

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON LOCAL RESIDENTS' WILLINGNESS AND ACTION  
TOWARDS REVITALIZATION OF DEVASTATED VILLAGES  
BEYOND THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI IN 2011  
~ CASE STUDY ON UNOSUMAI DISTRICT, KAMAISHI CITY, IWATE PREFECTURE~

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ABSTRACT

The Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami that occurred on March 11th 2011 caused severe damage to the coastal area of the northern part of Japan, including the research site in Kamaishi City in Iwate Prefecture. Among the city, especially Unosumai district suffered the severest damage, with more than half of affected buildings and victims in the whole city. Originally, Japanese local society has the problem of shrinking society, which means not only a population decrease but also a decline of economic and social activities inside areas (Watanabe, 1967). In case of Kamaishi City, they also suffer from “loss of identity” (Genda and Ohori, 2008), after the recession of iron industry in 1960s. Considering the fact that disaster play a role of exposing potential social change, and promoting the change (Hirose, 1981), and the need to create a better society by considering the damage caused by the earthquake as “creative destruction” (Hayashi, 2009), the term “disaster recovery” can be defined as follows in this research: Disaster recovery not only means bringing population back to their original status, but also solving original challenges such as shrinking society that was worsen by the disaster. Thus, we should deeply

discuss the revitalization of the local area as ultimate goal beyond population outflows as direct damage. From previous studies, necessary points to meet the definition above are; (i) Considering influences of social functions or challenges to individual life recovery, (ii) Grasping indirect factors such as value or feeling behind opinions or actions, and (iii) Investigating real actions of local residents including leadership or discussion to discuss potential self-governance in ongoing recovery process.

The objective of this research is to find a possible way for local residents in Unosumai district to achieve “disaster recovery” which was defined in the previous section, through an ethnographic study on local residents’ willingness and action toward revitalization of devastated Unosumai district beyond 3.11 disaster.

The methodology of this research consists of informal interviews, targeting local residents who still remain inside of Kamaishi city and somehow restarted their life with work or business in four affected villages in the downstream of Unosumai basin; center of Unosumai, Katagishi, Nebama and Hakozaki. By seven site visits from March 2012 to January 2013, 19 interviewees were collected through local people’s networks; 1) local leaders engaging in green tourism or cultural conservation, 2) some merchants who restarted their businesses in temporal shop streets in pre-fabric buildings prepared by government. Six key questions from Q1 to Q6 were extracted.

Q1: Trigger or conclusive factor to return to original village or restart their life and business / Q2: Preparedness to take risks / Q3: Attachment to local area / Q4: Meaning of this disaster / Q5: Awareness and action to local issues existed even before the disaster / Q6: Future vision and action toward disaster recovery

Interviewees were classified into three groups based on interview results focusing on Q1 to Q6. Group 1 originally had strong attachment to local area and also took leadership tackling local challenges. Even after the disaster, they continuously pursued proactive and wider-scale action for disaster recovery with organization skills and leadership. Group 2 clearly aware of original local challenges as well as an unclear

future vision toward disaster recovery, their attachment and willingness to remain might have been reduced, which let them take an inactive (just adaptive) attitude toward disaster recovery. Group 3 originally have stronger attachment to the local area but less awareness of local challenges and their scopes are limited to the individual level (about themselves or people around them). Eventually, in spite of their stronger attachment /willingness of return to local area, they take a passive attitude toward disaster recovery.

As result, the following challenges were observed in each group. Challenge of Group 1 is that each local leader is independent from each other but currently developing a whole structure and role division among diversified recovery discussion bodies. Challenges of Group 2 are: 1) They have fewer intentions to reflect their critical but minor opinions into recovery discussion, and 2) They have fewer intentions of long-term business from current short-term adaptation. Challenge of Group 3 is the difficulty to correctly understand the updated discussion for the recovery and land adjustment plan.

In the discussion, two future visions are derived from the interview results. For Group 1 and Group 2, that is involvement of Group 2 (mainly store owners) into town rebuilding discussion. There is an ongoing discussion of establishing a Unosumai basin-scale consociation, combining diverse discussion bodies emerged in these two years. Merchants like Group 2 should be also integrated in this whole structure by organization skills of Group 2. As there is already a new organization for recovery which consist of around 15 merchants in their 30s to 50s, I would strongly expect other merchants to join it and this association itself to be structured into a whole Unosumai basin consociation with enough power of reflecting opinions from such younger generations.

For Group 2 and Group 3, future vision is 1) strengthening the network of stores and customers, and 2) keeping the new community of stores from temporal shop facilities into new town building, with 3) well-examined customer needs. The relationship between Group 2 and Group 3 can be of merchants and customers. As locally based merchants selling products and services embedded in local people's daily life, Group 2 had better to try their best on keeping a reliable network with local customers like Group 3

through their businesses rather than prioritizing temporal customers from outside. Indeed, merchants like Group2 already have meeting special demands from customers in post-disaster situation. This relationship will be one of the motivations to remaining in the vacant devastated area for both merchants and customers, as if they are in the relationship of chickens and eggs. In this light, the emerging idea of putting scattered merchants into one area or facility as if a shopping mall seems to have potential with some agreements from merchants already. Also, I found an interviewee promoting daily discussion with customers for disaster recovery. These actions will be effective to gather as much needs from residents as possible, such as best location of each business and combination for safer and more convenient shopping life for customers.

In conclusion, involvement of Group2 and mutual connection with Group1 and Group3 would be a key for disaster recovery in the case of devastated Unosumai district. By promoting discussion with customers, focusing on local business network, merchants like Group2 could be in mutual-help relationship with residents like Group3. And this would be motivation for both merchants and customers to remain in devastated area. Also, Group2 could be involved into Unosumai basin-scale consociation towards wider consensus, by Group1's organization skills.

Thus, Group3 would be aware of solving original local issues through recovery discussion, and Group2 would be active in tackling with these issues with their critical opinions as well as they obtain long-term motivation to remain in the devastated area.

*Key words:*

The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, Disaster recovery, Local revitalization, Ethnography