DEVELOPING AND FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE URBAN TOURISM THROUGH GOVERNANCE NETWORKS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLAND AND THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

A trans-national comparative case study was conducted in Thailand and England to answer two questions. How exactly do governance networks (GNs) influence sustainable urban tourism (SUT) policies and practices? And what lessons can be drawn from the analysis of effective GNs in urban tourism? Data was collected from documentary evidence and through interviews relating to World Heritage Sites (WHS) in Bath and Ayutthaya and the seaside towns of Margate and Pattaya. The study confirmed that GNs offer an effective and suitable means of addressing the challenges of SUT in two widely differing political and cultural contexts. Successful GNs were observed to feature strong leadership, a high degree of democracy and local control, trust, inclusion, and agreement on policy goals and implementation. Empirical evidence also highlighted the tenet that effective GNs are more likely to be formed when dialogue is encouraged, knowledge is freely exchanged and problems are addressed and solved through partnership.
Keywords: governance networks, sustainable urban tourism, heritage management, seaside town management

INTRODUCTION

Although hierarchical models remain in place in public administration, governance increasingly proceeds through networks involving a negotiated process that allows a plurality of stakeholders to produce joint decisions and mutual solutions on the basis of trust and political obligation, which can subsequently maintain networks by creating self-regulation and norms. The surge in interest in and the establishment of such GNs is prompted by persistent criticism of traditional hierarchical forms of government, which are considered to be excessively rigid and reactive. Partnerships and inter-organisational networks are perceived as the key to more flexible and proactive governance.

Some scholars point out that GNs might strengthen the balance and equity of policy, as a principal goal of sustainable development, through democratic leaning, and the empowerment of stakeholders from different sectors. However, others argue that GNs are likely to create an unequal pattern of participation replicating the patterns of decision-making and asymmetric power found in traditional representative democracy (Dryzek, 2007; Davies, 2011).

Tourism is a key sector of economic activity, distinguished by increasing international cooperation, interdependency and competition. It has been estimated that tourism accounted for 3.1 percent of global economic activity in 2016; this is predicted to rise to 11.4 percent by 2027 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). Awareness of SUT – which is perceived as an approach balancing economic development, social demands and environmental protection – has also developed significantly over the last 30 years to generate a positive impact on tourism (UNEP and WTO, 2005). The literature suggests that GNs are likely to play a major role in determining the socioeconomic success of urban tourism since a pluralistic approach

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is required to orchestrate the activity of multiple stakeholders at multiple levels to create effective partnerships and to achieve common goals.

There has been little progress in implementing the GN approach within the Thai public and private sector but the Thai government considers that GNs offer a useful mechanism for sustaining development in urban tourism. England, on the other hand, has accumulated more than 25 years' experience of using the GN approach in urban tourism and thus provides a useful benchmark for identifying the factors which promote the creation of successful GNs.

There are very few studies of GNs in relation to urban tourism; this research was designed to address this shortfall. The main aims were: (1) to explore how and why GNs in different guises influence SUT policies and practices; and (2) to critically examine the conditions required for effective GNs to be created and to operate effectively, such that SUT is enhanced. The research was conducted in Thailand and England to examine and compare the impact of GNs on SUT in two countries which have very different political systems and cultural contexts.

BACKGROUND: GNS

The traditional, hierarchical model (typical of the 20th century) of government-dominated public administration is no longer considered an effective way of dealing with a range of increasingly complex social and economic issues, such as unemployment and healthcare and pollution control. These issues are seen to be best resolved by GNs which are based on the cooperation and interdependency of various stakeholders.

The structure of GNs varies depending on the national and local context; this flexibility allows them to mirror norms, values, ideas and practices. This leads in turn to different policy choices and outcomes. Rhodes (1997) emphasises horizontal relations in terms of autonomous, self-governing networks, which are increasingly removed from influence and control by the central state. However, Bache (2003) and Davies (2003) argue that the state still retains power over local authorities. Three basic forms of GNs have been identified according to Provan and Kenis (2008).

Participant-governed networks are decentralised and managed by the network members who control decision-making. This type of network is widely seen at grassroots level and aims to strengthen "community capacity".

Lead organisation-governed networks are highly centralised with an asymmetrical power distribution, resulting in one group dominating management and agenda control. This model often occurs in Thailand's local government system.

Network administrative organisations are externally governed by an administrative unit, which plays a central role in communication, coordination and decision-making.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Selection of urban tourism centres for the case studies

The heritage tourism sector lends itself well to the analysis of GNs in relation to SUT, since effective management requires support from numerous stakeholders who are working towards shared goals yet have different and sometimes contradictory agendas. Tension can arise, for example, due to the preservationist ethos of the WHS and attempts by local authorities to extract maximum economic benefit. WHS in Bath and Ayutthaya were selected for study to identify the key variables that help explain GN dynamics, unstable periods of partnership working and enabling factors.

Margate and Pattaya were selected as examples of "seaside towns". The evolution of seaside resorts is essentially a form of urbanisation. As seaside resorts mature, ambience deteriorates, pollution levels climb, negative social impacts increase, and questions of equity arise. In the late 1990s, Margate's local government and funding agencies decided to develop

new forms of economic activity to stimulate tourism and revive the town. It was envisaged that cultural tourism would drive regeneration through direct benefits and secondary spending in the local economy. While Margate felt the post-1970s decline in UK seaside tourism particularly keenly, Pattaya is becoming increasingly attractive as a tourist destination, resulting in major economic growth, job creation and revenue. However, there is a need to consider SUT in relation to negative social and environmental impacts. For example, the private sector has become a key player in driving resort development but may place more emphasis on profit than socioeconomic benefit.

Trans-national comparative case studies were conducted to examine the relationship between the structure of GNs and their influence on SUT in WHS in Bath and Ayutthaya and in seaside towns in Margate and Pattaya. Each case study provided a unique opportunity to compare and contrast the development and effectiveness of GNs. A longitudinal analysis was conducted for each case study and thematic, cross-case analyses were performed to identify key findings. Extensive data were drawn from multiple sources, including documentary and in-depth interviews. The interviewees associated with each case study were "elites" from public authorities, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. The aim was to ensure that all three pillars around SUT (economic, social and the natural environment) were represented. A total of 37 participants were interviewed – Bath and Margate (18 interviewees), Ayutthaya and Pattaya (19 interviewees).

FINDINGS

The case studies provided empirical support for the following propositions in relation to the effectiveness of GNs in SUT. An overview of the case study analysis is illustrated in Figure 1.

Proposition 1: Institutional design directly affects network initiatives and the roles of actors, such as local tiers of government.

Evidence from the Bath case suggests that a unitary system where there is only one level of local government covering an area promotes holistic management and the creation of highly efficient channels of communication. Stakeholders in the Thai and English cases interact frequently with central government and state regulators, which are crucial links for both regulation and financing. Bath's advantage lies in strong policies/plans for the WHS and successful implementation due to the appointment of a coordinator. Evidence from the Thai cases showed GNs driven at the national level through agencies appointed by central government, typical of a hierarchical structure. The state has historically devolved some functions to the regional level, together with the means to allocate funds. The role of the centre is clear, as power is retained while function is devolved.

Proposition 2: A coordinator needs to be appointed with leadership skills to manage conflict among partners and to influence key policy decisions across and beyond the organisation.

GN leadership in the Bath case works on two levels, through a formal authority which delegates essential powers to a coordinator, who assists in policy development and directs implementation. The coordinator possesses highly developed leadership skills to help mobilise stakeholder support for the management plan.

Unlike in Bath, the coordinator in the Pattaya case – DASTA (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration) – appears to have less authority, as the position is neither permanent nor well-resourced and does not cover the entire territorial area. This may lead to network instability and lowered influence to pursue network goals. Thus, sufficient authority is crucial to enable a coordinator to fulfil the expected role.

Figure 1: Overview of case study analysis
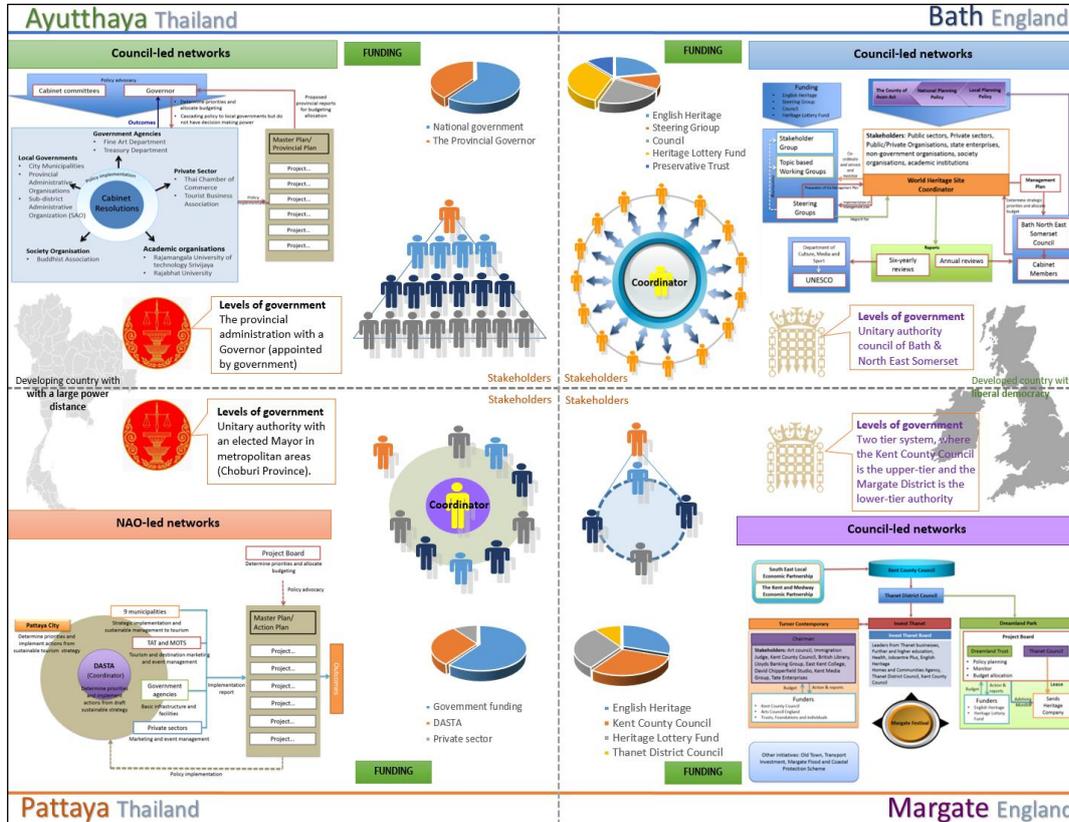
Source: the researcher

Proposition 3: The involvement of social groups representing civil society and non-governmental organisations is expected to deliver an essential contribution to the policy-making process.

Empirical evidence from the Bath case confirmed that a wide range of stakeholders is needed to help mobilise specific (local) expertise, improve awareness and support for policy measures, enhance the legitimacy of decisions, and build new networks and coalitions.

Unlike in Bath, there was little evidence of such actions in Ayutthaya. A majority of the interviewees said there were too many stakeholders and partners in the network and they did not represent the full spectrum of tourism industry interests. The private sector, social groups and non-governmental organisations were not involved to a large degree. The overall effect was to weaken the GN and restrict development of SUT.

Proposition 4: The more engaged the stakeholders are throughout the planning process, the greater their chances are of making the right decisions.

The GN operated in Bath included different stakeholders who were engaged throughout the planning process. The coordinator shared ideas and obtained agreement on issues, often in an informal context, and opportunities were provided for local residents to share knowledge and ideas in the initial stage of agenda setting (Portney and Berry, 2010). Thus, it may be concluded that the planning system involves collective decision-making by all stakeholders, which would be more likely to engender support.

In contrast to the Bath WHS case, the strategic plan in Ayutthaya was mainly formulated by central government, without the involvement of local authorities or the public. Locals felt that they received orders and direction from above without being consulted and did not therefore understand the importance of the WHS. This may explain why residents believed that the WHS was likely to create more problems than benefits for the city. Thus, it seems that networks fully mandated by government agencies do not elicit the effective cooperation, commitment and contribution of stakeholders to network goals.

Proposition 5: The development of a more formal, deeper interactive relationship over time influences sustainable collaboration.

Like the Bath case, Ayutthaya featured a GN model in which the city council played a major role in establishing and controlling collaborative processes. Evidence from the Margate study illustrated two types of GN. One was similar to Bath, while the second "Dreamland venture" presented a model similar to participant-governed networks in which the members manage external relations with groups such as funding bodies, government and customers. The Pattaya case provides an example of a network administrative organisation where a central government appointed agency, DASTA, plays a broker role in coordinating and sustaining the networks. Such models are generally set up when the network first forms, to stimulate growth through targeted funding and/or network facilitation and to ensure that network goals are met (Eggers and Goldsmith, 2004).

Empirical evidence from all cases confirmed that the setting up of formal networks was likely to be advantageous for maintaining stability. However, the Ayutthaya study demonstrated that tight control by central government compromises the core principles and purpose of GNs and alienates participants. On the other hand, high flexibility and adaptability could be difficult to sustain. Strategies for achieving the stability of GNs are best learned from long established and successful networks, as exemplified by the Bath study. This model featured a high degree of democracy and local control, inclusion, collective responsibility, effective coordination and collaboration of stakeholders, and agreement on policy goals and implementation.

Factors which promote or inhibit GNs

Each type of GN has strengths and weaknesses in relation to enhancing SUT and can profoundly influence how ideas and initiatives are promoted or inhibited. The study identified key foundational and individual factors which affect the performance of GNs engaged in SUT. Tables 1 and 2 summarises the findings and should be read in conjunction with this discussion.

Foundational platform factors

Proposition 6: In weak state structures, a wide range of politicians and bureaucrats can claim some jurisdiction and equal relationship.

This study confirmed the argument of Klijn (2008) that national political and cultural factors distinguish partnerships in different countries. The authoritarian "top-down" nature of modern Thai society has been a feature throughout its history. Inequalities are accepted and a strict chain of command and protocol are observed – those in lower positions show loyalty, respect, and deference to their superiors in return for protection and guidance. This system may lead to paternalistic management, where major issues do not come to the surface, resulting in stalemate outcomes. Attitudes towards people in higher positions are more formal in Thai society and information flow is hierarchical and controlled. British society, on the other hand, believes that inequalities among people should be minimised (Hofstede, 1984). Clearly, a compelling reason for the success of Bath's governance model is that social forces support democracy and equality.

The major challenges to establishing effective GNs in Thailand are a highly hierarchical and deferential culture, and fierce bureaucratic resistance to decentralisation. These traits remain very much part of Thai political and administrative life.

Effective partnerships

All case studies clearly showed that effective partnerships were a requirement for good governance. Although extreme command-and-control" approaches were not found in the case studies, the threat and enactment of legislation were evidence of explicit assertions of hierarchy. Empirical evidence from the Bath case demonstrated that successful partnership working was characterised by an equal relationship between partners and local government within the unitary authority.

In the English cases, the national level does not dominate decision-making at a local level. Collaboration in the Thai cases was considered asymmetric between central and local governments, reflecting the strong hierarchical social system of Thai culture. The Ayutthaya case showed the strong steering role of the centre as illustrated by the importance ascribed to three agencies in the WHS (the Fine Art Department, Department of Treasury and City Municipality) and the distribution of funds.

Proposition 7: A strong positive culture leads to strong inter-agency collaboration.

Empirical evidence indicated that different cultures are likely to create GNs of different types and dynamics. Bath's GN demonstrates a strong positive and optimistic culture and is organised to represent the broad city interests. The steering group meets formally twice a year and there are also many formal and informal interactions with the coordinator and the chairman. Additionally, Bath has very strong communication within the networks and participants share a strong sense of purpose and strategic direction.

Table 1: Foundational platform factors influencing the effectiveness of GNs operating in SUT

Foundational platform factors	Bath	Ayutthaya	Margate	Pattaya
National political factors	Social forces lead to democracy and equality.	Decentralisation did not help weak and inefficient administrative bodies.	Reform objectives to enhance local democracy.	Inequalities among stakeholders should be minimised.
Effective partnership	High: Equal relationship between partners and local government.	Low: Asymmetric between central and local governments.	Low: Collaboration between the two tiers is needed.	Low: Asymmetric between central and local governments.
Positive and negative cultures	High: Positive attitude and leans towards optimism.	Low: Nobody listened to or supported to partners.	High: Positive attitude.	Low: Key actors do not realise importance of partnership working.
Teamwork and collaboration	High: Partnership working seen as a valued method of operation.	Low: Thais do not show a positive attitude towards teamwork.	High: Within each network. Low: Between networks.	High: Between coordinator and municipalities. Low: Key actors prefer a stand-alone strategy.

Foundational platform factors	Bath	Ayutthaya	Margate	Pattaya
Oral communication "story telling"	High: Stakeholders encouraged to speak in whatever manner felt comfortable to them.	Low: Thais avoid criticism and leave problems on the table.	High: Stakeholders were encouraged to express their views.	High: Communication between local municipalities.

Source: the researcher

Table 2: Individual factors influencing the effectiveness of GNs operating in SUT

Individual factors	Bath	Ayutthaya	Margate	Pattaya
Leadership	High: Coordinator has full positional and personal authority.	Low: Council seemed to lack legitimacy to integrate all sectors to achieve shared goals.	Low: Local government plays inactive role.	Low: Coordinator's position is neither permanent nor well-resourced (Pattaya City decided not to take part).
Acceptance of diversity, equity and inclusiveness	High: Bath seeks to engage citizens.	Low: Nobody listens to or supports their partners.	Low: Legitimate coordinator is required.	Low: Key actors are expected to be included.
Clear role and responsibilities of participants	High: Task-oriented and outcome-focused.	Low: Central and local governments overlapping and diffused, resulting in a lack of clarity and direction in WHS management.	High: Task-oriented and outcome-focused. Low: No holistic view.	High: Task-oriented and outcome-focused but limited in broader sense.
Degree of consensus	High: Stakeholders agree on network-level goals.	Low: Each stakeholder seeks to bring benefits for its organisational preference.	Low: Elites play influential role in decision-making.	Low: Search for consensus between local governments, except Pattaya City.
Trust	High: Interactions are dense and frequent and funding are clear.	Low: Relationships between central and regional governments are tense.	High: Within each network. Low: Between upper-tier and lower-tier.	High: Except Pattaya City.

Source: the researcher

Teamwork and collaboration

Effective communication strategies and mechanisms to coordinate partner activities are needed to facilitate synergistic thinking and action. Network members in the Bath GN realised the importance of cooperative interaction to improve individual performance, enhance legitimacy, attract resources and develop new ideas.

In contrast, interviews in Ayutthaya and Pattaya revealed that Thai people do not show a positive attitude towards teamwork and prefer a stand-alone strategy in collaborative working. This is particularly the case for Pattaya City, which has more power and resources than other municipalities.

Oral communication

The Bath study demonstrated that effective oral communication is important for building effective GNs. Stakeholders were encouraged to speak in whatever manner felt comfortable to them and no conditions were placed on the way they shared or presented information.

Assertive communication rarely occurred in the Thai cases, particularly among group members with lower positions. Most Thai are loyal to the group they belong to, indicating the influence of the country's collectivist culture, and this over-rides most other societal rules and regulations. In order to preserve the "in-group", Thais are not confrontational and "yes" may not mean an acceptance or agreement. Personal relationships are key to conducting business, and it takes time to build these; thus, patience is necessary as well as not openly discussing business at the first meeting. As a result, there are difficulties in reaching agreement.

Individual factors

Proposition 8: Inclusiveness empowers and broadens public participation in network arrangements.

The empirical evidence from the Bath case suggests that it is crucial to involve the right partners. Problems in policy decision-making and implementation can arise due to the resistance of various participants with different perceptions and views. Bath seeks not only to empower and broaden citizens' participation in the GN, but also to deepen participation, for example by ensuring that preferences influence outcomes.

Unlike Bath, the question of equity and inclusiveness arises in the Margate case, where the local community has less influence on policy-making. It is clear that in the Margate network more emphasis must be placed on providing a platform for the local community to ensure that the socioeconomic benefits of cultural tourism reach all residents.

Proposition 9: Achieving effective outcomes often depends on clear roles and responsibilities, which encourage actors to activate their resources and knowledge for the problem and/or policy process at stake.

All case studies revealed formal institutional structures which set out clear roles and responsibilities, as stated in their strategic plan. The Bath network was effective because participants generally agreed on network-level goals and wanted to create an attractive city and vibrant economy, as well as attract visitors and maintain their WHS status.

In Ayutthaya, stakeholders' roles and responsibilities were assigned in accordance with cabinet resolution. However, they were overlapping and diffuse, resulting in a lack of clarity and direction in WHS management. The dominance of overlapping governmental stakeholders in Ayutthaya due to the traditional bureaucratic system and the nature of Thai governance meant that the notion of a GN where each stakeholder was equal would be doomed to failure, especially given the territorial nature of responsibility among the stakeholders.

Empirical evidence confirmed the importance of appropriate levels of goal consensus in network governance (Van de Ven, 1976). Interviewees recognised the importance of having a broadly shared vision and consensus among partners for achieving long-term goals. Bath also seemed cognisant of the challenges presented in "staying focused on the shared goal" and was better able to not only articulate these challenges but also, and more importantly, to respond to them. Unlike the other three cases, Bath possessed the discipline to commit to a long-term strategy and let this dictate the partnership's focus and structure, rather than letting short-term goals distract attention and consume scarce funding.

"Influence" is an important parameter that can have a significant effect on network operations. Empirical studies indicated that influence is based on a number of factors, such as control of material resources, information, knowledge, and social and political support. The link between centrality and influence has been well established in the general social network

literature (Burkhardft and Brass, 1990). The Bath case illustrated that the lead organisation in the network is more likely to influence the decisions of other stakeholders and maintain a "gatekeeping" role through control of resources. In the Margate case, elite and high-profile participants are perceived to be the most influential bodies in policy networks.

The Ayutthaya case highlighted the power of stakeholders and their original affiliations. Influence on decision-making reflected Thai culture. Thais always say "yes" to influential organisations because they fear the consequences of conflict and exclusion from the group arising from a candid expression of views. In Pattaya, most stakeholders had equal status (sub-district councils) within the administrative network with similar power. Thus, they could freely express opinions, identify issues and solve problems that local authorities would not be able to cope with alone.

Proposition 10: Building trust and relationships can improve problem-solving capacity.

The empirical evidence confirmed that building strong relationships among partners is essential for the creation of effective GNs. The interviews showed that trust was built by sharing and discussing information, and forming long-term, reciprocal relationships. A group thinks in new ways only if members talk to one another and are influenced by what they hear. The Bath case illustrated that trust exists because of frequent interactions and previous trusting relationships. Informal interactions were found to bring positive outcomes, particularly with planning issues

Unlike Bath, decision-making in Ayutthaya was hampered by the unwillingness of actors to share information: they feared opportunistic behaviour from other participants. Distrust was also evident in the Pattaya case because Pattaya City – a key actor – perceived the claiming of credit for collaborative achievements to be a manifestation of power. It is important to note that an element of "distrust" is also necessary. According to the interviews, a certain amount of distrust seems "healthy" in keeping partners sharp in their cooperative relationship. It can increase the checks and balances that create better understanding.

DISCUSSION

It was evident from the English case studies that effective institutional design requires strong, open, and accountable local government working in partnership with all interested parties. The empirical evidence revealed that the unitary authority, in the Bath case, working through a highly skilled coordinator, promoted effective holistic management and created communication channels which facilitated the activities of the complex GN.

The Bath WHS case study clearly demonstrated the ability of GNs to enhance SUT. The local council was the central player in the GN, and the main funding source and the partnership model featured broad representation of key stakeholders including, in some cases, funding bodies from independent organisations and the private sector. Non-governmental organisations from civil society also played an active role in fostering SUT but were steered by council leadership.

The Ayutthaya WHS case study demonstrated poor application of GN principles. Formal hierarchical structures were in place which lacked dynamism, and policy-making was based on self-referential rather than inter-organisational decisions. At the same time, practice showed that existing governmental organisations were incapable of developing effective partnerships. GNs call for an exchange of information between stakeholders and a willingness to seek mutually agreeable solutions. The Ayutthaya case clearly did not function in this way, recognising the need for cooperation but not converting this into practice. The Ayutthaya case also showed the difficulty of interactive decision-making when government stakeholders retain primacy. Consequently, private partners and non-profit organisations were

reluctant to contribute knowledge and effort, which created serious obstacles to achieving synergy and problem solving. It is imperative, therefore, that traditional bureaucratic approaches are replaced by effective GN models rather than simply paying "lip service" to the need for change.

The Margate and Pattaya seaside town case studies demonstrated GN initiatives driven by the need for councils to address resource and funding scarcity. In Pattaya, the central government exerts overall control and primary decision-making powers through an appointed facilitator or coordinator (DASTA). The Pattaya system of governance seems to offer a more "inclusive" model of GNs in SUT since it is successfully managing the rapid development of tourism and the associated increases in population and demands on infrastructure.

The major obstacle to implementing GNs in SUT in Margate is the complex structure of the network, which involves a myriad of partners with no overarching coordination body. The role of the district council was essentially subservient to that of the county council and there was little evidence of strong collaboration between the two tiers. Nonetheless, the Margate GN model clearly showed how a unique cultural heritage can translate into urban regeneration and positive economic impact, as exemplified by the success of the Turner Contemporary gallery.

CONCLUSION

Empirical evidence confirmed that effective GNs are more likely to be formed when dialogue is encouraged, strategy is agreed, knowledge is freely exchanged, and problems are addressed and solved through collaboration.

The study identified key factors affecting the formation and effectiveness of different types of GNs and their impact on SUT. The norms of leadership, inclusiveness, transparency, responsibility and equity must be followed at the network level. However, GNs continue to be a contested domain between different stakeholders and are subject to competing imperatives.

The challenge for Thailand where stalemate in policy development is the more likely outcome is to build on the existing centrally controlled and directed policy networks to allow more local control. In England, democratic concerns play a decisive role in governance but do not guarantee the development of effective partnerships or policy outcomes. Individual factors, including commitment to collective goals, trust and inclusion, need to be considered and synergised. The current best practices found in Bath's GN, which is closest to the pluralistic model, offer a sound framework for adaptation to the Thai context.

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