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The Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project as Soft Power in Environmental Education in Bandung's Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to examine how the Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project functions as a form of soft power in promoting environmental awareness and understanding of waste and wastewater management among teachers and students in Bandung's elementary schools.

Design/methodology/approach: This study adopts a mixed-method approach, using interviews, literature review, observations, and questionnaires. The qualitative data are examined using thematic analysis, while the quantitative data are analyzed using a Likert scale.

Findings: The findings indicate that the BKG Project operates as soft power through agenda-setting and framing. Agenda-setting determines the environmental issues and target audiences prioritized by the project, while framing shapes how environmental knowledge and practices are communicated. In this framing stage, the project localizes Kawasaki's environmental education approaches through culturally relevant educational materials, including the *Petualangan Si Jalu* animated video.

Practical Implication: This study provides practical insights for city governments on implementing sister city partnerships in concrete and attractive ways to address urban challenges.

Originality/value: This study contributes to the literature by examining the BKG Project as a form of subnational soft power and by showing how agenda-setting and framing shape the communication of environmental knowledge in elementary-school education.

Keywords: Sister City, Elementary School, Primary Education, Soft Power, Environmental Education

Paper type: Research Paper

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Proyek Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) sebagai Kekuatan Lunak dalam Pendidikan Lingkungan di Sekolah Dasar di Kota Bandung

Abstrak

Tujuan: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana Proyek Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) berfungsi sebagai bentuk kekuatan lunak subnasional dalam meningkatkan kesadaran lingkungan dan pemahaman mengenai pengelolaan sampah dan air limbah di kalangan guru dan siswa sekolah dasar di Bandung.

Desain/metodologi/pendekatan: Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran dengan wawancara, studi literatur, observasi, dan penyebaran kuesioner sebagai teknik pengumpulan data. Data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan analisis tematik, sedangkan data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan skala Likert.

Temuan: Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Proyek BKG beroperasi sebagai soft power melalui agenda-setting dan framing. Agenda-setting menentukan isu-isu lingkungan dan kelompok sasaran yang menjadi prioritas proyek, sedangkan framing membentuk bagaimana pengetahuan dan praktik lingkungan dikomunikasikan. Dalam tahap framing ini, proyek juga melokalkan pendekatan pendidikan lingkungan Kawasaki melalui materi pendidikan yang relevan secara budaya, termasuk peluncuran video animasi Petualangan Si Jalu.

Implikasi Praktis: Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi pemerintah kota mengenai cara mengimplementasikan kerja sama kota kembar secara konkret dan berorientasi pada solusi dalam menghadapi tantangan perkotaan.

Originalitas/Nilai: Penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap literatur dengan mengkaji Proyek BKG sebagai bentuk soft power subnasional dan menunjukkan bagaimana agenda-setting dan framing membentuk proses komunikasi pengetahuan lingkungan dalam pendidikan di sekolah dasar.

Kata Kunci: Kota Kembar, Sekolah Dasar, Pendidikan Dasar, Kekuatan Lunak, Pendidikan Lingkungan

Jenis Penelitian: Artikel Penelitian.

INTRODUCTION

Bandung and Kawasaki have developed a sister city partnership since 2015. This partnership enables the two cities to make cooperation in waste management, water environment management, and air quality management, with the signing of Memorandums of Understanding in 2016 and 2020 (Aurelivia, 2025; Hakiem et al., 2025). Sister city partnership is a long-term cooperation between two cities from different countries to strengthen cultural, educational, economic, and political ties (Bilder, 1989; Reskiyah & Pusvitasary, 2026). The idea of establishing the Bandung–Kawasaki partnership emerged from Bandung's serious waste management challenges in 2015. At the time, Mayor Ridwan Kamil sought to establish cooperation with Kawasaki, drawing on the Japanese city's experience in addressing comparable waste management problems during the 1960s. Kawasaki's experience provided Bandung with an opportunity to acquire relevant knowledge and lessons through intercity cooperation (Ulung et al., 2025). Under this sister city partnership, the two cities made several initiatives, such as the Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project. The BKG Project is a program rolled out by the two cities to solve wastewater management issues in Bandung. The BKG Project facilitates Kawasaki to transfer knowledge and experience in wastewater management to the government and people of Bandung (Y. Setiawan et al., 2025).

The sister city partnership between Bandung and Kawasaki has been examined by several scholars. They are divided over its benefits. Hakiem et al. (2025) argue that the partnership enhances the capacity of the staff of the Bandung administration to address environmental challenges. However, its contributions to local communities remain limited because of factors, such as budget constraints, leadership changes, and bureaucratic complexities. Sabati (2024) offers a contrasting view, arguing that this partnership has benefited local communities by fostering community-driven initiatives, such as independent sorting of organic and inorganic waste. Laoli & Dermawan (2025) also contend that the partnership has improved urban wastewater management through human resource development programs, such as seminar. These programs involve local communities, including students. Siregar & Rizqullah (2022) also finds the same, arguing that the sister city partnership has strengthened human resources in Bandung and improving their ability to manage waste-related issues. The partnership has decreased daily waste generation, increased the volume of recycled waste, and improved the capacity of the staff of Bandung administration in planning and implementing waste management. However, they also identify some challenges in its implementation, such as financial constraints, the Covid-19 pandemic, and communication issues. Overall, the existing literature primarily focuses on the effectiveness of Bandung-Kawasaki sister city partnership, particularly in addressing waste management challenges in Bandung.

Existing studies also examine the Bandung-Kawasaki partnership primarily from the perspectives of paradiplomacy. Paradiplomacy is the direct and indirect involvement of subnational governments in international relations to reach political, functional, or economic objectives (Reskiyah & Pusvitasary, 2026, p. 5). Less attention has been paid to how knowledge and environmental practices are communicated to local communities through educational activities. This study aims to address that gap

by conducting direct research on the implementation of the Bandung-Kawasaki sister city partnership, particularly on how the Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project transfers knowledge and environmental practices to students and teachers in elementary schools in Bandung.

The BKG Project is a joint initiative implemented by the Kawasaki and Bandung governments to promote environmental awareness and improve understanding of wastewater management among communities in Bandung, including municipal staff, elementary school teachers and students across the city. This study views this project as a form of soft power because it seeks to promote environmental knowledge, practices, and values through attraction rather than coercion. This study specifically focuses on examining how the BKG Project works as soft power within environmental education in Bandung's elementary schools, with particular attention to its role in promoting environmental awareness and understanding of wastewater management among teachers and students. Therefore, the research question raised in this study is: "How does the BKG Project function as soft power in promoting environmental awareness and understanding of waste and wastewater management among teachers and students in Bandung's elementary schools?"

This study finds that, in the Bandung-Kawasaki sister city partnership, the BKG Project works as a form of soft power through agenda-setting and framing in promoting environmental awareness and understanding of wastewater management in elementary schools in Bandung. To further elaborate this finding, the Results and Discussions section is organized into three parts. The first part presents the soft power concept as the analytical framework. The second part describes the implementation of the BKG project as a form of soft power. The third part discusses the empirical and theoretical contributions of this study to existing literature.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study raises this following research question: "How does the BKG Project function as soft power in promoting environmental awareness and understanding of waste and wastewater management among teachers and students in Bandung's elementary schools?" To address this question, the study employs soft power theory and adopts a mixed-methods approach for data collection. This theoretical framework helps the authors interpret and explain the meaning of the data obtained. In this mixed-methods approach, qualitative and quantitative methods are combined to examine the contributions of the Bandung–Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project on primary education in Bandung. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of both the implementation process and its perceived outcomes. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth structured interviews, observations, and a literature review, while quantitative data were obtained through questionnaires. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with field notes. To ensure reliability, primary and secondary data were validated through data triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

For the qualitative component, secondary data were gathered from books, academic journals, research reports, and news articles. Primary data were collected through observations and interviews conducted in Bandung between July and August 2025. Observations took place at SDN 079 Kopo Pajagalan and Hotel Grandia, where BKG training activities were held. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the project, such as Bandung Development Planning and Research Agency, Bandung Cooperation Division, SDN 079 Kopo Pajagalan, Bandung Environment Agency, Bandung Education Agency, and Kawasaki Waterworks and Sewerage Bureau.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which identifies and interprets patterns of meaning within the dataset. Following established procedures, the analysis involved stages such as familiarizing with the data, coding, identifying patterns, and interpreting themes in relation to the research questions (Jaspal, 2020, p. 33; Neuendorf, 2019, p. 213). Quantitative data were analyzed using a five-point Likert scale, with responses converted into numerical scores and percentages for interpretation. Questionnaires were distributed to 120 respondents, including students, teachers, and parents involved in or observing the BKG Project. The survey measured participants' perceptions of the project's effectiveness based on their experiences with the training activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to choose respondents based on criteria relevant to the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study finds that the Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project functions as a form of subnational soft power not simply because it transfers Kawasaki's environmental knowledge, but because that knowledge is communicated through non-coercive and attractive approaches. Two mechanisms are important in this process: agenda-setting and framing. Agenda-setting determines which environmental issues are prioritized and brought to the attention of the target audience, while framing determines how these issues are presented and communicated. Within the framing process, localization enables the BKG Project to adapt environmental knowledge to the local culture and social context. This localization helps make the communication more relevant and accessible to the target audience, thereby supporting the project's objectives in promoting environmental awareness and understanding. These findings are discussed in greater detail below.

The Concept of Soft Power

Joseph S. Nye (1990) defines soft power as the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. Instead of forcing others to act in a certain way, an actor makes others want the same outcomes. Soft power derives from intangible sources such as culture, values, and ideology, and it influences others through persuasion rather than military or economic pressure. Although commonly associated with states, soft power can also be exercised by non-state actors (Lee, 2009; R. Setiawan et al., 2025; Zhou, 2022).

Soft power operates through direct and indirect mechanisms. In the direct model, it targets decision-makers such as political elites and policymakers by presenting attractive values, credible policies, and legitimate actions. In the indirect model, it targets the general public. When public attitudes are shaped by certain values or ideas, citizens may pressure their leaders to adopt policies consistent with those views. In this way, public opinion can influence political decision-making (Nye, 2004; Trisni & Putri, 2023).

Agenda-setting and framing can function as mechanisms through which soft power operates. Rothman (2011) argues that agenda-setting and framing are important mechanisms of soft power through which actors can shape the preferences of others without physical force. Both mechanisms enable actors to influence choices, preferences, and behaviors through non-coercive means. Agenda-setting directs attention toward particular issues and values, while framing shapes how those issues are understood and interpreted.

a. Agenda-setting
   Agenda-setting refers to the ability of an actor to determine which issues, values, and priorities receive attention and are regarded as important by others. Agenda-setting has an important position in soft power because influence does not necessarily begin by directly persuading an audience to adopt a particular position. It can begin earlier by shaping what the audience thinks about in the first place. Agenda-setting involves selecting priorities, identifying issues, establishing objectives, and directing attention toward particular values and practices (Rothman, 2011, p. 53).
b. Framing
   Framing takes place after an issue has been placed on the agenda. It revolves around how that issue is presented, interpreted, and given meaning. An actor may successfully make an issue important, but that does not automatically mean that the audience will interpret it in the desired way. Framing addresses this problem by presenting the issue through particular narratives, values, symbols, examples, or interpretations (Rothman, 2011, p. 55).

Soft power has various forms. One-way soft power is exercised at the local level is through sister city partnerships. A sister city is a long-term partnership between cities in different countries designed to strengthen cooperation in areas such as culture, education, economy, and governance (Sabati, 2024; Siregar & Rizqullah, 2022; Ulung et al., 2025). These partnerships facilitate exchanges, academic collaboration, trade promotion, and the sharing of knowledge and best practices in fields such as infrastructure, healthcare, and environmental management (Bilder, 1989; Cremer et al., 2001; Kencana et al., 2024). Scholars note that cities do not select sister cities randomly. According to Zelinsky (1991), partnerships are often based on factors such as historical ties, cultural similarities, economic interests, or geographical proximity. Similarly, Ramasamy & Cremer (1998) argue that sister city partnerships initially aim to promote international friendship and cultural exchange, which later evolve into platforms for economic cooperation and business activities.

The Implementation of Soft Power

The Bandung and Kawasaki governments implement their sister city partnership through the Bandung-Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project. This project was launched by the two governments in 2023 after they signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2020 on waste management and water and air quality management. To run the BKG Project, the two cities established a Joint Working Group, which consists of the Kawasaki Waterworks and Sewerage Bureau and several Bandung local agencies, including the Environment Agency and Cooperation Division of the Bandung Administration (Ekawati, interview, July 11, 2025). This study finds that the BKG Project functions as a form of soft power, with the Joint Working Group serving as the institutional mechanism through which the soft-power process was implemented. Rather than relying on coercion, the project communicates environmental knowledge through training and educational activities. In this process, agenda-setting and framing function as two key mechanisms through which the BKG Project operates as soft power.

a. Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting in the implementation of soft power refers to an actor's ability to influence which issues, values, and priorities other actors should pay attention to and regard as important. In the BKG Project, agenda-setting represents the initial stage through which the Bandung and Kawasaki governments identified the environmental issues, values, and practices that should be introduced and communicated to communities in Bandung. This process was coordinated by the Joint Working Group, which represented the governments of the two cities. This group facilitated the transfer of knowledge and experience in environmental management from Kawasaki to Bandung. In particular, the group sought to identify environmental concerns that were relevant to Bandung while drawing on Kawasaki's experience in addressing similar challenges (Restu, interview, July 11, 2025). This approach was significant because Bandung continued to face challenges in raising environmental awareness and encouraging proper waste management practices among its residents, including children. Consequently, learning from Kawasaki provided Bandung with opportunity to introduce alternative approaches to environmental education and behavior change.

Figure 1. The agenda-setting of BKG Project



Source: photos by Asep Nandar (2024)

As illustrated in Figure 1, the agenda-setting process involved determining which environmental issues and values should be prioritized and which target groups should be exposed to them. The Joint Working Group identified elementary school students and teachers as important target groups because environmental awareness and responsible behavior can be cultivated from an early age and reinforced through formal education. The group therefore agreed to introduce selected environmental issues and practices through wastewater management training sessions at elementary schools. Teachers were also included because of their important role in shaping students' knowledge and behavior and because they interact with students regularly in the school environment. Through these activities, the Kawasaki government sought to introduce environmental knowledges and practices that could encourage students to develop greater awareness of proper waste management and adopt environmentally responsible behaviors (Takehisa, interview, August 18, 2025). As part of this agenda-setting process, the Joint Working Group selected SDN 079 Kopo Pajagalan and SDN 249 Astana Anyar as pilot schools for the BKG Project.

The issues prioritized during this agenda-setting process concerned several aspects of wastewater and environmental management, including the functions of rivers and other waterways, the importance of proper waste disposal, and the need for appropriate waste sorting. These issues were selected because improper waste disposal and waste sorting remained important environmental challenges in Bandung, particularly the practice of disposing of waste directly into rivers and other waterways. By placing these issues on the educational agenda, the Joint Working Group sought to direct students' and teachers' attention toward environmental problems that affect their everyday surroundings. At the same time, the process provided an entry point for introducing environmental knowledge and practices derived from Kawasaki's experience.

Table 1. Agenda-Setting Elements in the BKG Project

Agenda-Setting Element	BKG Project Application
Problem	River pollution and improper waste disposal
Priority	Wastewater management awareness
Target audiences	Elementary students and teachers
Knowledge	Kawasaki's environmental practices
Mechanism of Knowledge Transfer	Training and educational materials
Intended outcomes	Increased environmental awareness

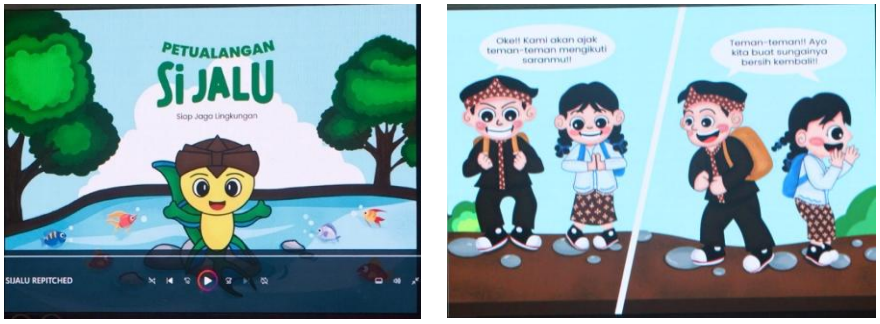
b. Framing

After the agenda-setting stage, the Joint Working Group carried out framing during the wastewater management training sessions of the BKG Project. While agenda-setting determined which environmental issues and practices should receive attention, framing concerned how these issues were communicated and interpreted by the target audience. In this process, the Joint Working Group used language and symbols to shape how elementary school students and teachers perceived wastewater management issues and appropriate responses. Kawasaki's environmental education

experiences provided an important reference for this process, while the Bandung government adapted these approaches to the local social and cultural context.

One of the main instruments used in this framing process was an animated video titled *Petualangan Si Jalu* (The Adventure of Si Jalu). This video was designed and made to raise students' environmental awareness and teach proper waste disposal and waste sorting practices in an engaging manner. *Si Jalu* is an animated green suckermouth catfish whose name stands for *Siap Jaga Lingkungan* (Ready to Protect the Environment). As illustrated in Figure 2, the character wears a Sundanese headband to reflect local culture of Bandung. The *Si Jalu* character was inspired by Wotan and Kappy, two animated characters used by the Kawasaki government in primary education programs for children in Kawasaki. Wotan is a blue-colored character representing water, while Kappy is a green-colored character inspired by a legendary Japanese figure associated with rivers and their protection. *Si Jalu* demonstrates that Kawasaki did not simply transfer an existing Japanese educational model to Bandung. Instead, Kawasaki's environmental education approach was adapted to Bandung's cultural context.

Figure 2. The video of *Petualangan Si Jalu*



Source: photos by Asep Nandar (2024)

The adaptation of the characters of Wotan and Kappy into *Si Jalu* demonstrates how Kawasaki's environmental education approach was localized rather than transferred unchanged to Bandung. Similar to the educational videos used in Kawasaki, the *Si Jalu* video presents simple stories about wastewater problems in Bandung and their solutions. The use of a locally recognizable character and Sundanese cultural symbol made the messages more relevant to students in Bandung. The *Si Jalu* video was produced by the Bandung Environment Agency in collaboration with the Kawasaki Waterworks and Sewerage Bureau in the Joint Working Group. The Kawasaki Waterworks and Sewerage Bureau mentored its Bandung counterpart in producing the video, ensuring that the *Si Jalu* video adopted elements of the educational video approach used in Kawasaki. The video thus represents a form of knowledge and cultural adaptation through which Kawasaki communicated environmental values, knowledge, and expertise to elementary school students and teachers in Bandung in an engaging and non-coercive manner through framing.

The framing strategy was grounded in Kawasaki's previous experience in addressing environmental and wastewater problems. In the 1960s, Kawasaki experienced severe wastewater pollution. At that time, the city strengthened regulations, built wastewater treatment plants, and promoted public education. This action contributed to the restoration of the polluted Tamagawa River (Burhanudin, 2023). The Bandung sought to learn from and adapt Kawasaki's experience to the local context, particularly in addressing environmental challenges affecting the Citarum River. For this reason, the BKG Project provides training not only for civil servants but also for teachers and elementary school students in order to build environmental awareness from an early age (Takehisa, interview, August 18, 2025).

The framing process also incorporated behavioral approaches derived from Kawasaki's environmental management experience. One example was Nudge Theory. Nudge Theory is a behavioral approach used by the Kawasaki government to address environmental and wastewater management challenges. Developed by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, Nudge Theory explains how individual behavior can be influenced through subtle changes in the decision-making environment without eliminating freedom of choice or substantially changing economic incentives. Rather than relying exclusively on regulations or coercive measures, nudges encourage individuals to adopt desirable behaviors by altering how choices are presented. In the context of the BKG Project, the introduction of this approach reflects Kawasaki's effort to place behavioral change alongside environmental knowledge on the agenda of environmental education in Bandung. Through these approaches, the BKG Project did not merely transfer information about wastewater and waste management. It also introduced particular environmental knowledge, educational approaches, and behavioral practices that the Kawasaki government considered important for cultivating environmentally responsible behavior among children in Bandung.

The framing strategy was subsequently implemented through training activities at elementary schools. The Joint Working Group targeted elementary schools located near the heavily polluted Citarum River. The schools include SDN 079 Kopo Pajagalan and SDN 249 Astana Anyar in the Nyengseret district. The governments selected this school as the pilot location because it is located near the Citepus River, which flows into the Citarum River. In February 2025, the BKG training session held at SDN 079 Kopo Pajagalan. As illustrated in Figure 3, It was attended by nearly 100 fourth-grade students. During the BKG student training sessions, trainers from the Joint Working Group introduced students to the functions of rivers and other waterways, the importance of proper waste disposal, and the importance of sorting waste properly. Kawasaki officials contributed technical and pedagogical knowledge based on the city's environmental management experience.

Figure 3. The BKG Training Session at SDN 079 Kopo Pajagalan



Source: photos by Asep Nandar (2024)

The training translated these environmental issues into messages that were relevant to students' everyday lives. Regarding the function of rivers, students learned that rivers are important ecosystems that support human life, agriculture, sanitation, and biodiversity. They also learned how river pollution harms the environment and public health. In relation to proper waste disposal, students learned that disposing of waste correctly helps prevent water pollution, reduce flooding, and protect aquatic life, while irresponsible disposal harms the environment. In terms of waste sorting, students also learned to distinguish between organic, inorganic, and recyclable waste, and understood that proper waste separation supports recycling and reduces waste entering rivers and landfills.

The *Si Jalu* video reinforced these messages by framing proper wastewater and waste management as matters of everyday responsibility. Rather than presenting wastewater management as a technical issue, the video translated environmental problems into simple and relatable messages that could be understood by elementary school students. In particular, the video emphasized that waste should be sorted properly before disposal and should never be thrown into rivers. By presenting these practices in a fun and engaging format, the BKG Project sought to associate proper waste management with positive and responsible behavior, thereby making the promoted environmental knowledge more accessible and meaningful to students. The use of animated educational videos as a tool for environmental education represents a relatively new approach in Bandung. Prior to the BKG Project, educational videos of this kind had not been widely used by the Bandung government to raise students' awareness of waste management issues. Through the BKG Project, therefore, the use of animation introduced a new and engaging approach to environmental education in Bandung's elementary schools.

The Kawasaki and Bandung governments further extend soft power strategy by involving teachers as key intermediaries in doing the framing process. Teachers participated in training sessions designed to strengthen their understanding of wastewater management issues in Bandung. The training framed river pollution not merely as an environmental problem but also as a consequence of everyday household practices and limited public awareness. For example, the sessions explained how improper household waste practices continue to disrupt the city's water system. Despite the presence of a wastewater treatment plant (IPAL) in Bojongsoang and the widespread use of septic tanks, many residents still dispose of organic waste directly into rivers. The training also introduced the differences between off-site treatment

systems, such as IPAL, and on-site systems, such as septic tanks. Trainers highlighted persistent problems, including poorly constructed septic tanks that leak and illegal pipes that discharge wastewater directly into rivers. By presenting these conditions, the training encouraged teachers to understand river pollution as a problem that is closely connected to everyday human behavior and the need for greater public awareness (Fiziarita, interview, August 15, 2025).

The framing process was further reflected in the way the training linked technical wastewater management issues with familiar activities in everyday life. One teacher training program, titled "Domestic Wastewater Management Seminar for Bandung Residents," illustrates this strategy. The seminar raises awareness about everyday activities that contribute to river pollution, such as washing greasy cooking utensils or pouring used cooking oil into sinks. This information is important not only for teachers but also for students and their parents, many of whom are unaware that sinks are connected directly to drainage systems. Local residents are also invited to attend the seminar. Interviews indicate that improper waste disposal often results from a lack of knowledge, particularly among street vendors who are uncertain how to dispose of used cooking oil properly (Nandar, interview, July 11, 2025).

Figure 4. The BKG Project training session at Hotel Grandia



Source: photos by Alessandro Kurniawan (2025)

Through this framing strategy, as illustrated in Figure 4, the Kawasaki government sought to construct a particular understanding of wastewater management: river pollution is not solely a problem of inadequate infrastructure but is also the result of everyday practices and insufficient public knowledge. Teachers became important intermediaries in communicating this interpretation because they could translate technical information into forms that were relevant to students and their families. In this way, the BKG Project extended Kawasaki's soft-power influence beyond direct interaction with students to the broader school and community environment.

The framing process implemented during the BKG training sessions has also contributed to discussions within the Bandung Education Agency regarding the incorporation of BKG materials into future environmental education textbooks in primary schools. The government considered the integration important because the existing curriculum focuses primarily on theoretical content and offers limited practical activities. By incorporating the BKG Project activities into the curriculum, students can gain hands-on knowledge that reflects real environmental problems in

their communities. The Bandung Environment Agency and the Bandung Education Agency are collaborating to include the materials given in the BKG Project in environmental education textbooks, with the goal of creating long-term impact by strengthening environmental awareness among future generations (Nandar, interview, July 11, 2025). The materials include the *Si Jalu* animated video among other things. The Environmental Education Curriculum Team at the Bandung Education Agency already produced textbooks about environmental education. The curriculum team has committed to incorporating *Si Jalu*-related materials into future editions of these textbooks (Fitriani, interview, August 15, 2025).

Overall, the framing process demonstrates how the Kawasaki government exercised soft power through knowledge transfer. Rather than compelling Bandung's teachers and students to change their behavior, Kawasaki communicated environmental knowledge and practices through engaging educational materials, localized cultural symbols, behavioral approaches, and everyday examples. The Joint Working Group functioned as the institutional mechanism through which these approaches were adapted and implemented in Bandung. The BKG Project therefore illustrates how subnational actors can project soft power through sister-city cooperation by shaping how environmental issues are understood and by encouraging the gradual acceptance of particular environmental knowledge, norms, and practices.

The Empirical and Theoretical Contributions of this Study

Under the sister city partnership between Bandung and Kawasaki, the BKG Project works as a soft power instrument intended to promote environmental awareness of waste management among children in Bandung. The making of the *Petualangan Si Jalu* video represents one key strategy during BKG training sessions to attract students' attention and promote environmental awareness. The governments of Bandung and Kawasaki employ the BKG Project as a form of soft power, expecting it to contribute to increased environmental awareness among elementary students. This case therefore provides an opportunity to examine the effectiveness and limitations of soft power beyond conventional state-to-state diplomacy.

The debate over the effectiveness of soft power remains unresolved. While some scholars question the effectiveness of soft power, others remain confident in its ability to shape behavior. Saeed & Askari (2021) argue that soft power enables states to achieve foreign policy objectives by generating support from other countries, shaping their perceptions and preferences, and projecting an attractive image. Rothman (2011) adds that soft power can complement and enhance hard power. Because hard power is not always capable of producing effective outcomes, soft power offers a source of legitimacy that hard power often cannot provide. Therefore, soft power can also serve as an effective instrument for realizing foreign policy objectives. However, not all scholars agree on its effectiveness. Although hard power has limitations, soft power cannot replace it. The problem is that soft power is difficult to measure because its influence on other actors' behavior cannot be easily quantified. Rostoks & Sprūds (2015) argue that soft power is a long-term investment that does not guarantee immediate results and is not suitable for responding to sudden crises. They

also note that soft power tends to work better with allies than with adversaries. In addition, the effectiveness of soft power depends on the diversity of the target audience. Different groups within a society may respond differently to the same source of attraction. Seong-Hun (2018) further argues that soft power is subjective because it depends on how foreign audiences perceive a country's culture, values, and policies. If these are not considered attractive or legitimate, soft power will not be effective.

The empirical findings of this study support a more nuanced position in this debate. The BKG Project demonstrates that soft-power can generate attraction and positive perceptions, while also illustrating the difficulty of translating such attraction into sustained behavioral change. The findings provide evidence that the BKG Project functioned as an exercise of soft power by generating favorable perceptions of Japanese environmental education among elementary school teachers and students in Bandung. These positive perceptions are evidenced by the survey conducted in this study. Teachers generally expressed favorable perceptions for the Japanese environmental education introduced through the BKG Project, as reflected in their evaluations of the BKG training: 62.5% rated the training delivery as very good, while 37.5% rated it as good. The *Si Jalu* video, which was inspired by Japan's Wotan and Kappy characters, was also positively received and was particularly effective in attracting students' attention, with 55.6% of teachers rating it as very effective and 44.4% as effective. The video received a mean score of 4.55 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating a highly favorable perception among the respondents. This positive perception was further reflected in the relevance of the training materials, with 56.3% of respondents considering the materials provided through the BKG Project to be very relevant to environmental challenges, while 43.8% considered them relevant. Taken together, this positive feedback from teachers and students indicates that the BKG Project generated favorable perceptions of Japanese environmental education. This finding is consistent with Nye (2008)'s argument that soft power can foster positive emotions, including admiration, by making a country, its values, and its practices attractive to foreign publics.

However, the empirical evidence also reveals an important limitation of soft power. Although the BKG Project generated positive perceptions among teachers and students, this study finds it difficult to demonstrate that these positive perceptions resulted in sustained behavioral changes in waste management practices. This difficulty reflects a broader challenge in evaluating soft power because positive perceptions or favorable responses to an initiative do not necessarily demonstrate its influence on subsequent behavior (Pamment, 2014). At the level of foreign policy, Goldsmith & Horiuchi, p. (2012, p. 561) explain that, the relationship between foreign public opinion and policy behavior is conditional rather than automatic, suggesting that favorable perceptions may translate into behavioral or policy outcomes only under particular circumstances. The findings of this study therefore highlight the important distinction between positive perception, influence, and behavioral change. Positive reception should not automatically be equated with influence, just as influence should not automatically be equated with behavioral change. The BKG case demonstrates that an actor may successfully generate attraction and communicate

preferred values without necessarily being able to demonstrate that these values have been internalized and translated into long-term behavioral change.

The BKG Project also provides empirical support for Flew (2016)'s argument that the effectiveness of soft power is context-dependent. The context-dependence means that an asset does not automatically becomes soft power merely because the sender considers it attractive. It becomes a source of soft power when the target audience perceives it as attractive or credible. In the context of the Bandung–Kawasaki sister-city partnership, the practices and educational approaches developed in Kawasaki could not simply be reproduced in Bandung with the expectation that they would generate identical outcomes, because the two cities have different social, cultural, institutional, and environmental contexts. In the BKG case, Kawasaki's environmental practices became attractive to the target audience in Bandung when they were translated into locally relevant forms, such as the *Si Jalu* character and the use of Sundanese cultural symbols. Therefore, the effectiveness of soft power depends not only on the attractiveness of the source but also on the source's ability to contextualize and localize its messages. The finding of this study reinforces Seong-Hun (2018)'s argument that attraction is subjective and dependent on how audiences interpret the values and practices being communicated.

An additional indication of a possible institutional effect of the BKG Project is its incorporation into Bandung's educational system. The Bandung Education Agency subsequently considered integrating materials from the BKG training sessions into elementary school environmental education textbooks. This development suggests that soft power can produce influence beyond the immediate target audience by encouraging local institutions to adopt and institutionalize ideas introduced through international cooperation. However, this institutional response should not be interpreted as evidence that the broader population of Bandung has adopted the same environmental values. The diverse characteristics of Bandung's population mean that attraction among teachers and education officials cannot automatically be generalized to the wider community.

These findings make two contributions to the literature of soft power. Empirically, the study demonstrates how soft power can be exercised through sister-city cooperation at the subnational level. Rather than operating exclusively through central governments and diplomatic missions, soft power can be embedded in practical cooperation involving local governments, schools, teachers, and students. The BKG Project shows how knowledge-sharing can become a source of attraction when the knowledge is communicated through accessible, culturally relevant, and non-coercive forms.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the debate by distinguishing attraction, perception, influence, and behavioral change as analytically different stages of soft power. The BKG case demonstrates that a soft-power initiative can be successful in generating positive perceptions and attraction without providing sufficient evidence of long-term behavioral transformation. It therefore supports the argument that soft power effectiveness should not be assessed solely through the attractiveness of a country's values or the positive responses of its target audience. Instead, assessment should consider whether attraction is translated into sustained influence and

observable behavioral or institutional outcomes. The study therefore proposes a more cautious understanding of soft power: soft power can create attraction and the conditions for influence, but attraction alone does not guarantee behavioral change.

The BKG Project thus offers a nuanced perspective on the existing debate over the effectiveness of soft power. It demonstrates that soft power can be effective in generating attraction, facilitating the acceptance of knowledge and values, and encouraging institutional responses. At the same time, the BKG Project's limited capacity to directly address the structural dimensions of Bandung's wastewater problems indicates the limits of attraction-based influence. The case suggests that soft power is most appropriately understood not as an autonomous source of power that automatically produces desired outcomes, but as a relational and context-dependent process whose effectiveness depends on audience perceptions, cultural adaptation, and institutional receptivity.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the Bandung and Kawasaki governments collaborated to use the Bandung–Kawasaki Gesuido (BKG) Project as a soft power instrument to promote environmental awareness and understanding of proper wastewater management among teachers and elementary school students in Bandung through two stages: agenda setting and framing. During the agenda-setting stage, the two city governments identified the issues, values, and priorities they sought to promote through the BKG Project and determined how these values and priorities could be translated into activities to achieve the project's objectives. The identification of the environmental issues and target audiences then shaped the development of educational materials, such as the *Si Jalu* video. In the framing stage, *Si Jalu* translated environmental issues into accessible and culturally relevant messages for the local audience. The *Si Jalu* video was used to frame waste management issues in ways intended to communicate environmental knowledge and encourage greater awareness among teachers and elementary school students. This study found that the framing process generated favorable perceptions among participating respondents and provided teachers and students with accessible and culturally relevant environmental messages.

However, this study is limited to examining how the BKG Project functions as a soft power instrument for raising environmental awareness of waste management among elementary school students and teachers in Bandung. It does not examine whether the increased awareness translates into changes in students' environmental behavior. Therefore, future studies should investigate how the BKG Project influences behavioral changes among elementary school students. Examining the project's impact on behavior change would strengthen the findings of this study and provide further practical insights for city governments into how sister-city partnerships can contribute to addressing urban environmental challenges.

PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, the positive responses to the BKG Project suggest that foreign environmental practices are

more likely to be accepted when they are adapted to local culture and social contexts rather than transferred unchanged from originating country. The use of the *Petualangan Si Jalu* video in the BKG Project shows that transfer of knowledge should be localized to the target context. However, positive perception of Kawasaki's environmental education through the BKG Project cannot automatically produce behavioral changes. It needs monitoring, continuous education, and behavioral reinforcement to translate awareness into sustained waste-management practices. One potential avenue for continuous education is the planned incorporation of BKG materials into Bandung's elementary education system. This shows that the Bandung administration recognizes that sister city partnership can have a greater and more sustainable impact when knowledge and practices from foreign cities are incorporated into existing local institutions.

Theoretically, the study extends the literature on soft power by demonstrating that soft power can operate at the subnational level through sister-city cooperation and by showing how agenda-setting and framing facilitate the communication of values and practices. More importantly, the finding of this study distinguishes between attraction, positive perception, influence, and behavioral change as analytically different outcomes. Rather than viewing soft power as an autonomous form of power that directly produces desired outcomes, the case of the BKG Project suggests that soft power is better understood as a relational process that creates attraction and conditions for influence. Whether that influence produces sustained behavioral change depends on contextual, cultural, and institutional factors.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

This study uses Grammarly and other generative AI or AI-assisted technologies solely to improve language, grammar, sentence structure, and readability during manuscript preparation. These tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, interpret findings, or develop the study's conclusions. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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