

## **SIMPLE YET EFFECTIVE: RELATIONAL PUBLIC DIPLOMACY BY INDONESIAN ART CENTRES**

*Sofia Trisni\**

Department of International Relations, Universitas Padjadjaran,  
Jl. Bukit Dago Utara No. 25, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia

Universitas Andalas, Kampus Limau Manis, Pauh, Padang,  
West Sumatera, Indonesia

E-mail: [sofi\\_hi01@yahoo.com](mailto:sofi_hi01@yahoo.com)

*Teuku Rezasyah\*\**

Department of International Relations, Universitas Padjadjaran,  
Jl. Bukit Dago Utara No. 25, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia

E-mail: [teuku.rezasyah@unpad.ac.id](mailto:teuku.rezasyah@unpad.ac.id)

*Junita Budi Rachman\*\*\**

Department of International Relations, Universitas Padjadjaran,  
Jl. Bukit Dago Utara No. 25, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia

E-mail: [junita@unpad.ac.id](mailto:junita@unpad.ac.id)

*Chandra Purnama\*\*\*\**

Department of International Relations, Universitas Padjadjaran,  
Jl. Bukit Dago Utara No. 25, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia

E-mail: [chandra.purnama@unpad.ac.id](mailto:chandra.purnama@unpad.ac.id)

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## ABSTRACT

*Indonesia has engaged in public diplomacy through the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (IACS) programme for over two decades. This programme provides scholarship to foreign and Indonesian students to study Indonesian art and culture at government-partnered art centres in Indonesia. These art centres organise IACS activities for two to three and a half months. The success of Indonesia's public diplomacy initiative depends on how the art centres implement their activities and programmes. However, there is a lack of research on the role of art centres as agents of public diplomacy. Understanding this would offer a clearer picture of the advantages and disadvantages of art centres as public diplomacy agents and enrich our knowledge of how public diplomacy is carried out by non-state actors in non-Western countries. To address this gap, this study interviewed Indonesian art centre owners, teachers, IACS 2023 participants, and informants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The study also analysed 52 alumni testimonials from the book "15 Years of Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship". All interview data were coded using Lee and Ayhan's relational public diplomacy framework, and alumni testimonials were coded by highlighting frequently appearing words. The results of this study demonstrate that art centres engage in public diplomacy through their natural intuition, which is nurtured by experience and interaction with the public. The public diplomacy approach may be simple and not fully adhere to a specific framework, but it has effectively established an emotional connection with the alumni.*

**Keywords:** Relational public diplomacy, international mobility, cultural diplomacy, non-state actors, art centre

## INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government has utilised public diplomacy to establish connections with civil society through scholarships, cultural activities, and cultural exhibitions since the country's independence in 1945 (Basnur 2018). However, only in 2002 was the Public Diplomacy Division officially established within the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as one among other bureaucratic reforms (Rachmawati 2017). Since then, the government has launched several public diplomacy programmes, including the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (IACS) programme, aimed at using relational public diplomacy to maintain long-term relations with a wide range of actors.

The IACS programme, launched in 2003, offers opportunities for foreign and Indonesian youth to study Indonesian arts and culture at various studios (hereafter referred to as art centres) partnered with the MFA scattered across the many islands of Indonesia, including Sumatera, Java, Bali, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan (Dirjen IDP Kemlu 2018). The MFA is responsible for the programme's funding, recruitment, and design. Art centres, non-state actors in the arts and culture sector, function as the implementers of the government programme. The art centres provide participants with accommodation, food, and daily activities over a three-month span. The programme is open to all individuals between 19 and 35 years old who are interested in Indonesian arts and culture and meet a few other requirements. This programme has remained in place for 21 years, over which 1,069 people from 84 countries have participated (Direktorat Diplomasi Publik 2024).

The IACS programme exemplifies Indonesia's public diplomacy efforts involving non-state actors. However, after over two decades, research on how these art centres conduct public diplomacy remains limited. Most of the existing works analyse IACS from the state's perspective (e.g., Kurnia 2016; Gelar Nanggala et al. 2018; Lee and Madu 2018; Setiawan and Fahmi 2019; Sumiati 2019) or describe the programme without examining the implementing actors (Issundari and Rachmawati 2016; Yudhaningtyas 2017; Arini and Mekarini 2022). Meanwhile, the articles on the international level discuss the goals of cultural diplomacy that have been achieved through the IACS programme rather than focusing on agents (see Trisni et al. 2023). Evidently, previous publications have simply not examined art centres as research subjects.

Expanding the literature search to Indonesian public diplomacy yields similar results. Searching reputable publication journals reveals only a few studies on Indonesian public diplomacy. This is not surprising because Indonesia is not even one of the top twelve countries highly discussed in articles published by EBSCOhost, Web of Science (WoS), and ProQuest Central regarding public diplomacy (see Sevin et al. 2019). Meanwhile, publications at the domestic level also need to discuss how non-state actors carry out public diplomacy. Many publications on Indonesian public diplomacy analyse the strategies, activities, and efforts of state actors (e.g., Rakhmawati 2010; Huijgh 2016, 2017; Puspita and Pelenkahu 2017; Widhasti et al. 2017; Achsin and Nadhifa 2018; Putra 2019; Anggraeni 2020; Nurhanifa et al. 2020; Tiffany and Azmi 2020; Trisni 2020), though some discuss diplomacy involving state and non-state actors (Rachmawati 2017), the government and the media

(Sabir 2018), or the government and athletes (Puspitasari and Indrawati 2021). However, these articles cover public diplomacy programmes in general rather than non-state actors' role in public diplomacy programmes. Evidently, collecting information on non-state actors' public diplomacy practices is a challenging task. There is a clear lack of research on non-state actors implementing Indonesian public diplomacy, with most existing studies focusing on developed countries, such as the US (e.g., Zatepilina 2009; Attias 2012; Trent 2012; Martínez Pantoja 2018; Biltekin 2020).

In today's globalised world, it is essential to analyse public diplomacy initiatives undertaken by international actors, including non-governmental organisations, civil society groups, and individuals (Gilboa 2008). Notably, non-state actors are often more successful in cultural diplomacy efforts than state actors (Saliu and Llundji 2022), so their participation is crucial. However, their role remains understudied (Ayhan 2019), hindering the potential for their effective utilisation (Johanson et al. 2019). Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research to explore the potential and development goals of non-state actors (Irrera 2022). By analysing how non-state actors carry out public diplomacy, we can assess their limitations and understand how to optimally leverage them. A more thorough study of public diplomacy conducted by the art centres partnered with the MFA, can help identify both the positive and negative aspects of this dynamic. These findings can be used to enhance the structure and implementation of the IACS programme.

### **Public Diplomacy: A Brief Overview**

Public diplomacy is an activity that aims to reach the public. It is generally associated with foreign policy and the pursuit of national interests (Melissen 2005; Sharp 2005; Snow 2009, 2020; Kim 2017; Trisni et al. 2018, 2019a; Adler-Nissen and Tsinovoi 2019; Sevin et al. 2019; Ayhan and Gouda 2021; Ingenhoff et al. 2021; Kobierecka and Kobierecki 2021; Lee and Snow 2021; Ayasreh 2023; Bueno 2023; Sutjipto et al. 2023), with the government functioning as the implementer of public diplomacy programmes. Public diplomacy can shape global perceptions (Cull 2009) and introduce a country's values to the rest of the world (Saliu 2023). In doing so, it will play a critical role in addressing the challenges of the twenty-first century, including terrorism, environmental degradation, and infectious diseases (Riordan 2005, as cited in Sustarsic and Cheng 2022). Public diplomacy can serve as a tool to enhance public understanding of the challenges of this century and shape their attitudes towards these challenges.

Traditional public diplomacy entails governments' messaging strategies, advertising campaigns, and direct engagement with foreign publics. In contrast, modern public diplomacy focuses on building relationships with international civil society organisations and creating networks between domestic and international non-governmental organisations (Melissen 2005). According to Gilboa (2008), modern public diplomacy has several features, including the interaction between state and non-state actors and using "soft power", two-way communication, media framing, information management, public relations, national branding, self-presentation, and e-image. This new form of public diplomacy also aims to socialise foreign policy to the domestic public and address both short-term and long-term problems. Public diplomacy entails several essential activities, such as identifying public attitudes, cultural norms, and media representations of current events and issues. It also involves facilitating dialogue between individuals and institutions and advising political decision-makers on the impact of public opinion and communication strategies on their potential decisions. Furthermore, public diplomacy employs communication techniques, behaviours, and narratives with the authority of messages to influence the public's beliefs, behaviours, and social norms. Lastly, it analyses the impact of actions taken previously and adjusts accordingly (Gregory 2008).

Today, public diplomacy is not implemented solely by state actors; non-state actors too are increasingly participating in public diplomacy (Lee and Ayhan 2015; Triana 2015). This makes sense, given the wide range of activities covered by public diplomacy. The concept of public diplomacy has expanded from a sole focus on the state (Bier and White 2021) to include non-state actors conducting or hosting cultural and corporate diplomacy activities (Melissen 2005). Diplomacy now considers the views and opinions of citizens, including those from both friendly and enemy countries, rather than just official state representatives (Kiel 2020). Although non-state actors do not hold formal state power, various studies show that non-state actors play an essential role in governance processes (Parreira 2021). According to recent study by Eckert (2020) and Charountaki (2022), non-state actors are becoming more influential in culture-based diplomacy in the future (Saliu and Llundji 2022). To achieve positive results in public diplomacy, collaboration among governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and individuals is essential (Sustarsic and Cheng 2022).

Student mobility is one notably effective public diplomacy strategy. However, it can be challenging for states to implement scholarship programmes without collaborating with non-state actors. The main objective

of such programmes is to promote strong relationships, improve societal perceptions, and foster better understandings between different countries (Ayhan and Snow 2021). Public diplomacy achieves this end by exposing international students to host countries' culture, political institutions, economic system, values, way of life, and society at large (Ayhan et al. 2022). The success of educational exchange programmes depends on the ability of competent citizens to promote their countries as part of established public diplomacy efforts (Bettie 2015). By personally experiencing a host country through their studies and personal encounters, foreign students can bolster their understanding of the country and develop positive attitudes towards it (Ayhan et al. 2022).

Student mobility programmes have been shown to provide numerous benefits to countries. According to Kim (2016) and Cull (2019), these programmes effectively reduce prejudice and stereotypes (Tam and Ayhan 2021). Additionally, such programmes promote peace and mutual understanding between countries (Sustarsic and Cheng 2022). Exchange participants can share knowledge with their larger community back home and act as “multipliers” (Scott-Smith 2009: 54). Student exchanges are widely believed to be essential in building relationships and are considered a foundational element in the pursuit of long-term impacts (Snow 2020). For this reason, academic programmes and student exchanges constitute a widely recognised form of public diplomacy that improves relations between countries (Varpahovskis 2022).

International student mobility programmes, as with research on non-state actors in public diplomacy, deserve more academic attention. Although many countries offer scholarships to international students as a form of public diplomacy, there is a lack of comprehensive empirical analyses of such programmes. Those that exist primarily focus on programmes in Western countries (Ayhan and Gouda 2021; Ayhan and Snow 2021; Jon and Ayhan 2021), meaning that there is a dearth of research on international student mobility schemes for non-Western students (Ayhan dan Snow 2021). Public diplomacy researchers tend to evaluate the effectiveness of exchange programmes through the anecdotal experiences of participants (Snow 2020) rather than empirical analysis. Prazeres (2013), as cited in Istad et al. (2021) highlights the need for further investigation into the mobility of non-Western students.

## **Relational Public Diplomacy**

A relational sphere is a collection of an individual's relationships, ranging from intimate connections to more distant ones (Zaharna 2011). The relational approach emphasises building trust through mutuality, symmetry, and dialogue rather than pursuing information dominance or propaganda (Brown 2013). Relational public diplomacy occurs in the context of relationships. Therefore, the success of a public diplomacy initiative depends more on the relationships established between the relevant parties than on the initiative's quality (Brown 2013). It is worth noting that assuming the existence of relationships—including those beyond immediate social groups—also assumes that individuals can initiate these relationships on their own without the help of others (Zaharna 2011).

Deos (2014) characterises the relational approach as the formation and maintenance of relationships through communication, collaboration, and resource exchange. Kelleher and Miller's (2006) research on blog audiences found that specific strategies—including communicating with a sense of humour, admitting mistakes, treating others as human, and using a conversational voice in blog posts—can be used to effectively maintain good relationships with audiences. By implementing these strategies, bloggers can encourage their audiences to return. Relationship-building is often the main objective of public diplomacy based on a relational framework, as it creates a favourable environment for collaborative projects featuring a range of public diplomacy actors, including non-state actors (Varpahovskis 2022).

Lee and Ayhan's (2015) research on the relational dimension is primarily based on public relations and dialogue theories. Combining multi-disciplines, Ayhan explains that the foundations of relational public diplomacy are using dialogic techniques, practising symmetrical two-way communication, and implementing relationship management theory (Ayhan 2016).

In dialogue, it is essential to prioritise inclusiveness, open-mindedness, and mutuality instead of striving for one-sided conversion and to maintain each participant's identity instead of advocating for a melting pot—to accept people for who they are and judge them by their actions, not just their words. Involving community members and leaders is critical to building lasting solutions to shared problems. Instead of following a predetermined static process, dialogue should be based on dynamic needs to achieve better outcomes. It should prioritise building relationships through events to achieve broader societal goals (Sleap and Sener 2013, as cited in Ayhan 2016). In terms of communication, one must remain open to change by

actively listening to others rather than simply offering the veneer of listening (Saunders 2013, as cited in Ayhan 2016). The public should be recognised as active participants and stakeholders in relational public diplomacy rather than mere passive targets (Lee and Ayhan 2015). When engaging with the public, the symmetrical two-way communication model entails listening to and considering their interests (Ayhan 2016). To establish meaningful dialogue and accommodate diverse interests, public relationships must be based on trust and reciprocity; this dynamic can be achieved through two-way communication (Fitzpatrick 2007, as cited in Ayhan 2016). According to Ledingham's (2003) relationship management theory, effective organisational-public interactions require mutual understanding, shared objectives, similar interests, and long-term benefits (Ayhan 2016). Long-term sustainable planning and implementation are vital to facilitate successful interpersonal relationship-building (Ayhan 2016). Lee and Ayhan's (2015) detailed and comprehensive explanation constitutes a solid foundation upon which to thoroughly analyse the art centres' public diplomacy strategies through the IACS programme. Through Ayhan's insights, we can better understand how the art centres engage with their target audience.

The preceding explanation underscores two vital aspects of public diplomacy that should be considered in scholarly discussions. First, it draws attention to the practice of public diplomacy by non-state actors. There is a clear need for additional research to examine the activities and strategies of non-Western non-state actors in conducting public diplomacy. Second, it underscores the necessity for further research on the mobility of international students in non-Western nations. Understanding the experiences of non-Western students while overseas and their interactions with their hosts would shed light on the potential benefits and drawbacks of non-Western countries using student mobility as a tool for soft power.

This research investigates the IACS programme, a public diplomacy initiative of the Indonesian MFA and its partnering Indonesian arts and culture studios. It examines how non-state actors in non-Western countries conduct public diplomacy and contribute to the subject's theoretical framework.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Two methods were used to collect data for this study. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with targeted informants to understand how art centres partnered with the MFA conduct public diplomacy. Second, an analysis was carried out of testimonials from fifty-two IACS alumni collected in the



book *15 Years of Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship* (Nurwahyudi et al. 2017) to assess the programme's reception. Determining whether the art centres' public diplomacy efforts produce positive reception is essential to understanding the outcomes of the IACS programme overall.

Six art centres were selected to host IACS 2023. This research involved interviews with three art centre owners and four administrators. The three visited art centres, located on three different islands in Indonesia, were the most experienced. Their extensive knowledge and experience as implementers of the IACS programme allow for a more comprehensive explanation. In addition, this study involved interviews with four participants from the three selected art centres as well as two diplomats from the MFA, ensuring a wide range of perspectives. Data completeness was ensured by asking follow-up questions via WhatsApp after conducting the interviews.

The interview questions were formulated based on the concept of relational public diplomacy proposed by Geun Lee and Kadir Ayhan. In the previous section, the idea of relational public diplomacy was discussed. During the interviews, this study sought to understand how the art centres treat their participants and whether they consider them to be stakeholders and active participants. The interviews also focused on efforts to develop interpersonal relationships and the art centres' long-term vision. The art centres' communication practices and their responses to communication from other stakeholders were enquired. Furthermore, this study sought to gain an understanding of the mutualism between the participants and the art centres as well as among the participants themselves.

Data processing entailed the use of coding techniques. The interviews were transcribed and given specific labels corresponding to different aspects of relational public diplomacy previously identified by Lee and Ayhan (2015). These labels were used to create a set of categories, which were then grouped into broader themes describing how the art centres implement relational public diplomacy.

The alumni testimonials were analysed based on the responses most commonly expressed by the alumni. They were marked and grouped according to their substantive closeness, and this grouping process persisted until several themes were produced that pointed to the results of the IACS programme.

## **PUBLIC DIPLOMACY BY THE ART CENTRES**

### **The IACS Programme**

The IACS programme is led and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but implemented by partner studios. Its goals are explained in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Performance Report and IACS Module (Direktorat Diplomasi Publik 2018):

1. Encourage the development of sociocultural cooperation by fostering interpersonal relationships, consistently developing Indonesian friends and ambassadors, and creating a network of Indonesian supporters known as Indonesianists;
2. Foster an international understanding of Indonesia to increase collaboration across various industries and, over time, develop relationships between programme participants;
3. Maintain international support for Indonesia's territorial unity, especially from the Pacific and other regions;
4. Encourage foreigners to have a deeper understanding of Indonesian arts and culture and create an Indonesian diplomatic community abroad to bolster Indonesia's reputation through cultural knowledge;
5. Enable programme participants to act as cultural ambassadors representing Indonesia abroad to promote travel, tourism, and healthcare in the country; and
6. Involve local communities as recipients and collaborate with local organisations as implementing organisations.

During the welcoming ceremony for the 2023 IACS programme participants, Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi expressed that the programme's alumni are expected to act as a bridge between Indonesia and their respective communities. The friendships they form during the programme will help them to expand their network and work together efficiently in the future. Marsudi also stated that the IACS programme provides all stakeholders with an opportunity to learn from one another, broaden their perspectives, and embrace diversity, enabling them to act as agents of peace for a better future (Kementerian Luar Negeri Republik Indonesia 2023).

The IACS programme is a global initiative that promotes international mobility and collaboration between the Indonesian government—specifically the Public Diplomacy Directorate of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—and

the Indonesian art centres as non-state actors. Interacting with the art centres and participants in this programme provides a valuable opportunity for academics to explore the practice of public diplomacy by non-state actors. The IACS is an excellent example of how such actors engage in this crucial field, and it offers valuable insights for future research and analysis.

Recruitment for the IACS programme is typically conducted by the Indonesian MFA between April and May each year. Candidates who successfully pass the selection process gather in Jakarta with the art centres' administrators to participate in an initial orientation session hosted by the MFA. The 2023 IACS programme was implemented over a two-month period due to necessary adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the orientation session, participants were allowed to attend presentations from all partnered art centres providing information on upcoming activities. After the nearly week-long orientation session in Jakarta, the MFA divided the participants into nine-person groups corresponding to the six participating art centres. Each of these groups needed to have at least one member from Indonesia. Participants departed for their respective placement areas the day after the orientation session ended in Jakarta, at which point they were under the responsibility of the art centres to which they were assigned.

The art centres offer a comprehensive programme that immerses participants in Indonesian arts and culture. The programme features lessons on music and dances alongside explanations of their meanings, philosophies, and histories. Participants also learn about local customs and norms pertaining to the Indonesian language. The programme also features excursions (for which they frequently partner with relevant local institutions), during which participants visit cultural, historical, and tourist sites and social, arts, and cultural institutions. During these visits, they are taught about the sites' local norms and values. The MFA has also requested partnered art centres to design activities that involve participants in festivals and community sociocultural activities. At the end of the programme, participants showcase what they have learned through a song and dance presented at an event dubbed the Indonesian Channel.

The art centres collaborate with local partners to provide participants with an enriched learning experience. The art centres regularly cooperate with local universities to assist students in learning the Indonesian language. Education in the arts and music primarily occurs during the daytime. Although art centres collaborate with external parties for specific activities, they always ensure the presence and support of participants when conducting activities outside the studio. Therefore, the most intense interaction during the programme is that between the art centres and the participants.

### **Participants' interests take priority**

The subsequent sections elucidate the interaction that transpires in art centres. They explain how art centres deal with participants' interests, develop long-term relationships, actively listen, innovate, and promote local values. In relational public diplomacy, participants are considered stakeholders who can actively voice their own opinions and interests.

Participants in the art centres are encouraged to freely express their opinions. This was confirmed by both the participants and the art centres' representatives. Participants are welcome to provide feedback on the activities they are currently engaged in at the art centres. According to Informant 4, "Every weekend, we discuss, what do you think?". The participants also confirmed that they were actively asked about their opinions regarding ongoing activities. Informant 4 said, "They thought it through, and they applied. We had a discussion not too long ago, just a meeting for the art centres, to know what we're feeling". Informant 8 said, "So, it's always a communication between—it's not just one side. It's either from the art centres or from the participants. It's always in the negotiation, [the] communication between both".

The art centres prioritise the participants' desires and requirements while simultaneously accomplishing and fulfilling their goals. Informant 4 explained, "We cannot do everything we want, right? For example, we practised six days a week in the first month. Although we wanted more free days, we had to meet certain standards. After meeting those standards, we were rewarded with the whole weekend free from activities".

The art centres are willing to negotiate and identify the best possible solution to meet the aspirations of the participants while still sticking to the curriculum assigned to them. The participants emphasised that they were able to negotiate certain things with the art centres. The art centres listened to their feelings and provided appropriate solutions quickly. Informant 8 said, "They are always ready to help us anytime. In fact, we even practise in the morning and afternoon so that, if we need to practice in the evening, they're always ready for us to come and teach. For example, there is a girl who is sick and cannot come. So, another day, she went out. They will teach one by one". Although this level of attention towards the participants can sometimes inconvenience the centres themselves, the centres prioritise the interests of the participants and strive to accommodate them.

This research has revealed that art centres consider the personal interests of the participants in the IACS programme. Sometimes, participants arrive with a specific purpose, such as doctoral students conducting research on

Indonesian art or individuals who want to study an art field that is not covered in the established curriculum. The art centres typically provide participants the opportunity to take additional lessons outside of the regular class hours to pursue their personal interests (Informant 7). Participants can request to learn a specific dance or art form that is relevant to their interests, and the art centres will provide instruction. According to the participants, the art centres are respectful and allow them the freedom to explore and develop their skills in their area of interest (Informant 9). Overall, art centres are very accommodating to participants and always prioritise their interests.

### **Lack of long-term relationship building**

Envisioning and planning long-term interpersonal relationships is essential to the success of relational public diplomacy. All of the considered art centres have maintained long-term relationships with their alumni, often keeping in touch through social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp). The art centres send birthday wishes to their alumni in a shared alumni group, and in return, the alumni send birthday wishes to the officials of the art centres. This friendly dynamic creates an atmosphere where alumni and art centres official regularly check in on each other's well-being. Alumni often reach out to officials at art centres seeking guidance on Indonesian dances they plan to perform in their home country. Typically, their conversations revolve around the movements that the alumni find challenging, and together they work to find suitable solutions. Some alumni have even revisited the city to check back in on the art centre they once called home. Some alumni still want to learn more about Indonesian dance, and the art centres are always happy to accept such requests (Informants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 11). The art centres always welcome alumni back and treat them like family members.

Notably, the analysis of testimonials from IACS alumni revealed their desire to maintain long-term relationships with other fellow alumni in the programme as well as those who oversaw it (Nurwahyudi et al. 2017). One participant from Vietnam (Informant 8) stated that she stayed in contact with the officials of the art centre for various reasons, such as to gain a deeper understanding of Indonesian dance. This desire to develop and maintain ties with Indonesia is advantageous for the nation. It drives a favourable international perception of the country and facilitates easier approaches to target audiences in the future. When asked which party they preferred to communicate with further—the art centres or the MFA—it appears that the art centres are the preferred choice of the participant (Informants 8 and 9).

Based on these findings, it is clear that both the art centres official and participants have expressed a desire to maintain long-term relationships. However, the art centres have yet to establish a clear vision for building such relationships; they appear to communicate with alumni to simply keep them updated without any clear overarching plan or strategy. The art centres want to establish long-term relationships, but they have not defined what these relationships should entail. Thus, the relationships are largely based on communication and do not have specific objectives. Sometimes, alumni invite the art centres to organise performances in their home country or collaborate with them on certain projects, but these offers are typically transactional in nature (e.g., buying and selling costumes). Alumni also generally have limited funds, making extensive collaborations fairly unlikely and mostly aspirational.

According to previous studies, alumni are more active in initiating long-term relationships through collaboration. At the same time, the art centres tend to be passive and exhibit little initiative. Until now, the long-term relationships that have been established have mainly been limited to exchanging birthday wishes and New Year's greetings. However, these relationships lack a specific mission. In the modern world of public diplomacy, it is important to maintain long-term relationships, as emphasised by Leonard et al. (2002) and Melissen (2005). Therefore, after completing a programme, appropriate follow-up procedures should be implemented to ensure the continuation of the positive feelings generated during participants' time in the programme. Encouraging further collaboration between the art centres and alumni would foster more substantial and enduring relationships.

### **Listening in IACS**

Relational public diplomacy requires active listening and a willingness to change based on what has been heard. These two aspects are essential for establishing a two-way relationship. The IACS programme distinguishes between two types of listening: listening to be followed up on and listening when a decision cannot be changed. The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that the art centres established active two-way communication with the participants, positioning themselves as good listeners. Informant 8 indicated that it was easy for them to ask questions to their music teachers, who were always available for *trump* and *talempong* (traditional music instruments) lessons: “So that if I have questions, I just ask. For example, for music, I have me and one girl and have one teacher teach the *trump*, and

one teacher teach the *talempong*. Talking to the teacher is easy. It's really easy for us to have questions or any suggestions". The art centres' approach to communication with participants followed the principles of modern public diplomacy.

IACS programme participants can offer suggestions to improve their daily lives, such as flexible schedules, food menus, and trips. Teachers usually accept suggestions from participants, even when these suggestions are rather mundane. For example, a student may ask for a break if they find the day's activities to be particularly tiring. The centres' teachers usually tolerate short breaks even though they may interfere with their schedules at home. Of course, not all suggestions can be accommodated, especially those related to technical and structural matters. For example, requests for repetition may sometimes be denied in group settings (e.g., dance groups or music groups) to avoid setting back other participants, as each one has a different skill level. An art centre official (Informant 2) revealed that some participants request technical changes that can be difficult to provide. The art centres have a limited period of two months to teach an entire course, so technical suggestions are typically not accommodated.

The art centres have established formal standards for their art courses. Therefore, if a participant's request is related to technical aspects of music or dance, it may be challenging for centres to fulfil the request. However, the centres still allow participants to provide feedback even though it may not be acted upon. Informants 2 and 11 stated that they need to be strict because they are responsible for maintaining the integrity of Indonesian dances—they own the dances and, thus, know what is best for the participants. Informants 5 and 6 added that they do not allow suggestions because they already know the potential of the participants. These statements indicate that opinions and advice cannot be entertained on all topics. Those related to the technicalities of music and dance are difficult to advise on, as these art forms have standard established patterns often linked to cultural or religious factors. Thus, participants cannot modify these arts for.

The IACS programme's listening process is typically applied through two approaches—adjustments and negotiations—which can always be taken to accommodate participants when it comes to non-technical matters. However, these opinions may not be catered to, as it's not feasible for the art centres officials to do so. The art creators have already conceptualised the rhythm of the dance or music; any changes could impact the dance's rhythm or structure.

### **Innovation based on intuition**

Public diplomacy programmes that utilise arts and cultural elements will greatly benefit from the involvement of artists. Artists are highly creative and generally prioritise the satisfaction of their audience. They always strive to present something new on an annual basis, which can greatly advance the promotion of their country's culture. However, even if they were to continue teaching the same art, it would not constitute a problem—as the participants change on a regular basis. Innovation could lead to positive outcomes for the promotion of Indonesia's culture, as explained in this section.

Interview results revealed that the art centres teach different art forms every year. Various reasons were cited by the art centres officials for this dynamic practice, though most pertained to a desire to avoid boredom and monotony: “As artists, we constantly need to be creative and avoid showing the same art to prevent boredom” (Informants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 11). Artists rely on their intuition when choosing a performance to be staged. They would feel embarrassed and bored if they were to display the same creation every year. Additionally, as performers, the art centres officials are motivated to showcase their breadth of artistic wealth. Even if learning material is repeated, the cycle takes at least five years to loop.

The art centres' innovation is attributable to their own initiative—not an MFA mandate. In fact, the MFA has confirmed that it does not require the art centres to provide annual updates on the teaching arts (Informants 12 and 13). As artists, the art centres officials' intuition drives them to deliver innovative and non-monotonous performances year after year: “every year, the art centres always introduce something new and avoid reusing the same teachings as the previous years” (Informants 12 and 13). According to Goff (2013), cultural diplomacy can be implemented in various ways, including through innovation. Goff emphasises that the delivery method of any work of art should adapt to the era as well as the audience's attention span, and the art centres abide by these recommendations. These efforts by the art centres help promote Indonesian culture on an international scale by sending a diverse range of regional arts back to participants' home countries.

### **Application of Indonesian values**

Lee and Ayhan (2015) have proposed a framework for relational public diplomacy that incorporates cross-disciplinary elements to make the framework operational. This framework was very helpful in formulating interview questions, coding interview results, and analysing the data.



Beyond this framework, the art centres' efforts in relational public diplomacy abide by fundamental Indonesian values of kinship, friendliness, and warmth in welcoming guests. These are linked to the value of *gotong royong* (cooperation), a hereditary value widely practised in Indonesia. Without realising it, these values have fostered a sense of closeness among alumni and resulted in a desire among many to return the favour to Indonesia and the art centres.

These art centres treat their participants like family. When the MFA put the participants into their care, the art centres took them on as though they were family members. As the management views the participants as akin to their children, they feel responsible for caring for them whenever problems arise, just as they would with their own children. In the same vein, the participants view their art centre as a second home.

All of the art centres treat their participants as family members. They even use family terms like *kakyang* (grandfather), *ibu* (mother), and daddy. This approach is based on traditional Indonesian hospitality. It is a simple approach, but it fosters emotional closeness between participants who later become alumni. "It has really become my second home", said one alumnus from Thailand. An alumnus from Greece said, "We all found a second family and friends in our teachers and people who were taking care of us all that time" (Nurwahyudi et al. 2017). This study found that 52 IACS alumni, in the book *15 Years of Arts and Culture Scholarship*, highlighted their emotional closeness to Indonesia and, more specifically, to the art centres. Similarly, testimonials from the alumni of the 2023 iteration of the IACS programme make their closeness to the art centres clear: "Therefore, while living and studying here, I feel that I'm also a member of the art centres; everything is so close, familiar, and full of emotions" (Hong 2023). Similarly, an alumnus from Bulgaria said, "I will miss every single one of them" (Chariff 2023). The intuitive approach practised by the art centres produces a strong sense of closeness and makes a deep impression on their participants.

The art centres officials are dedicated to making sure that participants are satisfied with their programme. In fact, they are so committed that they are willing to spend their personal funds on various activities beyond the confines of the programme. The surrounding community warmly welcomes IACS programme participants, fostering a supportive and enthusiastic environment.

### **A Simple but Effective Implementation**

The previous section explained that the Indonesian art centres do not implement all aspects of relational public diplomacy proposed in the theoretical framework, which could represent a weakness in their function as public diplomacy agents. However, the art centres' methods—which are derived from their intuition and instincts as experienced field actors—can be a source of soft power for the country. The arts centres utilised their natural instincts to execute the programme and engage with participants, thereby strengthening the role of non-states actors in public diplomacy.

In relational public diplomacy, the public is considered a stakeholder and an active participant (Lee and Ayhan 2015). These participants are members of society who interact with the art centres, which constitute the agents. The art centres treat participants well and allow them to provide their views on all of the learning processes to which they are exposed. The considered art centres all have their own style but always ask for participant feedback, enabling them to pay attention to the participants' needs. The art centres are very accommodating; they consider the participants' cultural backgrounds and habits rather than forcing them to follow local values. Although the art centres prioritise the learning targets that have been set, they remain flexible in the learning process, as not all IACS participants have a background in the arts.

The art centres accommodate the participants' wishes to study art beyond the confines of the established curriculum, which results in them working longer hours, including outside official class hours. This effort has had a positive effect on the practice of public diplomacy by enabling it to meet the needs of participants (Storie 2017). By providing education in the arts craved by participants, the art centres are meeting their needs. Even after the participants become alumni, the art centres' dedication to their participants does not end; they continue to serve alumni on a voluntary basis, either by teaching them dance online or welcome them warmly when they visit. The art centres consider alumni to be part of their family, forever welcoming them with open arms. Two things can be highlighted here. First, the art centres consider participants to be stakeholders and active participants. Second, the art centres—even as public diplomacy agents—practice the values of volunteerism towards participants and alumni.

Modern public diplomacy emphasises the importance of establishing long-term relationships with target audiences (Fitzpatrick 2010; Storie 2017; Nye 2019). Ayhan (2016) suggests that non-state actors can contribute a long-term vision to public diplomacy activities, taking advantage of their

benefits. In implementing the IACS programme, these art centres rely on their instincts when developing relationships with participants without having specific plan to establish long-term connections. Although the art centres maintain long-term relationships with alumni, these relationships are generally limited to exchanging greetings and life updates. Any collaboration between the art centres and alumni outside of this dynamic is usually initiated by the alumni themselves. The art centres are not responsible for maintaining these relationships. The art centres consider their duties fulfilled once the IACS programme ends and do not actively try to conduct follow-ups. While the art centres are professional and responsible in carrying out their tasks as art organisations, they have not properly played their role as public diplomacy agents in this sense. Instead, they have been limited to carrying out tasks outsourced to them by the state.

Relational public diplomacy entails maintaining a symmetrical two-way relationship with the target audience. Building such relationships requires active listening on the part of those involved, and truly active listening requires a willingness to change (Fitzpatrick 2010; Ayhan 2016). While the art centres involved with the IACS programme listened to their participants, they could not accommodate all of their requests. Certainly, participants were considered to be active contributors, and their input was considered—but the art centres could only make changes within certain limits. For example, they could accommodate participants' physical limitations but could not change the music or dances being taught.

True dialogue involves listening, talking, and acknowledging that one may not have all the answers; it means being open to the possibility that others may have alternative—and superior—solutions (Riordan 2005). The art centres listen to the opinions of their participants and work towards finding the best possible solutions for them. In fact, the art centres prioritise participants' personal interests, including those beyond the realm of art covered by the established curriculum. This approach promotes flexibility and enables participants to enjoy a programme that is tailored to their needs, supporting the assertion that non-state actors handle society and the opinions of members of society more effectively (Pantoja 2018; Guilbaud 2020). Overall, the art centres can be seen as engaging in symmetrical two-way communication and actively seeking suggestions from participants.

This article highlights Indonesian art centres' use of innovative value-based approaches to relational public diplomacy. The centres comprise skilled artists from diverse backgrounds who are both enthusiastic about their art and dedicated to providing an exceptional performance. To keep things

fresh and avoid monotony, the artists introduce new and innovative elements to their performances every year, including new dance and musical styles. Interestingly, the MFA—which governs the IACS—has never requested any such innovations. The artists update their approaches based on their artistic intuition and their desire to provide participants with unique, fresh, and engaging experiences. This approach has had unexpected benefits for the country and its government's efforts, with participants learning a variety of dances and sharing their knowledge with others, promoting the spread of Indonesian culture, values, and goodwill.

The second strength of the art centres lies in their application of values related to *gotong royong*, a common practice among Indonesians. The art centres treat their participants like family, often making them feel a sense of emotional closeness—like they have found a second home. Non-state actors have an advantage in this respect, as they can more naturally engage with interlocutors in a way that garners less suspicion with regard to their motives (Riordan 2005). In contrast, the state often faces a degree of scepticism from the public (Leonard et al. 2002), resulting in general distrust (Nye 2004).

The volunteerist values explained earlier constitute an example of the value of *gotong royong*, which has been practised by Indonesians for centuries and adds to the art centres' advantage as public diplomacy agents. The art centres are committed to fulfilling participants' wishes and granting alumni a sense of family spirit—even when the participants make no demands. Such approaches are common in Indonesian society, as the value of *gotong royong* has been passed down from generation to generation. Surprisingly, this simple practice can leave a deep impression on participants and alumni.

Public diplomacy has long been known as an instrument with which to generate soft power (Nye 2008; Nye 2019; Trisni et al. 2019b; Trisni and Putri 2023), meaning the ability to influence people's preferences without resorting to coercion and to gain the trust and support of others. The considered art centres have treated participants like family, leading to alumni developing strong emotional bonds, remembering Indonesia fondly, and feeling a strong desire to return and reunite with the people they met. This simple approach has been highly effective in winning the hearts and minds of participants.

## **CONCLUSION**

Some non-state actors in Indonesia have the unique ability to act as reliable public diplomacy agents. This research shows that such actors prioritise practical experience over theoretical knowledge when building relationships with IACS participants. While this approach is generally well-received by participants and leaves a positive impression, it may neglect the importance of long-term sustainability.

Arts centres in particular tend to employ a simple and intuitive approach to public diplomacy, effectively building emotional closeness with alumni. This emotional closeness can be used as capital for the state, motivating alumni to voluntarily advance the state's aims. However, it is important to maintain emotional closeness in the long term. In the words of Brown (2013: 46), cited in Lee and Ayhan (2015: 61), "Social relationships are not mechanical and require constant attention to maintain them".

This study determined that the state's role is critical in maximising the potential of arts centres as long-term relationship builders. Thus, the state should train arts centres to function as extensions of the state, fostering long-term relationships with alumni. This is valuable, as the government's operational needs make it difficult for the state to implement such long-term projects without third-party assistance. Additionally, states must identify ways to facilitate the development of long-term relationships. It is essential to construct a post-implementation plan that features both the art centres and alumni to ensure that the positive connections made during the IACS programme are not lost to time.

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## **COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS**

Interviews were conducted following applicable ethical standards. Informants were informed about the usefulness of the information they provided.

## NOTES

- \* Sofia Trisni, S.IP., MA (IntRel) is a doctoral student at the Department of International Relations, Padjadjaran University in Bandung, Indonesia. Trisni is also a lecturer at the Department of International Relations, Andalas University in Padang, Indonesia. She has written extensively on public diplomacy and Indonesian foreign policy.
- \*\* Teuku Rezasyah, MA, PhD, is a senior lecturer in the Department of International Relations at Padjadjaran University in Bandung. His research and writings focus on diplomacy, public diplomacy, and foreign policy issues. Rezasyah is a respected international relations commentator and frequently appears on various television media to discuss current and contentious topics in international relations.
- \*\*\* Junita Budi Rachman, M.Si, PhD is a senior lecturer at Padjadjaran University in Bandung. Her publications focus on public diplomacy, soft power, cultural studies, and gender in international relations.
- \*\*\*\* Chandra Purnama, MS, PhD is a senior lecturer at Padjadjaran University's Department of International Relations in Bandung. He has published extensively on foreign policy, public diplomacy, and democracy.

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