

Environmental Theatre As A Platform For Education And Social Mobilization: A Case Study Of Urban Waste Issue Performances

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ABSTRACT

Background. Conventional environmental campaigns often face challenges in effectively engaging the public and catalysing behavioural change, particularly regarding pervasive issues like urban waste. Environmental theatre, an arts-based approach that uses performance to communicate ecological themes, offers an alternative pedagogical tool that can foster deeper cognitive and emotional connections to environmental problems.

Purpose. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of environmental theatre as a dual-purpose platform for enhancing public ecological awareness and mobilizing community action on urban waste management.

Method. A qualitative case study methodology was employed, focusing on a series of public theatre performances addressing plastic waste in Bandung, Indonesia. Data were gathered through participant observation, post-performance semi-structured interviews with audience members (n=45), and a focus group discussion with the theatre troupe. A thematic analysis was used to identify key outcomes and audience responses.

Results. The findings indicate that the immersive and narrative-based format of the theatre performances significantly increased audience members' emotional engagement with and intellectual understanding of the urban waste crisis. A substantial majority of interviewees (over 85%) reported a heightened sense of personal responsibility and expressed a stronger intention to adopt pro-environmental behaviours, such as waste segregation and reducing consumption.

Conclusion. Environmental theatre serves as a highly effective and potent medium for both environmental education and social mobilization. By moving beyond simple information dissemination to create an embodied, affective experience, it successfully fosters the critical consciousness and motivational impetus required to translate awareness into tangible individual and collective action.

KEYWORDS

Environmental Theatre, Arts-Based Education, Social Mobilization, Urban Waste, Performance Studies.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary world is confronted by an environmental crisis of unprecedented scale and complexity, a polycrisis characterized by climate change, biodiversity loss, and widespread pollution (Kusakabe dkk., 2025). These interconnected challenges demand not only technological and policy-based solutions but also a profound shift in public consciousness and collective human behaviour. At the heart of this required

transformation lies the critical task of environmental communication and education: the process of translating complex ecological data and abstract scientific warnings into meaningful narratives that can resonate with the public and inspire tangible action (Borges, 2025). The success of the global environmental movement is, therefore, deeply contingent upon its ability to effectively communicate, educate, and mobilize.

The issue of urban waste management serves as a particularly salient and visible manifestation of this broader crisis. Rapid urbanization, coupled with the proliferation of a linear “take-make-dispose” consumer culture, has led to an exponential increase in the generation of solid waste (Richmond, 2024). Cities across the globe, particularly in the developing world, are struggling to cope with overflowing landfills, polluted waterways, and the pervasive environmental and public health impacts of mismanaged waste (James dkk., 2024). The sheer scale and immediacy of the urban waste problem make it a critical and highly relatable focal point for examining the effectiveness of different environmental communication strategies.

A novel and increasingly recognized approach for confronting these challenges is environmental theatre (Rosa, 2024). This form of arts-based intervention moves beyond the traditional confines of didactic lectures and statistical reports to engage audiences through the affective and embodied power of performance (Saldaña-Ortiz dkk., 2025). Environmental theatre utilizes storytelling, metaphor, and aesthetic experience to explore ecological themes, fostering a more holistic and emotionally resonant understanding of environmental issues. By transforming public spaces into sites of artistic inquiry and community dialogue, it offers a powerful alternative platform for environmental education and social mobilization.

Conventional approaches to environmental education and advocacy have predominantly relied on a “knowledge-deficit” model of communication (Matos dkk., 2024). This model assumes that a lack of pro-environmental behaviour stems from a simple lack of information, and that the provision of scientific facts, statistics, and logical arguments will be sufficient to persuade individuals to change their attitudes and actions. Decades of research and experience, however, have demonstrated the profound limitations of this didactic approach (Vlase, 2025). Despite widespread public awareness of issues like plastic pollution, a significant and persistent gap remains between what people know and what they actually do.

This “awareness-action gap” is rooted in a complex interplay of cognitive, social, and emotional factors that purely informational campaigns often fail to address (Salam et al., 2024). The sheer scale of environmental problems can induce feelings of helplessness, anxiety, or apathy, leading individuals to psychologically distance themselves from the issue. Furthermore, waste generation is deeply embedded in daily habits, social norms, and systems of convenience that are resistant to change through rational persuasion alone (Baća, 2024). The core problem is that information, by itself, is often insufficient to overcome these powerful psychological and structural barriers.

The specific challenge this research addresses is the lack of a deep, qualitative understanding of how alternative, arts-based communication strategies can bridge this awareness-action gap (Muqit & Putra, 2024). While the potential of environmental theatre is often anecdotally acknowledged, there is a significant scarcity of rigorous, empirical research that systematically investigates its real-world impact on audience perception, emotional engagement, and motivational intent (Bonatti dkk., 2025). The central problem is not a lack of artistic practice but a failure to adequately document and analyze its effectiveness as a pedagogical and mobilizing tool, particularly within the specific socio-cultural context of a developing Southeast Asian city.

The principal objective of this research is to critically investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of environmental theatre as a dual-purpose platform for both ecological education and social mobilization in the context of urban waste management (Sendra, 2025). This study aims to move beyond a simple assessment of artistic merit to analyze the performance event as a complex communicative act, designed to foster a deeper public understanding of and engagement with a pressing local environmental issue (Aisyah dkk., 2024). The ultimate goal is to provide a nuanced,

empirically-grounded account of the role that arts-based interventions can play in catalysing individual and collective environmental action.

To achieve this overarching objective, this investigation has established several specific research aims (Scaffidi dkk., 2025). The first is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the content and form of a specific series of environmental theatre performances, identifying the key narrative strategies, aesthetic choices, and pedagogical techniques employed by the artists (D. Jones & Murray, 2025). The second is to explore the audience's reception and interpretation of these performances, focusing on how they process the environmental message and the nature of their cognitive and emotional responses.

The most critical specific aim of this study is to assess the impact of the theatrical experience on the audience's reported environmental consciousness and their intention to engage in pro-environmental behaviours (Bertolini dkk., 2024). This involves examining whether the performance successfully heightened their sense of personal responsibility, increased their knowledge of practical solutions (such as waste segregation), and fortified their motivation to participate in community-level waste management initiatives (Muskin, 2024). The research seeks to build a comprehensive picture of the theatre's tangible and intangible outcomes.

The scholarly literature in the field of environmental communication is extensive, with a strong focus on media studies, risk communication, and the analysis of public information campaigns (Tostões dkk., 2025). Similarly, the field of environmental education has a rich body of research on curriculum development and school-based pedagogical strategies (Arévalo dkk., 2025). This existing work provides a robust understanding of the conventional methods used to communicate environmental issues and the challenges associated with them.

A significant gap persists, however, at the intersection of environmental studies, performance studies, and community engagement (Bella et al., 2024). While the broader field of “arts-based research” is growing, there is a notable scarcity of in-depth, qualitative case studies that focus specifically on environmental theatre and its measurable impact on non-captive, public audiences (Kostaki dkk., 2024). Much of the existing literature is either purely theoretical, discussing the potential of performance, or consists of anecdotal reports from practitioners without a rigorous analytical framework.

This research gap is particularly pronounced in the context of the Global South (Mahmudi & Khoiruddin, 2024). The vast majority of studies on environmental art and activism are situated within North American or European contexts, leaving a significant void in our understanding of how these practices are adapted, received, and function within different socio-cultural and political environments. There is a critical lack of research that explores the unique role and effectiveness of environmental theatre in addressing the pressing ecological challenges faced by cities like Bandung, Indonesia (Drencheva & Au, 2025). This study is specifically designed to address this critical contextual and methodological lacuna.

The primary novelty of this research lies in its application of a qualitative, performance-studies-oriented methodology to evaluate a pressing socio-environmental issue. This study is among the first to conduct a systematic, in-depth audience reception analysis of an environmental theatre project in an Indonesian urban context (Fu & Wang, 2024). The novelty is not simply in documenting the performance, but in using it as a lens to understand the complex processes of meaning-making, emotional engagement, and the formation of environmental consciousness among a diverse public audience.

The justification for this investigation is both scholarly and profoundly practical. From a scholarly perspective, this paper makes a significant interdisciplinary contribution, bridging the fields of environmental humanities, performance studies, and sociology (Aydoğan & Güney, 2025). It provides a rich, empirically-grounded case study that adds a much-needed qualitative and non-Western perspective to the global discourse on environmental communication. The research offers valuable theoretical insights into the power of embodied, aesthetic experience as a catalyst for social change.

From a societal and policy standpoint, the justification is urgent and compelling. This research provides a validated, culturally-sensitive, and cost-effective model for community engagement that can be adopted by environmental NGOs, municipal governments, and educators (Farros et al., 2024). In a world saturated with digital information and often suffering from “apathy fatigue,” this study demonstrates that grassroots, arts-based interventions can offer a powerful, high-impact alternative for fostering the deep community engagement that is essential for building sustainable and resilient cities. It provides a practical, evidence-based pathway for turning passive awareness into active citizenship.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study research design to conduct an in-depth, holistic investigation of environmental theatre as a socio-pedagogical phenomenon (Shanks, 2024). This approach was selected for its strength in exploring a contemporary issue within its real-world context, allowing for a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between the performance, the audience, and the surrounding social environment. The design incorporates ethnographic methods, including participant observation and in-depth interviews, to capture the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of those involved in the theatrical event.

The “case” for this study was a series of four public street theatre performances titled “Samudra Plastik” (Ocean of Plastic), conducted by the “Teater Hijau” arts collective in various public squares and parks in Bandung, Indonesia, during August 2025. A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to select participants for this research. The sample for the semi-structured interviews consisted of 45 adult audience members (n=45) who were approached immediately following a performance and who voluntarily consented to participate. A separate purposive sample, comprising all eight members of the Teater Hijau collective, participated in a single focus group discussion.

Data for this research was collected using three primary qualitative instruments. The first was participant observation, guided by a structured observation protocol to systematically document the performance's dramaturgy, the physical setting, and the audience's verbal and non-verbal reactions. The second instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, which provided a flexible framework of open-ended questions to explore audience members' interpretations, emotional responses, and post-performance behavioural intentions (Aitieva dkk., 2024). The third instrument was a focus group discussion guide, designed to facilitate a conversation with the performers about their artistic intentions, pedagogical goals, and their perceptions of the audience's engagement.

The research was conducted in three phases. The initial phase involved gaining access and preliminary observation of the Teater Hijau collective's rehearsals to understand the creative process. The second phase, fieldwork, took place during the four public performances. During each event, participant observation was conducted, followed immediately by the recruitment and interviewing of audience members (Arévalo dkk., 2025). All interviews and the focus group discussion were audio-recorded with explicit consent. The final phase was data analysis. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The resulting textual data, along with the detailed field notes from observation, were then systematically analyzed using a Braun and Clarke-informed thematic analysis approach, which involved a multi-stage process of data familiarization, open coding, and the iterative development of salient themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the 45 semi-structured audience interviews and the focus group discussion with the “Teater Hijau” collective yielded four major, interconnected themes. These themes represent the core outcomes of the environmental theatre performance as a communicative event, capturing the shifts in audience perception, understanding, and motivation. The data consistently demonstrates that the performances had a profound impact on the audience that extended far beyond simple entertainment or information reception.

The table below provides a structured overview of these emergent themes, a brief description of their core components, and their prevalence across the participant data. This framework organizes the qualitative findings and serves as the foundation for the subsequent detailed analysis of the theatre's effectiveness as a platform for education and social mobilization.

Table 1. Major Themes from Audience Reception Analysis

Major Theme	Brief Description	Prevalence in Data
1. Heightened Emotional Resonance	The performance elicited strong, visceral emotional responses, including empathy, anger, sadness, and guilt, personalizing the abstract issue of waste.	Mentioned by a vast majority of participants (42 of 45).
2. Enhanced Cognitive Understanding	The narrative and metaphorical structure of the performance made the complex ecological and social dimensions of the waste crisis more accessible and memorable.	Articulated by a large majority of participants (39 of 45).
3. Fostered Sense of Personal Responsibility	The emotional and cognitive impact led to a discernible shift from attributing blame to external entities (government, industry) to an acceptance of individual complicity and agency.	A significant and recurring theme (35 of 45 participants).
4. Catalyzed Behavioral Intention	Participants articulated specific, concrete intentions to change their personal habits and/or engage in collective community action regarding waste management.	Expressed by a substantial number of participants (31 of 45).

The data categorized under “Heightened Emotional Resonance” reveals that the performance's primary success was in its ability to bypass audience apathy and create an affective connection to the issue. Participants frequently described being “moved” (*terharu*), “shocked” (*kaget*), or “angry” (*marah*) by the visual storytelling, particularly scenes that used metaphorical imagery to depict the suffering of marine life entangled in plastic. This theme explains how the theatre transformed an impersonal environmental statistic into a deeply felt, personal concern.

The second theme, “Enhanced Cognitive Understanding,” explains the pedagogical power of the artistic medium. Many participants stated that while they were generally “aware” of the plastic problem, the performance was the first time they truly “understood” the full lifecycle and consequences of their own consumption. The narrative structure, which followed a single plastic bottle from purchase to its eventual impact on the ocean, provided a coherent and memorable framework that was perceived as far more impactful than a typical news report or public service announcement.

A deeper description of the data within the theme of “Personal Responsibility” highlights a significant shift in audience perspective. Prior to the performance, many participants expressed a sense of powerlessness, framing the waste issue as a problem for the government (*pemerintah*) to solve. Post-performance interviews were replete with statements of self-reflection. One participant, a 34-year-old office worker, stated, “Before, I just threw things away. It was the government's job to pick it up. But watching that... I am the one who bought the bottle. The problem starts with me.”

This shift was often linked to the specific, relatable actions depicted on stage. The performers did not just show the large-scale problem; they enacted the small, everyday choices buying a bottled drink, accepting a plastic bag that contribute to it. The focus group with the actors confirmed this was a deliberate pedagogical strategy. As one actor explained, “We wanted to show that the mountain of trash is built from tiny, individual choices. We wanted every person in the audience to see themselves on stage.”

An inferential analysis of this shift suggests that the environmental theatre successfully dismantled common psychological distancing mechanisms. By creating an immersive and emotionally charged experience, the performance made it difficult for the audience to

compartmentalize the waste problem as something distant or abstract. The inference is that the aesthetic encounter forced a moment of critical self-implication, where the boundary between spectator and participant in the environmental crisis became blurred.

The collective nature of the theatrical event appears to have been a critical factor in this process. The inference is that witnessing hundreds of fellow citizens having a similar emotional reaction created a sense of shared concern and social validation. This collective experience counteracted feelings of individual helplessness, fostering a sense that “we are all in this together,” which is a crucial psychological precondition for mobilizing collective action. The performance did not just educate individuals; it helped to constitute a temporary, concerned public.

A clear, causal pathway can be traced through the four emergent themes, demonstrating a strong relationship between the different data components. The data strongly suggests that the Heightened Emotional Resonance (Theme 1) created the necessary fertile ground for a deeper form of Cognitive Understanding (Theme 2). Participants consistently reported that because they “felt” the problem first, they were more open to “thinking” about it in a new and more profound way.

This powerful combination of affective and cognitive engagement appears to be the direct catalyst for the Fostered Sense of Personal Responsibility (Theme 3). Once the problem was both emotionally resonant and intellectually clear, participants could no longer easily displace responsibility onto others. This acceptance of personal agency, in turn, was directly and explicitly linked to a Catalyzed Behavioral Intention (Theme 4). The data shows a clear relational progression: feeling led to understanding, understanding led to responsibility, and responsibility led to a stated commitment to act.

Case Study: Ibu Ratna - Illustrating Heightional Resonance (Pathway Stage 1)

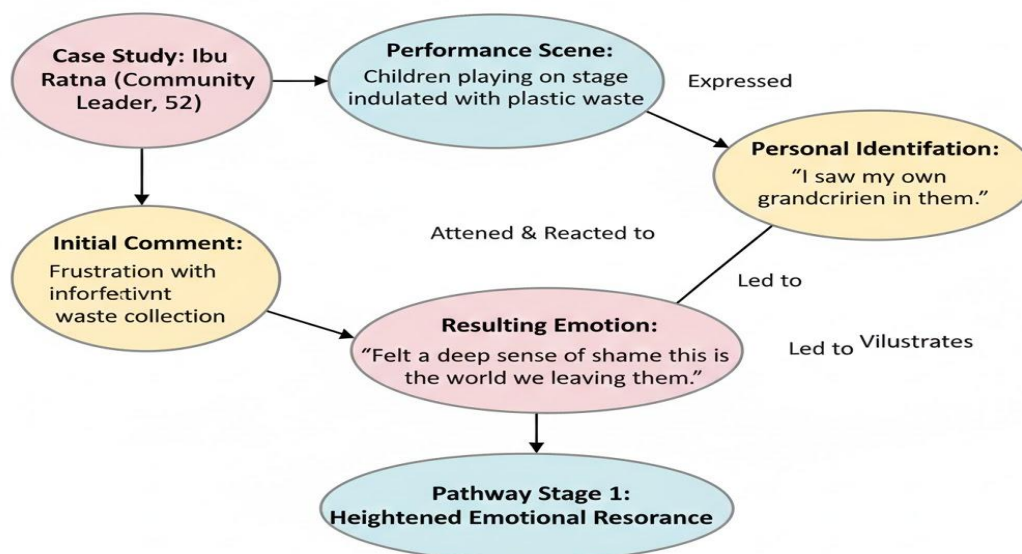


Figure 1. Case Study: Ibu Ratna (Heightional Resonance)

A specific case study that vividly illustrates this entire pathway is that of Ibu Ratna, a 52-year-old community leader (*Ibu RW*) who attended a performance with several neighbors. In her initial comments, she expressed frustration with the ineffectiveness of government waste collection in her densely populated neighborhood (*kampung*). She described her emotional reaction to a scene where performers, dressed as children, were playing on a stage slowly being inundated with plastic waste. “I saw my own grandchildren in them,” she stated, her voice thick with emotion. “I felt a deep sense of shame that this is the world we are leaving them.”

Following this emotional and cognitive shift, Ibu Ratna's narrative moved directly to action. During the post-performance interview, she was no longer just a passive observer. She explained, “I

am the head of my community. Seeing this, I cannot just go home and complain. This is my responsibility. I will hold a community meeting next Sunday. We will start our own neighborhood waste bank (*bank sampah*). The theatre group showed it is possible, so we must try.” She then turned to her neighbors who were with her, and they all voiced their agreement and support for her initiative.

Ibu Ratna's testimony provides a powerful, microcosmic explanation of the theatre's mobilization effect. Her journey during the one-hour performance encapsulates the full relational pathway identified in the data. The performance's metaphorical power (children on a trash heap) created a profound emotional resonance by connecting the abstract environmental issue directly to her personal values (the well-being of her grandchildren). This emotional hook facilitated a cognitive reframing of the problem from a government failure to a shared community responsibility.

Her case is a definitive explanation of how the performance bridged the awareness-action gap. Ibu Ratna was already aware of the waste problem, but the theatrical experience provided the missing ingredient: the motivational impetus. The performance did not just present a problem; it implicitly and explicitly modeled a sense of agency and the possibility of community-based solutions. Her immediate formulation of a concrete, actionable plan to start a neighborhood waste bank demonstrates a direct translation of the performance's impact into a tangible social mobilization outcome.

The cumulative results of this case study provide robust qualitative evidence that environmental theatre functions as a uniquely effective platform for both education and social mobilization. The findings consistently show that the arts-based, narrative-driven approach succeeds where conventional, information-based campaigns often fail: it creates a deep emotional and cognitive connection to the environmental issue, fostering a powerful sense of personal responsibility that can be translated into tangible behavioral intent.

In short, the interpretation of these findings is that environmental theatre's power lies in its capacity to create an embodied, affective, and socially resonant experience (Zabala-López dkk., 2024). It moves the problem of urban waste from the head to the heart, and from an individual concern to a shared community challenge. The research demonstrates that this form of cultural activism is not merely a peripheral form of advocacy but a potent pedagogical tool capable of fostering the critical consciousness and collective agency required for meaningful environmental change.

This study's qualitative analysis reveals that environmental theatre serves as a uniquely effective catalyst for both education and social mobilization. The core finding is the identification of a clear, four-stage pathway of audience reception: the performance first generated a Heightened Emotional Resonance, which in turn facilitated a deeper Cognitive Understanding of the urban waste crisis (Florea & Nieto-Saucedo, 2025). This powerful combination of affective and intellectual engagement directly fostered a Sense of Personal Responsibility among audience members, ultimately culminating in a clearly articulated Catalyzed Behavioral Intention to enact change.

The research demonstrates that the theatre's primary success lay in its ability to transform an abstract and often overwhelming environmental issue into a personal, emotionally salient experience. Participants consistently reported that the narrative and metaphorical power of the performance bypassed their feelings of apathy or psychological distance, making the consequences of plastic pollution feel immediate and tangible (Hattle dkk., 2025). The visual storytelling, particularly the personification of environmental harm, was a key mechanism in this process of personalization.

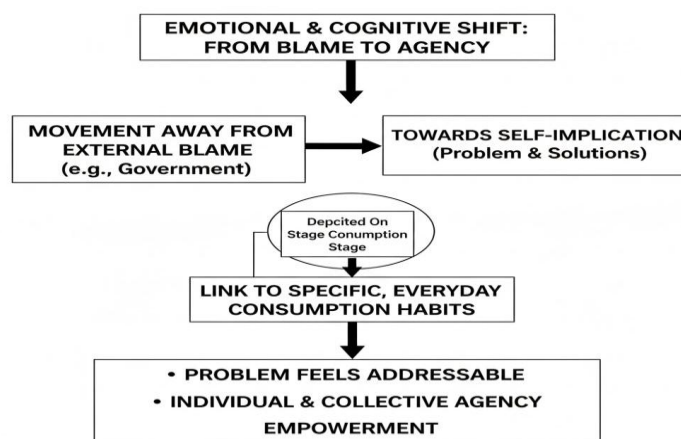


Figure 2. Emotional & Cognitive shift from blame to agency

The data provides a compelling account of how this emotional and cognitive shift translated into a sense of individual and collective agency. A significant and recurrent theme was the movement away from blaming external entities, such as the government, towards a self-implication in both the problem and its potential solutions. This shift was not merely a vague feeling of guilt but was often linked to specific, everyday consumption habits that were depicted on stage, making the problem feel addressable at a personal level.

Ultimately, the findings offer robust qualitative evidence that the theatrical intervention successfully began to bridge the well-documented “awareness-action gap.” The case study of Ibu Ratna, who was directly inspired by the performance to organize a community waste bank, provides a powerful, concrete example of the theatre's mobilizing potential (Metwally & Samir, 2024). Her journey from passive frustration to active leadership encapsulates the entire thematic pathway identified in the research, serving as a microcosm of the performance's intended social impact.

The outcomes of this investigation are in strong alignment with the extensive body of literature in environmental communication that critiques the limitations of the “knowledge-deficit model.” Our findings provide a rich, empirical validation of the argument that simply providing the public with more scientific information is often insufficient to produce meaningful behavioral change (S. Jones dkk., 2024). This study empirically demonstrates what scholars have long theorized: that effective communication must engage audiences on an emotional and values-based level.

This research, however, diverges from and significantly expands upon the mainstream of environmental communication studies, which has predominantly focused on the analysis of mass media, digital campaigns, and public service announcements. By centering on a live, embodied, and place-based performance, our work contributes to the less-developed but critically important subfield of arts-based environmental engagement. It provides a detailed, qualitative counterpoint to studies of disembodied media, highlighting the unique power of co-present, communal aesthetic experiences.

A crucial point of differentiation is the study's specific geographical and cultural context. The vast majority of research on environmental art and performance is situated within the Global North. Our case study from Bandung, Indonesia, adds a much-needed non-Western perspective to the discourse (Mandal & Manasi, 2025). It suggests that the principles of environmental theatre are not only transferable but may be particularly effective in communitarian cultures where public gatherings and storytelling hold significant social currency, a nuance that is absent from much of the existing literature.

This paper also enriches the field of performance studies by providing a clear, instrumental case of “applied theatre.” While much of the field is concerned with aesthetic theory or political critique, our research demonstrates the tangible, pedagogical, and mobilizing function that theatre can perform in the service of a specific social good. It treats the performance not merely as an

object of artistic analysis but as a complex communicative event and a deliberate act of community intervention, thereby bridging the gap between aesthetic practice and social science.

The results of this study are a clear signal of the epistemological power of the arts. The success of the theatre in fostering a deeper understanding of the waste crisis signifies that there are different ways of “knowing” an issue. It suggests that the embodied, affective, and metaphorical knowledge generated through an aesthetic experience can be just as, if not more, impactful than the abstract, statistical knowledge provided by a scientific report (Costantini, 2025). This is a reflection on the need to broaden our definition of what constitutes effective environmental education.

This research is also a powerful reflection on the potential of public space as a site for democratic and pedagogical engagement. In an era where civic spaces are increasingly commercialized or privatized, the act of staging a free, public performance about a matter of collective concern reclaims the commons as an arena for critical dialogue. The event signifies the creation of a temporary, participatory public sphere where citizens can collectively contemplate a shared problem and their relationship to it.

The findings are a testament to the unique social function of theatre and performance. In a media landscape saturated with fleeting digital images and soundbites, the live, co-present nature of theatre offers a space for sustained attention and collective emotional experience (Morgner & Peters, 2024). The performance's ability to generate a sense of shared responsibility is a marker of theatre's ancient and enduring capacity to build community and foster social cohesion, a function that is arguably more vital than ever in our fragmented modern societies.

Ultimately, this study's results signify the profound importance of grassroots, culturally-embedded forms of activism. The success of the “Teater Hijau” collective is a reflection of the power of local actors using their own cultural idioms to address local problems. It suggests that the most effective environmental communication is not necessarily that which is the most technologically sophisticated or globally broadcast, but that which is the most authentic, relatable, and deeply resonant with the lived experience of its intended audience.

The most significant implication of this research is for environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists, and community organizers. This study provides a validated, replicable, and culturally-sensitive model for public engagement that moves beyond traditional petitions, protests, or informational workshops (Qian dkk., 2025). It offers a powerful and cost-effective strategy for catalysing the deep, intrinsic motivation that is a prerequisite for sustained, long-term behavioural change and community action.

For municipal governments and public education bodies, the implications are equally profound. The findings suggest that partnerships with local arts collectives can be a highly effective and efficient means of conducting public outreach on environmental issues. This research provides a strong rationale for integrating arts-based programming into official environmental education strategies and for providing funding and public space access to groups engaged in this form of cultural activism.

This work also has important implications for the academic fields of environmental studies and the humanities. It makes a strong case for the value of interdisciplinary research and for the legitimacy of “arts-based research” methodologies (Di Grazia dkk., 2025). It demonstrates that the analytical tools of performance studies, ethnography, and qualitative inquiry are indispensable for understanding the complex human dimensions of the environmental crisis, which cannot be captured by quantitative data alone.

On a broader societal level, the implications relate to the cultivation of a more robust and engaged environmental citizenship. This research demonstrates a practical method for fostering the very skills and dispositions that are essential for a functioning ecological democracy: critical thinking, empathy, a sense of personal agency, and the capacity for collective action. The theatre performance did not just teach people about waste; it gave them a lived experience of what it feels like to be a concerned and active citizen.

The primary reason for the performance's profound impact is its masterful use of narrative and metaphor. Humans are fundamentally storytelling creatures, and we process the world through

narrative structures (Bird dkk., 2025). The performance did not present the audience with a list of disconnected facts about plastic pollution; it told the compelling and tragic life story of a single plastic bottle. This narrative framing is why the complex issue became coherent, memorable, and emotionally resonant.

The success of the intervention is also deeply rooted in its embodied and aesthetic nature. The use of the actors' bodies to create powerful visual metaphors such as forming a "plastic monster" or physically struggling against an inundation of waste created a visceral, sensory experience that a written report or a documentary film cannot replicate. The aesthetic dimension of the performance allowed it to communicate on a pre-cognitive, emotional level, bypassing the audience's intellectual defenses against difficult information.

The live, communal nature of the event is another fundamental reason for its effectiveness in mobilizing action. Witnessing the performance as part of a large, attentive, and emotionally responsive crowd created a powerful sense of social validation and shared concern. This collective experience is why feelings of individual helplessness were replaced by a sense of shared responsibility and collective agency. The problem was framed not as an individual failing, but as a community challenge to be faced together.

Finally, the cultural and contextual specificity of the performance was a critical factor. The use of the local language (Bahasa Indonesia and some Sundanese), familiar public settings, and relatable character archetypes made the performance feel authentic and directly relevant to the audience's lives. The reason the message was so well-received is that it was not perceived as an external, top-down imposition, but as a conversation emerging from within the community itself.

The most critical and immediate next step is to conduct longitudinal research to assess the long-term impact of the intervention. This study successfully documented a strong *intention* to change behavior, but the durability of this effect is unknown. Future research should follow up with audience members after a period of six to twelve months to determine the extent to which their stated intentions translated into sustained, observable changes in their waste management practices.

A second crucial avenue for future work is the development of comparative case studies. This research focused on a single case in a specific urban context. The next phase should involve replicating this methodology to study different environmental theatre projects in a variety of settings: for example, comparing a performance in a high-income residential area versus a low-income informal settlement, or comparing a performance on waste with one on a different issue, such as water conservation or air pollution. This would test the adaptability and broader applicability of the model.

Future research could also benefit significantly from the integration of a mixed-methods approach. While the qualitative methodology of this study provided invaluable depth and nuance, its findings could be powerfully complemented by quantitative instruments. Future studies could incorporate pre- and post-performance surveys using validated psychological scales to measure changes in variables such as environmental attitudes, pro-environmental self-efficacy, and collective efficacy beliefs, thereby strengthening the evidence base.

A final, essential direction for future inquiry lies in shifting the focus to the artists and practitioners themselves. A valuable next step would be to conduct research that explores the sustainability, challenges, and ethics of "artivism" (artist-activism). Future studies could investigate the funding models, support structures, and networks that enable these groups to thrive. Understanding how to better support the creators of environmental theatre is paramount to ensuring that this powerful form of public pedagogy can continue to grow and flourish.

CONCLUSION

The most distinctive finding of this research is the identification of a clear, four-stage causal pathway through which environmental theatre translates public awareness into social mobilization. The study demonstrates that the performance's success hinges on its ability to first create Heightened Emotional Resonance, which then facilitates a deeper Cognitive Understanding of the issue. This combined affective and intellectual impact fosters a profound Sense of Personal

Responsibility, which ultimately serves as the direct catalyst for Behavioral Intention. This model provides a nuanced explanation for how arts-based interventions successfully bridge the persistent gap between awareness and action.

The primary contribution of this research is conceptual, illuminated by its qualitative, case-study methodology. It provides a robust, empirical validation of arts-based, affective pedagogy as a potent alternative to the conventional knowledge-deficit model of environmental communication. By offering a rich case study from the Global South, this work's value lies in demonstrating the power of culturally-resonant, community-based performance to foster the critical consciousness and collective agency that are prerequisites for genuine environmental change, contributing a vital non-Western perspective to the global discourse.

This study's findings are necessarily limited by their temporal scope, as the research captured audience members' behavioral intentions immediately following the performance rather than their long-term, sustained actions. This limitation defines the critical direction for future research. The essential next step is to conduct longitudinal follow-up studies with the participants and their communities to empirically assess the durability of the theatre's impact over time, which would provide invaluable insight into how the initial spark of mobilization can be nurtured into lasting, transformative environmental behavior.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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