



## Research Paper

## Managing a mature coastal destination: Pattaya, Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to develop a full and more explicit account of what constitutes destination management by examining how a mature coastal resort, Pattaya in Thailand, is being managed. The paper addresses two key questions: what is destination management and is destination management being practised in Pattaya? Empirical research in Pattaya was guided by a conceptual framework incorporating three basic features of management: goals, activities and management structures. The research focussed on the management of three major features of the resort identified by public and private sector interviewees: the beach zone, nightlife and the Pattaya Music Festival. If the management of these features is assessed in terms of definitions stressing integration, coordination or collaboration then destination management is not being practised in Pattaya. Rather, many of the management activities being carried out are undertaken independently by a range of agencies in accordance with their broader institutional goals and responsibilities. Where complementary activities are co-ordinated, integrated or collaborative this is generally limited to a series of formal or informal dyadic relationships rather than a comprehensive destination-wide approach. These results raise questions about the scope of destination management and the need to consider its dimensions more closely.

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## 1. Introduction

A considerable body of research has emerged on destination management in the past decade. Scholars are enthusiastic about the topic, destination management is seen as a 'good thing' and as a consequence studies are often normative and advocate what should be done and how. In particular, sound destination management is seen to be essential for ensuring that destinations are competitive and sustainable (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Jenkins, Dredge, & Taplin, 2011; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Welford & Ytterhus, 2004). Issues of organization and governance are often the focus of research to achieve these goals (Bieger, Beritelli, & Laesser, 2009; Bodega, Cioccarelli, & Denicolai, 2004; Pechlaner, Volgger, & Herntrei, 2012; Presenza, Sheehan, & Ritchie, 2005; Sainaghi, 2006). However, in the enthusiasm to embrace this new field of study, reality may be being lost in the rhetoric. Before advocating the pursuit of particular goals and new forms of organization or governance, is there sufficient consideration of what constitutes destination management or sufficient empirical evidence of how and to what extent destinations are currently being managed? This is a particularly crucial for issue although the management of destinations may be enhanced by a sound theoretical basis, and this is ultimately a very applied field of activity which must be

grounded in reality and not given over solely to abstract and ideal notions.

As is common with other rapidly growing literatures, research in this field is characterized by varying definitions and perspectives on destination management. In defining destination management some researchers emphasize the activities directed to satisfying the needs of tourists (Fuchs & Weiermair, 2004; Zehrer et al., 2005) or some broader set of stakeholders (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Buhalis, 2000; Wang, 2011). Others take a more management-oriented focus. For Hawkins (2004, p. 298), 'destination management refers to the specific decisions and actions tourism managers can take in order to enhance the destination's core and supporting resources'. In a recent handbook the WTO (2007, p. 4) defined destination management as:

...the co-ordinated management of all the elements that make up a destination (attractions, amenities, access, marketing and pricing). Destination management takes a strategic approach to link these sometimes very separate entities for the better management of the destination. Joined up management can help avoid duplication of effort with regards to promotion, visitor services, training, business support and identify any management gaps that are not being addressed.

A tendency in much of the literature has been to link destination management and marketing together and to consider these in terms of the roles of DMOs, variously defined as Destination Marketing or Management Organizations. Although Crouch and Ritchie (1999, p. 149) stated more than a decade ago that 'this

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broader view [DMOs as Destination Management Organizations] sees management as responsible for the well-being of all aspects of the destination', in many places and in many studies DMOs continue to be regarded essentially as Destination Marketing Organizations (Wang, 2011) whose main function is 'to increase tourist visitation to a destination area' (Wang & Pizam, 2011 p. x). Other researchers also recognize the roles and activities of various levels of government and their multiple agencies, NGOs and private sector organizations (Jenkins et al., 2011; Mason, 2003; Pearce, 1992; Welford & Ytterhus, 2004). Jenkins et al. (2011, p. 34), for example, observe that 'local government remains at the very centre of Australian destination planning, policy-making, development and management as a result of responsibilities in

managing land use and the environmental impacts of development, infrastructure provision and asset management...'

In this discussion over what activities are being undertaken, by whom and for what purpose one essential aspect of destination management has been largely ignored or taken for granted, namely what is the scope and extent of destination management? Does destination management refer only to activities and practices carried out in a destination-wide manner (i.e. across a resort as a whole), or does it involve a series of more dispersed and diffuse actions which together contribute to the management of the destination, however that is defined? If the latter, do these actions need to be coordinated through some common strategy (WTO, 2007) and mediated by some organizational framework

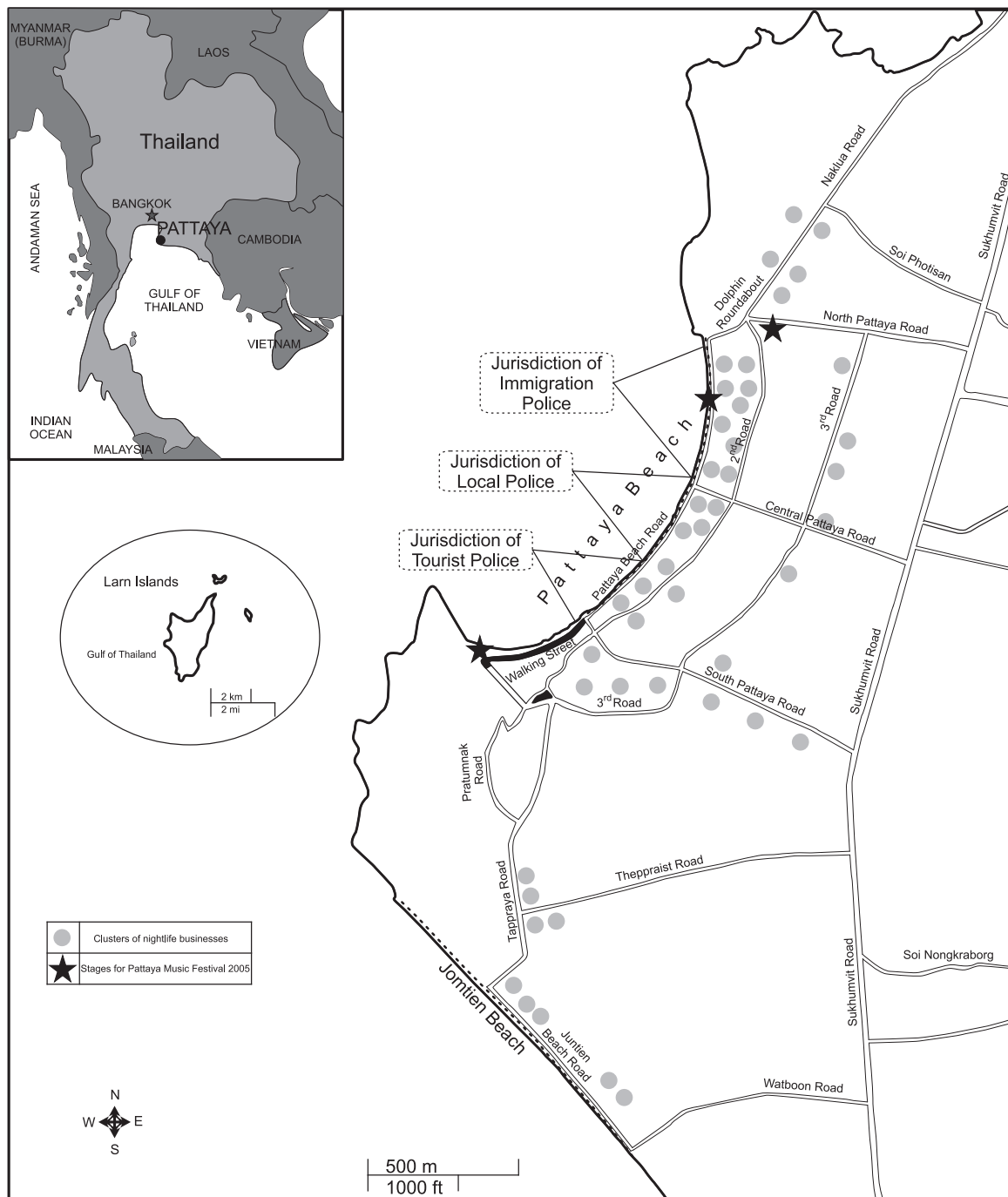


Fig. 1. Pattaya: location and distribution of management features analysed.

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