

Para-Diplomacy in Time of Covid-19: Jakarta Regional Government's Objectives in Hosting International Youth Championship

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Abstract

The Novel Corona Virus Disease or COVID-19 has caused unprecedented huge impacts and affected all aspects of governance including the relations among countries. Amid the crisis, sub-national governments have demonstrated their international engagements and innovations in order to respond to the pandemic. Jakarta as the largest city and the capital of the Republic of Indonesia became the national attention in early of the pandemic due to its functional position as the main gate of international mobility. However, the region held an international event called the International Youth Championship while the pandemic still existed. This research aimed to describe the region's objectives to carry out the event as a para-diplomacy practice. This research applied the qualitative research method with a descriptive analysis. In addition, the research utilized para-diplomacy concept as a theoretical tool to help describe such objectives. This research found that the regional government had a number of objectives in hosting the event; promoting the success of handling the COVID-19, promoting sports tourism in the post-pandemic, and introducing a new icon of the region. Those objectives belong to the economic and cultural dimension of para-diplomacy. This paper argues that Indonesian para-diplomacy is an asset in as much as the national government can harvest benefits from sub-national governments' para-diplomatic activities.

Keywords: *para-diplomacy, COVID-19, Jakarta regional government, International Youth Championship, sports tourism.*

Introduction

The Novel Corona Virus Disease or so-called COVID-19 has been a global threat which absolutely affects all nations and countries. The new threat has demonstrated uneven capabilities among governments in responding the pandemic. Those with more resources and preparedness can escape the pandemic relatively more quickly than others. National governments have struggled to respond to the pandemic in order to mitigate the impacts through either cooperation or populism-motivated actions. While some national governments took the COVID-19 seriously, some others downplayed the pandemic. Border closure whether it is a total or partial measure was a common policy taken by national governments among countries.

Apart from national governments, the sub-national governments or units within sovereign countries have been rising actors during the pandemic. They have taken part

responding to the pandemic beyond their countries' borders. The phenomena show that nation-states are no longer the sole actors in international relations and diplomacy is no longer played by only national governments. The practice called para-diplomacy which allows sub-national actors to play their roles in international relation is believed as the consequence of globalization. In the time of pandemic, for example, sub-national governments engage in multilateral process to respond to the infectious disease thanks to the international networking they have built (Acuto et al., 2017).

Just like in other parts of the world, Indonesia has suffered in term of deaths and economic catastrophe since the government announced the first confirmed cases. The most critical times of the COVID-19 were the first and second wave of the pandemic as the national vaccination program was still very limited and not evenly expanded in addition the stricter measures across the country. Jakarta as the capital city of the republic became a national attention and concern due to its role as the main gate of international mobility and an amalgamated area in the country's most populous island. The Jakarta COVID-19 Response Team records as many as 1,250,200 confirmed cases and 15,300 deaths in accumulation from the beginning of the pandemic until 26 May 2022 in the region alone (Jakarta Regional Government, 2020). The region's service industry like travel and tourism sector has got hit since announcement of national measures such as the border closures and mobility restrictions which either discouraged or prevented tourists from making their visits.

In April 2022 the Jakarta regional government initiated and hosted an international sport event called the International Youth Championship (IYC) which involved a couple of prominent European football clubs and other local football teams. Jakarta is one of the regions in Indonesia which has been actively conducting para-diplomacy and maintaining its international networking. However, the IYC event was carried out when the national government has yet to declare the lifting of national emergency status of the COVID-19. It means health threat still exists and health protocol and other restrictions still apply despite being not as strict as they used to be during the first two years of the pandemic. This study aims to describe the Jakarta regional government's objectives to hold the IYC event as a para-diplomatic practice. This study belongs to para-diplomacy which put sub-national governments as one of the actors in international relations other than national governments or nation-states.

Literature Review

There exists some recent literature on sub-national governments' para-diplomacy in the time of COVID-19 (Alvarenga et al., 2020; Luerdi, 2021; Moenardy & Sinaga, 2021; Rudakowska & Simon, 2020). Amidst the economic decrease affecting all actors, Moenardy and Sinaga (2021) found that sub-national government was able to increase its export on the products of micro, small, and medium enterprises through trade diplomacy attached in its para-diplomacy. In addressing the COVID-19 itself, sub-national governments are the forefronts behind the global response to the pandemic (Rudakowska & Simon, 2020). The regional governments can be less dependent on their national government in order to pursue their specific interest in responding the pandemic (Alvarenga et al., 2020; Luerdi, 2021). The awareness of internet and ICT development in addition to expertise and opportunity structure has driven the sub-national government to demonstrate its capacity in handling the pandemic before its international audiences (Luerdi, 2021).

McDowell (2022) has studied sports para-diplomacy in the case of Falkland Islands' pursuance of political objective. The study revealed that the sub-national government inserted its community identity and sovereignty by participating in international sports event (McDowell, 2022). The studies on para-diplomacy particularly carried out by Jakarta governments were studied by a few scholars (Hubert & Dermawan, 2020; Primawanti et al., 2019; Susilowati & Adila, 2021). The studies show that the sub-national governments have a variety of motivations in their para-diplomacy. The global concern such as refugee issue has encouraged the sub-national government to play its para-diplomacy to reduce the potential of social conflicts within its area (Hubert & Dermawan, 2020). Para-diplomacy in term of sister city cooperation by the sub-national governments aims to strengthen bilateral relations between Indonesia and other countries (Primawanti et al., 2019; Susilowati & Adila, 2021).

The abovementioned studies show that sub-national governments are active international actors in carrying out their external relations despite some restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Surprisingly, regardless their purposes the situation-like pandemic has boosted the sub-national governments to play their para-diplomatic roles more actively so that the practices of para-diplomacy are becoming more relevant in the time of crisis.

Jakarta is one of the most prominent regions in the Unitary State of Republic of Indonesia which has been consistently conducting its para-diplomacy over time. However, most of the scholars studying the regions' para-diplomacy in Indonesia show that sister

city/province cooperation is still the central topic within their studies, which is strongly believed as the yield of the Regional Autonomy Act (Luerdi, 2014). As a matter of fact, para-diplomatic practices can be carried out by sub-national governments in variety of forms other than sister city/province cooperation.

This research was intended to narrow the gap by raising the phenomenon on the Indonesian sub-national government in practicing its international relations other than sister city/province-typed para-diplomacy. This study attempts to describe Jakarta regional government's objectives behind a para-diplomatic initiative in the form of the IYC event. Interestingly, such para-diplomacy was carried out while other regions were still struggling to prevent the COVID-19 cases and counting on conservative ways to improve the situation within their areas. This study contributes to understanding more established regions' behaviors through para-diplomacy in supporting their national governments in the time of global crises in addition to pursuing their own objectives.

Conceptual Framework

This research applied the concept of para-diplomacy in order to understand the Jakarta regional government's policy to initiate an international event and the objectives behind it. That there has not been a consensus on para-diplomacy can be the main reason behind the various foci of para-diplomacy study. Having decided to emphasize the regional governments as the actors of para-diplomacy, this research referred to para-diplomacy definition suggested by Kuznetsov. Kuznetsov (2015:30-31) defines para-diplomacy as "a form of political communication". Such communication aims to reach "economic, cultural, political, or any other types of benefits" (Kuznetsov, 2015:30-31). Kuznetsov emphasizes the term of 'region' and 'regional government' in para-diplomacy. Region is defined as "the territorial and administrative unit on the first level of authority after the central government in both federal and unitary state systems" (Kuznetsov, 2015:22). Thus, regional government is the actor in para-diplomacy practices. Regional government's actions in para-diplomacy are self-sustained which are projected to foreign governments and non-governmental actors (Kuznetsov, 2015:30-31).

In addition to expertise possessed by regional governments, Lecours (2002) argues that both domestic and international opportunity structures contribute to their para-diplomacy. Structure refers to any institution internally and externally exposed to the regional

governments which either allow or encourage them to carry out para-diplomacy. Similar to Kuznetsov's para-diplomacy objectives, Lecours (2008:2-3) suggests three layers of para-diplomacy which correspond to different purposes the regional governments pursue; namely first layer (economy), second layer (culture, education, technology and others), and third layer (politics). The latter refers to the identity and sovereignty insertion by regional governments.

Para-diplomacy by regional governments provides two perceptions; either opportunity or challenge to the national government and whole nation (Kuznetsov, 2015:113). In many cases, para-diplomacy by regional governments is supposed to be the extension of national government's foreign policy and public diplomacy especially in unitary-state system. It means that what regional governments commit in their international relation will not contradict national interests. However, Keating (2013:11) argues that para-diplomacy is "more functionally specific and targeted, often opportunistic and experimental" which differentiates it from conventional diplomacy (state diplomacy) by national governments. Regional governments may project their own interests in addition to supporting the national interests pursued by their national governments.

Regarding this, 'cooperative-joint' and 'parallel-harmony' pattern can be the most common and most suitable in unitary-state system in which regional governments enjoy some degree of democracy and decentralized authorities. While the cooperative-joint pattern describes the incorporation of regional governments' para-diplomacy to national governments' foreign policy, the parallel-harmony pattern means that regional governments project and initiate their own para-diplomacy independently in order to pursue their specific objectives without harming the foreign policy of their countries (Soldatos, cited in Kuznetsov, 2015:114).

Based on the conceptual framework, the Jakarta regional government's para-diplomacy in initiating the IYC event was a political communication towards its international audiences in order to pursue its objectives. Such objectives had economic and cultural dimension referring to the first and second layer of para-diplomacy. Through the international event, the regional government expected to rebound tourism industry which was being harshly damaged by the COVID-19. In addition, the event aimed to promote sports tourism as a new attractive economic sector as well as the landmark as a new icon in the region.

Examining the patterns discussed previously, this paper argues that the Jakarta's para-diplomacy represented the parallel-harmony pattern as the regional government acted

independently or with very little intervention from its national government in carrying out the IYC event. However, the objectives intended by the regional government did not contradict the national foreign policy. Instead, the regional government has assisted the national government to promote the best practice in handling of COVID-19 and provide a good image that Indonesia is a safe place for international communities. Thus, para-diplomacy by the Jakarta regional government was merely an opportunity rather than a challenge to the whole nation.

Methods

This research applied the qualitative research method with a descriptive analysis. The qualitative research aims to help comprehend phenomena, activities, and social processes which focusses on meanings and understanding instead of quantification (Bakry, 2017). This research is the library research whose data were gathered from a number of sources such as official recorded statements and documents released by the Jakarta regional government, scientific journals, books, and other relevant online sources. The data were analyzed through the technique developed by Miles and Huberman called interactive model. The interactive model has a few steps namely collecting data, reducing data, displaying data, and drawing conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The analysis is cyclical and interactive and each step is intertwined to each other. The application of such data analyzing technic is as the following; (1) Collecting data; an amount of information on the IYC event by the Jakarta regional government was collected. (2) Reducing data; data were sorted out to raise critical questions so that the issue turned specific. Meanwhile, the unnecessary data were taken aside or stored. The critical questions were leading to the region's objectives in carrying out the international event in para-diplomacy perspective. (3) Displaying data; at this stage, pieces of information were organized so that an early conclusion drawing could be done. Nonetheless, collecting and reducing data still simultaneously continued. (4) Drawing conclusion; the conclusion was becoming clear as well as strong after the researcher found meanings in addition to recording regularities, explanatory patterns, configurations, causalities and propositions. This research found that the objectives of Jakarta regional government's para-diplomacy in conducting the IYC event had economic and cultural dimension such as promoting the success of COVID-19

management, promoting the region's sport tourism, and introducing a new landmark relevant to its ambition to be a sport tourism hub.

Results and Discussion

The International Youth Championship (IYC) was an international quadrilateral football tournament consisting of two Spanish football clubs namely Barcelona U-18 and Atletico Madrid U-18 in addition to Indonesia all-star U-20 and Bali United U-18. The event was facilitated by the Jakarta regional government involving a number of region-owned enterprises, collaborating with the Pancoran Soccer Field as the event operator and the MNC group as the media airing the event nationally and internationally. The event was held from 13 to 19 April 2022 concentrated in the Jakarta International Stadium (JIS). The event should have been held in December 2021 collaborating with the Bali regional government but postponed following the central government's instruction due to the emergence of Omicron variant of COVID-19 (Jakarta Regional Government, 2021).

The Jakarta regional government had a number of objectives carrying out the IYC event. As theorized in para-diplomacy practices, the event was projected to pursue merely economic and cultural objectives after the region was hit by the pandemic. The objectives which the regional government wished to achieve were showing to international audiences that the region successfully handled the pandemic, promoting tourism sector especially sport tourism, and introducing the JIS as a new icon of Jakarta.

Show to International Audiences that Jakarta Successfully Handled COVID-19

As a capital city of the republic as well as the busiest gate of international access, Jakarta was often reported to be the one which would be worst hit by the COVID-19. The first wave of earlier variant and the second wave of Delta variant could be the most critical times in the region and other counterpart regions in Indonesia. Despite being one of the regions with the highest number of confirmed cases, Jakarta was still mentioned to have demonstrated its best practice in handling the pandemic. The region could pass the two waves of the pandemic thanks to massive and consistent testing capacity, healthcare system transformation, data-based policy making and collaborative platforms. Those efforts were even capitalized by the regional government to project its para-diplomacy in order to gain trust from its international audiences as a crisis-proof city (Luerdi, 2021).

In term of vaccination program, in July 2021 it was reported that Jakarta along with Bali was the region which gained the highest rate of vaccination across the country (Kompas, 2021a) and in November 2021 the regional officials claimed that the region already completed full vaccination to all its residents (Kompas, 2021b). As an amalgamated area, the region also contributed to assisting its neighbors such as providing healthcare for hospitalized patients and fastening vaccination program (Antara, 2021; Tempo, 2021).

Through the IYC event, the Jakarta regional government attempted to show to international and national audiences that the region already passed the most difficult times of the COVID-19. At the welcoming press conference, I Gede Widiade acting as the IYC event chairman also delivered that the event was campaigning the success of handling the pandemic in the region particularly and in Indonesia generally (Jakarta Regional Government, 2022). The regional government wished to reiterate that the region would be ready to host other international events especially sporting events or sportainment following the IYC. Thanks to the involvement of prominent European football clubs, the event was expected to gain international attention and help to promote such message.

Hosting an international event has been a common practice representing a para-diplomacy policy whether or not it is self-initiated by regional governments in order to raise their international reputation. As a matter of fact, the momentum of crisis like the COVID-19 has been able to encourage the regional governments to more actively pursue it (Alvarenga et al., 2020; Rudakowska & Simon, 2020). In this case, the Jakarta regional government attempted to utilize the momentum of pandemic decreasing trend to promote the region's capability in order to ensure its audiences that Jakarta is getting safer and safer after passing a couple of crisis peaks.

Promote Jakarta's Tourism Sector Especially Sports Tourism

Like other regions in Indonesia, Jakarta suffered from unexpected loss of its tourism industry sector. The sector was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic due to a number of restrictions issued by both regional and national government in order to respond to it. There was a great decrease in term of tourist number constituting both domestic and international tourists to the region. The Jakarta Tourism and Creative Economy Department recorded that a number of 40,555,694 domestic tourists visited the region in 2019 (Musthofa & Anwar, 2021). However, the number fell to 7,141,420 in 2020 – the first year of the pandemic (Musthofa & Anwar, 2021).

Meanwhile, the number of international tourist visits to Jakarta only reached 39,966 in 2020 which also dropped drastically compared to that in 2019 as many as 282,453 (Musthofa & Anwar, 2021). In addition, the Indonesian Commerce and Industry Chamber recorded that 1.4 million people were laid off in Jakarta's tourism sector – not included freelancers – accumulated until the end of 2020 (Bisnis Indonesia, 2021).

As the COVID-19 began to be less dangerous globally and it began to be controlled both regionally and nationally, the Jakarta regional government attempted to rebound its tourism sector. In order to convey the message, the regional government chose an option to carry out an international event which easily attracted both domestic and international audiences' attention. The Junior football tournament or the IYC could be right decision to promote that the region would be ready to open up its tourism sector as well as hosting a number of international sports events in the near future.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) points out that travel and tourism were one of the largest economic sectors constituting 319 million jobs worldwide and generating 10.4 percent of the world GDP worth US\$8.8 trillion in 2018 (del Pilar Leal Londoño et al., 2021). Meanwhile, sports tourism referring to the intersection of leisure activities of sports and travel is one of the fastest growing sectors in tourism industry and one of the most popular leisure practices in the contemporary world. Thanks to its growth, many countries have attempted to benefit from the sports tourism sector in order to boost their economy. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) also suggests that sports and tourism be two driving forces for the promotion and sustainable economic development of tourism destinations (UNWTO, n.d.).

The experience of economic decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic and opportunity provided by such global trend have encouraged the Jakarta regional government to fasten the region as a hub of sports tourism – not only football – in the post-pandemic. The following international sports events would be expected to liven up the tourism industry, provide more employment, and help the regional economic recovery. In addition, sports tourism promotes regional development and contributes to creating good tourism image of the host destination (UNWTO, n.d.). Considering the potential of travels and sports in addition to successful practices in more developed countries, sports tourism involving people across continents has been an ambition as well as innovation by Jakarta regional government. Sports are just means with which para-diplomacy is conducted by sub-national actors to pursue their objectives

(McDowell, 2022). Thus, the IYC event was supposed to be just a beginning to promote the region's tourism especially sports tourism sector which was previously hit by the pandemic.

Introduce Jakarta International Stadium as A New Icon of Jakarta

The idea of that Jakarta should have a classy European-like football stadium as much as the Old Trafford in Manchester and the Allianz Arena in Munchen was introduced at the regional electoral campaign in 2016 (Tirto, 2016). Despite early doubts on the idea and the challenges, the stadium which was then named the Jakarta International Stadium (JIS) kicked off its construction following the issuance of the Gubernatorial Regulation No.14/2019 as a legal protection in February 2019 (Peraturan Gubernur Provinsi Daerah Khusus Ibu Kota Nomor 14 Tahun 2019, 2019).

The design of JIS replacing that of previously known the BWM stadium was completed in 2018 with significant changes. The JIS is a retractable-roof and non-athletic-track stadium which is able to seat 82,000 people and inhabited by hybrid grass in both main and training fields. The Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan argued that such facilities make the stadium not only to gain merely an international status but also to meet the standard required by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) (CNN Indonesia, 2021). The stadium was also reported to be one of the most luxurious retractable-roof stadiums in the world (Daily Mail, 2020). Whereas, in domestic level the JIS is not only the first stadium with a retractable roof but also the first building which has gained green-building predicate with platinum grade (CNN Indonesia, 2021). The latter is in line with the concern of the International Sports Organizations (ISOs) such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the FIFA which have been increasingly embedding environmental protection in their policies regarding green sports and infrastructure (Fermeglia, 2017).

Since all of the matches were concentrated in the stadium, the IYC event was actually the part of JIS soft launching in order to promote the stadium as a new icon of Jakarta particularly and Indonesia generally as announced the event chairman I Gede Widiade (Jakarta Regional Government, 2022). The IYC has shown that the region now owns a classy international venue certified by the FIFA which brings a message that Jakarta would be ready to host similar international football matches in the future. The regional government would welcome more prominent international football clubs and foreign national teams beyond Asia which would play at the stadium.

In addition to being the venue for football matches, the sustainable or pro-environment stadium has been designated as a tourist attraction who visit the region. The practice of promoting stadiums has been a common strategy in sports tourism among regional governments in experienced countries such as those in the Western Europe in order to attract more tourists. This phenomenon indicates that stadium tourism has been a growing area within sports tourism (Edensor et al., 2021). Stadiums are able to provide multiple touristic experiences beyond on-the-match-day experience since they are no longer solely sports event venues (Edensor et al., 2021). Stadiums also function as sites of pilgrimage, heritage, entertainment, and mass gathering activities. Stadiums also contribute to the economic and cultural development of the area where they are located. In the case of JIS as stated by Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan, the regional government expects the stadium will regenerate the economic development in the Northern area of Jakarta and change the residents' mobility culture from relying on private transport to mass public transport in the future (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

The IYC has helped the regional government to promote the JIS to both domestic and international audiences as football is still the most popular sport especially in Indonesia. Even though the IYC matches could be attended only by invitation, the matches could be watched on a few TV stations and internet live streaming. The involvement of two Spanish La Liga teams was believed to attract people to watch the tournament held in the stadium. More events would be held and more people visit the stadium following the IYC. The existence of such FIFA-certified stadium is in line with the regional government's ambition to make Jakarta as an international sports tourism hub in Indonesia and beyond.

Conclusion

The Jakarta government's para-diplomacy in the time of COVID-19 could be a breakthrough to commence the economic recovery in the region and improve positive image among its audiences. The IYC event was carried out to show to international audiences – including domestic audiences – that the region could handle pandemic successfully, promote the region's sport tourism as a new attractive tourism sector, and introduce a new landmark facilitating the region as a hub of international sports tourism. As a mean of para-diplomacy, the IYC was projected to help the region to pursue such objectives which had economic and cultural dimension.

Having stated in the theory earlier, the region's para-diplomacy was a parallel-harmony model meaning that in addition to pursuing its own targeted, specific, opportunistic, and experimental objectives as suggested by Keating (2013), such sport para-diplomacy was also helpful to demonstrate the Indonesia's success in handling the pandemic and promote national tourism post-pandemic. Indonesia has just held the Moto GP event successfully in West Nusa Tenggara before the IYC. As of this writing, Jakarta is going to be hosting another international event called the Formula E in early June 2022. A series of these international sports events can create national branding in addition to providing positive economic and socio-cultural impacts to the nation.

Looking at the para-diplomacy practices in Indonesia particularly by the Jakarta government, the paper suggests that para-diplomacy be an asset to the nation. Para-diplomacy as an asset means that diplomacy practices by the units within sovereign countries bring about economic and peace development (Chatterji & Saha, 2017). Para-diplomacy – not limited to sports para-diplomacy – should be one of capabilities driving development in many regions across the country. This research also confirms the existing studies arguing that a number of regions worldwide especially those pretty much exposed to globalization could be more active – even more ambitious – to conduct their para-diplomacy despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

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