

PARADIPLOMACY OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH: SURABAYA'S APPROACH TO GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES (2016-2020)

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of paradiplomacy in Surabaya's approach to addressing global sustainability challenges from 2016 to 2020. As a key city in Indonesia, a Global South country, Surabaya illustrates how local governments can leverage international partnerships to address pressing urban and environmental issues. The study highlights how Surabaya's strategic collaborations with cities such as Kitakyushu and Liverpool align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly focusing on environmental sustainability and urban development. Despite facing significant socio-economic inequalities and institutional constraints due to Indonesia's decentralisation laws, Surabaya has utilised paradiplomacy to integrate global standards into local policies effectively. The city's partnerships have facilitated knowledge exchange and resource mobilisation, aiding in tackling issues like waste management and infrastructure development. This approach demonstrates a shift from traditional state-centric diplomacy to a more nuanced, subnational engagement that empowers cities in the Global South. Through Surabaya's experiences, the paper provides valuable insights into how other cities with similar challenges can adopt paradiplomatic strategies to enhance their sustainability efforts and contribute to global discussions on sustainable urban development.

Keywords

Paradiplomacy, Indonesia, Surabaya, global south.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa o papel da paradiplomacia na abordagem de Surabaya para enfrentar os desafios globais de sustentabilidade entre 2016 e 2020. Como uma cidade-chave na Indonésia, um país do Sul Global, Surabaya ilustra como os governos locais podem alavancar parcerias internacionais para abordar questões urbanas e ambientais prementes. O estudo destaca a forma como as colaborações estratégicas de Surabaya com cidades como Kitakyushu e Liverpool se alinham com os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS), centrando-se particularmente na sustentabilidade ambiental e no desenvolvimento urbano. Apesar de enfrentar desigualdades socioeconómicas significativas e restrições institucionais devido às leis de descentralização da Indonésia, Surabaya utilizou a paradiplomacia para integrar eficazmente as normas globais nas políticas locais. As parcerias estabelecidas pela cidade facilitaram a troca de conhecimentos e a mobilização de recursos, ajudando a resolver questões como a gestão de resíduos e o desenvolvimento de infraestruturas. Esta abordagem demonstra uma mudança da diplomacia tradicional centrada no Estado para um envolvimento



subnacional mais matizado que dá poder às cidades do Sul Global. Através das experiências de Surabaya, o artigo fornece informações valiosas sobre como outras cidades com desafios semelhantes podem adotar estratégias paradiplomáticas para melhorar os seus esforços de sustentabilidade e contribuir para debates globais sobre o desenvolvimento urbano sustentável.

Palavras-chave

Paradiplomacia, Indonésia, Surabaya, sul global.

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of urban populations globally is transforming cities into influential international actors. According to the United Nations, the global urban population surged from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018, with projections suggesting that 68% of the world's population will reside in urban areas by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). This demographic shift has significantly altered the role of cities, positioning them not merely as administrative units but as dynamic participants in global affairs.

Short et al. (2000) argue that globalisation has redefined cities as new international actors, while Giddens (2003) highlights how this shift has empowered local governments to become crucial nodes in global networks. Paradiplomacy, or subnational diplomacy, has thus emerged as a critical mechanism through which cities directly engage in international relations. By establishing autonomous connections with foreign cities, international organisations, and other non-state actors, cities address global challenges while enhancing their global standing (Barber, 2013; Curtis, 2016). However, the traditional approaches to paradiplomacy often fail to capture the unique complexities faced by cities in the Global South. These cities grapple with rapid urbanisation, socio-economic disparities, and developmental constraints, challenges that are not fully addressed by conventional paradiplomatic frameworks.

In the current globalised era, urban centres in the Global South face complex socio-political landscapes while aiming for sustainable development. Surabaya is among many cities that utilises paradiplomatic strategies to align its local efforts with global sustainability goals. Traditional paradigms often disregard the distinctive obstacles these cities face—rapid urban growth, limited resources, and limited institutional capacities—necessitating a re-assessment of paradiplomacy. By focusing on Surabaya's approach to environmental sustainability, this paper explores how paradiplomatic efforts in cities of the Global South can create significant international collaborations that address urgent local concerns while contributing to global sustainability discourse.

Global South cities like Surabaya in Indonesia, which has made notable efforts to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into its paradiplomatic strategies, provide insight into how such frameworks can be adapted to local realities. Focusing



particularly on environmental sustainability, Surabaya's engagement with paradiplomacy offers an example of how local governments in the Global South can navigate the intersection of global aspirations and local needs.

Surabaya's international relations framework, particularly its partnerships with sister cities, demonstrates the potential of paradiplomacy in facilitating the exchange of knowledge and sustainable practices. Surabaya's transformation from an industrial city to a sustainable urban hub reflects its alignment with the SDGs, focusing on environmental sustainability as a foundation for socio-economic growth (Wijoyo et al., 2023). This shift marks a significant departure from traditional state-centric diplomacy, elevating the role of subnational entities like Surabaya in global governance.

As Surabaya implements these strategies, it becomes a relevant case study for understanding the intersection of local realities and global aspirations in the Global South. The city's creative environmental initiatives provide a model for how other urban centres in similar contexts might integrate SDGs into their diplomatic efforts. By emphasising a comprehensive approach that aligns urban development with international sustainability standards, Surabaya's paradigm shift can serve as a replicable framework for other cities looking to navigate the complexities of urbanisation, socio-economic disparities, and global governance (Nganje, 2013).

Ultimately, this paper seeks to present a more nuanced perspective on paradiplomacy, one that attends specifically to the intricacies of urban governance and international cooperation in the Global South. By examining the case of Surabaya, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on how subnational entities can bridge the gap between local needs and global goals, advancing sustainable urban growth within the global community.

Paradiplomacy and the Global South

Paradiplomacy refers to the international activities undertaken by subnational entities—such as cities, regions, and states—that seek to engage directly with foreign actors and influence global affairs. The genesis of paradiplomacy represents a departure from traditional state-centric diplomacy, where national governments hold exclusive authority over international relations. Paradiplomacy allows local governments to pursue their own foreign policies and international partnerships, enabling them to address global challenges and leverage opportunities that align with their unique interests and needs (Lecours, 2002; Aldecoa and Keating, 2013).

The evolution of paradiplomacy can be traced back to the late 20th century when cities and regions began asserting themselves as significant international actors following the rise of federalism (Keating, 2013). As globalisation intensified, local governments increasingly recognised the potential to shape global outcomes through direct engagement with international partners.

Lecours (2008) outlines three main motives of paradiplomacy, namely economic motive, knowledge motive, and political motive. However, Tavares (2016) details it even more to seven motives. These include capitalising on global opportunities, especially in economic development; improving citizen services, particularly in cross-border contexts;



enhancing local competencies and programmes in areas such as healthcare and education; advocating for domestic decentralisation and addressing local demands; advancing the personal ambitions of local political leaders, including potential electoral benefits; fostering cultural uniqueness and nationalism; and overcoming political and geographic isolation.

Paradiplomacy differs from traditional diplomacy in several key ways. First, traditional diplomacy is state-centric, with national governments holding the primary responsibility for conducting international relations and representing the interests of their countries. In contrast, paradiplomacy allows subnational entities to engage directly with foreign actors, bypassing national governments. However, considering that the authority to engage in paradiplomacy is granted by the national government with certain limitations, paradiplomacy is generally carried out only on low political issues that are not directly related to national security. This is why, borrowing Lecours (2008) and Utomo (2019), paradiplomacy falls within the “gray” area of the constitution because traditionally, foreign activities are an exclusive right of the national government. However, paradiplomacy has now been regarded as a common practice, complementing and democratising foreign policy, not regarded as an anomaly anymore (Cornago, 2010).

The study of paradiplomacy has its roots in North America and Europe, where the concepts of federalism and decentralisation have long been established (Tremblay, 1990). To mention some, there is Martínez (2017) who explores the paradiplomatic efforts of Canadian provinces, detailing their interactions with the United States and Mexico, which underscores the region-specific focus of the research. He provides an in-depth analysis of North American subnational governments and their international activities, further emphasizing the emphasis on this region. In Europe, Kamiński and Ciesielska-Klikowska (2023) examine the integration of paradiplomacy into EU foreign policymaking, highlighting the mechanisms and limitations within a European context. McHugh (2015) adds to this focus by investigating the foreign policy ambitions of Quebec and other Canadian provinces, illustrating the continued scholarly attention on North American paradigms. Collectively, these studies reflect a significant concentration of paradiplomacy research in North America and Europe, pointing to a need for broader exploration of paradiplomacy in other contexts.

In contrast, the scholarship on paradiplomacy remains underdeveloped in the Global South, where the dynamics of decentralisation and subnational autonomy differ markedly from those in the developed regions. Although paradiplomacy scholarship has made notable strides in both North America and Europe, the Global South still requires more comprehensive exploration. Studies such as Salomon (2016), de Macedo et al. (2023), and Nganje (2014) have started to shed light on paradiplomacy in the developing world, with a focus on developing countries like Brazil and South Africa. These articles generally highlight the unique challenges that shape the Global South’s approach to paradiplomacy. Issues like rapid urbanisation, socio-economic disparities, and institutional constraints are prevalent in these regions, influencing how local governments engage in international relations compared to the more developed regions. Paradiplomacy in the Global South often focuses on addressing these pressing local issues while navigating a complex global landscape.



Surabaya at a Glance

Surabaya, the capital of East Java Province and Indonesia's second-largest city after Jakarta, is a key gateway to Eastern Indonesia, with direct shipping and flight connections to major eastern cities such as Denpasar, Makassar, and Jayapura. Its role as a major industrial hub highlights the city's economic significance. Its port, Tanjung Perak, is the second busiest in the country after Jakarta's Tanjung Priok, playing a crucial role in regional and international trade. Surabaya's economy is diverse, with prominent sectors including shipbuilding, heavy equipment, and food and beverages. Its growing appeal as a market for new technologies and innovations makes it a prime location for investment in the digital and creative sectors.

The city's status as a trade centre was established during the Dutch colonial period, which began in the early 17th century. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) recognised Surabaya's potential for trading spices, sugar, and other valuable goods, leading to the expansion of its port facilities and its pivotal role in VOC's maritime trade routes across Asia and Europe. The colonial era saw Surabaya grow economically and culturally, with Dutch architectural and urban planning influences evident in its European-style buildings and organised street layouts.

With a population of over 3 million, modern Surabaya remains a vibrant and diverse city. While the Javanese are the predominant ethnic group, the city also hosts significant minorities, including Chinese Indonesians, Arab Indonesians, and the Madurese from the nearby Madura Island. Historically, foreign ethnic groups such as Armenians and Indians were also present, though they are now largely absent. Surabaya's strategic position at the northeastern tip of Java Island enhances its logistics and connectivity, making it a key node on the *pantura* (north coast) road, which links it to other major cities like Jakarta and Semarang and nearby towns.

From the 1970s to the late 1990s, Surabaya was known as the *Indamardi* city (Bagijo, 1992). The concept itself is an acronym of *Industri, Perdagangan, Maritim, and Pendidikan*, meaning "industry, commerce, maritime, and education" in Indonesian, respectively. This era saw significant industrial growth, maritime activities bolstered by Tanjung Perak port, and the city's emphasis on education through its universities such as Universitas Airlangga and the Tenth of November Institute of Technology.

As a metropolis, Surabaya faces significant challenges related to pollution and rising temperatures. The rapid urbanisation and industrial activities have contributed to worsening air quality, while the city's dense population and heavy traffic exacerbate these issues. In addition to pollution, Surabaya grapples with the challenge of high temperatures, which are exacerbated by the urban heat island effect. Surabaya is one of the hottest Indonesian cities, where the hottest daily temperature was recorded as high as 34.8 Celsius degrees (Detik, 2024).

In response to that, since the 2000s, Surabaya has been shifting its identity from a predominantly industrial city to a more touristy destination. This transformation was driven by the establishment of the "Sparkling Surabaya" brand, launched by the Department of Tourism in collaboration with the Surabaya Tourism Promotion Board to highlight the city's rich cultural heritage and urban development. The initiative aimed to



rebrand Surabaya as a vibrant, modern metropolis that offers a diverse range of attractions for both domestic and international tourists.

Through these comprehensive efforts, Surabaya has tried to redefine itself as a city that balances historical tourism with a strong commitment to sustainability, all under the "Sparkling Surabaya" brand. This reimagined identity not only appeals to enhance the city's appeal to tourists but also underscores Surabaya's dedication to sustainable urban development. As the city continues to evolve, its efforts to integrate sustainability into all aspects of its growth have become increasingly aligned with global standards. This leads naturally to a deeper exploration of Surabaya's initiatives, particularly in the context of its drive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Surabaya's Paradiplomatic Approach to Sustainable Development

Adopted by all UN member states in 2015, The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a universal call to action to address global challenges, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). On the other hand, it has become a key source of inspiration for national development in Indonesia, as mandated by the government. In its official statement, the National Development Bureau (Bappenas) mentions that the achievement of the SDGs is recognised as a "national development priority that requires policy planning synergy at the national, provincial, and city/regency levels" (Bappenas, 2020). This reflects the country's commitment to integrating global development objectives into its governance framework, emphasising the importance of coordinated efforts across all levels of government to address pressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental sustainability. For cities like Surabaya, the SDGs offer both opportunities and challenges. The city must balance global targets with its unique, rapidly urbanising context.

Surabaya's efforts towards SDGs gained significant momentum under the leadership of Mayor Tri Rismaharini, who led initiatives that localised the SDGs within the city's development plans. The stipulation of SDGs coincided with the second term of her leadership, meaning that she also had to navigate the policies in accordance with the global vision. The overall vision of Surabaya at that time was "Surabaya, a Prosperous City with Character and Global Competitiveness based on Ecology." While the city's Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2016-2020 did not explicitly mention the SDGs, her governance focused on fulfilling SDG 11, which promotes inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities (Utomo, 2022).

These efforts align with Giddens' (2003) observation that globalisation operates on both global and local levels, with global agendas increasingly being contextualised to meet local needs. During those periods, Surabaya conducted two significant paradiplomatic cooperations: with Kitakyushu (Japan) and with Liverpool (United Kingdom).

The partnership between Surabaya and Kitakyushu, a city recognised for its environmental and technological advancements, has been pivotal in Surabaya's environmental management strategies. Since 2012, Surabaya has worked closely with Kitakyushu on waste management and environmental sustainability. Kitakyushu's



expertise in waste treatment played a key role in Surabaya's solid waste management initiatives.

According to Damayanti (2020), there are three different stakeholders in the collaboration between Surabaya and Kitakyushu. First, the Surabaya Government takes on a central role in regulating, evaluating, and managing the program to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. Meanwhile, civil society actively contributes through social networking and community empowerment, fostering local engagement and awareness. Additionally, Nishihara Corporation serves as a key facilitator in knowledge transfer, providing technical expertise and support to enhance waste processing initiatives.

In collaboration with Nishihara Corporation, particularly, Kitakyushu has assisted in implementing waste management systems that address the city's growing waste problem. Nishihara Corporation's role has been particularly vital in enhancing waste collection and recycling efforts in Surabaya's communities, including notable projects in the Wonorejo area.

Wonorejo itself has become a model site for environmental sustainability in Surabaya. The development of the Wonorejo Mangrove Ecotourism area, supported by Kitakyushu, exemplifies how the city utilises natural resources for both conservation and economic purposes. This collaboration is part of a broader effort to rehabilitate the mangrove forest along the coast of Surabaya, which plays a crucial role in protecting the city from coastal erosion and provides a habitat for various species. Kitakyushu's input into the development of this ecotourism area has helped local stakeholders understand the importance of integrating sustainable practices into tourism and urban planning.

Moreover, through these partnerships, Surabaya has been able to integrate the SDGs into specific projects, particularly in addressing environmental issues. With Kitakyushu's support, Surabaya has advanced its work towards SDG 11, creating more sustainable and resilient communities by tackling key environmental challenges. These efforts have been further institutionalised through various agreements and technical exchanges between the two cities, demonstrating how city-to-city cooperation can be a critical mechanism for localising global goals.

Between 2016 and 2020, Surabaya actively fostered partnerships with Kitakyushu through various collaborative initiatives aimed at sustainable urban development. In 2016, the cooperation began with a Kitakyushu municipal grant for tap water management in Surabaya, enhancing the city's water infrastructure. This was followed in 2017 by a workshop on energy source management, emphasizing the importance of efficient and sustainable energy use. In 2018, both cities worked together on a workshop addressing dengue fever mitigation and medical waste treatment, highlighting their commitment to public health and environmental sustainability. The collaboration continued in 2019 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic with a workshop on forest conservation and ecotourism development (Utomo and Widiana, 2024).

In addition to its cooperation with Kitakyushu, Surabaya's relationship with Liverpool further highlights how the city integrated the SDGs into its local governance. The partnership with Liverpool, formalised in 2018, covers a wide range of areas, including economic development, port management, and education. This cooperation aligns



particularly with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), focusing on sustainable urban development.

One of the most notable aspects of the Surabaya-Liverpool partnership is the focus on inclusivity, particularly in education. Both cities share a commitment to improving the quality of education for children with special needs. Surabaya's collaboration with Liverpool in this area—through joint initiatives like school visits, capacity-building for special education teachers, and curriculum development—directly supports SDG 4 (Quality Education). The focus on Special Educational Needs (SEN) and inclusivity reflects Surabaya's commitment to creating an educational environment that caters to all children, regardless of their abilities.

Furthermore, Liverpool's expertise in port management offered Surabaya opportunities to enhance its maritime infrastructure, crucial for economic growth. With Liverpool's support, Surabaya engaged in projects like the development of Java Integrated Industrial and Port Estate (JIIPE) and Tanjung Perak's expansion, which are vital for regional trade and economic development. These initiatives align with SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 8 by promoting sustainable industrialisation and supporting economic development in the region.

The cooperation also extended to the creative economy, with Liverpool providing support through the Developing Inclusive Creative Economy (DICE) program. By fostering entrepreneurship and supporting creative industries in Surabaya, DICE aligned with SDG 8's focus on promoting sustained economic growth and productive employment. This partnership signifies how cities can foster economic resilience and inclusivity through international cooperation.

Finally, the sports diplomacy aspect of the Surabaya-Liverpool relationship, particularly in football, not only strengthened cultural ties but also promoted youth engagement and development. Surabaya sent young football talents to train in Liverpool, showcasing how sports can be leveraged as a tool for youth development, contributing to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by encouraging physical activity and promoting teamwork and social inclusion.

Through these two paradiplomatic partnerships—with Kitakyushu and Liverpool—Surabaya demonstrates how cities in the Global South can integrate global goals like the SDGs into their local governance frameworks, leveraging international collaborations to address specific urban challenges while contributing to global sustainability efforts.

Lessons from the Global South: Indonesia

The complex challenges faced by cities in the Global South, like Surabaya, pinpoints the necessity for innovative approaches that transcend traditional governance models. Surabaya's experience highlights how paradiplomacy can effectively address these issues by fostering strategic partnerships with other cities and international organisations. This approach has allowed Surabaya to align local efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on environmental sustainability—a pressing concern for rapidly urbanising cities (Utomo, 2022). The integration of local circumstances with global objectives illustrates the city's capacity to navigate socio-economic inequalities



and institutional limitations. These partnerships succeed because Surabaya can translate global standards into practical local policies, thereby enhancing resilience against urban challenges. This dynamic demonstrates how paradiplomacy can bridge local and global contexts while advancing sustainable development in Global South urban settings (Mierzejewski et al., 2018).

In contrast to developed countries, where paradiplomacy often operates within well-established frameworks and with greater institutional support, cities in the Global South like Surabaya face additional constraints. Developed nations typically benefit from robust legal and administrative infrastructures that facilitate international collaboration and implementation of global standards. These countries often have the resources and capacity to engage in high-level diplomatic negotiations and to integrate international policies seamlessly into their local governance structures.

Paradiplomacy predominantly flourishes in developed states, particularly within federal systems, where multiple levels of government share diplomatic responsibilities. In federal countries, regional governments often have formal roles in foreign affairs, which allows them to engage in paradiplomacy effectively. For example, in countries like the United States, Canada, and Germany, the federal structure supports active regional participation in international relations, enabling states or provinces to form partnerships, engage in trade agreements, and influence global policies (Fathun, 2022). This systemic approach provides these regions with the institutional backing and autonomy required to conduct international affairs, thus fostering a more dynamic and collaborative form of paradiplomacy.

In contrast, developed unitary states, such as France, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic, have more centralised control over foreign policy, which can limit the scope of paradiplomacy at the regional level. While these states may still engage in paradiplomatic activities, the absence of a federal structure means that regional entities often lack the formal authority to participate extensively in international affairs (Ksenicz, 2023). However, those countries benefit from the developed institutional infrastructures and greater access to resources, allowing them to overcome these constraints more easily than cities in the Global South. Even within the limitations of a centralised system, regions in developed unitary states can still engage in meaningful international partnerships due to their ability to leverage advanced governance mechanisms and strong diplomatic networks.

For cities in the unitarian settings and in the Global South like Surabaya, the situation is not only shaped by institutional capacities but also by specific regulatory frameworks that can either facilitate or hinder paradiplomatic efforts. While the Indonesian Laws No. 37/1999 and No. 24/2000 provide a legal foundation for local governments to engage in international relations, they do not inherently create barriers to effective paradiplomacy. Instead, the challenge lies in the varying capacities of local governments to navigate these frameworks and meet the additional requirements necessary to pursue international cooperation effectively.

As taken from Mukti (2013), there are some specific regulations which can be sources of limitations. For example, local governments are advised to maintain official websites that clearly outline regional conditions and potential areas for investment or cooperation,



particularly in English. This allows foreign entities to access vital information and encourages engagement. However, not all cities possess the resources to develop such digital infrastructures or maintain regular contact with consular offices like the Indonesian Consulate General or Indonesian embassies, which play an essential role in facilitating negotiations.

In addition to digital capacity, local governments must also collaborate with experts or professionals to accurately identify potential foreign partners. This collaboration provides valuable insights and helps to navigate the complex international environment. Once potential partners have been identified, local governments can proceed to initiate contact through Indonesian consulates or embassies, setting the stage for formal negotiations. The technical team established to oversee the partnership will then manage the execution of the agreed-upon projects, aligning them with the local budget and ensuring that the necessary resources, including human capital and financial backing, are in place. Finally, the partnership is subject to regular evaluation to ensure its effectiveness. Successful collaborations can fast-track regional development, while inefficient partnerships may drain resources and slow progress.

In essence, the laws governing paradiplomacy in Indonesia do not inherently block international partnerships. However, many cities in the unitarian settings, like Indonesia, may struggle with the institutional capacity and bureaucratic steps necessary to engage in such collaborations. The process requires not only regulatory compliance but also technical expertise, proactive identification of opportunities, and robust communication channels, all of which can prove difficult for resource-constrained cities.

Furthermore, the socio-economic inequalities prevalent in the Global South exacerbate these challenges. Unlike their counterparts in developed countries, cities like Surabaya must contend with more pronounced disparities that affect their ability to implement and benefit from international partnerships. These inequalities are deeply rooted in governance and social structures, which hinder equitable progress and often make it difficult to address urban sustainability issues effectively (Sukmana et al., 2022).

In summary, while paradiplomacy offers significant potential for cities in the Global South to engage in global sustainability discussions and advance local development, it operates within a distinct set of constraints compared to developed nations. The unique challenges faced by cities like Surabaya highlight the need for tailored approaches that address both local needs and global goals while overcoming the specific barriers encountered in the Global South (Alatas, 2021; Surwandono et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The results show that cities in the Global South, particularly Surabaya, have the potential to significantly enhance their sustainability efforts through effective paradiplomacy. Surabaya's active involvement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrates how local governments can balance socio-economic challenges with broader environmental objectives (Nganje, 2013). The city's partnerships, especially with sister cities, highlight the need for frameworks that not only support such relationships but also empower local authorities to navigate complex global contexts (Utomo, 2022).



Despite limitations imposed by central government policies, local initiatives remain crucial, shifting diplomacy from traditional models to a deeper understanding of subnational dynamics.

In conclusion, this article shows that by adopting integrative diplomatic strategies, Surabaya and similar cities can position themselves as key players in global sustainability discussions, paving the way for future collaborations within the Global South (Mierzejewski et al., 2018). The analysis of Surabaya's paradiplomacy reveals a complex relationship between local governance and global ambitions, particularly in relation to sustainable development. The findings suggest that Surabaya not only built international partnerships with cities like Kitakyushu and Liverpool but also successfully integrated the SDGs into its policies. This integration offers a practical approach to addressing environmental challenges while navigating Indonesia's post-decentralisation institutional limitations, a topic of much scholarly debate (Utomo, 2022). Moreover, Surabaya's involvement reflects a shift from a centralised diplomatic model to one that empowers local governments, in line with a broader trend in the Global South where cities use paradiplomacy to improve socio-economic conditions. These findings highlight Surabaya's leadership in global sustainability initiatives and offer valuable insights for other cities facing similar challenges.

Surabaya's strategic use of paradiplomacy serves as an important example for other cities in the Global South that are navigating complex urban challenges while pursuing sustainable development. By forming global partnerships and prioritising environmental sustainability, Surabaya provides a model that can be adapted to similar situations of rapid urban growth and limited resources. The city's collaborations show how effective partnerships can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and resources needed to address local challenges. Additionally, the article also suggests that cities engaging in paradiplomacy can use international partnerships to amplify their voices on global platforms, reducing traditional power hierarchies. Therefore, the implications for other cities in the Global South are clear: they should embrace innovative diplomatic strategies that align with both local goals and global agendas.

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