

Tsunami Disaster and Assistance: Interviews with Key Persons in Ofunato and Tono Cities

Tadahito YAMAMOTO

OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

Date: November 4-5, 2011

Field: Ofunato (大船渡) and Tono (遠野) City, Iwate Prefecture (岩手県)

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Purpose: Disaster destroys community and infrastructure systems embedded in ordinary life. This situation often causes new types of agents and networks for emergency assistance to develop and results in the transformation of social geography. In our research, we interviewed key persons from assistance groups, which emerged after the 11/3 Tsunami in the Sanriku (三陸) coast region of Iwate Prefecture.

The interviews focus on the following:

- When and what types of assistance networks emerged?
- Where were the assistance networks based?
- Who were the agents involved?
- How were community, built environment, and infrastructure reconstructed and how are they currently transforming?

POSITION OF OFUNATO AND TONO CITIES

Ofunato City and Outline of the Tsunami in Sanriku Area

Ofunato City is one of the most seriously damaged places in the Sanriku region of the Iwate prefecture.

According to the National Police Agency (警察庁), 15,856 people are dead and 3,084 are missing as a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake (April 4, 2012). Of the bodies subject to inquest, the causes of death were: drowning (92.4%), suffocation (4.4%), and fire (1.1%). The tsunami is the primary cause for the increase in the number of victims.

Iwate Prefecture has 4,671 dead persons and 1,237 missing, most of who come from the Sanriku coast area. The dead in Ofunato City totaled 340, ranking 6th place in Sanriku among 12 cities, towns, and villages.



Photo 1 Ofunato City 4/11/2011
Note: Photograph by author.

Ofunato suffered serious damage; nevertheless, about 70% buildings remained standing. In this, it differs from Rikuzentakata (陸前高田) or Ootsuchi (大槌), and in the Sanriku region, where residential zones were nearly entirely washed away and administrative functions broke down.

Can Ofunato be reconstructed faster than other seriously damaged cities or towns? How will Ofunato's networks of assistance or particular model of reconstruction influence other areas

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through people's interactions and the media? Or, will reconstruction actually progress more slowly because complex human relationships and interests remain concentrated on the site? This is a topic of our research on Ofunato.

Tono City as the Base of Assistance for Sanriku Area: the Tono Magokoro Net

The ravaged areas of the Sanriku region are far from the Tohoku expressway and Tohoku Shinkansen (Bullet train), which serve as the main transport systems linking big cities such as Tokyo to the Tohoku region. It was difficult to enter the ravaged areas or to convey food, water, and other relief goods.

Tono City is a halfway point between Sanriku and several cities along the Tohoku expressway or Shinkansen. It takes approximately one hour to drive into the towns and cities which have suffered the most damage: Otschi, Kamaishi (釜石), Ofunato, and Rikuzentakata. On March 27, 2011, Tono Magokoro Net was founded by assistance groups for the Sanriku area and has played the central role of base camp for assistance groups, responsible for matching needs in the afflicted areas with volunteers who come from outside Iwate Prefecture. One feature of this network

is that it is composed of groups from both inside and outside of Iwate Prefecture, totaling 59 (December 2011).

Further Information:

Tono Magokoro Net (遠野まごころネット)

Web <http://tonomagokoro.net/>

INTERVIEWS

Ofunato City

Mr. Shingo KIKUCHI (菊池真吾), Chief of the San-San Group (さんさんの会)

Place: Goishi Community Center (碓石地区コミュニティセンター)



Photo 3 Mr. Shingo Kikuchi (right) at the Goishi Community Center, 4/11/2011

Note: Photograph by author.

The San-San Group sprang into action on March 12, 2011, the day following the earthquake. On that day, the chef of an Italian restaurant in Ofunato made 50 “onigiri (rice balls)” and delivered them to victims. A cooking group gradually developed, and, on March 15, it set up its base in “Riasu Hall,” a public hall that had been saved from the tsunami and was serving as one of the main shelters in Ofunato. This new hall had large kitchen facilities, which were good for cooking and distributing a large volume of emergency food to large numbers of victims. In its early phase, San-San Group delivered food to all shelters (around



Photo 2 Tono Magokoro Net in Tono Synthesis Welfare Center (遠野市総合福祉センター) 17/8/2011. Office moved to another place, Tono Clarification Center (遠野浄化センター) from Dec. 4, 2011

Note: Photograph by author.

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Photo 4 Riasu Hall 4/11/2011
Note: Photograph by author.

60 places according to Mr. Kikuchi) and even now continues to make deliveries, although the volume is gradually decreasing.

Just after the earthquake and tsunami, electric and communication systems were shut down and the main roads linking central areas to small fishing villages along the coast were destroyed in many places. Local governments did not have enough resources and power to supply food, water, and so forth in such a situation. San-San Group played an important role in compensating for the lack of government functions after the disaster.

This group sent information through Facebook and Twitter and received relief goods and food from all over Japan. It is particularly interesting to note that Shingo Kikuchi, Chief of Group San-San lives in Tono City, 50 km from Ofunato, and drives between these two cities every day. Although the San-San Group developed from a “local” situation, we cannot say it is purely a “local group.” This mixture of “inside” and “outside” elements is an important feature among systems and agents that emerged after the disaster.

The San-San Group left Riasu Hall on September 30 and moved to the Goishi Community Center, located on the coast. It is currently building its own office building, called the “San-San Kitchen House”. The Malaysian government provided the group with

building materials.

Further Information:

San-San Group (さんさんの会)

Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/sansannokai>

Mr. Kyoji IWAKI (岩城恭治), Chief of Dream Net Ofunato (夢ネット大船渡)

Place: ふれあい待合室 (The Fureai Waiting Room at Sakari Station, Sanriku railway)

Dream Net Ofunato was founded in 2006 as an intermediate group supporting civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Kesen Region (気仙地域), which is composed of Ofunato City, Rikuzentakata City, the town of Sumita (住田町). Sixty-four CSOs are listed on Dream Net’s website (Sep. 30 2011). Dream Net formed the “Civilian Liaison Conference for the Reconstruction of Kesen Region” (気仙市民復興連絡会議) in April 2011. This network distributed relief goods, emergency food, and shelters, and since April 11, has published “Reconstruction News” (復興ニュース), which carries information about types of assistance and events for victims. These actions were advised and supported by NPO Aich Net (愛知ネット) from Aichi Prefecture (愛知県).

On October 5, Dream Net founded the Fureai Waiting Room (ふれあい待合室) in the Sakari Station (盛駅) on the Sanriku railway line (三陸鉄道), which had closed after the disaster. This Waiting Room provides victims, who are often alone in an



Photo 5 The Fureai Waiting Room (Sakari Station) 4/11/2011
Note: Photograph by author.

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unfamiliar environment, the chance to communicate with each other and gives information to various types of groups and individuals who visit from outside Ofunato.

Further information:

Dream Net Ofunato (夢ネット大船渡)

Web <http://www.geocities.jp/npoyumenet/NPO.html>

Tono City

Mr. Terukazu OZEKI (大関輝一) , Staff of the NPO Independent Life Support Center (Moyai) (NPO 自立生活サポートセンター・もやい) / Foundation for Cooperative Community Creation (共生地域創造財団)

Place: Guesthouse "Bent House" (曲り屋)

Mr. Terukazu Ozeki is a member of the staff of the NPO Independent Life Support Center (Moyai), which has been a key player in the anti-poverty movement in Tokyo since its foundation in 2001, specifically after the Lehman Brother's shock in 2008. As a leader of (Moyai), Mr. Makoto YUASA (湯浅誠) has served as Special Advisor to the Cabinet (内閣府参与), focusing on social inclusion policy, and, on March 16, became Head of the Cabinet Secretariat's Volunteer Coordination Office (内閣官房ボランティア連携室長).



Photo 6 Mr. Terukazu Ozeki in the garden that is in front of his office in Tono, 5/11/2011
Note: Photograph by author.

Mr. Ozeki took part in emergency assistance in several historical disasters during the past 20 years; for example, Kobe in 1995, central Niigata in 2004, and so on. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, he first went to Sendai, the largest city in the Northeast Region, and worked with One Family Sendai (ワンファミリー仙台), a sister group of Moyai. About two weeks after the earthquake, he drove into the devastated area of Sanriku for the first time.

He mainly assisted the Ofunato area. He also became a staff member of the Foundation of Cooperative Community Creation that was founded on April 15 by the National Homeless Support Network (全国ホームレス支援機構) (office in Ktakyusyu), Green Coop (グリーンコープ共同体), and the Seikatsu Club Consumer's Cooperation Union (生活クラブ生協). Mr. Ozeki established his "base" in Tono City because Tono Magokoro Net, which aims to coordinate the need of afflicted areas with volunteer groups from all over Japan, was located there. It is important for assistance groups to be able to get information and communicate with other groups.

Mr. Ozeki gathered together various civilian groups, individuals involved in aid, and Ofunato municipal government officials and established the Ofunato Action Network (大船渡アクションネットワーク) on June 30. This network played a central role in exchanging information and promoting interaction between assistance groups in Ofunato.

Further Information:

Independent Life Support Center (Moyai) (自立サポートセンター・もやい)

Web <http://www.moyai.net/>

Foundation of Cooperative Community Creation (共生地域創造財団)

Web <http://from-east.org/>

PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Networks and “Transit Points”

We learned in these interviews that the emergency assistance system was composed of networks ranging over a broad geographical area and including various types of “transit points.” It is possible that an important feature of the disaster response process of the Great East Japan Earthquake is the blurring of the boundaries between “inside” and “outside.” We will continue to conduct research on the Sanriku area as well as on “transit points” such as Tokyo, Sendai, some industrial cities in the Iwate prefecture, for example Kitakami (北上) , and so on.

Evolution of Assistance System

The Great East Japan Earthquake has brought the systems of governance and infrastructure which have sustained people’s lives and society into question. We will research the central and municipal government’s response to the disaster and the reconstruction of the emergency assistance system.

Interview Archives

It is important to promote discourse between afflicted areas, urban areas, and various “points” within the global community. We are trying to compile archives of interviews and will publish some parts of these resources on the original website.