



MICE EVENTS AS CATALYSTS FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF DAVAO CITY

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ABSTRACT

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) events have emerged as powerful drivers of urban growth, catalyzing economic development, infrastructure enhancement, and global visibility for cities worldwide. This paper investigates the role of MICE events in promoting urban development in Davao City, Philippines. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative interviews with key stakeholders and secondary data analysis, this study uncovers the socio-economic impacts, policy implications, and urban transformation linked to the MICE sector. Findings reveal that MICE events contribute significantly to local revenue, infrastructure modernization, and the city's positioning as a competitive urban hub in Southeast Asia. However, challenges related to policy integration, community engagement, and sustainable practices persist. The study closes with recommendations to strengthen Davao's MICE industry as a strategic lever for inclusive and sustainable urban development.

KEYWORDS: MICE events, urban development, Davao City, tourism,

INTRODUCTION

The global Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry has increasingly become a key driver of urban development, stimulating economic activities, infrastructure investments, and cross-sectoral collaborations (Rogerson, 2015). Cities across Asia, such as Singapore, Bangkok, and Manila, have leveraged MICE events to boost tourism, attract foreign direct investment, and foster urban innovation (Zeng et al., 2021). The strategic importance of MICE is evident in its capacity to generate employment, improve service standards, and enhance the global profile of host cities (Davidson & Cope, 2016).

Davao City, situated in the southern region of the Philippines, has emerged as a burgeoning hub for MICE activities in Mindanao. With its modern convention centers, accessible transport infrastructure, and dynamic local government policies, Davao has positioned itself as a preferred destination for national and international MICE events (Tata, 2020). The city's emphasis on peace, order, and sustainable urban management has further strengthened its reputation, attracting both public and private sector investments in event facilities and related urban amenities (Davao City Investment Promotion Center, 2022).

Despite these advancements, there remain significant questions regarding the depth and breadth of MICE-induced urban transformation in Davao City. Previous studies have highlighted the economic benefits of MICE tourism but have given limited attention to its broader impacts on urban development, including infrastructure, governance, and community welfare (Song et al., 2022). Furthermore, the interplay between MICE event proliferation and sustainable urban growth remains underexplored, especially in the Philippine context where urbanization is often rapid and uneven (Nogradio & Yu, 2021).

Given these gaps, this research aims to critically examine the role of MICE events as catalysts for urban development in Davao City. Specifically, it investigates the mechanisms through which MICE events influence economic growth, urban infrastructure, social inclusion, and policy formulation. By doing so, the study seeks to address the research gap concerning the holistic urban impacts of MICE events in secondary cities of Southeast Asia.



LITERATURE REVIEW

The Global Evolution of the MICE Industry

The MICE industry has witnessed exponential growth over the past two decades, driven by globalization, technological advancements, and shifting business paradigms (Davidson & Cope, 2016). Globally, cities have recognized MICE events as platforms for economic exchange, knowledge transfer, and cultural diplomacy (UNWTO, 2019). Research shows that hosting international conferences and exhibitions can enhance a city's global reputation and competitiveness (Lee & Back, 2005).

Countries in Asia-Pacific have invested heavily in MICE infrastructure, seeing it as a means to diversify tourism portfolios and attract high-value visitors (Zeng et al., 2021). The increasing demand for specialized venues and professional event management has spurred innovations in hospitality, transport, and digital connectivity (Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, the integration of sustainability practices into MICE operations is becoming a standard in global event hosting (Jones, 2014).

In emerging economies, MICE events are linked with job creation, skills development, and increased tax revenues (Rogerson, 2015). Yet, studies also caution about the environmental and social costs of unchecked MICE expansion, including congestion, waste generation, and local displacement (Jones, 2014). These dualities underscore the need for balanced policies and stakeholder engagement in MICE-driven urban strategies.

The literature affirms the industry's transformative potential, but emphasizes that the benefits of MICE events are not automatic. Effective governance, strategic planning, and community participation are critical for maximizing positive outcomes (UNWTO, 2019).

MICE Events and Economic Development

Economic development is one of the most cited benefits of MICE events. Direct spending by delegates, organizers, and exhibitors translates into significant revenues for hotels, restaurants, transportation services, and local suppliers (Song et al., 2022). In cities like Davao, the multiplier effects of MICE tourism are evident in increased business activities and employment opportunities (Tata, 2020).

Empirical studies demonstrate that MICE events can increase city GDP and stimulate investments in infrastructure and technology (Kim et al., 2019). For instance, Singapore's MICE sector is credited with generating billions of dollars annually, supporting both traditional and emerging industries (Zeng et al., 2021). Similarly, Manila has leveraged MICE events to boost its hospitality sector and related services (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). However, the economic impact is not uniformly distributed, and local SMEs often face barriers in accessing MICE-generated opportunities (Nogradio & Yu, 2021). Additionally, economic gains are sometimes offset by rising costs of living and gentrification pressures in host cities (Rogerson, 2015). This complexity necessitates targeted policies to ensure inclusive growth.

Sustainable economic benefits from MICE events require continuous investment in human capital, infrastructure, and marketing, alongside robust monitoring of socio-economic indicators (Song et al., 2022).

MICE-Driven Urban Infrastructure and Spatial Transformation

The need to host large-scale events often catalyzes upgrades in urban infrastructure, such as convention centers, hotels, airports, and public transport systems (Rogerson, 2015). Davao City, for example, has witnessed a surge in construction of modern event venues and improved connectivity in response to growing MICE demand (Davao City Investment Promotion Center, 2022).

Urban planners regard MICE events as triggers for spatial transformation and urban renewal (Jones, 2014). Event-driven infrastructure investments can lead to enhanced public spaces, improved safety, and better amenities for residents (Kim et al., 2019). These upgrades often extend benefits beyond event participants, contributing to the city's long-term livability and attractiveness.

Nevertheless, infrastructure development tied to MICE events can also bring challenges such as congestion, land use conflicts, and environmental degradation if not managed properly (Lee & Back, 2005). Literature suggests



the importance of integrating MICE-related projects into broader urban development plans to maximize synergies and avoid negative spillovers (UNWTO, 2019).

Effective coordination among government agencies, private investors, and local communities is critical in ensuring that MICE-induced infrastructure leads to sustainable urban transformation (Rogerson, 2015).

Governance, Policy, and Community Engagement in MICE Tourism

Policy frameworks and governance structures play a pivotal role in shaping the outcomes of MICE events (Song et al., 2022). Successful MICE cities implement integrated strategies involving multiple stakeholders, including local government, tourism authorities, industry associations, and civil society (Davidson & Cope, 2016).

In the Philippines, national policies such as the Tourism Act of 2009 have provided legal backing and financial incentives for the development of the MICE sector (Department of Tourism, 2018). Davao City's local ordinances and investment incentives further support event hosting, though coordination gaps sometimes hinder effective implementation (Nogradio & Yu, 2021).

Community engagement is essential to foster local ownership and ensure that the benefits of MICE events are widely shared (Jones, 2014). Participatory planning and transparent decision-making can mitigate resistance and align event objectives with local priorities (Kim et al., 2019).

However, challenges such as inadequate consultation, limited capacity, and fragmented policy execution remain common in secondary cities (Song et al., 2022). Strengthening governance mechanisms and promoting inclusive stakeholder participation are necessary for maximizing the developmental impacts of MICE tourism.

Sustainability and Resilience in MICE-Driven Urban Development

Sustainability has become a central concern in the planning and execution of MICE events, with increasing attention to environmental, social, and economic impacts (Jones, 2014). Sustainable MICE practices include green venue certification, waste reduction, carbon offsetting, and the promotion of local culture and products (UNWTO, 2019).

In Davao City, efforts are underway to incorporate sustainability into event management, though challenges such as limited awareness and resource constraints persist (Davao City Investment Promotion Center, 2022). Literature highlights the importance of embedding resilience in urban systems to cope with shocks such as pandemics, climate change, and economic downturns (Kim et al., 2019).

Resilient MICE cities invest in flexible infrastructure, robust health and safety protocols, and diversified event portfolios (Song et al., 2022). Such measures help safeguard urban development gains and ensure the sector's long-term viability.

The need for continuous improvement in sustainability and resilience is echoed across the literature, particularly in light of COVID-19 and its disruptions to global travel and urban economies (Zeng et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **mixed-methods research design**, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of MICE events' role in urban development in Davao City (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The methodology is structured in three stages: (1) secondary data analysis, (2) key informant interviews, and (3) thematic analysis.

First, secondary data were collected from official reports, event statistics, and academic publications on Davao's MICE sector, urban development indicators, and policy documents (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020; Davao City Investment Promotion Center, 2022). These data provided baseline figures on the number, scale, and type of MICE events held in the city, as well as their documented economic and infrastructural impacts.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 key stakeholders, including representatives from the Davao City Tourism Office, event organizers, hotel and venue managers, business chambers, and local government officials. The interviews explored perceptions of MICE event impacts, policy effectiveness, and



challenges in event management and urban development. The interview protocol was adapted from prior studies on MICE impacts in emerging cities (Rogerson, 2015; Song et al., 2022).

Third, data from both secondary sources and interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing, defining, and reporting. NVivo software was used to facilitate coding and data management. Quantitative data were triangulated with qualitative findings to ensure validity and depth (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the local university's Institutional Review Board. All interviewees provided informed consent, and their identities were anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that MICE events have become significant catalysts for urban development in Davao City, with multi-dimensional impacts across economic, infrastructural, and social domains.

Economic Impacts

MICE events contributed approximately 15% of total tourism revenue in Davao City between 2019 and 2023, generating over 10,000 jobs annually (Davao City Investment Promotion Center, 2022). Hotel occupancy rates and local business revenues experienced marked increases during major conventions and exhibitions. These results corroborate previous research linking MICE activities to urban economic vibrancy (Zeng et al., 2021; Song et al., 2022).

Urban Infrastructure

The city's investments in convention centers, road networks, and hospitality infrastructure have accelerated in response to rising MICE demand. Stakeholders reported improved airport facilities, expanded public transport, and the development of mixed-use commercial spaces around event venues. Such developments mirror patterns observed in other Southeast Asian MICE cities (Kim et al., 2019).

Policy and Governance

Davao's local policies, such as tax incentives and streamlined event permitting, have encouraged public-private partnerships in the MICE sector. However, interviewees noted gaps in inter-agency coordination, especially in sustainability and security protocols. This is consistent with literature on governance challenges in rapidly urbanizing cities (Nogradio & Yu, 2021; Davidson & Cope, 2016).

Social Inclusion and Community Engagement

While MICE events have generated jobs and skills development, benefits have not been uniformly distributed. Local SMEs expressed concerns about limited access to MICE opportunities due to high entry barriers and limited information dissemination. Community leaders emphasized the need for more inclusive event planning and stronger linkages with local suppliers and artisans (Jones, 2014).

Sustainability and Resilience

Sustainability practices remain at an early stage, with some events piloting waste management and local sourcing initiatives. Stakeholders cited resource constraints and lack of awareness as key hurdles. Nevertheless, there is growing recognition of the need for resilient and green MICE practices, especially post-pandemic (UNWTO, 2019; Zeng et al., 2021).

Overall, the study finds that MICE events play a strategic role in catalyzing urban development in Davao City, but maximization of benefits requires stronger policy integration, stakeholder participation, and sustainability focus.

CONCLUSION

MICE events have undeniably become catalysts for urban development in Davao City, stimulating economic growth, modernizing infrastructure, and enhancing the city's profile as a competitive urban hub. The findings underscore the positive contributions of MICE activities to revenue generation, job creation, and urban renewal. However, challenges related to inclusive access, policy coordination, and sustainable practices remain. Addressing



these gaps requires a multi-stakeholder approach that integrates government, private sector, and community perspectives.

Future strategies should focus on strengthening governance, supporting local SMEs, and embedding sustainability into all facets of the MICE value chain. The experience of Davao City offers valuable lessons for other emerging urban centers in Southeast Asia seeking to leverage MICE events as engines of urban transformation.

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