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## **STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF A NONPROFIT FESTIVAL IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE, VIETNAM**

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### **Abstract**

Festival stakeholders have different power levels in relation to an event, and this depends on their investment or importance to the event's success. Governments or associations commonly organise non-profit festivals to celebrate a particular event or achieve a specific goal with less profit-making priority. As a long-established festival in Asia, the Tianhou Festival in Vietnam benefits the tourism sector and the local community. This festival is bound to the religious beliefs of local people originating from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China, who immigrated to Vietnam and are now living in Binh Duong Province (BDP), Vietnam. Over the years, the festival's success has intensified the socioeconomic development of Binh Duong Province. Undeniably, the festival quality can be enhanced with substantial and solicitous collaboration amongst stakeholders. Despite the contributions of such events, thus far, only a few studies have focused on the perceived benefits of non-profit-oriented events. To address this gap, the current study used the qualitative method by using semi structured interviews with key stakeholders to collect data, which were then transcribed by thematic analysis. The findings reveal that organising non-profit festivals may enhance interpersonal skills as well as bring about economic benefits, social incentives, and community cohesiveness. This research envisions the impacts of the Tianhou Festival on the stakeholders of this non-profit-oriented event. The findings of the study can provide guidelines to other key stakeholders in improving the same concept of event management in the future.

**Keywords:** stakeholder analysis, non-profit event, religious festival, perceived benefits and Vietnam

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In tourism, non-profit organisations that conceptualise and organise cultural events or festivals receive part of their financial support from public sources and other parts of business revenue. Consequently, they can cooperate with the public and private sectors depending on their wants and needs (Giannoulakis, 2014). In the festival tourism literature, public and non-profit festivals centre themselves as events that do not pay focus on seeking sponsorships and donations. As they have already successfully lobbied the government for money or other benefits, non-profit festivals seem less concerned about sponsors (Andersson & Getz, 2009).

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) assesses that 300–330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites annually. This is mainly because tourists often travel to events and festivals directly or indirectly related to religions (UNWTO, 2014). Therefore, studies have been conducted on festivals and events worldwide for their crucial role in social development and cultural preservation and for being promoted and created as tourist attractions (Tommy, Andersson, & Getz, 2008). As a subfield of festival studies, religious festivals are also becoming an interesting topic for researchers and policymakers due to their functions in terms of enhancing and protecting local culture and economy. However, to date, only a few studies have specifically addressed stakeholder analysis in religious festival contexts (Zhang et al., 2019). The management side of festivals is less prevalent in the literature than the broader cultural, social and touristic aspects of festivals, especially in political and religious festivals. Thus, the site management, sustainability issues and importance of different stakeholders involved in religious festivals have been given less focus in the literature (Kim et al., 2020). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to identify the perceived benefits received by TRF stakeholders, which motivate them to organise this festival. The findings of this paper will help identify the benefits that can be obtained by stakeholders from non-profit festivals in ways that can contribute to the empirical study and methodological approaches employed in the literature.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Stakeholder Analysis**

Identifying the stakeholders makes it more effective for managers to manage the festival and the relationships between various stakeholders, resulting in a smoother organising process. However, it can be quite challenging to identify the stakeholders without applying the stakeholder analysis. Stakeholder analysis is 'an approach for understanding a system by identifying the key actors or stakeholders in the system and assessing their respective interest in that system' (Grimble & Chan, 1995). Similarly, Freeman (1984) proposed 'stakeholder management' as a framework to help managers understand turbulent and complex

business environments. By gathering and analysing qualitative data, researchers can identify stakeholders' interests, the position in which they are supported or against the project/programme, the convergence and alliance between stakeholders and the ability to affect the policy process with their power and leadership (Schmeer, 1999). Furthermore, by analysing stakeholders, policymakers and managers can interact more effectively with key stakeholders and increase their support and engagement. Potential misunderstandings can also be prevented if stakeholder analysis is conducted before a policy or programme is implemented and likely to succeed (Schmeer, 1999).

Governance, as a reflexive self-organisation with multiple stakeholders, helps promote the growth of an area. By analysing the governance approach toward stakeholder participation and collaboration in festivals, innovative channels of communication, public participation, and the most committed and proactive performers selection can be evaluated (Ng & Rahman, 2021). Stakeholder analysis can also enhance local people's awareness of the conservation of sacred destinations or festivals (Pimid et al., 2020). Hence, enhancing awareness and the authorisation of local communities could lead to greater support for tourism (Fitri Amir et al., 2024). In the TRF context, festival stakeholders also play a crucial role in determining the success of a festival. Subsequent studies have developed different models in identifying and analysing stakeholders. However, these models focus on music festivals and festivals that are more profit-oriented, thus leaving a gap for developing a new research direction that is focused on non-profit festivals.

### **Religious Festivals and Perceived Benefits**

Religious festivals have been shown to have positive impacts on their host communities. Nowadays, religious festivals are becoming increasingly important for local policymakers and tourism agencies due to their ability to protect local cultures while boosting local economies simultaneously. In particular, festival tourism positively influences material heritage by promoting it and increasing profits from tourism. Moreover, festivals make it possible to cultivate and develop the local nonmaterial cultural heritage and promote ideas related to its preservation (Cudny, 2013). Empirical studies on the perceived socioeconomic impacts of festivals on host communities vary. For example, from 1970 to 1996, the economic and financial impacts of these festivals were the most frequent research topics (Donald Getz, 2010).

Recently, researchers have examined studies on large-scale events and festivals and concluded that the most frequent topics were economic development and the impacts of events, followed by sponsorship and event marketing from the corporate perspective (Getz, 2008; Hede et al., 2002). Meanwhile, studies on the socioeconomic impacts of festivals focus on four dimensions: community cohesiveness, economic benefits, social incentives and social costs (Gursoy et al.,

2004). As shown in Figure 1, festivals bring back the benefits that outweigh the social costs and, according to organisers, serve as means for achieving socioeconomic development rather than posing threats to communities by creating a host of social problems. A festival’s length can explain this conclusion; most festivals last for two to three days, so it is assumed that there will be no major social problems. At the same time, festivals that are customer-oriented, which means they adjust to the tourists’ preferences, often risk losing their authenticity.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research conducted semi structured interviews with topic guides. The topic guides were provided beforehand so that the participants could be well prepared and guided in focusing on the scope of the discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). However, this type of research differs from empirical studies, which only have one set of topic guides for all respondents. In the current work, the respondents’ interviews were guided by different topic guides based on their respective roles in the Tianhou Festival and whether they came from the private, public or nongovernment organisation (NGO) sectors. All interviewees gave individual and departmental consent. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at their own workplaces. The targeted sample size for this research is 15, and 8 agreed to be interviewed, and the answers obtained reached the point of saturation. A summary of the brief descriptions of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Respondent’s background

Respondent	Occupation	Private/ public sector	Years of experience (festival’s background)	Festival’s position
A	University student	Private	3	Coordinator (manage volunteers)
B	University student	Private	2	Volunteer
C	Vice Chairman of the Phu Cuong Ward People’s Committee - TDMC	Public	5	Facilitator
D	Deputy Head of Culture and Information Division of TDMC	Public	25	Organizer
E	Deputy Head of the Tianhou Temple’s	Private	30	Organizer

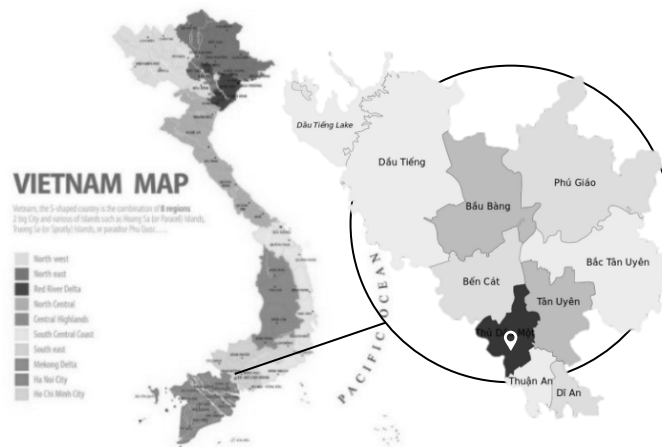
Respondent	Occupation	Private/ public sector	Years of experience (festival's background)	Festival's position
	organisational management board			
F	Public's security officer of TDMC	Public	3	Regulator
G	Officer of the Broadcasting Division - TDMC	Public	4	Promoter
H	Officer of the Natural and Environment Division - TDMC	Public	5	Regulator

Source: Fieldwork

The interviews were audio-recorded, and notes were taken. Thematic analysis was used because it provided researchers with greater flexibility while retaining rich and valuable data. Following the six steps of conducting thematic analysis introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006), the collected data were manually coded by the researcher into codes and themes, in accordance with the study objectives.

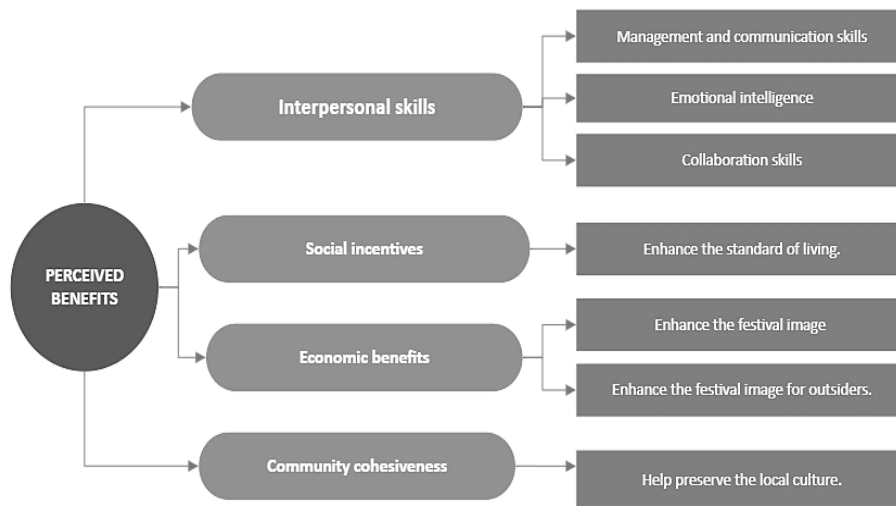
## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Tianhou Temple is currently located at No. 04, Nguyen Du Street, Chanh Nghia Ward, TDMC, BDP, Southeast Vietnam (Dang, 2014). BDP, an economic gateway between Ho Chi Minh City and other provinces in Southeast Vietnam, is famous for the steady growth of industrial parks and its tourism industry, especially cultural and festival tourism (Hào, 2016). The Tianhou Palace is monitored by four Chinese communities whose members worship the Goddess of Tianhou. Pilgrims are mostly Vietnamese with Chinese origin from all over the country. The others came from nearby cities and provinces or even neighbouring countries, such as Thailand or Laos, who visit the place for tourism purposes (Choi, 2019).



**Figure 1:** Vietnam map and Binh Duong Province map  
*Source: (Google Photo)*

Figure 2 shows the extracted data from key stakeholders’ interview sessions, indicating the benefits they obtained from organising the Tianhou Festival. Based on the interview sessions, the most frequent benefits involve interpersonal skills, economic benefits, social incentives and community cohesiveness. These findings have similar patterns with the perceived impacts of festivals from a festival organiser’s perspective (Gursoy et al., 2004).



**Figure 2:** The perceived impacts of festivals by organisers at TRF, BDP, Vietnam  
*Source: Author*

Key stakeholders stated that their interpersonal skills were improved, especially their management skills (time management, planning and communication skills), emotional intelligence (how they handle urgent situations before or during the festival) and collaboration skills (how they collaborate in harmony). These skills are not only crucial in organising the Tianhou Festival but also in performing their daily work requirements.

### **Theme 1: Interpersonal skills**

#### **Code 1. Management and communication skills**

The key organisers of the Tianhou Festival agreed that being stakeholders improved their management skills in general, including time management, planning and communication skills. These are crucial not only in organising the Tianhou Festival but also in their daily life contexts, in which they need to communicate with people and sketch out plans for their divisions.

*R2: Being a member of the volunteers' team helps me develop my social skills and emotional intelligence...Attitude is [also] key to the festival's success. ... For volunteers, we have a hotline connected with key stakeholders.... [We also developed] negotiation skills during this process... Even when conflicts and issues occur, organisers and stakeholders must be calm first and promptly contact each other for solutions.*

*R3: First, the attitude in communication between stakeholders and myself is undeniably essential. Second, respect is the critical work on an excellent harmonious relationship between stakeholders...I also improved my management skills, helping enhance the position of the People's Committee in the organising process for festivals and other events.*

*R5: Being one of the main stakeholders who organise this festival, I also help promote religious tourism in BDP and the Tianhou Temple, particularly by drawing more people to participate each year... From the excellent promotion, more people and pilgrims will come to the Tianhou Festival and promote its image, especially the unique name that tourists gave it: the 'Free festival', with its distinct features that can be spread out to outsiders.*

*R8: Planning and monitoring the tasks during the festival are the most significant skills that I learned. We also understood more about budget management for unforeseen circumstances.*

### **Code 2. Emotional intelligence**

Aside from management and communication skills, emotional intelligence was another skill gained by key stakeholders from organising the Tianhou Festival. The interview sessions with key stakeholders reveal that conflicts in organising festivals are inevitable. By having greater control over their emotions and attitudes, key stakeholders can tackle emergent conflicts, as expressed in the following excerpts:

*R1: The skills that I gained in network development will help me in my future work and encourage me to socialise more... It also helps me control my emotions.*

*R2 Being a member of the volunteers' team helps me develop my social skill and emotional intelligence... Attitude is [also] key to the festival's success. ... For volunteers, we have the hotline contact connected with higher-level stakeholders ....*

*R3: First, the attitude I have when other stakeholders and I communicate with each other is undeniably essential. Second, respect is critical to creating an excellent harmonious relationship between stakeholders.*

### **Code 3. Collaboration skills**

Each event and festival needs excellent collaboration between stakeholders to make it successful. Tianhou Festival also follows the same trait, with key stakeholders revealing that they struggled for the first few years to create good harmony and collaboration amongst themselves. However, through many years of experience in organising the festival, they developed their collaboration skills to improve the overall organising process. They also stated that they learned about the importance of good collaboration and developed negotiation skills, which are crucial in organising the Tianhou Festival. They believed that thoroughly understanding each other's responsibilities and negotiating on the rightful issues helped create a good foundation that could make the festival more successful:

*R1: ... It is crucial to cooperate reasonably with the Steering Committee of the festival....*

*R2: I developed negotiation skills during this process. Even when conflicts and issues occurred, organisers and stakeholders must be calm first and promptly contact each other for solutions.*



*R3: The most significant benefit from being a part of the organising process of the festival is that we need to respect each other, listen and analyse each of the situations carefully to have a wisely final decision. Thus, meetings before the festival happens are crucial for better understanding between stakeholders.*

Since 2017, a new team has been formed entirely in charge of continuously checking the activities of the business people around the venue during the festival. This is a product of good collaboration in establishing an examination team involving different divisions. It aims to ensure a safer Tianhou Festival that can detect any business without proper permission.

*R5: It is also crucial to collaborate with other stakeholders in harmony so that the festival can run smoothly.*

*R6: [We must apply] conflict resolution when we need to thoroughly communicate with other stakeholders and understand each other's tasks so that we can help each other out in a satisfactory way.*

*R7: [We] have a chance to improve teamwork with other stakeholders.*

*R8: Moreover, I also improved my problem-solving and teamwork skills when organising the festival with other stakeholders.*

## **Theme 2: Economic benefits**

Improving one's interpersonal skills benefited key stakeholders by facilitating smooth collaboration in organising a successful festival and enhancing the province's economic development.

### **Code 1. Enhance the standard of living**

Key stakeholders stated that they did not directly gain economic benefits for themselves, as Tianhou Festival is mainly a nonprofit festival. However, they revealed that by being a stakeholder in organising the festival, they indirectly brought more livelihood opportunities for the local community by selling spots for businesspeople and encouraging new facilities to serve pilgrims. Consequently, the profits gained by the tourism sector will also enhance the economic development of the whole province.

*R5: Being one of the main stakeholders who organise this festival can help promote religious tourism in BDP. By doing so, the economic development of the province and in TDMC can also rapidly improve, which then brings back the economic benefits to the local community.*

*R6: Being one of the stakeholders is a way for me to support the socioeconomic growth of BDP.*

*R7: I can contribute to the province's socioeconomic development if the broadcasting team performs its role well in organising the festival.*

### **Theme 3: Social incentives**

Tianhou Festival is a long-established festival in BDP, so it is reasonable for key stakeholders to gain social incentives from organising the festival. This would raise people's awareness of the festival and enhance its image to outsiders. In turn, this would eventually promote and attract more tourists and pilgrims each year.

#### **Code 1. Educational - Raising public awareness**

The interviewees stated that being a stakeholder gives them the benefit of having more chances to raise awareness, not only among the BDP people but also among tourists and even themselves, about the importance of this festival, its history, beauty and invaluable heritage:

*R1: I can listen to the history of the festival and understand how the festival celebrates the customs and the beauty of our religion. This information cannot be fully explained in newspapers or magazines [alone].*

*R2: I can visit sooner and listen to the stories from the management board about the beauty of the cult, the history of the Goddess Tianhou and the remarkable things about the festival and share it with my friends.*

*R3 ...In addition, raising people's awareness about this festival can help make it more sustainable and feasible for everyone.*

Key stakeholders also benefited from experiencing the festival themselves, enabling them to pass on their knowledge to younger generations:

*R5: Another benefit is the awareness of culture and religious preservation that has been transferred from one generation to another. Organising the Tianhou Festival is a way for us to raise awareness amongst the young generation about its history and importance. Hence, more people will support in preserving the festival's values.*

## **Code 2. Enhancing the festival's image to outsiders**

Key stakeholders also claimed that being a stakeholder in organising the Tianhou Festival makes them more responsible and think more about its goal: to organise a successful festival and bring out the beautiful image of the festival to outsiders within a safe and comfortable environment.

*R1: [I aim] to be polite so that tourists will not feel disrespected and to help increase the reputation of the festival...[I am] willing to help the visitors feel more secure.*

*R2: To bring harmony to the organising process...providing a safe environment for TRF.*

*R3: To provide safer, more comfortable religious tourism....*

Key stakeholders also stated that being a stakeholder is a way for them to promote religious tourism development in the province, which has been its major focus in recent years.

*R4: It is also a way to promote religious tourism activities in the province and emphasise the importance of my role in the festival organising process in ensuring the festival's success.*

*R5: Being one of the main stakeholders who organise this festival also helps promote religious tourism in BDP and Tianhou Temple, particularly by drawing more people to come to the festival each year...The festival is not only linked to the local people's minds but also an alternative way to promote religious tourism.*

Due to the excellent promotion, more people and pilgrims will join the Tianhou Festival each year, and the image of the festival, especially the special name that tourists give it—the 'Free' festival with its unique features—can be spread to outsiders.

*R6: Being one of the stakeholders involved in the organising process of Tianhou Festival is a way for me to improve the festival's image.*

*R7: Being one of the stakeholders in organising the successful Tianhou Festival, I help increase its brand image. Therefore, I help the promotion process of the festival run smoothly and attract more people ... [I also] enhance the image of the province.*

*R8: Participating in the festival to ensure its success, bringing a beautiful image of a safe and exquisite festival.*

**Theme 4: Community cohesiveness**

By organising the festival, key stakeholders can raise pilgrims' awareness of the festival's values, as well as encourage the local community and pilgrims to preserve these values and pass them on to the next generation. Key stakeholders' interview sessions reveal that the religious and cultural values of the Tianhou Festival have been successfully transferred throughout the generations.

**Code 1. Helping preserves the local culture**

Both primary and secondary stakeholders agree that the collaboration between stakeholders in organising the Tianhou Festival helps preserve the local religious and cultural values. People know more about history and are blessed with good fortunes. Consequently, more tourists come every year to join the exquisite festival and feel at ease because of the organising process. As some stakeholders from the university and the People's Committee emphasised:

*R1: From a tourism perspective, I have certain benefits from organising the festival...I can listen to the history of the festival and understand how the festival celebrates the customs and the beauty of our religion. This information cannot be fully explained in newspapers or magazines [alone].*

*R2: From a tourism perspective... I can visit sooner and listen to the stories from the management board about the beauty of the cult, the history of the Goddess Tianhou and the remarkable things about the festival and share it with my friends.*

*R4: The festival is the beauty of the Tianhou cult that is strongly religiously attached to the Binh Duong people in general and Chinese people who live in BDP in particular. This is why being a stakeholder in the festival organising process is a way for me to celebrate the beauty of the religion.*

The findings show similar patterns between the perceived impacts of the festival by organisers (Gursoy et al., 2004) and the extracted data from interview sessions, which include the four dimensions comprising positive benefits (economic benefits, social incentives and community cohesiveness) and negative costs (social costs). However, key stakeholders' interview sessions also revealed another component of the festival's benefits, that is, stakeholders gain interpersonal skills development (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Perceived benefits of stakeholders in TRF, BDP in comparison with Gursoy’s model

The original model of perceived benefits and cost of the festival (Gursoy et al., 2004)	Obtained model for this study
	Interpersonal skills
	Management and communication skills Emotional intelligence Collaboration skills
<b>Economic benefits</b>	Economic benefits
<b>Increase employment opportunities</b> <b>Increase the standard of living</b> <b>Encourage locals to develop new facilities</b>	Enhance the standard of living
<b>Social incentives</b>	Social incentives
<b>Promote organisations and businesses.</b> <b>Offer family-based recreation activities.</b> <b>Provide more recreational opportunities</b>	Educational – make people aware Enhance festival image to outsiders
<b>Community cohesiveness</b>	Community cohesiveness
<b>Build community pride</b> <b>Enhance community image</b> <b>Help preserve the local culture</b> <b>Generate revenues for civic projects</b>	Help preserve the local culture

Source: Fieldwork

## CONCLUSION

The application of Freeman’s (1984) stakeholder theory is valuable even for the tourism sector. From the perceived benefits analysed in this study, a well-arranged collaboration between key stakeholders can be formed to ensure the sustainable growth of the festival. A single stakeholder’s model from the empirical studies cannot be used to identify varying stakeholder roles, as each festival has distinct characteristics. In fact, the findings show that depending on the scenario and groups of stakeholders, different stakeholders’ structures can adopt more than one stakeholder model. Furthermore, key stakeholders can receive the benefits directly and indirectly through the growth of the local community.

Public and non-profit festivals have effectively encouraged investment and support from governments. Hence, non-profit festivals appear less concerned about sponsors (Andersson & Getz, 2009). The current study discloses the motives of stakeholders to join the organising process of the festival through perceived benefits and how the festival can operate while being a non-profit-oriented event. Future studies can consider evaluating the differences from multiple countries that organise similar festivals to obtain more diverse findings.

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