

Indonesian Public Diplomacy In Building The Country's Image Through AIYEP Program 2023-2024

Diplomasi Publik Indonesia Dalam Membangun Citra Negara Melalui Program AIYEP 2023-2024

Haifa Nabila^{a*}, Widiandaru Wiryawan^b, Risalatu Mirajiah^c, Agung Prija Utama^d
Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Bisnis Universitas Wanita Internasional, Bandung^{a,b,c,d}
^{a*}haifaanabila7@gmail.com

Abstract

This study discusses Indonesia's public diplomacy in building a positive image of the country through the implementation of the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program (AIYEP) 2023–2024. In the context of post-pandemic globalization, public diplomacy has become a strategic instrument in communicating the values, identity, and character of the nation to the international community. The AIYEP program was analyzed using an instrumental case study qualitative approach with reference to constructivism (Wendt), nation branding (Dinnie), and public diplomacy (Cull) theories. The results of the study show that AIYEP contributes significantly to shaping positive perceptions of Indonesia through cross-cultural social interactions, the involvement of youth as informal ambassadors, and authentic narratives conveyed through direct experiences. The Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemenpora RI) plays an important role in designing cultural communication strategies, adapting post-pandemic policies, and maintaining the sustainability of diplomacy through alumni networks. This program also demonstrates the implementation of universal values such as gender equality, mutual cooperation, and social inclusion. AIYEP has proven to be a model of participatory public diplomacy that strengthens bilateral relations between Indonesia and Australia and builds Indonesia's image as an inclusive, progressive, and adaptive country in the eyes of the world.

Keywords: *AIYEP, Public Diplomacy, Indonesia-Australia, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Nation branding.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas mengenai diplomasi publik Indonesia dalam membangun citra positif negara melalui implementasi Program Pertukaran Pemuda Australia-Indonesia (*Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program* atau AIYEP) 2023–2024. Dalam konteks globalisasi pascapandemi, diplomasi publik telah menjadi instrumen strategis untuk mengomunikasikan nilai-nilai, identitas, dan karakter bangsa kepada masyarakat internasional. Program AIYEP dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif studi kasus instrumental dengan merujuk pada teori konstruktivisme (Wendt), *nation branding* (Dinnie), dan diplomasi publik (Cull). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa AIYEP berkontribusi secara signifikan dalam membentuk persepsi positif terhadap Indonesia melalui interaksi sosial lintas budaya, keterlibatan pemuda sebagai duta informal, serta narasi autentik yang disampaikan melalui pengalaman langsung. Kementerian Pemuda dan Olahraga Republik Indonesia (Kemenpora RI) memainkan peran penting dalam merancang strategi komunikasi budaya, mengadaptasi kebijakan pascapandemi, dan menjaga keberlanjutan diplomasi melalui jaringan alumni. Program ini juga menunjukkan implementasi nilai-nilai universal seperti kesetaraan gender, gotong royong, dan inklusi sosial. AIYEP terbukti menjadi model diplomasi publik partisipatif yang memperkuat hubungan bilateral antara Indonesia dan Australia, sekaligus membangun citra Indonesia sebagai negara yang inklusif, progresif, dan adaptif di mata dunia.

Kata Kunci: *AIYEP, Diplomasi Publik, Indonesia-Australia, Kementerian Pemuda dan Olahraga (Kemenpora), Nation Branding.*

1. Introduction

The Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program (AIYEP) has been running since 1982 and is one of the longest-running youth exchange programs between the two countries. This exchange program connects young people from Australia and Indonesia aged 21-25 years. Delegates participate in intercultural skills development

and international networking programs through internships, language training, workshops, and various cultural activities (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). The program is managed by the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII) with the support of the Australian government and through a partnership between the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Indonesia and the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT(Kemenpora, 2023)).

Since its inception in 1982, relations between Indonesia and Australia have not always been smooth and have often experienced ups and downs. Amidst various dynamics and issues that have arisen, the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program (AIYEP) has continued to be implemented consistently and has received full support from both countries. The continuity of this program demonstrates a strong commitment to building better relations through youth diplomacy. Not only does AIYEP strengthen cooperation, but it also has a positive impact, such as creating a better image for each country and strengthening mutually beneficial diplomacy.

AIYEP offers an approach that is not only symbolic but also very practical and tangible for its participants. Through this program, Indonesian and Australian youth not only live together but also work together on community projects and perform in cultural shows. These activities are not merely a forum for introducing Indonesian culture, but also a way to convey the values of the Indonesian people. From this direct experience, Indonesia has a great opportunity to leave a positive impression on the Australian people, so that AIYEP can be seen as a form of public diplomacy to build the nation's image (Cull, 2009).

This research was born out of the researcher's curiosity about how the AIYEP program actually plays a role in shaping a positive image of Indonesia in the eyes of the Australian public, especially amid the importance of public diplomacy in the era of globalization and the post-pandemic world. Behind every exchange activity, there is a great hope that Indonesia's friendly, inclusive, and collaborative image can be conveyed in a tangible way. This positive image is not only a source of national pride but also an important asset for strengthening mutually beneficial bilateral relations. With a more comprehensive understanding, it is hoped that diplomacy such as AIYEP can continue to be a bridge that strengthens the two countries.

The 2023–2024 period will be a crucial time to see the extent to which AIYEP is able to adapt to the various changes that have occurred after the pandemic, both socially and politically. During this transition period, the program is not only required to remain relevant, but also responsive to the new direction of both countries' foreign policies. Australia and Indonesia are focused on sustainable development, which is an important context in shaping the course of the program. Through evaluation during this period, we can understand how AIYEP continues to evolve and remain a strong bridge in bilateral relations (Nurshabrina, 2024).

2. literature review

Constructivism

Constructivism offers a different perspective compared to conventional approaches such as realism and liberalism in international relations studies. Wendt (1999) asserts that social structures, ideas, norms, and cultural practices are important elements in shaping state behavior, where state identity is not something fixed but is formed through a process of social interaction between global actors. The

key idea that "anarchy is what states make of it" shows that international relations are not always determined solely by national interests, but can also be constructed by a spirit of collaboration and mutual understanding.

Zehfuss (2002) expands on this idea by asserting that the reality of international politics is also shaped by everyday social actions, including those of non-state actors such as youth and non-governmental organizations. As for the relevance of this theory to this study, constructivism offers a conceptual framework for understanding how AIYEP 2023–2024 not only facilitates youth exchange but is also actively involved in the process of constructing Indonesia's national identity in the eyes of the world. In other words, social interactions among youth become a vehicle for building a new narrative about Indonesia as an inclusive, open, and progressive country in the eyes of international partners such as Australia.

Nation Branding

Nation branding is a strategic approach to shaping a country's image in the minds of the international community through the principles of communication, marketing, and public relations. Dinnie (2015) explains that countries, like commercial products, can be strategically positioned in the global market through positive and consistent narratives—covering the tourism sector, cultural exports, public diplomacy, and national achievements in technology, sports, and education. A strong national image can generate geopolitical and economic benefits, making nation branding an important instrument in contemporary foreign policy.

Unlike propaganda, nation branding emphasizes authenticity and consistency of messages through memorable real experiences for foreigners. Dinnie (2015) also places youth as important actors in this strategy—the younger generation is considered more flexible, easily accepted, and capable of forming strong emotional bonds in cultural diplomacy. In the context of youth exchange, participants act as informal brand ambassadors who introduce the country's image through direct social interaction.

Its relevance to this study lies in how the Ministry of Youth and Sports, through AIYEP 2023–2024, acts as an actor that builds a positive image of Indonesia by sending young people as representatives of the nation's values and character. This program is not merely a cultural activity, but a national communication strategy that strengthens Indonesia's position in bilateral relations with Australia (Dinnie, 2015).

Public Diplomacy

Cull (2009) views public diplomacy as an integral part of soft power—the ability of a country to influence the international community through the appeal of its values, culture, and persuasive communication without coercion. According to him, the success of public diplomacy does not happen overnight, but rather through a long-term process that requires consistency, empathy, and careful communication strategies.

Cull divides public diplomacy into five complementary dimensions. First, listening, which is the state's effort to understand the perceptions of foreign communities before conveying its message. Second, advocacy, which is communicating foreign values and policies in a persuasive but authentic manner. Third, cultural diplomacy, which uses culture as a medium to build emotional closeness across nations. Fourth, exchange diplomacy, which involves exchanges

between individuals that create deep and lasting personal relationships. Fifth, international broadcasting, which is the use of media to reach a wide international audience while maintaining transparency and integrity.

These five dimensions are integrated into a holistic and data-driven integrated public diplomacy approach. Its relevance to AIYEP 2023–2024 is very clear. This program directly reflects the dimensions of exchange diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, in which youth participants act as bridges of understanding between nations as well as agents who shape Indonesia's image as inclusive, progressive, and open in the eyes of the Australian public (Cull, 2009).

3. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with an instrumental case study design, as proposed by Creswell (2017), which allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific case to understand broader phenomena. The 2023–2024 AIYEP program was used as a representative case to examine the public diplomacy and nation branding practices carried out by the Indonesian government, including how the program was designed, the communication strategies applied, and its impact on international public perception.

The data sources consisted of primary data in the form of semi-structured interviews with officials from the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports, AIYEP alumni and participants, the organizing committee, and partners from Australia; and secondary data in the form of official documents, activity reports, mass media articles, and official social media posts related to the implementation of the program. Data collection was conducted using three complementary techniques, namely literature review, semi-structured interviews, and documentation study (Creswell, 2017).

Table 1. Research Data Set

No.	Theme	Data Details	Data Collection Technique	Data Source
1.	AIYEP's contribution to building a positive image of Indonesia	a) Testimonials from AIYEP participants b) Activity documentation (photos, videos, reports) c) Media publications (articles, news)	a) Semi-structured interviews b) Documentation studies	a) AIYEP alumni b) AIYEP Committee c) Australian & Indonesian media
2.	Adaptation of policies in both countries after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2023-2024	a) Latest bilateral policy documents b) Official AIYEP Report 2023-2024 c) Post-COVID-19 Implementation Change Protocol	a) Interview b) Literature review c) Document analysis	a) Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Indonesia b) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia c) AIYEP Archives
3.	Cross-Actor Cooperation in Public Diplomacy in the AIYEP program	a) List of actors involved (Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Foreign	a) Literature review b) Interviews (ministry officials, NGOs, Diaspora) c) Document analysis	a) Ministry of Youth and Sports b) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia

<p>Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Indonesian Diaspora)</p> <p>b) Forms of cooperation (MoU, memorandum of understanding)</p> <p>c) Activity documentation (photos, video, annual reports)</p> <p>d) Supporting and hindering factors for cooperation (policy, bureaucracy, resources, vision gaps)</p>	<p>c) Partner organizations</p> <p>d) AIYEP Activity Report</p> <p>e) Digital or printed archives (official government website, partner institution catalog)</p>
---	--

Source: Researcher's compilation

Data analysis was conducted in stages based on Creswell (2017), including data organization, comprehensive reading, coding, theme grouping, and interpretation of meaning. This process was not merely descriptive, but also reflective, linking field findings with the theoretical framework used to understand the strategic role of AIYEP as an instrument of Indonesian public diplomacy in a comprehensive and in-depth manner.

4. Result and Discussion

AIYEP's Contribution to Building a Positive Image of Indonesia

Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program

The Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program (AIYEP) was first launched in 1982 as a result of cooperation between the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemenpora RI) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII) (Kedutaan Besar Australia-Indonesia, 2023). This program was born amid the dynamics of bilateral relations, which often experienced ups and downs due to differences in political interests and foreign policy (Hanson, 2010). From the outset, AIYEP was designed to strengthen people-to-people relations in order to support long-term stability outside of official diplomatic channels, while reducing misunderstandings and stereotypes that often arise at the community level (Haniko, 2024). The establishment of AIYEP in the 1980s was also motivated by the need for both countries to build a deeper cross-cultural understanding, given that Indonesia-Australia relations at that time were often influenced by political and economic issues (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2018).

AIYEP targets young people aged 21–25 from both countries to live, work, and interact directly with host communities (Australian Embassy in Indonesia, 2022). The program structure includes two main phases—the urban phase and the rural phase—which ensure that participants not only get to know urban life, but also understand the local wisdom of rural communities as a unique cultural treasure of each country (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). In each

phase, participants engage in professional internships, community projects, skills workshops, and cultural performances. This pattern ensures that the exchange is not superficial, but touches on the deeper social and cultural layers of the two countries' societies (Nurshabrina, 2024).

AIYEP 2023 officially began virtually on October 2, 2023, and was officially opened by the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports on November 2, 2023, running until January 5, 2024 (Kemenpora, 2023). This program takes a hybrid approach that includes virtual sessions, a one-month phase in Canberra, Australia, and a phase in Belitung. Activities include webinars, workshops, Global Competence Certification (GCC), mentoring by experts, and professional internship programs (Kemenpora, 2025). The opening ceremony was held via Zoom and attended by the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Penny Williams, who emphasized her hope that this program would promote the sustainability of relations between the two countries in the fields of education, culture, social affairs, and economics (Kemenpora, 2025). The online sessions were held every Monday throughout October 2023, discussing GCC modules covering topics such as differences in customs and values between Indonesia and Australia, how to overcome stereotypes, and the DIVE method—Description, Interpretation, Verification, and Evaluation (Kemenpora, 2025).

Meanwhile, AIYEP 2024 officially began virtually on September 26, 2024, with pre-departure training for the Indonesian delegation opened by the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports on October 28, 2024, and running until January 9, 2025 (Kemenpora, 2023). This year's Indonesian phase is located in Mataram, West Nusa Tenggara. This program not only involves 21 delegates from each country, but also alumni and experts in the fields of diplomacy, academia, and business (Kemenpora, 2025). The presence of alumni provides a real perspective on the long-term impact of the program, while the involvement of experts enriches participants' insights into bilateral relations and opportunities for cross-border cooperation (Nurshabrina, 2024). This collaboration makes AIYEP not just a forum for cultural exchange, but a multidimensional learning space that supports the formation of professional networks and strengthens the capacity of the younger generation as actors of cultural diplomacy (Haniko, 2024).

From Wendt (1999) constructivist perspective, the birth of AIYEP reflects the efforts of both countries to reconstruct their identities and bilateral relations through intensive social interaction. National identity is not permanent, but is formed through social practices, norms, and ideas that are agreed upon intersubjectively (Wendt, 1999). By involving young people in activities such as living with host families, this program creates shared meaning that helps shape positive perceptions of Indonesia in the eyes of foreign audiences (Adler, 2013). Hopf (1998) also adds that the representation of national identity through culture and values has a strong political dimension, so that every activity in AIYEP is essentially symbolic communication that carries diplomatic messages. Thus, AIYEP is not merely a cultural exchange program, but a vital instrument for Indonesia to build its positive image through cross-cultural social interaction and the strengthening of a sustainable alumni network (Nurshabrina & Utomo, 2024).

How AIYEP Builds Indonesia's Positive Image

AIYEP has become an important tool in shaping a positive image of Indonesia because it is able to change the limited perceptions of Australian participants—who

often only know Bali or stereotypes about traffic jams and pollution—into a more complex and positive understanding (Putri, 2021). After interacting directly, participants witnessed the social solidarity, cultural diversity, and philosophy of life of the Indonesian people firsthand ((Haniko, 2024). According to Zehfuss's constructivism (2002), this change in perception is shaped through intersubjective experiences, not just one-way information from the government. In line with this, Dinnie (2015) emphasizes that effective nation branding requires authentic experiences, not just formal promotional campaigns, making AIYEP an ideal medium for building Indonesia's image organically and sustainably.

One of the main mechanisms for image formation is the direct experience of Australian participants in the local culture. Each year, participants live with host families in two different regions during the city and village phases, participating in arts training, traditional ceremonies, and community festivals (Kemenpora, 2025). Within the framework of constructivism, these experiences shape long-lasting perceptions of precisely because they are based on deep personal interactions, rather than one-way information (Wendt, 1999). Beyond culture, community project activities—such as supporting children's education programs, local entrepreneurship training, and environmental programs—provided Australian participants with the opportunity to witness firsthand the value of mutual cooperation inherent in Indonesian society (Putri, 2021). These values reinforce the impression that Indonesia is not only a country with a rich culture, but also a society that upholds togetherness and social care (Nurshabrina, 2024).

The 2023–2024 program also shows how AIYEP adapts to the needs of the modern youth generation through skills-based activities, such as leadership training, internships at social institutions, and collaboration with local communities (Kemenpora, 2023). Through this experience, Australian participants not only got to know Indonesian culture, but also saw the real contributions of Indonesia's young generation to community development (Haniko, 2024). This reinforces the image that Indonesia is a proactive and dynamic country in facing global challenges. In the context of nation branding, Dinnie (2015) emphasizes that young people involved in cultural exchanges act as informal brand ambassadors who convey symbolic messages about national identity through direct social interaction.

For Indonesian participants, the experience of living in an Australian city further strengthens their role as cultural ambassadors. They are involved in internships at social organizations, leadership training, and local community activities, while also introducing Indonesia through art, cuisine, and multicultural discussions. Within the framework of constructivism, this role is not merely a formal representation, but part of the process of forming a shared identity that strengthens relations between the two countries (Wendt, 1999). This experience also enhances the capacity of Indonesian alumni to explain national values to foreign audiences, lead cross-cultural discussions, and work in multinational teams (Kemenpora RI, 2023b). Cull (2009) refers to this process as exchange diplomacy—the most authentic form of public diplomacy because it is built on empathetic and lasting interpersonal relationships.

The testimonies of alumni are clear evidence of the impact of this program. Arif, one of the alumni, said that the most memorable experience was the internship phase because it allowed him to interact directly with the Australian community. This is in line with (Wendt, 1999) constructivism, in which national identity is constructed through real experiences and interactions between individuals, not solely through

political narratives. Adler (2013) adds that the meaning formed from such interactions is intersubjective and has much stronger staying power than messages conveyed unilaterally. Furthermore, Indonesian alumni who excel in this program also gain access to scholarships in Australia and funding for social projects carried out in Indonesia—concrete benefits that reinforce the strategic value of AIYEP for human resource development (Kemenpora, 2025).

The international alumni network that has been formed is a strategic extension of Indonesia's positive image. Australian alumni who have participated in AIYEP actively share their positive experiences through social media, public forums, and even engage in diplomacy and foreign policy related to Indonesia (Nurshabrina, 2024). In the context of Cull (2009) public diplomacy, the digital narratives produced by these alumni can be seen as a form of new international broadcasting—messages that are considered authentic and personal, thus having a wider impact than conventional media. Because this perception is formed through real experiences, its impact is much stronger than formal promotional campaigns (Dinnie, 2015). The sustainability of this network ensures that the positive effects of AIYEP are not only felt during the program, but also in the long term as a lively and active channel of informal diplomacy (Nurshabrina, 2024).

Thus, AIYEP is not merely a forum for cultural exchange, but a strategic platform where national values and norms are jointly constructed through cultural dialogue, social recognition, and deeply rooted practices of non-formal diplomacy (Zehfuss, 2002). In line with Hopf (1998) view, participation in cultural exchange programs is a form of symbolic communication that carries political and ideological messages—and in this case, Indonesia actively uses AIYEP to present itself as an inclusive, tolerant, progressive, and open country towards international cooperation. This is clear evidence that Indonesia's positive image is built not through rhetoric, but through a living and sustainable collective experience (Wendt, 1999).

Implementation of the AIYEP Nation Branding Strategy 2023–2024

The Role of the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports in the Nation Branding Strategy

The Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports plays a major role in organizing AIYEP as part of Indonesia's public diplomacy. The Ministry's involvement has been ongoing since 1982, when the program was launched in collaboration with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Australia-Indonesia Institute (AII) (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). This program was created in response to the need for both countries to strengthen people-to-people relations, especially at a time when bilateral relations were often influenced by differences in political interests and economic dynamics (Hanson, 2010). The Indonesian government sees AIYEP as a strategic means of introducing culture, values, and national identity through direct interaction between young people (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2018).

The initial step taken by the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports was to develop selection criteria for participants so that each Indonesian delegation could reflect ethnic, cultural, and regional diversity, including from provinces that are less exposed internationally (Kemenpora, 2025). The Ministry of Youth and Sports also provides intensive training to participants before departure, covering cultural knowledge, leadership, cross-cultural communication, and youth diplomacy ethics

(Kemenpora, 2024). In organizing activities, Kemenpora RI collaborates with local communities, educational institutions, and social organizations to design agendas that not only showcase culture but also involve participants in real activities such as local economic empowerment and environmental management (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). By being directly involved in community issues, participants can showcase the values of mutual cooperation and social awareness as part of Indonesia's image (Putri, 2021).

In addition, the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports actively oversees the documentation and publication of AIYEP activities through official channels and social media, in order to reinforce positive narratives about Indonesia to international audiences (Kemenpora, 2023). Kemenpora RI also plays a role in maintaining the AIYEP alumni network by encouraging their involvement in cultural promotion activities, international forums, and joint social projects that strengthen long-term bilateral relations (Haniko, 2024). Through this strategy, Kemenpora RI not only ensures the technical success of the program, but also affirms Indonesia as a cultured, caring country that is actively building international relations based on the younger generation (Nurshabrina, 2024).

The Role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Nation Branding Strategy

In addition to the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kemlu RI) plays a strategic role in supporting AIYEP as a nation branding instrument. Through the Directorate of Pacific and Oceania, Kemlu RI positions AIYEP not only as a cultural exchange program but also as an instrument of public diplomacy that strengthens Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the Australian people. AIYEP has even been part of the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) since 2018 and is listed in the CSP 2025-2029 Plan of Action as the "backbone" of people-to-people relations between the two countries ((Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2018).

Operationally, the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra, together with the Consulates General in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, and Darwin, facilitate meetings between participants and heads of representatives, arrange official visit agendas, and ensure that participants have direct access to interact with local communities. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also involved in briefing participants before they depart for Australia, covering insights into Indonesia's foreign policy, understanding bilateral relations, and cross-cultural communication strategies (Dinnie, 2015). This involvement is in line with Indonesia's foreign policy priorities in the Indo-Pacific region, where Australia occupies an important position as a strategic partner in maintaining regional stability (Nurshabrina, 2024).

From a nation branding perspective, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs utilizes AIYEP to consistently convey a positive narrative about Indonesia—values such as cultural diversity, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and openness are projected through participants' direct interactions with the Australian community (Dinnie, 2015). The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also utilizes AIYEP to build long-term networks through alumni who have careers in strategic sectors in both countries, creating a multiplier effect that expands Indonesia's positive influence in the fields of education, trade, and research (Haniko, 2024). The role of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflects the implementation of the nation branding strategy as stated by Dinnie (2015), in which the success of building a country's image is determined by

the consistency of messages, the authenticity of experiences, and the involvement of various state actors.

Policy Adaptation and Post-Pandemic Strategy Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point that prompted AIYEP to make significant strategic adjustments. This is clearly reflected in the differences between the 2018 AIYEP MoU and the 2022 MoU. The 2018 MoU relied on a traditional approach based on eight weeks of full face-to-face interaction, with a focus on homestay activities, orientation, and field work that reflected the classic values of public diplomacy Hanson (2010). In contrast, the 2022 MoU introduces flexibility in online, offline, or hybrid implementation, while expanding the scope of activities to include internships, cultural collaboration, and education that are more relevant to the capacity development needs of youth in an increasingly competitive global context (Kemenpora, 2025).

Another notable change in the 2022 MoU is the strengthening of health and ethical participation aspects. Participants are now required to undergo physical and psychological health checks before departure, including submitting information related to dietary requirements and medical conditions to the destination country 30 days in advance (Kemenpora, 2025). In addition, the 2022 MoU introduces a ban on participants engaging in sponsorship or advertising activities during the program, in order to maintain the purity of AIYEP as a representation of culture, not a commercial event (Dinnie, 2015). The evaluation mechanism has also changed from every three years to a more flexible regular evaluation, so that the program can respond more quickly to changes in the field (Nurshabrina, 2024).

In Dinnie (2015) perspective, this policy adaptation falls under the concept of strategic coordination, in which countries consciously regulate narratives, policies, and cross-cultural experiences to shape positive perceptions. When Indonesia and Australia adjusted the implementation of AIYEP to be more adaptive, it was a strategic response to maintain continuity in intercultural communication amid a global crisis (Wendt, 1999). However, a number of challenges remain post-pandemic. Restoring the intensity of people-to-people interactions to pre-COVID-19 levels is a top priority, given that online methods are considered less effective in building cross-cultural emotional closeness (Haniko, 2024). The sustainability of the program also depends heavily on funding support from Australia's DFAT through AII, as well as strategic cross-agency coordination between the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports to maintain the quality and continuity of the program (Nurshabrina, 2024).

The Role of Participants as Indonesian Youth Ambassadors

AIYEP participants are not just young people participating in a cultural exchange program, but representatives of Indonesia's younger generation who carry the nation's identity and values to the international stage. They act as informal ambassadors who convey stories, experiences, and cultural symbols that shape positive impressions of Indonesia (Putri, 2021). From the early stages, participants are prepared to understand this role through cross-cultural communication training, enabling them to explain Indonesian culture naturally in various situations, from formal performances to casual conversations with host families (Kemenpora, 2023).

The participants' contributions were evident in the formal activities of AIYEP. On November 6, 2023, the Indonesian delegation performed the Saman Dance as the first cultural performance since the offline phase began. Then on November 17, 2023, they performed Medley Nusantara at Lennox Park in front of the Australia Indonesia Youth Association ACT (AIYA ACT) and all host families (Kemenpora, 2023). Within the framework of nation branding (Dinnie, 2015), cultural ambassadors such as AIYEP participants play a crucial role as credible messengers because they speak from real-life experiences rather than formal scripts. Participants also utilize social media to document activities and share authentic experiences, creating a digital narrative whose reach extends beyond the AIYEP community. Cull (2009) refers to such content as an effective form of new international broadcasting because it feels personal and is trusted by the audience.

In addition to cultural promotion, participants actively raise positive global issues such as gender equality, environmental awareness, and social inclusion, so that Indonesia's image is not only perceived as a country rich in traditional culture, but also as a nation that is adaptive and in harmony with universal values (Nurshabrina, 2024). The interactions built by the participants do not stop when the program ends. Many continue to communicate with their host families and colleagues in Australia, even initiating workshops, cultural campaigns, and cross-border collaborations in education, business, and social activities (Haniko, 2024). Dinnie (2015) emphasizes that successful nation branding requires continuity of message and repeated engagement from brand agents—and in this case, AIYEP participants and alumni are at the core of a sustainable national promotion strategy. Through a combination of direct interaction, the use of digital media, and relationships maintained after the program ends, AIYEP participants prove that cultural diplomacy can be more effective when carried out by young actors who are sincere in conveying the nation's message (Wendt, 1999).

Implementation of Public Diplomacy through Multi-Actor Collaboration in the 2023–2024 AIYEP Program

Public Diplomacy Strategy by the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports

The Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports plays a central role in making AIYEP an effective public diplomacy instrument, not merely a cultural exchange program, but a strategic means of conveying messages about the values, identity, and character of the Indonesian nation to international audiences (Kemenpora, 2023). Referring to Cull (2009) five dimensions of public diplomacy, Kemenpora RI integrates listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting in an integrated manner in every aspect of program implementation.

The listening dimension is realized through surveys, periodic evaluations, and feedback collection from participants and local partners, the results of which are used as the basis for designing communication messages to remain relevant to the expectations of international audiences (Cull, 2009). The advocacy dimension is evident in the way the Ministry of Youth and Sports places participants as representatives who convey personal narratives about cultural diversity and the value of mutual cooperation in a natural and credible manner, which is far more effective than formal campaigns that often seem artificial (Kemenpora, 2023). The cultural diplomacy dimension is at the core of every AIYEP activity, where participants introduce traditional dances, music, cuisine, and local traditions not only through

official performances but also in daily interactions with host families and local communities—in line with (Cull, 2009) view that culture functions as a universal language that touches audiences across countries without triggering political debate.

The exchange diplomacy dimension is the main distinguishing feature of AIYEP compared to other cultural diplomacy programs, as the relationships formed during stays with host families and collaboration on social projects often continue long after the program ends, creating a bridge of diplomacy between citizens that has a long-term impact (Nurshabrina, 2024). Meanwhile, the international broadcasting dimension is realized through the use of digital media by participants and alumni who actively share their experiences through social media, blogs, and videos—content that is considered more credible because it presents a personal perspective (Dinnie, 2015). The Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports also ensures that AIYEP is aligned with global issues such as cultural diversity, gender equality, and environmental sustainability, so that Indonesia is perceived not only as a culturally rich country, but also as a nation that cares about the global agenda (Haniko, 2024). Cull (2009) emphasizes that effective public diplomacy must be sustainable and adaptive, and this principle is reflected in the way AIYEP consistently adjusts its curriculum, activity themes, and communication methods in line with the dynamics of bilateral relations and global developments.

Multi-Actor Collaboration in Public Diplomacy

The implementation of AIYEP 2023–2024 shows that Indonesia's public diplomacy is not carried out by a single actor, but by a multi-actor network working together to ensure the program has a sustainable impact. This collaboration includes the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports as the main facilitator, Australia's DFAT and AII as international partners, as well as local communities, universities, non-governmental organizations, participants, and alumni (Kedutaan Besar Australia-Indonesia, 2023). The Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports plays the role of coordinator and strategic director, ensuring that the identity of Indonesia presented to the Australian public is representative and authentic (Kemenpora, 2023). DFAT and AII provide logistical support, resources, and access to communities and institutions in Australia (Kedutaan Besar Australia-Indonesia, 2023).

The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kemlu RI) has positioned AIYEP as part of the Indonesia–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) since 2018, listed in the CSP 2025–2029 Plan of Action as the "backbone" of people-to-people relations between the two countries (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2018). The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides support through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Office of International Cooperation via the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra and Indonesian Consulates General in various Australian cities, which facilitate meetings between participants and heads of representatives, arrange official visits, and provide pre-departure training every year (Nurshabrina, 2024). The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also ensures that AIYEP is aligned with foreign policy priorities in the Indo-Pacific region, utilizing this program as a means to convey a positive narrative about Indonesia through authentic experiences such as homestays, internships, and community interactions (Haniko, 2024). Annual evaluation coordination through the CSP Plan of Action serves as an instrument to measure the relevance, effectiveness, and long-term impact of the program (Nurshabrina, 2024).

This multi-actor collaboration also reflects the listening dimension in Cull's theory of public diplomacy (2009)—through feedback from Australian participants, the Indonesian government can understand foreign perceptions and adjust its cultural communication strategy for future programs. The dimension of exchange diplomacy is also strong, as months of intensive exchanges create lasting networks of friendship and professionalism that form a basis of trust that is difficult to build through formal diplomacy alone (Cull, 2009). This multi-actor synergy ensures that the message about Indonesia as a friendly, inclusive country that cares about global development can be conveyed authentically and sustainably (Putri, 2021).

Implementation of Gender Equality in the AIYEP Program

One important aspect that stands out in AIYEP is its commitment to gender equality as part of Indonesia's inclusive and modern image. Since the selection stage, the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports has consistently ensured that the quota of male and female participants is distributed evenly—not merely as an administrative measure, but as a strategic effort to present Indonesia as a country that values gender equality in front of an international audience (Kemenpora, 2023). In the field, equality is realized in a tangible way: male and female participants are given equal opportunities to lead discussions, guide events, and make group decisions, without role divisions based on gender stereotypes (Kemenpora, 2025).

Cull (2009) asserts that public diplomacy encompasses not only cultural promotion but also the communication of values that enhance a country's image in the eyes of the world. By practicing gender equality, Indonesia sends a strong message that it is a progressive country in line with universal values—an effective advocacy strategy (Cull, 2009). Female participants who were entrusted with leading cultural presentations and discussions in front of Australian audiences helped shape the perception that Indonesian women have active and significant roles in the public sphere (Haniko, 2024). AIYEP activities also included thematic discussions on women's roles in development and leadership, reinforcing the message that Indonesia supports women's empowerment as part of its cultural diplomacy commitment (Nurshabrina, 2024). The social media content shared by participants often featured women's leadership and equal collaboration, which organically shaped a positive image of Indonesia in the eyes of international audiences (Dinnie, 2015). Thus, the implementation of gender equality in AIYEP not only enriched the participants' experience but also strengthened Indonesia's position as a modern, inclusive country that is relevant to global values.

Program Sustainability and Impact Evaluation

The success of public diplomacy is not only determined by program implementation but also by its ability to have a long-term impact. The Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports has made AIYEP one of the priority programs in Indonesia's youth diplomacy roadmap, positioning it as a long-term instrument that is comprehensively evaluated each year (Kemenpora, 2025). The evaluation is conducted through surveys of Australian public perception, narrative reports from participants, media documentation, and discussions with partners such as the Indonesian Embassy, NGOs, and local governments—a participatory approach that makes the evaluation more objective and relevant to field needs (Kemenpora, 2023). Within the framework of Cull (2009), the success of the program is measured not only

by the number of activities, but also by its impact on changing perceptions, increasing cross-cultural understanding, and the networks that are formed.

The alumni network is managed as an important part of the sustainability strategy. Alumni are facilitated through online forums, regular meetings, and involvement in follow-up programs such as cultural seminars and promotional campaigns, ensuring they remain active as part of Indonesia's public diplomacy ecosystem (Kemenpora, 2025). Many alumni have gone on to initiate cultural, educational, and social projects, even successfully bridging concrete collaborations between communities in Indonesia and Australia—proving that public diplomacy can be rooted in society, not just the government (Nurshabrina, 2024). The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also places AIYEP within the framework of the CSP Plan of Action, which is evaluated annually, and assesses that this program has succeeded in providing significant long-term impact (Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2018). Indicators of success include the program's sustainability for more than 40 years, the formation of strong emotional bonds between alumni and partner communities, and political appreciation from Australia, marked by the appointment of the Governor-General as patron of AIYEP (Haniko, 2024). Cull (2009) emphasizes the importance of adaptation in public diplomacy in order to remain effective in the era of globalization—and by integrating technology, updating program themes in line with global issues, and strengthening alumni networks, AIYEP has proven not only to survive but also to transform in line with the times (Dinnie, 2015).

5. Conclusion

The Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program (AIYEP) has proven to be an effective strategic instrument in supporting Indonesia's public diplomacy and shaping a positive image of the nation in the eyes of the Australian people. Indonesia's identity is not built through formal campaigns alone, but through authentic social interactions, shared life experiences, cultural performances, and community projects that create a deep and lasting cross-cultural understanding. AIYEP participants, who are carefully selected to represent Indonesia's ethnic, cultural, and regional diversity, serve as young ambassadors who naturally convey the values of mutual cooperation, tolerance, and openness in every interaction with the Australian community. Their experiences not only change the previously limited perceptions of Australian participants but also leave a much stronger and more lasting impression than conventional diplomatic approaches.

The role of the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports in designing a representative participant selection process, pre-departure training, and post-pandemic policy adaptation through a hybrid format demonstrates a consistent and structured approach to nation branding, while the involvement of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership framework ensures that the program has strong diplomatic legitimacy and is in line with Indonesia's foreign policy priorities in the Indo-Pacific region. Multi-stakeholder collaboration involving the government, international partners, local communities, participants, and alumni is the main foundation for the success of AIYEP as a diplomatic platform that is not only ceremonial but also rooted at the community level. The alumni network that has been formed has become a strategic extension of Indonesia's positive image, as they continue to actively spread the narrative of Indonesia as a friendly, inclusive, and progressive country long after the program has

ended. By implementing the five dimensions of public diplomacy—listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting—in an integrated manner, AIYEP has succeeded in strengthening Indonesia-Australia bilateral relations at the grassroots level and positioning Indonesia as a modern, adaptive, and collaborative country in the eyes of the world. This program not only addresses Indonesia's current public diplomacy needs but also offers a relevant strategic model that can be replicated in similar exchange programs to strengthen Indonesia's image and reputation on the international stage in a sustainable manner.

6. References

- Adler, E. (2013). Constructivism in international relations: Sources, contributions, and debates. *Handbook of International Relations*, 2, 112–144.
- Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2022). *Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/foundations-councils-institutes/australia-indonesia-institute/programs/aiyep/australia-indonesia-youth-exchange-program>
- Creswell, J. W. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Cull, N. J. (2009). *Public diplomacy: Lessons from the past* (Vol. 12). Figueroa Press Los Angeles.
- Dinnie, K. (2015). *Nation Branding*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315773612>
- Haniko, P. A. F. (2024). *Australia Indonesia Exchange Program (AIYEP) sebagai Diplomasi Publik Indonesia dan Australia Tahun 2018-2022*. Universitas Nasional.
- Hanson, F. (2010). *Indonesia and Australia: time for a step change*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/indonesia-australia-time-step-change>
- Hopf, T. (1998). The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory. *International Security*, 23(1), 171–200. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.23.1.171>
- Kedutaan Besar Australia-Indonesia. (2023). *Australia-Indonesia Institute*. <https://indonesia.embassy.gov.au/jaktindonesian/aii.html>
- Kemenpora. (2023). *Dukung Program AIYEP, Menpora Dito Harap Anak Muda Indonesia Bisa Membangun Jaringan yang Kuat Dalam Berbagai Aspek Kehidupan*. <https://www.kemenpora.go.id/detail/3729/dukung-program-aiyep-menpora-dito-harap-anak-muda-indonesia-bisa-membangun-jaringan-yang-kuat-dalam-berbagai-aspek-kehidupan>
- Kemenpora. (2024). *Wamenpora Bahas Diplomasi Olahraga Bersama Dubes RI untuk Kazakhstan dan Tajikistan*. https://www.kemenpora.go.id/detail/5692/wamenpora-bahas-diplomasi-olahraga-bersama-dubes-ri-untuk-kazakhstan-dan-tajikistan?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Kemenpora. (2025). *Sambut Hangat Delegasi AIYEP 2024: Menpora Dito: Ciptakan Generasi Muda yang Siap Hadapi Tantangan Global*. <https://www.kemenpora.go.id/detail/5824/sambut-hangat-delegasi-aiyep-2024-menpora-dito-ciptakan-generasi>
- Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia. (2018). *Indonesia-Australia Sepakat Tingkatkan Hubungan menjadi Kemitraan Strategis Komprehensif*.

- https://setneg.go.id/baca/index/indonesia_australia_sepakat_tingkatkan_hubungan_menjadi_kemitraan_strategis_komprehensif
- Nurshabrina, H. (2024). PERAN AKTOR NON-NEGARA DALAM CITIZEN DIPLOMACY PADA AUSTRALIA-INDONESIA YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM (AIYEP) 2020-2022. *Global and Policy Journal of International Relations*, 12(01).
- Putri, F. T. (2021). Upaya Diplomasi Publik Indonesia melalui Australia Indonesia Youth Exchange Program Periode 2016-2018. *Moestopo Journal of International Relations (MJIR)*, 1(2), 149–159.
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183>
- Zehfuss, M. (2002). *Constructivism in international relations: the politics of reality* (Vol. 83). Cambridge University Press.