



# Social and cultural impacts of the Selo hiking trail in Mount Merbabu National Park: a case study on community interaction and sustainable tourism development

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Mount Merbabu is one of the natural attractions in Central Java that attracts local and foreign tourists with the Selo Trail as the most popular climbing route for tourists. The number of tourist visits on the Selo Hiking Trail has increased significantly every year. Tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail have a social and economic impact on the surrounding community, both directly and indirectly. This study aims to analyze the social and cultural impacts of climbing tourism activities on the Selo Climbing Trail, Mount Merbabu National Park (TNGMb), Central Java. **Methods:** The analysis method used is descriptive qualitative analysis with a Likert scale. The results showed that tourism development in the Selo Hiking Trail had a significant impact on the level of community cooperation, social values, and livelihoods. **Findings:** The level of cooperation between communities increased, which was reflected in the formation of joint businesses and community activities. The social and cultural values of the community have changed, including the style of language and dress. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of livelihood types and community incomes. However, crime and violence around the tourism area are considered low. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that hiking tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail have a significant positive impact on the social and economy of the local community, while maintaining the sustainability and wisdom of local culture needs to be a concern in sustainable tourism management.

**KEYWORDS:** local wisdom; socio-cultural impacts; sustainable tourism; tourism development.

## 1. Introduction

Mount Merbabu National Park (TNGMb) is a conversion of protected forest areas on the slopes of Mount Merbabu and Tuk Songo Kopeng Nature Park (TWA) into a national park. Mount Merbabu National Park was designated in 2004 based on the Minister of Forestry Decree No. 135/Menhut-II/2004: 135/Menhut-II/2004 dated May 4, 2004 concerning Changes in the Function of Protected Forest Areas and Nature Tourism Parks in the Merbabu Mountain Forest Group with an area of  $\pm 5,725$  Ha (BTNGMb, 2010). TNGMb is an area that has a function for protection as well as utilization of natural resources. In the Mount Merbabu National Park Management Plan (RPTN), it is stated that the TNGMb area has important values in the form of biodiversity, protection of hydro-oroological functions, tourism potential, and community empowerment (BKSDA JATENG, 2006). Resource utilization through tourism activities in the National Park, especially in the utilization zone is a form of protection of biological resources and ecosystems (Nahriya, 2015).

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Mount Merbabu is one of the natural attractions in Central Java that attracts local and foreign tourists. Mount Merbabu with an altitude of 3142 meters above sea level has various natural tourism potentials, such as jungle tourism, mountain climbing tourism, educational tourism, historical tourism, adventure tourism, special interest sports tourism, and cultural tourism (Santoso, 2013). The most popular nature tourism activities on Mount Merbabu are camping and mountain climbing (Satyatama, 2008). Mount Merbabu is famous for its panoramic beauty. Tourists who climb Mount Merbabu can see the sunrise, the sea of clouds and other mountain peaks. The summit of Mount Merbabu can be reached through 5 official climbing routes from the Mount Merbabu National Park Office, including the Cuntel route, Thekelan route, Suwanting route, Wekas route, and Selo route.

Tourist interest in climbing Mount Merbabu, especially through the Selo Hiking Trail has experienced a significant increase from year to year. This can be seen from the increase in the number of tourists on the Selo hiking trail from 2014-2018 which increased by 800% (BTNGMb, 2018). Based on statistical data from the Mount Merbabu National Park Office, the total number of tourists climbing the Selo Trail in 2014 was 10 thousand tourists and experienced an exponential increase until 2018 reaching 80 thousand tourists (BTNGMb, 2018). Visitors to hiking tours in Merbabu are dominated by students and students with an age range of 15-24 years. Tourists in Merbabu come from various regions, but the majority come from Central Java and Yogyakarta (Purtanto et al, 2020).

The existence of TNGMb cannot be separated from the surrounding community. Tarubatang Village has a population of 2,730 people, most of whom have livelihoods as farmers, this can be seen from the land ownership owned by the community. In addition to being farmers, not a few people of Tarubatang Village, especially Genting Hamlet, also take advantage of the existence of tourism by becoming food and beverage providers (food stalls), basecamp managers and transportation service providers. Through tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail, TNGMb has a direct and indirect impact on the social and economy of the surrounding community. According to Ismail et al. (2017) tourism activities have an impact on the community directly with the absorption of labor, as well as indirectly such as business opportunities for the sale of goods and services. The development of tourist attractions does not only have a positive impact, but there are also negative impacts on the community and the area (Yulia, 2017). Therefore, an analysis of the social impact of climbing tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail of the GMNP is needed to take favorable policies.

In the context of culture, Mount Merbabu also has an important value as a cultural heritage that influences the lives of the surrounding community. Traditional rituals, local legends, and local wisdom related to Mount Merbabu are an integral part of the cultural identity of the surrounding community. Tourists visiting Mount Merbabu also enrich and expand their understanding of local culture, both through direct participation in traditional activities and through interactions with local residents. Therefore, in managing and utilizing the tourism potential of Mount Merbabu, it is important to pay attention to cultural aspects in order to preserve and promote the cultural heritage owned. This research will not only look at the social impact of climbing tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail of Mount Merbabu National Park but will also consider cultural aspects as an integral part of the sustainability of the management and utilization of Mount Merbabu National Park.

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1 Study Area*

This research activity was carried out around the Selo hiking trail tourist attraction of Mount Merbabu National Park (TNGMb), precisely in 3 villages (Tarubatang Village, Selo Village, and Senden Village), Selo District, Boyolali Regency, Central Java. The research was conducted in August-October 2021.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The type of data used in this research consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data includes social impacts obtained through interviews. Secondary data was obtained by conducting a literature review and field observations including the general condition of the research location and other literature that supports the research. The data collected are social variables. The criteria for social variables consist of the level of community cooperation, community social values, and community livelihoods.

Table 1. Matrix of data type, collection method, and analysis

Variabel	Criteria	Indicator	Data Source	Data Collection Methods	Data Analysis Method
Social	Level of cooperation	Intensity of community interaction	Community	Interview, observation, and literature study	Descriptive analysis with Likert scale
	Social value	hanges in community behavior			

Descriptive analysis was obtained from respondents' perceptions related to the social condition of the community. Descriptive analysis with a Likert scale was used to analyze the social impact of the Selo Hiking Trail in Mount Merbabu National Park. The Likert scale method is used to measure a person's attitudes, opinions and perceptions about social events or symptoms (Riduwan, 2010). Data were analyzed descriptively quantitatively with tabulations presented in the form of tables and graphs. Qualitative analysis was used to support quantitative data obtained by in-depth interviews.

3. Results and Discussion

Tourism development not only affects the social aspects of society, but also has a significant impact on local cultural life. In the context of the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction, this development not only creates changes in social terms, but also affects the sustainability and dynamics of the surrounding community's culture. According to Faizun (2009), tourism development has both positive and negative impacts on society. However, the use of positive and negative labels in the impact of tourism on social change is very subjective and needs a deeper sociological study. Therefore, in this study, it is necessary to conduct an analysis that includes social and cultural impacts, taking into account relevant indicators.

3.1 Social and cultural impact level of cooperation

In general, the community around the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction still upholds the value of mutual cooperation and cooperation, which is an integral part of their cultural life. Based on Table 2, tourism development has a significant impact on the level of community cooperation, which is reflected in the formation of joint businesses and community activities. In accordance with the opinion of Hijriati (2013) that ecotourism development can increase the intensity of interaction between surrounding communities and encourage cooperation in the field of tourism management. The cooperation between the community and the management of Mount Merbabu National Park (TNGMb) has positive implications for tourism management, especially Selo Resort. Previously, the community had been involved in various joint activities with TNGMb managers, such as national park land use and forest fire management. In a cultural context, this cooperation reflects the tradition of mutual cooperation that has been embedded in people's lives for a long time. However, the high intensity of community interaction can also result in the high

possibility of conflict in the community due to miscommunication. Social impacts based on cooperation criteria are divided into 4 indicators, which can be seen in Table 2.

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the existence of the Selo Trail Hiking tour has a high impact on increasing cooperation between communities. The community around the area is a rural community that highly upholds social values including cooperation or mutual cooperation in every aspect of community life, not only in the tourism sector. However, with the development of Selo Hiking Trail tourism, it encourages people to interact more intensely and cooperate in the tourism sector. Cooperation between communities in the field of tourism is allocated in several containers of organizations or community groups so that it is not mixed with other interests. Some organizations or groups are formed, such as Selo Volunteer Group, Merbabu Fire Care Community Organization, Merbabu Guide and Porter Group. The cooperation that occurs not only stops within the group, but also brings the community to engage and interact with the wider community in the interests of the group. In accordance with Cohen's theory (1984) which states that tourism has an impact on the relationship and involvement between the local community and the wider community.

Before the development of Selo Hiking Trail tourism, the surrounding community had cooperated with the management of TNGMb in several other interests, such as utilization of national park land, utilization of water sources, firewood collection, and forest fire prevention. The Selo Hiking Trail Tourism Object is officially managed by the TNGMb Center and is part of the Selo Resort management duties. The limited number of workers at the Selo Resort has an impact on the need for cooperation with the community in managing the Hiking Trail tourism. In Table 2, it can be seen that the impact of tourism on cooperation between the community and national park managers is considered moderate. This can be because the community is actively involved in planning, managing, and supervising tourism activities. However, the involvement is still limited and delegated to several community representatives who are members of volunteer groups or enter as official workers at Selo Resort. The rest of the community participates passively through the informal sector or tourism business units owned by the community.

Table 2. Social impact of cooperation level

Cooperation Level Indicator	Score	Score Criteria
Cooperation between communities	111	High
Community cooperation with TNGMb management	94	Medium
Joint venture establishment	96	Medium
Community activities	93	Medium
Average	98,5	Medium

Based on Table 2, it shows that the impact of Selo Hiking Trail tourism on the formation of joint businesses is in moderate criteria. The development of tourist attractions in general encourages people around the area to form business units both independently and collectively or together (Prasetyo and Suryoko, 2018). In general, the pattern of business unit formation found in the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction is independent, but in its management it collaborates with families as labor. However, there is the formation of business units collectively, as happened in several souvenir sales and car charter business units. No joint business unit formation was found in the basecamp business unit, food stalls and equipment rental. There is little formation of joint business units because most people have the same capital to be able to form a business, especially the people of Genting Hamlet, which is located at the entrance to the Selo Hiking Trail.

Before the development of Selo Hiking Trail tourism, there were already many community activities that existed and were preserved by the surrounding community. Some of the community activities include village cleaning, merti desa, mountain alms, sadranan, suronan, and harvest alms. These community activities come from customs, culture, and religion held by the community and are still carried out consistently. The existence of Selo

Hiking Trail tourism has an impact on increasing community activities with moderate criteria (Table 2). The impact of tourism on community activities is positive and felt indirectly. Some people stated that with the amount of additional income from tourism that the community gets, some of it is used to organize larger and more festive community activities. Tourism development does not make people forget and leave community activities, it can be seen in Putri's research (2017) which states that most Selo people still know and follow existing community activities.

### 3.2 Socio-cultural impact social value

Social values are values adopted by the community from the results of agreements relating to right and wrong in social life. The development of tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail has an impact on changes in some social and cultural values of the surrounding community but in moderate criteria (Table 3). This can be caused by contact between the surrounding community and tourist tourists which provides an opportunity for cultural exchange in the form of attitudes, actions or behavior (Tafalas, 2010). Some social impact indicators based on social value criteria can be seen in Table 3.

In general, people around the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction are natives who use Javanese in their daily lives. Tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail have a high impact on changes in the language style of the community around the area (Table 3). The changes that occur are generally in the form of more and more local people who can use Indonesian fluently, even some people can also speak foreign languages such as English. According to Thelisa et.al (2018), this is influenced by increased public awareness about the importance of expertise in serving tourists. The increase in language skills in the community occurs due to the large number of tourists from various regions including from foreign countries which requires people to interact using Indonesian and foreign languages such as English. In his book, Martono (2014) explains that the level of community development can be seen from the amount of motivation to develop and achieve from within the community itself. This can be seen in the motivation of the community around the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction to improve language skills.

In addition to changes in language, the increasing development of tourist attractions on the Selo Hiking Trail also has a high impact on changes in the style of dress of the surrounding community (Table 3). Changes in dress style are most felt in people who work as guides or porters. This is because the level of interaction is quite high with tourists so that it allows the transfer of information about the lifestyle or dress model of tourists, especially clothing or equipment for climbing. Another reason for the change is because people who work as guides and porters have an awareness of the climbing standards that have been set. Then these changes can extend to the community in general through interactions between the communities themselves. Changes in the surrounding community in general in the form of knowledge about the types of clothing that are more comfortable to wear in cold weather so that people are now aware and can choose good quality clothing.

Table 3. Social impact social value

Social Value Indicator	Score	Score Criteria
Language style	112	High
Dress style	110	High
Criminal acts	44	Very Low
Acts of violence	64	Low
Average	82,5	Medium

Table 3 shows that most respondents stated that the impact of tourism on criminal acts around the area is very low. Some criminal acts that have occurred in the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction are theft and consumption of alcohol. Based on the results of the interview, there was only one case of motorcycle theft and three cases of loss of helmets belonging to

tourists carried out by unscrupulous tourists. In addition, several times tourists were found consuming liquor secretly in the Selo Hiking Trail area. However, these cases can be resolved in a family manner and by giving a warning to the perpetrator. Therefore, no police reports were found regarding criminal acts that occurred in the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction in recent years. Crime has become a fundamental problem in tourism (Sari and Mahagangga, 2014) and affects the image of tourist attractions. The community and national park managers have taken preventive measures to prevent criminal acts by conducting nightly ronda guards and appealing to every tourist to comply with existing rules.

During the tourism development of the Selo Hiking Trail, the community considered that it had an impact on the occurrence of violence. However, the impact is considered quite low by the community (Table 3). Violence that has occurred in the form of disputes between tourists due to misunderstandings and the frequency is very rare. There have never been any acts of violence involving the surrounding community. Violence is the main focus for managers and communities involved because the smooth running of tourism activities is closely related to the safety of tourists. According to Mahagangga (2008), the intensity of acts of violence can affect the safety and comfort of tourists. The small level of violence that occurs can be influenced by factors of public awareness to create a comfortable environment and there is no interference from other parties outside the community and national park managers. In addition, most tourists are >20 years old and have at least a high school education, which affects the level of emotional maturity of tourists.

### *3.3 Social impact on livelihoods*

Based on Table 4, it can be seen that tourism activities on the Selo Hiking Trail have a very high impact on the livelihoods of the surrounding community. Tourism development provides opportunities for the surrounding community to get a job, increase income, and can create new jobs. The occupation of the community around the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction is generally a farmer (BPS Boyolali Regency, 2021). The community around the area has agricultural land and the commodities planted are horticulture, such as cabbage, potatoes, shallots, garlic, chilies, and chicory. After the development of tourism, the community generally maintains their agriculture but also works or entrepreneurship in the tourism sector with the aim of increasing income. Social impacts based on livelihood criteria can be seen in Table 4.

The Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction has a very high impact on increasing the number of new livelihood types (Table 4). According to Hermawan (2016), tourism development can bring up a variety of new employment opportunities and business opportunities in the field of tourism that used to be absent today. Before the development of the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction, the community only recognized 2 types of work, namely farming and trading in the market. However, in its development until now there are 10 types of jobs in the tourism sector, both based on business units and volunteers. The development and increase in the number of tourist visits on the Selo Hiking Trail can be the reason for the increase in the number of types of livelihoods. Because the higher the number of tourist attractions can lead to more diverse characteristics and needs of tourists in traveling. This is an opportunity for the community around the tourist attraction to open new business units and livelihoods that can meet the various needs of tourists.

The above is also the reason why the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction has a very high impact on changes in people's livelihoods (Table 4). Changes in the livelihoods of people around tourist objects to open businesses or work in the climbing tourism sector occur in a fast time span. Based on the research data of business unit respondents, there are only 3 business units managing basecamp and food stalls out of 15 business units established before 2014. Based on the Selo Resort data in 2017, there were 19 business units managing basecamps and food stalls recorded. The increase in numbers also occurred in the car charter business unit, souvenir sales, and equipment rental. In 2014, only 10 people around the area worked as porters and climbing guides. Currently, porter and guide work is the

most common side job for the surrounding community, especially men in the productive age of 20-50 years with a total of 70 people recorded in TNGMb.

Table 4. Social impact on livelihoods

Livelihood Indicator	Score	Score Criteria
Number of livelihood types	148	Very High
Changes in community livelihoods	149	Very High
Labor absorption and income generation	150	Very High
Working time	145	Very High
Average	148	Very High

Based on the data in Table 4, it shows that the social impact of the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction that is most felt by the community is the creation of new jobs, increased employment and community income. The high impact of labor absorption for the community around the area can be seen from almost all workers in the tourist business unit are natives around the area, especially Selo District. Communities that previously relied on agriculture as the main source of income are now also involved in various tourism activities, such as becoming guides, porters, or tourism business managers. This shows a change in livelihood patterns that reflects the community's adaptation to tourism development. In addition, the increase in community work time in the tourism sector also indicates the extent of their attention and commitment to tourism activities, which is also part of the cultural dynamics that develop in the surrounding community.

The development of the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction has a very high impact on the community's work time in the tourism sector (Table 4). Work time is the intensity of workers' attention to their work that can affect the success of management and economic value (Fauziyah et.al 2014). The intensity of community activities in the management of the Selo Hiking Trail tourism business is very high. This can be seen from the weekly work time of the community on tourism is actually more than the work time on non-tourism work. This proves that with the development of Selo Hiking Trail tourism, the community gets additional work time from work or activities in the tourism sector. The high outpouring of community work time on tourism work or side jobs is due to the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction visiting not only on holidays, but on weekdays as well.

Analysis of social and cultural impacts is important in understanding the implications of tourism development on the community around the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction. Such impacts are not only limited to economic and social aspects, but also include changes in local cultural values and patterns. Therefore, there is a need for a holistic approach that takes these aspects into account in tourism planning and management to ensure that tourism development has an overall positive impact on communities and their cultural sustainability.

#### 4. Conclusions

The tourism development of the Selo Hiking Trail not only has a significant social impact on the community around the area, but also affects aspects of their culture. Tourism activities provide social impacts with moderate score criteria on the level of cooperation and social values of the community, and provide a very high impact on community livelihoods. Increased cooperation occurs because the community is actively involved in tourism management and the formation of volunteer groups in the tourism sector. Changes in social values in the community occur because of the interaction between tourism visitors and the community, allowing the exchange of information and culture. Changes in community livelihood patterns occur massively and in a fast time, influenced by the increase in the number of tourists and the popularity of the Selo Hiking Trail tourist attraction. Tourism development not only creates economic and social impacts, but also contributes to local cultural dynamics.

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The author fully contributed to the writing of this article

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Not applicable.

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Not applicable.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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