

Government Paradiplomacy in Proposing Penyengat Island to UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage

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ABSTRACT

The cultural wealth of Indonesia, particularly from border regions such as the Kepulauan Riau, is increasingly threatened by external claims and lack of international recognition. One prominent case involves Penyengat Island, a significant historical and cultural site in Tanjungpinang, rich in Malay heritage and once a center of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate. Recognizing the island's cultural and historical value, the Government of Kepulauan Riau Province has initiated efforts to nominate Penyengat Island as a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. This study aims to examine the paradiplomatic strategies employed by the local government in this international cultural diplomacy effort. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research collects data through interviews with key officials from the Tanjungpinang Department of Culture and Tourism, field observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the local government has undertaken significant initiatives, including the revitalization of historical sites, the preparation of comprehensive documentation and cultural dossiers, and the lobbying of national institutions to support the nomination. The concept of paradiplomacy where sub-national governments engage in international relations proves central to these efforts. While challenges such as limited administrative authority and bureaucratic hurdles persist, the strategic collaboration with the central government and UNESCO-aligned bodies demonstrates the growing agency of local governments in global cultural advocacy. The study concludes that effective paradiplomacy can serve as a critical tool for promoting local heritage on the world stage, emphasizing the need for sustained intergovernmental cooperation and cultural diplomacy frameworks.

Keyword: Paradiplomacy, World Cultural, Local Government, Malay Heritage

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a collective intellectual product shaped and inherited by communities across generations. As an embodiment of shared identity and history, culture transcends individual creativity and reflects communal values, traditions, and social memory (Bertacchini et al., 2024; Fitri et al., 2015; Melis et al., 2022). In Indonesia, cultural heritage plays a central role in the construction of national identity. However, globalization, regional proximity, and historical tensions have placed several Indonesian cultural assets at risk, as seen in cases of cultural claims by neighboring countries (Ikaputra & Widyastuti, 2025; Koufodontis & Gaki, 2022).

One notable case involved the claim of Indonesian cultural elements by Malaysia in 2009, which sparked controversy and reaffirmed the urgency of preserving national cultural assets. Cultural appropriation in such contexts is not only a question of authenticity but also

intersects with diplomacy, sovereignty, and international legal frameworks. These issues expose the vulnerabilities of intangible cultural heritage, particularly in border regions where cultural exchanges are both inevitable and complex (Lepinay et al., 2017; M. Liu et al., 2025). Indonesia's geographical position, especially in provinces such as Kepulauan Riau that directly border Malaysia and Singapore, necessitates heightened vigilance in cultural protection. Tanjungpinang, the provincial capital, exemplifies a city rich in Malay heritage. Within it lies Penyengat Island a historical and cultural stronghold of the Malay world, recognized for its architectural, literary, and spiritual contributions (Canet et al., 2024).

Penyengat Island stands as a living testimony of the Riau-Lingga Malay Kingdom, possessing numerous cultural relics such as royal tombs, fortresses, ancient wells, and traditional buildings. The preservation of such a site is paramount not only for national pride but for the continuation of Malay civilization's influence within the Indonesian cultural mosaic (Suhaila & Baijuri, 2024). In recognition of its cultural importance, Penyengat Island has been designated as a National Cultural Heritage Area by the Indonesian government under Decree No. 112/M/2018. The island hosts 46 officially recognized heritage sites, reflecting the island's role as a center of Islamic scholarship, royal governance, and Malay literature. This concentration of heritage underscores the site's eligibility for international recognition (Sutianto et al., 2023; Swastiwi, 2022).

The global acknowledgment of cultural heritage has been institutionalized through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO's World Heritage framework emphasizes the protection of cultural properties with Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), which applies to sites that transcend national boundaries and hold significance for humanity as a whole. Registering a site with UNESCO ensures international support for preservation, sustainable tourism development, and global cultural diplomacy. According to Indonesian Law No. 11 of 2010 concerning Cultural Heritage, national cultural heritage can be nominated as a world heritage. Penyengat Island, with its strategic location, historical depth, and cultural richness, fulfills the criteria set by UNESCO.

Table 1. Comparison of Selected Indonesian Sites on UNESCO Tentative List

No.	Cultural Heritage Site	Tentative List Entry Year	Current Status	Notes
1	Penyengat Island, Riau Islands	2015	Position #11 on list	Requires local government support
2	Ombilin Coal Mining Heritage of Sawahlunto	2015	Inscribed 2019	Became World Heritage Site in 4 years
3	Kota Tua Jakarta	2015	Still on waiting list	Facing documentation and zoning issues
4	Sangiran Early Man Site	1996	Inscribed 1996	One of Indonesia's earliest listed sites
5	Muara Takus Temple Complex	2009	Still on waiting list	Requires conservation improvement
6	Nias Cultural Landscape	2020	Not yet evaluated	Awaiting national nomination submission

Source: Author, 2025

Despite its nomination since 1995 and its place as number 11 on Indonesia's tentative list for World Heritage status, Penyengat Island has yet to be recognized officially by UNESCO. The backlog of over 5,000 proposals globally, with only one approval allowed per country annually, has delayed the island's acceptance and underscored the need for proactive local

initiatives. Table 1 presents the current position of Penyengat Island in the UNESCO Tentative List and compares it with other Indonesian heritage nominations. To address this, Kepulauan Riau provincial government has adopted a paradiplomatic approach, engaging in international cultural promotion beyond the traditional confines of national foreign policy (Jackson, 2018; T. Liu & Song, 2020). Paradiplomacy refers to the conduct of international relations by subnational actors such as regional governments to pursue cultural, economic, or environmental goals (Cornago, 1999; Zamorano & Rodríguez Morató, 2015).

This approach aligns with Indonesia's decentralization policies, which grant substantial autonomy to regional governments. Under Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, provinces have the authority to initiate international cooperation in non-political sectors, including cultural exchange and tourism promotion. Through paradiplomatic efforts, the provincial government of Kepulauan Riau has facilitated revitalization projects on Penyengat Island, improved infrastructure, preserved heritage buildings, and enhanced community engagement. These actions reflect a broader commitment to cultural sustainability and tourism-based development.

The island's strategic location, situated between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, strengthens its cultural diplomacy potential. Historical ties between Penyengat, Johor, and Singapore provide a foundation for regional cooperation in preserving shared Malay heritage, which can serve as a bridge rather than a point of contention. The local government's engagement with national institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, has resulted in collaborative proposals supported by historical documentation, community participation, and sustainable management plans. These components are critical in meeting UNESCO's stringent nomination requirements.

Nevertheless, challenges remain, including bureaucratic inertia, limited funding, and insufficient international lobbying. To overcome these barriers, Kepulauan Riau must strengthen intergovernmental collaboration, utilize academic and civil society networks, and implement comprehensive strategies aligned with global heritage governance. This study, therefore, explores the dynamics of paradiplomacy in the context of cultural heritage nomination, focusing on Penyengat Island as a case study (Aguirre, 1999; Paquin, 2020). By analyzing policy frameworks, historical narratives, and institutional strategies, it seeks to demonstrate how local governments can assert agency in international cultural arenas and contribute meaningfully to the global preservation of heritage.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding the phenomenon of paradiplomacy by Kepulauan Riau Provincial Government in proposing Penyengat Island as a World Cultural Heritage Site to UNESCO. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore meaning and social processes in a contextual and natural setting. Qualitative research is naturalistic in nature, conducted under natural conditions with the researcher as the key instrument (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In this context, the researcher engages directly with informants to gather information about policies, strategies, and challenges faced by local government actors. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews with key informants from the Department of Culture and Tourism of Tanjungpinang City and direct observation at the research location, Penyengat Island. Observation serves as a supplementary method to capture the cultural and social context surrounding the nomination effort (Coast & Jackson, 2017).

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from informants who are actively involved in the nomination process, such as the Head of History and Cultural Heritage Division, officials from the Cultural Heritage Preservation Section, and cultural figures from the Penyengat Island Tourism Awareness

Group (Pokdarwis). Secondary data were drawn from various academic references, including journals, government documents, articles, theses, and relevant legal regulations, such as Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage and the UNESCO Convention concerning World Heritage.

The data analysis technique employed is descriptive-analytical, which involves categorizing the collected data, analyzing their relevance to the research focus, and systematically compiling findings into a coherent narrative. The entire methodological process aims to examine the extent to which local paradiplomacy functions effectively in the realm of international relations, particularly in cultural diplomacy and world heritage recognition, as emphasized (Fathun, 2021; Syuryansyah, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Local Government's Role in Heritage Diplomacy

Kepulauan Riau Provincial Government, particularly through the Department of Culture and Tourism of Tanjungpinang City, has emerged as a central actor in the paradiplomatic process of nominating Penyengat Island as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This reflects a growing trend where sub-national actors assume greater responsibilities in international affairs, especially in cultural diplomacy. The local government's initiative highlights a strategic shift in how diplomacy is conducted not merely by central governments, but increasingly by regional administrations that possess a strong cultural identity and international aspirations. The nomination process began with the preparation of a comprehensive dossier that includes both tangible and intangible heritage elements, supported by extensive historical documentation, as required by UNESCO's nomination guidelines.

This action aligns with Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage, particularly Article 96(2)(d), which explicitly authorizes regional governments to propose national cultural heritage sites to the international level. The legal mandate empowers local institutions to act as diplomatic agents in cultural matters, validating their efforts through a nationally recognized legal framework. This process reflects the concept of paradiplomacy described by scholars such as Takdir Ali Mukti (2013), in which sub-state actors engage in external relations in areas like education, culture, and environmental cooperation. The government's actions go beyond mere symbolic gestures; they are deliberate efforts to integrate cultural heritage preservation with global engagement.

Implementation on the ground involved active collaboration between the government and the local community. Through interviews with key informants such as the Head of the History and Cultural Heritage Division and cultural representatives from the Penyengat Island Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) it became clear that the dossier was not prepared in isolation. Community involvement played a vital role, particularly in collecting oral histories, preserving traditions, and maintaining the physical condition of heritage structures. In parallel, coordination with the Ministry of Education and Culture helped bridge the local initiative with the national-level nomination process. These multilayered efforts reflect the collaborative model of paradiplomacy, where local and central actors work in synergy for international cultural recognition.

From a triangulation perspective, the research draws credibility from the convergence of primary data, secondary data, and field observations. Primary data collected from interviews highlight the motivations, challenges, and strategies used by local officials and stakeholders. Secondary data, including government documents, scholarly articles, and media reports, reinforce the narrative that the local government is strategically pursuing UNESCO recognition. Finally, direct observations at the heritage site confirm ongoing restoration projects, improved infrastructure, and community-led cultural programming.

These three data streams validate one another, confirming both the intent and execution of local paradiplomacy initiatives. Role of the local government in heritage

diplomacy signifies a broader transformation in international relations. It shows how sub-national actors can become effective participants in global cultural governance. The case of Penyengat Island illustrates that cultural diplomacy is not limited to state-level negotiations; it is equally driven by regional actors with deep cultural assets and strategic intent. The government's commitment to preserving and internationalizing Malay heritage not only elevates regional identity but also contributes to Indonesia's cultural diplomacy. As such, Penyengat Island stands as a symbol of successful sub-national engagement in the global arena, supported by legal authority, grassroots participation, and strategic collaboration.

2. Implementation of Direct and Indirect Paradiplomatic Strategies

The implementation of paradiplomacy by Kepulauan Riau Provincial Government in nominating Penyengat Island to UNESCO demonstrates a combination of direct and indirect strategic approaches. Direct paradiplomatic strategies are marked by concrete actions initiated by the local government itself. These include preparing and submitting the formal proposal dossier for UNESCO nomination, organizing cultural exhibitions and heritage festivals, and fostering collaboration with international experts and cultural organizations. These efforts are aimed at raising both national and international awareness about the historical and cultural significance of Penyengat Island. Such direct engagement places the local government as an active agent in cross-border cultural dialogue.

Indirect strategies, on the other hand, involve more nuanced diplomatic channels. The local government exerts influence through advocacy and negotiation with central government agencies primarily the Ministry of Education and Culture which has the authority to approve and forward UNESCO nominations (Malik, 2023). This includes lobbying for national budget allocations, aligning the nomination with broader national cultural priorities, and ensuring compliance with international documentation standards. The success of this approach is evident in the government's ability to secure revitalization funding from the central government, including an allocation of IDR 33 billion in 2025 for infrastructure enhancement and cultural preservation on Penyengat Island.

This dual-track approach aligns closely with Kuznetsov's paradiplomacy model, which differentiates between direct paradiplomacy, where sub-national entities independently establish external relations, and indirect paradiplomacy, where these entities attempt to shape national foreign policy agendas. Kepulauan Riau Government clearly operates along both tracks building international networks while simultaneously engaging federal authorities to legitimize and advance their global cultural objectives. These strategic actions indicate that the government does not act in isolation, but rather as part of a larger, multi-scalar diplomatic ecosystem.

From the perspective of triangulation, the study integrates three types of data to support this analysis. First, primary data from interviews with cultural officials and stakeholders provides insights into the actual processes and strategies undertaken. Respondents confirmed both the submission of dossiers and their involvement in national-level advocacy meetings. Second, secondary data from policy documents, journal articles, and official news sources corroborate these accounts and present a timeline of the paradiplomatic activities. Lastly, field observation on Penyengat Island reveals evidence of ongoing infrastructure work, signage upgrades, and preparations for international recognition clearly aligned with the goals outlined in both the direct and indirect strategies.

Overall, the implementation of these two paradigms of paradiplomacy shows how sub-national actors can effectively navigate both local initiative and national institutional frameworks to pursue international cultural recognition. By balancing grassroots cultural promotion with national policy engagement, Kepulauan Riau Government maximizes its influence in the heritage diplomacy arena. This case affirms the growing capacity of regional

governments to act as legitimate actors on the global stage, particularly when equipped with legal authority, strategic planning, and intergovernmental cooperation. Penyengat Island's journey toward UNESCO recognition stands as a testament to the power of dual-track paradiplomatic strategy.

3. Revitalization Efforts and Infrastructure Development

The revitalization of Penyengat Island represents one of the most visible outcomes of the paradiplomatic strategies undertaken by Kepulauan Riau Provincial Government in its UNESCO nomination efforts. This revitalization includes comprehensive restoration of key historical structures such as mosques, royal tombs, ancient wells, and fortresses sites that symbolize the cultural depth of the former Riau-Lingga Sultanate. These physical efforts are not only aimed at conserving cultural heritage but also at presenting a coherent and well-maintained image of the island that meets UNESCO's expectations for Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The heritage landscape is being reimagined to reflect its historical significance in a way that is accessible and meaningful for both local communities and international visitors.

In addition to restoring cultural landmarks, the government has embarked on large-scale infrastructure development to improve visitor experience and accessibility. This includes paving roads, building information centers, enhancing signage, establishing cultural plazas for public performances, and improving the ferry terminals that connect the island to Tanjungpinang City. Such infrastructure development supports the dual goal of conservation and tourism promotion. By making the island more navigable and visitor-friendly, the revitalization project simultaneously respects historical integrity and adapts to modern tourism demands, positioning Penyengat as a heritage-based economic asset for the region.

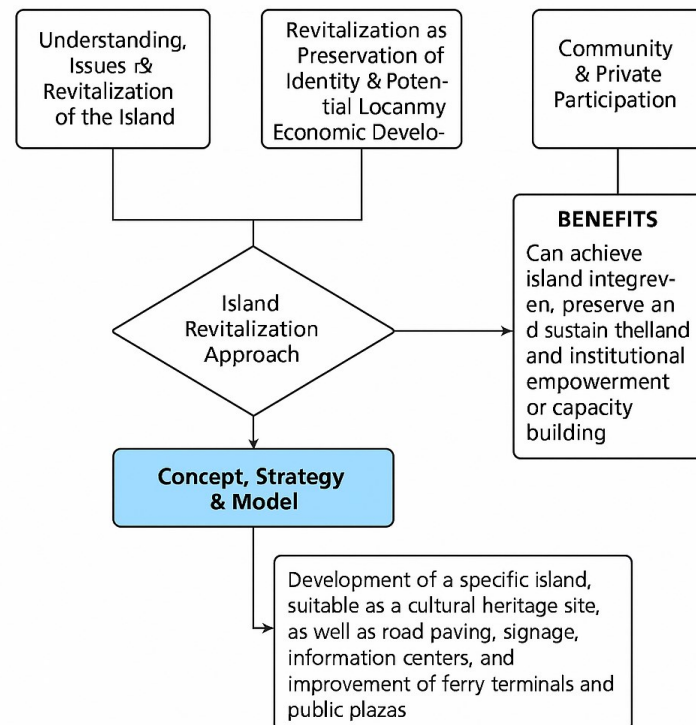


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Penyengat Island Revitalization
Source: Author, 2025

A critical component of this transformation has been the financial support from the central government, amounting to approximately IDR 33 billion allocated in 2025. This funding

covers the continuation of revitalization projects, including the design of the arrival plaza, restoration of Bukit Kursi fortification, and renovations at traditional cultural halls and public spaces. The financial commitment reflects a strong alignment between local ambition and national recognition. It also highlights the successful outcome of indirect paradiplomatic lobbying by the local government, as discussed in the previous section. The funding not only accelerates the physical transformation of the island but also sends a political signal of Indonesia's commitment to preserving its regional cultures.

From a triangulation analysis, the revitalization efforts are supported by three streams of validation. First, primary data obtained through interviews with local officials confirms the implementation and oversight of these projects. Interviewees emphasized the island's readiness in terms of heritage presentation and infrastructure support. Second, secondary data from policy documents, budget announcements, and national news reports verify the amount and allocation of central government funds, as well as the intended scope of revitalization. Lastly, direct observation by the researcher during field visits provided concrete evidence of completed and ongoing construction, including visual documentation of road improvements and rehabilitated cultural landmarks, which corroborates the other data sources.

Revitalization and infrastructure development initiatives on Penyengat Island are not merely preparatory acts for UNESCO recognition they are transformative projects that redefine the island's role in regional tourism, cultural preservation, and international diplomacy. The integration of heritage conservation with infrastructural modernization illustrates a balanced approach that respects both cultural authenticity and contemporary needs. This reinforces the island's narrative as a vibrant center of Malay history and a strategic site for Indonesia's soft power diplomacy in the international cultural arena. Through coordinated efforts and multi-level governance, Penyengat Island is steadily progressing toward global heritage recognition.

4. Socio-Cultural Significance and Historical Legitimacy

Penyengat Island occupies a significant position in the socio-cultural fabric of the Malay world. Historically, it was the capital of the Riau-Lingga Sultanate, an influential Malay kingdom that played a major role in the cultural, political, and intellectual development of the region. The island served not only as a center of royal governance but also as a hub of Islamic scholarship, literature, and diplomacy. This deep historical backdrop gives the island an identity that extends beyond national borders and places it at the heart of the broader Malay civilization, which also spans present-day Malaysia and Singapore. As a result, Penyengat Island is not just a geographic site it is a living symbol of shared heritage and historical interconnectedness among Malay-speaking communities.

One of the most powerful indicators of Penyengat Island's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) is its rich collection of heritage sites. A total of 46 cultural heritage sites have been officially documented, including the iconic Sultan Riau Grand Mosque, built with a mixture of white eggs and lime as part of its unique architecture. Other key sites include ancient wells (*perigi tua*), royal tombs such as that of Raja Ali Haji the author of the first Malay grammar book and remnants of palaces and fortresses that once housed royal families and administrative offices. These structures are not just monuments; they are repositories of cultural memory and continuity, offering a tangible connection to the past that meets the cultural criteria outlined by UNESCO for World Heritage recognition.

Furthermore, the island is widely recognized as a cradle of Malay literature and Islamic learning. It was home to scholars and poets whose works influenced Malay culture throughout the region. Raja Ali Haji, for example, is a key historical figure whose intellectual contributions continue to shape the identity and language of the Malay world. This intangible cultural legacy, combined with the physical structures on the island, provides a dual narrative both material

and immaterial that bolsters Penyengat Island's claim to historical legitimacy. Its cultural relevance extends to values of language preservation, religious education, and regional diplomacy in the pre-colonial era.

From a triangulation analysis, this socio-cultural importance is confirmed through multiple data sources. Primary data collected through interviews with heritage officials and local community leaders emphasized the pride and responsibility locals feel in maintaining their identity through the preservation of these sites. Secondary sources, including historical archives, scholarly journals, and UNESCO documentation standards, align with this view, illustrating that Penyengat's heritage meets international thresholds for cultural significance. Additionally, direct observations during fieldwork supported the data, where many of the documented sites were found to be preserved, actively visited, and clearly marked for both educational and ceremonial purposes. These layers of validation affirm the authenticity and historical continuity of the site.

The socio-cultural significance of Penyengat Island is not only foundational to its nomination but also essential to understanding its global relevance. The island's shared heritage status with neighboring nations enhances its nomination case, providing a compelling example of cross-border cultural history. Its role in shaping Malay intellectual and religious thought gives it a legacy that continues to resonate. Recognizing Penyengat Island as a World Heritage Site is not merely a symbolic act; it is an acknowledgment of its pivotal role in Southeast Asian history, culture, and identity. As such, its nomination stands on a firm ground of historical legitimacy and cultural resonance.

5. Challenges in UNESCO Nomination and Strategic Outlook

Despite the significant progress made in nominating Penyengat Island as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, several challenges remain that may hinder or delay the process. One of the foremost issues is the island's position on Indonesia's tentative list, where it ranks 11th among 20 cultural and natural sites. Given that UNESCO generally accepts only one nomination per country per year, the long queue creates a timeline that could stretch over a decade. This bureaucratic bottleneck is compounded by the fact that Penyengat has been on the tentative list since 1995, yet concrete progress toward official nomination has only accelerated in recent years. These delays highlight the complex and highly competitive nature of the World Heritage nomination process.

Another challenge lies in the administrative and technical readiness required to meet UNESCO's strict nomination criteria. The island's dossier must demonstrate clear Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), authenticity, integrity, and management systems aligned with UNESCO standards. While the local government has made strides in documentation and revitalization, gaps remain in terms of conservation planning, risk management, and ongoing monitoring mechanisms. Furthermore, UNESCO requires extensive community involvement and legal protection frameworks, which, although improving, still demand more structured institutional support. The absence of specialized human resources and heritage management professionals within the local bureaucracy also presents a barrier.

Public awareness and community participation also pose a challenge. Although the local population takes pride in their heritage, many residents remain unaware of the technical and diplomatic processes behind the UNESCO nomination. This gap in understanding could limit grassroots support for preservation policies or affect how the community adapts to potential tourism growth and international attention. UNESCO strongly emphasizes the role of communities in sustaining heritage sites, and a lack of inclusive engagement could be perceived as a weakness in the nomination. Therefore, the local government needs to expand education campaigns and increase stakeholder involvement across all stages of the process.

From a triangulation perspective, these challenges were verified using primary, secondary, and observational data. Interviews with government officials highlighted internal limitations in human resources and procedural knowledge. Secondary sources, such as legal reviews, academic journals, and UNESCO nomination guidelines, confirmed the institutional and procedural gaps that Penyengat must still address. Field observations further revealed inconsistencies in signage, incomplete restoration projects, and limited tourist infrastructure in some areas, all of which underscore the need for more comprehensive site management. This triangulated analysis provides a balanced view that validates the strengths of the nomination effort while clearly outlining areas for improvement.

In light of these obstacles, the strategic outlook for Penyengat Island must focus on sustainable long-term planning and continued multilevel collaboration. The local government should prioritize capacity-building in heritage management, maintain active communication with the Ministry of Education and Culture, and seek technical assistance from UNESCO or partner institutions. Additionally, diversifying funding sources through public-private partnerships and international grants could accelerate site development. While the road to official World Heritage status is long and complex, Penyengat Island's rich cultural legacy, strategic diplomacy, and growing institutional support place it in a strong position to eventually achieve global recognition. With perseverance and strategic refinement, the dream of elevating Penyengat to UNESCO status remains well within reach.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that Kepulauan Rias Provincial Government, through the Department of Culture and Tourism of Tanjungpinang City, has played an active role in cultural diplomacy through the mechanism of paradiplomacy. This effort is reflected in the preparation of a comprehensive dossier that highlights the historical, tangible, and intangible cultural wealth of Penyengat Island as part of the Malay civilization's heritage. Such an initiative signifies a shift in diplomatic engagement from state-centered diplomacy to the increasing influence of sub-national actors. The local government has demonstrated strategic capacity in promoting local potential within the framework of international relations, supported by legal legitimacy through Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage and strengthened by collaboration among local authorities, the central government, and local communities.

The strategies employed consist of both direct and indirect paradiplomacy. Direct strategies include heritage revitalization, cultural promotion, and the formal submission of the nomination proposal. Indirectly, the local government has engaged in advocacy with the central government, secured national funding, and aligned its cultural initiatives with UNESCO's global heritage standards. The success of these strategies is reflected in the central government's allocation of approximately IDR 33 billion for revitalization in 2025, as well as the visible transformation of cultural infrastructure and heritage identity on the island. Nevertheless, challenges persist, such as Penyengat's long-standing position on Indonesia's tentative list, the shortage of skilled local human resources, and limited public awareness of the global value of cultural preservation.

Considering the island's historical depth, cultural importance, and the institutional strategies already in place, Penyengat Island holds strong potential to be recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It represents not only a local heritage site but also a symbol of shared Malay identity and cross-border cultural history in Southeast Asia. To strengthen its nomination prospects, the local government must continue improving institutional capacity, increasing community engagement, and expanding collaboration with international bodies. With consistent strategic planning and multi-stakeholder support, the recognition of

Penyengat Island by UNESCO is achievable—and would significantly contribute to cultural preservation, regional identity, and the development of sustainable heritage tourism.

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