Space, Region, and Power: Regional Boundary Conflicts in The Regional Autonomy Era

Mohammad Maiwan a,1

a Department of Pancasila and Civic Education, Faculty of Social Science, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia
1 maiwan@unj.ac.id

Introduction
Regional autonomy is an essential manifestation of efforts to accelerate development. Through the implementation of regional autonomy, the range of control of services to the public can be shortened, making it more efficient and practical. In addition, community participation can also be increased. At the level of local government, this policy is expected to trigger important breakthroughs that lead to improving the welfare of the people and opening access to control of power in the region. During this time, before the decentralization policy was implemented, the mechanism for administering power was more top-down, centralized, and pushed the position of the people as sovereign holders. Such a
development process only makes society merely an object and not a subject.

In practice, regional autonomy then gives birth to various impacts, in political, economic, social, cultural and administrative and institutional. In the economic field, a prominent issue is the emergence of demands for the improvement of people's welfare through the management of local financial resources. In the social area, issues of social conflict and the protection of local rights emerge. While in the field of government politics, it is the birth of a policy of direct election of regional heads, as well as demands for the formation of new regions, both at the provincial and district/city levels, in the form of territorial expansion. In the process, the phenomenon created many problems.

In some regions, the politics of regional expansion is not only a "project" for local and national political actors but also a new burden on the central government from a financial perspective. Even the most chronic phenomena of regional expansion have triggered spatial conflicts in the form of territorial disputes that lead to the birth of intergovernmental claims over certain border areas. This territorial dispute is inseparable from the existence of political, economic, social, and cultural motives. This situation indicates that the regional expansion process was, for the most part, not well planned and well planned.

In the author's note, throughout the implementation of regional autonomy, starting from 1999 until now, in almost all provinces in Indonesia, there are boundary conflicts that affect the implementation of development. Besides, there are still many problems with the boundaries that have the potential to trigger conflicts among people. Studies on communal conflicts in Indonesia after the economic crisis 1998 have been linked with the role of political crisis and decentralisation reform in the early 1999 in producing communal conflicts (Sujarwoto, 2017). Although so far, most of the boundary conflicts have been resolved by the government, but there are still problems in a number of areas. Based on the description above, this study further explains how the disputes between regions occur, what are the factors that cause them, what are the implications, and how are the solutions resolved?

The regional autonomy policy implemented by the government since 1999 provides an essential foundation for regional development. Under decentralisation laws, authority was granted to two levels of regional government—provinces (propinsi) on the one hand, and districts (kabupaten) and cities (kota) on the other—to make their own policies and local laws (Butt, 2010).

Hope for the realization of equitable growth is increasingly open. In several aspects, several regions were able to develop well as expected because they were supported by intelligent and innovative local leadership. While not a few areas that are oversized in realizing the promises of autonomy, because of the barrenness of thought, lack of innovation, as well as corrupt political and bureaucratic leadership. Regions like this only survive politically and administratively without having the ability to manage development plans adequately. The ideal condition when autonomy is held is a manifestation of the presence of the government in every matter of life. So far, after 20 years of regional autonomy, there still remain serious problems stemming from the low commitment and seriousness of the leaders in translating the grand design of development in a decentralized framework, in the form of a real program of action. Whereas all this time, lot of funds or technical and administrative guidance have been carried out. In this connection, the implementation of regional autonomy is still trapped in the search for a "balance" between regional freedoms on the one hand and central control and supervision on the other.
Experts’ studies have found that various problems that arise in the implementation of autonomy are not solely stemming from the lack of a comprehensive central government concept and strategy, but the lack of regulation and supervision, which is intertwined with politics, which impacts on the reduction of popular sovereignty (Aspinall & Fealy 2003; J. Wallis 2019), the marginalization of public space (Buehler 2010), conflict and the spread of identity politics (Featherstone 2008; Storey 2012; Eric Hiari & Stokke 2017), excessive exploitation of natural resources, fragmentation of power (Agnew 2014; Sadu Wasistono & Petrus Polyando 2017), the emergence of predatory local regimes (Vedi R. Hadiz 2010), and strengthening patronage in politics (Aspinall & Mada Sukmajati 2016; Aspinall & Berenschot 2019). Although in general Indonesia has been quite successful in transforming from an authoritarian political system to democracy, there are no denying that some aspects of decentralization have opened the gap for disruption to sustainable reform. (Horowitz 2013). Even Gerry van Klinken (2010:172) asserted that regional autonomy stimulates power struggles among local elites by risking traditional authority, traditions, customs, and all available resources.

Regional Autonomy and Politics of Expansion

A critical dimension of regional autonomy policy is the emergence of the problem of regional expansion. With the opening of decentralized taps, the division is happening everywhere. Various regions eagerly volunteered for regional expansion, starting from the division of the province up to the district and sub-districts. Meanwhile, a compilation of funds pouring into the villages emerged various interests in the division of villages where new villages appear as government units that can receive the flow of village funds. The legal basis for regional expansion is Law Number 22 Year 1999 concerning Regional Government (Article 5 paragraph 2), then Law Number 32 of 2004 Article 4 paragraph 3 and 4 concerning Regional Government, and Law Number 23 Year 2014 (Article 32 paragraph 1 and 2).

Based on the three laws, it is stated that regional formation can take the form of regional expansion and regional integration. The establishment of the area includes; the creation of provincial regions and the structure of regency/city regions. Autonomous law indeed confers legitimacy upon the existing order, but it does so by binding this existing order to its own rules. In this manner it also offers protection to the poor and disadvantaged (Bedner, 2016). The substance of the articles in the three laws emphasizes that an autonomous region can be developed or expanded into two or more new autonomous regions. The division was carried out not only because of consideration of facilitating public services and improving people's welfare, but also a review of national political stability. This means that strategic areas for national politics and security, such as border areas and outermost islands are the focus of the division. But on its way, the expansion expanded to almost all parts of Indonesia, virtually out of control (Kimura 2013). As an illustration, in 10 years, between 1999-2009, 205 new autonomous regions were born. If at the end of the New Order government there were 27 provinces, with 234 regencies/cities, since the implementation of regional autonomy until today the number of provinces has swelled to 34. While the number of regency areas has increased to 415 regions, the number of cities increased from 59 to 93 cities.

In the future, this number will continue to grow, because even though since 2008 a regional division moratorium has been applied, several new autonomous regions (DOB) candidates will continue to be proposed. Vice President Jusuf Kalla once stated that the temporary division was halted because national
economic growth was still less than 7 percent, and the costs for the regions in the APBN were too high (Kompas, October 7, 2017). Based on an evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2017, it was stated that 60 percent of new autonomous regions established since 1999 failed to develop. Some of them almost depend entirely on central funds. The fast demand for the formation of DOB was only loud when the regions submitted proposals. The parent regional government often promised that it would help the regional government, but they forgot when the division was realized, and the new DOB came into being.

Even until 2018, when the DOB moratorium had been carried out for many years, it was revealed that there were provinces and parent districts of the DOB that had not yet completed their obligations. Such as: personnel diversion, not having capital city, not yet handed the assets, documents, and grant funds to DOB. In addition, other problems which have not yet been resolved are the general spatial plans and the determination of DOB area boundaries. The latter problem, namely the establishment of territorial boundaries, almost spread in most parts of the province, which at some stage led to community conflict. Whereas when regional expansion occurs, various issues regarding administrative, political, social and cultural dimensions should be finished.

However, in reality, not all regions experiencing expansion can solve this problem. The remaining issues, especially regarding these boundaries, are often ignored. The area boundary can be; dispute boundaries between provinces, boundaries between regencies/cities, and borders between countries. In the national context, as a consequence of the country's sovereignty, the edges of the territory do not only concern land boundaries, but also sea and air boundaries. The claims that have emerged so far are indeed more often in the form of land boundaries. Even though in the future, the sea has excellent potential as an economic resource over land, so that sea border conflicts will still exist. The facts show that not all administrative regions of the DOB results have natural boundaries. Such as rivers, mountains, lakes, seas, so sometimes the conflict requires a fairly complex solution to be accepted by all parties.

Besides, some indigenous territories that also clash with administrative regions. As a result, one indigenous community is divided into several different districts or cities, where they need special handling from each local government (Rachmat Hidayat 2017). The phenomenon in several regions so far shows how after regional autonomy many customary territories were divided in such a way, scattered from their unity, only to fulfill the ambitions of division which were rolled out by local political actors.

While concerning borders with other countries, not a few areas in Indonesia are problematic, in the sense of being vulnerable to change. On some islands, the boundary markers are blurred, shifted, or are very close to residential areas. The National Border Management Agency (BNPP) has stated that there are around 12 small islands in vulnerable border areas. These regions can be claimed at any time by other countries because we neglect to take care of them. We can take an example of how the shifting of the Indonesia-Malaysia border markers in the West Kalimantan region a few years ago. That indicates the existence of certain foreign elements trying to take advantage of Indonesia’s negligence. The case of the escape of the islands of Sipadan and Ligitan to Malaysia in the 1990s became a bitter fact that could be made a valuable lesson. Where in the future we need to take care of the border areas as well as other parts of Indonesia.

Based on data from the Directorate General of Administrative and Regional Development of the Ministry of Home Affairs, said that until the end of 2016 there were 977 boundary dispute cases, of which 763 had been decided. At the end of 2017, there were still 355
segments in the process of the regional boundary affirmation stage, and 169 segments had not yet been confirmed by the regional boundaries (Kompas, 11 October 2017). While until 2018, there are still 139 boundary segments that have not been completed (Kompas, 14 December 2018). This number has been significantly reduced compared to previous years, especially the period between 2004 and 2009 when the "regional expansion projects" was rife.

**Result**

If viewed as a whole, then the boundaries of these territorial conflicts can disrupt the development process. Where based on the narrow interests of the local government and also the community inadvertently participate in degrading national unity, which is at the same time, the national defense of the nation. In practice, unclear territorial boundaries cause interregional authority to be vague and overlapping. The struggle for territorial boundaries is getting tougher. Especially when accompanied by mutual claims of natural resource, both on land and at sea, because it affects Local Revenue (PAD) and the number of constituents of the political elite of certain regions in the boundary region needed in general elections or post-conflict local elections.

As a result, the potential for conflict and interregional conflict events has continued over the past few years. Sometimes the local government mobilizes community tensions, causing the conflict to worsen.

It also can be seen that in various disputed areas people are trapped and dragged into two versions of government. Sometimes its impact on the formation of a vertical arrangement of dual governance in the same place, so that there is a village head version of local government A and village head version of local government B in the same village. This situation causes various public services such as; making identity cards to the implementation of general elections or regional head elections under the version of government that was followed. Problems become complex when each party claims to be the most legitimate.

Furthermore, in addition to political nuances, boundary conflicts are triggered by technical aspects, where the resolution is professional. In this case, the determination of the territorial boundaries used by the government is not appropriate because it uses indicative maps that are not under reality on the ground. This situation occurs, one of them is because almost all existing regional formation laws use indicative maps in the appendix to the local formation rules. This was especially true for regions that were formed long before Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, especially regions that were formed during the previous revolution for independence. Even when some new regions were formed in the Old Order era when the central government succeeded in completing various resistance movements in a number of regions at that time.

One of the urgent demands of regionalists in the 1950s was a demand from the government in Jakarta to recognize the territorial existence of local governments in certain regions (Legge 1963; MacAndrews & Ichlasul Amal 2000). When during the New Order era, during the period of President Soeharto’s administration, to respond to the development needs, the formation of new regions was limited. However, technically, the basis for the establishment of a regional government used by the New Order is the same, which is based on an indicative map.

Yet in reality on the ground many boundaries in a number of regions or regions disregard natural lines such as rivers, mountain ranges, economic or trade routes, break down historical and economic zones without the need, and ignoring local ethnic and religious identity (Staudt 2017). In this era of decentralization, one tribe can be scattered in several different districts, while a new DOB region can sometimes combine fragments from many different identities — problems like this haunt the newly created regions. Communities living in boundary areas often have to bear undue burdens, where their rights to obtain services are ignored. It is not even rare to be mortgaged for political
interests for a moment. In the context of regional development, the existence of disputes over territorial boundaries in the provinces and regencies/cities also inhibits the expansion of subdistrict territories whose memorandum aims to accelerate development implementation and accelerate infrastructure improvement. In the regions, many areas of one sub-district are so broad that they need to be expanded, as is the case in areas outside of Java where the area of the sub-district is sometimes almost the same, or even more, with an area of one regency in Java.

Therefore, when the disputed boundaries erupted, the central government realized that they found many borders that were outlined as unfair or inappropriate for the geographical, economic and ethnic realities and culture in the regions. Many of the difficulties faced by the government / Ministry of Home Affairs Team are rooted in the fact that their borders make no sense. This is especially true in the eastern regions of Indonesia. Political interests defeat everything. Local actors are more interested in quickly obtaining DOB status than in resolving overall technical matters. However, disputes over boundaries between one region and another are not always the same and are multi-complex. It is caused by different factors. There are certain regions which are only caused by one or two factors, but there are areas that are complex due to various factors that are connected together.

In some areas with severe topographical conditions, it is ideally challenging to establish boundaries. This situation is inseparable from the interests of the respective regional governments which tend to defend their territories. For local leaders, they will feel guilty towards their community if, under their leadership, one region loses territory by other areas. Based on this reality, presumably contestation and the struggle for space can be minimized if there is a dispute between the relevant parties (Saru Arifin 2016:452).

The settlement of this dispute can also be done through regional cooperation that borders each other. In this connection, cooperation between regional heads needs to be further enhanced with an integrated regional or national development perspective as an area (Djoko Harmantyo 2007). For example, conflicts in border regions in a number of regencies and provinces in Sumatra need to be resolved by each regional head by referring to the integrated development of Sumatra as one region. Likewise with Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, North Maluku, and Papua. For this reason, the facilities and welfare of the people on the border need to receive serious attention from each local government. Interregional integration in a chain will accelerate regional growth, developing in accordance with its comparative advantage.

During this time, inequality of facilities and welfare at the border can trigger social jealousy, thus affecting national integration sentiment. As an example, the performance of the benefits of civil servants, teachers, or midwives, for example, in bordering districts receives benefits that are different from the neighboring districts or provinces that are perceived as higher. Though maybe the school or community Health centers is only a few hundred meters from the border area. Especially if the border is, concerning the border with the territory of another country. Therefore, it is appropriate that government efforts under the leadership of President Joko Widodo focus their attention on the concept of building Indonesia from the edge, namely the border areas, or the outermost which is synonymous with poverty and underdevelopment. The development of economic centers in the border region is one of
the keys to the physical "presence of the state". The key to the success of regional expansion lies in how to design local constraints to drive development (Tommy Firman 2013).

Besides, territorial disputes can be overcome by applying a one map policy. Through the application of a map, it is expected that the determination of the boundaries of an area is based on a single valid data set by the government. At the end of 2018, the Ministry of Home Affairs has completed the compilation of a national map, which will be applied in making development policies throughout Indonesia. This single map becomes an agreed reference so that it can avoid misinterpretation and selfishness of data in each institution or ministry.

The way out to resolve the conflict can also be through community participation. In this case, the resolution of inter-province or inter-regency or inter-city boundaries must involve the wider community, in particular, mass organizations and elements of traditional unity as well as local figures. In areas of Java and Bali where the population is already densely populated, the closeness of the location of the residence has an impact on the residents’ knowledge of their environmental conditions making it easy to determine the boundary. However, for the settlement of territorial borders on islands outside Java, where the population is sparse, defining the limit is not easy. Therefore, it requires the role of the regional government in order to resolve the barriers themselves. Mainly if the disputed area contains abundant natural resources, it will usually be challenging to achieve. In this context, the central government then intervened and resolved it based on the applicable regulatory framework.

The importance of clear regional boundaries in terms of legal and technical aspects, as the boundaries of the development area system, in addition to reducing the potential for conflict can also be used as a measure of the performance of regional heads in developing their regions. Assessment of the success of local leaders can be done, among others, by taking into account indicators of environmental quality, land use, availability of complete primary data, both spatial data and non-spatial data or the achievement of improved economic, socio-cultural, political and security indicators (Djoko Harmantyo 2007:21).

Conclusion

Regional boundary conflicts that have occurred in almost all regions of Indonesia during the implementation of regional autonomy have caused its own problems so that it seized the attention of the government. The spread of boundary conflicts, in the form of "spatial" claims, is inseparable from the lack of careful planning, in the sense of decentralized design, and weak aspects of regulation. At the local level, regional expansion was responded with enthusiasm by the local political elite as a means to achieve power ambitions. Demands for division are not always in line with efforts to realize equitable development and community services.

Unclear boundaries have a fatal impact. Many problems arise such as; overlapping area coverage, overlapping business location licensing, duplication of government services, struggles in natural resource management, even the absence of government services. In essence, disputes over boundaries hamper the administration of government functions, reduce the level of service to the community, and potentially cause legal uncertainty. There are several leading causes that become the base of conflicts over the struggle for space (regions) in the area, namely; First, economic factors, in the form of the mastery of natural resources; Second, political factors, especially demographic politics, which are related to electoral politics; Third, juridical factors, weak legislation; Fourth, social factors; Fifth, are historical and cultural factors; Sixth, administrative-technical factors, in the form of overlaps between maps of one institution and another.
As a way out, it takes several steps, namely, a judicial solution. The settlement of this dispute can also be done through regional cooperation that borders each other. In addition, territorial disputes can be overcome by applying a one map policy. Through the application of a map, it is expected that the determination of the boundaries of an area is based on a single valid data set by the government. The way out to resolve the conflict can also be through community participation. The role and cooperation of all levels of government and society need to be encouraged by releasing a narrow regional spirit.

Reference


