Busan's Paradiplomacy: Aspiring to be the World's Premier Film City

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the image transformation of Busan, South Korea, from an industrial hub to a globally recognized City of Film. By employing a paradiplomacy framework, the research examined how Busan utilized BIFF as both a cultural event and a strategic tool for international diplomacy, economic development, and city branding. This qualitative research focused on gathering data largely through a comprehensive evaluation of scientific literature, including books and papers relevant to the case study. The analyses delved into the evolution of the BIFF event and its significant role in rebranding Busan from a declining industrial city to the first “City of Film” in Asia, a title bestowed by UNESCO. The study highlighted how the festival had successfully stimulated local economic growth, bolstered creative industries, and facilitated cultural exchange. The result demonstrated that BIFF had been pivotal in repositioning Busan as a significant player in the international film industry and a vibrant cultural destination. In conclusion, Busan’s status as Asia’s “City of Film” should be sustained, and the ongoing significance of integrating cultural initiatives with wider urban development strategies should also be emphasized.

Keywords: Busan, City of Film, Cultural Diplomacy, International Film Festival, Paradiplomacy, Urban Transformation

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi transformasi citra Busan, Korea Selatan, dari pusat industri menjadi Kota Film yang diakui secara global. Dengan menggunakan kerangka kerja paradiplomasi, penelitian ini meneliti bagaimana Busan memanfaatkan BIFF sebagai acara budaya dan alat strategis untuk diplomasi internasional, pembangunan ekonomi, dan pencitraan kota. Penelitian kualitatif ini berfokus pada pengumpulan data yang sebagian besar dilakukan melalui evaluasi komprehensif terhadap literatur ilmiah, termasuk buku dan makalah yang relevan dengan studi kasus. Analisis yang dilakukan menggali evolusi acara BIFF dan peran pentingnya dalam mengubah citra Busan dari kota industri yang menurun menjadi “Kota Film” pertama di Asia, gelar yang diberikan oleh UNESCO. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana festival ini telah berhasil mendorong pertumbuhan ekonomi lokal, meningkatkan industri kreatif, dan memfasilitasi pertukaran budaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa BIFF telah berperan penting dalam memposisikan kembali Busan sebagai pemain penting dalam industri film internasional dan destinasi budaya yang dinamis. Sebagai kesimpulan, status Busan sebagai “Kota Film” di Asia harus dipertahankan, dan pentingnya mengintegrasikan inisiatif budaya dengan strategi pembangunan kota yang lebih luas juga harus ditekankan.

Kata Kunci: Busan, City of Film, diplomasi budaya, festival film internasional, paradiplomasi
1. Introduction

Busan, a city with a population of almost 3.5 million (Joo Y. M., 2015), was previously recognized mainly for its industrial sector, port facilities, natural scenery, and recreational spots (Bossa, 2013). However, it has experienced a notable transition. Over time, the city evolved into Korea's second-largest city with the nation's largest port, but later, the city faced an industrial downturn (Park S. H., 2016). Furthermore, Busan was labeled a cultural desert, an unlikely city image to hold an international film festival. The city was ideal for cultural events for some people, owing to its picturesque beauty and oceanic vistas. (Robert Hassink, 2017). However, due to the post-Korean War population surge primarily from war refugees, the city was acclaimed as an industrial and trade hub rather than a cultural center (Joo Y. M., 2015).

In a remarkable turn, Busan was designated as the first Asian "City of Film" in 2014, a title that seemed implausible given its historical lack of cultural acclaim in film. The acknowledgment of the city's makeover has prompted an investigation into the paradiplomatic efforts and strategies that catalyzed this dramatic rebranding. In the intricate branding arena, where cities and nations endeavor to forge and broadcast their unique identities, the transformation of Busan is especially notable. The significant roles of the Busan International Film Festival and the Busan International Short Film Festival have been acknowledged in the current period. Over the years, the city's picturesque landscapes have increasingly served as settings for film and television, indicating a shift in its identity. Despite its initial reputation as a cultural void, Busan has deeply embedded itself in the film industry, achieving another milestone as the first city in South Korea to release a film (festival, 2023).

The Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) has become a significant cinematic event, surpassing similar events like the Hong Kong International Film Festival, and obtained the title of the most prestigious film festival in Asia (Ahn, 2011). Attracting over 200,000 visitors annually and showcasing around 300 films, the city has been lauded as the leading film event and most vital Asian film festival by international media outlets, including The Hollywood Reporter (Brasor, 2018). At present, the festival stands among the world's largest film festivals, comparable to iconic events like Cannes, Berlin, and Venice (Stringer, 2019). Focusing primarily on Asia, particularly East Asian cinema, the festival aims to serve as a central platform for showcasing and discussing the future and vision of Asian films (Ahn, 2011). The Busan Film Commission was established in 1999 to support the mission of BIFF by initiating various forums and discussions in conjunction with the festival, further enhancing its role in the global film industry and as a cultural highlight for both South Korea and Busan City (festival, 2023).

Previous studies have significantly contributed to understanding festivals and their influence on city identity and development. Stringer (2001) explored how festivals, particularly film festivals, shape the branding and image of countries, societies, or cities. Loist (2016) observed the commodification of film festivals in response to global political and economic shifts. Hassink and Lee (2018) provided a comparative perspective by examining the economic impact of film festivals in Berlin and Busan, highlighting their role in promoting growth and development. Ooi and Jesper (2009) focused on the influence of stakeholders in crafting the image and identity of cities, emphasizing the role of international film festivals in this process.
Moreover, cities' history and evolving political roles in international politics have been a focal point of study. Rodrigues & Mattioli (2017) acknowledged cities as pivotal political entities, while Pluijm and Melissen (2007) identified diverse roles of cities in international politics, including in security, development, economy, culture, networks, and representation. Hocking (1993) described the intricate interplay of subnational, national, and international policies in the modern political landscape. Joo (2015) highlighted how globalization and technological advances have elevated cities to pivotal roles in global capital and market control. This notion of cities as competitive market players was further explored by Cudny (2020), who discussed city promotion strategies through product creation and branding. Ooi & Pedersen (2009) and Zamorano & Rodríguez Morató (2015) discussed the strategic use of cultural paradiplomacy in promoting cities, emphasizing positive image projection's role in attracting investment and tourism.

The present research builds on the impact of film festivals on city branding and development as explored by scholars like Stringer (Stringer J. , 2001), Loist (Loist, 2016), and others. However, it distinctively narrows its focus to the paradiplomatic activities instrumental in establishing Busan as the City of Film, mainly through the Busan International Film Festival. While earlier studies highlight the role of film festivals in city branding and stakeholder influence, the current study dives more deeply into how sub-state actors utilize these cultural platforms for international relations to meet sub-national demands. The study provides a distinctive viewpoint by analyzing how the Busan International Film Festival is strategically utilized as a form of paradiplomacy. Additionally, the research addresses the gap in the existing literature by emphasizing the connection between local cultural initiatives and international diplomatic endeavors. The study provides a nuanced understanding of how local actions in the cultural sphere can significantly impact a city's global standing and image. This article attempts to investigate how the Busan International Film Festival was used as a form of paradiplomacy to reshape Busan's image on the international stage as the City of Film.

2. Paradiplomacy in Action: Unveiling Busan's Ascent as a Global Film City

Paradiplomacy refers to the international activities and foreign policy initiatives of substate political units, such as regions or cities, which have traditionally not been regarded as primary actors in international politics. The framework emerges in response to the evolving geopolitical landscape, where the rigid, state-centric model of diplomacy is challenged by the increasing involvement of substate entities in global affairs (Tianyang Liu, 2020). Jackson (2018) emphasized paradiplomacy's spatial dimensions, highlighting how political geography offers valuable insights and focuses on spatial relationships and scales. Royles (2017) argued that the paradiplomacy approach could help unravel the complex web of interactions underpinning the diplomatic activities of substate regions. The framework recognizes paradiplomacy practices' heterogeneity shaped by each region's unique political, cultural, and economic contexts. The system also acknowledges the multiplicity of actors and varied scales at which they operate, from local to global (Tubilewicz, 2016).

Cities and states have emerged as new international arena players. Historically, certain states or regions exerted worldwide impacts by employing foreign policy to boost
domestic autonomy. However, a broader range of cities are now actively engaged in
global governance. These entities are increasingly seen as territories and hubs where
global flows—of capital, information, people, goods, and services—intersect and take
shape. The extensive global reach of megacities or global cities was recognized.

Nevertheless, almost no current state or major city has refrained from exploiting
the benefits of an international presence (Cornago, 2010). The foreign affairs concept by
cities and states has been given different labels, which contribute to the depth and variety
of the discussion yet complicate the establishment of a universally recognized phrase in
the vocabulary of foreign affairs (Sevin, 2020). The complexity is evident in the numerous
descriptions of non-central governments' participation in international relations. Several
examples of contribution include the establishment of ongoing or specific engagements
with foreign public or private organizations and aiming to advance any international
aspect of their constitutional responsibilities (pejic, 2020).

Paradiplomacy, comprised of the terms parallel and diplomacy, gained
prominence in the 1980s through the works of Duchacek (Duchacek, 1990) and Soldatos
(1990) that surfaced during the discussions about then-US President Richard Nixon's new
federalism strategy. Most academics perceived paradiplomacy as traditional diplomacy
in the form of independent international engagement by subnational entities that either
supports, enhances, replicates, or even challenges national diplomatic efforts (Tavares,
2016). Critics argue that the international affairs of subnational governments are distinct
and should not be seen merely as extensions of standard national diplomatic activities. In
Belgium, in regions like Flanders and Wallonia, the term paradiplomacy is considered
pejorative (Marchetti, 2021). Furthermore, some professional diplomats and scholars
question the inclusion of the term diplomacy in paradiplomacy, as traditional diplomacy
is typically a statecraft tool conducted by state representatives. They argue that
conventional foreign policy terminology undervalues paradiplomacy and obscures its
unique nature (Hocking B., 1993).

On the other hand, the federative diplomacy gained popularity in Brazil during
the 1990s and 2000s. Lampreia (1999) emphasized that incorporating the federative
diplomacy concept is a crucial perspective in line with Brazil’s political system as it
recognizes the growing international role of states and even local governments that have
integrated into the Union's broader foreign policy agenda. Moreover, many alternative
phrases emerge to convey the same concept but differ depending on the political and
intellectual environment of the proposing individuals (Sohela Amiri, 2023)

Based on the observation by Acuto (2013), paradiplomacy is a persistent
phenomenon used by city leaders to fulfill a significant yet frequently underestimated role
that connects international relations and urban studies. The municipal leaders are involved
in diplomatic initiatives and influence through localized responsibilities like planning and
managing essential services. Soldatos (Soldatos, 1990) delineated different types of state
responses to regional paradiplomacy, identifying essential preconditions for activities,
including the synchronization between regional and national governments. The
mentioned study also outlines four main typologies of national-regional relations:

1. *Cooperative-coordinated type*, where the central government fully coordinates
local government paradiplomacy.
2. **Cooperative-joint type**, which integrates paradiplomacy activities into the central government's foreign policy.

3. **Parallel-harmony type**, where local governments conduct paradiplomacy independently, yet their actions are in line with national foreign policy.

4. **Parallel-disharmony type**, characterized by local government paradiplomacy that conflicts with the central government's foreign policy.

In general, paradiplomacy complements city branding, which refers to creating a unique identity and reputation for a city in the global arena. City branding goes beyond visual elements like logos and slogans but also encompasses a holistic approach to improving the residents' quality of life and achieving competitive advantages (Kavaratzis M., 2009). The evolution of city branding from function-based to emotion-based strategies resonates with paradiplomacy, which often aims to evoke positive emotions and perceptions about a city internationally (Auladel, 2014). The present study used a theoretical framework developed by Kavaratzis (2004) and expanded by (Kavaratzis M., 2009), which bridges city branding with paradiplomacy to analyze the aforementioned formulation problem.

3. **Research Methods**

The present study adopted a qualitative research methodology within the interpretivism paradigm to evaluate the complex social meanings and relationships within the specific context of Busan and BIFF (Lamont, 2021). The research delves into the Busan International Film Festival as an illustrative instance of paradiplomacy by employing a case study design. The selected method facilitated a detailed examination of the festival's potential as a tool for diplomacy and provided a nuanced understanding of Busan's evolution into a recognized City of Film. The interpretative nature of this research is pivotal for probing the subjective meanings and interpretations that underpin the festival's role in augmenting Busan's image through paradiplomatic activities.

The data obtained in this study was collected through an extensive review of document-based and digital sources such as existing literature, theories, and previous research pertinent to paradiplomacy, the activities of sub-state or city actors, and the branding or imagery associated with film festivals. Official documents from government bodies and other relevant institutions were scrutinized. Domestic and international news reports concerning the Busan International Film Festival were also included to incorporate a contemporary viewpoint. Internet-based research provided secondary data from diverse sources such as academic articles, newspapers, and official online platforms. A comprehensive data collection strategy guarantees an extensive and diverse dataset, which is crucial for thoroughly addressing the research questions.

The obtained data was analyzed based on the qualitative research approach's tenets, consisting of a nuanced interpretation of textual and verbal non-numerical data to unearth the underlying meanings and ramifications of the studied phenomenon. The data was methodically organized and analyzed to construct a coherent narrative on how the Busan International Film Festival was used as a tool of paradiplomacy and image cultivation. Interpretive techniques dissected the relationships between various identified variables and factors within the data. The triangulation method was used to bolster the
validity and reliability of the findings. The approaches compared and cross-referred data from diverse sources to assess their consistency and validate the research outcomes. In conclusion, the present study aimed to deliver a thorough and credible analysis of the festival's contribution to Busan's diplomatic endeavors and branding as a City of Film through robust methodology.

4. Paradiplomacy and the Ascendancy of Busan in Global Cinema

The journey of the Korean film industry from its nascent stages in the early 20th century to its contemporary global acclaim encapsulates a significant aspect of the Republic of Korea's transition into a modern nation. Renan's perspective accentuates the importance of understanding a nation's complex history, traditions, folklore, and sacrifices intricately woven into the fabric of Korean cinema and literature (Ciecko, 2004). The various elements collectively narrate the Korean people's imagination, as well as the multifaceted histories and structures of the country that are often expressed through language and various cultural products (Bossa, 2013).

The Korean film industry went through its Golden Age between 1955 and 1972 after emerging from the shadows of colonialism and war. The US foreign financial assistance significantly aided the comeback during the economic rehabilitation of the Republic of Korea, which benefitted the film industry (Bossa, 2013). The latter part of the 20th century marked a renaissance for the Korean film industry, gaining domestic popularity and facing international competitiveness. The resurgence was primarily influenced by two pivotal factors: globalization and democratization, which ushered in an era of open markets and direct global competition (Jones, 2013).

The transformation into a globally competitive industry was further propelled by adopting the Hollywood blockbuster model, aiming to expand its reach across Asia and into the American market (Bossa, 2013). Concurrently, the hallyu or Korean Wave trend significantly bolstered the global promotion of Korean culture, transforming it into a transnational phenomenon through a local and global hybridization process (Kim, 2019). The Hallyu cultural wave encompasses cinema and music that enabled Korea to regain control of its domestic film market and make substantial inroads into the global market (Bossa, 2013).

At the heart of the cultural and cinematic surge was the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF), initiated in the 1990s by a cohort of domestic filmmakers eager to elevate Korean film culture globally (Brien Yecies, 2016). The festival, borne out of the transformative forces of globalization in politics, economics, and culture, epitomizes Busan's strategic deployment of cultural diplomacy to elevate its global stature. As a paradiplomatic endeavor, the festival has enabled Busan to assert its influence in the global film industry as a cultural epicenter. The event's alignment with broader worldwide trends and the rising Korean Wave illustrates the profound impact of local cultural initiatives on a city's international reputation. Additionally, the festival symbolizes Busan's metamorphosis from an industrial stronghold to a contemporary cultural nexus, redefining its identity through the lens of cinema.

In the context of paradiplomacy, where subnational entities like cities utilize cultural assets to partake in international relations, the Busan International Film Festival
is a testament to the city's successful strategy in crafting a distinctive, globally recognized brand as the City of Film. The BIFF contributes to Busan's narrative and significantly enhances the broader story of Korean cinema's ascendancy on the world stage. Therefore, the Korean film industry's evolution and global impact, mainly through the Busan International Film Festival, presents a compelling case study of the efficacy and transformative power of cultural paradiplomacy and city branding.

5. Harnessing Paradiplomacy: Busan's Ascendancy as a Film City and Cultural Hub

Busan City, recognized as a key tourism hub in the Republic of Korea, boasts picturesque beaches that attract over 8 million visitors during summer (Ahn, 2011). Beyond its natural allure, the Busan City Government has strategically identified the hosting of a film festival as an opportunity to rejuvenate its economy by fostering a burgeoning new industry. Geographically, Busan has historically been pivotal due to its external connections, strategic location as a gateway to Japan and Western countries, and its relationship with the southwestern city of Gwangju. The expansion of Busan and its container port has cemented its status as a primary entry point to Korea (Hwang, 2019). Despite its growing importance, the focus of Korean society predominantly revolves around Seoul, the nation's capital, and Jeju Island, a major tourist attraction (Ahn, 2011).

The 1990s marked a significant era of decentralization and empowerment for local governments in the Republic of Korea. A notable shift in local governments' political and social focus towards the cultural sector was seen with the introduction of self-governance policies in 1995. The system change encouraged the creation of cultural events to strengthen local identity, leading to a surge in local festivals post-1995. Each region sought to carve out its unique characteristics through festivals, with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of the Republic of Korea initiating evaluations and support of various local festivals since 1996 (Park S. H., 2016). The Busan International Film Festival emerged as a manifestation of Busan City's ambition for broader recognition and its strategic utilization of cultural assets (Ahn, 2011).

Busan's dedication to cultural and cinematic development was internationally acknowledged when the city was declared a part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) and earned the title "City of Film" on December 1, 2014. Thus, a new image was designated as Busan and marked as the first Asian City of Film in the UCCN, with very satisfactory initial assessment results (Busan, 2020). Inspired by Western cinema, Busan has laid solid roots in the film industry, becoming the first city in Korea to release films. Its natural environment, which encompasses mountains, rivers, and sea, has provided popular filming locations and enticing film and television productions. Over the past few decades, Busan has evolved into a crucial hub for the Asian film industry and a center for creative industries (Busan, 2020).

6. Paradiplomatic Leverage: Busan's Transformation into a Global Film City

Integrating city branding within paradiplomacy has become increasingly vital for regional governments' internationalization efforts, as seen in South Korea's adoption of local autonomy and self-governance since globalization in 1995, which fostered this trend significantly (Kjulavkovski, 2017). The shift towards decentralization has enhanced the role of paradiplomacy, where non-central actors engage in international relations to
advance their cultural and socio-economic interests, as noted by Cornago (2010). Within the evolving framework, city branding in paradiplomacy emerges as a strategic approach, allowing cities like Busan to sculpt their global identity and presence.

The Busan International Film Festival exemplifies city branding's role in paradiplomacy. The event has evolved beyond a cultural phenomenon, becoming a strategic mechanism for Busan to assert its identity as a City of Film on the Asian and global stages. By hosting the BIFF event, Busan engages in Paradiplomacy, intimately linked to city branding, projecting its image and reinforcing its identity as a cultural hub (Marić, 2018). The rebranding process involves community participation to ensure that the public is involved in and benefits from these paradiplomatic endeavors, as mentioned by Zamorano & Rodríguez Morató (Joo Y. M., 2015).

Moreover, the festival's influence extends beyond cultural realms, stimulating the local economy and revitalizing urban spaces, embodying Anholt's concept of the sustained effort required to build a reputable and trustworthy city brand (Anholt in Anttiroiko, 2014). (Anttiroiko, 2014). In a competitive global landscape where cities vie for investment, tourism, and cultural recognition (Anttiroiko, The Political Economy of City Branding, 2014)ion, the Busan International Film Festival showcases how city branding within paradiplomacy can significantly enhance a city's cultural standing and achieve broader economic and developmental objectives (Stringer J., 2001).

The Busan International Film Festival was initiated by local filmmakers, not the Busan city government. Nevertheless, the festival quickly garnered support from the government, which assisted in funding and licensing to assist the festival's success in crafting Busan's image. In alignment with the national cultural policy of 'Cine Culture City,' the government of Busan City Government, the Busan Cultural Vision 2020 in 2007 reflected their commitment to establishing Busan as a City of Film. Significant funds were allocated to construct various cultural facilities, such as museums, art exhibitions, opera theaters, and new film facilities (Park S. H., 2016). Recognizing Busan's achievements through the festival, the Republic of Korea's government fully integrated Busan as a City of Film in national development plans, solidifying Busan's status as an innovation city, a hub for maritime, film, and financed the plan from 2006 to 2020 (Jang-soo Ryu, 2006).

As a cultural paradiplomacy tool, the Busan International Film Festival also capitalizes on the business aspects of festivals. Similar to a previous study by Getz, which asserted that festivals serve as attractions, image makers, and catalysts for development, they will require management akin to a business due to their impact on local economies (Lim, 2016). The festival boosts tourism and local businesses, offering packages that include transportation, accommodation, and festival tickets, actively promoting through local media campaigns (Ahn, 2011). Since the late 1990s, Busan has experienced a shift in tourism patterns, with areas like Gwangbok-dong and Nampo-dong evolving into urban centers and festival hubs, which further developed with the expansion of projects in the Haeundae-gu area (Ahn, 2011). The city developments not only changed the visual appearance of Busan but also enhanced its image as a global cinematic city.

Embracing its vision as "the Hub City of the Film Industry in Asia," Busan has built networks and positioned itself as a communication center for the Asian film industry, striving to integrate city development through cultural discourse (Park S. H., 2016).
Cinema has become a significant driver for developing civic identity and adapting to the global economy (Ahn, 2011). Busan has improved cinema-related infrastructure to support this vision, establishing sustainability in film production, distribution, and commercialization. The Busan Film Commission and several cultural and training facilities actively contribute to the local cinema production process and facilitate the expansion of local, regional, and international collaborative initiatives.

To support Busan City's diplomacy in realizing the City of Film image, the Busan City Government improved infrastructure related to cinema, including the construction of the Busan Cinema Center, Busan Cultural Content Complex, Busan Cinematheque, AZworks, and Busan Film Experience Museum. The city of Busan has also succeeded in establishing sustainability in film production, distribution, and commercialization. The Busan Film Commission helps in the local cinema production process. Cinema heritage in the form of an archive or museum was realized through the construction of the Busan Film Experience Museum, while initiatives to disseminate films were done through holding the Busan International Film Festival. A training ground for filmmakers and the dissemination of film knowledge is also achieved through the Asian Film Academy. The paradiplomacy of Busan, apart from holding a film festival which has been automatically achieved through the implementation of the Busan International Film Festival, also builds collaborative initiatives at local, regional, and international levels by implementing the Asian Film Market co-production platform and discussions between professionals and film lovers through the Asia Film Committee Net. Non-state actor entities also participate in developing the local cinema production process. The establishment of the Busan Film Experience Museum and the Busan International Film Festival organization have contributed to preserving cinema legacy by creating an archive or museum and promoting film dissemination. The Asian Cinema Academy plays a crucial role in spreading cinema knowledge and providing training facilities for filmmakers.

Busan's paradiplomacy is directed at showcasing its capabilities and uniqueness, raising global public awareness of its qualifications as the City of Film. The city's focus on Asian cinema and its commitment to using culture for sustainable development has created a unique global image. Awarded the City of Film title by UCCN in 2014, Busan has embraced the "Film for All" vision, providing equal opportunities for participation in film activities. The comprehensive approach to cultural paradiplomacy has reshaped Busan's image and paved the way for its ascent as a global cinematic hub.

7. Crafting Global Identity: Paradiplomacy and the Rise of Busan as a Film City

The transformation of Busan City into a prominent "Film City" is a striking example of how strategic paradiplomacy can profoundly enhance a city's international profile and identity, similar to the theoretical framework on city branding and image building by Kavaratzis (2004). The city image transformation epitomized by the growth of the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) and the city's holistic participation in the film sector demonstrates the significant role of cultural paradiplomacy in augmenting a city's global visibility and reputation.
The key factor behind Busan's success is its savvy use of the film industry as a channel for cultural paradiplomacy. The BIFF transcends being just a mere event as it serves as a cultural emblem, showcasing Busan's vibrant film culture and positioning it as a central figure in the global cinematic arena. The approach aligns perfectly with Kavaratzis's emphasis on primary, secondary, and tertiary communication. The festival and related cultural initiatives have significantly enhanced the city's physical and cultural infrastructure. At the same time, the formal and intentional communication of Busan's vision as the City of Film has been skillfully broadcast globally. Moreover, the festival has propelled Busan's image internationally through media exposure and word-of-mouth, reinforcing its image as a culturally rich and dynamic City of Film.

Central to Busan's success is its savvy use of the film industry as a channel for cultural paradiplomacy. The BIFF transcends a mere event; it serves as a cultural emblem, showcasing Busan's vibrant film culture and positioning it as a central figure in the global cinematic arena. This approach aligns perfectly with Kavaratzis's emphasis on primary, secondary, and tertiary communication. The festival and related cultural initiatives have significantly enhanced Busan's physical and cultural infrastructure. At the same time, the formal and intentional communication of its vision as a Film City has been skillfully broadcast globally. Moreover, the festival has propelled Busan's image internationally through media exposure and word-of-mouth, reinforcing its image as a culturally rich and dynamic Film City.

The government of Busan City has been crucial in this narrative. The government's support and investments have significantly contributed to developing the film sector, which began as a local initiative and is crucial for integrating global cultural trends into the city's identity and economy. While external factors like Hallyu have provided a conducive environment, the targeted paradiplomacy strategies, resonating with Kavaratzis's theoretical framework, have been primarily responsible for Busan's unique achievements and global acclaim as the City of Film.

Busan's narrative exemplifies how cities can utilize cultural assets to attain global prominence and socio-economic development. The evolution from hosting a local film festival to gaining international recognition as a City of Film is a paradigm of how strategic cultural initiatives, robust vision, and consistent branding efforts can revolutionize a city's global perception and influence. While the Korean Wave offered a favorable backdrop, the city's deliberate paradiplomacy strategies, aligning with Kavaratzis's city branding and image-building framework, decisively sculpted Busan's unique triumph and global stature in the film industry.

8. Conclusions

The case of the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) is a compelling testament to the successful application of paradiplomacy in reshaping and elevating the city's image on the global stage. The transformation, driven by targeted policy and development strategies centered around film and culture, has positioned Busan not just as a competitor among major Asian film festivals but also as a leading cultural epicenter. The festival succeeds in transforming Busan's image from an "Industrial City in Decline" to an "Aesthetic City" and ultimately into Asia's first "City of Film," as recognized by UNESCO, highlighting the profound impact of cultural paradiplomacy.
Busan has skillfully navigated political, economic, and socio-cultural landscapes through the BIFF, using the festival as a platform for diplomatic outreach, economic growth, and cultural exchange. The festival has evolved from its original status as a mere event. It has now become a defining element of Busan’s identity and ambitions, significantly influencing the city’s international perception. Establishing various cultural facilities and implementing supportive city policies have garnered international acclaim for Busan and significantly shifted global perceptions of the city.

Evaluating the study of the Busan International Film Festival in addressing the research question and contributing to the literature reveals that this case offers valuable insights into the dynamics of city branding through paradiplomacy. The festival exemplifies how a city can strategically leverage a cultural event to achieve substantial socio-economic and political goals. The case is a model for other cities seeking to enhance their international standing through similar endeavors. The successful branding of Busan as a City of Film through the BIFF demonstrates a holistic approach to paradiplomacy, where cultural, economic, and diplomatic strategies are integrated to form a powerful and cohesive city image.

The Busan International Film Festival has effectively functioned as a paradiplomacy tool, enabling Busan to secure a prestigious international reputation as the City of Film. The current research addresses the central question by illustrating the practical implementation of paradiplomacy in city branding and providing a tangible example of how cultural events can strategically boost a city's global image and influence. As Busan continues to develop sustainably and harmoniously with its cultural offerings, particularly the BIFF, the city solidifies its position as Asia's "City of Film," which imparts valuable lessons in cultural paradiplomacy and strategic city branding. The present case study underscores the potential of cultural initiatives to serve as powerful catalysts for urban transformation and global recognition.

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