

Marine Plastic Pollution: ASEAN Values and The Bottom-Up Role of Divers Clean Action

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Abstract

This study analyzes the role of Divers Clean Action (DCA) as an implementation of ASEAN Values in a bottom-up approach to tackling marine plastic pollution in Southeast Asia. Drawing on Alexander Wendt's constructivism theory, it shows how DCA utilizes values such as collectivism, social harmony, respect for cultural diversity, and gotong royong to build a pro-environmental collective identity. Qualitative research methods were applied through in-depth interviews with a DCA representative and document analysis, revealing that an ASEAN Values-based approach can form a strong pro-environmental collective identity while addressing the weaknesses of the top-down approach previously relied upon by ASEAN. However, challenges such as resource constraints and cross-border coordination require more structured policy support from ASEAN. This research makes an important contribution to the literature on regional environmental governance by demonstrating the potential for integrating local values and community-based approaches in addressing complex environmental issues. The implications of these findings suggest the need for a more inclusive policy framework that combines the strengths of bottom-up and top-down approaches for more effective management of marine plastic pollution in the ASEAN region.

Keywords: ASEAN Values, marine plastic pollution, Divers Clean Action, bottom-up approach, constructivism.

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INTRODUCTION

The ocean is a vast expanse of saltwater covering the Earth's surface, capable of absorbing large amounts of heat and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, maintaining the hydrological cycle, supporting a diverse array of marine habitats and organisms, and producing approximately half of the Earth's oxygen and biomass. In addition, the ocean can also provide food, energy, transportation links, genetic and mineral resources, employment opportunities, recreational, cultural and social services (Solidoro, 2021). With all these capabilities, the ocean has a role to support the lives of living things and maintain the stability of the earth's ecosystem. ASEAN as a regional organization in the Southeast Asian region seeks to maintain ocean sustainability by implementing three ASEAN pillars, such as the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), which plays a role in strengthening social and cultural awareness of the importance of protecting marine ecosystems, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which plays a role in encouraging sustainable economic policies for marine resource management, and the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), which ensures the creation of cooperation between member countries that are safe and stable in marine management (ASEAN, 2023).

As a region with one of the longest coastlines in the world, Southeast Asia experiences various complex maritime issues such as climate change, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU fishing), plastic pollution, and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Marine plastic pollution, as one of the crucial issues in the global maritime discourse ranks third after climate change and IUU leakage into the marine environment in the Southeast Asian region. Data shows that 6 out of 10 ASEAN countries produce 31 million tons of plastic waste per year that flows into the sea and causes marine ecosystems to be polluted (Fallin et al., 2021). Meijer et al. (2021) also stated some of their findings: 6 of the top 10 countries are the main contributors (estimated) of plastic, 29 of the 50 rivers that contribute the largest plastic emissions in the world come from Southeast Asian countries, and 56.7% of the total global plastic leakage occurs in ASEAN countries. This problem is exacerbated because plastic materials are so durable that the decomposition process takes between 500-1000 years, but this time period also does not guarantee that the plastic is fully decomposed (Fava, 2022).

Marine plastic debris pollution has significant adverse impacts on marine life and other organisms that depend on aquatic ecosystems. This is due to the tendency of marine biota to identify plastic debris as a food source based on visual similarities, chemical cues, and plastic sphere formation (Tuuri & Leterme, 2023). Consumption of plastic by marine life causes various health problems such as blockage of the digestive tract, internal injuries, decreased reproductive ability and growth, malnutrition, and death. Marine animals such as sea turtles, marine mammals, and seabirds that become entangled in plastic debris also often experience physical injuries, movement disorders, and even death (Râpă et al., 2024). Furthermore, plastics that have no nutritional value at all trigger physical abnormalities in animals, including genetic malformations, mechanical obstruction, impaired organ function, and exposure to toxic chemical compounds such as POPs, plastic additives, and hydrophobic contaminants (Ugwu et al., 2021). Microplastic particles ingested by small marine organisms and then to larger predators through the food chain and to humans through seafood consumption can cause oxidative stress, cytotoxicity, and metabolic disorders. In addition, plastic accumulation impacts marine habitats such as physical damage to coral tissue, algae, beaches, estuaries and salt marshes, reducing biodiversity and disrupting trophic relationships (Paul et al., 2024).

Responding to this issue, the 34th ASEAN Summit adopted the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN Region and the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris and furthered this commitment by developing the ASEAN Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris. But the documents also imply that challenges in tackling marine plastic pollution are constrained in their implementation and effectiveness by limited resources, lack of coordination between countries, and lack of public awareness and participation. The country's society is an important element in carrying out policies because public participation and involvement in the policy planning, implementation, and monitoring process are needed to ensure the success and sustainability of the policy (ASEAN, 2021b). In this context, there are social values that developed naturally in each culture prior to the juridical values in the ASEAN Charter. These values include collectivism, social harmony, respect for cultural diversity, and *gotong royong*, which can be referred to as ASEAN Values.

Although ASEAN Values are not explicitly explained in official documents, they are strongly reflected in every decision and policy taken by ASEAN. To clarify the context, it is necessary to distinguish between the ASEAN Way and ASEAN Values. The ASEAN Way refers to the four flexible principles by which ASEAN countries communicate and solve problems: non-intervention, quiet diplomacy, non-use of force, and consensus decision-making, while ASEAN Values refer to the cultural values that naturally grow in Southeast Asian societies and form the basis of ASEAN. The ASEAN Charter (2008) implements the principles of the ASEAN Way in a more detailed and structured manner, but the ASEAN Values are embedded in the rules.

Collectivism is reflected in phrases such as One Vision, One Identity, One Caring, sharing community," "shared commitment, shared destiny, collective responsibility, and a people-oriented ASEAN. Social harmony is reflected in phrases such as peace, security and stability, prosperity, and a sense of belonging. Respect for cultural diversity is reflected in phrases such as respecting, unity in diversity, respect for the different cultures, diverse culture and heritage, and phrases such as respect for the different cultures, languages, and religions. *Gotong royong* is reflected in phrases such as cooperation and integration, collaborate and close collaboration.

In contrast to Asian Values, which Amartya Sen (1997) criticized as a means of legitimizing authoritarianism and rejecting universal values, ASEAN Values reinforce the principles of inclusiveness and human rights through communitarian norms that are institutionalized in documents such as the ASEAN Charter and its pillars. This approach is not only culturally contextual but also strategic in addressing regional challenges by tapping into the collective consciousness of the people. As such, ASEAN Values offers a progressive alternative to the hegemonic narrative of Asian Values while addressing the soft-law critique in the ASEAN Way through strengthening the role of civil society.

Having understood the conceptual differences between the ASEAN Way and ASEAN Values, further focus lies on how the foundation of ASEAN Values stems from the main legal foundation to the drafting of agendas that evolve from that legal foundation in the context of the environment in general to the marine environment. In the Environment Overview (ASEAN, n.d.), it is stated that ASEAN prioritizes environmental development as part of robust sustainable development because the ASEAN region is home to 20% of the world's species and is the center of the world's marine biodiversity. This principle is also stated in the ASEAN Charter (2008), which prioritizes sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations. One of the key pillars of ASEAN, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), has a strategic role to play in ensuring a sustainable and resilient environment for the benefit of the ASEAN community.

Several policies are made under the auspices of this normative commitment, including through the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris (ASEAN, 2021a), which contains a regional dedication to reducing marine pollution through an integrated waste management-based approach, research cooperation, and capacity building of member states. Unfortunately, the implementation of this policy still reflects the classic ASEAN dilemma (strong in commitment but weak in execution) so that a truly transformative strengthening is

needed in the face of environmental crises such as the issue of marine plastic pollution. This research proposes ASEAN Values as a new, innovative, and data-driven conceptual solution to address the gap of lack of awareness and participation of the country's people that has not been accommodated in the current policy. ASEAN Values formulated in a bottom-up solution are ensured to be internalized in the organization, because community values must be integrated in the social system in order to create stability (Parsons, 1991).

The proposal of ASEAN Values as a reflection of the bottom-up approach was found after reviewing studies, such as Jans' (2021) research that has proven the success of the bottom-up approach in forming a strong pro-environmental social identity and encouraging pro-environmental behavior among community members. Eicken et al. (2021), in their research in the Arctic region stated that the bottom-up approach can be applied as the main step in observing the environment because local communities have in-depth knowledge related to environmental changes experienced. Then Putri and Sabatira (2023), who also examined marine plastic pollution in ASEAN, argued that ASEAN's non-binding legal instruments, the soft-law ASEAN Way, and member countries that tend to prioritize their national interests over collective interests make the issue of marine plastic pollution difficult to handle together, requiring a persuasion and acculturation approach by building shared norms. Thus, the integration of these findings can strengthen community participation in addressing environmental issues by introducing robust approaches and strategies.

Divers Clean Action (DCA) is a clear example of implementing bottom-up solutions that have elements of ASEAN Values in every activity. Swietenia Puspa Lestari, Nesha Ichida, and M. Adi Septiono founded DCA in November 2015, and it currently operates out of South Jakarta. DCA actively shares news and insights about the marine environment including marine plastic waste through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Currently, DCA receives support from thousands of volunteers from various countries in Southeast Asia and develops four main programs namely research, campaigns & community service, community development, and CSR/EPR collaborators. The organization's future goal is "we will fight until 2050 when there will be no more plastic than fish in the ocean" (Divers Clean Action, n.d.). DCA focuses not only on plastic waste cleanup but also on collective awareness building and environmental education that emphasizes the values of shared responsibility, social harmony, respect for diversity, and *gotong royong*, all of which are highly valued in the ASEAN region.

This research aims to analyze how Divers Clean Action (DCA) reflects the implementation of ASEAN Values in addressing marine plastic pollution in the ASEAN region. By prioritizing a bottom-up approach that actively involves the community, DCA has successfully demonstrated how basic ASEAN values such as collectivism, social harmony, respect for cultural diversity, and *gotong royong* can be concretely applied in addressing environmental issues. Through this initiative, DCA not only plays a role in cleaning up plastic waste but also educates the community on the importance of environmental awareness and collective responsibility, which is in line with ASEAN principles. Thus, this study confirms that the application of ASEAN Values in community-based solutions contributes significantly to the reduction of marine plastic pollution in the region while strengthening solidarity among

countries and communities in ASEAN. This research is expected to contribute to the development of policies that are more inclusive and aligned with the socio-cultural characteristics of the ASEAN region.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It collected primary data through semi-structured in-depth interviews with Divers Clean Action (DCA) representatives to explore their contextual perspectives as key actors in tackling marine plastic pollution. Secondary data were obtained through literature study and document analysis; the former developed the conceptual framework, while the latter examined relevant texts.

Thematic analysis identified patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This provided deep insights into the role of ASEAN Values as a basis for bottom-up solutions to encourage collective action against marine plastic pollution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contextualizing ASEAN Values in the Environmental Activism Movement

The contextualization of ASEAN Values can become an important foundation in directing the environmental activism movement in the Southeast Asian region to encourage cross-country collaboration for environmental sustainability. In relation to collectivism, DCA effectively builds a collective identity by involving various parties in its programs and creating a sense of community to take responsibility for the issue of marine plastic pollution. Based on personal interviews with representatives from DCA, it is known that PHINLA (a collaborative program with the Philippines and Sri Lanka) does not only focus on waste banks but also on the welfare of the participants' children.

This process creates a collective identity that transcends national boundaries. DCA's EcoTrip involves volunteers, companies, and local communities in cleanup and ecosystem restoration activities, thus forming a shared awareness of the importance of protecting the environment. Participatory data platforms such as MarineDebris.id allow communities and other stakeholders to contribute to data collection and strengthen a sense of shared ownership of the marine debris problem.

Everyday environmentalism emphasizes small, community-based actions taken collectively to achieve environmental sustainability, thus requiring the value of collectivism to build collective awareness, strengthen citizen participation, and create incremental yet sustainable changes in everyday life. Agyeman and his colleagues' thinking is manifested in practices such as sorting household waste, educating families on the importance of sorting waste from the source, and managing it through waste banks. In addition, activities such as Clean-Ups and workshops that involve direct community participation contribute to forming sustainable pro-environmental habits.

Then, Vandana Shiva's Earth Democracy emphasizes that ecological justice cannot be separated from social justice, where every living being has equal rights to natural resources and survival on earth. DCA ensures social-ecological justice by ensuring that the benefits of the program are felt by vulnerable groups by placing waste management as an integral part of

efforts to improve quality of life, including aspects of environmental education and public health.

The value of social harmony built by DCA aims to create a balance between humans and the environment. DCA does not only focus on cleaning up waste, but also on education that emphasizes the balance of the ecosystem. DCA explains that there are campaigns on the impact of plastic on marine biota in workshops and holistic educational approaches, such as collaboration with Smiling Coral Indonesia in coral reef restoration that invites people to see firsthand the consequences of plastic pollution on marine ecosystems, especially in coastal areas that function as living spaces as well as livelihood bases. DCA also uses YouTube as an online medium to explain how plastic waste damages marine ecology so that people understand the relationship between their actions and environmental damage. Furthermore, the Toko Cura program (Divers Clean Action, 2024) established by DCA in order to reduce plastic waste while educating the public about sustainable lifestyles, creates harmony between economic needs and environmental preservation.

Community involvement in these activities reflects a form of integration of everyday environmentalism because there are small behavioral changes (such as reducing dependence on single-use plastics through daily shopping habits) from the habit of engaging the community in sustainable practices that are easily adopted into daily routines. This integration is even stronger when associated with Earth Democracy, which shows that there is community sovereignty (such as controlling product distribution system to reduce plastic packaging), strengthening sustainable economics (linking environmental value with economic benefits), and proving Earth Family, which emphasizes the harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

As a continuation, DCA highly values cultural diversity in each of its programs, both locally and internationally. Programs such as PHINLA and SOI Alliance certainly involve countries with different cultures, but DCA is able to adapt the approach to the local context. DCA shared that when implementing activities in Bali, DCA temporarily suspended activities during Nyepi; in Muslim areas, the team participated in communal prayers. This clearly demonstrates respect for local values. When implementing activities, DCA tailors its strategies based on local culture, rather than applying a universal solution. The use of needs mapping and informal dialogue before program interventions, for instance, guarantees that the solutions offered are consistent with community values.

As a commitment to inclusivity and social sensitivity, DCA has a safeguarding policy to respect religious, racial, and cultural differences that is applied in every interaction with the community. Earth Democracy explicitly states respect for the rights of nature and local communities, including their cultures. DCA applies this principle by adjusting program approaches based on local culture, such as respecting community traditions when running activities.

Equally important, the value of *gotong royong* reflects social solidarity and collaborative practices that support community participation in development. In the interview, it was explained that DCA adopts the principle of *gotong royong* by involving various parties including companies, producers, volunteers, the government, and local communities. DCA

facilitates mutually beneficial collaboration. For example, companies get CSR benefits, communities get education and economic incentives, and the government achieves waste management targets. This reflects modern *gotong royong*, where all parties contribute according to their capacity. One activity that demonstrates mutual cooperation is the EcoTrip to clean the coastline of stranded marine plastic by combining the participation of companies (CSR), volunteers, and coastal communities.

This activity began with a focus group discussion designed to build a sense of community and equalize perceptions among participants regarding the urgency of the plastic waste issue. Through this process, participants were directed to a collective understanding that plastic waste is a common challenge that must be faced in mutual cooperation, which was then realized through collaborative coastal cleaning actions. Then, there is the Circulating Island program that synergizes the roles of various key actors in the waste management system in the Thousand Islands by involving waste banks as a driving force at the community level, the local government in providing logistical support for ships, and the private sector as an offtaker that ensures the distribution and final use of waste is managed in a sustainable manner.



Figure 1. Interview with Divers Clean Action representative

Community-Based Environmental Practices Offer Alternatives to Top-Down Domination

ASEAN structurally adopts a top-down approach in its policies but in addressing marine plastic pollution, ASEAN's normatively comprehensive top-down policies can face significant implementation challenges. Three paradoxes were identified by Putri and Sabatira (2023) in the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris (2021a) and the ASEAN Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN Member States 2021-2025 (2021b). It was found that minimal community participation in policy planning resulted in programs that often did not meet local needs and even tended to be fragmented by competing national interests.

Concrete examples can show policy contradictions in the management of plastic waste imports, such as Malaysia, which began restricting plastic waste imports since 2018 but legal loopholes still allow the entry of "clean and homogeneous" waste through official licenses

(Reuters, 2021). The recycling process is not entirely clean due to the consumption of fossil energy, release of pollutants into the air, contamination of additives, contamination of waste, transportation requiring emissions that will generate a carbon footprint, and the final product having a limited lifetime (Walker & Fequet, 2023). At the end of the day, even though it is often referred to as "recycled material", plastic waste is still waste.

OECD data (2023) shows that 3 countries in Southeast Asia became the main importers of plastic waste and scrap globally in 2020 and 2021, with Malaysia ranking as the second largest importer in both years. Indonesia and Thailand also show significant import volumes making these countries major destinations for plastic waste, reflecting a continued reliance on imported materials for their recycling industries. After years of facing serious challenges related to plastic waste, both Indonesia (Neilson, 2025) and Thailand (Lodhi, 2025) have officially implemented policies banning the import of plastic waste.

This disparity complicates regional coordination while exposing the fundamental weakness of the top-down approach, which is the inability to homogenize policies at the local level without disregarding national sovereignty. This finding is consistent with Sabatier's (1986) criticism that hierarchical policies often fail because they ignore the complexity of the field. Therefore, there is a need for policy vernacularization so that community participation can grow in a deep-rooted, meaningful, and sustainable manner.

On the one hand, the soft-law nature of ASEAN has led to low compliance rates among member states. Member states tend to prioritize national economic interests over regional environmental commitments, such as Thailand which has a national economic interest in the issue of plastic waste due to its economic sector, especially the petrochemical and plastic industries, which contribute significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When economic growth is threatened by stringent environmental regulations, there is concern among policymakers that it could undermine economic stability and public welfare (Marks et al., 2023). General data for the Southeast Asia region shows that demand for recycled plastics in Southeast Asia continues to grow, with a projected contribution of 14%-16% to total plastic use by 2030 (Luedi et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the ASEAN Way approach of non-intervention and flexibility is counterproductive on environmental issues that require a quick response. For example, the case of plastic waste leakage in the Mekong River has not been resolved significantly, even though this river plays a crucial role in the lives of millions of people along its flow from Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Environmental analysis data published in 2024 said that plastic enters the Mekong River from various sources, resulting in piles of plastic waste at critical points such as Tonle Sap Lake and the Mekong Delta. This can pose a threat to biodiversity and local food security, so countries need to build waste management infrastructure and conduct strict monitoring in areas along the Mekong River (Reccessary, 2024).

While ASEAN normatively emphasizes the importance of cross-stakeholder collaboration in addressing marine plastic pollution, documentation of such engagement is descriptive and lacking in quantitative data. As in the ASEAN Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris 2021–2025 (2021b), NGO participation is mentioned as part of the

strategy to strengthen governance and community capacity building, but there is no measurable information on the proportion or form of NGO involvement in the concrete policy design phase. The discrepancy between the normative narrative and the implementation reality shows a gap between the participatory commitments echoed at the regional level and the elitist and top-down policy practices at the national and local levels. Thus, the gap between normative commitment and implementation reality illustrates the importance of the integration of a bottom-up approach in regional environmental governance.

The bottom-up approach implemented by DCA has proven effective in addressing marine plastic pollution in the ASEAN region through three main mechanisms. First, DCA adapts to community culture through community profiling and safeguarding policy that ensures programs are aligned with local values as reflected in respect for cultural diversity. Second, the direct involvement of communities in its programs increases collective accountability in addressing marine plastic pollution in ASEAN, as advocated by Putri and Sabatira (2023) in their research. Third, DCA builds multi-stakeholder collaborations with governments, companies, and NGOs to utilize a wide network of resources without compromising community autonomy.

With this method, DCA's 2023 Annual Report shows how the organization succeeded in its programs such as the *Sehari Menjadi Rangers* program that involved 250 participants in conservation activities such as collecting 105.22 kg of waste, planting 281 mangrove seedlings, and transplanting 50 corals in the Kepulauan Seribu region. On the other hand, the PHINLA program implemented with *Wahana Visi Indonesia* managed to reach more than 200,000 people in waste management campaigns, activate 10 waste banks, and educate more than 5,000 households and 3,000 school students. This achievement shows that a community-based approach can encourage active community participation and strengthen local capacity in facing environmental challenges in a sustainable manner, while proving that bottom-up initiatives are more effective in creating sustainable behavior change through the formation of social identity. However, the combination with top-down support can be optimized if perceived as part of the group.

On the other hand, DCA faces challenges such as limited resources and cross-country coordination. Based on information from interviews with DCA, limited funding and infrastructure are the main obstacles in expanding the scope of plastic waste management programs, especially in coastal areas, islands, and remote areas. Expanding coastal cleanup areas, organizing large-scale workshops, and building cross-border strategic partnerships that go beyond knowledge exchange require a large budget allocation. Adequate infrastructure is also crucial, not only to reach and transport waste from coastal and in-ocean activity sites but also to support sustainable waste management systems such as waste banks. Without strong financial and infrastructure support, these initiatives are unlikely to be scaled up effectively and sustainably.

This challenge is compounded by the less binding nature of ASEAN's soft law, which has led to concerns that member states' commitment to supporting community-based initiatives such as DCA may be inconsistent. However, DCA overcomes these obstacles by strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships, involving the private sector through CSR

programs, and utilizing a flexible bottom-up approach to adapt to local conditions. Thus, the challenges experienced by DCA reinforce Sabatier's (1986) argument that ensuring the effectiveness of environmental governance depends on the balance between bottom-up flexibility and top-down institutional capacity.

Construction of Pro-Environmental Collective Identity through ASEAN Values

The bottom-up approach adopted by Divers Clean Action reflects Alexander Wendt's constructivist perspective, which posits that collective identity does not emerge naturally but is instead constructed through social interaction and the internalization of shared values. In the context of DCA, this theory explains how the organization has managed to create a sense of we-ness among volunteers, communities, and other stakeholders. Wendt (1999) states that collective identity enables cooperation that transcends individual rational interests, meaning that when people feel part of a group, they tend to help each other not solely for personal gain but because they feel they have common goals and values.

This is reflected in DCA programs such as EcoTrip and MarineDebris.id, where active community participation in beach clean-ups and marine debris data collection is not only driven by pragmatic interests but also by a sense of shared responsibility as part of a community that cares about the environment. Wendt's role identity makes it clear how DCA utilizes local values such as *gotong royong* and collectivism to shape the role of communities as "drivers of marine conservation at the grassroots level".

After having shared goals, values, and responsibilities, environmental problems in the form of marine plastic pollution will be seen as a common threat (Wendt, 1992), as applied by DCA in focus group discussions before conducting activities to the intended coastal areas. Another concrete example is DCA's educational campaign that uses social media to spread content about the impact of plastics on marine life and the environment of communities close to the sea, thus further strengthening the collective identity as a community that must act.

According to the latest video from 2024, interviewees involved in the EcoTrip Laguna Village collaboration between DMC Dompot Dhuafa and Divers Clean Action stated that the community needs to protect the marine ecosystem and encourage people not to throw garbage into the river or sea (DMC Dompot Dhuafa, 2024). This data aligns with Wendt's contention that social interaction shapes identity rather than exogenous factors. In this case, identity as an environmentally responsible individual is formed through communication, participation, and collective calls on the issue of marine plastic waste.

As a non-state actor, DCA is important for promoting environmental values by using ASEAN principles that are already part of the community so that ideas like collectivism, social harmony, respect for different cultures, and *gotong royong* encourage the community to get involved in environmental efforts. According to Wendt (1999), norms will not be effective if they are only abstract as they must be internalized through concrete actions. DCA does this by integrating these values into its programs such as Circulating Island in the Kepulauan Seribu, where the community, local government, and private sector collaborate to manage plastic waste.

In addition, DCA can serve as a strategic mediator between ASEAN's top-down policies and bottom-up implementation. For example, the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine

Debris (ASEAN, 2021a) calls for community participation but does not provide concrete mechanisms, but DCA can fill this gap by developing the Marine Debris.id platform that allows communities to report marine debris in real-time. Environmental organizations' initiatives have been shown to contribute to improving the accountability and transparency often lacking in regional policies through innovative reporting and stakeholder participation (Tang & Higgins, 2022). This approach encourages systematic improvements in governance and builds public trust in environmental policy processes.

Jans' (2021) research proves that bottom-up initiatives are more effective (3-4 times) in creating sustainable behavior change than top-down approaches, especially when based on the formation of a pro-environmental social identity, so this finding is relevant to DCA. One of DCA's programs, the Toko Cura which focuses on reducing single-use packaging waste, is not only beneficial for reducing plastic waste, but also for forming new habits such as bringing their own containers when shopping. From DCA's Annual Report 2023, the result is that this consignment model shows a positive response from the local community, with the involvement of five partner stalls and local champions in the distribution and education process.

This approach is also supported by collaborations with platforms such as Kecipir.com and Hapi Circle, as well as influencer-based marketing strategies to encourage the transition of people's consumption more sustainable patterns. From an economic perspective, this initiative also has a significant economic dimension with the potential reuse-refill market estimated at Rp25,584,661,163 for Pramuka, Kelapa, and Harapan Islands. DCA also encouraged innovation by organizing an Island Hackathon with AIS Forum that involved ten startups in designing solutions to the problem of single-use plastic waste. One of the featured projects was Energizing Island Transportation, which utilized pyrolysis technology to convert 527.9 kg of plastic into 359.7 liters of alternative diesel fuel. This activity encourages cross-sector collaboration and demonstrates the potential for integration between technological solutions and community participation in small island-based waste management. The findings reinforce the argument that collective identity not only changes individual behavior but also drives broader systemic action.

CONCLUSION

Divers Clean Action (DCA) exemplifies a bottom-up approach that aligns with the socio-cultural values of the ASEAN region, such as collectivism, social harmony, respect for diversity, and gotong royong. By prioritizing community-based initiatives, DCA builds ecological awareness starting at the local level and expanding to national and regional scales. However, to ensure the effective participation of non-state actors, ASEAN must create transparent, structured mechanisms for integrating civil society inputs into policy-making. This includes setting quotas for representation, structured feedback, and accountability indicators. Strengthening the involvement of local communities, especially those living close to the sea, is essential for creating equitable and effective environmental policies, as they possess valuable knowledge of local ecological dynamics. Earth Democracy offers a framework that emphasizes decentralization, recognition of ecological rights, and

participatory democracy, providing a foundation for addressing ecological inequality and strengthening environmental resilience. Future research could compare community-based environmental movements in Southeast Asia and explore the integration of ASEAN values with global principles, addressing potential tensions and fostering more progressive policies.

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