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Barriers towards hotel disaster preparedness: Case studies of post 2011 Tsunami, Japan

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ABSTRACT

For many coastal destinations, its geography provides a variety of intrinsic resources that serve as the foundation of its tourism industry, while simultaneously exposing the area to natural hazard risks. Although literature in the fields of tourism and disaster management have identified the accommodation industry's potential in contributing towards disaster preparedness, very few hotels were designated as evacuation buildings during the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Utilizing a mixed methodology of surveys and interviews, this research investigated the state of disaster management collaboration between local governments and hotels. Three Japanese cities were selected due to similar population sizes, presence of a tourism economy, and a history of tsunami vulnerability. Interviews revealed a number of common barriers hotels faced in adopting disaster preparedness initiatives, such as evacuation training, maintaining emergency supplies, and communicating hazard risks to tourists. The presence of a destination marketing organization in one city, contributed towards improved collaboration between the public and private sectors, allowing stakeholders to overcome some of the financial, knowledge, and human resource limitations facing them.

1. Introduction

For many coastal destinations, the ocean is one of its primary intrinsic asset used to attract visitors. The Asia-Pacific Region is poised to become the largest tourism region in the world, projected to welcome over 535 million visitors by 2030 [1,2]. However, as much of the Pacific Rim lies within the Ring-of-Fire, these coastal destinations are vulnerable to a multitude of natural hazards including: tropical cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Despite these vulnerabilities, planners may be adverse towards adopting structural mitigation strategies, such as seawalls and embankments, due to fears of altering local landscapes and negatively impacting the tourism experience [3]. Reluctance towards structural mitigation are also financial, due to high construction expenses, costly maintenance, and the low probability of a major disaster event. Non-structural mitigation, such as early warning systems, education, and evacuation drills, are an alternative solution that can be less costly, reduces exposure to hazards, prevents loss of life, and strengthens disaster resiliency [4]. Indeed, research on the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (GEJE) have found strong correlations between mortality rates with community social capital and political orientation, suggesting that planners should consider non-

structural mitigation approaches to strengthen community resiliency [5].

According to a UNESCO report, hotels can contribute to destination disaster preparedness as their facilities typically possess an established emergency response system. Its tall structure allows the hotel to function as a vertical evacuation building while its abundant room capacity can serve as short-term refuge during the response phase of a disaster. The presence of large food stock and backup electric generators can be utilized by evacuees [6]. Brown et al., summarizes literature on the roles hotels can play before and after a disaster event, but despite its potential, staffing shortages, lack of planning abilities, low levels of training, and organizational culture limited the ability of hotels to improve its disaster preparedness [7]. The experiences of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami highlight the gap in hazard risk perception between tourists and the local community. Nearly half of the fatalities in Khao Lak, Thailand consisted of tourists. Survivors indicated low awareness of local hazard risks and evacuation strategies. [8]. Interviews with British tourists visiting locations affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami revealed that many visitors did not evacuate after initial tremors [9]. The case Khao Lak's hotels highlight problems that stem from disagreement over stakeholder roles and responsibilities over

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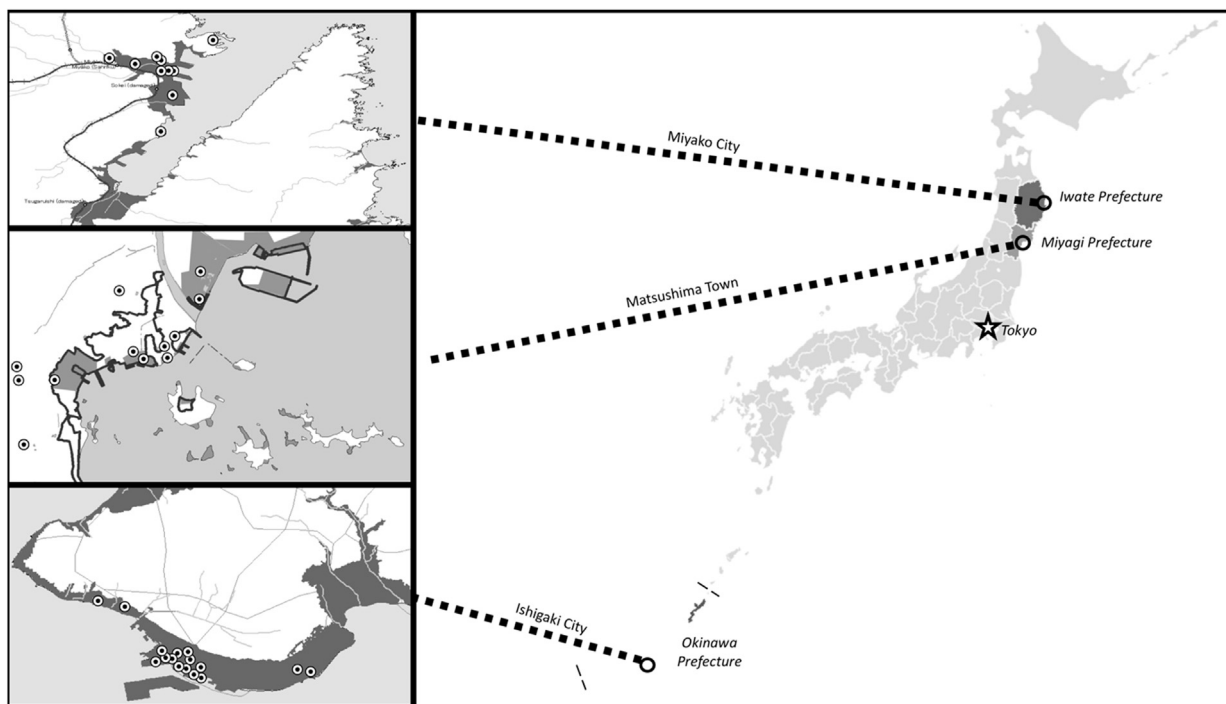


Fig. 1. This research's three case study locations in Japan. Shaded areas represent tsunami inundation zones based on municipal hazard maps. In the case of Matsushima City, shaded areas refer to areas inundated by the 2011 tsunami while the outlined areas refer to inundation areas based on municipal hazard maps [13–15]. Circles indicate location of hotels.

the safety and security of tourists.

Existing research in Japan have identified hotels in cities inundated by the 2011 GEJE, such as Matsushima, Ishinomaki, and Kesenuma, received evacuees. Prior to the tsunami, owners and managers had offered their hotels to local officials in hopes of being officially recognized as evacuation buildings, but to no avail [10–12]. This research examines public-private collaboration in Japan and the outcomes it has produced towards disaster preparedness among the hotel industry since 2011. For the purpose of this research, we have chosen two coastal cities in Tohoku, the region most devastated by GEJE, and examine how local governments and the hotel industry have collaborated towards implementing disaster preparedness initiatives which can lead to improved destination resiliency. Additionally, a third city located in southern Japan in Okinawa Prefecture, was chosen due to its similar tsunami hazard risk as well as the presence of an established Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) (Fig. 1).

Through this comparison, this research first examines the nature of public-private collaboration in two municipalities in the Tohoku Region, Matsushima Town and Miyako City, and seeks to discover how disaster risk management between the municipality and hotels have changed after 2011, and what kind of barriers may exist that prevent the adoption of disaster risk management initiatives. Secondly, by adding a third city, Ishigaki, this research examines how the existence of a DMO can influence collaborative planning outcomes towards disaster risk management and what lessons can be adopted by tourism stakeholders (Fig. 1).

2. Literature review

2.1. Collaborative planning theory

Collaborative planning is broadly defined as a collective process for participants to resolve their conflicts and to advance shared visions among a diverse set of stakeholders [16,17]. It differs from other participatory methods in that it emphasizes voluntary participation, face to face dialogue, social learning, and consensus based agreements [18–20]. The level of involvement between stakeholders surpasses

other planning processes and can be seen as a strategy to deal with conflict where other practices have failed [21]. Local stakeholders are encouraged to define and develop policy agendas that affect their place [22].

The primary benefit of collaborative planning is that it is more likely to resolve conflict among competing stakeholders than other methods as it identifies solutions that needs the mutual needs of all parties than individual groups [21,23]. Collaborative planning also strengthens institutional capacity through their effects on knowledge, relational resources, and the capacity for mobilization. Social capital is generated which lead to new or strengthened relationships, which Booher refers to as second order effects. Furthermore, successful collaborations can even spawn third order effects which include spin-off partnerships, new collaborations, the emergence of new norms or the establishment of new institutions [18].

Despite the benefits of collaborative planning, a number of obstacles have been identified that may dissuade stakeholders from participating. Due its emphasize on dialogue and consensus building, collaborative planning has been viewed as being time intensive [24]. Due to the amount of time required, stakeholders have felt that collaboration can be inefficient. Secondly, despite efforts to limit power imbalances that may emerge from the presence of influential stakeholders, asymmetrical distribution of negotiation skills and resources may allow such stakeholders to continue to dominate the collaborative processes [25,23].

2.2. Destination marketing organizations

The predecessors to DMOs were established in the early 20th century. Many of these pioneer DMOs formed in the distant peripheries of the world, such as the establishment of the New Zealand Department of Tourist and Health Resorts in 1901, Hawaii Visitors Bureau in 1903, and similar organizations in Jersey and Hong Kong. The 1980's and 1990's witnessed the rapid world-wide expansion of convention visitor's bureaus (CVB) which were later rebranded as DMOs in an effort to convey a less bureaucratic connotation to tourists [26].

The primary motivation for government intervention in tourism

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