapt livelihoods, participate in tourism activities, and influence development decisions. Their everyday practices produce differentiated economic and social outcomes. Over time, such practices may contribute to the reproduction of unequal distributions of resources and authority; where community agency influences institutional arrangements, they may instead contribute to gradual structural modification. Because the study is cross-sectional, it identifies these mechanisms but does not claim to have directly observed their long-term reproduction.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how institutional rules, differentiated access to allocative and authoritative resources, and community agency shaped tourism-led development outcomes in Kuta Village within the Mandalika Special Economic Zone. The findings showed that tourism development expanded employment, entrepreneurship, market opportunities, and livelihood adaptation; however, these opportunities were not converted into secure and sustained benefits uniformly across local actors. Unequal access to land, capital, commercial space, market networks, strategic information, and decision-making authority differentiated both economic outcomes and levels of community influence. Participation was substantial in economic activities and program implementation but remained limited in strategic decision-making. These patterns indicate that tourism-led development in Kuta should be understood not merely as economic expansion but as a socially differentiated process of transformation.

The central theoretical contribution of this study lies in specifying a structuration-based mechanism of unequal tourism development. By distinguishing allocative resources, such as land, capital, productive assets, commercial space, and market access, from authoritative resources, including strategic information, institutional networks, and decision-making authority, the study demonstrated that unequal outcomes were produced not by the absence of opportunities but by differentiated capacities to convert those opportunities into durable benefits. This framework moves beyond descriptive accounts of “winners and losers” in tourism development by explaining how institutional rules, resource distribution, and everyday agency interact recursively to reproduce or potentially modify unequal outcomes. The study therefore extends the application of Structuration Theory to tourism policy analysis and offers a transferable analytical framework for examining differentiated development outcomes in other Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and tourism-led development contexts.

The primary practical contribution of this study is the formulation of an evidence-informed framework for an Empowered Tourism Village centered on four policy conditions: (1) protection of productive assets and livelihood spaces; (2) more equitable access to economic resources, commercial space, and markets; (3) differentiated strengthening of community capabilities; and (4) substantive participation in strategic decision-making. These conditions shift the evaluation of tourism policy away from aggregate indicators—such as employment creation, business growth, training participation, or program involvement—and toward institutional arrangements that enable differently positioned groups to sustain their livelihoods and exercise meaningful influence over the direction of development. The framework is directly relevant to policymakers, SEZ authorities, and development practitioners seeking to design interventions that address not only the availability of opportunities but also the structural conditions that determine who can benefit from them.

This study was limited by its qualitative single-case and cross-sectional design. The ten participants provided information-rich but socially differentiated accounts, and the findings should not be interpreted as representing the prevalence of particular experiences across Kuta Village or the wider Mandalika SEZ. The inclusion of one older participant and one woman operating a small-scale enterprise enabled the study to examine particular vulnerable positions but did not support generalization to all older residents or women. Differences between semi-structured interviews and open-ended online questionnaire responses may also have affected the depth and comparability of the data. Future research should examine the distribution of productive resources, livelihood security, community influence, and institutional responses longitudinally and comparatively across villages exposed to different intensities of tourism development. The critical question for tourism-led development is therefore not merely whether opportunities are created, but who possesses the resources, capabilities, and institutional influence required to convert those opportunities into secure livelihoods and meaningful participation.

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