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Glocalisation and Paradiplomacy: Localising Global Agendas Through Local Networks

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ARIO BIMO UTOMO, DEC 8 2024

In the contemporary era of globalisation, the world faces many dispersed global issues that transcend national borders and challenge the traditional capacities of nation-states (Hirst and Thompson, 1995). Problems such as climate change, economic inequality, and pandemics have become global challenges that require concerted efforts across multiple regions. Consequently, there has been a paradigm shift in governance strategies, with many countries transforming their power by decentralising power and transferring authority to local governments (Hameiri et al, 2017). For example, Indonesia's post-Suharto decentralisation reforms have allowed provinces like Bali to manage their tourism strategies independently, ensuring that development aligns with local cultural and environmental priorities. This decentralisation is driven by the recognition that local entities are often better positioned to understand and address the specific needs of their communities, thereby fostering more tailored and context-specific solutions (Hanka and Downs, 2010).

The concept of glocalisation emerges as a vital framework for adapting global ideas and practices to fit local conditions. Glocalisation refers to the simultaneous occurrence of universalising and particularising tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems (Robertson, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2010). This means that while globalisation spreads ideas and practices worldwide, local values adapt these influences to fit their unique contexts. In a sense, that is similar to international brands, like McDonald's, fitting their products to suit local cultures and needs (Ritzer, 2002). As a conceptual framework, glocalisation is a useful lens through which global phenomena are interpreted and implemented at the local level.

Another consequence of this "glocalising" phenomenon is the emergence of the practice of paradiplomacy. A relatively new concept, paradiplomacy denotes international relations conducted by subnational or regional governments. It involves local governments engaging in diplomatic activities to promote their interests by establishing partnerships with other regions or countries. The activity has now been deemed a normal diplomatic activity (Cornago, 2010), going hand in hand with traditional diplomacy conducted by central governments (Wolff, 2007). A famous example is the collaboration between California and Quebec on climate change policies. These subnational entities have circumvented national-level diplomacy by engaging in paradiplomacy. This means that local governments can assert their influence in the international arena, fostering collaboration on common challenges and facilitating the exchange of best practices in specific policy areas. The process involves collaborating on shared challenges and exchanging best practices on particular topics. Thus, by utilizing paradiplomacy, local governments can make their voices heard in global governance processes.

The synergy between glocalisation and paradiplomacy lies in the ability of local governments to contextualise global agendas to suit local needs while simultaneously influencing these agendas through international partnerships. For instance, cities like Surabaya, Indonesia, have integrated SDGs into local urban planning while partnering for best practices with its sister cities worldwide. Glocalisation provides the framework for local governments to adapt global norms and practices, ensuring they resonate with local populations. Paradiplomacy, in turn, offers the mechanism through which local governments can fulfill their domestic interests by forming alliances and networks that bolster their global influence. This dynamic enables local governments to pursue their interests through regional partnerships and networks, contributing to global affairs while catering to local needs.

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Several examples illustrate how local governments can use the force of glocalisation through paradiplomacy to address global challenges. One prominent example is the Local2030 initiative, a UN platform that supports “on-the-ground delivery” of the SDGs. This initiative empowers cities and regions to contextualise the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to fit their unique circumstances. Local2030 was established through an acknowledgement that SDGs are built upon collaboration with relevant local actors. Therefore, aligning SDGs with local context enables municipalities to tackle issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change stipulated in SDG targets more effectively. Local2030 serves as a platform for local leaders, national governments, the private sector, and civil society to collaborate, providing tools, resources, and networks that facilitate the localisation of global goals.

Through Local2030, local governments can translate global objectives into actionable strategies. This platform exemplifies the principles of paradiplomacy by providing an arena for cities and regions to engage in international partnerships to contextualise and implement the SDGs. A good example of programs in the Local2030 is the Global Goals Week, an initiative conducted by Liverpool City Government in the form of environmental workshops and networking sessions. Through such programs, local governments can utilise collective resources and expertise to enhance their ability to address complex global issues. Furthermore, the initiative shows the importance of cultural and social considerations in sustainable development, in a sense that the efforts resonate with local communities and foster engagement (Moallemi et al, 2019). As the world continues to grapple with complex challenges, the localisation of the SDGs through initiatives like Local2030 will be increasingly critical for driving positive change at the local level.

In the evolving landscape of international relations, the traditional state-centric models of governance are increasingly being challenged by the complexities of global interconnectedness, meaning that many issues cannot be solved at the national level alone. As Gumplova (2015) suggests, states are no longer distinct or self-sufficient political and legal entities. Through globalisation and technological advancements, states are being integrated into a more complex web of connections, encompassing networks, exchanges of goods, ideas, and people, as well as transnational governance frameworks. These emerging structures are gradually taking over the state’s traditional role of establishing rules for its citizens. Therefore, this transformation necessitates a shift towards more decentralised approaches that empower local entities to address global challenges effectively. Within this context, glocalisation and paradiplomacy offer valuable insights into how local governments can take part in shaping international agendas while advancing their own interests.

The study of glocalisation and paradiplomacy offers invaluable insights into the mechanisms that enable local entities to assert their presence on the global stage. By understanding these mechanisms, scholars and practitioners can contribute to a more balanced and inclusive international order. This inclusivity is particularly important in regions that remain understudied in International Relations. For example, in the Global South countries, where democracy remains consolidating, central governments may not fully capture the nuances of local issues. Here, glocalisation plays a crucial role by enabling local governments to adapt global ideas and initiatives to their unique cultural, economic, and social realities. Empowering local governments to participate in international relations, these concepts help to democratise the global governance landscape. On the other hand, paradiplomacy ensures that the interests and needs of diverse local communities are represented and addressed.

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