

# The Regionalism of Borders in Indonesia (Case Study: Sebatik Island, Indonesia)

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**Abstract** Border management has, on the one hand, grown beyond the conceptual limit that is the terminological definition of borders as lines separating countries to also factor in their development as areas. On the other, it should aim to strengthen state sovereignty and improve the welfare of its citizens. These often lead to the dichotomy between security and prosperity in border management approaches. Regionalism is an approach used to create regional integration across national borders, but this concept is strongly influenced by the interests of states on each side of the border. Therefore, this research explores if spatial interaction between border communities is controlled by the regionalism concept introduced by the state or, instead, grows organically as part of regionalization due to livelihoods that require border crossings. It used a case study of Sebatik Island in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area. The qualitative research design applied exploratory principles on the spatial interaction pattern formed between border communities and then synthesized the identified units of information on transboundary activities while considering government-issued policies on border management. Results showed that regionalism was only minimally implemented in managing the border area. It means that border landscapes in Indonesia are organically formed on the micro-scale even though the perspective of regionalism has long been adopted at the regional level, i.e., ASEAN.

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## 1. Introduction

Studies of national borders worldwide have progressed from considering the borders as dividing lines to also including their complexities as areas. The concepts used in the early development of this field revolved around the definition of *boundaries* (Jones & Boggs, 1947; Johnston M, 1931). In the next phases, *borderlands* and then *territories* were mentioned in numerous related studies (UNCLOS, 1982; Agnew, 1994). In its development, the meaning of a border is no longer limited to these scopes but is understood from the complexity of the neighboring regions and their interactions, as stated by Johnson (2010) in his work titled "When Boundaries Become Borders." Moreover, a border is linked to inter-state relations, for it is often the product or subject of policies on the military and economy imposed by each side of the borders (Peter Andreas, 2003 in Bhardwaj, 2016). Further, in recent years, border studies have transformed into the contextual interpretation of borders as *frontiers* (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002; Sari, 2016).

More studies on state borders have profound implications for the use of geographical approaches in analyzing these objects. From the perspective of political geography, the formation of a state, nation, nation-state, and even the role of globalization in shaping the border landscape are among the approaches used in border studies (Agnew, 1994). With the expanding scope of border studies, geography is demanded to dig deeper into their connectedness to border issues. This is to explain, among others, space formation at the border—which is

shaped by the regionalism paradigm of border communities—and regional aspects of border area management and to develop geopolitical studies of any practices that affect the role of borders in state policy. Therefore, in-depth research will be able to determine the development and state of the art of geographical studies on border areas, both as a research topic and a field of study.

Regionalism is a theory and practice of coordination and functional actions related to political, economic, and social activities between two or more countries within the scope of a geographical area (Breslin & Higgott, 2003). In addition, Breslin & Higgott (2003) argued that the interaction between countries develops due to shared strategic issues identified through dialogues between respective governments. In India, Sattar (2011) discovered that regionalism emerged due to neglect, due to which the abandoned area's residents had to fight against discrimination stemming from societal division by religion, language, and caste. Sattar further explained that regionalism is an ideology formed among people living in a particular geographical space with a specific language, culture, and race (native or non-native) and can be a positive phenomenon if the nature of regionalism is in line with and aims for the nation's benefit. Vermenych (2022) confirmed that regionalism is a critical instrument in structuring social relations of various sociocultural organizations and entails a process of forming multi-level identities in an administrative-territorial organization.

Regionalism, as a concept, can also be interpreted as a response to regionalization or a manifestation of actions that follow transboundary regionalization. However, there is a difference between regionalism and regionalization. Hurrell (1995) stated that regionalization is a collaborative project resulting from dialogues between governments of different countries, which is then embodied in an international agreement. In contrast, regionalism is an integration process that accommodates the motives of the cooperating countries to be able to access the market and facilitates the policies and business development interests of multinational companies. Based on these definitions, it can be inferred that cooperation in the form of transboundary regionalization requires a process of integrating several actions that express the motives of each country involved. This concept corresponds with Kim (2004), where regionalization gives birth to regionalism, and regionalism is a cooperation between two or more state governments in managing shared problems and a process of sustainable economic integration. For instance, the European Union (EU) is a form of regionalization between European countries that has successfully created a large bureaucracy in economy and trade, close intergovernmental cooperation in foreign and security policies, and domestic justice policies. The EU integration process is a regionalism that is able to create good economic and market governance and encourage integrated sociopolitical cooperation between regions (Wang, 2013).

History recorded regionalism in the first half of the 19th century, where the influence of the industrial revolution gave rise to international agreements, especially in Europe. After World War I, regionalism grew stronger with the motive to perpetuate the dominance of the most powerful states, including the British Commonwealth scheme (Mansfield & Milner, 1999). In its development, regionalism emerged due to the weakening of bipolarity between the United States and the Soviet Union in many member countries of the two blocs from after World War II to the Cold War and until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Breslin & Higgott (2003) distinguished the milestones in the development of regionalism into two waves: the 1950s and the 1990s. The first wave in the 1950s was marked by regionalism in Europe and some parts of Africa and Latin America, although at this time, regional integration projects failed. The second wave in the 1990s witnessed an emergence of regionalism in Asia

after the global crisis. The desire to strengthen subregional economies to better deal with the situation was the reason behind the regionalization of Asian countries. These stages of development further confirm the definition of regionalism that countries with their own motives for cooperation can be united if they share similar demands.

In the context of national borders, similar motives are key to developing cross-country interactions. In addition, the local identity shared among border communities is a means of implementing regional cooperation. In addition to intergovernmental cooperation, collaborations between border communities also contribute to producing the concept of secondary diplomacy. Therefore, regionalism is also conceptually known as the Triangle of Regionalism (Figure 1) (Panbianco, 2010).

The Triangle of Regionalism combines three dimensions that determine the form of regionalism: political dimension, economic dimension, and identity dimension. To create regionalism, the political dimension should be directed from war and conflict toward political integration through cooperation between countries. In addition, the economic dimension should formulate or rely on specific state policies that actively strive for market protection and then transform it into market integration to produce fiscal efficiency. As for the identity dimension, regionalism is expected to change the clash of civilizations into a concerted effort to build a strong sense of regional identity. States and their citizens are both actors that express and move these dimensions toward regionalism. When state actors initiate regionalism, it turns into a formal process that produces policy mechanisms. In contrast, with social actors, communities start the process and establish a social system between countries that can be implemented informally. In principle, regionalism is optimal when there is a cooperation between state and social actors; when state actors begin collaborative projects with other states and formulate relevant policies, social actors help develop community groups that can sustainably advocate these strategies and vice versa. When regionalism comes from social actors, the state should provide the basis for regulation and legal certainty to control social movements in society (Chatterji, 2019).

Transnational regionalism leads to different cooperation initiatives according to geographical scope or function. Jimbo (2006) divided regionalism into mega or wide-regionalism, sub-regionalism, and functional regionalism. Mega or wide-

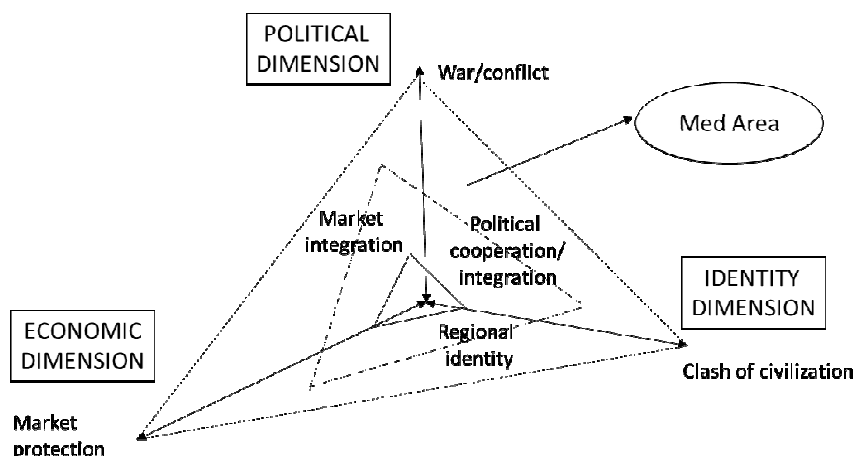


Figure1. The Triangle of Regionalism  
Source: (Panbianco, 2010)

regionalism covers a broad geographical area, e.g., the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Sub-regionalism is formed in a smaller scale, i.e., subregions, such as the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). Functional regionalism is developed based on the function of cooperation; for example, the Group of 20 (G20) is an association of 19 countries with the highest economic contributions worldwide and the European Union.

The three dimensions of regionalism affect the level of regional development in each country because they promote not only political activities between countries but also economic, social, and cultural interactions and cross-border environmental management. This multidimensional development was responsible for the inception of *new regionalism* (Ethier, 1998; Breslin & Higgott, 2003; Grugel, 2004; Baccini & Dür, 2012; Sezgin, 2018). New regionalism considers the varying motives for collaborating with other countries, even though, in reality, preferential market access remains the determining factor (Baccini & Dür, 2012). Thus, to understand the motives, multiplicity or diversity should be considered in formulating transnational regionalism on a micro-scale, like regional constellations between cities, villages, and settlement units in which the development of regionalism in a country is often manifested. Besides, every urban and administrative area has different characteristics that influence the decision and strategies taken to collaborate with adjacent areas across national borders. Therefore, understanding motives at the state and micro-scale is essential for creating a balanced or optimal regionalism (Chatterji, 2019).

Despite the extensive research, regionalism, as a concept, should be further explored when it comes to today's global challenges, e.g., the criticism of globalization after the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first few months, the EU could not respond to or control the pandemic effectively, but through regional cooperation and trust, it could overcome the resulting economic paralysis properly and comprehensively (Kliem, 2020). Likewise, ASEAN responded late, but after building cooperation with the EU and learning from its regional pandemic management, the devastating impact of the pandemic was dealt with successfully. In this context, the global COVID-19 pandemic is both a challenge to regionalism and to international cooperation.

In addition, spatial interactions between border communities are formed organically as a result of kinship,

closeness in culture, and livelihood. These create a region across national borders, commonly called the border landscape (Lumenta, 2010). Conceptually, this process is part of regionalization. In contrast, regionalism comes from a thought that is later incorporated into policies pertaining to border landscape management. Accordingly, this study sought to answer the main research question, "Is the spatial interaction between border communities influenced by the regionalism concept adopted by state actors or, instead, formed organically as part of regionalization due to people's livelihoods that require border crossings?" It can be broken down into several specific questions: (1) How is the interaction between people in the national border area?; (2) What factors influence border crossings?; (3) Is the concept of regionalism implemented in any form in the border area management?; and (4) How can the concept of regionalism be applied to the national border area? Based on these formulated research questions and the above theoretical description of regionalism in border management, this study was designed (1) to map the spatial interaction pattern between communities at national borders, (2) to identify the influencing factors of the spatial interaction, (3) to identify the practice of regionalism in national border areas, and (4) to formulate strategies to implement the concept of regionalism in national border areas.

## 2. Methods

This research was conducted in the border area between Indonesia and Malaysia, using a case study of Sebatik Island in Nunukan Regency, North Kalimantan, Indonesia (figure 2). The case study method was selected based on the character of the research location, which can be a reference for the border area management in Indonesia. Sebatik Island is directly adjacent to Tawau City in Sabah, a Malaysian state. There is a strong interaction between the two regions, as marked by the growth of urban settlements on each side of the national border.

Sebatik Island is a fitting case study for gaining a better understanding of regionalism. Law Number 43 of 2008 puts the state's territorial boundaries on land in district areas, and Government Regulation Number 26 of 2008 regulates spatial plans for national strategic areas in the field of defense and security. Both provide the same basis or criteria in determining border areas in Indonesia. According to the law and regulation, Sebatik Island can represent border areas in Indonesia.

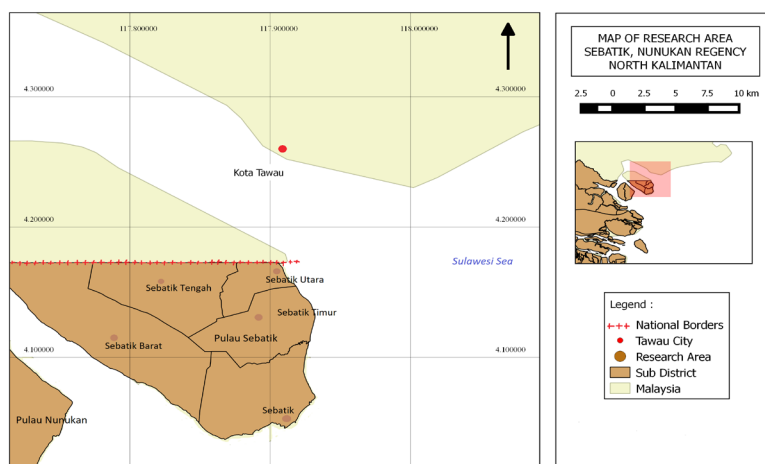


Figure 2. research sites

In addition, the research design comprised qualitative methods to collect primary and secondary data with the principle of data triangulation to corroborate findings. For this purpose, several data collection techniques were used, including in-depth interviews, field observations, and data inventory from relevant institutions. The first in-depth interview was conducted with five key informants to describe the existing social conditions of Sebatik Island. Each was representative of the largest ethnic groups in the study area: Javanese, Florenese, Bajonese, Tidungnese, and Buginese. Meanwhile, the second in-depth interview was conducted to identify border crossings with seven respondents from the groups of people who had to frequently cross the national border: traders, government workers, and immigrants.

In the next stage, the qualitative data were processed and analyzed using several techniques, including (1) verbatim transcription of in-depth interview data, (2) collecting units of information on border crossings from the primary data, (3) coding of the in-depth interview data, (4) secondary data processing that produced descriptive statistics to be compared against and validate the qualitative data analysis results, and (5) synthesizing the mapped information units and the coded information from the in-depth interviews. A regional hierarchical analysis was employed to map the spatial interaction patterns based on the ease with which a service facility can be accessed. To determine the Serviceability of Facilities, the centrality index was calculated by weighting the facilities (Muta'ali, 2015). Several studies use this analysis to find the hierarchy of service facilities (Kasikoen, 2018; Tuar et al., 2021; Sadali et al., 2021). In centrality index analysis, the weight represents the degree of their quality in serving the communities to meet their needs. The higher the serviceability of a facility, the higher the weight value. The formula is presented below:

$$C = \frac{x}{X} \quad (1)$$

where C indicates the weight attribute, x indicates combined centrality value, and X indicates the number of attributes in a system. In the final stage, the synthesized results were linked to the theoretical background to answer the research questions.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### Spatial Interactions of Border Communities on Sebatik Island

Settlements in the national border area on Sebatik Island, Indonesia, are mainly inhabited by immigrants from two ethnic groups: Bajonese and Tidungnese. The Bajonese people are originally from Sulawesi Island, and the Tidungnese are from the mainland of Kalimantan. Both have a very close culture to marine life, which makes it natural for them to come to Sebatik Island in the first place because Sebatik was a small island that was originally uninhabited. The toponym of Sebatik also derives from its geographical characteristics that are influenced by rivers, vegetation, and the life of the marine biota. This was explicitly stated by the Tidungnese community leader, as written in the excerpt below:

*"... the origin of Sebatik Island [started with] ... only two tribes: Bajonese [and] Tidungnese. ... In 1920, only two ethnic groups were there. Why is the island called Sebatik? Some outsiders, non-native people said, 'Oh, [it is because] there are snakes [on the island]'. That is incorrect. I refuted it. So, the landscape of Sebatik Island in 1920 [consisted of] only people from the two tribes: the Bajonese [and] the other one was the Tidungnese. For the Bajonese, Man Pungut was the name [of the elder]; then, for the Tidungnese, Ujang Wideh was the name [of the elder]. ... So, why is it called Sebatik Island? In the past, we, the Tidungnese people, had one tree on the Taiwan River. The Taiwan River was actually the original [name of] Sebatik River. Tanjung Karang [Village] was originally Tanjung Sebatik. So, there was a fruit [tree], the fruit was called 'petiken.' [This word means that] if you want to eat it, pick ['petik'] it first. That's why it's called Sebatik Island."* (Tidungnese community leader)

The strategic position of Sebatik Island in the border area is often used as a meeting point between people of various ethnic groups. Among the evidence is the toponym of the Taiwan River, which suggests that there were many logging workers from Taiwan (the local term used to indicate people of Chinese descent). Moreover, this river was initially named the Sebatik River. Besides, the local settlements are inhabited by not only the two pioneer groups (Bajonese and Tidungnese) but also by people from different tribes in Indonesia who made a stop in this region while migrating from or to Malaysia. Some of the reasons people relocate to this island are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Job Characteristics Based on Reasons for Migration for Each Ethnic Group on Sebatik Island

Ethnicity	Informant's Statement	Reason for Migration
Buginese	<i>"... many Buginese people work across [the border to Malaysia], and many also make a stop here [Sebatik] ..."</i> (Buginese community figure)	Working as laborers in Malaysia and traders on Sebatik Island
Tidungnese	<i>"Our ancestors, ... after [they] farmed here then harvested [the crop] too, the grass would grow back. [So, they] moved again to another place [and] keep moving from one place to another ..."</i> (Tidungnese community leader)	Working in farms and plantations
Javanese	<i>"Most of them [Javanese people] went directly here [to the island]. Some were those [from] Tawau whom I handled. There were also those who used to be workers [who] were lied to and stranded there with uncertain work. Their passports were retained by their employers, and [so] they ran here. But, there were also those who came straight here for trade; they could finally own a house."</i> (Javanese community figure)	Working as laborers in Malaysia and traders on Sebatik Island



Ethnicity	Informant's Statement	Reason for Migration
Bajonese	Not available (From the location where the Bajonese people live on Sebatik Island, which is on the east coast, it can be assumed that people of this ethnic group work as fishers)	Fishers
Florenese	<i>"As for the people from East Nusa Tenggara, [they] started to settle in Lourdes [a village on Sebatik Island] in 1997. But, ..., they were already there [on the island] before those years. Only they were dispersed in the Malaysian part of Sebatik; some were in Pancang [and] Sungai Nyamuk [two villages in Sebatik], but their status was workers, whether it was in a store or a plantation belonging to local residents [and] the people of Sebatik ... But, mostly, they went to Malaysian Sebatik. ... So, at that time, he [a Florenese community member] saw that many people from East Nusa Tenggara were working as migrant workers in Malaysia, whether illegally or legally. That's why he campaigned against this. [He said] 'Instead of working here [in Tawau, Malaysia], which is hard, it's better to go back there [Indonesia] to work in plantations because the government has provided the land for free. The important thing is our willingness to work.' That's why many people from East Nusa Tenggara came here [Sebatik]."</i> (Florenese community leader)	Working as laborers in Malaysia and farmers on Sebatik Island

Source: In-depth interviews, 2022

Table 2. Motives of Interactions Between Border Communities on Sebatik Island

Information Unit	Informant's Statement	Time Spectrum
Trading	<i>"... the ones who go there every day are those ladies. They also bring the goods with them; there can be up to 5 people, 7 people in one boat. Not one boat for one person, no. Lots of people are on it. They bring pineapples, basically agricultural products, from here [Sebatik] and take them there [Malaysia] to sell. [Then, they will] return home and bring things [from Malaysia]. For instance, they will bring 10 bunches of bananas from here. They prepare the fee for my boat, meaning I make some profit."</i> (a middleman for staple food trading across the national border)	Every day
Shopping	<i>"So, basically, the traders here should be like that [referring to the above excerpt]. In a sense, most of our people here [Sebatik] go there [Malaysia] bringing agricultural products, ... bananas, ... vegetables. When they return home, they will bring oil, ... sugar, ... Milo [chocolate-flavored drink powder][bought in Malaysia]."</i> (a cross-border trader)	Every day
Working	<i>"And, indeed, many of our people work there [Malaysia]. Return here [Sebatik] on Sunday. They use local cellular there."</i> (worker)	Every week
Attending school	<i>"The child of my relative, who is also the principal of the Mensalong Middle School in Tawau ... [the school] will be used by Malaysia. But, before [arriving in] Malaysia, people can come to closer cities [in Indonesia]: Balikpapan [and] Samarinda. [Besides], there is the border between Indonesia and Malaysia."</i> (an Indonesian immigrant in Tawau)	Every year
Receiving medical treatment	<i>"... this man has an appointment. He will be treated at the hospital [in Tawau] the day after tomorrow ..."</i> (an Indonesian immigrant in Tawau)	Incidental
Visiting family/relatives	<i>"Especially if it is close to the Day of Eid or the fasting month. They [migrant workers] would gather here [bringing] Malaysian Ringgit with them ..."</i> (family visitors)	Holiday seasons
Recreation	<i>"If it's for recreation, if only it [the border] is opened ... there are actually a lot of people from there [Tawau] because there are many workers there or Indonesians who already have Malaysian Ringgit. .... Especially if it is close to the Day of Eid or the fasting month. They [migrant workers] would gather here [bringing] Malaysian Ringgit with them. ... So, the people here [Sebatik] like me who used to travel there during the weekends can no longer use a permit letter since we have to use a passport now."</i> (ordinary individual)	Holiday seasons and weekends

Source: In-depth interviews, 2022

The job characteristics of each ethnic group on the island influence the pattern of interactions between border communities. During data collection in March 2022, the border checkpoint on Sebatik Island was closed due to construction. However, because many residents worked on the other side of the border, they had to use illegal crossing routes. The location of the gate is officially in the capital city of Nunukan, which can be reached by crossing the Celebes Sea (Figure 2). Some of

the community's motives for crossing the national border are explained in Table 2.

The results of the in-depth interview above indicated an organic formation of the border landscape on Sebatik Island. Based on the secondary data analysis using the centrality index (Muta'ali, 2015), service facilities attracted people to migrate or relocate. With many people traveling to Tarakan and Tawau City, it can be concluded that both are urban centers that

provide a variety of service facilities (see Table 3 and Figure 3). However, because of its close distance to Sebatik Island, the local people prefer the service facilities in Tawau to those in Tarakan. This finding aligns with the principle of intervening opportunity, a prerequisite for spatial interaction (Stouffer, 1940).

Notes: The service facility score was calculated by adding up the number and weight of facilities in each area. The weight represents their quality in serving the communities to meet their needs. The higher the serviceability of a facility, the higher the weight value. For example, the weight of a hospital facility is usually higher than that of a private clinic.

People’s livelihoods and the service facilities the destination city offers require and encourage the people of Sebatik Island to cross the national border, creating spatial interactions with the neighboring country. Works are widely available in Tawau City, Malaysia, triggering the organic formation of the border landscape on the island. Therefore, any political discourse attempting to close the border checkpoints in Indonesia will likely lead to illegal border

crossings. As such, the debate between the concepts of security and prosperity in border management on Sebatik Island should not be restricted, considering how people will always look for an efficient (i.e., potentially illegal) way to fulfill their needs. A study of cross-border development strategies in the Krayan-Ba’kelalan region on the Indonesia-Malaysia border discovered that social and cultural relations are formed by efforts to meet life needs due to low resources and accessibility (Arifin *et al.*, 2022). Another study by Braunerhielm *et al.* (2019) shows that the interaction of the people of Varmland Province on the Norwegian-Swedish border grows from local interests in matters that influence their lives, such as travel to the border, job opportunities, and trade activities on the border that are close to Norwegian shopping centers. The price soar of houses near the border triggers migration to Norway. Further, the narrative of state sovereignty that does not match the organic character of border communities will only remain as a discourse or discussion among policymakers instead of enforceable policies.

Table 3. Calculation of Serviceability of Facilities in the Border Area of Nunukan and Tawau

Subdistrict	Education Facility Score	Health Facility Score	Economics Facility Score	Total Score	Hierarchy
Nunukan	81	21	106	207.5	III
South Nunukan	38	5	30	72.5	II
West Sebatik	25	3	22	49.5	II
Sebatik	18	7	19	43.5	II
East Sebatik	31	3	23	57	II
Central Sebatik	21	3	13	36.5	II
North Sebatik	14	3	14	30.5	II
East Tarakan	91	11	49	150.5	III
Central Tarakan	91	20	118	229	I
West Tarakan	86	22	149	256.5	I
North Tarakan	38	21	54	112.5	III
Tawau	162	103	280	545	I

Source: BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2022

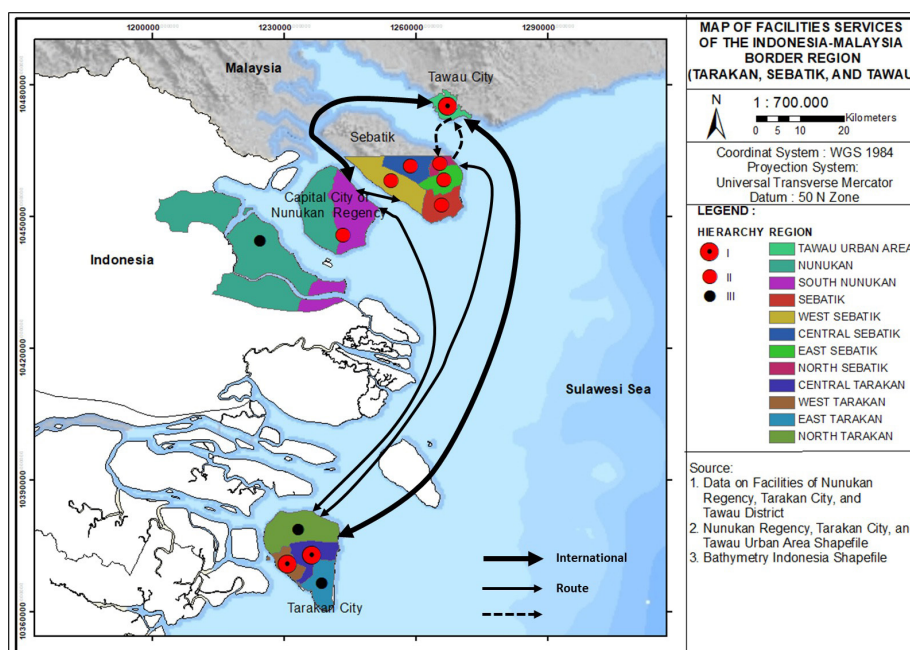


Figure 3. Map of Service Facilities in the Indonesia-Malaysia Border Area

Source: Data Analysis, 2022

**Regionalism on the Indonesia-Malaysia Border**

The organically formed border landscape on Sebatik Island has led to spatial interactions where the border communities in Indonesia flow into the Malaysian border area. Meanwhile, the narrative issued by the Indonesian government in managing border areas is still inward-looking, which concerns fulfilling everything that the public needs using local resources from within the country. The narrative of state sovereignty and nationalism is constantly echoed in border management, even though transnational cooperation between ASEAN countries has been acknowledged and promoted at the regional level. This collaboration is discussed in several principles of the ASEAN Charter (see Figure 4), which were approved by all ASEAN leaders in November 2007 and, thus, made ASEAN a rule-based organization (Woon, 2017).

ASEAN member states believe that being part of the ASEAN Single Community is the flagship of this intergovernmental association that has initiated multidimensional collaboration in several areas of life, including politics, security, socio-culture, and economy. These varying dimensions are also considered opportunities for regionalism in border management. Unfortunately, this concept is only used between the central governments of collaborating countries but is not widely applied in border management. For example, there is subregional economic cooperation between three countries in ASEAN termed the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), which has initiated many presidential meetings, but no systematic collaborative programs have been implemented at national borders. Previous research found the ASEAN Charter unable to resolve conflicts between its member countries, meaning that the promoted regionalism failed to meet the mutually agreed goals (Jones & Jenne, 2016). Another challenge in regionalism is the association's inability to overcome humanitarian problems, which were actually discussed in the ASEAN Charter as part of promoting and protecting human rights (Buszynski, 2019). Jones & Jenne (2016) and Buszynski (2019) demonstrated that the ASEAN Charter had not been able to resolve disputes between two or more member countries, posing challenges for future regionalism in the ASEAN region.

To realize the ASEAN Community, relevant policies on spatial planning have also been implemented in Indonesia. Law Number 26 of 2007 on Spatial Planning grants the Indonesian government the authority to organize spatial planning, including cooperation with other countries on this matter. Article 8 Paragraph (1) Letter d explains intergovernmental collaboration on spatial planning that applies to border areas. Transboundary spatial planning can be one of the criteria for regionalism in border areas, meaning that the management of border areas supposedly integrates with neighboring states. The principle of complementarity in spatial interactions across national borders can be applied to both planning and development implementation strategies at the border. However, to date, this policy has not been established effectively, as indicated by the eight presidential regulations on spatial plans for border areas that are still inward-looking and do not comprehensively describe the cooperation between countries. The eight presidential regulations are listed as follows:

1. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 43 of 2020 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in Riau Province and Riau Archipelago Province (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 43 Tahun 2020 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Provinsi Riau dan Provinsi Kepulauan Riau*)
2. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 49 of 2018 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in Aceh Province and North Sumatra Province (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 49 Tahun 2018 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Provinsi Aceh dan Provinsi Sumatera Utara*)
3. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 11 of 2017 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in North Sulawesi Province, Gorontalo Province, Central Sulawesi Province, East Kalimantan Province, and North Kalimantan Province (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 11 Tahun 2017 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Provinsi Sulawesi Utara, Provinsi Gorontalo, Provinsi Sulawesi Tengah, Provinsi Kalimantan Timur, dan Provinsi Kalimantan Utara*)

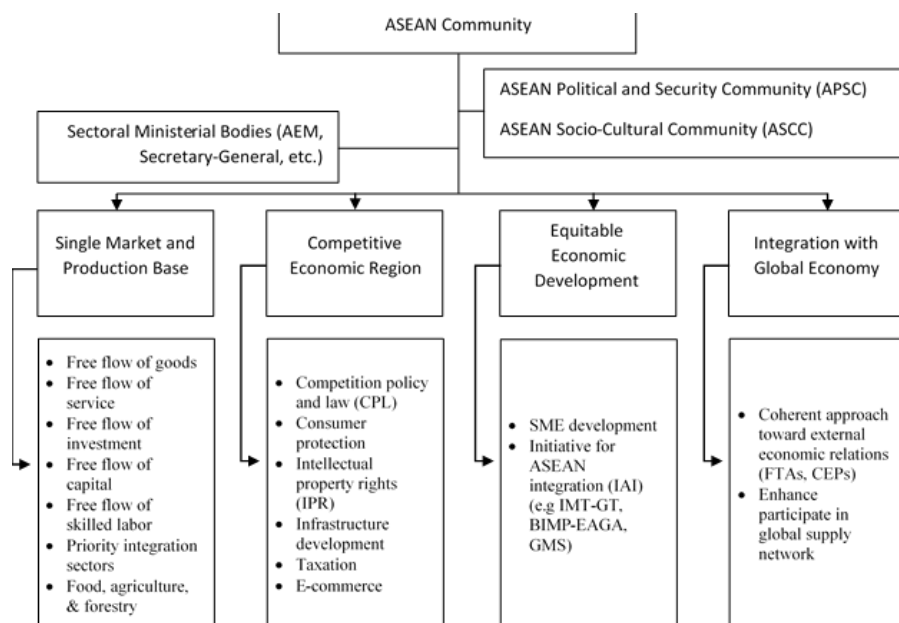


Figure 4. ASEAN Community Cooperation Agreement  
Source: (ASEAN Secretariat, 2009)



4. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 31 of 2015 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in Kalimantan (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 31 Tahun 2015 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Kalimantan*)
5. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 32 of 2015 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in Papua Province (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 32 Tahun 2015 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Provinsi Papua*)
6. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 33 of 2015 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in Maluku Province (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 33 Tahun 2015 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Provinsi Maluku*)
7. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 34 of 2015 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in West Papua Province (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 34 Tahun 2015 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Provinsi Papua Barat*)
8. Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 179 of 2014 on Spatial Planning for Border Areas in East Nusa Tenggara Province (*Peraturan Presiden Nomor 179 Tahun 2014 tentang Rencana Tata Ruang Kawasan Perbatasan di Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur*)

Regionalism in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area is manifested on a local scale in the establishment of Sosek Malindo, a bilateral socioeconomic organization between stakeholders on the island of Borneo, which is part of Indonesia and part of Malaysia. The cultural similarity between the people on the island is the background for this collaboration. So far, Sosek Melindo is a platform for secondary diplomacy, which, to some extent, influences the policy of transnational cooperation between central governments. One of the informants explained the vital role of this forum, especially in quickly resolving problems in the border area.

*“... I saw that Sosek Malindo, what is certain is [that is established by] the local government, and we are the vertical agencies that exist here, especially in the sector of the border [control] like CIQ [Custom, Immigration, and Quarantine]. The same as in the neighboring country ... Sosek Malindo is only in a forum [that is active] around Nunukan. There has not been a meeting between countries. Just the formulation in the internal [structure] between us [Nunukan Immigration Office], the regency, [and] the Regional Border Management Agency (BPPD). Then, later, it will be brought to the Sosek Malindo forum in the province, then next to the central [government].”* (Washington, Head of the Nunukan Immigration Office)

Based on this excerpt, Sosek Malindo is a bilateral cooperation on a local scale that can form regionalism in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area. Cappellano et al. (2021) further explained that local actors can aid in strengthening spatial planning and regional economic growth, particularly the private sector, which builds cross-border cooperation in infrastructure planning in the Cascadia Region.

## Discussion

Based on the aforementioned facts on regional interaction in the border area, it can be inferred that, predominantly, the spatial interactions are organically initiated and performed in the social, economic, and cultural sectors by the border communities, without the influence of regionalism. Border areas have a unique nature: complementarity between neighboring states, which stems from the prevailing narrative of sovereignty and nationalism at the central government level that is inward-looking. This political characteristic contradicts the perspective of people who organically interact with the neighboring country and encourage transnational integration. Even though the ASEAN Community has initiated regional cooperation between Southeast Asian countries, the idea of regionalism plays low contribution to shaping national border areas and their management practices.

Compared to the concept of regionalism introduced by Panebianco (2010), regionalism in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area cannot be implemented in border area management while maintaining balance across its three dimensions. This means that the economic, political, and identity aspects cannot run in parallel. The political dimension at the state level is considered the most influential in introducing regionalism policies to border management. In addition, the geographical characteristics of the border area are also a determining factor. The island is surrounded by seas, and the distance to urban centers in Indonesia and Malaysia, where service facilities and works are sufficiently available, affects the regional integration. These geographical features may create obstacles to the transferability principle of regionalism if not supported by adequate transportation technology. Economic activities, i.e., organic activities performed by the border community, play a small role in forming regionalism on the border. Studying cross-border regionalism in peripheral areas in Indonesia, Karim (2019) revealed that regionalism will be successful if, politically, the central government provides many projects to regional governments through decentralization. However, based on that study, the latter do not have the authority to oppose policies issued by the former. Another study related to regionalism by Iranzo & Caballero (2020) highlighted that regionalism is conceptually a multidimensional process where geographic and economic factors can be ignored, but social construction has an important role in shaping border areas as places to live. Apart from that, the role of actors, whether formal or informal, on the national, sub-national, supra-national, or global scale can build regional regionalism. Iranzo & Caballero (2020) also pointed out the concept of ‘new regionalism’, where regionalism is also formed due to the complexity, diversity, and simultaneity of regions.

Based on these challenges, regionalism in the Indonesia-Malaysia border areas cannot be applied simultaneously to all dimensions but rather in stages, as illustrated by the hierarchical pyramid below (Figure 5).

The two major challenges to consider in implementing regionalism are on the first and second levels of the hierarchical pyramid, i.e., geographical constraint and political construction. On the first level, the geographical conditions of the border area are the determining factor behind spatial interactions across national borders; therefore, the multiplicity of borders is the most essential principle in managing border areas in an archipelagic country like Indonesia. The second level comprises political narratives at the state level that



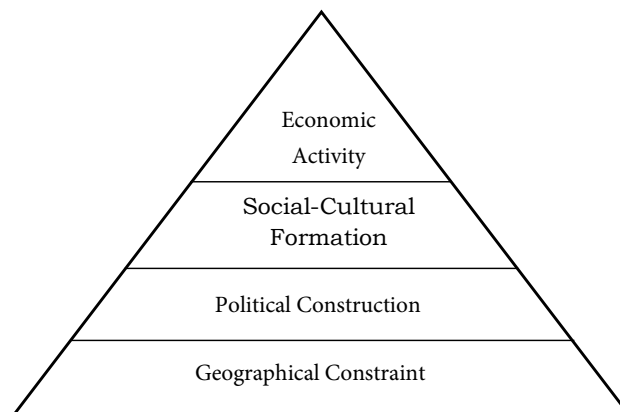


Figure 5. Implementation of Regionalism on the Indonesia-Malaysia Border

substantially influence the application of regionalism in establishing regional integration in border areas. The country's geographical and political factors together create obstacles to regionalism, meaning that regional integration can only be conducted on a micro-scale.

Border studies continue to grow in number and scope, which can provide the basis for further research on regionalism in border areas. The current research revealed that regionalism cannot be entirely implemented in the border area. Therefore, it is necessary to complement this finding with further research on institutional constraints to the performance of the ASEAN Charter as a long-standing agreement between Southeast Asian countries. Furthermore, there is a large opportunity for regional integration in the border area, as indicated by the organic growth of border crossings, despite the lack of political support—which makes them illegal. It is an opportunity to develop further research on the potential for cooperation between regions on a micro-urban scale with the sister-city or sister-town concept (Mikhailova, 2013; Joenniemi, 2017; Joenniemi & Jańczak, 2017). It is important to proceed with every idea of regionalism in border management because it is part of the principle of regionalism.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research aims to answer the central question: whether regionalism has been applied in managing the border areas between Indonesia and Malaysia. Results showed that the implementation of this concept in border area management still requires some improvements, even though there has been a narrative of regionalism in various cooperation agreements between countries at the ASEAN level. The needed improvements are associated with two challenges: on the one hand, there is a lack of policies promoting the idea of regionalism; however, on the other, people in border areas must cross the national borders to meet their needs. In the end, the developed border landscape comprises illegal border crossings, violating the value of sovereignty as the main narrative promoted by the Indonesian government. Sebatik Island is a case study that represents border area management in Indonesia, which is based on Law No. 43 of 2008 and Government Regulation No. 26 of 2008. It can thus be generalized to study regionalism in Indonesia's border areas. Therefore, based on the characteristics of the border area management, it is necessary to implement regionalism ideas in stages. The hierarchical pyramid suggests the implementation starts from the basis, that is, geographical constraints, followed by a political narrative to manage the multiplicity of borders.

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