



Regional Synergies: South Sumatra's Strategy for Sustainable Connectivity in the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle

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Abstract. Regional connectivity is vital for ASEAN's community-building, exemplified by the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). Focusing on South Sumatra Province, this study explores its strategic role in IMT-GT through key commodities like palm oil, rubber, coffee, and coal. Using Jensen's (2013) neofunctionalism framework, qualitative research involves interviews with South Sumatra's Provincial Planning Board and secondary sources. Findings reveal the government's phased IMT-GT implementation—Task Expansion and Consolidation—addressing challenges while emphasizing sustainability. South Sumatra fosters economic integration and sustainable development, strengthening regional cooperation and aligning economic growth with environmental priorities. **Keywords:** Regional Synergies, South Sumatra's, Sustainable Connectivity, Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand, Growth Triangle

1 Introduction

Regional connectivity among ASEAN members is vital for realizing the ASEAN community. IMT-GT established in 1993 and highlighted in the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2010, exemplifies efforts to bridge development gaps and enhance collaboration. IMT-GT leverages shared cultural, geographic, and historical ties to promote sustainable development across seven sectors, including tourism, trade, and human resources.

This study focuses on South Sumatra Province, a key player in IMT-GT. Spanning 91,592 km², the province is a major exporter of rubber, coal, and palm oil, with thriving mining and agriculture sectors. South Sumatra also advances tourism, particularly sport tourism, and human resources to maximize IMT-GT benefits. Situated along the vital Strait of Malacca, South Sumatra underscores maritime connectivity's complexity, economic significance, and sustainability challenges. Balancing economic growth with resource preservation is essential for lasting regional integration.

Sustainability is central to IMT-GT's future, as highlighted at the 30th Ministerial Meeting in 2024. Priorities include green and blue economies, clean energy, and sustainable urban development. For South Sumatra, this involves advancing tourism, agriculture,

biofuel, and infrastructure projects, aligning with IMT-GT Vision 2036 for a vibrant, green, high-value sub-region. [1].

This study examines the South Sumatra Provincial Government's strategy in overcoming challenges during IMT-GT implementation from 2010 to 2021, a period aligned with its inclusion in MPAC. The research question asks: "How did South Sumatra realize IMT-GT cooperation from 2010 to 2021?" The study contributes theoretically by analyzing ASEAN regional cooperation and practically by offering insights for IMT-GT stakeholders, particularly in South Sumatra. It emphasizes sustainable strategies that balance connectivity with environmental goals, promoting responsible resource management and green growth within the IMT-GT framework.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Regional Cooperation as Function for Sustainability

Regional cooperation, as Caporaso argues, hinges on multilateralism [2], with success depending on the economic and political conditions of participating countries. Economic integration often drives regional efforts, as seen in ASEAN, where trade strengthens cooperation and fosters regional stability. Panke emphasizes trade's role as a catalyst for deeper integration, starting with shared foundational motives for forming regions or subsystems [3]. Asia's regional identity is shaped by geographic proximity and diverse cultural, political, and economic legacies, underscoring a sense of unity despite diversity. Theories like intergovernmentalism highlight states as key actors in regional cooperation. States pursue strategic interests [4], forming intentional political processes within regionalism, whereas regionalization often involves private-sector dynamics [5]. In East Asia, regionalization is particularly relevant due to economic and cultural ties [6].

Subregional cooperation plays a significant role in ASEAN, exemplified by the Southern Growth Triangle (SIJORI), later expanded into IMS-GT to include Malacca. Despite its initial success, IMS-GT faced challenges, such as imbalanced cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. In response, IMT-GT was established in 1993 to leverage comparative advantages and complementary resources. Its implementation in 2010 further emphasized fostering economic growth and connectivity. IMT-GT reflects evolving subregional cooperation models, focusing on sustainability and inclusivity. By addressing challenges in microregional partnerships, it aims to enhance integration within ASEAN, balancing economic growth with regional cohesion [2]. This framework underscores the dynamic interplay between states, private actors, and economic priorities in East Asia.

The discourse on regional cooperation, particularly within the framework of the IMT-GT, emphasizes the critical need for embedding sustainability in economic integration processes. By leveraging comparative advantages and fostering growth in trade, tourism, and agriculture, participating states can achieve economic expansion while mitigating risks

of environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality. Incorporating sustainability into regional initiatives ensures equitable distribution of benefits and safeguards the natural resources essential for economic resilience. The transition toward sustainable and green practices not only bolsters adaptability to global challenges but also secures the region's long-term economic and environmental viability.

ASEAN's integration trajectory exemplifies the theoretical principles of neofunctionalism, particularly through the MPAC. MPAC represents a comprehensive strategic framework aimed at enhancing connectivity across various sectors. Subregional cooperation, such as IMT-GT, aligns with this agenda by fostering trilateral collaboration to address shared objectives. This cooperative framework reflects the principle of spillover, where progress in one domain necessitates and catalyzes further integration in other [8], thereby reinforcing regional cohesiveness [9].

Neofunctionalism, as articulated by Ernst B. Haas, provides a robust theoretical lens for analyzing the dynamics of regional integration. The theory emphasizes that integration is propelled by the interests and actions of political and economic elites, operating within a framework of functional, political, and cultivated spillovers [10]. While supranationalism constitutes a core component of neofunctionalism, ASEAN's strict adherence to state sovereignty precludes its evolution into a supranational entity [11]. Instead, ASEAN's integration efforts prioritize domestic-level problem-solving while leveraging functional and political spillovers [12].

IMT-GT serves as an illustrative case of functional and political spillovers. Functional spillover emerges as technical interdependencies across sectors necessitate integrated solutions, such as infrastructural projects linking member states. Political spillover, conversely, manifests through intentional collaboration where regional interests are prioritized over unilateral national approaches. These dynamics facilitate the alignment of IMT-GT's initiatives with ASEAN's broader connectivity and sustainability objectives [12]. By situating IMT-GT within the theoretical framework of neofunctionalism, this study elucidates the interplay of economic, political, and institutional factors in driving regional integration. The strategic incorporation of sustainability within IMT-GT's agenda underscores the relevance of subregional cooperation as a mechanism for achieving equitable growth and reinforcing ASEAN's vision of a resilient and prosperous regional community.

The spillover concepts relevant to IMT-GT cooperation are functional and cultivated spillovers. Functional spillover occurs when cooperation in one sector necessitates collaboration in others, while cultivated spillover involves supranational actors promoting integration. Political spillover, however, contradicts ASEAN's principle of national sovereignty. Using the spillover approach, the South Sumatra Provincial Government's strategy links sectoral cooperation to broader integration. This approach highlights interdependence and mutual benefits, enabling IMT-GT to succeed as a model of regionalism based on economic collaboration and effective strategies [13].

According to Stephenson, the realization of regional cooperation involves two key processes: task expansion and task consolidation [14]. Task Expansion focuses on introducing and broadening initiatives. It includes: (1) *Leading/Entrepreneurship*: Guiding

processes, fostering negotiations, and balancing stakeholder needs; (2) *Learning/Applying Lessons*: Gaining knowledge to refine policies through experience and expert collaboration; (3) *Framing/Projecting*: Presenting issues to align with broader priorities and influence perceptions; (4) *Mediating/Brokering*: Facilitating dialogue to resolve conflicts and enhance cooperation.

Meanwhile, the Task Consolidation strengthens coordination and institutional capacity, involving: (1) *Coordinating/Co-managing*: Overseeing policy execution and addressing challenges; (2) *Legitimizing/Rationalizing*: Demonstrating policy effectiveness to gain stakeholder support; (3) *Socializing/Mobilizing*: Engaging experts and building alliances for collective learning and strategy validation; (4) *Off-loading/Diversifying*: Delegating tasks to optimize resource use and focus on core priorities. These processes align with Börzel and Schmitter's concepts of breadth (scope) and depth (level, locus), emphasizing comprehensive and adaptive approaches to regional cooperation [14].

3 Method

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach, focusing on description, perception, and experience. It aims to explore diversity rather than generalize, providing insights into specific issues related to regional cooperation in South Sumatra [15]. Primary data were gathered through unstructured, in-depth interviews with key informants at the South Sumatra Provincial Development Planning Agency while they were in tenure when this research was conducted. The informants include Mr. Hari Wibawa, Head of Control, Evaluation, and Strategic Planning; Mr. Daryanto, Head of the Tourism, Industry, and Trade Subdivision; Mr. Andhi Wiriansyah, staff member in the Tourism, Industry, and Trade Subdivision; and Mr. Aditya Rizki Ferdani, Analyst in the Tourism, Industry, and Trade Subdivision. Additionally, primary data were obtained from field observations at the agency. Thematic analysis was employed to identify and report key patterns within the data, allowing for a deep understanding of the informants' perspectives and experiences. This approach ensures flexibility in analyzing the data and deriving meaning from the context provided by the informants [15].

4 Result And Discussion

4.1 Cooperation in regional connectivity within the ASEAN context

Since the early 1990s, ASEAN governments have focused on enhancing economic cooperation through subregional development, aiming to attract foreign investment and leverage growth across regions. The success of the SIJORI Growth Triangle led to its rebranding as the IMS-GT in 1994, and ASEAN advocated for the creation of the IMT-GT in 1993, implemented in 2010. Connectivity, as outlined in the MPAC 2011–2015, involves

three strategic pillars: physical connectivity (transportation, infrastructure, ICT, and regional energy security), institutional connectivity (effective institutions and processes for trade facilitation), and people-to-people connectivity (social and cultural exchanges, and Mutual Recognition Arrangements to regulate mutual interests) [9] [16] [17] [18].

A key subregional initiative under ASEAN's connectivity framework is the IMT-GT, aimed at enhancing regional connectivity by addressing infrastructure gaps in underdeveloped areas [19]. Irawati highlights the importance of geographical proximity, with land connectivity fostering cooperation by overcoming physical barriers [20]. Established in 1993, IMT-GT includes 32 provinces/states, home to approximately 70 million people, spanning Southern Thailand (14 provinces: Nakhon Si Thammarat, Narathiwat, Pattani, Phatthalung, Satun, Songkhla, Trang, Yala, Chumphon, Krabi, Phangnga, Phuket, Ranong, Surat Thani), Peninsular Malaysia (8 states: Melaka, Kedah, Kelantan, Negeri Sembilan, Penang (Pulau Pinang), Perak, Perlis, Selangor), and Sumatra, Indonesia (10 provinces: Aceh, Bangka Belitung, Bengkulu, Jambi, Lampung, Sumatera Selatan, Riau, Kepulauan Riau, Sumatera Utara, Sumatera Barat) [21] [22].

The Indonesian government has established regulations for the IMT-GT border, highlighted in Law No. 43 of 2008 on State Territory. Article 6(1)(a) defines Indonesia's borders, including those with Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor, while Article 6(2) emphasizes the importance of coordinated points via bilateral or trilateral agreements [23]. This legal framework is crucial for economic activities, especially in border areas like Indonesia-Malaysia, fostering initiatives that promote mutual welfare. Several IMT-GT cooperation initiatives are outlined in the 2012–2016 Implementation Blueprint. These include promoting agricultural investments, Indonesia's role as coordinator for halal products (2014–2016), tourism sector coordination, and infrastructure development aligned with the five economic corridors of IMT-GT [18]. One key initiative is halal tourism, especially in Sumatra's border regions, offering Muslim-friendly services and halal food options. Indonesia's halal tourism efforts, launched in 2017, led to it ranking second in the Global Muslim Travel Index by 2018, behind Malaysia. Collaborative efforts with Malaysia and Thailand within IMT-GT continue to enhance this sector through information sharing and development strategies [22].

4.2 Implementation of IMT-GT in South Sumatra

South Sumatra plays a key role in the IMT-GT cooperation framework. It is part of Economic Corridor 3 (EC3), which connects Banda Aceh in the north to Palembang in the south, linking crucial corridors such as EC1 (industrial centers), EC4 (maritime corridors), and EC5 (maritime transit ports). This connectivity boosts mobility across regions, benefiting EC2 (the halal hub) as well. Despite its geographic distance from the main IMT-GT activities, South Sumatra is strategically positioned to optimize the benefits of the initiative. The province aims to leverage its tourism and labor potential. Studies by the Integration Processing and Dissemination Statistics Agency and the Central Statistics Agency show that tourism is vital for South Sumatra's economy, contributing to foreign

exchange and job creation. Key tourism sectors include sport tourism, cultural tourism, shopping, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions), and natural tourism. South Sumatra has hosted major events, such as the 26th SEA Games (2011) and the Jakarta-Palembang Asian Games (2018), demonstrating its capacity in sport tourism. Regarding labor, South Sumatra is a major exporter of crumb rubber, crude palm oil, and coal. Its industrial base supports significant employment potential. Shift Share (SS) analysis from 2010–2014 shows competitive advantages in 11 sectors: agriculture, mining, electricity, clean water, construction, accommodation, financial services, real estate, educational services, and corporate services [26]. This highlights the need for local and national entrepreneurs to expand market access and improve product quality, ensuring continued growth within the IMT-GT framework.

The IMT-GT cooperation trajectory is outlined in two key blueprints, covering 2012–2016 and 2017–2021. The initial blueprint emphasized cooperation in sectors such as transportation, energy, trade, investment, agriculture, halal products/services, and tourism. In South Sumatra, tourism, particularly sport tourism, was a focal point, with the province hosting multiple international sporting events. South Sumatra's significant infrastructure projects, such as the Pematang Panggang-Kayuagung Toll Road, were also highlighted. In 2017, the focus expanded to include human resources, education, and culture, with South Sumatra establishing the IMT-GT Center and launching the South Sumatra Labor Market Information System (LMI). The transportation sector saw the construction of key infrastructure, including the Palembang Toll Road and Light Rail Transit (LRT) systems. In 2018, South Sumatra hosted major events like the 18th Asian Games, reinforcing its position as a hub for sport tourism. Governor Alex Noerdin's emphasis on sport tourism and labor shifted to a focus on tourism and agriculture under Governor Herman Deru in 2019. South Sumatra also became the location for the Rubber City Indonesia initiative, with its agriculture and industry sectors receiving increased attention. The transportation and ICT sectors continued to grow, with projects like the Kayuagung-Palembang-Betung Toll Road. By 2020, South Sumatra was active in e-commerce, with its role in the Indonesian UMKM Digital Market (PaD) growing. The labor sector also saw the completion of the South Sumatra LMI. By 2021, the province played a crucial role in halal product innovation and was involved in the transfer of the Tanjung Api-Api Special Economic Zone. The ongoing development in the transportation and ICT sectors, including new toll roads and special economic zones, showcased South Sumatra's commitment to IMT-GT cooperation and regional development.

4.3 Task Consolidation Phase

Leading/'Entrepreneurial'

In the task expansion typology, national leaders drive priority projects, as seen in the IMT-GT Implementation Blueprint 2012–2016. Indonesia promoted investments in agriculture through the Ministry of Agriculture, aiming to reduce barriers. From 2014–

2016, Indonesia coordinated the tourism sector, boosting tourism within and beyond the IMT-GT region. Collaboration in transportation, energy, and infrastructure was promoted, focusing on the five IMT-GT economic corridors [18]. In 2019, Indonesia chaired Working Groups on Transport and ICT Connectivity and Trade and Investment Facilitation, conducting annual reviews of past activities [27].

Learning/Applying Lessons

According to Stephenson, “learning/applying lessons” allows member countries to create new processes, cooperation structures, and knowledge-sharing practices for policymaking. This is evident in the enhancement of cooperation through the Chief Ministers Governors Forum (CMGF) within an Economic Corridor approach. In the IMT-GT blueprint for 2011-2017, five priority economic corridors (ECs) were established and outlined by ADP:

1. EC1 (Songkhla-Penang-Medan): Encompassing key border areas, EC1 serves as a critical economic anchor with industrial and special economic zones.
2. EC2 (Trang-Satur-Perlis-Penang-Port Klang-Melaka): Positioned as a potential food and halal hub, integrating regional food production.
3. EC3 (Banda Aceh-Medan-Pekanbaru-Palembang): A vital part of the ASEAN highway network, crucial for Sumatra's development and IMT-GT connectivity.
4. EC4 (Melaka-Dumai): A maritime corridor with longstanding trade and transit connections, Dumai acts as a gateway to resource-rich Riau.
5. EC5 (Ranong-Phuket-Aceh): Aims to strengthen sea connections between Sumatra and Southern Thailand, with enhanced port facilities [28].

To evaluate the implementation of the 2011-2016 blueprint, IMT-GT introduced the 2017-2021 blueprint, which reviews these economic corridors and introduces a sixth corridor (EC6) that links South Sumatra, the Riau Islands, Bangka Belitung, and multiple states in Malaysia and Thailand. This corridor expansion encourages state/provincial governments to capitalize on opportunities within IMT-GT economic corridors, favoring a bottom-up approach for more proposals and project programs [27].

Framing/Projecting

In this typology, national leaders propose new project initiatives and identify emerging sectors. A shift in development focus between governors illustrates this change: Governor Alex Noerdin (2008–2018) emphasized infrastructure and sport tourism, particularly in Palembang. However, Governor Herman Deru (2018–present) introduced a “South Sumatra for All” approach, targeting development in all regions, including underserved areas like Muratara. Since 2021, agriculture has become a primary focus, responding to challenges in sport tourism, which was hindered by resource limitations and the pandemic. South Sumatra has developed initiatives to strengthen the food supply chain, especially rice production

[29]. As a top rubber producer, South Sumatra aligns with the IMT-GT initiative, and plans for industrial collaboration, such as “Rubber Cities,” are in place [27].

Mediating/Brokering

Here, member states play a crucial role in facilitating negotiations and reaching agreements within IMT-GT. Members propose collaborative projects to IMT-GT’s partner, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which funds approved projects. This structure allows each country to advocate for projects that align with national interests while advancing collective goals. ADB-backed projects include developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Sumatra, connecting them with SEZs in Malaysia and Thailand [27] [29].

4.4 Task Expansion Phase

Task expansion involves ‘channeling’ and ‘releasing’ integrative pressures through shared leadership, entrepreneurship, and creative action. Task consolidation, meanwhile, strengthens institutional resources to support collaboration, aiming to improve policymaking with delegated tasks, legal instruments, information, and expertise.

1. *Co-ordinating/Co-managing.* In this aspect, member states jointly address gaps in policy implementation. Past inconsistencies include: (1) limited comprehensive contributions to the IMT-GT Working Group (WG) due to former structures under WGHREDEC; (2) UNINET’s Strategic Action Plan (USAP) lacking direct connections to WG IMT-GT projects; (3) minimal interaction between UNINET and business communities for exploring industry collaborations; and (4) limited involvement in IMT-GT’s policy process. This led to updates in the Implementation Blueprint (IB) from 2017-2021 to 2022-2026, aiming to link UNINET with Working Groups. UNINET serves as a think tank for government, business, IMT-GT Working Groups, and the IMT-GT Guiding Framework [29][30].
2. *Legitimizing/Rationalizing.* Member states focus on optimizing decision-making tools for setting priorities, public funding allocation, and impact evaluation to enhance institutional legitimacy and agenda-setting. The IMT-GT established decision-making mechanisms through bodies like the Leader’s Summit, Ministerial Meeting, Chief Ministers and Governors Forum, and Development Partners, coordinating with six Working Groups: Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry (WGAAE), Halal Products and Services (WGHAPAS), Tourism (WGT), Trade and Investment (WGTI), Human Resources (WGHRD), and Infrastructure and Connectivity. UNINET collaborates with these groups to accelerate project implementation.

3. *Socializing/Mobilizing*. Member states identify challenges, devise solutions, encourage private investment, and foster synergy among stakeholders. For instance, the Tanjung Api-Api SEZ project stalled due to inadequate investor support, limited road and transport access, and unmet investor expectations of tax exemptions and transportation guarantees. This prompted relocation to Tanjung Carat SEZ, which has more favorable logistics, including deeper port access, as specified in Government Regulation No. 2 of 2022, which repealed the Tanjung Api-Api SEZ regulation.
4. *Off-loading/Diversifying*. In this typology, tasks are delegated while the overall responsibility for policy, programming, and evaluation remains centralized. Since 2021, Indonesia has appointed the Governor of South Sumatra as the Head of the Indonesian Delegation [30], now advancing into the second Blueprint for 2022-2026. While tasks are delegated across various ministries and provincial governments, the overarching policy responsibility is collectively shared by the Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs, the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs, the Ministry of National Development Planning/Bappenas, and numerous other ministries and agencies. These entities include the Ministry of Trade, Investment Coordinating Board, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, and provincial governments from Aceh to Lampung, alongside the IMT-GT Joint Business Council Indonesia [27][31].

Challenge and Opportunities for South Sumatra

The DESTEP framework is utilized here to map out challenges and obstacles faced by the South Sumatra Provincial Government in implementing policies and fostering collaboration within IMT-GT. This framework provides a detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by the South Sumatra Provincial Government in implementing policies and fostering collaboration within IMT-GT:

1. *Demographic Analysis*. South Sumatra is the largest province on the island of Sumatra, covering an area of 91,592 km². It is also home to the largest rubber plantation in the world, covering 1,311,727 hectares, as well as the largest coffee plantation in Indonesia, which spans 250,305 hectares. Additionally, it has the third-largest population on Sumatra, with 8,551,000 residents, consisting of 4,360,000 males and 4,191,000 females as of 2021.
2. *Economic Analysis*. South Sumatra is a leading producer of rubber, coffee, and palm oil. It is the world's largest rubber producer, producing 896,000 tons per year in 2021 [34], and the largest coffee producer in Indonesia, with an annual production of 162,975 tons. The province also ranks as the sixth-largest palm oil producer in Indonesia, with 3,062 tons produced annually. The export value at Boom Baru port reached 4.55 billion USD, accounting for approximately 97.22 percent of the total exports [32]. Despite these strengths, South Sumatra faces challenges such as a poverty rate of 12.79% and an unemployment rate of 4.98% as of 2021. The region's economy heavily depends on exports, particularly in

agriculture, where the main commodities accounted for 62.84% of exports in 2020. In 2019, South Sumatra faced challenges from rubber-importing countries like China and India, which aimed to reduce imports, potentially lowering South Sumatra's exports. In response, the province sought to attract investors and participated in international rubber exhibitions. However, progress has been slow due to infrastructure challenges, which have deterred investment [32] [31].

3. *Social Analysis*. South Sumatra's society benefits from a high human development index of 70.24%, and nearly 57% of families are considered prosperous. The region is also notable for its high school completion rate, with 67.20% of the population achieving at least a high school education. The province has developed a robust tourism sector, hosting 38 international events between 2011 and 2017. Opportunities in tourism continue to grow, particularly in the adventure and historical tourism sectors.
4. *Technological Factors*. South Sumatra has embraced technological innovation, particularly in e-commerce, with the launch of PaDi (Digital Market) for MSMEs, and in the halal certification sector, through an innovative online application. The province has also worked on enhancing local marketplaces' export capabilities by integrating them into the IMT-GT Mall.
5. *Ecological Factors*. The province is focusing on sustainable development initiatives, such as the Green Cities Initiative, and has been active in infrastructure projects, including the Sumatra Toll Road and the Trans Sumatra Railway Project. South Sumatra is also developing the New Palembang Port in Tanjung Carat and expanding its Light Rail Transit (LRT) system, all of which are aimed at enhancing regional connectivity and supporting sustainable growth.
6. *Political/Legal Factors*. South Sumatra has seen notable political leadership with its Governor serving as Chair of the Indonesian Delegation since 2021. The province benefits from support by international organizations like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and participates in the IMT-GT framework, with the region aligned with the IMT-GT Vision 2036. The province follows the 2017-2021 Implementation Blueprint for its development strategy.

The potential of South Sumatra, particularly in rubber and palm oil commodities, can be maximized through increased production and trade across various sectors by utilizing six working groups: the WGAAE, WGHAPA, WGT, WGTI, and WGHRD. These IMT-GT Working Groups will collaborate with the UNINET to accelerate the implementation of projects and programs under IMT-GT. UNINET serves as a think tank for the government, the business sector, IMT-GT Working Groups, and the IMT-GT Guiding Framework. Its functions and responsibilities include generating innovations to support the subregional economy and addressing urgent issues in the subregion, supporting the development of human resources in the IMT-GT subregion, and strengthening cooperation among universities in the IMT-GT subregion to produce skilled communities. UNINET consists of 12 universities in Indonesia, 9 universities in Malaysia, and 5 universities in

Thailand. UNINET serves as a platform for collaborating experts and university representatives to plan IMT-GT projects [29].

South Sumatra continues to strive to strengthen connections and secure infrastructure support for integration. To achieve good regional integration, indicators described by neofunctionalism theory can serve as supporting elements for the development and creation of mutually beneficial integration mechanisms. In the context of IMT-GT cooperation, neofunctionalism theory can bridge the assessment and prediction of the long-established subregional cooperation that is vulnerable to institutional governance and its programs. The reciprocity and interdependence among member countries are also important points that need to be emphasized in this theory. The concept of spillover is crucial for achieving effective economic and regional integration. The strength of interactions can lead to beneficial interdependence for member countries [13]. Therefore, as a regionalism based on economic cooperation, IMT-GT should be able to become a successful form of regionalism with effective strategies.

4.5 Ensuring Sustainability through Economic Cooperation

The sustainable development of South Sumatra, particularly within the IMT-GT framework, depends on effective strategy implementation and regional cooperation. By leveraging its abundant natural resources and fostering economic interdependence among member states, South Sumatra can achieve long-term sustainability in its key sectors. The province's economic landscape reveals strong potential in rubber and palm oil production, along with emerging opportunities in agriculture and other industries. The collaboration among six working groups within IMT-GT plays a vital role in optimizing resources, enhancing production capabilities, diversifying economic activities, and reducing reliance on any single commodity.

The establishment of UNINET offers a platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange among institutions across the three countries. By combining academic expertise with governmental and business initiatives, UNINET fosters innovation and the development of human capital. This collaborative approach enhances workforce skills and supports sustainable practices in agriculture and industry, contributing to a resilient economic structure. Infrastructure quality also significantly influences sustainable development. South Sumatra's focus on improving transportation and logistics infrastructure is crucial for facilitating trade and attracting investments. Key infrastructure projects, such as ports and processing facilities, help the province efficiently serve its growing export markets, particularly in rubber and palm oil, while also reducing operational costs. Integrating neofunctionalism theory into IMT-GT ensures that regional cooperation focuses on mutual interdependence, spillover effects, and long-term environmental sustainability. South Sumatra's proactive approach to diversifying export markets and investing in processing capabilities demonstrates its commitment to resilience in a fluctuating global economic environment.

5 Conclusion

From 2010 to 2021, the South Sumatra Provincial Government's efforts in the IMT-GT cooperation focused on regional integration and sustainable economic development. The province utilized its natural resources, particularly in rubber and palm oil production, while fostering interdependence among member states. Working groups coordinated initiatives in agriculture, trade, tourism, and human resource development, optimizing resources and diversifying the economy. The establishment of UNINET supported innovation and capacity building through academic partnerships.

Infrastructure development was key to improving connectivity, attracting investments, and ensuring trade efficiency. Integrating neofunctionalism theory into IMT-GT emphasized mutual interdependence and sustainable practices. In the face of external challenges like fluctuating commodity prices and trade disruptions, South Sumatra demonstrated resilience through diversification and strategic growth initiatives. Overall, these efforts reinforced the province's role as a key player in the IMT-GT framework, contributing to regional prosperity.

6 Disclaimer

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