

TOHOKU STUDY TOUR

REPORT



NOVEMBER 2022

Course: Humanitarian Action And Natural Disasters II

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Last but not least, a thank you to all contributors of our study trip who are not listed here by name but who have contributed to a fruitful implementation of the study tour.

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INTRODUCTION

Janina Jasper and Sirine El Halabi

In late autumn, 29 November to 1 December 2022, the student group of the course Humanitarian Action and Natural Disasters II at ICU participated in a study tour to the Tōhoku region. This region in Japan is well known for the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (GEJET) disaster that hit the Sanriku coast in March 2011. Since then, the region has undergone a long-term reconstruction and development process, step by step by “building back better”. The purpose of the trip was to deepen the students’ understanding of Japan’s disaster risk reduction policies and its actual implementation through the case of Rikuzentakata city. The objective of the trip was for the students to learn from the successes and lessons learned in the disaster risk reduction process after the 2011 disaster, to understand the complexity of reconstruction and to recognize its challenges.

For the students of this course at ICU, it was the first time that they were able to personally participate in such a study trip after a long break. In the context of the global Covid-19 pandemic, followed by a lockdown in Japan and travel restrictions across the country, students have had to participate virtually in the activities of this course through online meetings and discussions for the past two years.

Tōhoku region was selected for the study tour as it represents a coastal part of Japan that was most affected by the greatest disasters in recent times, by now already 12 years ago. Destination and the place of study during the tour was the city of Rikuzentakata, which is in the most southern part on the coast of Iwate prefecture. Within the Tōhoku region, this city was mostly affected by the earthquake with a magnitude of 9.0 and a tsunami that followed shortly after. In Rikuzentakata about 1,556 residents died, 207 went missing and 4054 houses were destroyed due to the disaster. Citizens were evacuated to evacuation centers throughout the region’s hinterland¹.

During the three-day study tour, ICU students, their professor, a teaching assistant and an interpreter visited various locations in the city as well as initiatives that arose from the disaster situation and developed over time. A total of seven students participated in the on-site program, including two Japanese students and five international students. All seven students had previously completed the ICU course Humanitarian Action and Natural Disasters I in the autumn term of 2022.

¹ Iwate Prefecture (2015). Proposal from Iwate Prefecture about Disaster Risk Reduction and Reconstruction based on the lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake & Tsunami, p. 5.

The program and initiatives that the students visited during the study tour included:

- Day 1:**
- Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum
 - Temporary Housing
 - Lecture on “What happened on March 11 & Overview of the reconstruction and rehabilitation process in Rikuzentakata by Kiyoshi Murakami
- Day 2:**
- Takata Matsubara Tsunami Reconstruction Memorial Park
 - Sakura Line 311
 - Nagahora Genki Village
 - Lecture on “Crossroad Game” by Mr. Seiji Murakami
 - Banzai Factory
 - Meeting with youth at Camocy
- Day 3:**
- Lecture on “Fisheries in Rikuzentakata city by Mr. Kazunari Takahashi
 - Lecture on “Riku Café” by Ms. Kazuko Yoshida and Ms. Junko Uura



Tohoku study tour group with our sensei Dr. Naoko OBI and a local resident from Rikuzentakata at the Sakura Line 311; Rikuzentakata, November 2022.

THE MARUGOTO RIKUZENTAKATA ASSOCIATION

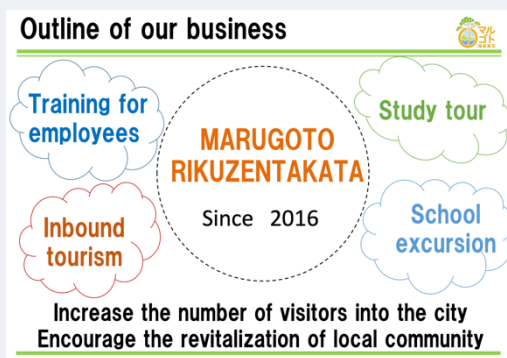
Mako Hayashi

Introduction of Mr. Furutani-san and the Association of “Marugoto Rikuzentakata”

Keiichi Furutani-san is an employee of a publicly incorporated association called Marugoto Rikuzentakata. “Marugoto” means everything in Japanese. Furutani-san, who grew up in Yokohama, visited Rikuzentakata in 2008 and 2009 for a cappella activities. After the Great East Japan Earthquake struck the Tohoku region, he visited Rikuzentakata, where he met people who remembered him from his a capella activities. With this background, he moved to Rikuzentakata and began working at Marugoto Rikuzentakata.



Logo of the Association “Marugoto Rikuzentakata”.
Source: <http://marugoto-rikuzentakata.com>



Slide from Mr. Furutani-san's presentation outlining the business of Marugoto Rikuzentakata.

Marugoto Rikuzentakata is an organization founded in 2016 as a platform to connect people inside and outside. In order to increase the number of visitors to the city and promote the revitalization of the local community, Marugoto Rikuzentakata offers various experiences including but not limited to study tours, school trips, staff training, and inbound tourism. Overall, Furutani-san's informative presentation helped us prepare for the study tour with basic knowledge of the city and inspired us to learn more by triggering various questions about the city to be asked directly during the trip.

The 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Rikuzentakata

Furutani-san explained the situation of the city of Rikuzentakata before and after the Great East Japan Earthquake with different pictures. Before the earthquake, Rikuzentakata was a place for tourists, up to one million people, to enjoy the beautiful beach with 17,000 pine trees, oysters, hotels, and shopping stores. When the earthquake hit the city, a tsunami threatened the city at a maximum height of 17 meters and reached a distance of 9 kilometers. The number of victims is about 1,800, but 215 are still missing. Victims account for about seven percent of the city's population, with a higher casualty rate than other affected areas.

The Association “Marugoto Rikuzentakata” and the City

Furutani-san mentioned two important terms: kouryuu-jinkou and kankei-jinkou. While kouryuu-jinkou denotes the exchange population that visits the site for various reasons, including tourism, shopping, and leisure, kankeijinkou means related population that visits the site regularly and connects with locals for various activities. In keeping with Marugoto’s objective of energizing Rikuzentakata, the organization seeks to increase these two populations through various activities.

For instance, the organization and the city welcome people to enjoy a homestay in Rikuzentakata. Before COVID-19, 10,000 people came to the city for homestay, and now there are around 4,000 people staying at home in the city. The positive side of homestay is that people can interact and connect with local people and the city itself. There was a visitor who came to the city and decided to go into farming because of the host family.



Meeting with Mr. Keiichi Furutani from Marugoto Rikuzentakata in front of Rikuzentakata’s Salon de Royal.

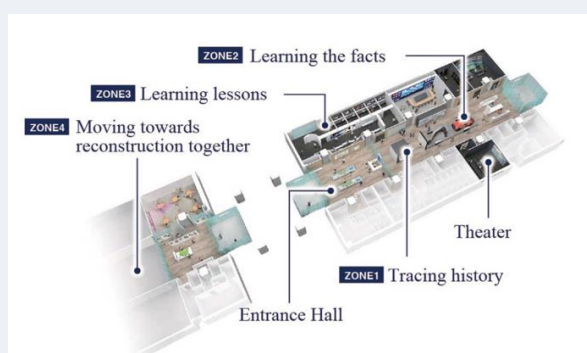
Furthermore, the organization introduces various local places and people in Rikuzentakata to tell both the situation of reconstruction and the attractiveness of the city: Kesen Junior High School, whose students were all safe during the earthquake, Yonezawa’s company that helped Yonezawa-san to survive the tsunami, oysters, apples, a temple that used to be an evacuation center and a place for housing corpses, and an electronic bus. One of the outstanding initiatives in Rikuzentakata is Salon De Royal Takata, which has its main store in Kyoto. As Salon de Royal is one of the oldest chocolatiers in Japan and owns a line of pecan nuts, it sells chocolate products, especially pecans, made in Rikuzentakata. This new industry in Rikuzentakata not only helps the city’s economy but also supports the elderly to maintain their health. There are other initiatives in the city from the local people who restarted operations after the earthquake and from people who came from other parts of the region and started their businesses.

THE IWATE TSUNAMI MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Amanda Kangme Sumabe

The Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum was built with the purpose of sharing the wisdom of Japanese ancestors, the reality of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, and the lessons learned from it with the rest of the world in order to build a society resilient to natural disasters. It debuted in September 2019 and also functions as a Michi-no-eki roadside station. It is operated and administered by the Iwate Prefecture. The museum, which is located near the waterfront of Rikuzentakata on the Sanriku coast and is bordered by three out of five buildings that have survived, namely the youth hostel to the west, Kiseki no Ippon Matsu (the Miracle Pine Tree) to the northwest, and the old shopping center of the city to the east. The museum is divided into four zones and shares an entrance with the Tsunami Memorial Park. The entrance is built on the concept of Japanese Shrine gates and has a purification basin at the entrance.

Exhibit Theme/Mission statement ~ "Protecting lives, and living together with the ocean and earth to never again experience the sadness of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami"



Overview of the museum from top. Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum, 2020; <https://iwate-tsunami-memorial.jp/en/about.html>

WOW

It was interesting to know that the museum is free to enter.

WHY

According to the tour guide, there are about 14,000 small light holes in the museum's ceiling to commemorate the victims of the disaster. However, when we visited the lights were turned off.

WHAT

What struck me most about the tour was the display of the damaged fire engine and bridge beam, which are high quality metal objects. This shows the effects of the tsunami.

Our visit started after lunch at the shopping center opposite the museum. We were welcomed by an English speaking tour guide who would later also led us through the Tsunami Memorial Park. We walked through the entrance hall where the tour guide informed us about the Sanriku coastal area and the 3.11 road map and the memory trail. We then watched a 12-minute documentary video in the museum's theater about the tsunami that made landfall and how people were evacuated from the advancing wave.

At the hallway, among the 150 exhibits are a fire truck and a bridge beam damaged by the tsunami. In zone three of the museum, or the carpeted areas, the tour guide walked through several lessons learnt through the experience of the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami. The most outstanding lesson was victim complacency. Photography was prohibited in this area of the museum.

The tour ended with a timeline of appreciation for supporters in Japan and around the world and a deep understanding of Iwate's plans towards reconstruction.

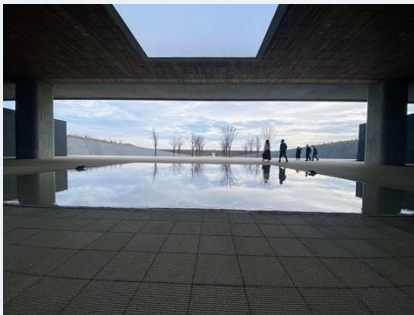


Rikuzentakata fire engine after the tsunami; now displayed at the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum.

VISIT TO TAKATA MATSUBARA MEMORIAL PARK

Janina Jasper

The visit to the Takata Matsubara Tsunami Reconstruction Park was one of the most impressive highlights of our study tour. Our guide, Ms. Yuuko Musashi, grew up in this area. Her profession is driven by being a storyteller, and so it was no surprise that she welcomed our group in a special way. Right from the beginning she clearly stated to us the preventative measures to be taken in case of any disaster: "If anything happens, we need to act. Please keep this in mind." Right after she pointed to the elementary school on the top of the hill on the opposite side of the road, indicating the pathway of the evacuation plan.



Shrine-like entrance to the Takata Matsubara Memorial Park in Rikuzentakata City facing the seawall and sea in the horizon.

Following the introduction in front of the park, the guide explained to us the special architecture of its entrance – which represents a shrine gate. The water spot in the middle of the entrance symbolizes the water spot in shrines where people go to clean their body. The guide also emphasized that "the park is in a calmer area to clean your mind, in particular, for people who have been affected by the disaster". The gate is for praying for the victims of the disasters.

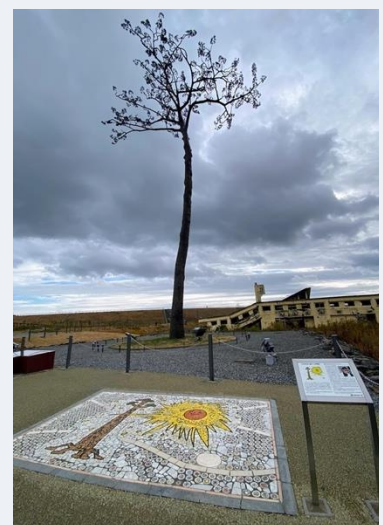
In the past, the park at this location used to be five times bigger. Now, the park includes fewer trees and there are only five buildings that remain standing as witnesses that represent the immensity of the disaster. With our guide, we explored the park and visited all of the five remaining buildings.

First, from far away we look at public housing and apartments - to promote worker residences. The 14-meter-high tsunami reached up to the 5th level of this building. Today the memorial has the important function to show the height of the tsunami. Second, our guide points to the Topic 45, a triangle shape of wall based on a strong construction method; though the walls have been broken, the building remains to demonstrate to the visitors of the park the strength of the tsunami. Moreover, the building embodies the miraculous survival of three residents who evacuated to the rooftop of this building and survived.

We continue our tour, moving on towards the ocean. On a staircase we climb up the new seawall with its height of 12.5 meters separating the city from the ocean to ensure protection from possible future tsunamis. It is hard to believe that in the past, beautiful beaches with an oasis of pine forest stretched right in front of us on this coast. Based on Musashi-san's words, it will probably take up to 50 years for those new 70,000 trees to grow and reach their full potential. In the past, the seawall stretched 5.5

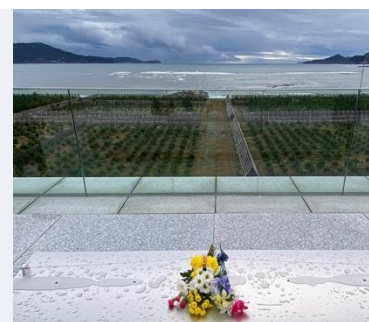


Our group between the museum and seawall, listening to our tour guide during the walk through the park.



The surviving miracle pine tree with a mosaic by a Japanese artist and the youth hostel in the background.

meters high through the forest, so all you could see were pine trees, blocking the salty winds from spreading further into the farmland and thereby protecting agriculture. Now, the seawall catches your immediate attention. Still, the city aims to harmonize the seawall with the city's surrounding nature over time by allowing, for instance, grass to spread and make its home in the joints of the wall. From the seawall vantage point, we can experience the majesty of the ocean on one side and the vastness of the valley on the other. The impressive view particularity of the place invites you to linger and reflect on the disaster; it awakens imaginary views of the historically decisive experience; there is no doubt – despite or because of the historical event – that the place carries a distinct aura.



View from the new seawall to the Sanriku coast with its newly planted and steadily growing pine trees and the open sea.

Only slowly we move on to the third remaining building of the park, the city's former youth hostel. Collapsed, after 12 years it still lingers next to the only surviving pine tree, which probably owes its survival to the protection of the hostel and its thin trunk. Today, this pine tree symbolizes hope to the residents of the city.

Still experiencing the consequences of the catastrophe 12 years later, Ms. Musashi is keen to suggest that the sea is not the villain in the interaction between nature and man: "It wasn't a wave, it was a wall when the tsunami came." She reports to us how she saw the tsunami from its beginning to its end from a distance and thought she would die. In the past, her grandfather had told her that when the tsunami comes, the first wave is being pushed back to the ocean. "I recalled my grandfather's message and after the shake I watched the ocean. The first thing that came was the sound of the wave, then the wave. I was looking at the wave making something similar like smoke. And I felt this is the end of the city [...]. I believed everyone went up to higher ground because there were 30 minutes in-between. But there were many people that did not believe it. 18,000 people died."

We move on to the last remaining building of the park –which is a high school– located at the beginning of a slope right next to the ocean; in fact, a precarious location for a school representing a historical compromise between two communities. Again, before entering the devastated school building, the guide reminds us of evacuation measures and indicates to us the evacuation path. In the course, we learn that no casualties emerged from this school; when the earthquake shook the building 68 students were in the school practicing graduation songs. As the students were previously told that the infrastructure was not strong enough during any earthquake or tsunami, everyone was aware of the school's weakness in times of a disaster. Still, it was impressive for us to hear that the evacuation of all students had been completed after 15 minutes. Following the country regulations, the tsunami warning consisted of two announcements – a warning and instructions; right after the first warning, teachers and students acted swiftly as they were well educated on disasters.



In the Takata Matsubara Memorial Park with the high school that was evacuated during the disaster in the background.

In the end, Ms. Musashi tells us what drives her to continue development in Rikuzentakata. It is the question: Who is going to protect our hometown? – Because "lost lives are the most precious ones, so it is most important to protect."

LECTURE BY MR. KIYOSHI MURAKAMI

Mako Hayashi

Mr. Kiyoshi Murakami, born and raised in Rikuzentakata, is the founder and CEO of Rikuzentakata Agency Co. (RTA). Prior to his career in Rikuzentakata, he had extensive human resources management experience at multinational financial institutions. From 2000 to 2005 he was also director of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva . He is also visiting professor at Iwate University in Morioka and Rikkyo University in Tokyo.

His presentation about the city from a long perspective provided an insight into how Rikuzentakata showed resilience to build back better while respecting the concept of inclusiveness and accessibility that was even in place before the earthquake. With his last words: "I put a lot of effort into communication and information dissemination to solve and develop the city together with local people," he reminded of the importance of emphasizing communication in different circumstances for a better environment. His strong passion for improving the environment and community can empower people locally and internationally and help victims worldwide.



Mr. Kiyoshi Murakami giving a presentation on the reconstruction and rehabilitation process at the Rikuzentakata City Community Hall.

Overview of the Earthquake and Response

Mr. Murakami explained what happened to the city on March 11, 2011, and how the city responded to the disaster. When the earthquake hit the city at 2:46 pm, a large tsunami alarm warned people to evacuate. Many evacuated to higher ground, but as one of the lessons learned from the disaster, some could not escape the tsunami because they were hesitant or relaxed even though they had to flee. A mayor of Rikuzentakata, Mr. Toba, who lost his wife in the disaster, was elected four weeks before the earthquake.

In response to the disaster, more than half of the people of Rikuzentakata were displaced from their homes. The city had previously designated emergency shelters, but these were all "washed away". Therefore, it was necessary to find other available locations such as schools and community centers. Despite the water supply prepared by the Osaka department and food supply by Afghan refugees, there was a lack of food and water, especially in the first month, but also electricity and mobile phones were lacking. In response to the shortage of mobile phones, Mr. Murakami initiated a radio program called FM Rikuzentakata 80.5 Mhz to provide citizens with information quickly.



Logo of Rikuzentakata Co. Agency of which Mr. Murakami is the CEO.

Mr. Murakami also spoke about how it was not easy to reach a consensus on the reconstruction plan, which took a year and a half to complete. The reconstruction of Rikuzentakata did not begin with rebuilding new items, but with rebuilding basic infrastructure, first removing millions of tons of debris. As the soil was needed for construction, the whole mountain was cut down to supply the soil. Much more emphasis was placed on the reconstruction of public housing than on the construction of temporary houses. He says reconstruction is struggling to find a compromise between massive work and massive budget.

Mr. Murakami also coordinated donations and supplies when the government appeared confused with regard to addressing international support. One of the notable outcomes of international assistance is the City Hole in Rikuzentakata, built with a donation from Singapore. Also, Crescent City, California, has a high school that formed a sister-city relationship from the students' boating story.

Different initiatives carried out in the city

Mr. Murakami also introduced different initiatives being carried out in Rikuzentakata. For example, Watami Organic, which creates healthy products made from organic food and ingredients carefully selected according to internal standards, has an agricultural park called Watami Organic Land. This park offers people various farming experiences including educational opportunities for children. There are other different experiences by using products in the city, such as apples, grapes, sake, and Ishikage shells.



Mr. Kiyoshi Murakami giving a presentation on the reconstruction and rehabilitation process of Rikuzentakata.

He also highlighted that the city had respected inclusiveness and accessibility by considering the number of elderly even before the SDGs were introduced. Under this concept, universal employment was emphasized to employ people with disabilities in various employment opportunities. Also, unity in diversity was respected, welcoming people outside the city and Japan and creating new initiatives together.

VISIT OF THE TEMPORARY HOUSING

Wei Yingchao

Around 3:30 p.m. on November 29, 2022, after visiting the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum, the bus drove 15 minutes along the breakwater across from downtown by the ocean. We reached “311 Temporary Housing”, which was built on the former site of Yonesaki Middle School. 18 emergency shelters were set up on the school’s playground, housing 89 households. As of March 2020, people affected by the disaster were still living in these apartments. After the refurbishment and relocation by the government, only the two residential buildings on the south side of the gymnasium have remained for viewing and learning about the residential building, which had served as accommodation for the people affected for a long time.



Side of the temporary housing in Rikuzentakata 11 years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.



Guided tour on the side of the temporary housing in Rikuzentakata 11 years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

Some of us were rather impressed during the visit. In the houses where 80-year-old seniors lived, handrails were installed from the hallway to the toilet because of the mobility handicap. In families with five members, including three children, parents’ and children’s rooms were located on both sides, separated by the living room in the middle. Also, accordion doors were installed to ensure privacy and desks were placed in children’s rooms; the bathroom and toilet were also separated. In addition, simple changing rooms were set up in the rooms of the emergency shelter. The dwellings contained other facilities such as canopies above clothesline poles, solar indicator lights in the porches, gas and water purification systems and beds exclusively for babies. It became obvious that temporary houses aimed to meet the needs of many individuals and families. There were many details in the apartments that suggested a satisfactory standard. However, then we noticed residents stickers on the interior walls with the following statements:

In the seven years of living in the temporary housing, the “small community”, which seemed not spacious yet had complete functions, also showed many issues. Living in emergency shelters over long periods of time brought with it great psychological stress for the people affected by the disaster. Clearly, in fact the temporary housing was more than a shelter from rain and wind; It was like a “home”. While a temporary house aims to bring warmth and dignity to people, it could offer some comfort to those who suffered from the great disaster. The way the people in Rikuzentakata responded to the impact of the disaster can easily appear impressive

for an outsider visiting the affected area. In the limited time of three days, our group met many interesting and welcoming

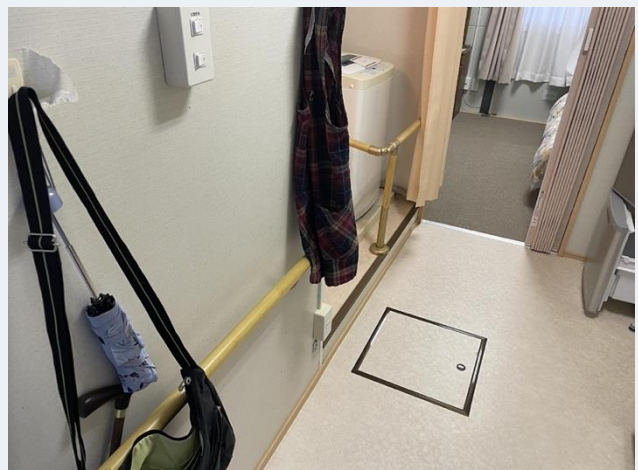
residents that have put much effort into the revitalization process of their home environment despite its state of devastation after the disaster. Only by reflecting on such experiences can we be better prepared for possible disasters in the future.

Finally, I want to end this report with a quote by Shigeru Ban, a well-known Japanese architect who won the Pritzker Prize in 2014, "If an interim construction completes its functions during the life cycle and it is the collection, the love and devotion of many people, it is no longer interim. It can even be eternal as it will last in the hearts of people eternally."

- "You can't live in the temporary housing for long"
- "The walls are too thin, and I can hear neighbors talking"
- "I can't take a shower after eight o'clock. There is echo in the bathroom"
- "It's cold in winter. The dew is leaking through the ceiling when I wake up"
- "Ants get into the room through the window cracks"



Entrance to a temporary housing in Rikuzentakata; stairs and elevation for wheelchairs were added later.



Inside of temporary housing in Rikuzentakata with handrails installed from the hallway to the toilet because of the mobility handicap for 80-year-old seniors.



Inside of temporary housing in Rikuzentakata with main room including kitchen facilities.



Inside of temporary housing in Rikuzentakata with a children's room including a desk to study for school.

VISIT TO SAKURA LINE 311

Sirine El Halabi

Sakura Line 311 is a non-profit organization established in the city of Rikuzentakata, Iwate prefecture, Japan. Back in October 2011 and following the Great East Japan Earthquake, they set about planting a line of 17,000 Sakura trees along the Sanriku coast of the region devastated by the March 11, 2011, earthquake. The aim of this initiative is to pass on the memory of this disaster to future generations and to remind everyone in the future of the importance of preventing and reducing disasters.

There are several aspects of this initiative that literally make it 'beautiful' and significant for Rikuzentakata and its closer surroundings. First, the Sakura trees themselves. People from all over the world admired the beauty of the Sakura trees. They are extremely attractive to everyone, and people intend to visit Japan specifically for the Sakura season – hence the trees attract a lot of attention. Second, generations will come and go in this region, but the trees will live for thousands of years. Planting Sakura trees feels like planting hope and beauty in a place that was once completely destroyed and 'washed off'. They will grow and thrive to keep alive the memory of the Great East Japan Earthquake, and all those affected, and to educate people about disaster prevention so history does not repeat itself.

You might be wondering why 17,000 Sakura trees? The "line" part of the name of the non-profit organization, Sakura Line 311, is very important to their mission. After the earthquake took place on March 11, 2011, tsunami waves crashed inland along a coastline stretching about 170 km. The founders of the non-profit organization have strived to plant at least one Sakura tree every ten meters, which brings them to a target of 17,000 trees. Another important aspect of this "line" is a reminder of how far inland the powerful tsunami waves reached that day. This will help future generations know immediately to bypass this Sakura "line" and head to higher grounds should a similar-magnitude tsunami strike again. Reconstruction in the city should also take place beyond this line.

Despite the sustainable meaning behind this initiative, there are several challenges that the Sakura Line 311 employees face. Negotiating with landowners to plant Sakura trees on their property has proven difficult at times, especially with landowners who lost family members during the disaster. Sakura trees are indeed beautiful plants, but when they bloom, they will serve as a constant reminder that they are there because of some tragedy that befell the residents of Rikuzentakata. Therefore, a lot of work and effort is put into the negotiations with the landowners. It may be years before some people agree to changing the setting of their tragedy, but some may never agree to do so.



Sign of Sakura Line 311 with Sakura tree and Rikuzentakata in the background.



Sign explaining the emergency strategy behind the Sakura Line 311.



Sign explaining the emergency strategy behind the Sakura Line 311.

It is without doubt that the work this non-profit organization has done is impressive. It is never easy to transform a tragedy into something beautiful that will serve to raise awareness. I believe that their initiative is a genuine and purposeful one and I am eager to see them reach their target of 17,000 trees in the future. There is a lot to learn from their project, but I can say that my favorite lessons are two: transformation takes a lot of effort and patience, and we can always find beautiful ways to convey painful messages.

Sakura Line 311 employees put their heart and soul into the work they do. They continuously take care of the Sakura trees as they require a lot of care. As of November 2022, they were able to plant a total of 2,031 trees. They also constantly work to establish and maintain communication and trust with the landowners who have ceded them their lands to further their initiative. This became very clear to us in an encounter that took place while we were visiting one of the parcels of land, where they have planted trees. The landowner rushed to greet us and the Sakura Line 311 staff who were with us, only to tell us how happy she is about the work they have done and are still doing. The strong relationship between the landowner and employees of the Sakura Line 311 was special and obvious.



Group photo with a landowner of Sakura Line 311 who came to greet us from her house across the street.

NADESHIKO KAI

Amanda Kangme Sumabe

A group of women promoting mental health through cooking and conversations



Ladies from Nadeshiko Kai in Nagahora Genki Village.

On the second day of our tour, we walked into the Nadeshiko Kai house with a well set up lunch table filled with Northeastern Japanese delicacies. Nadeshiko Kai literally means “Japanese women” in Old Japanese and is also the name of the Japanese women’s national soccer team. This local Non-Governmental Organization in Iwate is a cook-to-order restaurant that was founded after the 3.11 disaster. Currently, Nadeshiko Kai has twelve members but only eight active members.

It all started at the temporary housing in Rikuzentakata, where a group of women met for a tea party and chat. During one of these parties, one of the attendees suggested making Mochi (もち, 餅) a Japanese rice cake made of mochigome (もち米), a short-grain japonica sticky rice, and sometimes other ingredients such as water. Her recipe was good and eventually they started selling it. They made the rice cakes for other members of the community.

In the first few days after the disaster, the group of women was in disbelief, but the unity, friendship and sharing food became a way to connect and forget about the situation. During their meetings, they share stories to prevent another disaster.

After an article in the Japanese National Newspaper and an invitation to the sports stadium in 2011, the Nadeshiko remained committed to their donors and supporters by sending them home-made food parcels. And your guess may be as good as mine, the package includes Mochi, and all the ingredients used in preparing these meals are sourced from local Iwate foods.

*“The image of this meal
will remain a vivid memory of
Nadeshiko Kai to me.”*



Meal served to us by the Nadeshiko Women on the day of our visit.

CROSSROAD GAME WITH MR. MURAKAMI

Aya Kamio

When the Great East Japan Earthquake happened, Mr. Seiji Murakami was the deputy head of Nagahora-mura's Neighborhood Association. In his session, Mr. Seiji mainly spoke about disaster prevention and response in Nagahora. In addition, he directed a crossroad game that allowed us to think about what we would do for different specific scenarios when a tsunami comes. In the following the Nagahora Neighborhood Association's response to the earthquake and tsunami will be highlighted.

Nagahora Neighborhood Association's Response

Immediately after the earthquake, the Nagahora Neighborhood Association prioritized confirming the safety of the people living in Nagahora and securing food and shelter. Mr. Seiji shared the actions of the neighborhood association after the earthquake through his experience in leadership. As the deputy head, Mr. Seiji faced various challenges. In particular, he mentioned the dilemma he encountered when he decided to stop searching for the missing people, who fortunately turned up safely the following day. On the other hand, the response of the Nagahora Association was relatively successful as the community was strongly connected through festivals and daily interactions prior to the disaster. When asked about the reasons for the community's success, Mr. Seiji highlighted the significant impact of a four-yearly festival that brings the people of Nagahora together in preparation. The neighborhood already had a strong bond through this commitment, which led to smooth cooperation after the disaster.



Mr. Seiji Murakami giving his talk about the Crossroad Game at Nagahora Genki Village.

Festivals as "Bosai"

Mr. Seiji considers festivals to be the most effective bosai measure, bosai, being a Japanese terminology for disaster prevention. During Mr. Seiji's lecture, I realized that festivals enabled Nagahora residents to build and deepen networks and relationships of trust, which naturally brought the community together in the crisis situation. Mr. Seiji explained how the Neighborhood Association successfully raised food supplies that would last a month when they asked for donations from community members. Among these, I see the willingness of the residents to support each other because of their connection and their trust in the neighborhood, which can only be built gradually through regular interactions, including festivals.

VISIT TO THE BANZAI FACTORY

Anas Ali Saleh Al-Hamati

As a part of our study tour to Rikuzentakata City, we visited the Banzai factory in Ofunato City located at the Sanriku coast northeast of Rikuzentakata. The factory produces Tsubaki tea from the leaves of the popular Tsubaki or camellia plant grown in the area of Sanriku coast. "Tsubaki" means spring and refers to the fact that in the area of Rikuzentakata its blossom is the first to bloom in spring, symbolizing the start of a new life. Besides, the flower takes a long time to grow, but once it has reached a certain size, it is deeply rooted and said to be "one of the most disaster-resistant plants". The strength of the camellia has been proven during the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in Rikuzentakata, when many camellias at the coast survived the tsunami and in the following year many of them bloomed. Already in the past the camellia used to be the city's flower and a local characteristic, hence, after the disaster it was a clear step to designate it as the flower of Ofunato City and Rikuzentakata City.



Entrance to Banzai Factory in Ofunato City at the Sanriku Coast northeast of Rikuzentakata.



Camellia harvest photo exhibition at Banzai Factory in Ofunato City.

"I want to create something that can express my gratitude. I want to create such a job!" With these words the owner of the factory began his presentation. He explained that his main motivation is to create more jobs in Rikuzentakata and to build a long-term business to help the most vulnerable people find employment. He also said, "I want to contribute to the reconstruction of the region by using Sanriku's unique regional resources and raw materials as much as possible. We produce food that children, pregnant women, and people who have diabetes with high blood pressure can eat with peace of mind."

The owner of Banzai factory has a degree from a top US university and used to work in the Silicon Valley. He ended his career as an IT specialist and worked in his factory to create shared value for himself and his fellow citizens in Rikuzentakata.

The factory location is behind the seawall in a very fragile area. So, if the tsunami hits again, it may affect him directly, but according to his response evacuation in the area is easily manageable as from his factory to the evacuation center it takes only five minutes.

The factory has another branch in another city, and the brand has won many awards and been recognized as a successful business by many companies in Japan. The business still has a lot to grow and expand to meet demand in different markets, according to the owner, who also confirmed that he plans to export overseas, and they still have plenty of opportunities. He seemed to us to be very optimistic about his 'new life fulfillment and career' and business and visiting his factory including a tour of the various workshops with a view of the machines and products was such an inspiring experience for all of us.



Presentation at the Banzai Factory in Ofunato City at the Sanriku Coast northeast of Rikuzentakata.

MEETING WITH THE YOUTH AND THOSE WHO MIGRATED TO RIKUZENTAKATA

Anas Ali Saleh Al-Hamati & Mako Hayashi

As a part of our study tour to Rikuzentakata-city, we met several entrepreneurs who decided to stay in the city and get involved in Rikuzentakata's economic growth and recovery. Those entrepreneurs can be classified as follows:

- Entrepreneur who started a business
- Professionals who migrated to Rikuzentakata and found job opportunities in the city
- Foreigners who found an opportunity to contribute positively to the city's business

The commonality between those people, who have chosen to live in Rikuzentakata, is that they have made their own decision, and it is not a result of government efforts to pave the way for these people to return and start a new business in the city. All of them have received no support from the local government but have to pay the same taxes as in other areas in Japan. So, it was obvious that they need more people to come and create more jobs for more people to come.

During our interview with the youth who have immigrated to Rikuzentakata, we noticed that they have the energy and willingness to make a positive contribution to the city's and region's recovery effort.



Group picture taken after meeting representatives of the youth and those who migrated to Rikuzentakata at "CAMOCY".

It was interesting to see how a young migrant lady from Denmark engaged with the Japanese community, how she described Rikuzentakata as her permanent home and how she enjoys being a part of the Rikuzentakata's community. In the same context, we met some local authorities who were mainly focused on motivating people who had immigrated from Rikuzentakata before the disaster to return. It was evident how this focus may create something tangible for the city but requires a broad understanding of potential new residents in the city and how to attract them, even if they are not necessarily Japanese.



Photo of the Rikuzentakata Fermentation Park CAMOCY, the place where we met and talked to the youth of Rikuzentakata.

LECTURE ON FISHERIES IN RIKUZENTAKATA BY MR. KAZUNARI TAKAHASHI

Wei Yingchao

On the last day of our trip, in the conference room of Rikuzentakata Community Hall, we met Mr. Kazunari Takahashi - he was simply dressed and calmly waiting for us. After we were seated, Mr. Takahashi began to talk about the rich marine environment of Rikuzentakata, the tremendous changes caused by the tsunami, shellfish breeding and cultivation, and how to achieve the industrialization of breeding. As some of the students in our group were born inland or have different professional backgrounds, we did not know much about marine biology. However, as the lecture progressed, Mr. Takahashi's passion for shellfish and the bay became obvious to us.

Mr. Takahashi used to work for the government, but he was no ordinary office worker. After graduating from the Department of Aquaculture at Tohoku University, he has been conducting research and studies on the plants and animals in Iwate prefecture for years. His research also confirmed the endangered shellfish and butterflies in the local prefecture.

After the major disaster on March 11, 2011, the museum, where Mr. Takahashi worked, was destroyed by the tsunami. While helping with local reconstruction as a government employee, he found that people's concern for the natural environment was decreasing. Five years later, he decided to retire from the Municipal Office and dedicate himself to shellfish research and protection in Hirota Bay. However, with the great changes in the marine environment after the disaster, even he faced many challenges despite his wealth of knowledge. After countless attempts and failures, Mr. Takahashi finally discovered and cultivated the shellfish called Ishikage shellfish, which became the new signature specialty in Rikuzentakata.

At the end of the lecture, Mr. Takahashi wrote down the following words for us: Ishikage shellfish was originally considered rubbish among other types of shellfish. But it became a treasure in the end. Seemingly unneeded things may turn out to have other values. Even if the same thing can be valuable in different ways from various perspectives."



Mr. Kazunari Takahashi giving his presentation on Fisheries in Rikuzentakata at Rikuzentakata's Community City Hall.



Mr. Kazunari Takahashi talking about the exhibition at the former Sea and Shell Museum in Rikuzentakata that was destroyed by the tsunami.

VISIT TO RIKU CAFÉ

Aya Kamio



Ms. Yoshida and Ms. Inoura presenting their project of Riku Café at Rikuzentakata's Community City Hall.

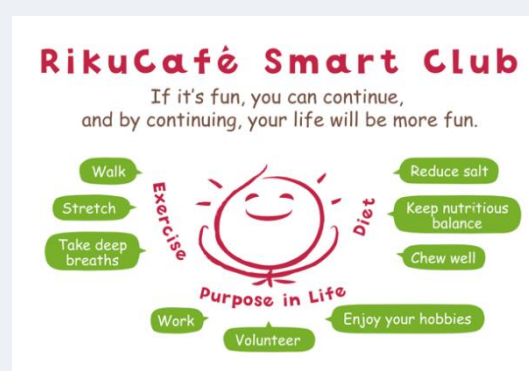
Ms. Yoshida and Ms. Inoura founded Riku Café in 2011 with the motivation to create a place for the people of the community to relax. The three principles of Riku Café are to be a place where everyone can meet for fun, to be a bridge that connects people in and outside the city, and to be a place where people seek health and meaning in life. For over 11 years, Riku Café has supported the physical and mental health of the community by adapting to the continuously changing needs of the community, which we found absolutely impressive.

Riku Café after the Earthquake

After the earthquake, Ms. Yoshida received boxes of relief supplies from her friends in Tokyo. To distribute the supplies, she gathered her neighbors to discuss how, and the teatime in between became the starting point for setting up the cafe. Many of the founding members of the cafe were part of the gathering. Riku Café's first activity was to build temporary medical facilities, including dentists and a pharmacy, since all neighboring facilities were damaged by the tsunami. Near the medical facilities, they created a gathering place with a stage where people could come together and, at times, watch performances. This became a place for people to make new connections and ensure the safety of friends. However, at this point, the activities of Riku Café were entirely voluntary, which questioned its sustainability. Visitors who came for coffee simply donated as much as they wanted.

Riku Café's Development

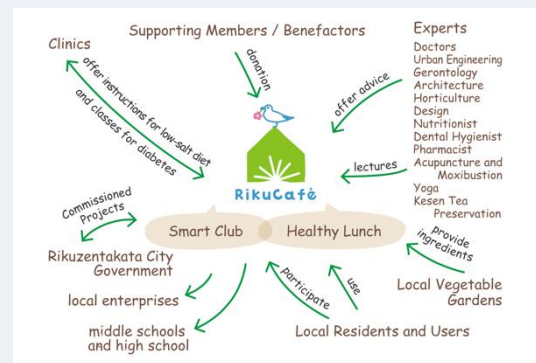
Currently, Riku Café promotes health in the community through food and activities. The cafe offers healthy menus with ingredient displays and is non-smoking. In addition, members established the Riku Café Smart Club, which includes various activities to promote participants' physical and mental health, such as yoga, oral health sessions, and cooking classes for low-salt recipes. Having fun is the core of Riku Cafe Smart Club, and its three principles are healthy eating habits, short-term daily exercise, and creating the meaning of living is creating happiness. What is special about this Smart Club is that after the sessions, the participants can enjoy the healthy meals of the Riku Café together and build deeper connections with each other. For lunch, we also had the opportunity to eat Riku cafe's healthy and



Riku Café's Smart Club's principle of supporting a healthy lifestyle; Source: <http://rikucafe.jp/about-english>.

delicious lunch. The menu was created by night school students as a part of their program to learn about healthy eating habits.

The needs of the community have changed significantly as Rikuzentakata's post-earthquake rehabilitation process progresses. The story of Riku Café is not only about its development, but also how it has responded to the continuously changing needs in the Rikuzentakata community.



Riku Café Organisation chart
Source: <http://rikucafe.jp/about-english>



Bento box prepared for us by the team of Riku Café.



The building of Riku Café; Source: <http://rikucafe.jp/about-english>

CONCLUSION

Visiting the different sides of the city and closer surrounding of the affected area, various challenges of a reconstruction process became obvious to us. For example, we realized that fair distribution of temporary housing is a challenging task in the humanitarian response process and requires assessment and clear prioritization criteria in order to provide a fair process. Also, we learned that the extent to which a city or an area has been affected by a disaster makes a difference for the reconstruction process, considering its initial steps, and thus potentially challenging cooperation between different areas affected. Different communities may have different views on whether to start the revitalization process with infrastructure versus employment and business. So, as the context matters for the direction of the reconstruction process, its success seems to lie, primarily, in involving the residents affected in the decision-making processes and listening to their voices and opinions as they are the life and core of this community.

During our final hours in Rikuzentakata we had the chance to sit one last time with some of the inspiring key people we met throughout the trip and present them with our takeaways from this trip. There were so many lessons learned and there was so much for us to carry back home and into our professional lives.

After visiting all the initiatives, we realized that Rikuzentakata is not a destroyed or washed off city but rather a city of resilience that can demonstrate to the world how we can live with nature, truly 'build back better' and stronger and not let disasters defeat us. Examples are reflected by each of the initiatives that developed over the years, and we were able to witness such as the Sakura Line or the appreciation and the very wise utilization of the highly valued products from the surrounding nature such as the Camellia flower and the different products made from it such as the mouthwatering apples of the city, the pecan nuts or the Ishikage shell. We also learned what unites the city in Rikuzentakata are 'the people', demonstrated and, in particular, personally experienced during our visits to the Nagahora Genki Village, our talk with the youths, meeting the Nadeshiko ladies or the owners of Sakura Line or Riku Café.

Overall, what was particularly nice to see was that the Rikuzentakata residents, regardless of their age and gender, all have contributed in their own way to the reconstruction of their city. The unity, patience and perseverance of the people of Rikuzentakata over the past decade, and up until today, is something for everyone to learn from. Residents have been able to take care of their own mental and psychological health and provide this support to others, in both the traditional and some interesting unconventional ways. Thus, the behavior of the residents in Rikuzentakata seems to reflect a powerful peaceful transition between what was yesterday, was today and what will be tomorrow.

Photos: ICU/ Tohoku Study Tour Group

