

A Qualitative Approach to the Analysis of Tourism Policy and MICE¹ Sector in Singapore. From the Specific to the General

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Abstract

This paper is a case study that develops a conceptual and methodological framework to unravel the complexity of the tourism policy process, with special focus on the Meetings or MICE sector. This work has been designed as qualitative research, with the use of partly novel methods and techniques for the study of the tourism policy process, such as the qualitative content analysis and the documentary analysis. The study of Singapore's tourism policy from multiple levels of analysis (micro and macro) and its historical contextualization has allowed for a better understanding of the evolution of Singapore as a MICE destination over the last 50 years. Singapore is an example of how a country with limited resources has managed to transform itself into a highly competitive MICE destination that exerts significant influence within its geographical area. This success story is linked to the formulation and implementation of a tourism policy that has responded to local and international factors and dynamics, i.e. the economic framework, the political system, the territorial context, or globalization. By using the case of the MICE sector of Singapore, the paper also affords valuable insights into the dynamics of the tourism policy process more generally. This study shows that public policy aimed at the development of a specific tourism segment, such as MICE, should not be analysed as an isolated element but enmeshed in broader structures of political, economic, and cultural power.

Key words: Southeast Asia, Meetings, Tourism Planning, Qualitative research

1. Introduction

The MICE sector in Asia has undergone significant development in the last two decades and has positioned itself as a key segment within the tourism sector. It is a young and dynamic industry that has grown and matured at a rapid pace (Weber & Ladkin, 2003; Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Many Asian countries soon realized that this sector could become a crucial element in their development strategies (Carlsen, 1999; Spiller, 2002)

¹ The term MICE (acronym in English for “Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions”) is very widespread in the world, especially in North America and Asia, although several authors advise against the use of this nomenclature (Davidson and Cope, 2003; UNWTO, 2006). The reasons they allege are that this term presents the sector as a set of separate parts and not globally. Despite this, in this study the name “MICE sector” will be used, as it is the most widespread in the country under study, Singapore.

and began to consider that holding meetings in their territory was a fundamental means of global engagement (UNWTO, 2012).

This research approaches the MICE sector through a holistic analysis of the public policy aimed at its management and development. It proposes the development of a conceptual and methodological framework that allows analysing and relating a strictly local event, such as the MICE sector in Singapore, with broader economic, political, and cultural processes.

Bauer, Lambert, and Hutchison (2001) point out that the success of the MICE sector depends to a large extent on how governments plan, develop and manage the destination. In this same sense, Richter (1989: 11), with a more global vision, suggests that whether tourism succeeds or fails is largely a function of political and administrative actions.

There are abundant studies that analyse what governments have done or should do about the development of the MICE sector (Bauer, Lambert, and Hutchison, 2001; Dwyer and Mistilis, 2008; Gartrell, 1994). Much of this research, which is included within what Dredge, Jenkins and Whitford (2011) has called the normative/prescriptive and the procedural traditions, seeks to guide and advise on the content of policy for development, planning and management of MICE tourism (Clark, 2006; McCartney, 2008; Priporas, 2005). The goal of it is to increase the rationality of public decisions, in line with what Lasswell (1951) pointed out, and thereby improve the contribution of MICE tourism to economic development.

The technocratic orientation or “industry perspective”, as Scott (2011) calls it, implies the assumption that technical rationality is the main element in the decision-making process, giving it a central role in the analysis of the public policy aimed at the development of this tourist segment.

This widely extended approach in research on the MICE sector agrees with other research in tourism in which tourism policy is characterized as a sectoral policy within the economic policy (Barroso and Flores, 2007; Díaz-Pérez, 2006; Figuerola, 1984; Monfort Mir, 2000). This perspective focuses on the premise of policy formulation as a rational and objective process and the contribution of tourism to economic development (Jenkins, 1980).

This prioritization of the rational and economic dimension in the analysis of public policy and tourism has raised criticism from certain areas of political science and anthropology for not considering aspects such as society, culture or the environment (Hall

and Jenkins, 1995; Shore and Wright, 2006; Velasco, 2011; Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; Kerr, Barron, & Wood, 2001; Pforr, 2005; Russell & Faulkner, 1999).

In the specific case of the MICE sector, it should be mentioned that organized meetings have been an essential element since ancient times not only in commercial life but also in cultural and political life, and have contributed significantly to the changes and advances made by society, as Davidson and Rogers (2006) point out.

Thus, the underestimation of these other aspects in the analysis of public policy applied to the MICE segment has led to a lack of empirical studies on how it has been elaborated and implemented. This has resulted in limited information on this process, which is more pressing in the specific case of Singapore.

Considering this research gap, this study has set out to meet three specific objectives. The first is to analyse the role of the Singapore government in MICE tourism policy. The second is to examine the relationship between the actors involved in the MICE sector (opinion, vision, and interests) and tourism policy. The third purpose is to determine the influence that external and internal factors to the tourism system have on the tourism policymaking and implementation process.

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the public policy process in Singapore, in all its complexity and ambiguity. By using the case of the MICE sector of Singapore, the paper also affords valuable insights into the dynamics of the tourism policy process more generally.

2. Description of MICE Tourism Policy

The approach adopted in the research requires defining what is understood by public policy, since this definition will be the basis on which the analytical framework will be built.

The use of the term “public” presumes, as Parsons (1995) points out, the existence of a sphere or dimension of human activity that is neither private nor individual, but collective, and that requires government intervention, or at least a collective action.

The public policy applied to MICE tourism, as a subsector of the tourism industry, is included in this study within the so-called tourism policy, which is in turn conceptualized as a sectoral public policy (Velasco, 2011). In line with this characterization, one of the most common definitions of tourism policy, despite its

generality, is that made by Hall and Jenkins (1995), according to which it is “[...] whatever governments choose to do or not with respect to tourism ”(p. 8).

This perspective, which places the government at the centre of its analysis, has been nuanced by other researchers such as Fayós-Solá, Fuente and Muñoz (2012), who indicate that tourism policy implies more than what governments do in terms of tourism. In this same sense, Dredge and Jamal (2015) point out that “policy cannot be understood independently from the rise of corporate influence, processes of globalization, neoliberal public management, networked governance and public-private partnerships” (p. 5). These factors go beyond the government of a given country and are related to a broader context and global dynamics.

Tourism policy formulation is, therefore, described in this article as a dynamic process framed within public policy (Velasco, 2011), and where the central role does not fall exclusively on the action of governments. Tourism policy is conceived as an instrument promoted by powerful actors and institutions at the local, national, and international levels to achieve the goals proposed in relation to tourism.

The importance of this instrumental character, however, should not overshadow the symbolic and cultural component of tourism policy, since it creates new realities and forms of power and knowledge within a particular society (Shore & Wright, 1997; Ramírez, 2010). This approach, developed in the field of Social Anthropology, implies framing tourism policy in the cultural context in which it operates and establishing its links with other concepts, norms, and institutions. Shore (2006), in this regard, specifies that public policies contain the history and culture of the society that generates them and can be read as cultural texts.

3. The study area

This article is a case study that analyses from a holistic approach a dynamic and complex reality such as the public policy process and the MICE sector in Singapore over the last 50 years. This period provides a broad look at the history of MICE tourism in this country, avoiding that its analysis is only a photograph of the moment.

The case of the MICE segment is especially relevant in Singapore’s tourism industry. The strong interest by Singapore’s government since the 70s for the development of this sector has turned Singapore into an innovative and top-leading MICE

destination in Asia, where it was not until the 90s when this type of tourism began to emerge more strongly (Chiang, 2009).

The government of Singapore soon realized the benefits of this sector. Since the beginning, it was considered a key element for the national development strategy. This support has meant that MICE tourism has gradually acquired a great importance in the country, becoming the tourism segment with the highest economic profitability (MacLaurin & Leong, 2000). It has also generated indirect benefits by its capacity to offer to the city a platform for dissemination and exchange of knowledge, networking, and businesses.

Table 1
ICCA City Ranking (2019)

Position	City	Number of meetings
1	Paris	237
2	Lisbon	190
3	Berlin	176
4	Barcelona	156
5	Madrid	154
6	Vienna	149
7	Singapore	148
8	London	143
9	Prague	138
10	Tokyo	131

Note. Own elaboration based on ICCA (2015)

From an academic point of view, little recognition has been given to the MICE sector of Singapore as an object of study. The few analyses on this subject have focused mainly on these three lines of research: economic impact (Lim & Zhu, 2018), destination planning and development (Lew & Chang, 1999; MacLaurin & Leong, 2000; Tan, 2007), and exhibition centres and congresses management (Tay, 2005).

This situation, however, contrasts the numerous studies and reports elaborated by the local MICE sector and the government, which have responded to the interests and perspectives of those funding them.

4. Conceptual framework

This research has applied two conceptual models. Its combination has been effective to define the processes that intervene in tourism policy, to merge its instrumental and contextual component and to determine the existing links at different levels, offering a comprehensive vision of this phenomenon.

Firstly, an adaptation of the conceptual model of Airey and Chong (2011) has been made, which is based on Easton's theory of political system (1953). This model makes it possible to dissect complex processes such as those that occur in the development of tourism policy (Airey and Ruhanen, 2014) and analyse the context from a broader perspective and not exclusively focused on the role of government.

The model has several strengths and weaknesses. It tends to oversimplify the tourism policymaking and implementation process (Pforr, 2005). This process is not as clear, successive, and ordered in real life (Velasco, 2016: 580) as the one presented by the model. However, its use has a great advantage that is in line with the objectives set out in this research. As indicated by its authors, Airey and Chong (2011: 45), it facilitates collecting the factors that influence the development of policies in an organized and systematic way, which is key for the proper development of this work.

Although this model provides a basis for a better understanding of the tourism policymaking process (Airey and Chong, 2011), it lacks sufficient power to explain in greater depth the relationship between the actors involved in the tourism industry, the decisions and actions taken, the role of government and its context. The reason, as pointed out by Pforr, 2005 about the theory of the political system, is found in the fact that this approach is linear and it is difficult to explain the interactions between the micro, meso and macro levels through it.

Consequently, these weaknesses have made it necessary to adopt another perspective of analysis that helps to complement the previous one, so that in this way the combination of both provides an adequate conceptual framework to meet the proposed objectives.

This approach has been designed following the suggestion of Hall and Jenkins (1995) for the analysis of tourism policy, according to which it must be studied at various levels (micro, meso and macro) in time and space.

The concept of "levels of analysis" (Hall and Jenkins, 1995) has served as the basis for developing this methodological approach. From the field of Sociology, authors such as Coleman (1988) or Jepperson and Meyer (2011) use it to explain how actions at the micro-level are linked to structures at the macro-level (and vice versa).

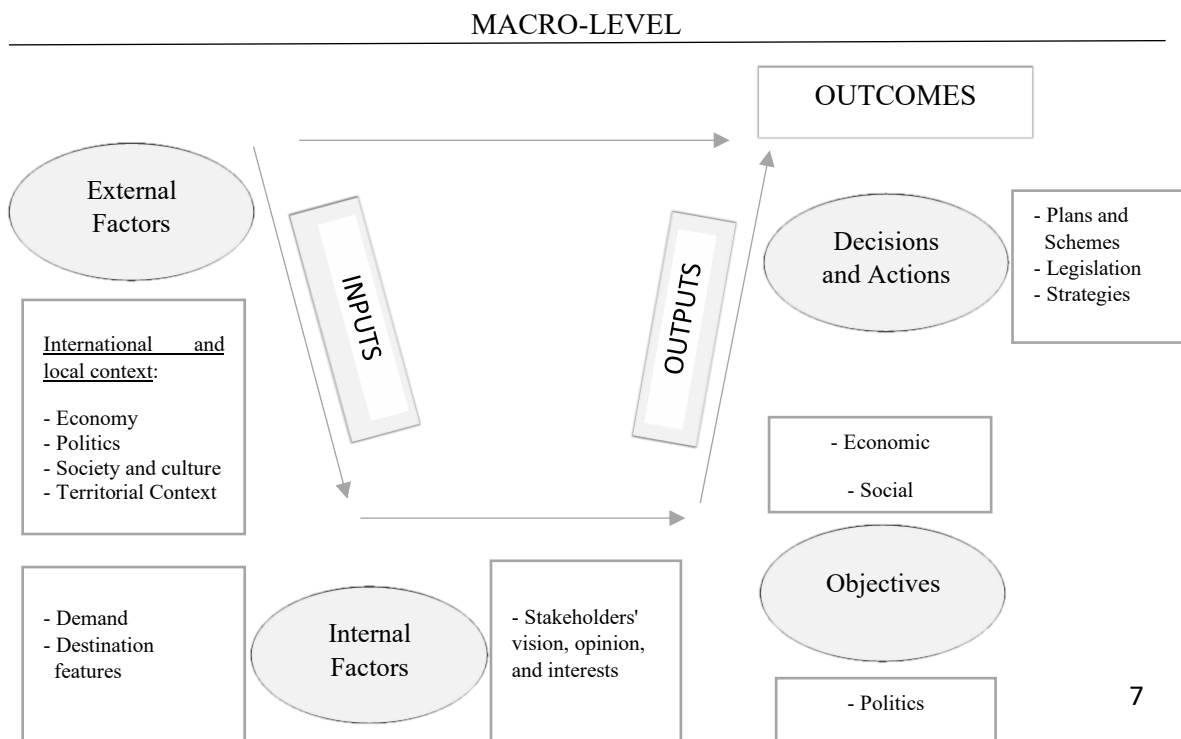
Taking this concept as a reference and depending on the objectives of this research, two levels of analysis have been distinguished:

1. **Micro-level.** It focuses on the relationship between MICE tourism stakeholders and the tourism policy making and implementation process.
2. **Macro-level.** It refers to the role of the government and other aspects of the context that influences the tourism policy making and implementation process.

The conceptual framework designed for this study emphasizes the interactions between the micro and macro levels. But this entails a series of problems (Ham and Hill, 1984) due to the dynamic and complex nature of tourism policy (Hall and Jenkins, 1995). To help mitigate this issue, two methodological considerations have been considered in this work.

On the one hand, a historical perspective has been adopted. The development of tourism policy is a dynamic process influenced by its temporal context. So, in this process, what happened in the past cannot be ignored, since it is this that will help us understand the present and shed light on the future, as Cohen and Manion (1990) mention.

And, on the other hand, the case study has been used as a research method, since it allows developing a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), and analysing less tangible aspects of tourism policy such as ideology or values, favouring this way, a greater understanding of the processes implicit in this phenomenon (Stevenson, Airey and Miller, 2008; Jafari, 1987; Kerr et al, 2001) and better integration of the micro and macro levels.



MICRO-LEVEL

Figure 1. Enfoque “Niveles de análisis.
Elaborated by autor

5. Study methods

This research starts from the premise that tourism policy is a complex element intertwined with other realities and in which a multitude of factors of an economic, political, or cultural nature intervene (Hall). This approach has advised the adoption of a holistic view of the phenomenon, with a comprehensive analysis of the problem. These characteristics have been decisive in the choice of methodology, being considered the qualitative paradigm (Cook and Reichardt, 1995) as the most appropriate for being the one that best responds to the needs of this research and the one that will define the methods and techniques here employees, which are listed below:

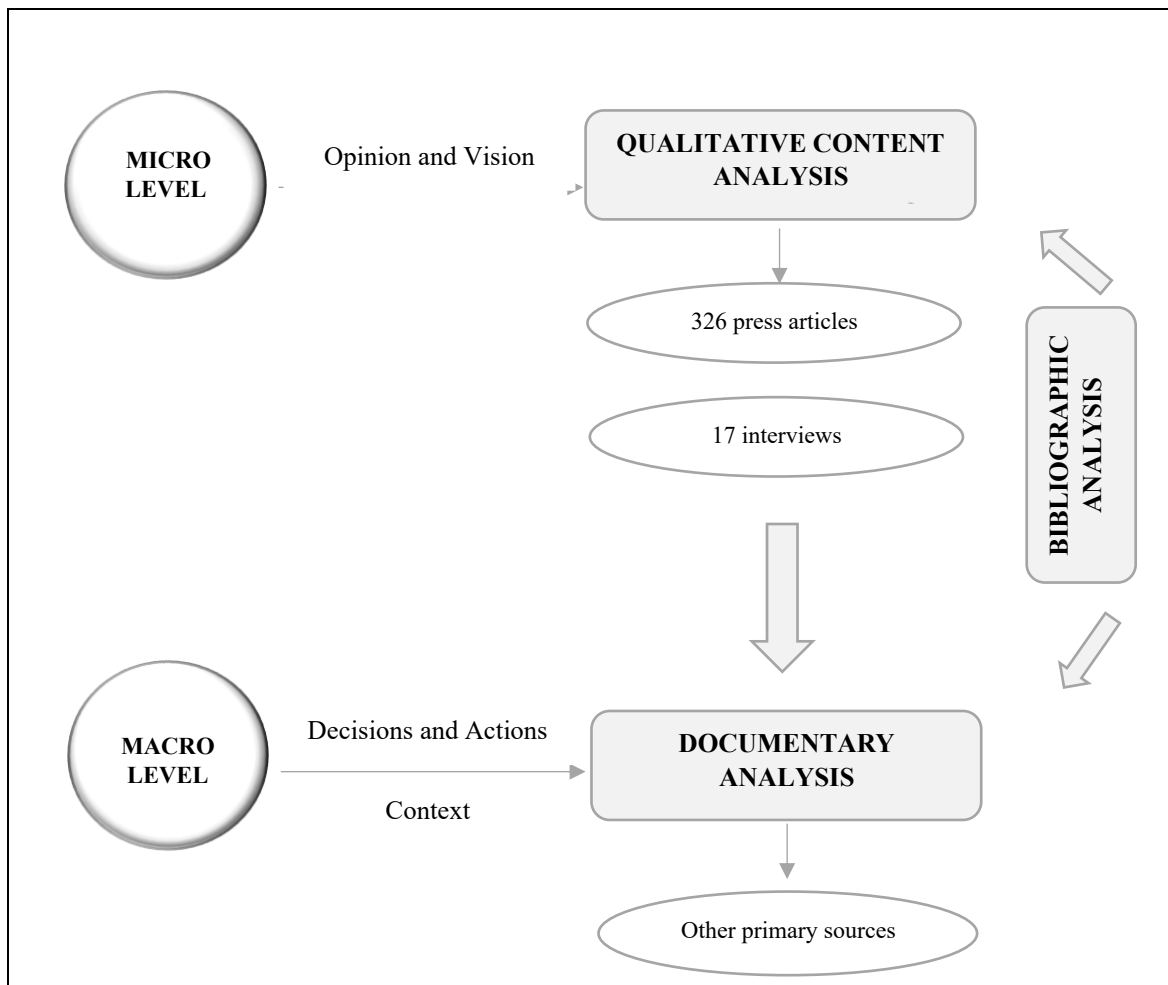


Figure 2. Outline of the research methods and techniques used in the article
Elaborated by author

5.1. Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis has been one of the methods used in this case study, which is partly novel for the study of tourism policy. Its usefulness lies in the fact that it allows verifying the presence of topics, words, or concepts in each content.

This instrument has been highly effective in identifying what the various players in the MICE sector think about Singapore as a MICE destination in the different phases established, this being the object of analysis. In other words, it has served to execute an analysis of the phenomenon investigated at a micro-level.

To successfully achieve this end, it has been necessary to develop a clear and precise procedure, following the proposal of Mayring (2000), which has been used as a guide to implement the analysis and to guarantee its reliability and validity at the same time.

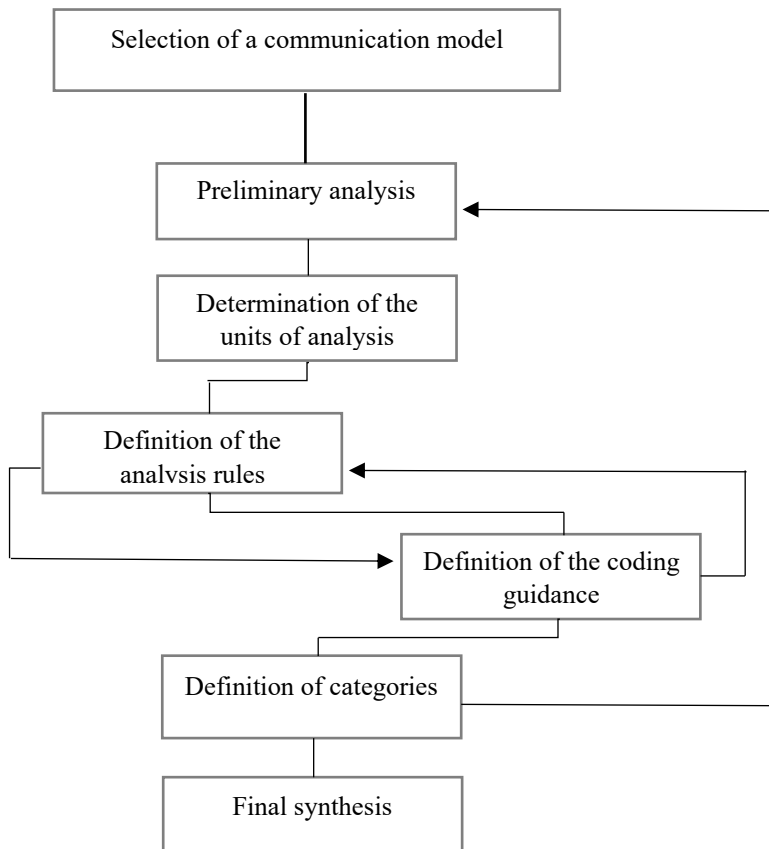


Figure 3. General procedure for qualitative content analysis.
Retrieved from Cáceres (2003: 58)

There have been two types of documents used for the qualitative content analysis.

The first type of documentary material chosen has been **press articles** referring to Singapore's MICE sector from 1970 to 1999. For this purpose, an intensive search has been carried out in the database of the National Library of Singapore, *NLB eResources*. The total number of articles collected has been three hundred and twenty-six (326), published in the three main Singapore newspapers: *The Straits Times*, *New Nation* and *The Business Times*.

The second type of documentary material comes from **semi-structured interviews** with key players in Singapore's MICE and tourism industries. The scarcity of news in the press from 1999 that met the requirements for this investigation made it necessary to seek information through other documentary means. The principle of relevance (Bardin, 1986: 73), understood as the requirement that the chosen documents be adequate for content analysis, prevailed over the principle of homogeneity.

A total of 17 people has been interviewed for this research. In the selection process of the interviewees, it was mainly considered that they had or have had a relevant position in sectors directly or indirectly linked to the Singapore MICE segment. To identify and locate them, use was made of the network of contacts established by the authors, who provided a series of relevant names and acted as intermediaries to arrange interviews with them. Likewise, the snowball sampling technique was also put into practice (Patton, 2002), consisting of making some of the interviewees identify other key people related to the field of study.

The list of interviewees, therefore, has been based on the suggestions made by people who, due to their professional position, have been or are familiar with the ins and outs of Singapore's tourism and MICE industries and have had and still have an influential role in its development. Most belong to the group that Rogers (2013: 46) calls “providers” of the MICE sector. We also wanted to know the opinion of actors from other fields, the economy, tourism, and education to have a broader vision.

After selecting documents, the process of reading and fragmentation of these into units of analysis began, understood as the pieces of content on which the analysis will be carried out (Cáceres, 2016). The units of analysis were grouped according to their theme.

An identifier or code was granted to each of the identified groups. To ensure the rigour of the research and strengthen its validity, once 30% of the documentary material was analysed, some grouping and coding rules were established.

Table 2.
List of codes within the category “Positive Attributes”

SUBCATEGORIES	CODES	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
DESTINATION	Accessibility	X		X
	Logistics	X		X
	Stability	X		X
	Security	X		X
	Language	X		X
	Cleanliness	X		X
	Comfort	X		X
	Diversity	X		X
	Economic Hub	X		X
	Economic environment	X		X
	Tourism product	X	X	X
PRODUCT	Infrastructures	X	X	X
	Services	X	X	X
	Ecosystem			X
GOVERNMENT	Government support	X	X	X
PROMOTION	Image	X		X
	Prestige	X	X	X
STRATEGY	Collaboration			X
	Adaptability			X
HUMAN FACTOR	Professionalism	X		X
	Efficiency			X
EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES	Competitor weaknesses			X

Note. Elaborated by author

Developing categories was the next step once the classification codes were established. Hernández, cited in Cáceres (2003) defines the categories as “the drawers or 'boxes' where the previously encoded content is definitively ordered and classified” (p. 67). The categorization has not been a random process but based on rules to guarantee the reliability of the analysis. However, the name given to each category has been a creative act (Pérez Serrano, 1994), drew on the authors’ judgment.

Establishing the categories has been perhaps the most important part of content analysis. In total, 7 categories have been identified, which have been linked to the specific objectives of the qualitative content analysis. The software Atlas Ti facilitated the identification of key issues regarding the opinion and vision of Singapore’s MICE tourism stakeholders, by coding information from primary documents and establishing links between categories and registered codes.

Table 3
Definition of the category

CATEGORY	REFERS TO:	NUMBER OF CODES
1. Vision	The way in which the MICE visitor is represented in the official speech, whether it is a negative or positive view concerning other types of visitors	Lexical classification
2. Opportunity	Situations generated (or to be generated) by the MICE sector that is considered in the official discourse as beneficial for Singapore in economic terms, in the image and prestige of the country, in the creation of collateral benefits, etc.	9
3. Positive Attributes	Elements of Singapore, as a country or as a tourist destination, and of the local MICE industry perceived as positive in the official discourse, such as geographical location, image, attractions, infrastructure, organizational aspects, efficiency, quality, government support, etc.	22
4. Negative Attributes	Situations internal and external to the MICE sector, such as organizational aspects, infrastructures, or foreign competition, which are perceived as factors that put Singapore's competitiveness and future at risk as a MICE-destination.	20
5. Perception	The way in which the situation that Singapore is going through as a MICE-destination and future expectations, whether positive or negative, are assessed in the official discourse.	6
6. Solutions	Aspects indicated in the official discourse as keys to counteract a weakness or threat present in the MICE sector and or in Singapore as a destination.	22
7. Trend	Aspects that will mark the future of the MICE sector in Singapore according to the opinion of the actors involved, together with those situations and elements to be considered to guarantee the competitiveness of this sector according to those same actors.	18

Note. Elaborated by author

However, it should be noted that the method of qualitative content analysis has been used in this research as a form of analysis and not as a research strategy (Cáceres, 2003). It is for this reason that the findings of the qualitative content analysis have related to those from the documentary analysis, as will be detailed below.

5.2. Documentary analysis

This research, which is proposed as a holistic study of the public policy process aimed at the development of MICE tourism, has also required the use of another research method, the documentary analysis. This has been defined by Chaumier (1982), cited in Bardin (1986), as an “operation or set of operations, tending to represent the content of a document in a different form from its original one to facilitate its consultation or location” (p. 34). Unlike content analysis, this type of analysis acts on documents and not on their messages.

Its use has allowed an approximation to the object analysed from other perspectives and has been very effective in framing within its historical context the opinions of the actors involved in the MICE sector in Singapore, identified thanks to the qualitative content analysis. Its importance lies in the fact that this process enables a greater understanding of the factors that influence the tourism policy formulation and implementation, as well as the role of the government.

The documents chosen for the development of documentary analysis are part of the so-called primary sources or also called first-hand sources of information (Bounocore, 1980: 229). Specifically, the types of primary sources selected for this study were the following: documents elaborated by the Singapore Tourism Board, the Singapore Exhibition and Convention Bureau, and tourism industry publications.

The information from the primary sources has been classified taking as a guide the categories elaborated in the qualitative content analysis, POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES and NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES, with the aim of:

- framing in context the opinions of Singapore’s MICE tourism actors;
- establishing a link between the opinions identified and the decisions and actions taken.

The selection criteria for both external and internal factors and actions and decisions in this matter has been based on the degree of influence that the government itself has given to them, leaving aside others that, although they have had some influence, they have been considered less relevant.

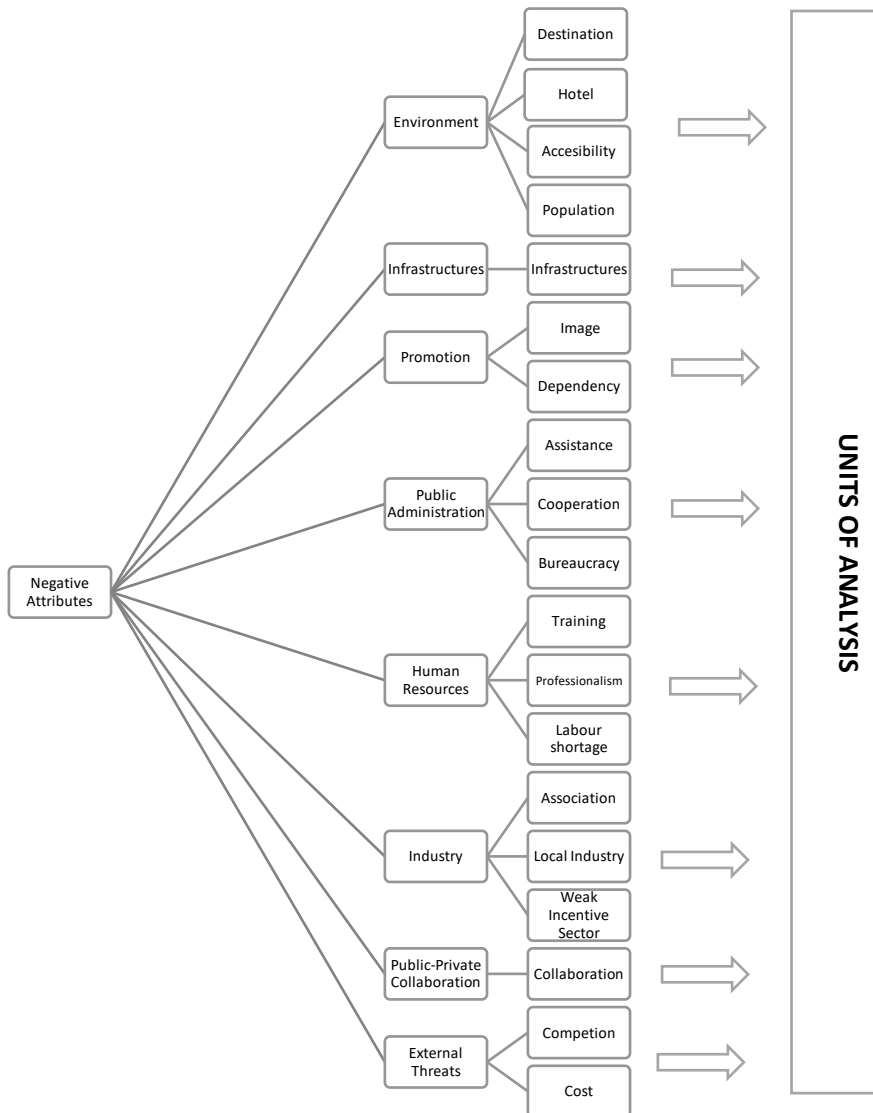


Figure 4. Classification of documents based on the NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES category
Elaborated by author

Consequently, the combination of several research methods linked to the qualitative paradigm has been fundamental for the integration of the micro and macro levels of analysis and thus to achieve the objectives proposed in the research.

6. Findings

In order to convey the discussion in a coherent way, the evolution of the MICE tourism policy in Singapore has been divided into three phases: *Taken-Off and Growth Phase* (Decades of the 70s and 80s), *Consolidation Phase* (Decade of the 90s) and *Maturity and Uncertainty Phase* (Decades of the 2000s and 2010s). The criterion followed for this classification is based on the perception of the actors involved in the MICE sector regarding the situation of Singapore as a destination, identified in the qualitative content analysis.

Table 4
List of codes within the category “Perception”

CODES	DECADE OF THE 70s (Frequency of occurrence)	DECADE OF THE 80s (Frequency of occurrence)	DECADE OF THE 90s (Frequency of occurrence)	DECADE OF THE 2000s-2010s (Frequency of occurrence)
Potential	9	3	1	0
Growth	12	20	4	2
Consolidation	0	12	10	1
Maturity	0	2	0	8
Uncertainty	0	1	1	4
Decadence	0	0	0	6

Note. Elaborated by author

6.1. From macro to micro level. An analysis of the factors (inputs) influencing the objectives and decisions (outputs) of the MICE tourism policy

A first analysis of the MICE tourism vision among some of the key Singapore’s stakeholders seems to indicate that economy has been the main engine that has driven the interest of the government and the tourism sector in its development, at least explicitly. However, the question emerging at this point is: Has it been the only engine?

The perception of the MICE visitor constantly reflected in the official discourse throughout the identified phases has been that of a type of visitor desired for the destination: one with high purchasing power, a greater spending capacity and who is associated with quality.

TAKEN-OFF AND GROWTH PHASE	CONSOLIDATION PHASE	MATURITY AND UNCERTAINTY PHASE
High yield	Wealth generator	High value
High-dollar visitors		Big spender
Greater spending power		Quality
Big spender		

High spending
 Much desired
 Highly sought after
 Quality

Figure 5. Official vision of the MICE visitor.
 Elaborated by author

It was officially considered that this type of visitor had the capacity to generate positive opportunities for the economy of Singapore and the tourism industry.

Regarding MICE tourism opportunities, the aspects outlined were linked in one way or another to economic issues, which implied that the economy prevailed over other elements when formulating and implementing tourism policy in the period analysed.

TAKEN-OFF AND GROWTH PHASE	CONSOLIDATION PHASE	MATURITY AND UNCERTAINTY PHASE
Economic impact	Economic impact	Economic impact
Hotel	Boost	Boost
Quality	Hotel	Knowledge
Boost		Hotel
Alternative		Quality
Prestige		Alternative
Deseasonalization		
Knowledge		
Showcase		

Figure 6. Opportunities of the MICE tourism.
 Elaborated by author

However, this research shows that the decisions and actions taken by Singapore for the development of tourism and MICE industries have also been due to certain aims that have gone beyond the economic sphere and that have not been explicitly recognized in public discourse.

As stated by Díaz-Pérez (2006), each country sets objectives for its tourism policy based on the general goals pursued for its development or even for the survival of the political system. From this perspective, the analysis of Singapore’s MICE sector cannot be separated from the local and global context in which it is developed, as this case study has revealed. A good knowledge of the context facilitates a better understanding of the different initiatives implemented (or not) for the development of this industry.

MICE tourism policy responses to the global and local economic dynamics

The *Taken-Off and Growth Phase* of the MICE sector was characterized by a greater stability of the political and economic situation in Singapore, after a complex period in which the survival of the newly independent country was feared for. In the 1970s, Singapore was still a country with a developing economy that needed a constant inflow of foreign currency and increased job creation.

Tourism was, in this context, a key economic sector. For this reason, one of the objectives of its policy was to increase the number of tourists and extend their stay. Many tools were used by STB to achieve this goal, among which we would highlight: the intense work of promotion and marketing, the development of infrastructures and tourist attractions and the commitment to the MICE segment, which was acquiring in this stage a greater relevance. The government of Singapore was aware of the benefits of the so-called MICE tourism. It was argued that the economic impact generated by this type of visitor was positive, so they showed interest in the development of Singapore as a MICE destination. The main milestone in this phase was the formation of Singapore Convention Bureau (SCB) in 1974. Nevertheless, its take-off was hampered not only by the weakness of Singapore as a tourist destination, but also because it was a very incipient sector in Asia where there were no reference models.

The continuity of political stability and the creation of an environment very favourable to business in the 1980s allowed this country to enjoy high economic growth, which resulted in a radical transformation of its social and urban landscape.

The spectacular growth of tourism made the government identify it as one of the economic pillars of the country in the 1980s. This consideration implied the need to intervene more actively in this industry, which began to show signs of weaknesses, with a fall in the number of visitor arrivals in 1983.

This crisis context, however, was identified as an opportunity to promote and strengthen the MICE sector. The aim was to replace the decrease in income from tourism with the attraction of this type of visitor whose average expenditure almost doubled the leisure tourist and whose average stay was longer. This sector, whose development could not be separated from the development of the destination, experienced great progress.

The *Consolidation Phase* of the MICE sector was a period of important challenges for Singapore due to the international context and the revision of the role of its economy within the region and the world. The advances made by this country at an economic and social level made it a leading destination in Southeast Asia.

In the 1990s, Singapore faced the great challenge of transforming an economy based on labour-intensive sectors and low wages into another high-tech, higher-skilled economy.

Tourism did not escape this economic logic. There was a change in the mentality and in the conception of the strategies and policies developed during this phase. The objective was to maximize the contribution of this sector and guarantee its competitiveness. This required making Singapore not only a destination capable of offering memorable experiences, but also an ideal place to do business and investments in the tourism sector to take advantage of the full potential of tourism.

The MICE sector was perfectly aligned with these objectives. Its ability to attract people from all over the world and its influence in creating an adequate environment for the exchange of knowledge, products and business made it a priority segment in this context. Singapore had managed to consolidate itself in the 90s as an attractive, efficient, safe, highly professional destination with modern facilities for hosting any MICE event. These attributes and qualities placed the country in an advantageous position with respect to other competing destinations.

The *Maturity and Uncertainty Phase* of the MICE sector was characterized by a series of changes and challenges caused mainly by globalization and the increasingly widespread use of new technologies, which led to a rapid transformation of economic and social interactions. Additionally, the emergence of a new axis of global power changed the geopolitical and economic relations maintained by Singapore.

The complexity of this phase forced the government of Singapore to consider as the ultimate goal of its policy a reinvention and repositioning of its economic structures and a strengthening of its role as the centre of Southeast Asia in the face of increased competition

Singapore had succeeded in its purpose of becoming a global city, with an economy based on high technology and skilled labour. It had strong and mature service industries such as tourism, commerce and logistics, information and communication technology and financial services. However, with the intensification of competition and the rapid evolution of demand, the country had to not only reinvent its services sector, (MTI, 2016), but also achieve the generation of added value to its product.

Tourism was not left out of this process. Tourism policy was focused in this period to accomplish these broader economic objectives. The introduction of elements such as quality and sustainability were the answer to transforming Singapore into a much more

competitive destination in this complex context. It was essential to offer better experiences to visitors to generate added value to its tourism product.

The MICE segment, associated with quality, was a priority interest within the tourism industry. Due to its ability to boost the economy, the public policy applied to this sector had as its main objectives to create and attract MICE events related to key national economic initiatives. It was based on the consideration that those events favoured the emergence of an ecosystem conducive to the promotion and development of new companies in Singapore in line with the strategic interests of the country.

MICE tourism policy responses to the local and global socio-political dynamics

The MICE segment, and tourism in general, have played a key role in Singapore's economic development. But its importance in Singapore's domestic and foreign policy should also be noted.

Singapore was in the *Taken-Off and Growth Phase* a state of recent formation and immersed in a process of building its national identity. Its government soon saw the utility of tourism for its goal of transforming the social and cultural reality of the nation in accordance with the values and ideology of the political party in power since 1959, the PAP. The creation of new tourist attractions and infrastructures as well as promotion and marketing activities were linked to this program of social engineering (Leong, 1997).

In the face of the uncertainty caused by the crisis of the mid-1980s and the beginning of the transition process towards a new economic model, Singapore was in need of closer ties with the economies of the neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia, and of strengthening its intermediary role in the region. But as pointed out by Hall and Oehlers (2000), the scope of this objective faced obstacles that had to be overcome as a consequence of the misgivings that existed in the region towards Singapore, as it was a nation strongly influenced by the West and had a majority population of Chinese origin.

Tourism played an important role here because of its usefulness to improve the international image of Singapore and its influence on the economy, with the MICE segment being relevant for the opportunities it generated.

In the *Consolidation Phase*, the dynamism of Asia and the need of Singapore to internationalize its economy compelled an improvement of the image of this country in the region and a narrowing of its political and economic ties with it. The tourism policy of this phase was formulated in such a way that, in addition to selling an image of the

destination in accordance with specific interests, it should also generate a perception in the neighbouring countries of the important role of Singapore in their development, thanks to its advisory work in tourism and the strong investments of Singaporean tourism companies. The MICE sector was relevant since the celebration of events of strategic sectors contributed to turning Singapore into the showcase of the world in Southeast Asia, increasing its influence in the region.

Likewise, the government, controlled by the same political party, still needed constant propaganda and control of the population for its survival, so that the formulation and implementation of certain actions within tourism policy were aimed at achieving this objective less explicit.

The *Maturity and Uncertainty Phase* was marked by the need to reinforce the role of Singapore as a global city and centre of Southeast Asia. Singapore once again deployed its foreign policy resources, knowledge, and skills to achieve the success of this goal.

Due to the rise and dynamism of Asia and the emergence of a new global geostrategic axis, the debate over the so-called “Asian values” intensified among the rulers of Singapore. They suggested that many of the hegemonic political, social, and cultural norms were Western and not universal, and it was necessary to respond to this cultural imperialism of the West through the legitimation of “Asian values” (Barr, 2007).

Singapore sought with this issue not only to reinforce its influence and hegemony in Asia, but also to endorse the policies of its government, accused, especially from the West, of exercising power in an authoritarian manner. In the promotion of this ideology among the Singaporean population and internationally, tourism, and MICE segment, again played a fundamental role.

6.2. From micro to macro. An analysis of the role of stakeholders and power relations

The development of Singapore’s MICE tourism has been intricately linked to government intervention, which has been responsible for providing the necessary infrastructures to the destination, planning its development, designing marketing and promotion strategies, and regulating the operation and management of the industry.

The case of Singapore is an illustrative example of highly active government involvement, taking the terminology of Jenkins and Henry (1982: 501). This element, which has remained constant throughout the phases analysed, has been fundamental for

the take-off and consolidation of tourism and MICE sectors, as recognized by the industry players. This research reveals that the government of Singapore has assumed a leading role that has led to an almost absolute control of the destination, this being a distinctive feature of what some authors have called the Singapore model. Taking as reference the proposal of Hall (1994) on the role of the states, several areas in which the government of Singapore has acted have been identified.

As recognized by Hall (1994), the tourism industry is one of the most complex industries because of the number of stakeholders involved. The coordination between them becomes essential to ensure its viability and develop effective strategies.

The government of Singapore, since the formation of Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (STPB) in 1964 and SCB in 1974, took on the **role of coordinator**, and has maintained it to this day. The case of the MICE segment was paradigmatic within the Singapore tourism industry, because STB and SECB shared the coordination tasks with a sectoral association, SACEOS (Singapore Association of Convention & Exhibition Organisers & Suppliers), especially in relation to issues related to the growth and orderly development of this industry.

This country has two peculiarities that have partly facilitated this coordination work. On the one hand, Singapore is a city-state with only one level of government. The conflicts of interest that have occurred in other countries (Pastras and Bramwell, 2013) due to the existence of a public administration with several territorial levels has been non-existent here. And, on the other hand, the other element is related to its political system, which has favoured the development of a policy characterized by strong control and authoritarianism, reducing the number of actors involved in the policy decision-making process. The government has had a greater capacity to coordinate the tourism and MICE industries, always based on its interests and values, and with hardly any discrepancies.

The political system, with a single party in power, has also facilitated long-term planning, which has been remarkably effective for the success of Singapore as a MICE destination. Planning has been a defining element of Singapore's public policy. The importance attached to this action is related to an external factor that has marked the future of the country, its spatial limitations. As Henderson (2008: 125) points out, the search for solutions for a better use of space has been a fundamental boost for planning, which has become one of the bases of Singapore's political action.

In relation to MICE tourism, the **role of government as a planner** has been maintained in the three phases identified. Planning has always responded to objectives that have varied according to the interests and values of each stage.

The search for growth and development of the MICE tourism industry was the driving force behind the planning activity in the Taken-Off and Growth Phase. The establishment of an appropriate organizational structure (STB and SECB) and the launching of the first strategic tourism plan in Singapore, i.e. Tourism Product Development Plan (1986-1991), aimed at the achievement of these objectives.

The challenges in the Phase of Consolidation and the Phase of Maturity and Uncertainty forced the approach of new goals, which pursued a gradual transformation and improvement of the industry. The complexity of these phases implied an intensification of the research and analysis tasks of STB and SECB around supply and demand in MICE tourism. The information obtained was crucial for the planning in the sense that it was used as a basis for the development of the different strategic plans elaborated in this period, such as the Strategic Plan for Growth (1993-1995), Tourism 21 Plan, Tourism 2015 Plan, Tourism Compass 2020 roadmap, the strategic vision of Quality Tourism and MICE 2020 roadmap. These plans and roadmaps collected the various strategic lines and guidelines to be followed in each period to guarantee the MICE sector competitiveness in the long term.

The **role of the government as legislator and regulator** has also been essential to control, order and avoid situations of abuse in the tourism sector.

Focusing on the MICE sector, the strong growth experienced in the Taken-Off and Growth Phase revealed the existence of a weak and confusing regulation, which was beginning to affect the proper functioning of this industry and the protection of the visitors. The government found it necessary to put order through the simplification and/or enactment of laws and norms that clearly established the obligations and rights of tourism companies and also the rules related to work, following a particular model of conduct and professionalism.

Once the problem of the lack of management capabilities of the local MICE sector was solved, the government's legislating and regulatory activity did not decrease in the Consolidation and Maturity and Uncertainty Phases. There was a need to adapt and improve it in the face of new environmental conditions, in which the search for internationalization, quality or sustainability became a priority objective to strengthen the competitiveness of Singapore as a MICE destination.

However, although the explicit objective of the enactment and application of laws has been the regulation of the tourist industry, the strengthening of the destination and the protection of the visitor, the important coercive function cannot be left aside. These have been used by the government as a tool of control and coercion so that the industry, the visitors and even the local population always follow the ideological and strategic lines marked as a priority (Ooi, 2002).

The interest generated by the MICE segment made also the government of Singapore assume the **role of entrepreneur** in relation to this industry and mobilized its financial and human resources to promote businesses identified as key to the development of the MICE tourism activity. From the Taken-Off and Growth Phase to Maturity and Uncertainty Phase, the government has created several companies with public capital and has participated in others of a mixed nature. In general, these have been linked to the following areas: accessibility (i.e., Singapore Airlines, whose majority shareholder is the public investment company Temasek Holdings) and tourism product (hotels and exhibition centres and congresses such as Singapore Expo).

This strong control and interventionism of the government could give rise to the belief that there has been a top-down approach on policy issues, including those related to tourism, where the private sector has had no responsibility or influence in the tourism policy-making and implementation process.

The findings of this research reveal, however, the existence during the three identified phases of a communication and fluid collaboration between the public and private sectors of Singapore, which has been reflected in the decisions and political actions developed.

Airey and Chong (2011) conceptualize the policy process as a process of learning and coordination, in which decision-makers assimilate new information and try to create a consensus among the different stakeholders.

Under this perspective, one of the objectives of this case study has been to examine the links between the actors involved in the MICE sector in Singapore and the tourism policy. The multiple levels of analysis (micro and macro) approach in this research has been very relevant for this objective since it has allowed demonstrating how the private sector has participated in a certain way in the of tourism policy-making, being taken into account their opinion, knowledge and experience.

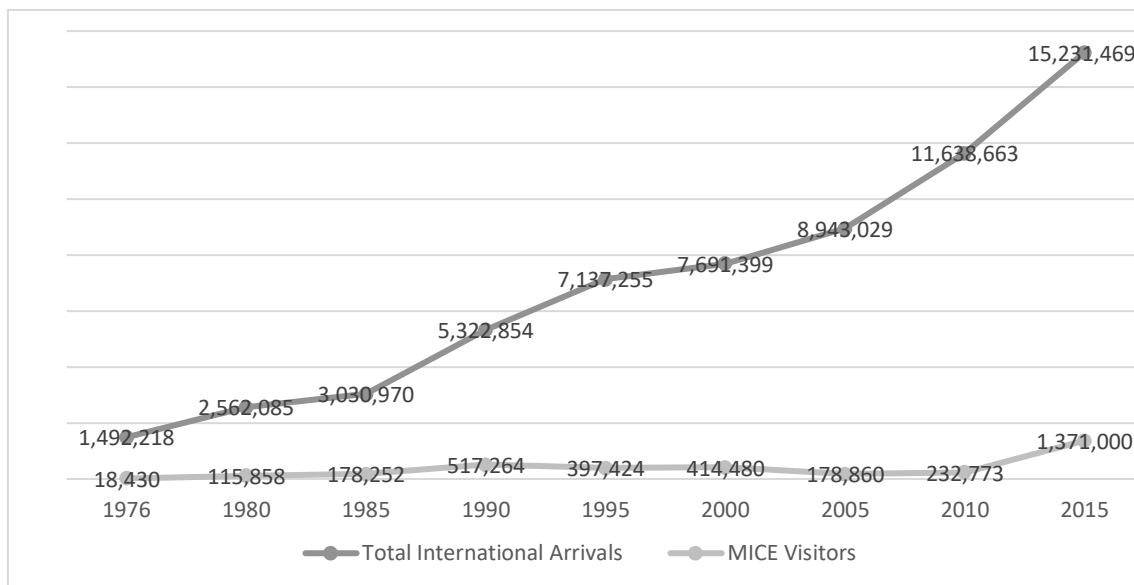
Singapore has developed a unique tourism model with respect to other strongly centralized countries. Although there has been an obvious top-down approach to the development and planning of the destination, the close collaboration that the government has established with the private sector cannot be ignored. The private sector has been consulted and exercised its ability to influence those initiatives related to its area of interest, becoming one of the keys that has contributed to the success of Singapore as a MICE destination.

7. Conclusions

This research contributes to current theoretical debates by presenting a conceptual and methodological framework with the aim of unravelling the complexity of MICE tourism policymaking process. The study of Singapore's MICE tourism policy from multiple levels of analysis (micro and macro) and its historical contextualization, through a multi-methods approach, has allowed for a better understanding of the evolution of Singapore as a MICE destination over the last 50 years.

The paper revealed, **first**, the need to use several approaches and research methods for the study of the MICE tourism policy process, supporting the opinion of Hall and Jenkins (1995: 14) in this regard. They affirm that studies that adopt a single approach or perform a one-level analysis are limited and partial in explaining this complex and dynamic reality. This analysis model has provided an opportunity to reflect on broader socioeconomic patterns and forms of governance based on the analysis of a local phenomenon.

Table 5
Evolution of Visitors Arrivals to Singapore (1965-2015)



Note. Statistical information taken from Singapore Tourism Board (various years)

Second, the study provided evidence of how MICE tourism policy cannot be separated from its context since it is an activity framed in a specific space and time and influenced by external factors and internal to the tourism system itself (Airey & Chong, 2011; Lawrance & Dredge, 2007), that interact with each other. In the case of Singapore, the analysis of the links between the context and MICE tourism policy has been fundamental in understanding the how and why of the decisions and actions taken. Tourism in Singapore has been distinguished by strong state intervention. The institutional framework has permeated all aspects of Singapore's tourism policy. This fact is closely related to the political system that emerged after the independence of the country in which a single political party, the PAP, has remained in power continuously until now. It has exercised its leadership and influence in all spheres of the nation, favouring the development of a policy characterized by strong control and authoritarianism (Hall & Oehlers, 2000; Henderson, 2014). However, this research, in line with Dredge and Jamal (2015), also highlights the interaction in the country of other elements and dynamics that have escaped government control and have had a great influence in the MICE tourism policy process, such as globalization, neoliberalism and the territorial context.

Third, this research showed that public policy aimed at the development of a specific tourism segment, such as MICE, should not be analysed as an isolated element from other policy areas. It is an activity embedded within a broader framework for action on the public policy system. In consequence, it is advisable for future research to approach

this phenomenon from a holistic view, with no artificial boundaries within its analysis, as indicated by Stevenson, Airey, and Miller (2008). Tourism policy must be conceived of as a connected reality, whose components influence the whole and not exclusively a particular tourism segment. The case of the MICE sector in Singapore suggests that the MICE tourism policy formulation and implementation have always been subject to the economic, social, or political objectives considered priority by the policymakers. Therefore, the supposed rational and objective character that from certain academic and political spheres is attributed to this process is called into question.

Fourth, the paper confirmed that the way in which tourism policy is formulated and executed reflects the way in which governments exercise their power. The importance of the instrumental role of tourism policy to achieve the objectives of competitiveness and survival of the MICE sector should not hide its political nature (Shore, 2006). The case of Singapore is paradigmatic due to the excessive influence of its government in all spheres of the nation. This way of understanding power has materialized in top down planning and in the assignment to the STB of functions that are beyond tourism, including economic, social, and urbanistic actions. However, despite this government intervention, this work reveals the strong relationship established with the private sector, which has participated and has been consulted on numerous occasions in the decisions and actions taken. This public-private collaboration, which has become a defining feature of its tourism policy, has contributed to the success of Singapore as a MICE destination. Although there has been an obvious top-down approach to the development of the destination, the influence capacity of other industry players has been a determining aspect that has not been given due attention in the few previous analyses of Singapore. Therefore, this collaboration and communication process should not be ruled out in future research on the tourism policy of highly centralized countries.