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Heritage Spaces and Business Events in Vietnam: A Comparative Assessment and the CIVIC Governance Framework

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ABSTRACT:
Background: Heritage spaces offer distinctive settings for business events, yet their reuse depends on values that intensive programming may place at risk. Objective: This article examines the opportunities, constraints and governance requirements associated with heritage-based MICE development in Vietnam. Methods: Qualitative document analysis and purposive comparison were applied to the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, the Hue Imperial City and Cham temple-tower festivals, drawing on national legislation, dated reports and published research. Results: Evidence indicates potential for cultural differentiation, international visibility, incentive visits and premium dining experiences. It also highlights four tensions involving capacity, cultural meaning, infrastructure and public accountability. The proposed CIVIC framework combines Conservation-sensitive classification, Impact screening, Venue reversibility, Income accountability and Community review. Conclusion: Event use should be assessed against heritage sensitivity and community-recognised meaning before commercial benefits are considered. CIVIC is a conceptual management proposal, not an empirically validated assessment tool; further site-based research is needed to test its feasibility and effects.

KEYWORDS: MICE tourism, heritage venues, business events, cultural heritage conservation, authenticity, governance, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

The experience of a business event is partly produced by its setting. Convention facilities provide the logistical foundations for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), but destination image and opportunities outside formal sessions can influence venue selection (Oppermann, 1996). Event-tourism scholarship similarly regards the relationship between place, programme and visitor experience as important to event value (Getz & Page, 2016). Historical precincts consequently offer organisers a distinctive proposition: participants encounter a destination through architecture, memory and cultural interpretation rather than through a function room alone.

This proposition has become more relevant as the meetings sector reassesses face-to-face attendance after the expansion of virtual formats (Jung et al., 2023). Yet a heritage monument is not an ordinary commercial asset. Its value may lie in fragile fabric, archaeological remains, ceremonial use, collective memory or associations that cannot be reproduced once disturbed. In Vietnam, recent programmes have brought large cultural events to the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, incentive-oriented visitors and royal-style dining to the Hue Imperial City, and tourism-oriented festivities to Cham temple-tower settings (Thuy An, 2022; Quang et al., 2022; Nhan Dan, 2026; Tuoi Tre Online, 2026). These activities are not all MICE events, but together they expose decisions that arise when protected spaces are opened to programmed gatherings.

The Law on Cultural Heritage No. 45/2024/QH15, effective on 1 July 2025, provides a general legal basis for heritage promotion while requiring the protection of original elements and heritage values (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2024). Practical event decisions remain more specific. Managers must consider how visitors enter and circulate, whether sound or temporary structures affect a protected area, whose historical narrative is presented, how fees are distributed, and how affected communities can respond. A compliant permit is necessary but does not itself demonstrate cultural suitability or positive safeguarding outcomes.

Research offers relevant but dispersed perspectives. Studies of destination images and storytelling concern the attractions of distinctive experiences (Moscardo, 2020), while heritage-tourism research addresses authenticity, interpretation and commodification (Bui & Lee, 2015; Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). Work on adaptive reuse and World Heritage management examines conservation priorities and decision procedures (Arfa et al., 2022; Coimbra et al., 2025). What remains underdeveloped is a practical connection between the event product and the conditions under which a heritage site may responsibly host it.

The article addresses three questions. RQ1: What opportunities for event-related tourism are documented in selected Vietnamese heritage settings? RQ2: Which risks and governance tensions follow from the documented uses? RQ3: What review process can relate event decisions to conservation obligations and public accountability? It combines qualitative document analysis with a purposive comparison of three different settings and

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proposes the CIVIC framework. The aim is conceptual and management-oriented; no visitor survey, revenue audit, structural test or claim of verified event impacts is presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Heritage distinctiveness and the event value proposition

Venue choice extends beyond physical meeting capacity. Oppermann (1996) showed that convention planners form differentiated images of destinations, and Getz and Page (2016) situated business events within a wider field of planned experiences. Cultural setting is one means through which a destination may become recognisable. Moscardo (2020) further explains how stories shape the way visitors anticipate and interpret tourism experiences. A historic courtyard can therefore support a memorable reception when its narrative is credible and understandable. Architectural atmosphere alone, however, does not establish that an event accurately communicates the site's history.

In a post-pandemic context, the comparison with online participation strengthens the case for place-specific encounters, although it does not guarantee commercial success (Jung et al., 2023). Lekgau and Tichaawa (2024), studying collaborative recovery in the South African MICE sector, emphasise connections among public authorities, suppliers and organisers. A Vietnamese study of heritage-based MICE prospects in Binh Duong likewise identifies cultural resources together with gaps in facilities and coordination (Tran Hanh Minh, 2025). Such work suggests the possibility of distinctive products, but it cannot establish the number of event bookings or the profitability of any of the sites analysed here.

2.2. Physical limits, authenticity and cultural authority

The concentrated spatial and temporal demands of an event differ from everyday sightseeing. Research on visitor crowding at the Master-of-Nets Garden highlights the importance of where and when pressure accumulates (Ding et al., 2023). At the Alhambra and Generalife, the history of quotas and ticket controls shows that capacity management also depends on enforcement (García-Hernández et al., 2023). For a MICE programme, the relevant load includes guests, catering, storage, vehicles, sound equipment and the installation and removal of temporary facilities. Capacity consequently requires site-specific assessment rather than a figure borrowed from another monument.

Cultural limits can be less visible than physical ones. Bui and Lee (2015) analyse how national, political and commercial agendas intersect in the presentation of the Thang Long Imperial Citadel. Phat et al. (2025) find that perceived authenticity matters to heritage-destination attractiveness, although their survey concerns another Vietnamese setting. Quang et al. (2022) document Cham community concerns when sacred celebrations became official tourism festivals. Their findings indicate that public attention and cultural legitimacy are not interchangeable. Community involvement, accurate attribution and limits on inappropriate performance or photography may be as important as crowd control.

The distinction between event experience and heritage integrity therefore cannot be reduced to an opposition between tourism and preservation. Some interpretation and carefully designed access can support public understanding; other forms of spectacular presentation may detach a site from the relationships that sustain its meaning. Nguyen and Cheung's (2014) classification of heritage tourists in Hue additionally cautions against assuming one uniform audience. Event design must ask which audiences are involved and what kind of heritage experience is being offered.

2.3. Conservation-first reuse and stakeholder governance

Adaptive-reuse scholarship offers a value-first logic. Arfa et al. (2022) place documentary investigation and assessment of significance before design interventions. Espino (2026) identifies governance and community-centred approaches as important themes in commercial heritage reuse, while Akbar et al. (2026) argue for tourism that follows conservation priorities rather than replacing them. Event use is usually temporary and is not identical to permanent reuse, but both require assessment of what can change without undermining significance.

Institutional research supplies a complementary warning. Coimbra et al. (2025) find continuing uncertainty about management responsibilities across urban World Heritage sites; Vanhuele and Vanneste (2025) identify fragmentation in planning around buffer zones. Panagiotopoulou and Skoultsos (2025) observe gaps in feedback arrangements and the inclusion of less powerful stakeholders in destination management. Hoang and Bakucz (2024) associate governance quality with tourism development in Vietnam. These findings justify an accountable approval process with identifiable roles, written conditions, public-benefit requirements and post-event review, rather than relying only on an organiser's proposal.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research design and scope

A qualitative documentary design was combined with a purposive comparison of three heritage-event settings. The analytical unit was a documented use of heritage space, considered in relation to its purpose, physical arrangements, cultural representation and governance responsibilities. The settings were selected for contrast, not as a statistically representative sample of Vietnam's MICE venues. Thang Long illustrates large-scale public cultural programming; the Hue Imperial City includes a directly MICE-related group visit, a premium dining programme and a dispute over event-related structures; Cham temple-tower festivals provide a cultural-authority comparator. The last setting is not presented as proof of commercial MICE activity.

3.2. Documentary materials and selection

The case-specific materials comprised the Law on Cultural Heritage 2024, four dated news reports from 2022 to October 2026, and two peer-reviewed studies directly addressing Thang Long and Cham heritage (Bui & Lee, 2015; Quang et al., 2022; Thuy An, 2022; Nhan Dan, 2026; Tuoi Tre Online, 2026; Vo Thanh, 2026). The reports were selected because they identify activities, organisers, attendance or official actions rather than merely offering general promotional claims. Supporting international and Vietnamese scholarship was used to explain MICE experience, authenticity, crowding, adaptive reuse and governance. Materials were assembled through topic- and site-specific Vietnamese and English searches. This is a bounded source collection, not a registered or exhaustive systematic review.

3.3. Procedure, traceability and limits

Following the logic of qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009), material was read for four fields: the documented event activity, the possible contribution to destination value, the reported or plausible risk, and the governance decision that would require evidence. Passages were first assigned to these fields, then compared across settings for recurrent tensions. Legal provisions, reported episodes, scholarly findings, conditional

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inferences and recommendations were recorded separately. The comparison generated a practical governance sequence rather than a numerical assessment scale.

The source base contains no on-site inspection, structural measurements, event contracts, financial accounts, interviews or independent attendance counts. Absence of reported damage is not evidence that damage did not occur, and a request for an inspection cannot be treated as a legal finding. Media reports also differ from academic studies in evidentiary purpose. Accordingly, the results concern documented events and analytical risks; the framework's effectiveness must be tested through field research before claims can be made about conservation outcomes or economic returns.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Regulatory conditions: permission is not unlimited use

The Law on Cultural Heritage 2024 identifies tourism, visitor services and cultural activities among ways of promoting the value of relics (Article 26). At the same time, Article 5 requires use that does not damage original elements or compromise heritage integrity. Article 27 distinguishes protection zones I and II; Articles 28 and 29 regulate construction and approval within protected zones. Article 9 addresses prohibited conduct, including unauthorised construction and unlawful exploitation (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2024). These provisions indicate that an event's commercial purpose cannot override statutory safeguards. They do not, by themselves, amount to a detailed operating code for MICE events.

A governance gap arises between a general principle and an individual application. A proposed dinner, product launch or cultural conference raises practical questions about temporary cables, equipment anchors, emergency routes, noise, operating hours and interpretive content. The legal distinction between protection zones is an essential starting point, but managers still require location-specific screening, approval responsibilities and a documented account of how interventions will be removed or reversed.

4.2. Contrasting evidence from Hanoi, Hue and Cham settings

At the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, the second World Culture Festival was reported as taking place on 1–4 October 2026, bringing participation from approximately 50 countries and international organisations. The report described 45 cultural spaces, 35 food areas, film programming and international performances (Nhan Dan, 2026). It provides evidence of substantial programmed cultural activity and international visibility within a heritage precinct. It does not establish corporate-meeting demand, the financial return of the festival or the physical effects of its infrastructure. The earlier study by Bui and Lee (2015) demonstrates why political and cultural representation must remain part of the interpretation of site use.

Hue provides a more direct link to business-event products. In March 2022, nearly 600 team-building visitors arriving on five flights were received in the Imperial City; the group was split for visiting and cultural performances were included. Authorities also announced incentives for MICE and team-building organisers, including fee reductions and access to selected public and heritage spaces (Thuy An, 2022). In April and May 2026, royal-style banquets at Duyet Thi Duong were reported for 130 guests per evening, with a stated ticket price of VND 1.7 million (Tuoi Tre Online, 2026). These examples demonstrate differentiated event formats; the available sources do not disclose their net revenues or lasting conservation benefits.

A separate Hue episode concerns infrastructure rather than visitor demand. In January 2026, the Cultural Heritage Department requested an inspection of newly constructed event-related buildings at Phu Noi Vu. The responsible conservation centre described the works as removable trial facilities, while the report described concrete and other modern elements that did not follow the historic palace architecture (Vo Thanh, 2026). The report documents scrutiny and competing characterisations; it does not provide a final inspection outcome. The episode makes technical reversibility and approval records salient governance questions.

The Cham temple-tower comparison concerns sacred festivals rather than a verified MICE service. Quang et al. (2022) report that some community members viewed the transformation of New Year observances into official tourist festivals as inconsistent with their religious worldview. The analytical relevance is the potential conflict between visibility and authority: a successful public programme may still compromise community-recognised meaning if decisions are made without the relevant cultural custodians.

Table 1. Documentary settings and the boundaries of inference

Setting	Documented use	Potential relevance to events	What cannot be inferred
Thang Long Imperial Citadel	International cultural festival, October 2026	International profile and large-scale cultural programming	MICE bookings, net income or site impacts
Hue Imperial City	Team-building visit, 2022; royal banquets and event structures, 2026	Incentive visits, heritage dining and operating conditions	Net returns, full compliance findings or conservation effects
Cham temple-tower festivals	Tourism-oriented public presentation of sacred celebrations	Comparator for cultural meaning and community authority	Direct MICE demand or impacts at all Cham sites

Source: Synthesis of Thuy An (2022), Quang et al. (2022), Nhan Dan (2026), Tuoi Tre Online (2026) and Vo Thanh (2026).

4.3. Four recurring tensions in heritage-event use

Across these documents, four tensions emerge. First, destination visibility versus carrying capacity: a larger programme can increase reach while intensifying concentrated loads. Second, marketable experience versus credible interpretation: heritage storytelling can add value but also simplify cultural meaning. Third, operational convenience versus conservation reversibility: a venue may seek durable equipment that is difficult to justify inside a protected setting. Fourth, institutional promotion versus public and community accountability: organisers may emphasise attendance or

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receipts while affected groups prioritise representation, access and continuity. These are analytical categories, not an estimate of how frequently damage or conflict occurs in Vietnamese heritage sites.

The cases also indicate why evidence must match the claim being assessed. For physical effects, a description of a structure as temporary is less informative than installation drawings, approvals and removal records. For cultural interpretation, an attractive programme is not a substitute for review by relevant knowledge holders. For economic outcomes, ticket prices and headcounts cannot replace documented net receipts or conservation expenditure. Distinguishing these forms of evidence makes conditional approval more transparent: a low-impact educational activity and a large amplified reception need not meet identical requirements, even at the same monument.

Table 2. Recurrent tensions and screening questions

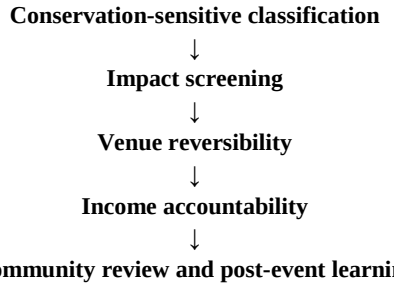
Tension	Risk of a narrow decision	Minimum balancing test
Visibility / capacity	Attendance goals displace material limits	Can visitor and production loads be safely accommodated at this location?
Experience / meaning	Historical or sacred practices are reduced to spectacle	Is interpretation accurate and accepted by the relevant cultural custodians?
Convenience / reversibility	Equipment or fixtures produce lasting alterations	Can all event interventions be installed and removed without avoidable loss?
Promotion / accountability	Public responsibilities are overshadowed by event receipts	Who approves, benefits, monitors and can challenge the proposed use?

Source: Authors' comparative interpretation of the cases and cited governance literature; not measured incident rates.

4.4. The CIVIC framework: from eligibility to review

The synthesis produces a five-part governance proposal termed CIVIC: Conservation-sensitive classification, Impact screening, Venue reversibility, Income accountability, and Community review. It is a decision process rather than a certification score. Classification identifies the parts of a site that may host specified activities. Screening examines both material and intangible effects of an actual proposal. Reversibility controls equipment and restoration obligations. Income accountability addresses fees, contracts and public benefit. Community review provides appropriate cultural input and evaluates the event after completion. Each step may return managers to an earlier decision when new evidence changes the site's suitability.

Figure 1. The proposed CIVIC governance sequence



Review findings inform subsequent classification and screening decisions.

CIVIC distinguishes approval evidence from promotional claims. An event application should contain the proposed activity and audience, an annotated location map, estimated attendance and load-in requirements, an impact assessment appropriate to the site's significance, a dismantling plan, financial terms and an identified route for stakeholder feedback. A post-event record should document any incident, removal and restoration, visitor or community concerns, and decisions for future programmes. These are suggested instruments for subsequent piloting, not procedures demonstrated to be in force at the three settings.

In practical use, the sequence begins with eligibility rather than a weighted score. If a proposed venue or intervention is restricted by law, that threshold must be addressed before market benefits enter the decision. If an activity relies on ceremonial material, consultation must begin while the programme can still change. Technical review should then consider vehicle access, peak density, emergency routes, weather contingencies, equipment removal and restoration. Only after these safeguards are established should managers assess fees and prospective returns.

Table 3. CIVIC operational questions and review evidence

CIVIC element	Management decision	Documentary evidence for review
Conservation-sensitive classification	Where and for which activities is event use permissible?	Sensitivity map, heritage-value statement, applicable zoning constraints
Impact screening	What physical, interpretive and social effects need conditions?	Written screening record, permissions, attendance and timing limits

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CIVIC element	Management decision	Documentary evidence for review
Venue reversibility	What must be removed, repaired or reinstated?	Equipment and installation plan, removal protocol, inspection record
Income accountability	How are fees, costs and conservation benefits documented?	Published charges, contract terms, expenditure and reinvestment account
Community review	Who provides cultural consent, corrections and feedback?	Consultation record, complaints route, post-event assessment

Source: Authors' proposed CIVIC framework; operational criteria require site-based validation.

The framework is intentionally non-additive: strong ticket sales cannot compensate for an unacceptable threat to protected fabric or a serious violation of a community's conditions for cultural representation. Conversely, a low-risk educational meeting may be suitable for a space that cannot support amplified entertainment. Management should thus determine eligibility and non-negotiable safeguards first, and only then weigh experience quality, service feasibility and anticipated economic benefit.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. What heritage contributes to business-event development

The documented Vietnamese settings support a bounded proposition. Heritage places can supply symbolic distinction, cultural narratives and a platform for reception, learning or incentive-oriented experiences. The Hue group visit and banquet programme provide closer examples of MICE-adjacent offerings; the Hanoi festival demonstrates broader event capacity and international communication. These observations are consistent with destination-image and storytelling scholarship (Oppermann, 1996; Moscardo, 2020), but they should not be interpreted as a measured competitive advantage over conventional venues. The source material does not compare client satisfaction, expenditure, repeat bookings or conservation finance.

5.2. Implications for policy and venue management

The first implication is to separate an area's legal status from a programme's suitability. A protected site's zoning map should be linked to specific uses, loads and operational limits, while approval for structures should follow applicable legal procedures. The second is to design events around conservation rather than modify the site to fit a standard commercial package. Adaptable layouts, controlled equipment movement and documented reinstatement are plausible options, but their adequacy requires technical examination (Arfa et al., 2022; National Assembly of Vietnam, 2024).

The third implication concerns narrative and authority. A royal-themed dinner, international festival and sacred celebration create different obligations. A public festival should not be presumed to represent private-sector MICE demand; likewise, a ceremonial practice should not be treated as generic entertainment. The Cham evidence especially supports consultation with recognised knowledge holders before promotional material or performance arrangements are approved (Quang et al., 2022). Participation needs a route to influence decisions and correct representations, not merely an invitation to perform.

Fourth, public benefit must be documented. Publishing consistent fees and reporting how a designated portion of relevant income supports maintenance or interpretation would allow managers to explain how commercial use relates to safeguarding. The proposed reporting mechanism follows value-based reuse principles and stakeholder-governance concerns (Akbar et al., 2026; Panagiotopoulou & Skoultsos, 2025). It is a recommendation; none of the reviewed reports provides a comparable audited revenue-and-reinvestment account. CIVIC therefore offers a reviewable logic for testing, not evidence that one governance model has already delivered better outcomes.

5.3. Limitations and directions for further research

The analysis is restricted by a small purposive documentary corpus, heterogeneous event types and unequal detail across cases. The contrast is useful for identifying decision questions but cannot determine causal effects, comparative risk levels or the actual distribution of benefits. A next study should combine site plans, permit files, event contracts, visitor-flow observations, equipment-impact assessments and interviews with event organisers, conservators and affected communities. Repeated assessments before and after an event could examine both fabric condition and cultural acceptability. Multi-site testing could then refine CIVIC's thresholds, feasibility and institutional responsibilities.

6. CONCLUSION

Heritage spaces can broaden Vietnam's business-event offer through place-specific narratives and experiences, but the same qualities that make these settings attractive create limits on their use. Evidence from Thang Long, Hue and Cham festival settings indicates opportunities for visibility and differentiated programming alongside questions about physical pressure, interpretation, temporary structures and cultural authority. Because the sources vary in their relation to MICE, they support cautious comparison rather than an estimate of sector performance.

The proposed CIVIC framework connects conservation-sensitive classification, impact screening, venue reversibility, income accountability and community review in an iterative decision process. Its central principle is that an event should be acceptable to the heritage setting before its commercial benefits are assessed. The framework requires evaluation with actual site users and managers; it should not be described as an empirically validated tool.

DECLARATIONS

Author contributions. Nguyen Tri Phuong: conceptualisation, methodology, analysis, original draft and supervision. Tran Diem Hang: documentary collection, analysis, review and editing. Both authors approved the manuscript.

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