



Transdisciplinary Approaches To Developing A Mice Tourism Model Based On Local Cultural Heritage: A Case Study Of Binh Duong

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to develop a culturally grounded Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism model for Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang islands in Binh Duong, Vietnam. Although both islands possess rich tangible and intangible heritage—from archaeological sites and ancient communal houses to pomelo orchards and wartime narratives—they have yet to feature in formal tourism circuits. The novelty lies in employing a transdisciplinary co-design approach, involving academic researchers, local residents, cultural officers, and tourism businesses.

Method: The study employed Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) workshops with community members, semi-structured interviews with 35 stakeholders (including local authorities and tourism providers), and field observations. The conceptual framework integrated systems knowledge, target knowledge, and transformation knowledge, analyzed using thematic coding and comparative stakeholder analysis.

Result: Key findings reveal that while the islands have high cultural tourism potential, development is hindered by infrastructure gaps (internet, event venues), fragmented branding, and limited service capacity. Stakeholders proposed innovative MICE products—such as agro-heritage retreats and river-ecology workshops. The study concludes that a stakeholder-driven, heritage-based MICE model can position these rural islands as distinctive destinations. Future research should test the model's scalability in similar riverine heritage sites across Southeast Asia.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been increasingly recognized as a strategic driver of socio-economic growth, cultural innovation, and sustainable development in both developed and emerging economies. Within this dynamic industry, Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism has evolved as a particularly important subsector due to its dual contributions. On one hand, it generates immediate economic benefits through visitor spending, job creation, and infrastructure development. On the other, it fosters intangible impacts such as professional networking, knowledge exchange, and destination branding (Kim et al., 2022; Rady Mohamed, 2022). These characteristics make MICE a high-value form of tourism that is deeply interlinked with national development strategies. In the context of globalization and regional competition, countries are increasingly investing in MICE to build distinctive destination profiles and attract international engagement (Martín-Rojo & Gaspar-González, 2025).

The growth of MICE tourism has been uneven, shaped by global disruptions and structural imbalances. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reshaped the industry, with widespread cancellations of events, a 61% decline in business travel expenditures in 2020, and a sudden shift toward virtual and hybrid formats (Litvinova-Kulikova, 2023; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022). These

digitalized approaches helped sustain knowledge-sharing and organizational continuity but also underscored the limitations of purely online engagement. Studies emphasize that hybrid formats are effective for reach and efficiency but struggle to replicate the authenticity of cultural immersion that physical destinations provide (Rady Mohamed, 2022; Bassiouny & Wilkesmann, 2023).

Vietnam offers a particularly compelling context in which to explore these challenges. While the government has identified MICE as a growth sector, development has been heavily concentrated in metropolitan centers such as Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City. Secondary provinces remain underrepresented despite their diverse cultural landscapes and heritage resources (Minh, 2025; Dao Thi Kim, 2019; Phuong et al., 2025). Binh Duong Province emerges as a representative illustration of this paradox. Known for its industrial expansion and urban growth, it also encompasses rural landscapes and cultural assets that remain marginalized in tourism planning. Among these are Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang islands, two river islets located approximately 20 kilometers from Thu Dau Mot City. Both islands preserve a unique array of resources, including archaeological sites, communal houses, Buddhist pagodas, ancestral temples, pomelo orchards, riverine livelihoods, and oral traditions rooted in revolutionary struggles (Nguyen Quoc et al., 2004; Hoa An District Party Committee, 2002; Nguyen Van & Dao Linh, 2002; Le Truong Phuong, 2013). Yet despite this richness, the islands remain absent from official MICE circuits, representing an underutilized opportunity to balance economic diversification with cultural sustainability.

The importance of research into heritage-based MICE models lies in their potential to simultaneously strengthen local economies and preserve cultural traditions. Existing studies have shown that embedding cultural heritage into tourism offerings enhances destination authenticity, fosters community pride, and contributes to sustainable place branding (Phuong et al., 2025; Li et al., 2022). Within MICE tourism, cultural integration is particularly impactful, as it allows events to differentiate themselves from conventional formats, creating immersive and memorable experiences (Sirivadhanawaravachara, 2025; Yao et al., 2024). At the same time, new research stresses that heritage-based initiatives cannot succeed through infrastructure investment alone. They require innovative entrepreneurship, collaborative governance, and genuine participation from local communities (Salam et al., 2025; Iriany et al., 2025; Wafa et al., 2024; Prakasa et al., 2024). Without inclusive processes, MICE tourism risks replicating top-down models that fail to capture local identity or respond to residents' needs.

The academic debate increasingly recognizes the role of entrepreneurship and transdisciplinary collaboration in ensuring sustainability. Entrepreneurship has long been central to tourism development, but recent studies emphasize entrepreneurial sustainability—whereby tourism enterprises not only pursue profitability but also generate social and environmental value (Sifolo, 2025; Seyfi et al., 2025). For example, transformative action research has demonstrated how tourism entrepreneurs can co-create sustainable practices with communities (Sifolo, 2025), while studies in Iran highlight the resilience strategies of women entrepreneurs navigating systemic challenges (Seyfi et al., 2025). Similarly, the literature on MICE tourism has expanded in response to global disruptions. Research underscores the rise of virtual and hybrid events as essential adaptations during the pandemic (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2022; Rady Mohamed, 2022).

At the same time, transdisciplinary approaches are emerging as an important methodological framework in tourism and entrepreneurship research. Transdisciplinarity extends beyond interdisciplinary collaboration by actively engaging academic and non-academic actors—including government officials, entrepreneurs, and local residents—in defining problems, co-producing knowledge, and developing solutions (Schmidt et al., 2020). In tourism contexts, transdisciplinary and participatory approaches have increasingly been mobilized to strengthen governance, foster collaboration, and embed sustainability principles into practice. Recent scholarship highlights how stakeholder engagement and governance mechanisms are central to the long-term success of sustainable ecotourism initiatives (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Parallel studies demonstrate the role of asset-based community development models in empowering local actors to co-manage resources and innovate tourism village practices, as seen in Madura, Indonesia (Salam et al., 2025; Iriany et al., 2025). At the community level, the cultivation of social capital

has been shown to enhance rural tourism innovation and adaptability, linking collective trust and networks with entrepreneurial experimentation (Wafa et al., 2024). Extending this discussion into urban and event-based tourism, research on MICE city ecosystems in Thailand illustrates how digital information systems can facilitate collaboration among diverse stakeholders, bridging public and private sectors to sustain competitive and resilient tourism environments (Warintarawej et al., 2025). Together, these findings reinforce the argument that multi-actor, knowledge-sharing processes are essential for resolving conflicts over resource use, fostering participatory governance, and ensuring tourism's alignment with sustainable development agendas.

Despite these advances, several research gaps remain. First, empirical applications of transdisciplinary research in Vietnam's MICE sector are scarce, particularly in rural or secondary destinations. Most existing work has centered on metropolitan hubs, leaving heritage-rich areas like Binh Duong underexplored (Tran Hanh Minh, 2021). Second, although entrepreneurial sustainability is increasingly discussed in tourism research, there remains limited analysis of how entrepreneurial practices intersect with cultural preservation and transdisciplinary collaboration to produce viable MICE models (Sifolo, 2025; Li et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps is crucial for both theory and practice, particularly as destinations seek to recover from the pandemic and reposition themselves in competitive tourism markets.

This study applies a transdisciplinary framework to develop a MICE tourism model grounded in the cultural heritage of Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang islands, Binh Duong province. Methodologically, it integrates participatory rural appraisal (PRA), in-depth interviews, and stakeholder workshops with local residents, cultural officers, tourism enterprises, and government representatives. The research pursues three objectives: (i) to identify the cultural and natural resources of the two islands that can support heritage-based MICE tourism; (ii) to co-design a MICE tourism model that balances entrepreneurial viability with cultural sustainability; and (iii) to explore collaborative governance mechanisms that ensure long-term resilience and stakeholder engagement. By bridging theoretical debates on transdisciplinarity, co-creation, and entrepreneurial sustainability with applied fieldwork in Vietnam, the study contributes both academically and practically. It extends knowledge on how MICE can be harnessed in secondary destinations, and it offers a replicable framework for other heritage-rich rural contexts across Southeast Asia.

RESEARCH METHODS

The formulation of the research problem followed a transdisciplinary problem-framing process, which acknowledges that complex tourism development challenges cannot be fully understood or addressed through academic perspectives alone (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008). Initial scoping activities in Binh Duong Province between 2020 and 2021 revealed that Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang islands possessed significant tangible and intangible heritage assets including ancient temples, communal houses, agricultural landscapes, and traditional festivals yet these had not been systematically integrated into tourism planning frameworks. While provincial tourism strategies aimed to diversify the sector, there was no targeted plan to harness heritage resources for Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism. The study therefore refined the research problem as: How can a transdisciplinary approach be employed to co-create a heritage-based MICE tourism model that aligns with both market expectations and community values?

Stakeholders were identified through purposive sampling to ensure representation across governance, cultural, and economic domains. This process drew upon documentary reviews—such as commune development plans. Five priority stakeholder groups were identified: local government – Commune and provincial departments responsible for culture, tourism agency, and economic planning; cultural custodians: Temple monks, community elders, and leaders of religious associations; tourism and business operators – guesthouse owners, catering providers, event organisers, and local guides; academic and technical experts – specialists in tourism planning, cultural heritage management, and community development; community-based organisations – representatives from farmers' associations, women's unions, and youth groups.

This stakeholder diversity was essential for transdisciplinary research, enabling the integration of both scientific knowledge and local experiential expertise (Bramwell & Bernard, 2011).

Fieldwork was carried out from May to June 2021 in a stepwise engagement process: PRA Workshops – Conducted separately in Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang with hamlet heads, farmers' associations, women's unions, and youth unions. Problem-tree analysis and seasonal calendars were used to assess tourism readiness and constraints. Outputs included community-generated heritage maps and proposed tourism itineraries. Participant Observation – Researchers attended the Kỳ Yên festival, shrine worship rituals (lễ cúng miếu), and clan ancestor commemorations (giỗ tổ), documenting ritual processes, levels of participation, and symbolic meanings of heritage practices. Semi-Structured Interviews – Conducted with 35 stakeholders to explore perceptions of heritage value, tourism potential, and MICE hosting capacity. The participants were purposively selected to represent five priority stakeholder groups to ensure balanced perspectives: local residents (n = 10), who provided insights into cultural practices, place identity, and expectations of tourism benefits; municipal authorities (n = 7), offering perspectives on governance, infrastructure, and policy frameworks; cultural officers (n = 6), contributing expertise on heritage preservation and event management; tourism enterprises (n = 7), highlighting operational opportunities and market constraints; and academic researchers (n = 5), reflecting on theoretical alignment and methodological support. This distribution demonstrates representativeness and ensured that each group's voice was systematically incorporated into the analysis. Pilot “Conference Tourism” Model – A trial event combining a formal workshop, heritage tours, and local gastronomy. Feedback was gathered through post-event surveys and focus groups, informing refinement of the model.

Qualitative materials generated through PRA workshops, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation were systematically transcribed and analysed using NVivo software. The coding process adopted an inductive–deductive strategy, enabling emergent themes to be identified while also aligning them with established theoretical constructs from transdisciplinary research and heritage-based tourism (Pohl & Hirsch Hadorn, 2008; Stokols et al., 2008). Complementary content analysis of policy and planning documents provided insights into governance frameworks and infrastructural constraints, thereby situating local perspectives within broader institutional contexts. To ensure analytical rigor, triangulation across diverse data sources was employed, which enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings (Denzin, 2012).

This methodological design allows the study to extend theory in two ways. First, it demonstrates that transdisciplinary co-design can be operationalised in MICE tourism through participatory tools (PRA, workshops, consensus meetings), thereby refining the application of transdisciplinarity beyond its traditional focus on environmental or health contexts. Second, the findings suggest that embedding community-driven heritage narratives within MICE packages advances Getz's (1997) event-tourism framework by linking competitiveness not only to infrastructure and cost but also to authenticity and cultural identity. These refinements make the study's theoretical contribution explicit and distinguishable from its practical implications for local development (Figure 1).

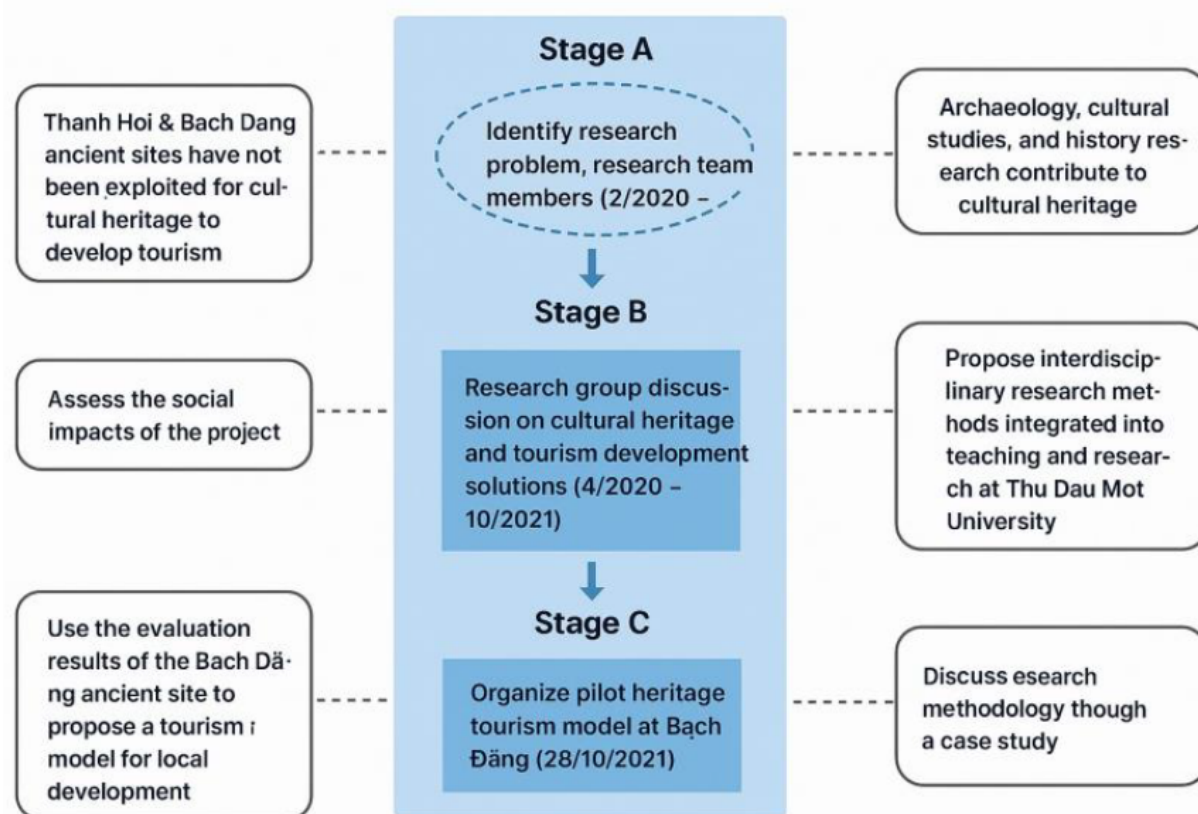


Figure 1.
Transdisciplinary research process
 Source: Tran Hanh Minh Phuong (2021)

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The tourism resources of Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang islands

Tourism resources constitute the foundational capital upon which destination competitiveness is built, particularly in the context of heritage-based Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism (Kim et al., 2022). The effective mobilisation of such resources requires both a comprehensive inventory of tangible and intangible assets and a nuanced understanding of how these assets are perceived, used, and valued by stakeholders (Dimitrios & John C, 2000). This section presents an integrated analysis of the natural, cultural, and socio-economic tourism resources of Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang islands, drawing on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) findings, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation conducted during 2021.

The analysis is structured thematically, highlighting the strengths, challenges, and strategic potential of each resource category for heritage-based MICE development. PRA scoring was used to assess perceived readiness on a scale of 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater current value or potential for tourism integration (Table 1).

Table 1.
Tourism Resources of Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang Islands Based on PRA Findings

No	Resource Category	Key Assets Identified	Average PRA Score (1–5)	Illustrative Quotes from Stakeholders
1	Natural & Environmental	Saigon River landscapes, pomelo orchards, biodiversity, seasonal flooding cycle	4.5	“Visitors love the calm of the river, the shade of pomelo trees, and the sound of boats.” – PRA participant, Bach Dang

No	Resource Category	Key Assets Identified	Average PRA Score (1–5)	Illustrative Quotes from Stakeholders
2	Cultural Heritage	Temples, communal houses, ancestral halls, Kỳ Yên festival, archaeological sites	4.6	“The festivals are not just for locals; they are a story for visitors to learn who we are.” – Temple custodian, Thanh Hoi
3	Agro-tourism & Culinary	Pomelo-based gastronomy, traditional river fish recipes	4.2	“Our pomelo gardens can host visitors, but we need training to serve them professionally.” – Orchard owner, Bach Dang
4	Community & Social Capital	Farmers’ associations, women’s unions, youth groups, local guides	4.0	“We welcome guests to our homes, but for MICE events we need proper facilities.” – Women’s Union member, Thanh Hoi
5	Infrastructure Readiness	Roads, docks, sanitation, accommodation facilities	2.8	“We can organise a workshop under the pomelo trees, but without proper sound systems and clean facilities, big companies will not come.” – Event organiser, Bach Dang

Source: PRA workshops and semi-structured interviews conducted in May 2021

Natural and Environmental Assets

The Saigon River’s meandering channels and fertile alluvial plains create an aesthetic and ecological backdrop that is central to both islands’ tourism appeal. PRA participants consistently rated the islands’ environmental assets highly (average score 4.5/5), citing the combination of riverside tranquillity, shaded pomelo orchards, and seasonal rhythms as unique experiential qualities. As one PRA participant from Bach Dang expressed, “Visitors love the calm of the river, the shade of pomelo trees, and the sound of boats.” These landscapes not only provide visual and recreational value but also offer potential venues for outdoor MICE activities, such as team-building events or open-air receptions. However, ecological sensitivity must be considered; while a part of the islands’ character, can disrupt accessibility and infrastructure use. Integrating adaptive event planning into the MICE model could mitigate these challenges, ensuring resilience against environmental variability.

Cultural Heritage Assets

The islands’ cultural heritage portfolio is diverse and deeply rooted in the historical narrative of southern Vietnam. Key tangible heritage elements include ancient temples, communal houses (đình), clan ancestor halls, and archaeological sites such as Cù Lao Rùa. Intangible heritage is equally significant, encompassing ritual festivals like the Kỳ Yên and clan ancestor commemorations (giỗ tổ). These assets were assigned the highest PRA score among all categories (4.6/5). A temple custodian in Thanh Hoi noted, “The festivals are not just for locals; they are a story for visitors to learn who we are” (Figure 2). This statement underscores the role of heritage as both a repository of identity and a potential interpretive resource for tourism. The challenge lies in balancing ritual authenticity with visitor engagement. Unregulated commercialisation risks diluting cultural meaning, while overly restrictive practices may limit tourism’s economic contribution.



Figure 2.

Nhut Thanh Temple in Thanh Hoi Island and Ancient House in Bach Dang Island

Source: Tran Hanh Minh Phuong (2021) Source: Tran Hanh Minh Phuong (2021)

Agro-Tourism and Culinary Heritage

Agro-tourism emerges as a promising niche, with pomelo cultivation as the flagship product. PRA participants rated this category 4.2/5, reflecting the dual value of agricultural landscapes as both production systems and visitor experiences. Orchard-based tourism could integrate farm tours, pomelo harvesting workshops, and gastronomy-focused events. Traditional culinary offerings—river fish recipes, festival cakes—add depth to the islands' tourism narrative. One orchard owner from Bach Dang articulated the readiness gap: "Our pomelo gardens can host visitors, but we need training to serve them professionally." This points to the need for targeted capacity-building to transform agro-cultural assets into market-ready tourism experiences, particularly for corporate incentive trips and post-conference excursions.

Community and Social Capital

Community-based organisations, including farmers' associations, women's unions, and youth groups, represent a vital human resource for tourism development. The PRA score for this category was 4.0/5, reflecting the strong social cohesion and willingness to engage in tourism initiatives. A Women's Union member from Thanh Hoi commented, "We welcome guests to our homes, but for MICE events we need proper facilities." This encapsulates the dual challenge of social readiness and infrastructural inadequacy. While social capital can facilitate authentic, community-led experiences, the absence of purpose-built venues limits the ability to host large-scale or formal MICE functions.

Infrastructure Readiness

Infrastructure was identified as the weakest link in the islands' tourism readiness profile, with an average PRA score of 2.8/5. Although basic road and dock networks exist, limitations in sanitation, accommodation, and event equipment undermine the islands' competitiveness for MICE tourism. An event organiser from Bach Dang stated, "We can organise a workshop under

the pomelo trees, but without proper sound systems and clean facilities, big companies will not come”. This finding aligns with global MICE literature, which emphasises that accessibility, technological readiness, and comfort are decisive factors in venue selection. Addressing these gaps will require coordinated investment between local authorities and private operators.

Implications for Heritage-Based MICE Development

The PRA results indicate that Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang islands possess a strong foundation of natural and cultural assets, complemented by high levels of social capital. These strengths position the islands well for heritage-based MICE tourism, particularly in delivering immersive, place-based experiences that differentiate them from conventional urban conference venues. However, the relatively low infrastructure score signals that without significant investment in facilities, accessibility, and event technology, the islands may struggle to attract high-value MICE clients. Moreover, the findings reveal a gap between community enthusiasm and technical readiness, underscoring the importance of training in hospitality, heritage interpretation, and event management.

A transdisciplinary approach integrating local knowledge, academic expertise, and industry standards could address these gaps while safeguarding cultural authenticity. This would involve: co-designing tourism products that combine heritage interpretation with contemporary event formats; developing infrastructure incrementally, prioritising portable and adaptable solutions that respect environmental constraints; building capacity among local stakeholders to manage MICE logistics and deliver professional services without eroding cultural values. By aligning PRA findings with market expectations, the islands can be positioned not merely as peripheral attractions but as flagship destinations in Binh Duong’s sustainable MICE strategy.

Heritage-Based MICE Tourism Model through a Transdisciplinary Process

The pilot heritage-based MICE tourism model was implemented on Bach Dang Island as part of a transdisciplinary initiative involving local residents, municipal authorities, cultural officers, and tourism enterprises. The primary aim was to assess the feasibility of integrating the islands’ tangible and intangible heritage assets into a Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) framework while ensuring stakeholder ownership and local economic benefits.

The model was structured around a one-day conference tourism event that combined formal meeting sessions with curated heritage experiences, including temple tours, pomelo orchard visits, and traditional music performances. This design was informed by prior Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) sessions, which identified both the potential and constraints of heritage-based tourism on the islands.

Table 2.

Key Outcomes of the Bach Dang Island Pilot MICE Event

No	Outcome Category	Pilot Result
1	Attendance	62 participants (provincial officials, tourism professionals, academics, local representatives)
2	Satisfaction Rates	87% rated cultural integration as “very good” or “excellent”; 79% expressed interest in repeat visits
3	Economic Impacts	25% increase in local pomelo product and handicraft sales during event period
4	Heritage Engagement	High participation in temple tours, orchard visits
5	Logistical Issues	Limited restroom facilities, inadequate sound systems

Source: Attendance and Stakeholder Mix

The pilot event attracted 62 participants (Table 2), a notable achievement given both its experimental format and the ongoing COVID-19 recovery phase in 2021. The participant composition was deliberately diverse, incorporating actors from both the supply side (local government, cultural custodians, tourism operators) and demand side (corporate delegates, event organisers) of the tourism economy. This inclusivity reflects the transdisciplinary ethos advocated

by Pohl and Hadorn (2008), where the co-production of knowledge requires a balance between academic expertise, practitioner insights, and community perspectives.

The symbolic significance of this cross-sectoral engagement was captured by one provincial cultural officer: “This is the first time we have seen community leaders, business owners, and government officers sitting together to plan a tourism product from the ground up.” Such convergence is more than ceremonial—it fosters the relational capital needed to negotiate competing interests, build trust, and develop shared visions for heritage-based MICE products (Bramwell & Bernard, 2011).

Satisfaction and Experiential Value

Post-event survey analysis indicated that 87% of participants rated the integration of cultural heritage into the MICE programme as “very good” or “excellent.” This strong endorsement underscores the competitive advantage of embedding place-specific narratives and multisensory experiences into conference design. A corporate delegate reflected “The conference was productive, but what I will remember most is walking through the pomelo orchards and hearing the temple bells.”

These responses affirm Bramwell and Lane’s (2011) argument that authenticity—grounded in lived cultural landscapes rather than staged performances—can enhance destination appeal and memorability. Notably, several respondents explicitly compared the riverine setting to conventional hotel-based events, citing the novelty and emotional resonance of the island environment. This suggests that the “venue as experience” concept, widely discussed in MICE innovation literature (Donald & Stephen, 2016), may be a viable differentiator for rural heritage destinations.

Economic Impacts and Local Buy-In

The pilot yielded an estimated 25% increase in pomelo and a range of value-added products such as candied pomelo peel (mứt vỏ bưởi) and pomelo-based liquor sales during the event period, offering tangible evidence of the model’s potential to generate immediate local economic benefits. For many vendors, this was their first direct interaction with an audience of corporate and institutional buyers—highlighting the role of MICE events as platforms for market diversification. A pomelo farmer noted: “Visitors are curious about more than just the taste; they want the story of our land and our people.”

This statement illustrates the intersection between product and narrative, aligning with Dallen J. & Gyan P. (2009) assertion that sustainable heritage tourism must deliver not only economic returns but also reinforce local cultural identity. The economic stimulus, coupled with the positive visitor interest in heritage narratives, suggests that cultural storytelling could be strategically embedded into vendor training and product packaging to extend post-event sales opportunities.

Heritage Engagement as a Differentiator

Participation in temple tours, orchard walks, and cultural performances was high, indicating that these activities were perceived as integral components of the conference agenda rather than optional add-ons. This aligns with UNWTO’s (2018) observation that MICE travellers increasingly seek hybrid experiences combining professional objectives with leisure and cultural enrichment. The pilot’s ability to blend formal sessions with hands-on cultural immersion demonstrates the market readiness of heritage assets for incorporation into structured MICE itineraries. Furthermore, such engagement serves a dual purpose—enhancing the destination’s brand identity while fostering community pride and intergenerational transmission of traditions (Richards, 2020).

Logistical Constraints and Scalability

Notwithstanding these successes, the pilot surfaced several infrastructural and operational limitations. Participants reported dissatisfaction with restroom capacity, sound quality during

presentations. These findings are consistent with (Donald & Stephen, 2016) analysis that peripheral or rural MICE destinations often lack the logistical reliability expected in urban venues. Without addressing these deficits, scaling the model to larger audiences risks eroding the high satisfaction ratings observed in the pilot. A pragmatic approach would involve phased capacity building, ensuring that infrastructural upgrades keep pace with event scale.

Strategic Implications

The empirical findings point toward three interlinked strategic priorities: Scale with care – Preserve the intimate and immersive qualities of heritage-based events while incrementally enhancing capacity to serve larger groups without diluting the experience. Institutionalise local economic linkages – Formalise vendor participation within MICE packages to ensure predictable community benefits and to standardise quality. Synchronise cultural programming with logistics – Align operational readiness—transport, facilities, and technical support—with the quality of the cultural offer, thus safeguarding participant satisfaction.

In sum, the Bach Dang Island pilot validates the feasibility of a heritage-based MICE model in a riverine context when developed through a phased, participatory, and infrastructure-conscious process. By coupling economic opportunities for local residents with distinctive, place-embedded experiences for MICE participants, such models can position heritage-rich, non-metropolitan destinations as competitive alternatives in the expanding global MICE market.

Strategies for Ongoing Collaboration and Event-Based Tourism Promotion

The thematic analysis of post-event evaluations and stakeholder interviews revealed seven interlinked strategies for sustaining heritage-based MICE tourism in Binh Duong. These strategies not only address immediate operational challenges but also lay the groundwork for long-term, collaborative event-based tourism development.

Table 3.
Strategies for Ongoing Collaboration

No	Strategy	Responsible Actors	Expected Impacts
1	Strengthen organisational processes and event design	Municipal cultural and tourism departments; local event organisers	More interactive sessions; higher participant engagement; improved conference quality.
2	Enhance heritage experience design	Local cultural custodians; community guides; agro-tourism operators	Richer sensory experiences; stronger heritage branding; increased repeat visitation.
3	Target diverse audiences for knowledge exchange	Universities; research institutes; youth organisations	Broadened participation base; sustained knowledge flows; international networking opportunities.
4	Infrastructure investments for scalable MICE tourism	Provincial government; private investors	Improved accessibility; ability to host larger events; greater destination competitiveness.
5	Professionalise local hospitality and service standards	Vocational training centres; local SMEs	Higher service quality; better guest satisfaction; increased local incomes.
6	Expand promotional platforms and storytelling	Destination marketing organisations; local influencers	Greater digital reach; stronger destination identity; attraction of younger markets.
7	Develop thematic events for ongoing engagement	Event planners; agricultural cooperatives; cultural groups	Diversified tourism calendar; stronger links between heritage and sustainability.

Source: Survey Result of the Pilot Conference in Bach Dang Islands on 28th October 2021

The strategies outlined in Table 3 represent a comprehensive, multi-actor framework for sustaining heritage-based MICE tourism in Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang Islands, reflecting the

transdisciplinary ethos advocated by Pohl and Hadorn (2008). Strengthening organisational processes through interactive formats and participatory event design directly addresses earlier pilot feedback on time use and engagement, thereby enhancing conference quality and participant satisfaction. Enhancing heritage experiences—by integrating sensory-rich activities such as orchard tours or craft workshops—deepens visitor immersion and strengthens place branding, a key determinant of repeat visitation (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). Targeting diverse audiences, including academic and youth groups, not only widens the participation base but also embeds knowledge exchange into the tourism value chain, fostering long-term professional networks. Infrastructure investments, particularly in transport and leisure linkages, are essential for scaling without eroding authenticity, aligning with Getz and Page's (2016) emphasis on destination competitiveness. Professionalising hospitality standards through vocational training ensures that service quality meets MICE market expectations, thereby enhancing local incomes and reputational capital. Expanding promotional platforms, especially via digital storytelling, can amplify the islands' hybrid appeal of heritage and conference capability, attracting younger demographics attuned to online content. Finally, developing thematic events diversifies the tourism calendar and forges stronger links between heritage and sustainability, creating cyclical visitation patterns that stabilise economic benefits. Collectively, these strategies underscore the necessity of continuous multi-stakeholder collaboration, aligning local cultural assets with market-driven innovation in a manner consistent with Planning Malaysia's integrated tourism development paradigm.

CONCLUSION

This study advances both theoretical and practical understandings of how transdisciplinary methods can be operationalised in the development of heritage-based MICE tourism in non-metropolitan contexts. The project's novelty lies in its systematic integration of diverse knowledge domains—academic expertise, institutional governance, market insights, and local experiential knowledge—into a continuous co-design cycle. Unlike conventional top-down tourism planning, the study adopted an iterative, dialogic process in which stakeholders jointly framed the problem, identified resources, tested interventions, and evaluated outcomes. This process revealed the untapped tourism potential of Thanh Hoi and Bach Dang Islands, where a rich assemblage of natural landscapes, sacred architecture, festivals, and artisanal traditions had long been underutilised in tourism planning.

The active involvement of non-academic stakeholders, particularly local residents, ensured that the MICE product design reflected lived cultural values rather than externally imposed narratives. Community members contributed not only as informants but as co-creators, shaping itineraries, hosting cultural activities, and supplying local products that enhanced visitor experiences. Local authorities played a catalytic role, providing institutional legitimacy, mobilising resources, and aligning the pilot model with broader provincial tourism strategies. The scientific team contributed methodological rigour through the application of participatory rural appraisal, ethnographic observation, and pilot testing, ensuring that the model was grounded in both empirical evidence and community realities.

The pilot demonstrated that heritage-based MICE tourism, when designed through a transdisciplinary lens, can deliver multiple co-benefits: economic gains for local producers, strengthened community pride, enhanced cultural visibility, and differentiated market positioning. It also illuminated the critical importance of synchronising cultural programming with infrastructural readiness, ensuring that the immersive heritage offer is matched by logistical quality. The findings suggest that such an approach is replicable for other heritage-rich, rural destinations, provided that stakeholder collaboration is structured, iterative, and sensitive to local contexts. Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of transdisciplinary engagement as a driver of tourism innovation—transforming heritage from a static asset into a dynamic catalyst for sustainable, inclusive, and competitive destination development.

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