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To cite this article: Friederike Trotier (2017): Changing an image through sports events: Palembang's success story, Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science, DOI: [10.1080/21640599.2016.1276252](https://doi.org/10.1080/21640599.2016.1276252)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21640599.2016.1276252>



Published online: 02 Feb 2017.



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Changing an image through sports events: Palembang's success story

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ABSTRACT

Hosting an international sports event is seen by many governments as an opportunity to promote a variety of issues and agendas such as inculcating a feeling of pride among the citizens of the host city and country, boosting development or conveying a positive image of the host to a large international audience. This is especially true in the local context of the host city where the event takes place. Drawing from the results of ethnographic fieldwork, this paper examines the Indonesian city of Palembang as a repeated host of international sports events and how these events create an image and narrative of success with regard to the city. The focus lies on change of image as Palembang formerly had a negative reputation. The time frame includes the 2011 SEA Games, the 2013 Islamic Solidarity Games and the upcoming 2018 Asian Games. Furthermore, the narrative of success can be perceived as a starting point to shed light on Palembang's potential for city marketing and promotion using sport as an urban event to attract visitors and investors. One salient promotion strategy is to link different events taking place in Palembang to the image of the city as a 'sport city'.

KEYWORDS

Sports events; Indonesia; Palembang; city image

Introduction

As some politicians and scholars have pointed out, the sports world has entered the 'Asian century' (see for example Pajic, 2015) with Asian countries hosting first- and second-order events. Nevertheless, the main focus has been on East Asian countries and on hallmark events such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup (e.g. Brownell, 2008; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2002). Yet, there are new actors on the scene using sports events of different sizes for specific purposes. One example is Indonesia, an emerging economy in Southeast Asia, and more specifically the South Sumatran capital Palembang with its ambitious sports event projects. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on host cities of sports events, to analyse the specific circumstances that make hosting an attractive opportunity for them and to describe the characteristics of an Indonesian city that has discovered in hosting sports events a strategy for improving its image. The three main sections of the paper include an introduction to the city of Palembang and its former image until 2004, an analysis of

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Palembang's strategy to improve its image with the help of sports events with details about specific events, and finally a discussion of the resulting new image.

Palembang is worthy of examination as the city had faced great pressure to change its previously very negative image. Yet, only after political changes in Indonesia did cities have the opportunity and the empowerment to implement initiatives by themselves. Consequently, decentralization was an important factor in Palembang's development. Furthermore, the example of Palembang shows the importance of actors and their commitment in order to achieve the target of an image change. The single bidding processes and the implementations of sports events such as the Indonesian National Games, the Southeast Asian Games or the Islamic Solidarity Games emphasize different aspects of Palembang's newly promoted image. Thus, the new image not only focuses on Palembang as a new sports event destination but puts forward other assets of the city such as religion, for instance. In the broader context, the example of this Indonesian city underlines the increasing attractiveness of sports events for cities beyond the capitals and for countries in the economically emerging region of Southeast Asia. This follows the findings and suggestions of Grix and Lee (2013) about the attractiveness of sports events for emerging states and Black's (2014) and Black and van der Westhuizen's (2004) call for a more detailed examination of second- and third-order events and of the role of more peripheral cities rather than well-known capitals.

The research shows that, in spite of some shortcomings, the hosting of sports events has initiated a success story about Palembang leading to an improvement of the city's image.

As the analysis of Palembang not only reflects the situation in Indonesia overall but provides an example of new opportunities in Southeast Asia, this paper helps to understand developments in the region and encourages further comparisons with other cities of a similar scale. Furthermore, Palembang will be the co-host of the 2018 Asian Games in Indonesia and thus will enter onto the stage of major sports events.

Palembang

Palembang is the capital of the province of South Sumatra. The city has about 1.56 million inhabitants and is the sixth biggest in Indonesia. The Musi River, which connects Palembang with the sea, shapes the life of the city. The river itself and the main bridge in the heart of the city, Ampera Bridge, are famous landmarks of the city. Palembang has a long history as a place of commerce and power. The Buddhist kingdom Srivijaya had its centre in the area of today's Palembang. Between the seventh and fourteenth centuries, this kingdom ruled or asserted influence over parts of Sumatra, today's peninsula Malaysia and mainland Southeast Asia. In Indonesian national historiography, Srivijaya is remembered as a 'golden age' with the association of grandeur, wealth and peace. One main factor in the kingdom's success was the control of the Malacca Strait and consequently international sea trade (Munoz, 2006). Today, the kingdom is still present in Palembang, for instance in the names of institutions such as the state university, the local football club, the main stadium, shops and restaurants. In addition, the residents of South Sumatra refer to their land as *bumi Sriwijaya* – land of Srivijaya – demonstrating their pride in the heritage of the kingdom (Manguin, 2008).

After the collapse of the Buddhist kingdom, a sultanate gained power in Palembang from the sixteenth century onwards. The spread of Islam changed the religious landscape in South Sumatra and, to the present day, Islam has played a salient role in the identity of the South

Sumatran population, especially the Malays. During the sultanate, Palembang constituted a centre of Islamic learning attracting scholars and students alike. The main mosque in Palembang is a reminder of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I, who headed the sultanate in the eighteenth century (Pudjiastuti, 2006).

Under Dutch colonial rule, many political, economic and social changes occurred. Palembang still functioned as a centre of trade but the focus was now on cash crops introduced by the Dutch. However, in spite of the economic boost under colonial rule, Palembang's residents participated in anti-colonial movements and, after the Japanese occupation and the Indonesian proclamation of independence in 1945, a local government was formed in Palembang. In the collective memory of the South Sumatran people, participation in the struggle against the Dutch (1945–1950) plays a significant role (Taal, 2003).

In the newly independent Republic of Indonesia, Palembang became the capital of the province of South Sumatra and remained the political, economic and social centre of the region. The population grew continuously and the city underwent major modernization processes. Although the oil boom contributed to Palembang's economic prosperity, the entire province experienced increasing marginalization in the New Order under President Suharto (1966–1998). The centralized character of the state as well as the patronage system generated a small group of profiteers, thereby preventing an equal share of resources and wealth at the local level.

Suharto's resignation from office in 1998 marked the beginning of a new era. The decentralization process that followed had great significance for districts and municipalities as they were the now main recipients of a political and economic power shift from the centre to the regions (see for example Kimura, 2010). Suddenly, they experienced empowerment offering new opportunities for actors in different domains. Networks with Jakarta, the currency of the previous New Order, lost their significance and cities and district had the possibility to create initiatives on their own. Naturally, the experience of 32 years of Suharto's government still shaped the country, but the era of *reformasi* began an experiment making Indonesia one of the most decentralized countries in the world. It was a time to trigger change and to try something new.

As a municipality, Palembang was one of the places that gained more independence and opportunities for autonomous actions. In this provincial capital, there was a particularly significant pressure for change because it had to face the challenge of a negative image. Hence, the new autonomy was a starting point for developing a strategy to improve the city's reputation. Although the capital of South Sumatra could look back on past grandeur such as that of the Srivijaya kingdom, the ensuing sultanate and the struggle against the Dutch, the city suffered from the negative reputation of being 'the most grubby city in Indonesia' (Creak, 2014, p. 860). Taal's (2003) dissertation on the image of Palembang in the 1990s offers an in-depth analysis of the background to and facets of this image. She stressed the negative perspective shared not only by other Indonesians but also by residents of the South Sumatran capital itself, summarising Palembang's image as follows.

Palembang is above all branded as extraordinarily dangerous, and is furthermore said to be dirty, chaotic, ugly, backward, and boring. Its inhabitants are generally seen as aggressive, backward, undisciplined, treacherous, and criminal. (Taal, 2003, p. 4)

This description includes negative characteristics which were mutually dependent and reinforced each other. The notion of being dirty, for instance, entailed not only the obvious lack

of cleanliness but also perceived chaotic conditions and a lack of discipline among the residents (Taal, 2003).

The stigmatization of the people of Palembang as being dangerous, criminal and treacherous can be traced back to the early nineteenth century when some Dutch colonizers offered their negative perspectives of the Malays. As a large part of Palembang's and South Sumatra's population was of Malay ethnicity, these stereotypes stayed with the place and its people. In the New Order era, this negative reputation remained or was even reinforced. The main stereotypes about the people of Palembang represented them as aggressive, easily provoked, backward and old-fashioned, undisciplined, treacherous and criminal (Taal, 2003). As the residents of the city perceived these characteristics as being true, this triggered a feeling of shame and resignation but also the will to correspond to the image. In particular, certain areas suffered from the stigmatization as exemplary proof of the accuracy of the negative image of Palembang.

The vicious circle of 'bad image' and 'bad behaviour' called for action. After the decentralization process in Indonesia, actors in the local government saw the opportunity to create a more positive image for the city and foster pride in its citizens. These first attempts at city marketing mainly focused on the glorious past of the Srivijaya kingdom or on a new image centred on development projects (Taal, 2003). However, another long-term strategy received increasing attention in Palembang and throughout the entire province. The starting point was Palembang's successful bid to host the Sixteenth Indonesian National Games in 2004 (*Peran Olahraga Nasional, PON*).

The strategy of hosting sports events

The Indonesian National Games (PON)

The creation of the Indonesian National Games happened in the spirit of nation-building. As Brown (2008) pointed out, President Sukarno perceived the event as a vital tool to unite the country and to inculcate feelings of belonging and pride. In order to demonstrate the equality of the diverse Indonesian regions, the host cities changed every time. Hence, between 1948, when the inaugural National Games were held in Surakarta (Central Java), and 1961 the event had five different host cities, two even outside Java, namely Medan (North Sumatra) and Makassar (South Sulawesi). Taking place every four years, this regular event provided the host city with the possibility to present itself and to welcome the youth of the archipelago.

After the political turmoil of 1965/66 and General Suharto's seizure of power, the concept of the National Games changed. Instead of naming different hosts for the Games, the government decided to have Jakarta as the permanent host. Although the first PON under the New Order took place in Surabaya, all the others were held in Jakarta. The capital also had the experience of hosting major international events such as the Asian Games (Fourth Games in 1962) and Sukarno's Games of the New Emerging Forces (1963).¹ The advantage of this arrangement was the availability and suitability of venues in Jakarta and the growing experience in the organization process. Nevertheless, the centralization prevented other Indonesian cities from becoming hosts to the National Games. Only after President Suharto's resignation from office was a new paradigm introduced, oriented towards Sukarno's idea of unity and diversity. Cities from different parts of the country now had the opportunity to

bid for the Games. The first host city of the *reformasi* era was Surabaya and the second Palembang.

For the capital of South Sumatra the hosting of the National Games held several promises. First, during the preparation period but even more during the implementation, the city would have a position in the spotlight of the national media. Second, the event and the related attention could be a chance to convey a new and different image of the city to the whole country. Third, the investment in the event and the gathering of the Indonesian youth could trigger increased enthusiasm and pride among the residents of Palembang and change their perception of their city as well. Consequently, the hosting of the event presented a salient project for the government of the city and the province.

The Governor in office after the first elections in South Sumatra was Rosihan Arsyad, who succeeded in winning the bid for Palembang. This was the starting point for several infrastructure projects. In 2001, fund-raising for the event and construction work began (Collins, 2007). The core project was the new complex of venues, built on the south side of Musi River in a vast lowland area. The complex was named Jakabaring, deriving from the acronym for the groups of settlers (or their origins) who lived in this area. The most prominent venue was the Srivijaya Stadium, with a strategic position close to the entrance of the sport complex. As a multi-functional arena, the stadium could serve as a host for the opening and closing ceremonies as well as football games. It is still considered to be one of the best stadiums in Indonesia, even comparable with stadiums in Japan. Other venues for athletics or swimming followed. The planners gave priority to the building of venues of international standard, underlining a future-oriented perspective. Besides the sports venues, the construction process also included a dormitory for the athletes on the Jakabaring complex. Moreover the project was not limited to the sports complex; rather, new construction sites also appeared within the city generating new roads, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops and recreation places. The changes within the city particularly triggered positive reactions.

Nevertheless, the National Games in Palembang encountered severe problems as they were mired in corruption. The companies competing for construction projects made additional promises to government officials in order to win the bid. The company chosen to build the dormitories for the athletes, for instance, demonstrated its gratitude towards the Governor with a new house. Further projects stayed within Arsyad's family. The Governor presumably used financial contributions to support his election campaigns for the 2004 gubernatorial elections (Collins, 2007). This corruption, however, did not have the expected result. Arsyad lost the election, and Syahril Oesman followed him into office. The change did not bring a cleaner policy; in contrast, in the aftermath of PON, the NGO Palembang Corruption Watch uncovered further cases of corruption, collusion and nepotism (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2005).

In spite of the corruption scandals, the memory of the National Games is very positive in Palembang. The reasons might be manifold. As the New Order politics had been based on corruption, collusion and nepotism, the cases of corruption related to the sports event did not come as a surprise. Furthermore, the following developments in Palembang helped people to concentrate on the positive aspects of the event. Thus, instead of perceiving PON 2004 as an example of corruption, the people of Palembang regard the hosting of the National Games as the starting point of Palembang's new success story. PON was the initial part of the strategy to change the city and its image and to increase the self-confidence of the residents.

It is difficult to say whether the strategy already existed prior to the event or came solely with the process. The few documents about sports events in Palembang suggest a good starting position especially due to the Jakabaring Sports Complex, which later had its name changed to Jakabaring Sport City, and a few committed actors striving for the right to host sports events. Certainly, the biggest coup after the hosting of the National Games was the co-hosting of the 2011 Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games). Although some other national and international competitions took place in South Sumatra between 2004 and 2011, the multi-sports events of the ASEAN countries put Palembang in the national and regional spotlight. Since the change of paradigm concerning the hosting of the Indonesian National Games, several Indonesian cities have organized the event, yet only Palembang has succeeded in building on the National Games by going on to host several international sports events in the following decade.

One of the main actors to initiate Palembang's success as a continuous host city is the current Governor of South Sumatra, Alex Noerdin. Having a background as a New Order bureaucrat, he profited from the decentralization process and ran for the post of regent (*bupati*) in the South Sumatran district of Musi Banyuasin. Noerdin convinced the voters by combining New Order patterns of cooperative development with populist policies concerning public welfare. He held the post of district regent between 2001 and 2008, when he was elected as the new Governor of South Sumatra. In this new position his political agenda continued to focus on welfare, especially education and health (Aspinall, 2013; Collins, 2007).

Yet, throughout his political career Noerdin demonstrated high commitment to one other issue that appears to be outside politics at first glance but can be highly political, namely the hosting of sports events. During his time as regent of the Musi Banyuasin district, Noerdin had already combined his ambitious development plans with sports events. As the district was part of the National Games project, he aimed to establish Musi Banyuasin as the new Indonesian sports hub (Collins, 2007). Later as Governor, his focus shifted to the entire province, giving priority to Palembang. Now, his target to create a sport city became more realistic as Palembang already enjoyed promising conditions with regard to sports facilities. The Jakabaring Sport City had the advantage of being spacious enough to add new venues at need. Noerdin became one of the main promoters of Jakabaring and even financed an arena for shooting.

Every time Palembang had the assurance or even the prospect of being the host city of an international sports event Noerdin received increased media attention. The events themselves, and especially the opening and closing ceremonies as well as accompanying events such as gala dinners, provided a stage for the Governor to show his commitment both to the host city (and province) and to sports, including the athletes. In addition, Noerdin followed the strategy of positioning himself as a performer and man of the people by giving entertaining speeches and even taking part in sport-related events. This behaviour is in line with the Indonesian trend of increased use of popular culture in political campaigns (Heryanto, 2010). Noerdin succeeded in establishing himself as the Indonesian sports event politician who attracted several international sports events to Palembang. Thus, he increased his popularity as well as his personal networks in the sectors of sport and business. Bringing the Southeast Asian Games to Palembang in 2011 is seen as his first major success.

The Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games)

The SEA Games bring together the eleven ASEAN countries and take place every two years. The honour of hosting rotates between the countries. This regional event started as the Southeast Asian Peninsular (SEAP) Games in 1959 and the participating countries were the initiator Thailand along with Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya and South Vietnam. The main objectives of the SEAP Games were to strengthen solidarity among the countries of the Southeast Asian Peninsula and to improve the skills of their athletes. The Games underwent some changes mainly due to political alterations in the region. In 1977, the SEAP Games Federation decided to expand and invite the countries of island Southeast Asia. Hence, the Philippines, Brunei and Indonesia became members of the Southeast Asian Games Federation, as it was now called. Indonesia was assigned to host the 1979 SEA Games and, with this event, the country began to play an active and important role in the regional event. During the New Order, all the SEA Games awarded to Indonesia (1979, 1987 and 1997) took place in Jakarta, reflecting, like the Indonesian National Games, the centralized character of the regime (Lim & Aman, 2015).

In 2011, the SEA Games came back to a politically changed Indonesia. The fall of Suharto and the subsequent democratization and decentralization process had given the country a new face. Hence, hosting the SEA Games provided the possibility to demonstrate the country's re-emergence in Southeast Asia after the turmoil of transition and to use the event as a soft power tool to strengthen Indonesia's influence in the region. The Games, however, entailed messages not only to the participating countries but also to the Indonesian population. One major change that contrasted with former international sports events in the country was to have Jakarta only as a co-host. The intention was to distribute the competitions to different provinces in order to reflect Indonesia's diversity and to bring the SEA Games close to the people in the different parts of the country (Creak, 2011). Compared to the New Order policy, this was a new strategy. Although most of the candidates were still cities located on Java the scope went beyond Jakarta.

Although the idea of having several provinces involved in the implementation of the Games did not materialize as the logistical challenge proved to be insurmountable, a compromise saw two co-hosts, one of them even from outside Java. Palembang outscored the other candidates for several reasons. First, the city could stand for the new decentralized perspective of the country providing a suitable infrastructure and appropriate venues. Palembang's location in the south of the Sumatran Island added to its advantage since it is only a one-hour flight from Jakarta, and the flights from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur are similarly short. Second, the leadership of South Sumatra demonstrated commitment and enthusiasm beyond a mere interest in the event. The Governor, Alex Noerdin, above all focused his energy on the event. As has been mentioned, his ambition to establish the province as a sports hub was not new and was therefore credible. Presumably, he also had some necessary connections to the decision-makers. The then president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono confirmed his trust in Noerdin's and Palembang's ability to be a successful host (Fathoni et al. 2011, p. 21). Third, Palembang had already built new venues for the National Games and the Jakabaring Sport City provided enough space to add more for the SEA Games. Although the schedule for the facilities was tight and some construction work delayed, the Jakabaring complex still proved a promising asset.

Palembang hosted strategically effective events of the SEA Games in order to provide memories for participants and spectators. Most important in this respect were the opening and closing ceremonies in the Srivijaya Stadium, which provided opportunities to present local cultures and costumes as well as demonstrating organizational abilities. Furthermore, the fact that the football final took place in the Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta turned out to be an advantage for Palembang as the match between Indonesia and Malaysia provoked an anti-Malaysia outburst and caused trouble for the organizers (Clark, 2013). The events in Palembang, by contrast, shed a positive light on the hosts.

The theme of the SEA Games put Palembang and not Jakarta centre stage as it made the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Srivijaya the main subject. The slogan 'Srivijaya: The Golden Peninsula' reflected Palembang's history as the centre of a historical entity. The logo, however, was less specific to a single place in Indonesia but rather represented the entire nation. The *garuda* – a mythical bird deriving from Buddhist-Hindu mythology – is the Indonesian symbol for the state's ideology *pancasila*. Thus, the logo reflected the national aspects of the event and the ambition to re-emerge as a strong player in the ASEAN region.

The Islamic Solidarity Games (ISG)

It is difficult to speak of a concrete strategy to host the Islamic Solidarity Games in Palembang. Yet, the way the event came to the city still conforms to the overall orientation of Palembang's (sports) policy. Scheduled for 2013, the international multi-sports event of the member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was planned to take place in Pekanbaru, the capital of the Sumatran province of Riau. Due to corruption scandals and construction mismanagement, however, Pekanbaru lost the right to host and the event had to be moved to another city. As a successful host of both the Indonesian National Games as well as the SEA Games, Palembang convinced the organizing committee of its ability to implement the Games in spite of time pressures. Palembang did not have to issue an official bid as this was an emergency situation for the country. Nevertheless, the city did present sufficient arguments to become the host although Jakarta had also offered to step in. These arguments matched those for the SEA Games but were enriched as a result of the successful implementation of the 2011 event.

The first iteration of the Islamic Solidarity Games took place in Saudi Arabia in 2005. The second was scheduled for Iran but never took place due to the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Thus, the event in Indonesia, although officially counted as the third, was in fact only the second iteration of the ISG. The Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation states as the first goal of the sports event to 'strengthen Islamic solidarity among youth in Member States and promote Islamic identity in the fields of sports' (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, 2016). The other listed targets further try to combine the ideas and ideals of Western competitive sports with Islamic values. Indonesia's interest in the Games focused on offering a platform for a peaceful and amicable gathering of athletes and officials from the Muslim world. Indonesian politicians continuously stressed the importance of solidarity and unity in diversity among the Muslim nations. That said, the event itself followed international standards and left decisions about interpretations of 'Islam' to the participants.

For Palembang, the Islamic Solidarity Games helped to increase its scope for publicity. In contrast to the National and the Southeast Asian Games, the ISG had a global reach with participants from about 40 countries from different continents. Hence, the South Sumatran

capital had the possibility of presenting itself to a much wider audience than only neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the event fitted into the strategy to underline the significance of Islamic values for the city and even for the country. The emphasis lay on tolerance and the connecting elements of the religion, which was manifested in a sports event that explicitly welcomed non-Muslim athletes. Hosting the Islamic Solidarity Games allowed Palembang to strengthen ties to the Muslim World, to stay in the forefront of attention and to position itself not only as a sport city but also as a seat of tolerant and open-minded Islam (Trotier, 2015).

The Asian Games

As the sports event with the largest impact on the Asian continent, the Asian Games represent a promising tool for host countries as well as host cities to pursue various goals such as gaining international attention, inculcating pride among the local population and strengthening legitimacy. For many countries in Asia to host the Asian Games is one of the highest objectives concerning event marketing. From a humble start in 1951 when the first Asian Games took place in New Delhi with 11 participating countries, the Games have developed into a major event that covers the whole continent. In terms of the numbers of participants, the Asian Games are second only to the Summer Olympics. Consequently, the hosting of such an event needs careful preparation and appropriate infrastructure and facilities. The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) conducts the bidding process and establishes the conditions for the implementation of the event.

Indonesia hosted the Asian Games in 1962 with President Sukarno as the driving force behind the event. On the one hand, the Fourth Asian Games were part of the nation-building and modernization process in Indonesia. On the other hand, they established the host country as a salient player in the Non-Aligned Movement. Both aspects contributed to a politicization of the event. As Sukarno ostentatiously used the Asian Games for his proclaimed struggle against imperialism, colonialism and capitalism, he challenged the core idea of the Olympic and Asian Games of not mixing sports with politics. He met strong resistance and consequently established a new sports event for the Non-Aligned Movement, the Games of the New Emerging Forces (Hübner, 2016). Sukarno's legacy, together with Suharto's focus on national development rather than large-scale events, led to the situation that for decades Indonesia did not express any ambition to host the Asian Games again.

However, the Yudhoyono government demonstrated renewed interest in hosting sports events starting with the Asian Cup (football) in 2007. Entering the bidding process for the Asian Games followed in 2012. Surabaya (East Java) competed against Hanoi and Abu Dhabi, losing to Hanoi in the final vote. Only when Hanoi announced its withdrawal did Indonesia get a new chance to organize the Games once more. At this point, Palembang put forward several strategies to become a co-host of the event. The main arguments in favour of Palembang were the experience of hosting events, international standard venues and the enthusiasm of the local people. Palembang welcomed delegates from the Olympic Council of Asia, the Indonesian President Joko Widodo as well as members of the Incheon organization team from the 2014 Asian Games in order to demonstrate an ability and readiness and to receive valuable advice to become a successful host of the 2018 Asian Games. Once more, Noerdin was the driving force behind Palembang's strategy to convince the Indonesian Olympic Committee as well as the Olympic Council of Asia of the city's capability to be a

co-host. He was among the officials who signed the contract between the OCA and Indonesia during the Asian Games in Incheon and he supports diverse preparatory events in Palembang.

The 2018 Asian Games will be a milestone in the history of Palembang and the entire province, reflecting a significant rise from hosting the National Games to co-hosting the most important multi-sports event of the continent – within the space of 15 years. In retrospect, the past events seem to have built on one another leading to the highlight of the Asian Games. This perspective contributes to the new pride in and positive image of Palembang and its citizens even though some of the events came rather unexpectedly to the city. The Asian Games are perceived as a chance to erase the negative image of the past and show Indonesia and the Asian guests the characteristics of Palembang as a sport city as well as an attractive tourist destination. Hence, the event is supposed to bring the narrative of Palembang's success to a new level. For Noerdin, a successful implementation of the Asian Games will underline his position as South Sumatra's strong and committed leader and provide new (political) opportunities and fame far beyond the borders of the province.

Palembang's new image

The strategy to host sports events has initiated a change in Palembang's image – especially in the eyes of the citizens of the South Sumatran capital itself. The success story of the city began with improvements associated with the hosting of the 2004 Indonesian National Games. The tangible measurements of success were new roads, hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, recreation places as well as an upgraded international airport. Above all, local investors used their capital to invest in the infrastructure with direct or indirect links to the sports event. The new infrastructure countered the image of the city as backward and boring. The building project of a new luxurious shopping mall, the Palembang Icon Mall, for instance, symbolizes the 'modernity' of the city. The idea of modernity was immanent in all the sports events in the city as sport in general is associated in a positive way with modernity. In Palembang – as in other Indonesian cities – the concept of development and an association with Western modernity have a great appeal. Consequently, to emulate the Western way to modernity through sports events receives the support of the local population.

Further icons of modernity are the sports venues, especially the stadiums emphasizing size, engineering and architectural achievement as well as capacity for spectators (Creak, 2014). In Palembang, it is not a single stadium but rather the entire Jakabaring Sport City that manifests the idea of modernity. The venues meet international standards and therefore symbolize Palembang's rise to the status of a sport city comparable with other Asian cities that have hosted international sports events such as Guangzhou (China) or Incheon (South Korea). This new position entails a clear demarcation from other Indonesian cities with venues of 'mere' Indonesian standards. In addition, the area of Jakabaring serves as a tourist attraction even at times when no events are taking place. As a place of leisure activities, especially for young people and families, Jakabaring offers a new option to spend time and counters the former image of Palembang as boring and lacking space and opportunity for leisure activities.

The successful implementation of several sports events has also contributed to weakening the perception of Palembang as a chaotic city. In spite of some shortcomings in terms of planning and the dubious case of the athletes' village² on the Jakabaring sports complex site, the events themselves went smoothly. There was even a clear contrast between

competitions in Palembang and Jakarta during the SEA Games, underlining Palembang's ability to create an atmosphere of friendship and sportsmanship. In Jakarta, on the other hand, the football matches between Indonesia and Malaysia got partly out of control, with an outburst of strong anti-Malaysia sentiment. The people in Palembang could, thus, 'out-source' the problems and negative sides of the event to Jakarta and celebrate the event in their city as a success. Therefore, the peaceful celebration of the diverse games in Palembang also helped to diminish the perception of Palembang and its inhabitants as dangerous and criminal even though this stereotype is difficult to overcome in a short period of time and will probably remain, at least for certain parts of the city. The upcoming Asian Games, however, embody the greatest chance yet for the city to create a new image as a sport city and present it to a pan-Asian audience.

Although not directly linked to sports events, Palembang has demonstrated the ambition to change its image as a dirty and ugly city. In 1998 the city government had already proposed a motto for the city related to the goal of becoming a clean and modern place. The motto is the abbreviation BARI, composed of the Indonesian words clean, peaceful, orderly and beautiful. The term in itself also has specific meaning for Palembang as *bari* or *bahari* means 'ancient' as well as 'sea' (Taal, 2003, p. 133). The initiators of the motto could therefore link BARI to the ancient history of Palembang and to the significant role that water plays for the city. In addition, the four adjectives symbolized the objectives not only to change the city and its image but also to embody ideas about a modern and successful city. The initiative has succeeded in the longer term with Palembang winning the nationwide competition for the cleanest city for three years in a row (from 2007 to 2010). The formerly 'dirty' and 'polluted' city was now considered to be the cleanest in the whole of Indonesia.

One important aspect of Palembang's success story and specifically its changed image is the idea of leadership and commitment. As already mentioned, the Governor of South Sumatra, Alex Noerdin, has played a significant role in the preparation and implementation of the sports events in the province throughout his time in office. In the case of Palembang, leadership entails acting for the good of the city and identifying with *wong kito* ('our people' in the Palembang dialect), meaning the place and the people. Noerdin, for instance, substantiates his claim to leadership with his belonging to the place as a 'son of the soil' (*putrah daerah*) as he was born in Palembang. Furthermore, by concentrating on social welfare and education he demonstrates being close to the voters as well as to local entrepreneurs on whom he can count for development projects. Noerdin's aim of establishing Palembang as a sport city combines his commitment to the citizens with a commitment to investors.

In order to change a negative image it is important to create new images to be associated with a place and its people. The hosting of sports events provides a platform to promote and strengthen these new facets, for example with the help of the logo, motto or mascot as well as the opening and closing ceremonies. In the case of the 2011 SEA Games, the motto 'Srivijaya: The Golden Peninsula' supported Palembang's claim of a glorious past. Although the archaeological evidence to prove the nature of Srivijaya is scarce and there are still controversies among historians, the polity has served Indonesian nationalists as a showcase of Indonesia's great history. Both presidents, Sukarno and Suharto, propagated Srivijaya as Indonesia's golden age, an example of greatness, wealth and tolerance. This positive connotation and identification of Palembang with the prosperous Buddhist kingdom continued after the end of the New Order when regional identity received increased significance. The omnipresence of the polity in the city as a name-giver and the link between Srivijaya and

sport as Palembang's new asset of pride and identity are parts of the change of image. In addition, the motto of Srivijaya as the golden peninsula links Palembang's past with the history of the SEA Games. The Thai founders of the predecessor event, the Southeast Asian Peninsular Games, referred to it as the 'Golden Peninsula Games'. Therefore, the motto was successful in connecting Palembang to national and regional history as well as to the background of the Southeast Asian Games themselves.

The logos of the events taking place exclusively in Palembang all include the city's icon, the Ampera Bridge (Figure 1 and 2). The integration of the bridge suggests a high recognition value and supports the association of Palembang, its famous landmark and sports events. The Ampera Bridge also serves as the logo for tourist brochures and as a popular photo scene. Built in 1965, the bridge crosses the Musi River, connecting the northern and southern parts of the city. The name of the bridge is an acronym and stands for the 'message of the suffering of the people', reminding of the past struggles of Palembang's residents. Yet, more



Figure 1.  Logo of the Islamic Solidarity Games. <http://inaisgoc2013.blogspot.de/>.



Figure 2.  Logo of the ASEAN University Games. <http://southeastasiansports.blogspot.de/2014/11/17th-asean-university-games-aug-2014.html>.

important than the meaning of the name is the recognizable feature of the Ampera Bridge and its role as Palembang's iconic landmark.

The logos of the Islamic Solidarity Games and the ASEAN University Games also serve as examples as they both incorporate the Ampera Bridge in a central position. In the first logo the icon is the one object associated with the host. The second logo combines the stylized bridge with the shape of a boat hull, underlining the importance of water in Palembang history.

The logo of the Islamic Solidarity Games highlights another aspect of Palembang's identity. The crescents framing the Ampera Bridge not only stand for the character of the event as a gathering of athletes from the Muslim world but they also embody the self-perception of the Muslim population that the city is a place of Islamic practice, worship and learning. As the idea of the city as a centre of Islamic teaching goes back to the time of the sultanate, this has a long tradition. The improvement of Palembang's image thus also includes its representation as a place of devout but tolerant Muslims. The Islamic Solidarity Games gave an opportunity to highlight Palembang as a representative of Indonesian Islam standing for a long tradition of Islam Nusantara – the way of Islamic practice in the archipelago. The sports event as a festival of peace, brotherhood and sportsmanship transmitted a positive image of the religion and the way the people united during the event. One aspect of Islam Nusantara is the importance of religious tolerance as people with different faiths have a long tradition of interaction. In Indonesia, Islam is only one of six recognized religions and not the state religion.³ The Islamic Solidarity Games reflected this tolerance as participation was not limited to athletes of Muslim faith but rather embraced everyone from the participating countries.

Palembang has several famous sights related to Islam. The main mosque in the city centre, the Masjid Agung Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I, for instance, is a central landmark of the city. In addition, Palembang has a unique site with the biggest carved Qur'an in the world. At the end of 2015, the building process for a new mosque had started, providing a link between Palembang's images of sport city and place of Islamic worship. The new mosque with the name Great Srivijaya Jakabaring Mosque (*Masjid Raya Sriwijaya Jakabaring*) is built in the area of the Jakabaring Sport City and shall outshine all other Indonesian and even other Southeast Asian mosques in size and grandeur. The new mosque is an additional facet of the pride of Palembang's Muslims. As religion plays an important role in Indonesia, an image of a city that values faith is very promising.

The ISG fostered another characteristic of Palembang's identity with regard to hosting events. The Games came to Palembang at short notice and the city had a very tight schedule. Nevertheless, the organization team was able to manage the preparations in time. Therefore, the Governor and other officials described Palembang as 'always ready' for any kind of event. When a host city shows signs of doubt as to whether it is able to organize an event, Palembang is willing and able to take over. For example, during the preparations for the 2017 SEA Games, the host city Kuala Lumpur signalled for a brief moment that it might not be capable of hosting the event. Immediately, several Indonesian newspapers reported on messages from Palembang that it was eager and ready to step in. This characteristic of 'always being ready' contributed to Palembang's success in becoming the co-host of the Asian Games, emphasizing its image of organizational ability and efficiency.

During the implementation of international sports events in Palembang, the attention of the media has been assured. Yet, in order to strengthen a new image a continuous

portrayal of the positive assets of the city is crucial. Therefore, the South Sumatran branch of the Indonesian Olympic Council (KONI SumSel) issues a monthly sport magazine to emphasise Palembang's image as a sport city. Since the first issue was published in 2013, this magazine, named SPORTNEWS, has provided information and photos of sports events, background stories about sport, athletes' biographies and advice concerning lifestyle and health for people in South Sumatra. This glossy magazine underlines the significance of sport in Palembang and the entire province and is also an advertisement to the Indonesian audience in general. In times of international events in Palembang, the magazine even contains articles in English in order to reach the larger audience of international guests. Although the English version has passages in rather poor English, its mere existence is a sign of the ambitious positioning of the KONI Sumsel. The magazine reflects the positive association of sport and modernity in the Indonesian context. Furthermore, SPORTNEWS is also a symbol of the new middle class and helps to refute the image of the people of Palembang as backward and unmodern.

All the diverse facets of the image change lead to a new perception of Palembang's residents concerning their own city. Just as they had formerly internalized that their city was dirty, ugly, chaotic and dangerous, they have gradually changed their opinion seeing the positive developments in the city and the new opportunities to identify with the place and to be proud of its new image. The regular hosting of sports events creates enthusiasm, especially among young people. The committed residents are a key factor in turning a sports competition into an 'urban event' (Koller, 2008, p. 7) by becoming volunteers, vendors of merchandise and ambassadors of their local culture.

Conclusion

Hosting sports events has a great appeal for city governments in emerging economies. The example of Palembang shows how a city formerly stigmatized with a negative image can actively gain a national and international reputation as a sports event destination. The sports events taking place at the Jakabaring Sport City underline the different facets of the Palembang success story: the new venues, the changes in the infrastructure, the memory of the famous Srivijaya kingdom, the salient role of Islam but also the importance of religious tolerance, the feeling of unity among the people of Palembang as *wong kito*, the commitment of the leadership, the growing experience of event management and, therefore, an increasing confidence as a city that is always ready to host events.

This image change has been a target as well as a part of Palembang's promotion strategy. On the one hand, image improvement was essential in order to secure a basis for successful city marketing. On the other hand, the transformation from an ugly, dangerous and boring city to an attractive sports event destination is a crucial asset of the marketing strategy. However, the strengthening of Palembang's image has not ended yet. Rather it is a continuous process with the co-hosting of the Asian Games as the next promising milestone.

The precondition for the development of city marketing strategies for Palembang was the decentralization process in Indonesia empowering the regions. Thus, sports events could take place outside Jakarta, and Palembang could develop into a sports event destination. The attractiveness of sports events as a promotional tool stands in line with a global trend that has witnessed an increase in the hosting of sports events in emerging economies.

Furthermore, as cities beyond the capitals strive to gain greater attractiveness, one possible tool to reach this objective is to bid for international sports events.

In Indonesia, except for Jakarta – in its role as a capital city – no city had previously developed a long-term strategy to position itself through the hosting of sports events. The decision-makers in Palembang and South Sumatra, especially Alex Noerdin, perceived this niche as a chance to gain advantages for the city and the province. Their targets included attracting investors, tourists and potential residents as well as improving the overall image of Palembang and making the city internationally known. Gaining the right to co-host the 2018 Asian Games demonstrates that the process of marketing has not ended yet. Rather, the outcome of the event will be of great importance for Palembang and its marketing strategy and also for the entire country. The event will call for further investigation with regard to comparison with other host cities and countries of the Asian Games as well as of other events of comparable scale.

Notes

1. There is a wide range of publications on the Fourth Asian Games and the Games of the New Emerging Forces.
2. For more details about the scandal see Creak (2011).
3. This is the principle of the state ideology *pancasila*. The six recognized religions are Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Confucianism.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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