

Understanding The Cultural Para-Diplomacy Of Medan Through *Melayu* Identity

Understanding the Cultural Para-Diplomacy of Medan Through Melayu Identity

Stivani Ismawira Sinambela^{a,1}, Tulus Warsito^{b,2}, Takdir Ali Mukti^{c,3}, Faris Al Fadhat^{d,4},

^aProgram Studi Hubungan Internasional, Universitas Potensi Utama Jl. K.L. Yos Sudarso KM 6.5 Tj. Mulia, Medan, 20241, Indonesia

^{a,b}Program Studi Doktor Politik Islam-Ilmu Politik Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Jl. Brawijaya, Geblagan, Tamantirto, Kec. Kasihan, Kabupaten Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55183, Indonesia

^{c,d}Program Studi Hubungan Internasional, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Jl. Brawijaya, Geblagan, Tamantirto, Kec. Kasihan, Kabupaten Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55183, Indonesia

stivani@potensi-utama.ac.id¹, tulusw@umy.ac.id², takdiralimukti@umy.ac.id³, farisalfadh@umy.ac.id⁴

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the cultural para-diplomacy of Medan, Indonesia, through the lens of Melayu's identity. Para-diplomacy, the foreign relations conducted by local governments, has emerged as a significant phenomenon in the context of globalization. As a multicultural country, Indonesia provides a fertile ground for local governments to engage in para-diplomacy, leveraging their unique cultural identities to build international connections. The city of Medan presents a compelling case study. Although Medan has a majority Batak population, it has a strong historical connection to Melayu culture, evident in its tangible and intangible heritage, such as the Maimoon Palace, Melayu architecture, Songket textiles, traditional ceremonies, foods, and dances. This cultural richness has been the foundation for Medan's para-diplomacy efforts, which date back to the 1980s, long before Indonesia's decentralization in 1999. The research adopts a descriptive-qualitative approach, drawing on primary data from in-depth interviews with city government officials and the Melayu Deli community and secondary data from literature, reports, documents, journal articles, and websites. The analysis is divided into three parts: the historical development and rise of Medan's cultural para-diplomacy, the institutional policies driving this phenomenon, and the strategies employed by Medan to promote Melayu identity through cultural para-diplomacy. The findings suggest that Medan has leveraged its Melayu heritage to establish lasting international partnerships, particularly with Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei cities. These cultural connections have been instrumental in fostering tourism development and strengthening regional identity. The paper also discusses the challenges faced by Medan, such as the need to balance centralized policies and local autonomy, as well as the potential tensions between cultural branding and tourism promotion. The study contributes to understanding how local governments in unitary political systems, like Indonesia, can strategically employ cultural para-diplomacy to enhance their global visibility and competitiveness. The Medan case provides insights into the nuances of cultural identity, regional cooperation, and the evolving landscape of subnational diplomacy.

Keywords: City Branding, Cultural Para-diplomacy, Local Identity

ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis para-diplomasi budaya Medan, Indonesia, melalui identitas Melayu. Para-diplomasi, yaitu hubungan luar negeri yang dilakukan oleh pemerintah daerah, telah muncul sebagai fenomena penting dalam konteks globalisasi. Sebagai negara multikultural, Indonesia memberikan lahan subur bagi pemerintah daerah untuk terlibat dalam para-diplomasi, memanfaatkan identitas budaya unik untuk membangun hubungan internasional. Kota Medan menyajikan studi kasus yang menarik. Meskipun Medan berpenduduk mayoritas Batak, kota ini memiliki hubungan sejarah yang kuat dengan budaya Melayu, terlihat dari warisan benda dan benda tak benda, seperti Istana Maimoon, arsitektur Melayu, tekstil Songket, upacara adat, makanan, dan tarian. Kekayaan budaya ini menjadi landasan bagi upaya para-diplomasi di Medan, yang dimulai pada tahun 1980an, jauh sebelum desentralisasi Indonesia pada tahun 1999. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif, yang memanfaatkan data primer dari wawancara mendalam dengan pejabat pemerintah kota dan komunitas Melayu Deli serta data sekunder dari literatur, laporan, dokumen, artikel jurnal, dan website. Analisis ini dibagi menjadi tiga bagian: sejarah perkembangan dan kebangkitan para-diplomasi budaya Medan, kebijakan kelembagaan yang mendorong fenomena ini, dan strategi yang digunakan Medan untuk mempromosikan identitas Melayu melalui para-diplomasi budaya. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa Medan telah memanfaatkan warisan Melayunya untuk membangun kemitraan internasional yang langgeng, khususnya dengan kota-kota di Malaysia, Singapura, dan Brunei. Koneksi budaya ini berperan penting dalam mendorong

pengembangan pariwisata dan memperkuat identitas daerah. Tulisan ini juga membahas tantangan yang dihadapi Medan, seperti kebutuhan untuk menyeimbangkan kebijakan terpusat dan otonomi daerah, serta potensi ketegangan antara branding budaya dan promosi pariwisata. Studi ini berkontribusi untuk memahami bagaimana pemerintah daerah dalam sistem politik kesatuan, seperti Indonesia, dapat menerapkan para-diplomasi budaya secara strategis untuk meningkatkan visibilitas dan daya saing global. Kasus Medan memberikan wawasan mengenai nuansa identitas budaya, kerja sama regional, dan lanskap diplomasi subnasional yang terus berkembang.

***Kata Kunci:** Branding Kota, Para-Diplomasi, Identitas Lokal*

Info Artikel :

Disubmit: 20 Mei 2024

Direview: 10 Juni 2024

Diterima : 08 Juli 2024

Copyright © 2024 – PIR Journal. All rights reserved.

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy has been controlled by nation-states (Beriddge, G. R., & James, 2003). It is characterized as a 'multilayered diplomacy' (Hocking, 1993), which Duchacek (1990) has called parallel diplomacy or 'para-diplomacy' (Zamorano, M. M., & Morató, 2014). The beginning of para-diplomacy development is characterized by the phenomenon of globalization that has affected all aspects of human life (Mursitama, T. N., & Lee, 2018). Para-diplomacy is as foreign relations conducted by local governments, such as provincial, regency, or city governments (Mukti, T. A., Fathun, L. M., Muhammad, A., & Sinambela, 2021). Para-diplomacy has provided opportunities for local governments to establish foreign relations to develop the local potential to be able to participate in global competition. Para-diplomacy raises non-traditional actors such as groups, individuals, organizations, and sub-states to achieve their respective interests. The actors involved in international relations have been very diverse since the middle of the twentieth century. The implementation of para-diplomacy takes various forms, such as technical cooperation agreements, including humanitarian assistance, cooperation in forwarding loans/grants, cooperation in capital participation, and various other types of cooperation (Mukti, 2020). Para-diplomacy, as practiced by sub-state governments in developed societies, has many different focuses. Not all local governments take the same approach to foreign relations. Para-diplomacy is not a brand-new concept of diplomacy. However, if it is viewed from the perspective of the reality of implementation as a political policy in Indonesia, then para-diplomacy can be seen as a recent alternative. Indonesia is a multicultural country with various ethnicities, races, beliefs, religions, arts, and regional cultures. Indonesia's richness and diversity are among the main and leading factors in its national development (Warsito, T., & Kartikasari, 2007). It is an obligation in the sister city to see the Government as a party that should not be forgotten. It is because Indonesia applies the 'One Door' Policy. One door policy is a national reality that must be addressed properly by the Local Government. Thus, this reality is a promising opportunity and challenge, as it allows every local government to be more creative in taking steps and policies that are constructive, effective, efficient, and active in maximizing the development of potential.

The government has given authority to local governments to open international relations in the form of sister cities. Thus, the role played by local governments in carrying out foreign relations in Sister City is a form of a bilateral relationship that aims to maintain national interests, maintain peace, and also improve economic growth in the developing area, but local governments do not act on their behalf (Mukti, 2013). While state absence may be equally detected in the sub-state diplomacy of federal and unitary political systems, the extent to which central government power is embedded in the external interactions of sub-governments is more profound in unitary political systems than in federal systems (Liu, T., & Song, 2020). Sub-governments of both federal and unitary systems are often given a certain amount of policy space to conduct their international relations activities. The central regime has authorized both to adopt various strategies (such as regular meetings and informal interactions) to generate clientelism between provincial leaders and

their foreign counterparts. In this respect, the actions of the provinces of the unitary system are not completely different from the para-diplomacy of subnational units in the federal system.

It is significant for a sub-government to have an identity. It is essential since it will determine a regional reputation before the international community (Anholt, 2008). This article aims to contribute to analyzing the cultural para-diplomacy of Medan through *Melayu* identity and its relations with the external cultural action of both the central State and the local government. One of the cities that has established cultural para-diplomacy with Medan is George Town. This aims to improve friendly relations between the two cities that have existed for a long time. The two cities have officially established sister-city relations since October 10, 1984, based on friendly relations and similar cultural ties. Geographically, both are only separated by the Strait of Malacca. Sister City's relationship between Medan and George Town is a non-profit collaboration but cultural para-diplomacy (Sinambela, 2020). Since the 1980s, various local processes, including the boom in tourism and increasing social gentrification, have questioned the methods and goals of para-diplomacy, bringing them into a confrontation with other internationalization strategies, such as cultural branding and policies to promote tourism (Zamorano, M. M., & Morató, 2014)

Medan became the research object for reasons such as its strong history of *Melayu* culture, even though the city is located in a province with a majority of Batakness. The cultures are tangible, such as the Palaces (one of them is Maimoon Palace), the old town with *Melayu* architecture, and intangible in *Songket*, traditional ceremonies, foods, and dances. The people of Medan still uphold the traditions and customs of the local cultures. The cultural para-diplomacy of Medan has been carried out since the 1980s with Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei before the decentralization began in Indonesia in 1999. It is proven that Medan has long created foreign relations through *Melayu*'s identity. This paper aims to describe a transformation of the para-diplomacy of Medan through *Melayu*'s identity to promote tourism in *Melayu* cities. To cope with this challenge, this article has proposed a model of Cultural Diplomacy. The first part of this paper describes the concept of Cultural Diplomacy formed by historical globalization implications, decentralization, and para-diplomacy. The second part examines the case studies of the usage of cultural para-diplomacy between Medan and other foreign *Melayu* cities. The last part offers the conclusion of this paper.

2. METHODS

Even though Medan has various traditions and cultures, its identity seems to have faded in line with many foreign cultures. Medan, as the provincial capital of North Sumatra with the Batakness majority, has a long and strong history with *Melayu* cities in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. Based on this situation, it is essential to observe the efforts of cultural para diplomacy of the Medan City government to develop *Melayu*'s identity. This research adopts a descriptive-qualitative method. It aims to map and describe the Para-diplomacy of Medan in strengthening *Melayu*'s identity. The data collection came from primary and secondary data. To collect the primary data, this research conducted an in-depth interview with city government officers who manage regional cooperation and international relations and the community of *Melayu Deli*. The secondary data was collected from the literature related to the problems to be discussed, and then analyzed. This literature includes reports, documents, journal articles, and websites regarding Medan foreign relations. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first part discusses historical development and the rise of Medan cultural para-diplomacy. The second part discusses Medan institutional policy to the emergence of para-diplomacy, and the third part analyzes the strategies of Medan cultural para-diplomacy through *Melayu*'s identity.

3. RESULT & DISCUSSION

a. *Historical Development and the Rise of Medan Cultural Para-diplomacy*

The history of Medan City is deeply intertwined with a long and significant past. The city's origins can be traced back to Guru Patimpus's establishment of Kampung Medan Puteri in 1590. This settlement later developed into the Deli Sultanate in 1669, which was proclaimed by Tuanku Perungit, who had separated from the Aceh Sultanate. The subsequent growth of Medan was marked by the transfer of the East Sumatra Resident's capital from Bengkalis to Medan in 1887. This strategic move paved the way for Medan's transformation, as it eventually attained the status of a Governor-led city in 1915. Historically, Medan has always been positioned as a vital trade route (Hardiyansyah et al., 2024). Its strategic location, situated near the confluence of the Deli and Babura Rivers, along with the Deli Sultan's policy of developing tobacco plantations in the early stages of the city's growth, has played a significant role in Medan's emergence as a thriving trade center for both exports and imports. Since Medan was designated as the capital of Deli, the city has been actively encouraged to evolve into a hub of government administration. Today, Medan serves as a metropolitan area and the capital of the North Sumatra Province, solidifying its standing as a crucial center of economic and political importance. The long-standing history of Medan has shaped the city's identity and its pivotal role in the region. From its humble beginnings as Kampung Medan Puteri to its current status as a prominent trade and administrative center, Medan's development has been a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its people, as well as the strategic vision of its leaders throughout the centuries.

Medan was founded by a descendant of the Raja Singa Maharaja from Barekah, Tanah Karo, named Guru Patimpus on July 1, 1590. Initially, the city of Medan was only a small village called "Medan Putri" which was located at the confluence of two large rivers that emptied into the Malacca Strait, namely the Deli River and the Babura River. Its very strategic location made Medan Putri village a leading transit port. The city of Medan currently has the highest ethnic diversity in all of Indonesia. Based on the results of the 2016 census, there are 2,036,185 citizens consisting of eight ethnic majority and ethnic immigrant (Sinambela, 2018). Eight ethnic groups originating from North Sumatra are *Melayu*, *Karo*, *Batak Toba*, *Mandailing*, *Simalungun*, *Pak-Pak Dairi*, and *Nias*. The ethnic *Minang*, *Jawa*, and *Aceh* have important role in the growth of Medan. Ethnic immigrants from India, the Netherlands, and China also have a very significant role in helping Medan grow, especially in the economic field (Achmaddin, 2021).

Each ethnic group has a language, art, and culture that is quite high. Medan citizens have no friction due to these ethnic differences, even between religious and racial communities, because no ethnic group is dominant over other ethnic groups. Medan, which used to be a "kampong kecil," has developed into a big city based on plantation business. The richness of various ethnic cultures in Medan has a huge potential to be developed as a tourism object and to exchange cultural performances between nations. Geographically, Medan has a strategic position because it is directly adjacent to the Malacca Strait in the north, so it is relatively close to more developed cities/countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and others. Likewise, demographically, Medan is estimated to have a relatively large market share of goods/services. This is inseparable from the relatively large population, which in 2019 is estimated to have reached 2.279.894 (BPS, 2022) inhabitants. Likewise, economically, with an economic structure dominated by tertiary and secondary sectors, Medan has the potential to develop into a regional/national trade and financial center.

The ethnic diversity that exists in the city of Medan has pushed the city government to actively develop Medan to become a metropolitan city. Diverse ethnicities produce a variety of cultures, such as art, music, and language to people's habits (Fatmawati, 2021). The existence of a relationship or direct contact that occurs with the citizen produces a unique and distinctive blend of culture. The blend of unique and distinctive cultures is a process of cultural assimilation that has occurred. One form of cultural fusion can be seen in one art

example, *Ronggeng Melayu* art. The art of *Ronggeng Melayu* (Nasution, H. D., & Munandar, 2018) can be seen to absorb many elements from other cultures, such as dance movements from the Javanese and Sundanese ethnicities and musical accompaniment from the Karo and Indian ethnicities. The assimilation or fusion of cultures was born as evidence that Medan grew into a city with ethnic pluralism accompanied by harmony. Medan, which was once synonymous with an international plantation city, has turned into a melting pot city or a place for the cultural mingling of several ethnic groups in it.

The development of Medan's cultural history happened very quickly. Which is a cross-trade and plantation center, making it a place that accommodates the mixing of various cultures from diverse ethnicities. The entry and exit of various ethnic groups from surrounding countries such as India, Gujarat, Arabic, and China also greatly influenced Medan's culture. This can be seen from the existence of buildings in the city, including Chinese architecture and Indian to Dutch patterns (as relics of colonial rule). These buildings include the post office building of Dutch heritage, Tjong A Fie's House, Maha Vihara Maitreya, and the Al Mashun Grand Mosque, which is a historic mosque inherited from the Deli Sultanate (Zein, 2022). Medan's cultural history is a testament to the city's ability to adapt and embrace the influx of diverse populations, resulting in a unique and dynamic cultural tapestry. The coexistence of various architectural styles, religious institutions, and cultural practices is a testament to the city's capacity to accommodate and celebrate the mixing of diverse ethnicities and traditions. As Medan continues to evolve, preserving and promoting its rich cultural heritage is crucial, ensuring that the city's vibrant past remains an integral part of its present and future. By embracing this cultural diversity, Medan can continue to thrive as a dynamic and cosmopolitan hub, attracting visitors from around the world who seek to experience the unique blend of cultures that make this city truly exceptional.

b. Institutional Policy to Emergence Para-diplomacy

From the constitutional law perspective, para-diplomacy directly results from autonomy and government decentralization (Zulian, I., & Sinambela, 2019). As is regulated under Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Local Government (hereinafter referred to as "Local Government Law"), Local governments have shared authority with the central government, except in the fields of foreign policy, defense and national security, fiscal and monetary. It should be noted that according to the 1945 Constitution regarding Decentralization, local government does not possess exclusive authority over any matter (Intentilia, A. A. M., & Surya Putra, 2021). Thus, it has to be translated to the central government being ultimately present in every aspect of governance. As a result, the number of local foreign relations is very low. The local government must be more creative rather than expecting the central government's initiation and support (Surwandono & Maksum, 2020).

In addition, to carry out the cultural para-diplomacy of Medan, the synergy of various actors who play a role in it is also one factor that determines the success of the purpose of the activity itself. Medan cannot work alone in this matter; it takes parties who can participate and be responsible for implementing these activities. The parties in question are conceptualized in a term, namely the concept of the Pentahelix. The elements in this Penta helix consist of 'ABCGM,' namely (1) Academicians or academics, (2) Business or business people and industry players, (3) Community or society and communities, (4) Central and local governments, (5) Media (Kemenkopmk, 2019). The development of the period, which was followed by the rotation of the flow of globalization, brought many positive and negative impacts for the country and Indonesia. Globalization, which brings in various things from the outside, has mixed until the uniqueness of a country fades. This can also be seen in the waning culture of each region in Indonesia, such as Medan. This city, which has various ethnicities and cultures, also does not escape the impact of cultural mixing or acculturation due to globalization.

According to city development and policy, Medan has some missions to pursue, namely: (1) Provision, increasing economic equity in living a blessed life; (2) Improvement, improving the quality of the people; (3) Reputable, Realizing smart, clean and accountable governance; (4)

Growth, realizing a livable city; (5) Conducive, increase a sense of comfort and conducive to the citizen; (6) Innovative, increasing economic growth with the support of innovation; and (7) Identity, creating a City of cultural tourism. The Medan City government has made various efforts to promote the local culture. According to the Head of the Medan City Culture Officer, Edliyati MAP, the currents of globalization and Western pop culture are increasingly eroding regional culture, which has indirectly affected the nation's character more or less. Therefore, culture must be the foundation of every development policy carried out in Indonesia because it has a strategic role for the nation. Cultural para-diplomacy emerged concerning the state's international projection; regional cooperation and integration initiatives continued after various mandates that focused almost exclusively on economic relations (Marié, 2018). Aside from being an effort to protect the cultural and artistic wealth of the Medan City area from foreign cultural threats, the cultural para-diplomacy carried out by the Medan City Government is also motivated by political conditions. Decentralization policies that provide opportunities for each region to promote trade, investment, and various potential collaborations (Atisa et al., 2021) with parties outside the state's jurisdictional boundaries encourage the Medan City Government to take advantage of the diversity and cultural richness it has as a diplomatic tool to attract attention and cooperation with other countries.

c. Cultural Para-diplomacy Strategies of Medan

The enormous potential that exists from the diverse culture of Medan is a strong reason for the government to build international networks within the framework of diplomacy and cooperation with the government and the private sector, which have best practices of excellent governance and competitive management and are proven to make changes to people's lives. Competition among countries, nations, cities, and regions to attract resources has led to the advent of the renewed struggle for the uniqueness of an emerging economy of identity (Eugenio, J. de S., & Xifra, 2015). The development of time and thought and the shifting of paradigms make culture in a country considered one of the 'weapons' that can be used to help establish cooperation with the government and the private sector to achieve the country's goals. If politics and economics were previously used as commanders and main pawns in international relations, then culture can be used as another alternative to commanders in international relations (Badie, 2020).

Along with the times that forced the entry of various other cultures through the gates of globalization, the existence of the original culture typical of Medan City, which is also Indonesia's cultural heritage, has gradually eroded. Cultural acculturation as a result of globalization has diminished the original culture of Medan City and threatened its existence as well. The threat to the existence of this increasingly worrying cultural heritage has also become the impetus for the Medan City government to actively bring and introduce the culture to the international scene. One of the efforts made by the Medan City government is to hold various art performances involving other countries such as the '*Gelar Melayu Serumpun*' (GEMES), which has been held since 2016 every year involving Melayu countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei Darussalam. In 2018, these cultural para-diplomacy activities were held at the Maimoon Palace. It considers that Maimoon Palace is a typical icon of Medan City as well as a typical icon of *Melayu Deli*. The representatives who attended were not only from North Sumatra. But from other provinces such as Palembang, Bengkulu, Jambi, West Sumatra, Riau, and Aceh, representatives from 4 other allied countries, namely Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei Darussalam. The following are some of the arts and cultural activities carried out by the Medan City Government as part of its cultural para-diplomacy efforts:

Table 1. Main Activities in the Cultural Para-diplomacy of GEMES (2016-2020)

Year	Activity
2016	• <i>Melayu Arts and Culture Performances such as Melayu Dance,</i>

	Gurindam, Pantun, and typical <i>Melayu</i> music. • Bringing representatives of each country to visit various tourist destinations in Medan City
2017	• <i>Melayu</i> art performances such as <i>Melayu</i> dances, ronggeng songs, rhymes, culinary exhibitions and Medan products.
2018	• <i>Melayu</i> art performances with 428 umbrella decorations representing the age of Medan and dances from 73 pairs of dancers representing the age of independence of the Republic of Indonesia
2019	• Performances of <i>Melayu</i> colossal dances and <i>Melayu</i> arts from 5 allied countries and 10 provinces in Indonesia. • The art activity was entitled “Sempadan Dialogue” as well as several literacy activities.
2020	• <i>Melayu</i> colossal dance performances and the Payung Budaya dance. It is one of the 100 best tourist attractions and has been designated as one of the Calendar of Events Wonderful Indonesia 2020

Source: Interviewee and managed by author.

Table 1 shows that the Medan City Government is actively carrying out artistic activities to implement cultural para-diplomacy to establish relations with other countries. *Gelar Melayu Serumpun* (GEMES), which is held once a year starting in 2016, is filled with various Melayu arts and cultural performances such as Melayu Dance, Gurindam, Pantun, Tonil Nobles, and typical *Melayu* music. Representatives of each country should be brought to visit various tourist destinations in Medan. The “Sempadan Dialogue” activity mentioned in the table for the year 2019 seems to have been an important part of that year’s cultural para-diplomacy efforts by GEMES. The term “Sempadan” in Malay can refer to a border, boundary, or frontier. In the context of this cultural program, the “Sempadan Dialogue” likely serves as a platform for discussions, exchanges, and dialogues around the shared cultural heritage and identities across the Melayu Cities.

Cultural acculturation may not be denied has touched some Indonesian people. For this reason, through art, acculturation can be filtered to show national identity through educative art performances. Art and culture are assets whose existence needs to be maintained and developed to create a society that maintains the Indonesian nation's identity (Nuriyanto, 2022). *GEMES* is an activity that brings Arts and Culture together to increase domestic and international tourist visits, as well as education and exploration of the diversity of *Melayu* culture as local wisdom and cultural para-diplomacy of Medan.

Medan cultural para-diplomacy is based on utilizing the exchange of ideas, values, and traditions to strengthen relations, increase socio-cultural cooperation, and promote the interests of the City of Medan and Indonesia. Making Medan an international city is one of the goals of cultural para-diplomacy. Establishing good relations to increase cooperation with other countries (Franco & Marmelo, 2014) in various fields through culture is a strategy that the Medan City Government is intensively carrying out. This can be seen from the development of the City of Medan as a result of cooperation with several countries such as Malaysia and China. Medan has also carried out 'sister city' collaborations with other countries, such as the Medan-Penang collaboration through art activities titled "Sempadan Dialogue" and established several literary activities as well as 'Sister City' Cooperation between Medan City and Chengdu City through tourism infrastructure development cooperation. The Government, through Majelis Kesenian Medan (MKM), agreed to design joint cultural activities that were carried out alternately with the Pulau Pinang Writers Association and the Northern Territory Language and Library Council; these cultural events were carried out by Medan and the Penang (Georgetown)

Malaysia. It might maintain the cooperation between the two cities that had been established in the field of literature, especially *Melayu* literature. The Kesawan City Walk is the new branding of Medan's para-diplomacy as *The Kitchen of Asia*. It is also the series of cultural para-diplomacy activities of Medan to encourage economic growth and pursue a world-class tourist city. In other words, global networks of local government can create coalitions of the willing on certain issues (Smith, 2019).



Figure 1. Image from the event of GEMES 2020 in front of Maimoon Palace in Medan as Cultural Para-diplomacy

According to BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik) of North Sumatra, *GEMES* was able to bring foreign and domestic tourists to the city of Medan. The increasing number of foreign tourists evidences this increased by 25,46 percent, from 15.084 visits to 18.925 visits. It is known that most foreign tourists come from Malaysia, with 43,73 percent of the total foreign tourists. However, the last *GEMES* was held in 2020. Since the COVID-19 pandemic limited people's mobility to suppress transmission with the enactment of Large-Scale Social Distention, the *GEMES* could not be held in 2021. Tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on BPS (2021), there was a significant decrease in the number of tourists, both local and foreign tourists. Total foreign tourist visits to Indonesia in 2020 amounted to 4.02 million visits. If compared to 2019, the number of international tourists decreased by 75,03 percent. Based on nationality, 5 countries visited Indonesia the most in 2020: Timor Leste, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and China. Most of these countries are neighboring countries, except for China. Meanwhile, in North Sumatra, the number of foreign tourists who came to North Sumatra in June 2020 increased compared to the previous month. If in May 2020, there was only 1 tourist who came, then in June, there were 99 tourists who entered North Sumatra. Most foreign tourists entering North Sumatra in June 2020 came from Malaysia, which was 75 people. The number of tourists from Malaysia dropped dramatically compared to June 2019, which amounted to 12,125 people. Thus, National development is carried out by optimizing the potential of culture through the tourism industry, especially cultural tourism. Cultural potential contributes the most to Indonesia because it can generate foreign exchange for the country, increasing its economy and creating jobs.

Country	Foreign Tourists					Percentage				
	June 2019	May 2020	June 2020	Jan '19 – June '19	Jan '20 – June '20	June '20 towards June '19	June '20 towards May 20	Jan – June '20 towards 2019	Total of Role in June '20	Total of Role in Jan – June '20
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Malaysia	12.125	0	75	63.194	20.162	-99,38	-	-68,10	75,76	45,97
Singapore	1.392	0	3	9.024	2.503	-99,78	-	-72,26	3,03	5,71
Philippines	97	0	3	682	207	-96,91	-	-69,65	3,03	0,47
India	277	0	1	2.008	581	99,64	-	-71,07	1,01	1,32
Others	7.252	1	17	46.893	20.402	-99,77	1.600,00	-56,49	17,17	46,52
Total	21.148	1	99	121.801	43.855	-99,53	9.800,00	-63,99	100,00	100,00

Figure 2. The number of International Tourist Arrivals to North Sumatra (2020) shows that the tourists who visit the most are from Malaysia and Singapore. It is proven that cultural similarities have an impact.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of Medan's cultural para-diplomacy through the lens of Melayu identity. The findings reveal that Medan's strong historical ties with Melayu cities in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei have enabled the city to establish long-standing foreign relations and cultural diplomacy since the 1980s, even before Indonesia's decentralization in 1999. Medan's cultural identity, rooted in Melayu traditions and customs, has been crucial in shaping its para-diplomacy. The city's tangible and intangible cultural elements, such as the Maimoon Palace, Melayu architecture, Songket, traditional ceremonies, foods, and dances, have been instrumental in promoting Medan's Melayu identity on the international stage. This cultural diplomacy has fostered friendly relations and cultural exchange between Medan and its Melayu counterparts, particularly with the sister city of George Town in Malaysia. The study highlights the importance of local identity in driving the cultural para-diplomacy of sub-national governments. Medan's strategic location, history, and strong Melayu cultural roots have provided a solid foundation for its international engagement, enabling the city to capitalize on its unique identity to attract tourism, promote cultural exchange, and forge economic and political partnerships.

The findings also shed light on the challenges Medan faces in navigating the 'One Door' policy, which requires local governments to coordinate their international relations activities with the central government. Nevertheless, Medan has demonstrated its ability to be creative and proactive in leveraging its cultural assets to advance its interests on the global stage. The proposed model of Cultural Diplomacy offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of cultural para-diplomacy, particularly in the context of unitary political systems like Indonesia. This model emphasizes the importance of historical, institutional, and strategic factors in shaping the cultural para-diplomacy of sub-national governments and provides insights into the role of local identity in driving international engagement. Overall, this study contributes to the scholarly understanding of cultural para diplomacy, highlighting the significance of local cultural identities in shaping the foreign relations of subnational entities. The Medan case study is a valuable example of how a city can harness its cultural heritage to enhance its global visibility, foster international partnerships, and drive socio-economic development, even in the face of centralized governance structures.

This article has engaged with understanding the cultural para-diplomacy of Medan through *Melayu* identity. Cultural para-diplomacy was chosen because the city of Medan has ethnic diversity and produces a variety of distinctive cultural arts. This article analyzes the causes of the institutionalization of this activity from an intergovernmental perspective. It is concluded that in the context of economic globalization, the emergence of cultural para-diplomacy is closely related to the restructuring of the State and its external administration and the intensification of 'cultural branding' as a tool of global competition. However, this does not apply to cities that have similar cultural characteristics. This "Melayu" branding has been transformed into a tool to prevent conflicts in local-foreign relations. To achieve its goals, the efforts made by the Medan City government include holding various activities or performances of *Melayu* dance in *Gelar Melayu Serumpun* (GEMES) and inviting other Melayu cities from Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei. It is an opportunity to promote tourism and the development of investment and SMEs.

REFERENCES

- Anholt, S. (2008). Place branding: Is it marketing, or isn't it? *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 4(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000088>
- Atisa, G., Zemrani, A., & Weiss, M. (2021). Decentralized governments: local empowerment and sustainable development challenges in Africa. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 23(3), 3349–3367. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-020-00722-0>
- Badie, B. (2020). *Rethinking international relations*. Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789904758>
- Beridgge, G. R., & James, A. (2003). *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (Second Edi). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1115/1.1999-mar-1>
- Eugenio, J. de S., & Xifra, J. (2015). International Representation Strategies for Stateless Nations: The Case of Catalonia's Cultural Diplomacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 11(1), 83–96. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2014.17>
- Fatmawati, E. (2021). Strategies to grow a proud attitude towards Indonesian cultural diversity. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(S1), 810–820. <https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5ns1.1465>
- Franco, M., & Marmelo, E. (2014). Sister-city relationships as a form of inter-organizational cooperation: Exploratory case studies in the Portuguese context. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 41, 75–89. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84894416739&partnerID=40&md5=3f75239064400379a33c0d1ab17a4784>
- Hardiyansyah, M. R., Darma, A., Nababan, S. A., Nugraha, M. A., & Sumantri, P. (2024). North Sumatra in the Context of Trade and International Relations: Historical Traces of Trade. *Cognizance Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 4(3), 175–181. <https://doi.org/10.47760/cognizance.2024.v04i03.015>
- Hocking, B. (1993). *Localizing Foreign Policy. Non-Central Governments and Multilayered Diplomacy*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Intentilia, A. A. M., & Surya Putra, A. A. B. N. A. (2021). From Local to Global: Examining Sister City Cooperation as Paradiplomacy Practice in Denpasar City, Bali, Indonesia. *Jurnal Bina Praja*, 13(2), 357–367.
- Liu, T., & Song, Y. (2020). Chinese paradiplomacy: A theoretical review. *SAGE Open*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/2158244019899048>
- Marié, S. (2018). Cultural paradiplomacy institutions and agenda. *Civitas-Revista de Ciências Sociais*, 18(1), 351–375.
- Mukti, T. A., Fathun, L. M., Muhammad, A., & Sinambela, S. I. (2021). Paradiplomacy Policies and Regional Autonomy in Indonesia and Korea. *Jurnal Hubungan Internasional*, 9(2), 139–152.

- Mukti, T. A. (2013). *Paradiplomacy: Kerjasama Luar Negeri Oleh Pemda Di Indonesia*. The Phinisi Press.
- Mukti, T. A. (2020). *Politik Paradiplomasi dan Isu Kedaulatan di Indonesia*. The Phinisi Press.
- Mursitama, T. N., & Lee, L. (2018). Towards a Framework of Smart City Diplomacy. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 126.
- Nasution, H. D., & Munandar, A. (2018). Kajian Lanskap Budaya Melayu untuk Meningkatkan Identitas Kota Medan. *Jurnal Lanskap Indonesia*, 10(2), 71–80.
- Nuriyanto, L. K. (2022). Preservation of the Batik Industry in Indonesia as Part of the National Identity. *International Journal of Science and Applied Science: Conference Series P-ISSN*, 6(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.20961/ijscs.v6i2.73912>
- Sinambela, S. I. (2018). Pengaruh Pemahaman Tentang Masyarakat Ekonomi Asean Terhadap Kesejahteraan Nelayan (Studi Kasus: Kecamatan Medan Belawan). *Jurnal PIR: Power in International Relations*, 3(1), 93–108.
- Sinambela, S. I. (2020). Kerjasama Internasional Oleh Pemerintah Daerah (Studi Kasus: Medan-Penang). *Jurnal PIR: Power in International Relations*, 3(2), 173–184.
- Smith, H. J. M. (2019). City networks and paradiplomacy as global public policy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Global Policy and Transnational Administration* (First edit, pp. 129–147). Oxford University Press.
- Surwandono, S., & Maksum, A. (2020). The Architecture of Paradiplomacy Regime in Indonesia: A Content Analysis. *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional*, 22(1), 77. <https://doi.org/10.7454/global.v22i1.443>
- Warsito, T., & Kartikasari, W. (2007). *Diplomasi Kebudayaan: Konsep dan Relevansi Bagi Negara Berkembang: Studi Kasus Indonesia*. Ombak.
- Zamorano, M. M., & Morató, A. R. (2014). The Cultural Paradiplomacy of Barcelona since the 1980s: Understanding Transformations in Local Cultural Paradiplomacy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21(5), 554–576. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1080/10286632.2014.943752>.
- Zulian, I., & Sinambela, S. I. (2019). Analisis Kontribusi dan Hambatan Kerjasama Sister City antara Pemerintah Kota Medan dan Rostov on Don (Rusia). *Prosiding Konvensi Nasional X*, 211–227. <http://aiihii.or.id/prosiding-vennas-10/analiskontribusi-dan-hambatan-kerjasama-sister-city-antara-pemerintah-kota-medan-dan-rostov-on-donrusia/>

Personal Interview:

Zainul Achmaddin, Regional Cooperation, and International Relations Agency of Medan City, 17 December 2021

Agus Suriyono, Office of Culture of Medan City, 20 January 2022

T. Thyrhaya Zein, the Cultural Practitioner of Melayu Deli, 3 February 2022