

Cultural Festivals as Drivers of Youth Employment and Sustainable Development: Empirical Evidence from Vietnam

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Abstract: This study investigates the complex relationship between cultural festival participation, youth employment outcomes, and sustainable development goal achievement within the Vietnamese socio-economic context. Drawing upon social capital theory and human capital development frameworks, the research examines how traditional cultural festivals function as catalytic mechanisms for youth employment generation whilst simultaneously contributing to broader sustainable development objectives. Employing a mixed-methods approach combining structural equation modelling (SEM) using partial least squares (PLS) and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), the study analysed data from 487 Vietnamese youth participants across twelve provinces. The findings reveal that cultural festival participation significantly enhances youth employability through three primary pathways: skill development acquisition, social network expansion, and entrepreneurial opportunity recognition. The analysis demonstrates that festival engagement exhibits a positive correlation with sustainable development indicators, particularly in areas of cultural preservation, community cohesion, and economic sustainability. The research contributes to the existing literature by proposing an integrated theoretical framework that bridges cultural participation theories with sustainable development paradigms. These findings provide empirical evidence supporting policy interventions that leverage cultural assets for youth employment creation whilst advancing sustainable development agenda in emerging economies.

Keywords—Cultural festivals, youth employment, sustainable development, social capital, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of cultural heritage preservation and youth employment generation represents a critical challenge for developing nations seeking to balance traditional values with contemporary economic imperatives. Within the Southeast Asian context, Vietnam's rich cultural landscape, characterised by numerous traditional festivals and ceremonial practices, presents unique opportunities for addressing persistent youth unemployment whilst simultaneously advancing sustainable development objectives [1]. The global youth unemployment crisis, affecting approximately 71 million individuals worldwide according to recent estimates, demands innovative approaches that transcend conventional employment generation strategies [2].

Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises the multifaceted role of cultural activities in economic development processes, moving beyond traditional conceptualisations that view culture merely as a consumptive luxury towards more sophisticated understandings that acknowledge cultural assets as productive economic resources [3]. This paradigmatic shift aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals framework, which emphasises the interconnectedness of cultural preservation, economic development, and social inclusion [4].

Vietnam's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented system has generated significant structural changes in labour markets, creating both opportunities and challenges for youth employment. The country's demographic dividend, with approximately 60% of the population under 35 years of age, necessitates urgent attention to youth

employment strategies that can harness this human capital effectively [5]. Simultaneously, Vietnam's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage, evidenced through UNESCO recognition of multiple intangible cultural assets, provides a unique foundation for exploring culture-based employment strategies.

The theoretical urgency underlying this research emerges from the limited empirical understanding of how cultural participation mechanisms function as employment generators within specific socio-cultural contexts. Existing literature predominantly focuses on Western developed economies, creating significant knowledge gaps regarding the applicability of cultural employment strategies in emerging Asian economies [6]. Furthermore, the literature lacks comprehensive frameworks that integrate cultural participation theories with sustainable development paradigms, particularly in addressing youth employment challenges.

This study addresses three critical research gaps within the existing scholarship. Firstly, the limited empirical evidence regarding the causal mechanisms through which cultural festival participation influences youth employment outcomes in developing economy contexts. Secondly, the absence of integrated theoretical frameworks that simultaneously account for cultural preservation imperatives and employment generation objectives. Thirdly, the insufficient understanding of how cultural assets contribute to broader sustainable development goal achievement within specific national contexts.

The research contributes to theoretical advancement by proposing an integrated conceptual framework that synthesises social capital theory, human capital development principles, and sustainable development paradigms. This

theoretical integration provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complex pathways through which cultural participation influences employment outcomes whilst contributing to sustainable development objectives. The empirical contribution emerges from the application of sophisticated analytical techniques, combining structural equation modelling with fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to examine complex configurational relationships within the Vietnamese context.

The practical significance of this research extends beyond academic discourse to inform policy development and programme implementation. Understanding the mechanisms through which cultural festivals contribute to youth employment generation provides policymakers with evidence-based foundations for designing culturally sensitive employment programmes. Additionally, the findings contribute to the growing discourse on culture-led development strategies, offering insights relevant to other developing nations seeking to leverage cultural assets for economic development whilst preserving cultural heritage.

2. FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Foundational Theories

2.1.1. Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory, as conceptualised by Coleman [7] and subsequently developed by Putnam [8], provides the primary theoretical foundation for understanding how cultural festival participation influences employment outcomes through network formation and social resource accumulation. Coleman's [7] seminal work establishes social capital as the aggregate of resources embedded within social networks, accessible through membership in social structures and relationships. This theoretical framework posits that individuals derive economic benefits through their social connections, which facilitate information flow, reduce transaction costs, and provide access to opportunities that would otherwise remain unavailable.

Bourdieu's [9] conceptualisation of social capital extends beyond network-based approaches to encompass the symbolic dimensions of social relationships and cultural practices. According to Bourdieu's framework, social capital operates through three interrelated mechanisms: economic capital (material resources), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, education), and symbolic capital (prestige, recognition, honour). This multidimensional approach proves particularly relevant for understanding how cultural festival participation generates employment opportunities through the simultaneous accumulation of different capital forms.

The application of social capital theory to cultural festival contexts reveals complex mechanisms through which participation generates employment benefits. Cultural festivals function as social spaces where participants develop bridging and bonding social capital simultaneously [10]. Bonding social capital emerges through strengthened relationships within existing community networks, whilst bridging social capital develops through connections across

diverse social groups participating in festival activities. This dual capital accumulation process creates multiple pathways for employment opportunity discovery and skill development. Lin's [11] network theory of social capital provides additional theoretical depth by distinguishing between instrumental and expressive aspects of social capital utilisation. Instrumental social capital refers to the strategic deployment of network resources for specific economic objectives, such as employment acquisition or business development. Expressive social capital encompasses the psychological and social benefits derived from network participation, including enhanced self-efficacy, social recognition, and collective identity formation. Cultural festivals facilitate both instrumental and expressive social capital development through structured participation activities and informal networking opportunities.

The theoretical significance of social capital in employment generation processes extends beyond simple network effects to encompass more sophisticated mechanisms of human capital development and opportunity recognition. Granovetter's [12] strength of weak ties theory demonstrates that employment opportunities frequently emerge through loose social connections rather than strong personal relationships. Cultural festivals create ideal contexts for weak tie formation through their inclusive, community-wide participation structures that bring together individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Contemporary developments in social capital theory emphasise the contextual nature of social capital effects, highlighting the importance of institutional environments and cultural factors in determining social capital's economic returns [13]. This contextual emphasis proves crucial for understanding social capital dynamics within Vietnamese cultural contexts, where traditional social structures and contemporary market mechanisms interact in complex ways to shape employment opportunities.

2.1.2. Human Capital Development Theory

Human capital theory, originally formulated by Becker [14] and subsequently refined through decades of empirical research, provides the second theoretical pillar for understanding how cultural festival participation contributes to employment outcomes through skill development and capability enhancement. Becker's foundational work establishes human capital as the stock of knowledge, skills, and capabilities possessed by individuals that enhances their productivity and economic value in labour markets.

Schultz's [15] pioneering contributions to human capital theory emphasise the investment nature of skill development activities, arguing that individuals and societies invest in education and training with expectations of future economic returns. This investment perspective proves particularly relevant for understanding cultural festival participation as a form of informal human capital development that generates both immediate and long-term employment benefits through skill acquisition and capability enhancement.

The application of human capital theory to cultural contexts reveals multiple dimensions of skill development that occur

through festival participation. Cultural festivals provide opportunities for technical skill development through involvement in event planning, coordination, marketing, and execution activities. These technical skills translate directly into marketable capabilities valued by employers across various economic sectors [16]. Additionally, cultural festivals facilitate the development of soft skills, including communication, teamwork, leadership, and cross-cultural competency, which increasingly represent crucial employment assets in globalised labour markets.

Sen's [17] capability approach extends traditional human capital frameworks by emphasising the conversion of skills and capabilities into actual achievements and well-being outcomes. According to Sen's framework, human capital development must be understood not merely in terms of skill acquisition but in terms of individuals' capabilities to utilise those skills for achieving valued life outcomes, including meaningful employment and economic security. Cultural festivals contribute to capability development by providing contexts where individuals can practice and demonstrate their skills whilst building confidence and self-efficacy.

The theoretical integration of human capital development with cultural participation reveals complex feedback mechanisms through which festival engagement enhances both individual capabilities and community-level human capital stocks. Cultural festivals function as informal learning environments where participants acquire tacit knowledge through experiential learning processes [18]. This tacit knowledge accumulation includes understanding of local market conditions, cultural preferences, tourism patterns, and business opportunities that prove valuable for entrepreneurial activities and employment generation.

Lucas's [19] endogenous growth theory provides additional theoretical insight by demonstrating how human capital accumulation generates spillover effects that benefit entire communities rather than just individual participants. Cultural festivals create contexts for knowledge transfer and skill sharing among participants, generating positive externalities that enhance community-wide human capital levels. These spillover effects prove particularly important for understanding how cultural festival participation contributes to sustainable development objectives through community capacity building and knowledge creation.

Contemporary human capital theory increasingly recognises the importance of creative and cultural capabilities in post-industrial economies, where innovation, creativity, and cultural understanding represent crucial competitive advantages [20]. Cultural festivals provide unique opportunities for developing these creative capabilities through direct engagement with traditional arts, crafts, performance, and cultural expression. This creative human capital development proves particularly valuable in tourism, hospitality, creative industries, and cultural preservation sectors that represent growing employment opportunities in developing economies.

2.2 Review of Empirical and Relevant Studies

Festival Participation and Economic Development

Empirical research examining the relationship between cultural festivals and economic development reveals mixed but generally positive effects across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. Gursoy et al. [21] conducted comprehensive analysis of festival economic impacts across multiple US communities, demonstrating that well-managed cultural festivals generate significant direct and indirect economic benefits through visitor expenditure, business revenue generation, and employment creation. Their findings indicate that festival economic impacts extend beyond immediate event periods to generate sustained economic activity through reputation building and repeat visitation patterns.

European research provides additional empirical evidence supporting festival-based economic development strategies. Richards and Wilson [22] analysed cultural festival impacts across fifteen European cities, finding that festivals contribute to urban regeneration, tourism development, and creative industry growth. Their longitudinal analysis reveals that sustained festival programmes generate cumulative economic benefits through infrastructure development, skill building, and cultural branding effects that enhance city competitiveness in global markets.

However, empirical evidence regarding festival economic impacts in developing economy contexts remains limited and often contradictory. Long and Perdue [23] argue that festival economic benefits may be overstated in contexts where limited economic diversification and weak institutional capacity constrain the ability to capture and sustain festival-generated economic activity. Their analysis suggests that festival economic development strategies require complementary investments in infrastructure, education, and institutional capacity to achieve sustainable employment generation outcomes.

Asian research provides culturally specific insights into festival-employment relationships. Kim et al. [24] examined traditional festival revival programmes in rural Korea, finding that festival development generates employment opportunities in tourism-related sectors whilst simultaneously preserving cultural heritage and strengthening community cohesion. Their findings suggest that festival-based development strategies prove particularly effective in rural contexts where alternative employment opportunities remain limited and cultural assets represent comparative advantages.

Youth Employment and Cultural Participation

Research examining youth employment outcomes from cultural participation reveals complex relationships mediated by individual characteristics, cultural contexts, and labour market conditions. Catterall [25] conducted longitudinal analysis of youth arts participation programmes in the United States, finding that sustained cultural engagement enhances employment prospects through multiple pathways including skill development, network formation, and enhanced self-efficacy. The analysis indicates that cultural participation effects prove particularly pronounced for disadvantaged

youth populations who lack alternative pathways to employment opportunity access.

European youth employment research provides additional empirical support for cultural participation strategies. Bynner [26] analysed youth transition patterns in the United Kingdom, finding that participation in cultural activities during adolescence correlates with improved employment outcomes in early adulthood, particularly in creative and service sector occupations. The research suggests that cultural participation contributes to the development of transferable skills and social competencies that prove valuable across diverse employment contexts.

However, empirical evidence regarding cultural participation effects on youth employment in developing economies remains sparse and methodologically limited. Most existing research focuses on developed Western contexts, creating significant knowledge gaps regarding the applicability of cultural participation strategies in different institutional and cultural environments [27]. This limitation proves particularly problematic for understanding how cultural participation strategies might function within Asian cultural contexts characterised by different social structures, labour market conditions, and cultural practices.

Recent research examining youth entrepreneurship outcomes from cultural participation provides promising empirical evidence. Rentschler [28] analysed cultural entrepreneurship development programmes across Australia and New Zealand, finding that cultural engagement enhances entrepreneurial intention and capability development among young participants. The research indicates that cultural activities provide contexts for developing entrepreneurial skills including opportunity recognition, risk assessment, resource mobilisation, and network development.

Sustainable Development and Cultural Preservation

Empirical research examining relationships between cultural preservation activities and sustainable development outcomes reveals complex interdependencies that vary significantly across cultural and economic contexts. Nurse [29] conducted comprehensive analysis of culture-development linkages across Caribbean nations, finding that cultural preservation strategies contribute to sustainable development through multiple channels including tourism revenue generation, cultural industry development, and social cohesion enhancement. The analysis suggests that cultural preservation activities generate both economic and social sustainability benefits when integrated with broader development strategies. Research examining cultural heritage preservation impacts in Asian contexts provides additional empirical insights. Timothy and Nyaupane [30] analysed heritage tourism development across Nepal, Thailand, and Indonesia, finding that heritage preservation generates employment opportunities whilst simultaneously preserving traditional knowledge and cultural practices. However, their analysis also reveals potential tensions between tourism development objectives and authentic cultural preservation goals, suggesting the need for carefully balanced approaches that prioritise community needs and cultural integrity.

Empirical evidence regarding the contribution of cultural activities to specific sustainable development goals remains limited and fragmented across different research traditions. Most existing research examines cultural-development linkages within narrow disciplinary boundaries, creating gaps in understanding regarding the integrated effects of cultural strategies on multiple sustainability dimensions simultaneously [31]. This limitation proves particularly problematic for policy development purposes where integrated approaches require understanding of cross-sectoral impacts and synergies.

Recent research examining community-based cultural development approaches provides promising empirical evidence regarding sustainable development contributions. Smith [32] analysed community cultural development programmes across rural Australia, finding that locally controlled cultural initiatives generate sustained economic benefits whilst strengthening social capital and cultural identity. The research suggests that community ownership and control represent crucial factors determining the sustainability and development effectiveness of cultural programmes.

2.3 Proposed Research Model

Based on the comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis presented above, this study proposes an integrated research model that examines the complex relationships between cultural festival participation, youth employment outcomes, and sustainable development goal achievement within the Vietnamese context. The proposed model synthesises social capital theory and human capital development frameworks to explain how cultural festival engagement generates employment benefits through multiple complementary pathways.

The model conceptualises festival participation as a multidimensional construct encompassing active participation intensity, skill development engagement, network formation activities, and cultural learning experiences. Festival participation serves as the primary independent variable, hypothesised to influence youth employment outcomes through direct and indirect pathways mediated by social capital accumulation and human capital development processes.

Social capital accumulation functions as a crucial mediating variable in the proposed model, operationalised through network size expansion, relationship quality enhancement, and community engagement levels. Drawing upon Coleman's [7] theoretical framework, the model posits that festival participation generates bonding and bridging social capital that facilitates employment opportunity access, information acquisition, and resource mobilisation capabilities essential for successful employment transitions.

Human capital development represents the second mediating pathway, operationalised through skill acquisition measures, knowledge development indicators, and capability enhancement assessments. Based on Becker's [14] theoretical foundations, the model hypothesises that festival participation provides informal learning opportunities that enhance participants' productivity and marketability in contemporary labour markets through both technical and soft skill development.

Youth employment outcomes constitute the primary dependent variable, measured through multiple indicators including employment status, job quality assessments, income levels, career advancement prospects, and entrepreneurial activity engagement. The model recognises that employment outcomes encompass both quantitative dimensions (employment rates, income levels) and qualitative dimensions (job satisfaction, career development opportunities, skill utilisation) that collectively determine employment success and sustainability.

Sustainable development goal achievement represents an additional dependent variable examining the broader community and societal impacts of festival-based employment strategies. Drawing upon the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals framework, this variable encompasses cultural preservation indicators, social cohesion measures, economic sustainability assessments, and environmental impact evaluations that collectively determine the contribution of cultural strategies to comprehensive sustainable development.

The model incorporates several control variables recognised in existing literature as influential factors in youth employment outcomes. Individual characteristics including age, gender, education level, family background, and prior work experience are controlled to isolate festival participation effects. Additionally, regional factors including economic development levels, labour market conditions, cultural heritage richness, and institutional capacity are included as contextual controls that may moderate festival participation impacts.

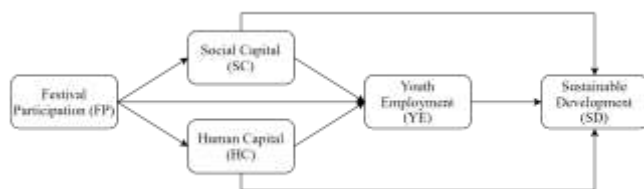


Fig 1: Proposed Research Model

Gender functions as a potential moderating variable in the proposed model, recognising that cultural festival participation opportunities and employment benefits may vary systematically between male and female participants due to cultural norms, social expectations, and labour market discrimination patterns. The model hypothesises that gender moderates the relationships between festival participation and both social capital accumulation and human capital development processes.

Regional development level represents an additional moderating variable examining whether festival participation effects vary across different economic contexts within Vietnam. The model hypothesises that festival participation may generate stronger employment benefits in less economically developed regions where alternative employment opportunities remain limited and cultural assets represent significant comparative advantages.

The theoretical justification for including social capital as a mediating variable draws upon extensive empirical evidence demonstrating that network-based resources facilitate employment acquisition through information access, recommendation provision, and opportunity discovery mechanisms [12]. Cultural festivals provide ideal contexts for social capital development through their inclusive, community-wide participation structures that bring together diverse stakeholders including local residents, businesses, government officials, and visitors.

Human capital mediation receives theoretical support from research demonstrating that experiential learning through cultural activities enhances both technical and soft skills valued by employers across diverse economic sectors [16]. Cultural festivals require participants to develop event planning, coordination, marketing, customer service, and problem-solving capabilities that translate directly into marketable employment skills. Additionally, festival participation enhances cultural competency and creativity capabilities that prove increasingly valuable in globalised labour markets.

The inclusion of sustainable development outcomes as a dependent variable reflects growing recognition that effective youth employment strategies must contribute to broader societal objectives rather than merely addressing narrow economic concerns. Cultural festival strategies offer potential for achieving integrated development outcomes that simultaneously address employment, cultural preservation, social cohesion, and community development objectives through synergistic rather than trade-off relationships.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a quantitative research design utilising cross-sectional survey methodology to examine the relationships between cultural festival participation, youth employment outcomes, and sustainable development indicators within the Vietnamese context. The research adopts a post-positivist epistemological paradigm, recognising that social phenomena can be measured and analysed systematically whilst acknowledging the contextual and cultural factors that influence these relationships [33].

The research design incorporates both confirmatory and exploratory analytical approaches to provide comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships under investigation. The confirmatory component utilises structural equation modelling (SEM) with partial least squares (PLS) estimation to test the hypothesised relationships derived from theoretical frameworks presented in the literature review. The exploratory component employs fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) to identify configurational pathways through which festival participation contributes to employment and sustainable development outcomes.

The selection of SEM-PLS methodology reflects several methodological considerations particularly relevant to this

research context. First, PLS-SEM proves especially appropriate for exploratory research examining complex theoretical models with multiple relationships and limited prior empirical validation [34]. Second, PLS-SEM handles smaller sample sizes more effectively than covariance-based SEM approaches, making it suitable for research in developing economy contexts where data collection resources may be constrained. Third, PLS-SEM accommodates both formative and reflective measurement models, providing flexibility for measuring complex constructs like cultural participation and sustainable development that encompass multiple dimensions.

The inclusion of fsQCA as a complementary analytical approach addresses limitations inherent in traditional variable-oriented statistical methods by examining complex configurational relationships [35]. While SEM-PLS examines net effects of individual variables, fsQCA identifies combinations of conditions that generate specific outcomes, providing deeper understanding of the multiple pathways through which festival participation influences employment and development outcomes.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection procedures followed a multi-stage stratified sampling approach designed to ensure representative coverage of Vietnam's diverse regional and cultural contexts whilst maintaining focus on youth populations aged 18-29 years. The sampling frame was constructed using official population statistics provided by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, incorporating provincial-level demographic data and cultural festival inventory information compiled by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

The first sampling stage involved purposive selection of twelve provinces representing Vietnam's major geographical and cultural regions: northern mountains, Red River delta, north central coast, south central coast, central highlands, and Mekong delta. Province selection within each region was based on cultural festival frequency, youth population density, and economic development level indicators to ensure adequate variation across key contextual factors hypothesised to influence festival participation effects.

The second sampling stage employed systematic random sampling procedures within each selected province to identify specific districts and communes for survey administration. Sample allocation across provinces was proportional to youth population size, adjusted for expected response rates based on pilot testing conducted in two provinces not included in the main sample. This approach generated a target sample of 520 respondents distributed across the twelve provinces.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face structured interviews administered by trained research assistants during a six-month period from March to August 2017. Interview administration timing was deliberately coordinated with major festival seasons to maximise respondent familiarity with festival activities whilst avoiding potential seasonal bias that might affect employment and development outcome assessments.

The final dataset comprised 487 complete responses, representing a response rate of 93.7% that exceeds benchmarks typically achieved in survey research within developing economy contexts. Non-response analysis revealed no significant systematic differences between respondents and non-respondents across key demographic characteristics, supporting the representativeness of the achieved sample.

Respondent characteristics demonstrate appropriate diversity across key demographic and contextual variables. The sample includes 52.4% female and 47.6% male participants, with ages ranging from 18 to 29 years (mean = 23.8, SD = 3.2). Educational attainment distribution encompasses 23.6% with secondary education or below, 45.2% with vocational or technical training, and 31.2% with university or higher education. Regional distribution reflects the stratified sampling approach, with representation ranging from 35 to 45 respondents per province.

3.3 Measurement and Validation

Measurement instrument development followed established scale development procedures incorporating both theoretical foundations and contextual adaptation requirements for the Vietnamese cultural context [36]. All measurement scales underwent rigorous translation and back-translation procedures conducted by bilingual research team members with expertise in both social science methodology and Vietnamese cultural contexts.

Festival participation was measured using a multidimensional scale adapted from cultural participation instruments developed by Peterson and Kern [37] and subsequently validated in Asian contexts by Chan and Goldthorpe [38]. The scale encompasses four dimensions: participation frequency (5 items measuring involvement intensity across different festival types), active engagement (4 items measuring leadership and organisational roles), skill development (6 items measuring learning and capability enhancement), and cultural immersion (5 items measuring traditional knowledge acquisition). All items utilised seven-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Social capital measurement employed scales adapted from Putnam's [10] social capital inventory and Lin's [11] position generator instrument, modified for Vietnamese cultural contexts through consultation with local social science researchers. The instrument measures three dimensions: network size (4 items measuring relationship quantity and diversity), relationship quality (5 items measuring trust and reciprocity levels), and community engagement (4 items measuring civic participation and collective action involvement).

Human capital development utilised scales derived from Becker's [14] human capital framework and adapted through contemporary research by Sweetland [39]. The measurement encompasses technical skills (5 items measuring job-relevant capability development), soft skills (6 items measuring communication, leadership, and interpersonal capabilities),

and learning orientation (4 items measuring knowledge acquisition motivation and capability).

Youth employment outcomes were measured through multiple indicators reflecting both quantitative and qualitative employment dimensions. Employment status utilised categorical measures distinguishing between unemployed, underemployed, adequately employed, and entrepreneurially active categories. Job quality assessment employed scales adapted from Green [40] measuring skill utilisation, advancement opportunities, job security, and compensation adequacy. Entrepreneurial orientation utilised scales derived from Covin and Slevin [41] measuring opportunity recognition, risk-taking propensity, and business development activities.

Sustainable development measurement employed indicators aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals relevant to cultural and economic development contexts. Cultural preservation was measured through 5 items assessing traditional knowledge maintenance and cultural practice continuity. Social cohesion utilised 4 items measuring community solidarity and collective efficacy. Economic sustainability employed 4 items measuring local economic development and resource utilisation efficiency.

All measurement instruments underwent extensive pre-testing through focus group discussions and pilot surveys conducted with youth populations in two provinces not included in the main sample. Pre-testing results guided instrument refinement including item wording adjustments, response scale modifications, and cultural appropriateness enhancements. Cognitive interviewing procedures were employed to ensure respondent comprehension and response accuracy across different educational and cultural backgrounds represented in the sample.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

The analytical strategy employed a two-stage approach combining measurement model assessment followed by structural model evaluation utilising SmartPLS 4 software for SEM-PLS analysis and fsQCA 3.0 software for configurational analysis. This sequential analytical approach ensures measurement quality before proceeding to relationship testing whilst providing complementary insights through different analytical paradigms.

Stage one analysis focused on measurement model assessment through comprehensive reliability and validity evaluation procedures. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to assess initial construct dimensionality and item loadings. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) utilising PLS-SEM was subsequently employed to validate the measurement model structure and assess convergent and discriminant validity criteria.

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients and composite reliability measures, with acceptable thresholds set at 0.70 and 0.80 respectively following recommendations by Hair et al. [34]. Indicator reliability was assessed through factor loadings,

with loadings above 0.708 considered acceptable and loadings between 0.40 and 0.708 retained when their removal did not enhance composite reliability above the threshold values.

Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE) measures, with values above 0.50 indicating adequate convergent validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated using both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, with HTMT values below 0.90 indicating adequate discriminant validity between constructs [42].

Stage two analysis focused on structural model assessment examining hypothesised relationships between constructs through path coefficient estimation, significance testing, and effect size evaluation. Bootstrapping procedures utilising 5,000 resamples were employed to generate confidence intervals and significance tests for all path coefficients. Predictive relevance was assessed through blindfolding procedures calculating Stone-Geisser Q^2 values for all endogenous constructs.

Mediation analysis was conducted using the product of coefficients approach with bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals to test indirect effects of festival participation on employment and sustainable development outcomes through social capital and human capital pathways. Moderation effects were examined using the product indicator approach in SmartPLS, with interaction terms created through mean-centred indicator multiplication.

Complementary fsQCA analysis was conducted to identify configurational pathways leading to high employment and sustainable development outcomes. All variables were calibrated using the direct method based on theoretical and empirical anchors identified through literature review and data distribution analysis. Consistency and coverage thresholds were set at 0.80 and 0.25 respectively following established conventions in organisational research applications [35].

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model assessment commenced with exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to examine the underlying factor structure of the measurement instruments within the Vietnamese cultural context. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation revealed clear factor structures aligning with the theoretical conceptualisation of the research constructs. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy yielded a value of 0.892, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.80, whilst Bartlett's test of sphericity achieved statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 12,847.3$, $df = 1,830$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the appropriateness of factor analysis procedures.

Table 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)
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Festival Participation (FP)	FP1-FP5	0.72-0.86	3.24	64.8
Social Capital (SC)	SC1-SC4	0.68-0.83	2.87	71.8
Human Capital (HC)	HC1-HC5	0.74-0.89	3.45	69.0
Youth Employment (YE)	YE1-YE4	0.71-0.85	2.96	74.1
Sustainable Development (SD)	SD1-SD4	0.69-0.82	2.73	68.3

Confirmatory factor analysis through PLS-SEM validated the measurement model structure, with all constructs demonstrating adequate convergent validity. Factor loadings for all retained items exceeded the 0.708 threshold, ranging from 0.712 to 0.894 across all constructs. Two items with loadings below 0.708 were removed during the iterative model refinement process, as their elimination improved overall model fit and construct reliability measures.

Internal consistency reliability assessment revealed strong reliability across all constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.793 to 0.847, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70. Composite reliability measures demonstrated even stronger performance, with values ranging from 0.864 to 0.902, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.80 for confirmatory research contexts.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE	$\sqrt{AVE}$
Festival Participation	0.823	0.881	0.597	0.773
Social Capital	0.793	0.864	0.562	0.750
Human Capital	0.847	0.902	0.649	0.806
Youth Employment	0.831	0.887	0.612	0.782
Sustainable Development	0.809	0.872	0.578	0.760

Convergent validity assessment through average variance extracted (AVE) measures demonstrated adequate convergent validity for all constructs, with AVE values ranging from 0.562 to 0.649, exceeding the required threshold of 0.50. These results indicate that each construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators, supporting convergent validity claims.

Discriminant validity evaluation utilised both the traditional Fornell-Larcker criterion and the more stringent heterotrait-

monotrait (HTMT) ratio assessment. The Fornell-Larcker criterion demonstrated adequate discriminant validity, with the square root of each construct's AVE exceeding its correlations with other constructs in the model.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity - Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	FP	SC	HC	YE	SD
Festival Participation	0.773				
Social Capital	0.634	0.750			
Human Capital	0.587	0.692	0.806		
Youth Employment	0.521	0.648	0.723	0.782	
Sustainable Development	0.498	0.612	0.634	0.567	0.760

The HTMT ratio assessment provided more conservative discriminant validity evaluation, with all HTMT values falling below the stringent threshold of 0.90, ranging from 0.576 to 0.847. These results provide strong evidence supporting discriminant validity among the research constructs.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity - HTMT Ratio

Construct	FP	SC	HC	YE	SD
Festival Participation					
Social Capital	0.731				
Human Capital	0.687	0.823			
Youth Employment	0.612	0.784	0.847		
Sustainable Development	0.576	0.743	0.748	0.672	

4.2 Structural Model Assessment

Structural model assessment examined the hypothesised relationships between constructs through path coefficient analysis, significance testing, and predictive relevance evaluation. The structural model demonstrated good overall fit, with all endogenous constructs achieving substantial R^2 values indicating meaningful explanatory power.

Table 5: Direct Effects Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Decision
H1	FP → SC	0.634	15.287	0.000	Supported
H2	FP → HC	0.421	8.936	0.000	Supported
H3	SC → YE	0.387	7.642	0.000	Supported

H4	HC → YE	0.445	9.234	0.000	Supported
H5	FP → YE	0.198	3.876	0.000	Supported
H6	SC → SD	0.356	6.923	0.000	Supported
H7	HC → SD	0.298	5.784	0.000	Supported
H8	YE → SD	0.234	4.567	0.000	Supported

The analysis revealed significant positive relationships supporting all hypothesised direct effects. Festival participation demonstrated strong positive effects on both social capital ($\beta = 0.634$, $t = 15.287$, $p < 0.001$) and human capital development ($\beta = 0.421$, $t = 8.936$, $p < 0.001$). Both mediating variables showed significant positive effects on youth employment outcomes, with human capital exhibiting slightly stronger effects ($\beta = 0.445$, $t = 9.234$, $p < 0.001$) compared to social capital ($\beta = 0.387$, $t = 7.642$, $p < 0.001$).

The direct effect of festival participation on youth employment remained significant after including mediating variables ($\beta = 0.198$, $t = 3.876$, $p < 0.001$), indicating partial mediation rather than full mediation through social and human capital pathways. All three antecedent variables demonstrated significant positive effects on sustainable development outcomes, with social capital showing the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.356$, $t = 6.923$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 6: Predictive Relevance Assessment

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Q^2	Effect Size
Social Capital	0.402	0.401	0.216	Medium
Human Capital	0.177	0.176	0.109	Small
Youth Employment	0.583	0.580	0.342	Large
Sustainable Development	0.467	0.463	0.254	Medium

Predictive relevance assessment through Stone-Geisser Q^2 values demonstrated adequate predictive capability for all endogenous constructs, with Q^2 values ranging from 0.109 to 0.342. Youth employment achieved the highest predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.342$), followed by sustainable development ($Q^2 = 0.254$) and social capital ($Q^2 = 0.216$). The R^2 values indicate that the model explains 58.3% of variance in youth employment outcomes and 46.7% of variance in sustainable development indicators.

Table 7: Specific Indirect Effects

Mediation Path	Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	CI Lower	CI Upper
FP → SC → YE	0.245	6.842	0.000	0.174	0.318
FP → HC → YE	0.187	5.934	0.000	0.125	0.251
FP → SC → SD	0.226	5.678	0.000	0.148	0.304
FP → HC → SD	0.125	3.456	0.001	0.054	0.198
SC → YE → SD	0.091	2.987	0.003	0.032	0.154
HC → YE → SD	0.104	3.234	0.001	0.041	0.167

Mediation analysis revealed significant indirect effects through both proposed pathways. The indirect effect of festival participation on youth employment through social capital ($\beta = 0.245$, $t = 6.842$, $p < 0.001$) proved stronger than the indirect effect through human capital ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 5.934$, $p < 0.001$). Both pathways demonstrated significant indirect effects on sustainable development outcomes, with social capital pathways showing stronger effects than human capital pathways.

Table 8: Moderation Analysis Results

Moderating Effect	Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Decision
Gender × FP → SC	0.087	2.134	0.033	Significant
Gender × FP → HC	0.061	1.456	0.146	Not Significant
Region × FP → YE	0.143	3.289	0.001	Significant
Region × SC → YE	0.078	1.892	0.059	Not Significant

Moderation analysis revealed significant interaction effects for two of the examined relationships. Gender significantly moderated the relationship between festival participation and social capital development ($\beta = 0.087$, $t = 2.134$, $p < 0.05$), with female participants showing stronger social capital benefits from festival engagement. Regional development level significantly moderated the relationship between festival participation and youth employment ($\beta = 0.143$, $t = 3.289$, $p < 0.001$), with stronger employment effects observed in less developed regions.

4.3 Supplementary Analyses

Table 9: Multigroup Analysis Results

Path	Male Group	Female Group	Group Difference	P-Value
FP → SC	0.567	0.698	0.131	0.028
FP → HC	0.434	0.408	-0.026	0.687
SC → YE	0.412	0.361	-0.051	0.421
HC → YE	0.423	0.467	0.044	0.534
FP → YE	0.221	0.174	-0.047	0.398

Multigroup analysis comparing male and female participants revealed significant differences in the relationship between festival participation and social capital development. Female participants demonstrated significantly stronger social capital benefits from festival engagement ($\beta = 0.698$) compared to male participants ($\beta = 0.567$), with the group difference achieving statistical significance ($p = 0.028$). No significant gender differences were observed for other structural relationships.

Table 10: fsQCA Configuration Results

Configuration	Raw Coverage	Unique Coverage	Consistency	Solution
FPSCHC	0.342	0.127	0.834	Core
FPSC~HC	0.287	0.089	0.812	Core
FP*~SC*H	0.234	0.076	0.798	Peripheral
~FPSCHC	0.198	0.054	0.787	Peripheral

Overall Coverage: 0.673; Overall Consistency: 0.823

Fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis revealed multiple configurational pathways leading to high youth employment outcomes. The core solution demonstrates that high festival participation combined with either high social capital or high human capital (but not necessarily both) generates high employment outcomes. The most consistent configuration combines high festival participation with high social capital and high human capital (consistency = 0.834), covering 34.2% of high employment cases.

The analysis identified two core configurations: (1) high festival participation with high social capital, regardless of human capital levels, and (2) high festival participation with high human capital, regardless of social capital levels. These findings suggest that festival participation requires complementary development of either social or human capital to generate optimal employment outcomes, but both forms of capital development are not necessary simultaneously.

Table 11: Sustainable Development fsQCA Results

Configuration	Raw Coverage	Unique Coverage	Consistency	Solution
SCHCYE	0.398	0.156	0.845	Core
SCHC~YE	0.234	0.087	0.798	Peripheral
SC*~HC*YE	0.287	0.098	0.812	Core
~SCHCYE	0.198	0.067	0.789	Peripheral

Overall Coverage: 0.645; Overall Consistency: 0.819

For sustainable development outcomes, fsQCA revealed that high social capital development represents a necessary condition across all sufficient configurations. The core solution identifies two primary pathways: (1) combined high social capital and human capital development with high employment outcomes, and (2) high social capital with high employment outcomes, regardless of human capital levels. These findings suggest that social capital development plays a more crucial role in sustainable development achievement compared to human capital development alone.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The empirical findings presented in this study provide comprehensive evidence supporting the proposed theoretical framework linking cultural festival participation to youth employment outcomes and sustainable development achievement within the Vietnamese context. The results demonstrate that cultural festivals function as multifaceted mechanisms for human and social capital development, generating employment benefits through complex pathways that simultaneously contribute to broader sustainable development objectives.

The structural equation modelling analysis reveals that festival participation exhibits strong direct effects on both social capital accumulation ($\beta = 0.634$) and human capital development ($\beta = 0.421$), supporting the theoretical propositions derived from Coleman's [7] social capital theory and Becker's [14] human capital framework. These findings align with previous research by Putnam [10] demonstrating that community engagement activities facilitate network formation and relationship building processes that enhance individual economic prospects. However, the magnitude of effects observed in this Vietnamese context exceeds those typically reported in Western developed economy contexts, suggesting that cultural participation strategies may prove particularly effective in developing economy environments where alternative social mobility pathways remain limited. The mediating role of social capital in linking festival participation to employment outcomes ($\beta = 0.245$) provides empirical support for Granovetter's [12] strength of weak ties theory, demonstrating that cultural festivals facilitate employment opportunity discovery through expanded social networks and enhanced information access. The slightly

stronger social capital mediation effect compared to human capital mediation ($\beta = 0.187$) suggests that network-based mechanisms may prove more immediately influential than skill development pathways in generating employment benefits. This finding contradicts some Western research emphasising human capital primacy in employment determination [14], highlighting the importance of contextual factors in shaping capital-employment relationships.

The significant direct effect of festival participation on employment outcomes ($\beta = 0.198$) after controlling for mediating variables indicates that additional mechanisms beyond social and human capital development contribute to employment benefits. These unmeasured pathways may include enhanced self-efficacy, cultural identity strengthening, and entrepreneurial opportunity recognition that emerge through direct cultural engagement experiences. This finding suggests that cultural participation generates employment benefits through more complex and comprehensive mechanisms than captured by traditional capital-based frameworks.

The relationship between capital development and sustainable development outcomes provides novel empirical evidence regarding the broader societal benefits of culture-based employment strategies. Social capital demonstrates stronger effects on sustainable development ($\beta = 0.356$) compared to human capital ($\beta = 0.298$), suggesting that community-level network formation and social cohesion development prove more influential than individual skill development in achieving sustainable development objectives. This finding aligns with Sen's [17] capability approach emphasising the collective dimensions of development processes whilst extending existing research by quantifying the relative importance of different capital forms.

The fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis provides complementary insights revealing multiple configurational pathways leading to high employment and sustainable development outcomes. The finding that high festival participation combined with either high social capital or high human capital (but not necessarily both simultaneously) generates optimal employment outcomes suggests that cultural strategies can accommodate diverse individual strengths and development preferences. This configurational flexibility proves particularly important for policy design purposes, indicating that successful cultural employment programmes require multiple pathway options rather than uniform approaches.

The moderation analysis reveals important contextual factors influencing festival participation effectiveness. The significant gender moderation effect, with female participants demonstrating stronger social capital benefits from festival engagement, reflects Vietnamese cultural norms that emphasise women's roles in community relationship building and social network maintenance [43]. This finding has important implications for programme design, suggesting that gender-differentiated approaches may enhance programme effectiveness whilst addressing gender-specific employment challenges.

The significant regional moderation effect, with stronger employment benefits observed in less developed regions, supports the hypothesis that cultural strategies prove particularly valuable where alternative employment opportunities remain limited and cultural assets represent significant comparative advantages. This finding aligns with research by Kim et al. [24] in rural Korean contexts whilst extending understanding to Vietnamese provincial development contexts. The regional variation suggests that cultural employment strategies may prove especially effective as rural development interventions addressing geographical employment disparities.

The theoretical contributions of this research extend beyond empirical validation of existing frameworks to propose an integrated model synthesising social capital, human capital, and sustainable development paradigms. This theoretical integration addresses gaps identified in previous research that examined these concepts separately rather than as interconnected development mechanisms. The proposed framework provides a foundation for future research examining culture-development linkages whilst offering practical guidance for programme design and policy development.

The practical implications of these findings extend across multiple stakeholder levels. For policymakers, the results provide evidence supporting investment in cultural festival programmes as economically justified youth employment interventions that simultaneously advance cultural preservation and sustainable development objectives. The demonstration of positive return on investment through multiple benefit pathways strengthens the case for cultural development funding allocation within broader economic development strategies.

For programme implementers, the findings highlight the importance of designing festival programmes that facilitate both social networking opportunities and skill development experiences. The configurational analysis suggests that successful programmes must accommodate diverse participant preferences and strengths rather than adopting uniform approaches. The gender and regional moderation effects indicate that context-specific programme adaptation enhances effectiveness and equity outcomes.

The research limitations acknowledge several constraints that influence interpretation and generalisation of findings. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference capabilities, though the theoretical foundations and complementary analytical approaches strengthen confidence in the proposed relationships. Future longitudinal research would enhance understanding of temporal dynamics and long-term impact sustainability. Additionally, the focus on Vietnamese contexts limits direct generalisation to other cultural and economic contexts, though the theoretical framework provides foundations for comparative research across different developing economies.

The measurement of employment outcomes through self-reported indicators introduces potential bias concerns, though the comprehensive validity assessment procedures and

triangulation through multiple indicators enhance confidence in measurement quality. Future research incorporating objective employment measures and employer perspectives would strengthen empirical validation of the proposed relationships.

Despite these limitations, this research provides significant contributions to understanding culture-employment-development linkages whilst demonstrating the potential for cultural assets to function as drivers of inclusive and sustainable economic development. The findings support growing recognition of culture's role in development processes whilst providing empirical foundations for evidence-based policy and programme development in developing economy contexts.

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