Conceptualising Governance Approach on Stakeholders Participation and Collaboration in George Town Festival, Penang, Malaysia

Patricia.S.K. Ng¹ and Suraiyati Rahman*²

¹, ² School of Housing, Building and Planning, UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA, 11800 Minden, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Coresponding Author : suraiyati@usm.my²

Abstract. Governance is defined as the reflexive self-organization carried out with multi-discipline processes and regulatory mechanisms that help in promoting the development of numerous policies and issues area including tourism planning. The primary concern is lack of focus on understanding the participation process and collaboration among key stakeholders in the context of special event projects especially in tourism event management. The article attempts to examine the participation and collaboration processes in conducting George Town Festival. A qualitative method which includes an in-depth interview with key stakeholders was adopted in the case study and thematic analysis was conducted. The findings revealed that process of participation and collaboration in George Town Festival event had contributed to innovative channels of communication, openness public participation, selection of most committed and proactive performers.

Keywords: Governance, George Town Festival, Stakeholders Participation, Event Management and Tourism Development

1. Introduction

Governance is being widely used in various fields and comprises a series of process of governing that can be approached in many forms according to the organization’s direction (1). Therefore, governance can be defined in numerous definitions where each is constructed from its depiction structure. Pertaining to the contribution of governance, there has been incremental growth of interest and potential to solve co-ordination problems whose influence areas includes choosing any political system or capacity to development, public authorities in local or nationally, building relation among the stakeholder and the collective problems faced by the key players (2–6).

Based on the documentary research conducted by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 2010-2011, it appears that a significant, perhaps unique effort was made by this organization to advance and deepen the study of governance in the field of tourism. It caused a great conflict in the local community when they were excluded from the planning process (7–10). In contrast to developed countries, the ‘bottom-up approach’ is emphasized and practiced in most developing countries. Thus, local community or stakeholder involvement play an important role in leadership that focuses on power and makes decision to execute stakeholders’ interest needs in order to meet the policy outcome (11,12).
new approach inviting “local community participation” recognized the significance of community involvement in tourism development after the stakeholders had proven the empowerment in managing and executing tourism planning and development (13), the destinations that require all the supporting infrastructure or facilities also need collaboration with other agencies and organizations. A government organization which includes local government, state government, private agencies, business managers, local communities and NGO may participate in the collaboration, practically be involved among the stakeholders. In this context, with the communities acting as ‘community governance’, the government may decide to join the partnership, as one of the stakeholders, or not to join the partnership. Thus, the empowerment of the local government is still vague in holding the concept of governance (14).

In tourism development, understanding different stakeholders’ perception is another element that may result in collaboration conflict (15,16). Managing collaborative relations should involve mutual benefit agreement among the stakeholders and an understanding of each stakeholder’s interests and needs in meeting the aims and objectives. It involves promoting cooperation among stakeholders and preventing any blockages to that organization. Managing stakeholders is important but relatively weak if the form of authoritative communities has no clear hierarchies of authority. The article utilizes festival management in assessing stakeholder participation and collaboration in tourism concerning ideas of governance and the contribution it may take to stakeholder engagement in a special project event. This led to a discussion of the framework of governance in steering stakeholders’ involvement from local government, state government, private agencies, NGOs, and the local community. It includes diversity and decentralization approaches, deliberation between the public and private sector, flexibility and revisability relates to a policy change, experimentation and knowledge creation on governance measures and knowledge sharing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Governance

The concept of governance refers to relationships between multiple stakeholders and how they interact with one another (17) especially with respect to network relationships which involves public and private partnership. Many researchers (18) note that the characteristics of the key elements and the new mode of governance as indicated in Table 1 have their own classificatory purposes. However, the focus on most discussions on policy instruments is much more emphasized on their effects and utilization rather than the understanding of governance elements (3,19–21) which have influenced policy–making on local development process. The new mode of governance approaches re-focus on the relationship between government and citizens as stakeholders and the competitive interpretation of their needs and wants. In line with this, it helps all strategists and policy makers to accept changes more readily in the participative processes after decisions are made.

| Elements                              | Characteristics                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participate and power-sharing         | Policymaking is not considered as the sole domain of regulators but private and public stakeholders from different levels are meant to participate in the policy process as part of public-private partnership. |
| Multi-level integration               | Coordination between different levels of government needs to occur both horizontally and vertically and should involve private actors. |
| Diversity and decentralization        | Rather than a standard legislative or regulatory approach, a diverse range of coordinated approaches is instead encouraged. |
| Deliberation                          | Greater deliberation is encouraged between public and private stakeholders to improve democratic legitimation of policy making processes |
Elements | Characteristics
--- | ---
Flexibility and revisability | Soft law measures are often applied that rely on flexible guidelines and open-ended standards that are implemented voluntarily and may be revised as policy circumstances change.
Experimentation and knowledge creation | Greater encouragement of local experimentation in governance measures as well as knowledge creation and sharing connection with multi-lateral surveillance, benchmarking and the exchange of results and best practices.

Source: (18)

All these integrated approaches emphasize the same principal in the empowerment of marginalized stakeholders’ group, where the team should be responsive to beneficiary demand and enhance the local capacities toward tourism development. George Town Festival (GTF) is an annual, month-long celebration of arts, culture, and heritage. GTF was inaugurated in 2010 to commemorate George Town’s 2008 inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Venturing into its ninth years of celebration, the GTF today draws participants from all over the world and turns the city into a stage that brings world class performance, exhibitions, installation, and collaboration which covers internal and external stakeholders such as actors, dancers, singers, and artists. However, the main problem with participation process and collaboration due to weak relationships among stakeholders in GTF still exists.

3. Methodology
This study used a qualitative method including interviews with identified key stakeholders and secondary data. A semi-structured set of interviews were conducted between September 2018 to November 2018. A snowball technique was adopted to gain more respondents who were involved in George Town Festival. As shown in table 2, seventeen respondents agreed to participate in the interviews. A topic guide was developed to explore the objectives set in the research. The representatives came from different organizations and sectors including local government officials, state councils (MBPP), George Town organizers, NGO, local partners and sponsors, public and private companies. Thematic analysis is one of the common forms of analysis in qualitative method approach. It is widely used and has been receiving growing popularity especially in social sciences (22–26). The goal in conducting a thematic analysis is to identify the themes which are derived from the data collected. The patterns in the data are essential, and they are used to identify themes within qualitative data to address research findings.

| Category | Number of Respondent(s) | Roles and Responsibilities |
| --- | --- | --- |
| City Administer Group |  |  |
| State Government | 3 | Acts as a representative of locals and is responsible for the administration of the city and encourages the growth of arts and cultural activities through effective collaboration between arts and cultural organizations, government agencies, private sectors, non-governmental organizations and arts and cultural activists from within and outside the country. |
| State Council | 2 | The Penang State Council is the local government that administers the city of George Town and commits to delivery of service that complies with quality standards. |
| Category                                      | Number of Respondent(s) | Roles and Responsibilities                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GTF Organizer Group                          |                         | This company has been organizing and coordinating the GTF for the past nine years. This is an official secretariat of GTF since 2010.                      |
| Liaison, Managing and Promotion Group        | 2                       | GTWHI is an organization dedicated to protecting, promoting, and preserving George Town as a sustainable city. GTWHI works in cooperation with the federal, state, and local government as well as several non-governmental organizations. |
| Art and Cultural Performers Group            |                         | The producer of the festival aims to share the story of Penang Island and George Town with a balance of life. They have invested money into the business specializing in the Arts, Culture and Heritage. This stakeholder has its primary role of administering and implementation of all festival programmes, partnership marketing and finance. |
| People Centred Group                         |                         | Non-governmental and non-profit organization that provides space for people to choose more responsible and socially beneficial goods and services.          |
| Local Community Sponsor & Partner            | 5                       | A typical local community consisting of public agencies either as an event partner or event sponsor that forms a mutual benefit in mind whether it is for economic or branding facilities. |
| Total                                        | 17                      | Source: Fieldwork (2018)                                                                                                                                  |

4. Findings
From an event management standpoint, stakeholder theory is often referenced in the literature on sustainable tourism development. It has also been observed that stakeholders’ knowledge and experience in tourism management, participation in tourism planning and development processes, and long-term community involvement have played an important role in tourism development (27,28). While each group of stakeholders plays an important role in the development of tourism, some stakeholders are more important than others in determining the success of activities. Thus, this study used the framework from freeman’s work on stakeholders and several concepts from (18) that highlighted the new mode of governance characteristic on state capacity to ‘steer’ the socio-economic through the involvement and relationship on other policy actors.

4.1. Initial Project of George Town Festival
The annual George Town Festival commemorates the inscription of George Town as UNESCO World Heritage Site and it has been assigned to George Town World Heritage Incorporated (GTWHI) by state government. The first anniversary showcase was held to mark the inscription of the historical core George Town in 2009. This was the first initiative by the state government to engage the state agency to execute the state program for celebration of World Heritage Site of George Town city. In April 2010, Penang State Government established the GTWHI which aimed to safeguard and protect the tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Encouraged by the positive achievement of the event in 2009, the state government with a joint nomination with GTWHI approached Joe Sidek Productions Sdn Bhd for a basic contract of organization to take over the George Town festival. The state government has
deregulated the responsibilities and given the opportunity to Joe Sidek Productions Sdn Bhd as the new stakeholder to continue to organize the second year of George Town Festival.

Initially, the annual event was conducted as just a one-day celebration, then it changed into a month-long event celebration of George Town during the custody of Joe Sidek Productions Sdn Bhd. Festivals often serve to fulfill specific common purposes, to plan and manage, to meet the objective and to ensure stakeholders are working and collaborating toward common goals. Therefore, engaging stakeholders throughout the planning process provides stronger strategic management and has potential of providing a competitive advantage to event organizers.

Many researchers have identified the value of stakeholder theory in understanding and analyzing tourism planning and tourism development (23,24,25). From the research result, they believe that a stakeholder approach contributes to the generation of consensus through interaction among tourism firms, government agencies, private agencies, NGOs, and the local community (15). In fact, this will create opportunities and challenges in relation to the growth of sustainable tourism development. The respondents stated that the stakeholders participated by performing their own tasks themselves in the process of organizing the festival events. They had the empowerment to control external forces of influence such as they knew very well the right timing to set up the event banners, promotion brochures or even the timing to get the security guards to perform safety checks to ensure a smooth operation during the festival event. In line with this, a stakeholder approach was first published and defined as ‘Any group or individual that will affect the organization’s objectives’ (31). Hence, the involvement of multiple stakeholders from various areas such as local government agencies, private companies and non-government organizations (NGO) in tourism sector justifies the importance of stakeholders’ contribution in the decision-making process. The principles of participation are not only about engaging people in the tourism development but also influencing the decision-making and design phase of planning.

4.2. Visualizing Stakeholders Theory in George Town Festival

After more than nine years, the festival director revealed that there is no doubt, it is a crucial process to select the key stakeholders either to be the main sponsors or partners. Thus, the present study took the development stage further through interviews with a range of stakeholders from different organizations who were asked about their perceptions toward their involvement in the George Town Festival. However, in designing the present study, the author defined the main key element, the ‘tourism planner’, as ‘Event Management Organizer (EMO)’ in the tourism stakeholder map. Thus, the impacts to be further examined using the stakeholder map in the current study were more visible and appropriate, and it helped to form a better understanding of the notion ‘who is the key owner in planning and managing’ the festival. In respect to the Freeman model, a priority set to satisfy the stakeholders’ needs and interests is another area that the Festival organizer needs to consider and to understand that each stakeholder may have their major contribution to the success of the Festival.

Stakeholder theory is vital to event management and tourism and has become an essential topic in festival studies. A stakeholder is defined as an individual or group who can affect or be affected directly or indirectly by the organization’s objectives or policies. The stakeholder theory suggests that the interests of stakeholders could lead the organization to be more sustainable and carry out a better performance (32) while some study focused on stakeholders’ roles and functions (33–35). Stakeholder participation is necessary to be legitimized, especially in the festival that has been planned, to achieve the set objectives in an organization. It indicates the concepts of (36) which required a tourism planner who has an interest in the planning processes, to deliver the outcomes of the tourism service but in the present case study, the author suggests that the tourism planner should be indicated as ‘EMO’. In the tourism sector, the success of tourism plan often relies on the cooperation of the stakeholders in the community such as the government, industry, and community stakeholders. Tourism strategy in planning and development has been an important topic to involve multiple stakeholders affected by tourism, including environmental groups, business interest groups, community groups, and public authorities. The respondents stated that the stakeholders had their own authority to perform their tasks themselves in the process of organizing the festival events. This participation can be classified as an
experimentation where local communities had their authority and rights in performing the services themselves.

The role of each stakeholder indicated the different levels of engagement and their responsibility. In selecting the festival stakeholders, it is important to recognize festival segmentation needs. Based on their type of stakeholders’ classification, the different stakeholders would have widely differing views regarding tourism. In the literature review on the case study, the range of stakeholders were classified into a few types of sponsors and partners which could be practical for a collaboration in practice.

Arguably, it was not easy to identify and differentiate the festival stakeholders even though the festival organizer was the most powerful stakeholders. In the present case study, the festival organizer, EMO, was able to identify the stakeholder as a key contributor to the success of George Town Festival. What emerged strongly from the interviews was the role played by each category particularly from the local government, state government, state council, private agency, NGO, and local community, which reflected the experience and knowledge they had gained over many years. Since this was part of an annual festival, the ‘EMO’ did not face many difficulties in identifying the key stakeholder of the George Town Festival.

4.3. Way Forward of Communication Channel
The ‘Event Management Organizer’ would first create their plan with a theme for the festival year followed by a great care taken to communicate and disseminate the information through the uses of a special website or social media such as Facebook or Instagram or YouTube. This social network could create opportunities to actively encourage participants to get involved as an individual or as part of a group stakeholder’s proposal. This participation channel allowed participants to bring in their ideas and challenges to be contributed to the themes.

The stakeholder theory suggests that it is the responsibility of the ‘tourism planner’ to make decisions. Thus, to have a successful product launch as the proposal required, it is important to understand the stakeholders and their interests as the stakeholder theory posits that the stakeholder group can have a direct influence on managerial decision making. To the ‘EMO’ in related services regarding the ‘proposal’ channel communication, the festival director will put an initiative effort to search around the website and social media such as YouTube, Facebook, or Instagram in targeting talented stakeholders and will approach them via e-mail or phone call to invite them for a meeting and discuss the proposal submission. For effective participation to occur (37), adequate information to understand heritage conservation issues and planning processes must first be provided or disseminated. In addition, effective channels of communication among stakeholders are vital (14). In line with this, researchers like (2) and (39–41) use this theory to widen the focus of attention on the environment and communications between the stakeholders involved in the preparation of the plan, the techniques used, and the political nature of policy making.

Venturing into the ninth year of celebration, with over 100 events, they have connected the past and the future with talented artists, performers, and collaboration, among others. With the publication on Tropfest in GTF, George Town festival has moved its portfolio to a national status, and they received proposals from various countries, including Singapore, India, Indonesia, Australia, France, Finland, Brazil, Italy, and Germany (The Star Online, 2012). Thus, George Town Festival organizer encouraged more participation from local artists. They had been pleading proposals from local performers ever since the festival started eight year ago. After seven years of running the showcase of festival, there was still a lack of local proposals. From the secondary data received, the existing participation processes in approaching still did not get a good response from local participants.

‘We had a proposal from 15 countries, but only four locals sent in theirs last year’ (FMT, 2016).
Together with our former Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, the event management organizer added and explained:

‘I appeal to local program planners and artists to come forward and share their idea for talks, performances and other events which we can host at next year festival’ (FMT, 2016).

In the subject of communication and proposal selection, there were different perceptions between the ‘EMO’ and other managers in the sense that the ‘EMO’ was concerned about the stakeholders’ reputation, talents, knowledge and skills on stage before identifying them as part of the stakeholders.

5. Conclusion
From this research, an understanding of the characteristics of the new mode of governance for event management was obtained. As such, it required a comprehensive framework to support the collaborative arrangement to establish an effective structure for multi-stakeholder participation in setting up the direction for participation and collaboration in the local tourism. This paper analyzed the perception of participation and collaboration, where the degrees of involvement of the stakeholders can influence the success of event management and tourism development. Besides, it describes the mechanism of an organization which uses the governance approach to ensure that its constituents follow its established policies, processes by which the businesses are operated, regulated, and controlled for event management and stakeholders’ collaboration.

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