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An Expert-Informed Framework for Sustainable MICE Operations: Evidence from Suwon City, South Korea

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Abstract - This study addresses the implementation gap between global sustainability agendas and the operational realities of secondary MICE destinations, using Suwon City, South Korea, as an informed framework case study. While Suwon strives to compete with mega-destinations, it faces critical challenges in operationalising international sustainability standards and overcoming fragmented governance within its distinct structural ecosystem. To address these issues, this research was guided by three specific objectives: (1) to identify core operational and governance challenges in Suwon City's MICE ecosystem; (2) to formulate an integrated, actionable framework combining environmental stewardship and local stakeholder collaboration; and (3) to provide strategic policy recommendations for municipal authorities and convention organisers. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study utilised Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) with 10 industry experts over three months to derive robust operational insights. The findings establish a four-pillar framework: Sustainable Hosting Facilities, Sustainable Transportation, Sustainable Food & Beverage, and Post-Event Management. Results indicate that a successful sustainable MICE transition requires a shift from isolated initiatives to integrated destination governance, digital innovation, and localised supply chain resilience. Practically, the research offers actionable plans for policymakers, including zoning for specialised MICE districts, incentivising AI-driven hybrid event technologies, and mandating localised procurement networks to ensure corporate accountability. This research offers a scalable, context-adaptive model for secondary cities, transforming sustainability

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from a branding narrative into a measurable, accountable corporate practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector has emerged as a cornerstone of urban economic development, destination branding, and regional regeneration (Kaewsaengorn et al., 2026; Kumar et al., 2026). As cities compete to establish themselves as attractive destinations for business events, the concept of a MICE city brand has become increasingly important. A strong MICE city brand reflects a city's ability to host high-quality events while showcasing its infrastructure, accessibility, cultural attractions, and commitment to sustainability. Thus, at the global level, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for promoting sustainable economic, social, and environmental development. Of the 17 SDGs, SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth is closely linked to the MICE industry as business events generate employment, stimulate tourism, attract investment, and support local businesses. In addition, MICE activities contribute to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) by encouraging innovation and infrastructure development, SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting sustainable urban destinations, SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) through greener event management practices, and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by fostering collaboration among governments, businesses, academic institutions, and international organizations.

However, the extent to which the MICE sector genuinely contributes to the SDGs remains debatable. Jung et al. (2024), in a bibliometric analysis of 159 event-tourism studies, found that although the literature demonstrates moderate alignment with the SDGs, the focus is disproportionately concentrated on economic growth and tourism development, while SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) remain significantly underrepresented. This imbalance suggests that the current discourse on sustainable MICE development is relatively narrow, emphasising economic and environmental outcomes over broader social sustainability objectives. Consequently, while integrating the SDGs into MICE city branding may enhance a destination's global image and competitive advantage, its credibility depends on whether sustainability principles are embedded in policies and practices rather than used solely as branding narratives. Therefore, a critical examination of how MICE city branding aligns with the SDGs is necessary to determine whether these initiatives constitute substantive contributions to sustainable development or primarily serve as marketing strategies.

Moreover, the rapid expansion of the global business events industry has historically driven resource-intensive consumption, significant carbon footprints, and systemic strain on local municipal infrastructures (Li & Schmid, 2026). In response to global climate accords and shifting market demands, contemporary tourism governance has necessitated a paradigm shift from volume-driven growth toward sustainable, resilient, and ESG-aligned (Environmental, Social, and Governance) operational frameworks (Korea Tourism Organisation, 2026). While primary metropolitan hubs such as Seoul have successfully institutionalised standardised green-event practices and destination-management models (Han & Wanyi, 2026), secondary and emerging cities face distinct structural bottlenecks. These include fragmented stakeholder governance, limited capital

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capacity for large-scale infrastructure, and a lack of localised execution strategies tailored to unique regional ecosystems (Kaewsaengorn et al., 2026).

This study proposes an expert-informed framework designed to evaluate and enhance sustainable MICE operations in Suwon City to address this gap. This research investigates how secondary cities can optimise resource management, streamline multi-agency governance, and foster long-term destination competitiveness by synthesising expert insights with empirical readiness assessments. The specific objectives of this research are: (1) to identify the core operational and governance challenges confronting Suwon City's MICE ecosystem; (2) to formulate an integrated, actionable framework combining environmental stewardship and local stakeholder collaboration; and (3) to provide strategic policy recommendations for municipal authorities and convention organisers. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader literature on destination governance and sustainable tourism by offering a scalable model for secondary cities seeking to balance economic vitality with ecological responsibility. However, a substantial gap remains in translating these high-level benchmarks into actionable, expert-informed operational frameworks tailored to secondary metropolitan destinations. Destination managers and municipal policymakers require context-specific strategies that bridge structural readiness, multi-stakeholder governance, and eco-efficient venue management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability MICE Industry

Sustainability has become a dominant theme in MICE research as the industry faces increasing pressure to reduce its environmental footprint while maintaining economic viability and operational resilience. Although literature broadly agrees that sustainability is essential for the long-term competitiveness of MICE destinations and enterprises, existing studies vary considerably in their emphasis, with many focusing on isolated sustainability practices rather than adopting a holistic perspective that integrates environmental, social, and economic dimensions.

Wee et al. (2021) provided one of the most comprehensive overviews through a decade-long systematic literature review, identifying five core green practices that underpin sustainable MICE development: green venues, accessibility, sustainable advertising and promotion, food and beverage management, and waste management. These practices were proposed as responses to the industry's significant environmental challenges, including carbon emissions, excessive resource consumption, and waste generation. While the review establishes an important conceptual framework for sustainable MICE, it remains largely descriptive. It offers limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness or implementation challenges of these practices across different destination contexts.

Subsequent empirical studies have sought to operationalise these sustainability dimensions. For example, Cahyadi et al. (2025) investigated green food practices in Indonesia and found that the industry continues to face significant deficiencies in standardised sustainable food management and waste reduction. Using the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), the study identified local and organic sourcing, storage optimisation, and sustainable packaging as priority strategies for improving environmental performance. Although these findings provide practical guidance for enhancing food and beverage sustainability, their emphasis on a single operational component illustrates a broader tendency in the literature to address sustainability through fragmented initiatives rather than integrated destination-wide

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strategies.

Beyond environmental practices, recent research has increasingly recognised organisational capabilities as critical drivers of sustainability. Yuan et al. (2025) demonstrated that operations management, strategic management, and stakeholder management significantly enhance the resilience and long-term sustainability of MICE enterprises in post-pandemic China. Their findings suggest that sustainable MICE development extends beyond environmental initiatives and require organisational adaptability and effective governance. Nevertheless, the study focuses primarily on enterprise-level performance, offering limited insight into how these organisational capabilities interact with broader destination sustainability objectives.

Similarly, Warintarawej et al. (2025) highlighted stakeholder collaboration as a key prerequisite for sustainable MICE ecosystems in Thailand. The study identified weak inter-organizational collaboration and inadequate data sharing as significant barriers to sustainability and proposed developing collaborative information systems to strengthen coordination. While the findings emphasise the importance of digital collaboration and stakeholder trust in facilitating sustainable practices, they also reveal that technological solutions alone are insufficient without institutional commitment and effective governance mechanisms. Business process automation plays a critical role in addressing institutional pressures for sustainable event management (Ramadhan et al., 2026).

Overall, the literature demonstrates a growing shift from viewing sustainability solely as environmental management toward recognising the importance of organisational resilience, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic governance in sustainable MICE development. However, existing research remains fragmented, often examining individual sustainability dimensions in isolation and within specific national contexts. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how environmental practices, organisational capabilities, and collaborative governance can be integrated into a comprehensive sustainability framework for the MICE industry. Addressing this gap would provide a more robust understanding of how destinations and MICE organisations can simultaneously achieve environmental responsibility, operational resilience, and long-term competitiveness.

2.2 City Brand

Literature increasingly positions MICE as a strategic mechanism for city branding, emphasising its contributions to destination competitiveness, stakeholder engagement, and urban development. However, existing studies present a more nuanced picture, suggesting that the effectiveness of MICE city branding depends on multiple contextual and managerial factors rather than the mere presence of MICE activities.

Ahn et al. (2016) argued that successful MICE city branding in Busan City relies heavily on internal stakeholder engagement, particularly residents' perceptions of brand authenticity. Their findings identified brand reality as the strongest determinant of residents' brand commitment, followed by partnership, organisational culture, and departmental coordination. Furthermore, brand commitment was shown to encourage brand citizenship behaviour and strengthen residents' brand pride. While these findings highlight the importance of resident participation in creating a sustainable city brand, the study primarily focuses on internal branding dynamics within a single city context, limiting its generalizability to destinations with different socio-cultural and governance structures.

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The integration of emerging technologies into MICE has also attracted growing scholarly attention. An et al. (2025) examined Korean industry experts' perceptions of the Metaverse. They found that, despite its ability to enhance accessibility, promotional effectiveness, and immersive visitor experiences, it was not perceived as a substitute for face-to-face interactions. Instead, Metaverse was viewed as a complementary platform that expands engagement opportunities while preserving the unique value of physical events. These findings challenge optimistic narratives about digital transformation, suggesting that technological innovation alone cannot replace the experiential, social, and relational dimensions that underpin successful MICE destinations. Consequently, the competitiveness of host cities continues to depend largely on their physical infrastructure, destination identity, and experiential offerings.

Similarly, Marchesani and Masciarelli (2025) extended the discussion by examining the relationship between MICE tourism and smart city development. Their longitudinal analysis of 30 Italian smart cities demonstrated that MICE tourism positively contributes to urban mobility and smart city initiatives. Nevertheless, the study revealed that increased visitor volumes lead to unintended consequences, including increased crime and security concerns, which may weaken the long-term sustainability of destination branding. These findings suggest that while MICE can stimulate urban development, its benefits are contingent upon effective governance and the capacity of local authorities to mitigate the negative externalities associated with increased tourism.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that MICE has evolved beyond its traditional role as an event sector into a strategic city-branding instrument. Nevertheless, current research also demonstrates that its effectiveness is contingent on achieving a balance between stakeholder engagement, technological innovation, and sustainable urban governance. Rather than viewing MICE as an inherently beneficial branding strategy, future research should adopt a more critical perspective by examining the contextual conditions under which MICE contributes to long-term destination competitiveness and resilient city branding.

2.3 Suwon City, a MICE Destination

Suwon is the largest city and the capital of Gyeonggi province (see Figure 1), South Korea's most populous province (Pinem et al., 2023). As a new venue that opened in 2019, the Suwon Convention Centre (SCC) is a leading MICE venue in southern Gyeonggi Province, offering extensive facilities, including convention and exhibition halls. Strategically located, SCC is part of a larger complex that includes a hotel, department stores, and an aquarium, providing integrated experience for business and leisure visitors alike. The Suwon Convention Bureau offers seamless event support through services such as financial assistance, accommodation booking, and virtual event exploration via the "SUWON MICE CITY" platform. The Bureau also provides special services, such as shuttle buses and unique venue banquets, to ensure the success of international conferences and major events (Suwon Convention and Visitor's Bureau, n.d., 2026).

Most importantly, Suwon's local efforts closely align with broader national strategies. Under the South Korean government's national policy framework, which designates MICE as a core strategic driver for high-value tourism, regional economic balance, and national export infrastructure, local governments are strongly encouraged to foster regionally specialised MICE ecosystems.

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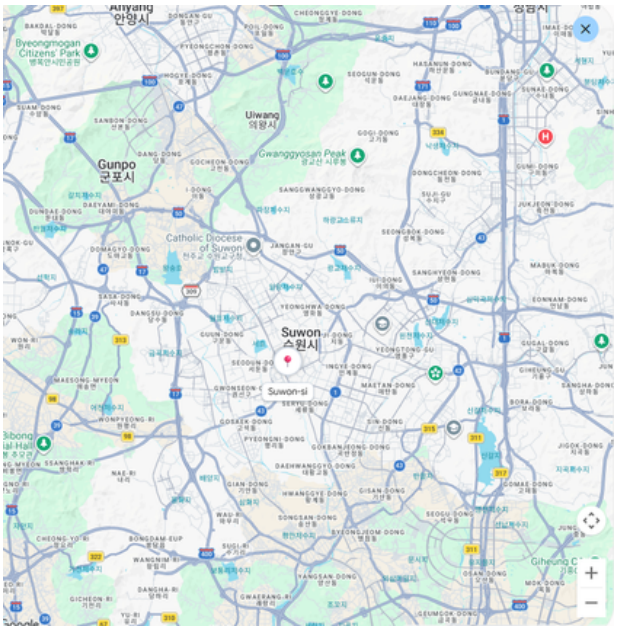

Figure 1. Suwon City, South Korea (Source: Map of Suwon-si, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea." Google Maps, Accessed 31 Aug. 2026, www.google.com/maps)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, incorporating snowball sampling to recruit participants for Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) and to examine and establish sustainable MICE operations for Suwon City. Given the emergent nature of sustainable MICE practices and the limited prior research and established tools in this domain, qualitative methods were deemed most appropriate to facilitate deep interaction and uncover rich, in-depth insights that cannot be easily obtained through quantitative surveys (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Following Krueger and Casey (2015), the FGI procedure was systematically structured into five distinct stages: 1) planning and protocol design, 2) expert participant recruitment, 3) interview execution, 4) qualitative data analysis, and 5) derivation and synthesis of results. To support the primary FGI process and triangulate the findings, supplementary techniques, including a systematic literature review, status analysis of municipal practices, and targeted case studies, were conducted concurrently.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

This study utilised a purposive snowball sampling approach to recruit ten experts with specialised, high-level knowledge of sustainable MICE and destination management. Selection criteria were strictly defined to include individuals with at least 5 years of professional or academic experience directly involved in sustainable tourism or event management in South Korea. The sample was strategically balanced to comprise five industry practitioners and five academics. This heterogeneous composition ensures a robust triangulation of perspectives: industry practitioners provide direct insights into operational realities and challenges, whilst the academic cohort offers theoretical rigour and broader contextual grounding.

The panel's relevance to Suwon City is justified by its capacity to provide external, high-level validation of the proposed framework. The experts offer a scalable perspective that transcends local institutional knowledge by cross-referencing national MICE standards with the specific operational requirements of secondary cities. This approach ensures the framework applies to Suwon's unique structural ecosystem whilst remaining aligned with broader South Korean sustainability mandates. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Qualitative data saturation was achieved as consistent themes and conceptual patterns emerged across the discussions, indicating that further interviews would not yield significant new insights.

Each FGI lasted approximately 90 minutes

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and was conducted in a dedicated, quiet meeting room to ensure a confidential and comfortable environment. A trained moderator guided each session using a semi-structured protocol designed to elicit deep insights whilst allowing for flexible exploration of emergent topics. Two research assistants served as notetakers, capturing non-verbal cues, contextual nuances, and verbatim quotes to ensure methodological rigour. All sessions were audio-recorded with explicit consent to guarantee accuracy during transcription. All participants were anonymised using alphanumeric identifiers from Participant 1 (P1) to Participant 10 (P10) to maintain strict confidentiality. The profiles of the participants are organised in Table 1.

Table 1. FGI interview participants

Participants	Years of Working in the MICE Industry	Position	Field	Education
P1	15	Managing Director	MICE Industry	PhD
P2	7	Director	MICE Industry	Master
P3	10	Professor	Academic	PhD
P4	15	CEO	MICE Industry	Master
P5	5	Director	Seoul Tourism Organisation	Master
P6	10	Professor	Academic	PhD
P7	5	Professor	Academic	PhD
P8	10	Professor	Academic	PhD
P9	5	Consultant	Seoul Tourism MICE Agency Support Centre	Master
P10	10	Director	Suwon MICE City	Master

3.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using systematic thematic analysis, as suggested by Taylor et al. (2025), to ensure analytical rigour and a credible framework. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic approach to examining expert perspectives and allows themes to emerge from participants' discussions regarding sustainable MICE operations. Each focus group discussion was audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The transcripts were systematically analysed through data familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, review, and refinement (Naeem et al., 2023).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are discussed for the three-fold objective: (1) to identify the core operational and governance challenges confronting Suwon City's MICE ecosystem; (2) to formulate an integrated, informed framework combining environmental stewardship and local stakeholder collaboration; and (3) to provide strategic policy recommendations for municipal authorities and convention organisers. As for the core operational and governance challenges, the thematic analysis of the FGI transcripts revealed critical insights into the operational standards and management practices that event organisers must consider when hosting sustainable MICE events in Suwon City. Four overarching themes emerged drawing upon the collective expertise of the ten MICE professionals, reflecting distinct areas of

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within the municipal MICE industry: (1) Sustainable Hosting Facilities, (2) Sustainable Transportation, (3) Sustainable Food & Beverage (F&B), and (4) Post-Event Sustainability Management. Each theme encompasses specific action items evaluated across environmental, economic, and social dimensions, aligning directly with broader sustainability frameworks.

4.1 Sustainable Hosting Facilities

Participants identified critical sustainability action items for event venues across environmental, economic, and social dimensions. A strong emphasis was placed on integrating environmental impact reduction with economic viability when selecting and managing venue infrastructure. Key environmental strategies included rigorous recycling, separate collection practices, and post-event monitoring. Economically, the adoption of digital platforms for a one-stop system was highlighted for its operational efficiency and potential to reduce paper and material waste. Furthermore, experts emphasised the development of reusable products with clear usage guides to minimise single-use items.

"Digital signage and event planning platforms are replacing paper-based materials, reducing waste and streamlining operations" (P 5).

The specific action items, sustainable factors, and goals from the FGI analysis for hosting facilities are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Sustainable hosting facilities

Action Plan	Sustainable Factors	The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Recycling and separate collection practice checklist and monitoring after the event	Environment	15
By utilising the results of holding a sustainable event, post-promotion and branding.	Economy	11
Creating reusable products and distributing usage guides	Environment	9
Establishment and utilization of one-stop digital system by implementing digital platform	Economy	13

4.2 Sustainable Transportation

Actionable sustainability measures related to transportation were frequently cited, with a primary focus on alternative energy and eco-friendly vehicles to minimise carbon footprints urban event logistics.

"Sustainable transport includes shifting from private vehicle use to low-emission public transport, such as battery electric buses and rail systems powered by renewable electricity, alongside safe and inclusive infrastructure for walking and cycling" (P 1).

Beyond environmental considerations, thesocial dimension of transportation was addressed by recommendations that prioritise accessibility for socially disadvantaged groups. Environmentally, encouraging active mobility, such as walking, and ensuring access to shared bicycle options were seen as vital for short-distance travel. Economically, prioritising service contracts with transport providers utilising smart alternative energy sources within the region was deemed crucial for a holistic regional sourcing approach. Table 3 outlines these transport-related action measures.

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Table 3. Sustainable transportation

Action Plan	Sustainable Factors	The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Recommendations for the use of transportation that are considered socially disadvantaged	Society	10
Guidance on walking, securing, and recommending the movement of shared bicycles	Environment	13
Utilisation of green mobility for protocol, transport vehicles, and group buses	Environment	13
Priority contract with transportation provider using smart alternative energy in the region	Economy	7

4.3 Sustainable Food and Beverage

Participants (i.e., P1, P2, P9) unanimously identified sustainable practices applicable to the F&B sector for MICE events. A significant finding was the emphasis on using local food (see Figure 2) to bolster the regional economy while reducing carbon footprints by minimising transportation distances. Experts prioritised requesting reusable tableware from suppliers to reduce waste, aligning with circular economy principles drastically. Contracting with local eco-friendly F&B suppliers was also highlighted for environmental and community economic benefits. Providing a curated list of sustainable restaurants was proposed as a social initiative to empower attendees to make responsible dining choices.

Figure 2. Traditional organic Korean vegetable side dishes (banchan) served at a local dining establishment in Suwon City represent sustainable, locally sourced culinary practices. (Source: Author)

"Suwon City is actively promoting sustainable local food practices through various initiatives to visitors and international tourists. These include supporting local farms, encouraging community gardens, and implementing food waste reduction programs. The city also focuses on reducing food transportation distances and promoting healthy eating habits through educational programs" (P 10).

Table 4 indicates sustainable food and beverage practices.

Table 4. Sustainable food and beverage

Action Plan	Sustainable Factors	The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Providing sustainable, organic, local food	Environmental	11
Request reusable tableware from suppliers	Environmental	11
Contract with local eco-friendly food and beverage suppliers	Economy	13
Provide a list of the restaurants that practice sustainability	Society	11

4.4 Post Event Management

Participants frequently highlighted sustainable practices for the post-event management phase, underscoring that environmental stewardship

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extends beyond an event's conclusion to amplify its long-term municipal impact. Derived action items focused on leveraging sustainable event outcomes, selecting sustainably certified facilities for future operations to foster a green supply chain, and maintaining documented ESG management for enhanced accountability. Furthermore, purchasing eco-friendly products was directly linked to national agendas such as the Green New Deal. Fostering this comprehensive framework aims to cultivate an innovative, eco-friendly MICE ecosystem.

"Using digital platforms, establish and implement a one-stop digital system to allow registration, promotion, operation, and post-management control... manage full event operation from registration to post-management" (P 2).

The specific post-event management strategies derived from the analysis are structured in Table 5.

Table 5. Post-event management

Action Plan	Sustainable Factors	The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Consider selecting sustainable and eco-friendly certified facilities and venues	Environment	11
Documented ESG Management / Consider your own MICE facilities	Society	9
Purchasing sustainable and eco-friendly products for the implementation of the Green New Deal policy	Environment	15
Eco-friendly event to build an eco-friendly, innovative MICE ecosystem	Economy	11

4.5 Expert Informed Framework

As shown in Figure 3, the word cloud aggregates core semantic markers extracted from expert interviews on the sustainable MICE framework. High-frequency terms cluster around structural pillars such as environmental stewardship, strategic partnerships, and resource optimisation. The visual prominence of terms such as destination competitiveness, recycling, and waste monitoring underscores the critical consensus among stakeholders that sustainable transformation relies heavily on green innovations, waste reduction, and technological integration. To visually synthesise the qualitative themes and action plans derived from the expert-informed framework, a word cloud was generated using the Python Wordcloud package (version 1.9+, integrated with Matplotlib). Figure 3 shows a word cloud of these qualitative themes and action plans derived from the expert-informed framework.

Figure 3. Word Cloud of the Expert-informed Sustainable MICE Framework

The empirical findings from the FGIs with MICE industry experts provide clear, multidimensional insights into the core operational sustainability, governance structures, and management frameworks needed to advance sustainable MICE operations in secondary municipal destinations such as Suwon City. Based

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on the systematic thematic analysis of expert perspectives across four primary operational domains, sustainable MICE transition is demonstrated to be a holistic endeavour that intricately bridges environmental stewardship, economic viability, and social equity. This aligns closely with Kaewsaengorn (2026), who emphasised that secondary cities must adopt triangulated readiness assessments and localised governance models to overcome capital constraints and successfully implement international standards such as ISO 20121. To maximise the future impact of the Suwon Convention Centre and establish Suwon as a premier global host, policymakers should focus on district integration, specialised tech infrastructure, and progressive sustainability mandates. Municipal policymakers must transition from isolated venue management to a highly integrated ecosystem approach to elevate Suwon's position within the competitive global MICE landscape. First, the formal designation of the urban periphery surrounding Gwanggyo Lake Park as a specialised MICE District is imperative.

Second, maximising international traveller transit efficiency necessitates a multi-modal transport link; specifically, an autonomous vehicular loop or a dedicated premium express corridor in connecting Suwon KTX Station directly to the convention Centre to bypass urban congestion. Finally, to address the paradigm shift toward hybrid event architecture, integrating on-site, high-fidelity Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Extended Reality (XR) broadcast studios with automated real-time translation booths and holographic displays is crucial. The empirical viability of these synchronised spatial, logistical, and technological interventions is demonstrated by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, which has successfully scaled comparable MICE clusters and smart-city infrastructures to solidify its global market leadership.

Furthermore, despite the shared objective of achieving low-carbon operations, the results demonstrate that expert priorities across different functional areas are highly heterogeneous yet strategically complementary. Within the realm of sustainable hosting facilities (Table 2), experts placed paramount importance on rigorous recycling checklists, separate collection post-monitoring (Goal 15), and the establishment of one-stop digital systems (Goal 13). This heavy emphasis on digital platform integration substantiates the findings of Chang and Chang (2022), who argued that reducing paper-based material waste through smart technological infrastructure is a prerequisite for long-term venue viability. Similarly, transportation strategies (Table 3) revealed a dual focus: environmental measures, such as green mobility for group buses and the promotion of shared bicycle networks (Goal 13), were tightly coupled with social responsibility considerations, such as recommending accessible transit options for socially disadvantaged groups (Goal 10). This multi-dimensional prioritisation echoes broader municipal frameworks that view urban transport decarbonization as inseparable from inclusive community access (Korea Tourism Organisation, 2025).

Interpreted through the lens of destination governance and stakeholder collaboration, the FGI findings highlight that F&B operations and post-event management serve as critical catalysts for regional economic integration. In the F&B sector (Table 4), contracting with local eco-friendly suppliers emerged as the leading economic priority (Goal 13), directly supporting regional farm networks and reducing carbon footprints associated with food transportation distances—a strategic initiative actively championed by municipal bodies such as Suwon City (P 10). This localised sourcing model aligns with sustainable destination principles by keeping economic value within the host

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community while simultaneously offering sustainable dining lists to empower attendee choice. Moreover, post-event management strategies (Table 5) highlighted that sustainability efforts must extend far beyond an event's conclusion to foster an innovative, eco-friendly MICE ecosystem. Experts strongly advocated purchasing eco-friendly products aligned with national agendas, such as the Green New Deal (Goal 15), and selecting certified green venues (Goal 11), thereby institutionalising a continuous green supply chain.

The expert-informed sustainable MICE framework strongly supports the achievement of SDGs 11, 12, and 13 while contributing to SDGs 7, 10, and 15. Specifically, SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 13: Climate Action, SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 15: Life on Land. In this study, sustainable hosting facilities emphasise recycling, reusable products, and digital platforms to reduce waste and improve operational efficiency. Transportation strategies promote green mobility, renewable energy, shared bicycles, and inclusive access for disadvantaged groups, supporting low-carbon urban development. Sustainable food and beverage practices prioritise local sourcing, reusable tableware, and eco-friendly suppliers, strengthening regional economies and responsible consumption. Furthermore, post-event management encourages ESG practices, the use of certified green venues, and eco-friendly procurement, creating a resilient, innovative, and environmentally responsible MICE ecosystem.

Ultimately, this study extends the foundational work on destination competitiveness by demonstrating that transforming secondary cities into sustainable business event hubs requires more than superficial green practices; it demands an expert-informed, structurally integrated framework. Over time, combining digital operational efficiency, local supply chain integration, and documented ESG management transforms municipal event sectors into high-value, resilient tourism destinations. In summary, the insights provided by seasoned MICE professionals offer crucial strategic directions for municipal authorities and event organisers, establishing a scalable model that balances economic vitality with long-term ecological responsibility.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study addressed the gap between global sustainability agendas and the operational realities of secondary MICE destinations by using Suwon City as a case study. It developed a practical four-pillar framework comprising Sustainable Hosting Facilities, Sustainable Transportation, Sustainable F&B, and Post-Event Management drawing on expert perspectives. The findings demonstrate that sustainable MICE development extends beyond environmental initiatives and requires integrated governance, stakeholder collaboration, and technological innovation. Localised supply chains, and ESG-oriented practices, secondary cities can strengthen their competitiveness while balancing economic growth with environmental and social sustainability by leveraging digital platforms. The informed framework, therefore, offers a practical reference for cities seeking to transform sustainability principles into implementable MICE strategies.

The study contributes theoretically by shifting the sustainability discourse from why sustainability is important to how it can be operationalised. It bridges the implementation gap between global sustainability frameworks and local destination management, while extending destination governance theory by demonstrating

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that effective sustainability strategies must reflect the infrastructure, institutional capacity, and stakeholder ecosystem of secondary cities.

From a managerial perspective, the findings provide actionable guidance for policymakers and event organisers. Priorities include developing designated MICE districts with integrated transport systems, adopting AI-enabled hybrid event technologies, strengthening local sustainable procurement networks, and implementing ESG reporting with measurable sustainability indicators. These strategies can improve operational efficiency, visitor experience, and destination competitiveness while supporting long-term sustainable development.

This study is limited by its qualitative design, its focus on 10 industry experts, and its spotlight on Suwon City, which may restrict broader generalisation. Future research should quantitatively validate the proposed framework across diverse MICE destinations. Future studies could evaluate the practical implementation of the framework by examining completed MICE events in Suwon City. Such evaluations would identify which sustainability practices are most feasible, effective, and challenging during actual event operations.

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