Strategizing Sister City Partnerships: Paradiplomacy, Bilateral Relations, and Sustainable Cooperation in Indonesia

Annisa Nadya1*, Zulfan Fakhri Mahendra2, Muhammad Muhajir Yahya1

1 International Relations, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia
2 Master of International Relation, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
*Corresponding author, e-mail: nadyaannisa642@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research explored the intricate dynamics of sister city cooperation within the framework of paradiplomacy and bilateral relations, with a specific focus on Indonesia's evolving landscape. By employing a qualitative methodology, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the structured stages involved in establishing sister city partnerships, from meticulous planning and strategic alignment to the drafting and signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). It highlighted the critical role of governmental oversight, legislative approval, and the convergence of local autonomy with national strategies in shaping effective and sustainable international collaborations. Furthermore, the research identified significant challenges in implementation and sustainability, emphasizing the need for robust strategies and active community engagement. Through the lens of Indonesian sister city networks, the study revealed the multifaceted nature of these partnerships, incorporating economic, cultural, educational, and political dimensions. The research offers valuable insights and strategies for policymakers, local government officials, and international organizations engaged in or considering sister city initiatives, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how these partnerships can foster mutual growth and welfare enhancement.

Keywords: Paradiplomacy, Sister City Cooperation, Bilateral Relations, Sustainable Partnerships, Indonesia's Decentralization

ABSTRAK


Kata Kunci: Kemitraan Sister City, Analisis Kualitatif, Diplomasi Akar Rumput Internasional,Nota Kesepakaman, Tata Kelola Daerah, Kerangka Kebijakan
1. Introduction

Sister city partnerships stand as pivotal elements in the global landscape, evolving from symbolic relationships to dynamic networks that facilitate an intricate exchange of technology, resources, knowledge, and cultural insights. These alliances, initially rooted in shared geographical, economic, cultural, and historical ties, have expanded into diverse platforms for developmental initiatives driven by mutual aspirations and benefits (Rochman, 2019).

In Indonesia, the decentralization process has been a catalyst for the expansion of sister city networks, now involving 47 cities across all 33 provinces. The momentum towards decentralization has significantly expanded sister city networks, now encompassing 47 cities across 33 provinces (Efraim Sitinjak, 2014). These networks are vital in promoting good governance, enhancing local governance capabilities, and strengthening community capacities. Inspired by European models, which have successfully harnessed these partnerships for mutual understanding and economic stimulation through public engagement (Rochman, 2019), Indonesia is navigating its path toward similar achievements. However, this journey encounters various challenges, including inconsistencies in the effectiveness of these partnerships, as evidenced by the varying levels of activity among Jakarta’s extensive sister city network (Salam, 2004) and the financial implications of maintaining such partnerships.

The international sister city initiatives, characterized by long-term commitments between municipalities engaging in collaborative endeavors across multiple domains, are formalized through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) (Diavie, 2017). These partnerships address the complexities of multilateral issues and serve as platforms for sub-state actors like provincial and municipal governments to foster intensive collaborations and enrich the understanding of diverse cultural, environmental, and social landscapes (Diavie, 2017).

The research findings illuminate the structured approach to establishing sister-city cooperation, emphasizing meticulous planning and strategic alignment from the initial stages to the signing of the MoU. However, the study also underscores significant challenges in implementation and sustainability, pointing to the need for robust strategies and community engagement. This aligns with the research framework "The Convergence of Paradiplomacy and Bilateral Relations in Sister City Cooperation," which examines the roles played by paradiplomacy and bilateral relations in shaping these cooperations, especially in the context of Indonesia's evolving landscape.

The framework explores how decentralized diplomacy (paradiplomacy) and traditional state-centric interactions (bilateral relations) interplay to shape the procedural flow and effectiveness of sister city agreements. This understanding is pivotal for addressing the challenges highlighted in the research findings and optimizing sister-city collaborations for maximum efficacy and mutual benefit.

Given the extensive nature of sister city agreements Indonesia has entered into, this study aims to dissect the procedural nuances of establishing such partnerships within the Indonesian context. The central research question, therefore, is: What are the pivotal stages in formulating and executing sister city agreements in compliance with existing regulations, and how can they be optimized for maximum efficacy and mutual benefit?
This question seeks to bridge the gap between the potential and actualized benefits of sister-city partnerships, ensuring they serve as effective instruments for international understanding and development.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Convergence of Paradiplomacy and Bilateral in Sister City Cooperation

In the dynamic and interconnected era of globalization, the established paradigms of diplomacy and international relations have encountered a significant disruption, leading to the emergence of innovative mechanisms and platforms for diplomatic engagement that extend beyond the conventional state-to-state interaction model. This research framework, "The Convergence of Paradiplomacy and Bilateral Relations in Sister City Cooperation," aims to provide an in-depth examination of the roles played by paradiplomacy and bilateral relations in shaping sister city cooperation, with a specific focus on the evolving landscape in Indonesia.

Paradiplomacy refers to the diplomatic activities undertaken by sub-state entities such as regional or municipal governments. This concept has gained prominence as an influential force in international affairs, particularly as a response to the global trend toward decentralization. This shift redistributes power from central governments to regional or local administrations, thereby enabling these entities to directly engage in international relations and forge partnerships based on shared interests and objectives (Putri Nindi, 2023). In the context of sister-city cooperation, paradiplomacy is a fundamental element that empowers cities to participate independently in global networks, exchanging knowledge, resources, and practices across various domains, including urban planning, environmental sustainability, education, and healthcare.

The move towards a more decentralized form of diplomacy enhances local governance and community resilience, especially in Indonesia, where decentralization policies have been progressively implemented. However, it also introduces complexities regarding oversight and the need for alignment with broader national policies. The activities encompassed by paradiplomacy, which include political, cultural, and economic interactions (Ignatius Hubert, 2020), represent a diverse diplomatic process undertaken by a variety of actors, such as regional, provincial, city governments, and private individuals or groups (Mukti, 2013). While this autonomy is empowering, it also necessitates a delicate balance to maintain coherent national foreign policies and respect sovereignty concerns (Alfarisi, 2021) (Alvarez, 2020).

2.2. Bilateral Relation

Bilateral relations, in contrast, offer a top-down perspective that is traditionally governed by state-level interests, including national security, economic prosperity, and the maintenance of peace (Perwita, 2011). As the traditional foundation of international cooperation, bilateral relations prioritize the state as the primary unit of analysis. Cooperation within this framework is often guided by a set of predefined national interests and strategies, thereby ensuring that international engagements align with the broader objectives of the nation-state.
Sister city programs serve as localized instances of bilateral relations, wherein cities or regions adopt the principles of mutual benefit, reciprocity, and long-term commitment to address local needs while contributing to broader international objectives. These initiatives provide a platform for cities to engage in diplomatic efforts that are both relevant and impactful to their communities, making the concept of international relations more tangible and accessible to everyday citizens.

A true innovation in sister-city cooperation emerges from the intersection of paradiplomacy and bilateral relations. This unique convergence creates a space where the autonomy and grassroots approach provided by paradiplomacy meet the structured and strategic framework of bilateral relations (Krisna, 1993). It is within this space that sister city initiatives can truly flourish, optimizing the benefits of international cooperation for all parties involved.

This symbiotic relationship respects the autonomy of local entities while ensuring that their international engagements are aligned with broader national interests and adhere to international norms and laws. It offers a balanced approach that leverages the strengths of both paradigms, fostering a more inclusive, responsive, and effective form of international cooperation.

Through this expanded framework, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how paradiplomacy and bilateral relations coalesce to shape the procedural flow and effectiveness of sister city agreements. It seeks to highlight the opportunities and challenges presented by this convergence, particularly in the Indonesian context, where the balance between decentralization, regional autonomy, and national strategies is increasingly pivotal. By examining the intricate interplay between these two constructs, the research intends to offer valuable insights and strategies for policymakers, local government officials, and international organizations engaged in fostering successful and sustainable sister-city partnerships.

3. Research Method

The research methodology employed in this study is rooted in the qualitative research paradigm, as delineated by Lexy J. Moleong (2002), which is designed to provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Qualitative research is particularly adept at capturing the behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions of subjects within their natural environments, utilizing narrative descriptions and a variety of data collection methods to explore the intricacies of the phenomenon at hand.

In pursuing a detailed and in-depth understanding, this study leveraged an array of qualitative techniques to gather relevant, comprehensive, and intricate data. The quality of this qualitative research was predominantly assessed based on the depth and richness of the data collected, focusing on obtaining valuable insights into the subjects’ experiences and perspectives (Sugiyono, 2010). While this approach often results in a more limited sample size, it is precisely this concentration that allows for a profound level of insight into the research subjects, ensuring that the findings are both meaningful and substantial.
Central to the research design was the incorporation of secondary data sources, which constitute the backbone of the empirical evidence for this study. The data pool was meticulously curated, comprising academically peer-reviewed literature that directly pertains to the research questions posed. This literature encompassed a wide range of sources, including scholarly articles, government reports, case studies, and historical records, each contributing a unique perspective to the study. By engaging with these diverse sources, the research is able to construct a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the complex dynamics between paradiplomacy and bilateral relations as they manifest in the realm of sister city cooperation.

This qualitative study is particularly concerned with the context of Indonesia, a nation where the intricacies of paradiplomacy and bilateral relations play out in unique and revealing ways. The research meticulously examines how these diplomatic paradigms interact within the Indonesian context, influencing and shaping the development and sustainability of sister-city partnerships. By focusing on Indonesia, the study not only contributes to the broader academic discourse on international relations and diplomacy but also offers practical insights and implications for policymakers, local government officials, and stakeholders involved in or considering sister city initiatives.

4. Results and Discussion

The research findings detail a structured approach to forging sister-city cooperation, underscoring the critical role of meticulous planning and strategic alignment from the initial stages to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding. However, the study also brings to light significant challenges in the implementation and sustainability of these agreements, noting that not all result in enduring collaborations. It emphasizes the necessity of robust strategies and active community engagement to navigate the multifaceted challenges embedded in the economic, cultural, educational, and political dimensions of these partnerships. Effectively addressing these challenges is essential for harnessing the full potential of sister-city collaborations and catalyzing mutual growth and welfare enhancement.

4.1. The Sister City and the Indonesian Experience

Every city has a unique foundation for sister-city relationships. It serves as a narrative of cooperation and development. In previous research, Surwandono and Ali Maksum (2020) stated that the trend of paradiplomacy originates from the cooperation between cities in Europe, particularly France, and Germany (Bennett, 1990), which utilized paradiplomacy to enhance and strengthen peace-building and reconciliation among European countries post-war. Initially, it served the function of post-war development (Surwandono, 2020). Meanwhile, in America, paradiplomacy is utilized to build cooperation among federal states through city-to-city relationships (McMillan, 2010), with the hope of contributing to the United States power in the global political context. From the aforementioned research, the existence of paradiplomacy depends on the factors desired by subnational powers (Mathieu Landriault, 2022). Through the development of sister cities to date, Indonesia has also utilized this activity to develop its cities.

According to Ivo Duchacek (1984), the existence of subnational actors engaging in cooperation beyond state control is important to be carefully considered. This
cooperation process can result in either conflict or harmony, depending on the dynamics formed among the involved parties. In this context, cities or regions aiming to strengthen the performance of twin cities need to consider the values underlying such cooperation and the long-term benefits it can bring. Duchacek emphasizes the importance of understanding that cooperation among subnational actors can create complex dynamics. Although such cooperation can bring significant benefits, such as knowledge exchange, technology, and resource sharing among cities, it can also lead to conflict or tension if not managed properly.

In the context of twin cities, thoughtful considerations of the values to be upheld and the expected long-term benefits can serve as the basis for guiding effective and sustainable cooperation. This involves the development of appropriate strategies, good management of relationships among the involved parties, and awareness of potential risks that may arise during cooperation implementation.

By understanding Duchacek's perspective, a city or region involved in twin-city cooperation can strengthen its efforts to achieve set goals. By considering shared values and benefits, they can build a solid foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation and for the communities they serve.

The evolving framework of Sister City relationships provides opportunities for scholars to elaborate on it from various perspectives. In research on sister cities in Indonesia, Takdir Ali Mukti (2015) stated that to date, foreign cooperation between local governments in Indonesia and foreign parties has reached a significant level. Among these cooperations, the partnership between Bandung and Braunschweig, Germany, which has lasted for over 60 years, is one of the longest. Additionally, several provinces, such as West Java, DKI Jakarta, and Yogyakarta, as well as cities like Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta, are major players in establishing twin-city cooperation with various foreign partners.

Sister city cooperation is closely related to the history, culture, and ideology of the local city or region, reflecting a deep relationship between two entities sharing similar values and identities. This is evident from the inception of sister city relationships between Bandung and Braunschweig, Yogyakarta and Kyoto, and Surabaya and Kitakyushu. Out of the numerous sister city programs formed, the author believes these three examples provide insight into the shells of sister cities in Indonesia. Firstly, Bandung and Braunschweig which are said to be the oldest sister city cooperation in the Republic of Indonesia until now. To commemorate this, both governments agreed to build a monument on Tamansari Street and Wastukencana Street in Bandung City to prove the close relationship between the two cities. In September 2022, the Bandung City Government and Braunschweig held a meeting to discuss the extension of the MoU and new opportunities potentially broadening the number of cooperation, such as exhibitions, cultural and educational exchanges, and collaborative efforts in environmental fields (Bandung, 2022). On the other hand, Yogyakarta and Kyoto also held a meeting in the same year to discuss strengthening cooperation, which was hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic (DIY, 2022). This normative strengthening effort is a means to maintain the relationship between the two cities. In the cooperation between Surabaya and Kitakyushu, both cities focus on waste management and processing. The Surabaya government received training related to household waste management. Later, this information will
continue to be disseminated to students from schools and campuses around the Surabaya City Government (Surabaya, 2021).

At a glance, sister-city cooperation is an effort to advance the capacity of local or city governments through bilateral relationships. Referring back to the idea above, that the ideology, culture, and history of a city become the aspiration for the formation of such bilateral relationships? The answer is yes. However, there might be other driving factors along with the strength of local governments, as stated by Mathieu based on his findings from Ivo D Duchacek's perspective. City-to-city cooperation heavily depends on the strength of the city.

4.2. Stages Involved in Sister-City Cooperation in Indonesia

In the Indonesian context, the establishment of sister-city cooperation is a methodical and multi-staged process designed to foster sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships. The first stage, 'Planning,' is pivotal as it lays the foundation for future collaboration. Local governments engage in an exhaustive process of identifying potential collaboration areas and partnership candidates. This involves a meticulous assessment of demographic, geographical, industrial, and community impact factors (International, 2017). Moreover, the integration of cultural and academic institutions is recognized as a crucial pathway to potential cooperation, emphasizing the exchange of cultural and academic resources. This stage also thoughtfully considers historical connections and ancestral relationships, which inherently foster a natural inclination towards cooperation and serve as a cultural bridge for initiating discussions. This nuanced approach effectively opens up dialogues and paves the way for more transactional relationships once agreements are in place.

Following the initial planning, the 'Communication and Drafting of MoU' stage is instrumental. This stage involves the transformation of previously outlined goals and materials into a draft Memorandum of Understanding. Active communication and exchange of interests and objectives are crucial here, leading to a binding agreement between the two cities. The MoU, as noted by George P. Smith (1966), is more than a document; it's a vital instrument establishing the interaction rules and laying down the foundation for rights and obligations to support the intended cooperation. The content of the MoU, exemplified by agreements like that of Yogyakarta and Kyoto (Indonesia, 2023), includes detailed sections informing the collaborating parties, objectives, areas of cooperation, implementation strategies, and duration. This stage underscores the importance of effective communication and mutual efforts in negotiating and aligning the goals of both parties, often necessitating significant time and dedication from each country involved.

The subsequent 'Submission to the Ministry of Home Affairs' and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) Approval' stage is critical in ensuring that the sister city agreement aligns with regional autonomy, legal provisions, and broader national interests. As highlighted by the findings of Takdir Ali Mukti (2020) and other regulations, obtaining approval from the DPRD is a necessary step for any foreign cooperation. This legislative involvement acts as a safeguard, ensuring that the regional government's foreign relations and collaborations are under appropriate oversight and that the agreements do not violate legal provisions or prove detrimental. The approval process
is a significant checkpoint in the progression of sister-city cooperation, ensuring all activities are within the legal and ethical boundaries set by the respective governments.

The 'MoU Signing' represents the culmination of the sister city cooperation process. Following the necessary approvals, the MoU is officially signed by the heads of government or sister cities, symbolizing the end of the administrative stages and marking the commencement of the effective implementation of the collaboration. This stage solidifies the commitments and parameters of the agreed-upon collaboration, establishing a formal foundation for future cooperation. It signified the mutual understanding and shared vision between the two cities, setting the stage for a productive and beneficial partnership.

The above discussion provides an expanded blueprint of the stages involved in establishing sister-city cooperation within the Indonesian context, emphasizing the critical importance of meticulous planning, effective communication, cultural understanding, and adherence to legal and legislative processes. Each stage is interconnected and builds upon the previous ones, ensuring a well-structured and effective partnership that aligns with both regional and national objectives and legal frameworks. The necessity for a comprehensive approach to sister-city cooperation is underscored, one that thoughtfully considers the various cultural, academic, historical, and legal aspects that influence the success of such partnerships. Through this detailed understanding, stakeholders can better navigate the complexities of international collaboration, enhancing the potential for sustainable and mutually beneficial sister-city partnerships.

4.3. Some Existing Challenges

While the structured stages of establishing sister-city cooperation offer a blueprint for initiating partnerships, the research underscores the inherent challenges in the implementation and sustainability of these collaborations. Not all sister city agreements translate into effective, long-term collaborations, with many barely advancing beyond the MoU signing stage. This discrepancy highlights the need for robust implementation strategies and the active involvement of communities to ensure the longevity and success of sister-city collaborations.

The potential benefits of sister-city cooperation, such as fostering development, increasing community welfare, and augmenting regional income sources, are substantial (Adinda, 2020). These advantages act as catalysts for local development and community welfare enhancement. However, realizing these benefits extends beyond formal agreements and requires a deep, ongoing commitment from both involved parties.

Sister city relationships, supported by local laws like Perda No.12 of 2010, aim to optimize regional autonomy and development. Yet, the actual execution of these partnerships unfolds across paradiplomacy layers—economic, cultural, educational, technological, and political. Each layer presents unique challenges and opportunities, necessitating tailored strategies and active community involvement. The economic layer, for instance, aims to attract investors and open export markets but often struggles with aligning goals and resources. Similarly, the cultural, educational, and technological layers
require sustained exchanges and collaborations, while the political layer needs alignment of political objectives and governmental support.

The study emphasizes principles like similarity, reciprocal relationships, and benefits exceeding costs (City of Kelowna, 2023), which, along with the goodwill and commitment of both parties, form the foundation for successful collaboration. However, not all collaborations succeed in practice, as seen with many sister-city relationships in Indonesia, which have failed to sustain themselves or achieve their intended goals.

This research points to a clear gap between the structured approach to establishing sister-city cooperation and the actual implementation and sustainability of these partnerships. To bridge this gap, there is a need for clear, robust implementation strategies and active community involvement. Both cities must align their vision and mission and work together to involve the community in the collaboration process actively. The low implementation rate in some regions, like Indonesia, further complicates these challenges, rendering some collaborations ineffective.

In conclusion, while the structured stages of establishing sister-city cooperation provide a solid foundation, the successful implementation and sustainability of these collaborations require overcoming significant challenges. These challenges include ensuring active involvement from both parties, aligning visions and missions, actively involving communities, and developing robust implementation strategies considering each partnership's unique economic, cultural, educational, technological, and political aspects. Addressing these challenges is essential for realizing the full potential of sister-city collaborations and achieving the mutual growth and welfare enhancement they promise.

5. Conclusions

The research on "The Convergence of Paradiplomacy and Bilateral Relations in Sister City Cooperation" culminates with several key conclusions that provide insightful implications for the field of international relations, particularly focusing on the nuanced dynamics within Indonesia's evolving diplomatic landscape.

Firstly, the study reaffirms the crucial role of meticulous planning and strategic alignment in establishing sister-city cooperation. The 'Planning' stage is foundational, requiring a comprehensive assessment of various factors, including population, geography, industry, and cultural ties. This stage sets the groundwork for future cooperation, ensuring that partnerships are well-founded and aligned with the specific needs and objectives of the communities involved.

Secondly, the research highlights the importance of effective communication and the formalization of agreements through the drafting and signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs). These documents play a pivotal role in establishing the operational framework of the cooperation defining the objectives, areas of cooperation, and implementation strategies. The MoU serves as a testament to the shared vision and
commitment of the involved cities, underscoring the importance of mutual efforts in negotiating and aligning the goals of both parties.

Thirdly, the study underscores the critical role of governmental oversight and legislative approval in ensuring that sister city agreements align with regional autonomy, legal provisions, and broader national interests. The involvement of entities such as the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) is essential in overseeing the foreign relations and collaborations of regional governments, ensuring that the partnerships are not only beneficial but also respectful of legal and ethical standards.

Fourthly, the research identifies significant challenges in the implementation and sustainability of sister-city agreements. Despite the structured approach to establishing these partnerships, not all result in enduring collaborations. The study emphasizes the need for robust implementation strategies and active community engagement to navigate the challenges inherent in the economic, cultural, educational, and political dimensions of these partnerships.

Fifthly, the convergence of paradiplomacy and bilateral relations presents a unique space where the grassroots approach of local governments meets the structured strategic framework of national governments. This symbiotic relationship offers a balanced approach that leverages the strengths of both paradigms, fostering a more inclusive, responsive, and effective form of international cooperation.

In conclusion, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the stages involved in establishing sister-city cooperation and the challenges that need to be navigated for successful implementation. It emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach, one that considers the various cultural, academic, historical, and legal aspects that influence the success of such partnerships. The findings of this study offer valuable insights and strategies for policymakers, local government officials, and international organizations engaged in fostering successful and sustainable sister-city partnerships. As Indonesia and other nations continue to expand their global networks through sister city initiatives, the lessons drawn from this research will be instrumental in shaping more effective, resilient, and mutually beneficial international relationships.

References


Strategizing Sister City Partnerships: Paradiplomacy, Bilateral Relations, and Sustainable Cooperation in Indonesia (Annisa Nadya)


