

## Redefining Paradiplomacy Strategy to Strengthen Island Governance Autonomy: The Case of Riau Islands, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the role of paradiplomacy in strengthening the local governance autonomy of the Riau Islands, Indonesia, a region facing challenges in capitalizing on its strategic geographical location and marine resources. While Riau Islands holds significant potential in tourism, fisheries, and regional development, its subnational autonomy has not been fully leveraged to foster successful paradiplomatic initiatives. Using desk research and secondary data from governmental sources, scientific articles, and media reports, this study evaluates the effectiveness of paradiplomacy in enhancing regional cooperation, promoting sustainable development, and addressing socio-economic issues such as poverty and inequality. The findings reveal that, despite numerous successful collaborations with international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and foreign governments, challenges remain in aligning local and national policies, managing external funds, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources. Empowering local communities, especially in the sectors of fisheries and tourism, has been a key focus, but issues of community displacement and foreign exploitation remain significant concerns. The research concludes that while paradiplomacy has contributed to some progress, a more coordinated and sustainable approach is necessary to fully realize the region's potential. Future strategies should focus on enhancing local governance capacity, improving public-private partnerships, and fostering a more inclusive development model that ensures the benefits of paradiplomacy are widely distributed.

Keyword: Island Governance, Paradiplomacy, Riau Islands, Subnational Autonomy

### INTRODUCTION

Wonderful place with an abundance of tourist attractions also has a strategy in geoeconomics and geopolitics, this one called Riau Islands. As a part of an archipelagic state, Indonesia, Riau Islands has many sectors as their potential to support regional competitiveness. Positioned strategically between the Malacca Strait, the Karimata Strait, and the Northern Natuna Sea as a getaway for world trade this depicts how crucial government roles are to confront the challenges nowadays along with their unique motto "Berpancang Amanag, Bersauh Marwah" means that the Riau Islands province is determined to develop its region into a center of economic growth while maintaining their values by a prosperous, noble, and educated society (BPK RI Riau).

A distinctive way for Riau is its regional autonomy, gaining greater authority has allowed for more responsive and efficient governance where there is a term called *das sollen* and *das sein*. In short, *das sollen* is what should or ought to be done and for *das sein* is empirical evidence. Begins with their awareness of their geographic location, they enhanced

their tourism hotspots gradually from year to year from historical sites to natural sites. Moreover, the Riau government is setting their goals for the number of tourists coming both domestically and internationally. These become a background where the ought to be done is increasing its local governance autonomy effectively to protect and monitor the economic growth where the Riau Governments should maximize its potential.

Regional autonomy in Indonesia (Otonomi Daerah) was introduced with the enactment of Law No.22 of 1999, replaced with Law No. 32 of 2004, and for the most recent and revised by Law No. 23 of 2014 concerning regional government. These legal frameworks become fundamental broader decentralization, deconcentrations, and distribution authority efforts at increasing local governance to manage their own resources, make effective decisions, and improve their public services. Since decentralization affects the financial and fiscal management between central and regional governments, Indonesia decree Law of No. 33 of 2004. It emphasizes the transparency of funds and constructs three financial transfers for instance The Profit-Sharing Funds (DBH), where the taxes are collected and distributed on the origin of the revenue; General Allocation Funds (DAU), annually state budget and distributed to the regions to enhance their capability in public services; and Special Allocation Funds (DAK), given from central government to complement the regional of their efforts and support their development goals. These improvements are expected to foster equitable development and sustain the integrity of Indonesia (Suryantini, 2017).

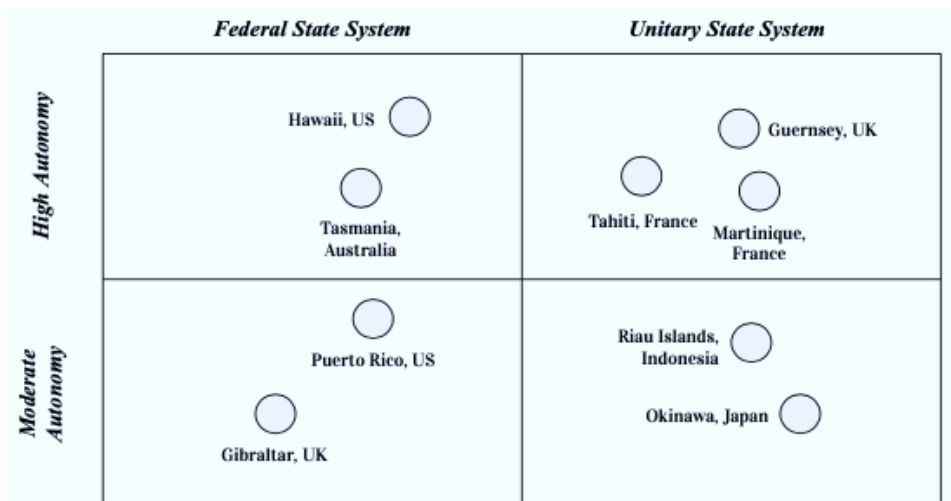


Figure 1. The multiple models of subnational governance, classified according to the existing state systems and levels of autonomy  
Source: data combined from multiple sources, 2024

Figure 1 shows the gap and the differences of regions, showcasing their level of autonomy from High to Moderate. It explains the regions within the Federal State System like Hawaii and Tasmania have their own way to balance their power with the central governments and the autonomy cannot be altered easily. For the Unitary State System, their regional autonomy can be changed by central authorities. High Autonomy, they have significant legislative powers and regions can manage their own taxes without needing central approval. On the other hand, moderates have limited ability to generate and manage their revenues such as Riau and Okinawa.

The implementations between Riau and other subnational governance differ considering cultural, historical, and geographical background. Riau is facing many challenges due to Indonesia's vast archipelago such as poverty and inequality. In fact, Okinawa has a

successful approach of decentralization by utilizing their advantages in tourism and international collaboration. Known for its beauty and biodiversity of coral reefs, the local governments consider it as a natural asset which can develop their economic growth. Involving local communities, local business, and international non-governmental organizations supported by national policies and marine protected areas in Okinawa leads to a better rapport. Moreover, Taitung in Taiwan has a similar way to preserve Whale-watching as their tourism attraction with increasing education and awareness to build a culture of respect towards the environment. As well as the synergy of relationship between national and local governments showed a successful paradiplomacy, this could establish sister city agreements which pave the way to economic cooperation and investment opportunities.

Ironically Riau Islands has a different case, albeit Riau Islands and Okinawa have the same regional autonomy system. Small islands with archipelagic state certainly facing copiousness of challenges and somewhat the governance being passive. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics or Badan Pusat Statistik, Riau Islands became the most impoverished province in Indonesia with 6.67%. The core of the issue is the access to basic services like sanitation, healthcare, and crucially education prove the dynamic of poverty in Riau. Where the socio-economic inequality is more visible is also multifaceted between the city of Batam and the remote islands because of their own socio-cultural aspects. Batam, the largest city in Riau Islands and the economic powerhouse giving rapid industrial growth and society development because of its status as a free trade zone, therefore attracted foreign investment.

Albeit its development, this issue is not distributed well enough, there are some islands that are lagging behind this equals to lack of paradiplomacy capabilities. This paper is explained to redefine the paradiplomacy activities towards Riau Islands province and the development of local and national governments, following the research question of "why has not the autonomy provided towards Riau Islands province been translated into successful paradiplomatic activities and developed its marine potential?"

## METHODOLOGY

This writing is constructed following the desk research principles. As described by Neuman (2014), desk research is one of the methodologies of researching functions to provide as much secondary data as possible to map out general findings of some issues or phenomena. The data collection then employs the internet-based data collection method on three separate sources, including:

- a. Official government sources. As government initiatives become one of the backbone of this writings' findings, referring to their official sources is considered necessary. There are two major sites that this writing looks at: (a) the official sources of the Indonesian central government; and (b) the official sources of the Riau Islands. Those two sources have their own complementaries. For the central government, the data includes what is also provided in the ministries' documents. While for the provincial sites of Riau Islands, it is also complemented by additional data taken from its municipalities.
- b. Findings on multiple scientific articles. This includes several findings from the existing paradiplomacy programs in Riau Islands. Some keywords used to deep dive into this information include: Batam, Bintan, community empowerment, fisheries, international aid, international collaboration, local fishermen, marine tourism, Natuna Sea, and paradiplomacy – filtered with research limitation on Riau Islands.
- c. Local mass media reports, especially the news related to public opinion on government paradiplomacy programs in Riau Islands.

All of the data is later served following an interactive analysis method. According to Bargate (2013), interactive analysis contains four steps of: (1) raw data finding; (2)

reductioning and filtering data; (3) serving the data into the shapes of tables, figures, or graphs; and (4) taking the conclusion of the research. This way of analyzing data is found suitable to explain a holistic finding of any studies.

That data analysis method would become a complementary process for a core theoretical framework used to orderly provide the results and discussion stages of this writing. The seeking of a proper theoretical framework is not an easy process of this paper's writing. The main concern that the writers raise mainly surround the unpopularity of two subjects discussed in this paper, which are: (1) subnational-level island governance; and (2) paradiplomacy. More specifically, when it comes to their implementations in Indonesia. Both practices of Regional Autonomy Law and paradiplomacy are still very young. And despite the subject of island development and the blue economy seeing a growing number of research in recent years, most of them are still very general with evidence of critical findings is still very limited.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Local Government Initiatives on Paradiplomacy

The provincial government of Riau Islands, Indonesia, have initiated several international collaborative programs to promote their marine abundance and tourism potential. Through this writing recording, paradiplomatic activities involving the local government have started as early as 2004, only five years after Indonesian central government disseminated a law regarding the regional autonomy. Since then, multiple international actors have been involved. This part classified some success stories of Riau Islands paradiplomacy based on three different actors: (1) International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs); (2) foreign local governments or subnational bodies; and (3) other minor actors, including participation to implement ratified law made by the central government.

Regarding its collaborative acts with several INGOs, Riau Islands government put a special emphasis on maintaining the local marine tourism potential. Those activities include the conservation of coral reefs, mangrove restoration, marine debris cleaning, and sustainable fisheries management. Among those four activities, the attention the government puts on coral conservation might be the largest. Since 2007, the municipal government of Bintan Regency – one of the largest regency in Riau Islands – has once published Law No. 261/VII/2007 regarding coral conservation. It is said that the government would support any act promoting coral conservation within the area of 116.000 ha (Adriman et al., 2013).

This agenda was then pushed towards the national government which led to the creation of Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) – a multilateral agreement involving Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa Island, Timor Leste, and Indonesia – to map out an international collaboration on coral conservation since 2009. CTI was also later translated into a non-profit organization headquartered in Bali Islands, Indonesia, while still maintaining Bintan Regency as one of its conservation hotspots (Anugrah & Putra, 2020). The NGOs made several initiatives with the local government to preserve the abundance of coral reefs within the province.

The strong initiative to preserve marine abundance on coral reefs brought spillover effects to another biodiversity hotspot including mangrove and fisheries. And, the implementation programs actually followed the similar blueprint by creating a protective law first and then seeking several suitable INGOs to work with. For its mangrove conservation, for example, the government initiative is mirrored through the expansion of local law enforcement on coral conservation. After that, several INGOs were brought in, including Yayasan Konservasi Alam Nusantara (YKAN) and Mangrove Action Project Indonesia, while collaborative programs have been carried out since 2017 (Zakia et al., 2022).

The aspect of sustainable fisheries took a hot start, with support from the central government through Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries Directives No.37/KEPMEN-KP/2014 regarding Marine Conservation in Riau Islands Province. This law sets their focus on the region of Anambas, also part of Riau Islands province, and the latter programs from the local government successfully brought several INGOs such as WWF Indonesia to participate. The program took place in 2015, with the focus to enrich local fishermen’s knowledge on sustainable fishing practices (Rahayu & Ozali, 2024). Besides those two aspects of mangrove and sustainable fisheries agenda, some other INGOs are also involved in various agenda such as marine debris reduction.

Besides promoting its marine tourism through collaboration with several INGOs, Riau Islands also work with foreign local governments to do so, which becomes the second point of this part. Sharing a border and having a similar geographical situation with Singapore, there have been several planned agenda involving both the provincial government of Riau Islands and local Singaporean government. One of them is the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) itself, which has been involved in “Singapore-Indonesia Tourism Cooperation” since 2010. The agreement has, since then, increased the number of Singaporean tourists visiting Riau Islands province, while also upgrading the marine tourism-based infrastructure in Riau Islands (Rizaldy, 2018).

The cooperation with the Singaporean government has actually started earlier in 2004, with the establishment of Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP). This multilateral cooperation focuses on securing the Malacca Strait, a body of water located near the South China Sea and bordering Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia. All four countries are involved in this join-patrol program. The provincial government does not have direct intervention through this program simply because this was placed outside of their jurisdiction. However, localized supervision and focus of cooperation is highly communicated with the parties of the Riau Islands government (Ikrami, 2018). According to some scientific findings, this initiative has significantly reduced the number of transnational crime taking place in the area of Malacca Strait.

As the third point, this writing also expands its findings not just on INGOs and foreign governance actors, but also some multilateral cooperation that Riau Islands participate in. First of all, the Riau Islands manage several Free Trade Zone (FTZ) and Special Economic Zone (SEZ) set by the central government, called “Galang Batang Special Economic Zone”. Therefore, the local government’s hosting capacity to attract private capitals from Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and other interested countries is also considerable in shaping their paradiplomacy agenda (Irawan et al., 2024). It is also worth mentioning that Riau Islands become a hotspot of some multilateral agreement such as Coral Triangle Initiative – as mentioned in the prior part – and also Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices, inviting best practices from experts of mostly Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific countries (Prasetyo, 2019).

Table 1. Riau Islands’ government initiatives on paradiplomacy wrapped up.

Scope of Actors	Agencies Involved	Year Started	Remarks
International Non-Governmental Organizations	Coral Triangle Center	2009	Focusing on coral reef conservation
	Yayasan Konservasi Alam Nusantara & Mangrove Action Project Indonesia	2017	Collaborative actions to preserve mangrove ecosystem in some parts of Riau Islands



Scope of Actors	Agencies Involved	Year Started	Remarks
	WWF Indonesia	2015	Promoting and teaching sustainable fishing practices towards local community
Foreign Governmental Bodies	Singapore Tourism Board	2010	Improving the capability of handling the tourism
	Malacca Strait Patrols	2004	Cooperation on regional security within the Malacca Strait
Other Related Actors	Galang Batang Special Economic Zone	2018	A central government initiative, which focused on economic development of Riau Islands by accelerating its free market
	Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices	2007	An international regime focusing on local fishing practices, in which Indonesia has been participating since its first discussion

Source: Author, 2024

Also, according to several news reports, some local communities across the province have developed private eco-tourism projects as part of the trickle-down effect following several initiatives from the government (Pristiwasa & Gunawan 2024; Kartini et al., 2023; Fadhil & Marja, 2024). Despite the finding that local communities' participation could still be connected with the government initiatives, it would be deeply dove later in the next part of this writing. The clear view of Riau Islands government initiatives on paradiplomacy is served through Table 1 However, there are several notable challenges worth mentioning. Heating geopolitical tension in the Malacca Strait recently have become the major reasons for constraining further initiatives from both provincial and municipal governments in Riau Islands. The discussion of political and security is simply out of the local government's reach, and therefore require the central government's attention.

The problem, then, in most of the times, laid-out policies from the local and central government is simply not aligned to one another. This has been the case which was revealed through a serious issue of heating political tension in the Malacca Strait (Zulkifli et al., 2020). Another occasion in which the central government's role is still highly expected could be pointed to COVID-19 management. Similar to other island states globally, COVID-19 has severe damage towards the islanders due to their usual dependence on the tourism sector. From 2020-2022, as the Indonesian central government's handling on COVID-19 has not fully worked out, Riau Islands face some consequences such as decreasing number of tourists soon followed by worsening economic performance (Mahadiansar et al., 2021). The effort to spark a wide-range recovery on these issues should be led with joint-initiatives from both central and local government.

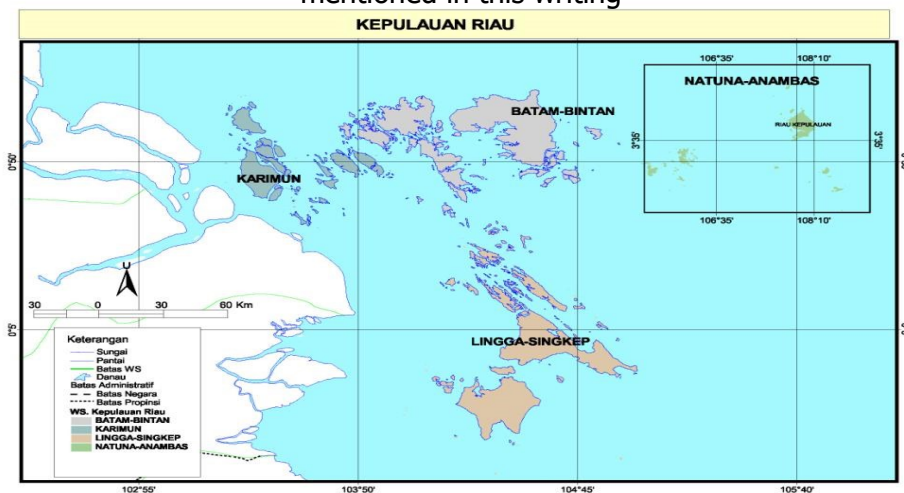
## 2. How Local Communities Empowered: Fisheries and Tourism

Following the findings on several international and collaborative programs initiated by the local government of Riau Islands, this writing then would like to map out how local communities get empowered through those programs' implementation. From what this writing knows based on the existing information, the empowerment of local communities are still limited into two island aspects: (1) fisheries; and (2) tourism management. It slowly indicates that the empowerment of local communities within Riau Islands province are still expandable, and show a high potential for a larger increase in the future, touching some other aspects of

the islanders' livelihood. Despite seeming to be hindered due to its limited subject of empowerment, the current participation of local communities within the government diplomacy agenda still contains several success stories, in which this part of the writing would like to cover.

From the fisheries sector, Riau Islands have an enormous potential. According to the data from the Indonesian government, 96% of Riau Islands total area is the body of water, and a more advanced finding from the local government shows that there are 387 potential spots of fisheries development (Supriadi et al., 2024). Therefore, opting to be a fisherman is still a reasonable choice for most of the local communities, despite most of the fishermen within the province still living in a poor condition (Usman & Mita, 2018). That makes a collaborative program from the local government to empower those fishermen highly anticipated, and also expected to deliver a lot of benefits towards local economic improvement.

Figure 2. Map of Riau Islands province to describe geographical positions of several islands mentioned in this writing



Source: Author, 2024

In the previous part, it has been said that some programs introducing the concept of sustainable fishing techniques are one of the priorities from the government's paradiplomacy agenda. Further findings said that this program mainly centered on the fishermen from the island of Bintan, Lingga, and Natuna, while the fishermen from other islands including Karimun and Anambas are also reportedly to be participating (Ariefananda et al., 2024). The reference of the islands' location is visible through Figure 2. Some INGOs are invited by the government to empower the locals and implement the sustainable fisheries promotion, including World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Indonesia and USAID. Some projects have been implemented since 2015 to ensure that the locals are having both ability and knowledge to use sustainable fishing techniques. By doing so, these projects are expected to give benefits for both the fishermen and marine diversity, which are both crucial considering the livelihood aspect of the local community itself (Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2018).

Another livelihood aspect of the islanders which is set to be the focus of community empowerment is tourism. Like the other coastal and small island areas in Indonesia, marine tourism has been the center of development in several local communities situated in the Riau Islands. To transform the island into a tourist-magnet, the knowledge of local communities are very important. As a response to that, community training within the sector of tourism also became the program of several government agendas. Explained in the previous part, the

provincial government has tried to bring in some bodies of Singapore Tourism Board to later provide enrichment of local communities capability in tourism management. This initiative was broadened through "Singapore-Indonesia Tourism Cooperation" and implemented in several tourist hotspots such as the island of Batam and Bintan (Karim et al., 2024). Training provided within this program includes hospitality specialty, foreign languages, entrepreneurship, and several aspects of cleanliness and eco-tourism. So far, this training has been making a positive impact towards tourism management of local communities, encouraging more people to guide the tourism industry and also diversifying the economy at some points (Andaiyani et al., 2024).

From those success stories of how community empowerment took place in some of Riau Islands paradiplomacy, there were also several recorded challenges. First, it is the lack of scrutiny on foreign intervention. Similar to other small islands, the two aspects of fisheries and marine tourism are the backbones of Riau Islands economy. However, with the potential it possesses, complemented with an opened door from the government to bring in foreign agencies, some cases of exploitation then occurred. And, it brought us to the second problem of local communities' displacement. With a high standard and expectation set by the program initiative, and while the locals simply could not achieve it due to capital disparity, locals' displacement then became a shortcut that both foreign partners and government take (Walangare & Bahchri, 2023).

Those two challenges actually are highly avoidable. It should be noted that the enrichment of local communities' capability would take a long time. It is indeed a form of investment rather than a short-term initiative. Therefore, the measurement of the program's success should take place later 10-20 years after program implementation, rather than expecting a significant result such as increasing the number of visitors in a relatively short period of time (McKinley et al., 2019). Those two challenges are also combined with another issue, concerning a limited involvement of local communities to just the aspects of fisheries and tourism among many other aspects of livelihood.

### 3. Diplomacy as an External Funding Sources

Besides focusing on the role of both government initiatives and public participation, diplomacy can also serve as additional funding sources to implement public policies. Currently, the majority of diplomatic relations – especially when it was released from the government – is focused on fostering economic cooperation. The increasing involvement of public-to-private partnerships through diplomacy in recent times has also raised the frequency of diplomacy function as an external funding source (Leese, 2018). Practically, there are three major types of how diplomatic arrangement can provide more funding to the bodies of government: (1) international cooperation, including agreements, aids, or any other type of assistance; (2) trade and investment promotion, including the release of incentives policies; and (3) cultural exchanges that potentially trigger grants or scholarships for local community. This part of the writing would focus on how Riau Islands paradiplomacy efforts invite more funding through investment promotion and international aid agreements.

Unlike many other advanced regions, the ability of the subnational level of government to seek external funding through diplomacy is still very limited. When talking about successful stories, one can take examples of several local governments in the European Union (EU). In one of its programs, the EU is having an initiative called European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) which could be transferred towards multiple actors, including regional governments in multiple levels.

For Horizon 2020, one of the recipients of the ERDF is Catalonia, Spain, in which they empowered their paradiplomatic channels to get an access towards the funding. Several research and innovation projects were then constructed after the fund injection from the ERDF (Ferasso et al., 2021). Despite being lacked of paradiplomatic channel, as mentioned in the



case of Catalonia, it does not mean that Riau Islands are being hindered with any international aids. Also mentioned in the previous part is the involvement of USAID within several capacity-building projects promoted by the local government. USAID stands for "United States Agency for International Development". They have been partnering with the Indonesian government for a long time, and have started to participate in several projects in the Riau Islands since 2015.. The vision to develop marine tourism and blue economy in the region is perfectly aligned with USAID's main project to fund international development on sustainability discourses. Some other INGOs have also injected a considerable amount of financial support towards the local government, including WWF Indonesia.

The problem that occurred, then, is similar to other aid-funded international programs. This type of funding usually causes an issue on continuity, as most of the international aids only serve to provide funding to initiate a program, rather than putting more attention towards audit and maintenance (Easterly & Williamson, 2011). This is the problem that should be solved when it comes to the second source of external funding: investment initiative. The Indonesian government has granted the island of Batam – also part of Riau Islands province – the status of Free Trade Zone and later Special Economic Zone in 1971. The creation of a Special Economic Zone in Batam was also expanded to include the island of Bintan and Karimun, in which the capital of Riau Islands – Tanjungpinang – is located. The SEZ has successfully become an initiative to attract more capital coming into the province. Local agency on the SEZ entitled "BP Batam" noted that for Q1 of 2024 alone, there have been 240 million USD worth of capital investment coming into the island. The majority of investors are coming from Singapore, Mainland China, Japan, France, and Hong Kong. Similar report also stated that this amount of investment has been gradually increasing over the past two years.

Despite its success to invite a considerable number of investors, followed by a massive amount of capital, the problem still lies on Riau Island investment incentives. This huge amount of money is not distributed on the sector should the government focus on – marine development. Instead, they are initially allocated by the investors to support the housing, local manufacturing, and energy exploitation sector in Riau Islands (Munir, 2018). Besides all that, project funding in Riau Islands province has always been hindered with the problems of corruption and unequal distribution. Many government officials have been captured by the state after being involved in multiple corruption scandals worth millions of USD (Ramadhan, 2017). Unequal distribution of international aid is also pointed to be an issue, with local communities being once again exposed to become a vulnerable group. Those issues surely become a major obstacle for trickle-down economic development to occur in Riau Islands, one economic principle which has been discovered to be successful in fueling island states development in many other cases globally (Weaver, 2017).

#### 4. Media and Public Opinion on Paradiplomacy Agenda

Generally, the media and public opinion regarding Riau Islands paradiplomacy agenda could be separated into two: positive and negative. The positive point of view has been spilled towards government awareness on their local potential, initiating to invite multiple international actors to collaborate and develop marine wealth possessed by the region. The public then, has seen the increasing attention towards some of their livelihood aspects including sustainable fisheries, environment conservation, and also marine security. More than that, local communities have been empowered through several collaborative initiatives, also complemented with the flow of infrastructure and capital to sustain blue economy aspects of people's livelihood. Increasing amount of tourists and investment towards marine sectors in the Riau Islands also becomes another reason why government paradiplomacy should trigger a positive opinion. All of those explanations could be found in multiple records of local news media of the Riau Islands.

On the other hand, it should also be admitted that negative opinion followed by critics from the public has also been raised. Through paradiplomacy, which allows the government to invite more actors and more funding boost towards their program, two problems of community displacement and huge-scale corruption have been really concerning. Several local media have launched an independent investigation through their news as an effort to express their concern. On one side, community displacement to build some modern tourist infrastructure within the island has raised the discourses of foreign exploitation, and neo-colonialism for some parts of the community. On the other side, there is also continuing exposure of corruption scandals surrounding the progress of some international projects. The case of corruption for any government would never be unsuccessful to initiate public distrust, and later on decrease the excitement of public participation towards government-handled programs (Navot & Beerli, 2017). Again, similar to the positive finding of public opinion on paradiplomacy, these negative concerns also refer to the evidence under the form of multiple media reports covering Riau Islands province.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the province of Riau Islands faces significant challenges despite its regional autonomy and strategic location. Although the government has initiated various paradiplomatic efforts to promote marine conservation and tourism, there are ongoing issues with poverty, inequality, and underdeveloped islands, which hinder the success of these initiatives. The government has worked with international organizations and foreign local governments, such as Singapore, to increase tourism and improve marine management. However, the benefits of these programs have not been distributed equally across the region, with some islands remaining significantly behind in development compared to Batam, the economic hub of the province.

The local community empowerment efforts, particularly in fisheries and tourism, show promise but are still limited. Programs like sustainable fishing practices, supported by international NGOs, have been beneficial in certain areas, but the scope of participation remains narrow, focusing mainly on select islands. Similarly, tourism training programs have empowered local communities to better manage eco-tourism and hospitality sectors, although challenges such as displacement and foreign exploitation remain. The government's paradiplomacy efforts, while showing some success in attracting investment and increasing tourism, have also faced criticisms, including issues related to corruption and the inequitable distribution of resources.

In conclusion, the region's paradiplomacy efforts have not fully translated into the expected economic and social development. Despite significant potential in marine tourism and fisheries, these efforts are often hampered by political and economic challenges, including a lack of coordinated policies between the local and central governments. The empowerment of local communities, although progressing, still requires more inclusive and long-term strategies to ensure sustainable development. The province needs a more integrated approach to paradiplomacy that not only focuses on attracting foreign investment and international cooperation but also addresses the underlying issues of inequality and local capacity building.

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