

RIKUZENTAKATA STUDY TOUR REPORT

November 2023



*ABIGAËLLE GUZZELLI, BIPASHA ALAM, DALIAH BREIT, DARA DE VERA, HIYONA OTAKE,
KRISTINA BANGE, KRISTINE FLEUR PAGAYONA, NATHANAEL THOMAS,
PITIA ALEX DONGA BOJO, SATOMI YAMADA, SOPHO KHARAZI
PROFESSOR NAOKO OBI*

Rikuzentakata Study Tour Report

27-29 November 2023

Compiled 30 December 2023
as part of the
ICU QPPI 526 “Humanitarian Action and Natural Disasters
II” (Tohoku Study Tour)

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to all the people who made this trip a reality. First and foremost, we would like to thank the incredible citizens of Rikuzentakata who gave their time and energy to share their expertise and experiences with us to help us understand better both the tragedy of March 11th and the hope for the present and future. We are so thankful that they shared their knowledge and listened to our questions and thoughts. We learned so much, and this knowledge enabled us to grow and learn in a way that is impossible from solely a textbook or in a classroom. The hard work of the people of Rikuzentakata to build back from the disaster is an inspiration for each of us.

We would like to give an individual thanks to the coordinators of this trip. First, a huge thanks to our wonderful Professor — Dr. Naoko Obi, who, as our Sensei at ICU and the Humanitarian Action (NOHA) Coordinator in Japan, guided us through our educational journey in order to better understand disaster response and prevention. An additional huge thanks to Mr. Keiichi Furutani of Marugoto Rikuzentakata who not only planned the program but provided context and answered all of our questions with a profound expertise. An additional special thanks to our translator, Takase-san, who enabled us to communicate, question, and understand each of our engagements.

We know that this trip would not have been possible without the hard work and coordination of many others, such as the ICU Graduate School Group. We are thankful for all of the faculty, sponsors, and mentors not listed here who made this possible and, in doing so, have contributed to our ability to better understand and make positive contributions to the field of humanitarian action.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	1
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
My Experiences from the Great East Japan Earthquake:	4
Lecture by Marugoto Rikuzentakata (NPO).....	7
Learning about Reconstruction from Mr. Masaru Abe	9
Visit to the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum	11
Takata Matsubara Memorial Park for Tsunami Disaster: A Private Guided-Visit with ICU Students	14
Meeting with the youths and those who migrated to Rikuzentakata after 3.11	19
Lecture by Sakura Line 3.11 and tree-planting	21
Discussion with Nadeshiko Kai & Crossroad Game and Talk by Mr. Seiji Murakami.....	24
Reconstructing a City, SDGs in the Process:.....	27
Lecture by Mr. Shinji Hashizume at WaWaWa	27
Fumon-ji Temple and Reconstruction.....	29
Activities of Riku Café	34
Tohoku Tour Group Presentation and Discussion	37
Conclusion	40

Introduction

Nathan Thomas

After a ten-week course on Humanitarian Action and Disaster Response at the International Christian University in Tokyo, eleven students witnessed the principles of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Build Back Better (BBB) in action. The group traveled to Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture in Northeastern Japan. Over the course of four days in November of 2023, the students met with the inhabitants of Rikuzentakata, leaders of local organizations, and business people who contributed to the reconstruction of the city after the devastation of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.



Image credit to Alison Hurt of NPR¹

At 2:46 PM on 11 March 2011, a magnitude 9.1 earthquake struck, causing a massive tsunami that would destroy 80% of the city of Rikuzentakata and lead to the deaths of approximately 7% of the city's inhabitants. In spite of a culture of *Bosai* (disaster preparedness), the city was not prepared for such a 1-in-1000-year event. Nonetheless, over the course of the last twelve years, private and public sector firms, volunteers from all over the world, and the citizens of Rikuzentakata have rebuilt their city to be able to withstand such an event should it happen again.

The objective of our study tour was to gain a holistic understanding of the process of disaster management through the experience of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. The trip provided us students with an opportunity to understand how the implementation of the principles of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction in the city of Rikuzentakata has reduced the risk. The reconstruction of Rikuzentakata is not complete, but rather its reconstruction is an ongoing dynamic process that provided us with an opportunity to both contemplate what has been done and even discuss potential solutions to the problems that the city is facing today.

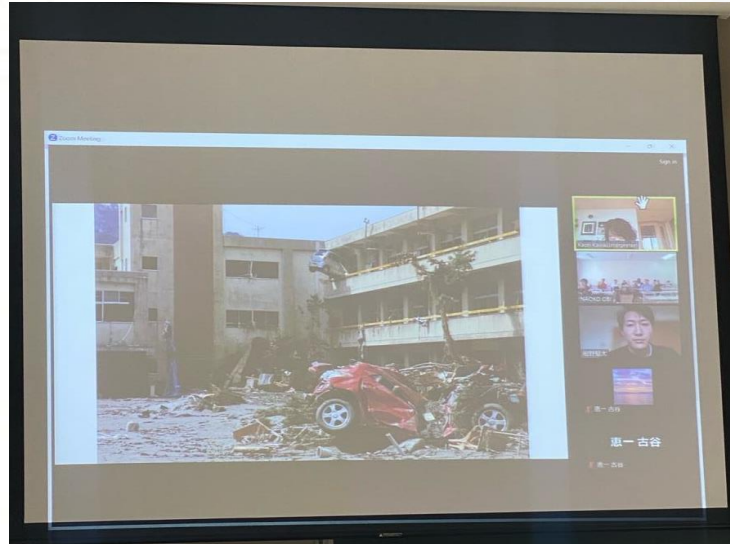
The following report is a compilation of our impressions, understanding, and takeaways from each of these engagements with these various civic and governmental actors. Each engagement provided us with a personal and impactful testimony of what happened twelve years ago, and how the city had changed to be more resilient. We hope the following testimonies help to consolidate the wisdom gained from the hard work of the people of Rikuzentakata.¹

¹ Stu Seidel, "A Small Japanese Town, Swallowed By The Sea," March 29, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/2011/03/29/134946960/a-small-japanese-town-swallowed-by-the-sea>.

My Experiences from the Great East Japan Earthquake: Kenta Konno

Dara De Vera

Through an online lecture, Mr. Kenta Konno shared a deeply personal story about his experiences during the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 while he was a student at Kamaishi-Higashi Junior High School. His talk brought attention to the crucial aspects of disaster preparedness and the importance of taking proactive measures in the face of unpredictable natural disasters.



The tsunami, triggered by a magnitude (Mw) 9.1 earthquake on March 11, 2011, devastated the coastal areas of the Tohoku Region. Mr. Konno, a young student at the time, recounted staying in the mountains for three days without electricity and scavenging for food in the debris to survive. He also shared the emotional toll of finding a body during his scavenging efforts and losing a close friend back home.

Despite the widespread devastation, Kamaishi-Higashi Junior High School achieved a remarkable outcome by recording zero deaths, earning it the title of the "Miracle of Kamaishi City." This success was attributed to an effective evacuation strategy, disaster preparedness, and critical decision-making during the calamity.

Mr. Konno imparted practical and critical lessons in disaster preparedness, starting with the valuable use of hazard maps, which are easily accessible online and often provided by government authorities. The speaker encouraged the audience to consult these maps with their friends and family as they can identify risk areas and safe zones. Hazard maps in Japan, created by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, are also available on municipality websites, serving as crucial tools for understanding potential dangers. However, Mr. Konno posed a limitation to the use of hazard maps by cautioning against blind reliance on hazard maps. While acknowledging their importance, he stressed that these maps may not always accurately reflect the actual risks during a disaster. Thus, there is a need to explore the limitations of conventional evacuation drills, particularly in preparing for real-life earthquakes and tsunamis.



The speaker proceeded to address the shortcomings of typical evacuation drills in Japan, which, while comprehensive, may not adequately simulate the chaos and unpredictability of an actual disaster. Drawing from his actual experience as a junior high school student during the tsunami, the speaker highlighted some/several key points to consider in evacuation drills. One of which is the focus on evacuating the injured, persons with disabilities, and those who may be sick, recognizing the diverse needs of the community.

Additionally, Mr. Konno explored the challenges of evacuation without an effective early warning system by narrating what could possibly happen during the sudden onset of a disaster without the appropriate use of the system. The speaker vividly recounted an incident during their junior high school drill when an alarm rang without warning, leaving students scrambling to follow the drill procedures. This realistic approach exposes participants to the chaos that can unfold during emergencies.

In times of disaster, the speaker has emphasized the importance of choosing higher grounds for safety and using alternative paths to reach safe/evacuation shelters. He shared his experience of climbing nearby mountains and considering different routes, highlighting the need for adaptability when faced with unexpected obstacles. Moreover, in this part of his lecture, the effectiveness of the *Tsunami Tendenko* was emphasized. This disaster preparedness practice, which emphasizes the need to save yourself first during tsunamis, had been passed down from Japanese ancestors in the Tohoku region.

Community involvement also emerged as a central theme in disaster preparedness in the lecture, with the speaker recounting instances of junior high school students taking the initiative to conduct evacuation drills with elementary school students and nearby residents. This grassroots approach fosters a sense of collective responsibility and ensures a more comprehensive and effective disaster response.

Reflecting on the fateful day of March 11, 2011, the speaker provided a vivid account of the earthquake's intensity, the ensuing chaos, and the challenges faced during evacuation. Despite prior drills, the actual evacuation proved to be chaotic and disorienting, with the tsunami reaching the third floor of the school building.

The speaker further reflected on the aftermath of the disaster, describing its devastating impact, including landslides and the engulfing of shelters by the tsunami. Importantly, he cautioned against complete trust in hazard maps, revealing that areas marked as safe may not always offer security

during actual disasters. This nuanced perspective encouraged listeners to consider additional factors and develop personalized evacuation plans tailored to their specific circumstances.

The speaker concluded the lecture by articulating his motivations for sharing this personal narrative, aiming to prevent others from experiencing the profound grief of losing loved ones in disasters and acknowledging the support received during challenging times. His ultimate goal is to contribute to reducing the number of deaths caused by natural disasters to zero in Japan.

In summary, Mr. Kenta Konno's comprehensive account goes beyond a mere recollection of events; it sparks self-reflection and the will to help the community. By incorporating his personal experiences with practical insights, his narrative, through the lecture, serves as an advocacy for disaster preparedness, urging listeners to become proactive agents in their own safety and that of their communities.



Lecture by Marugoto Rikuzentakata (NPO)

Kristina Bange

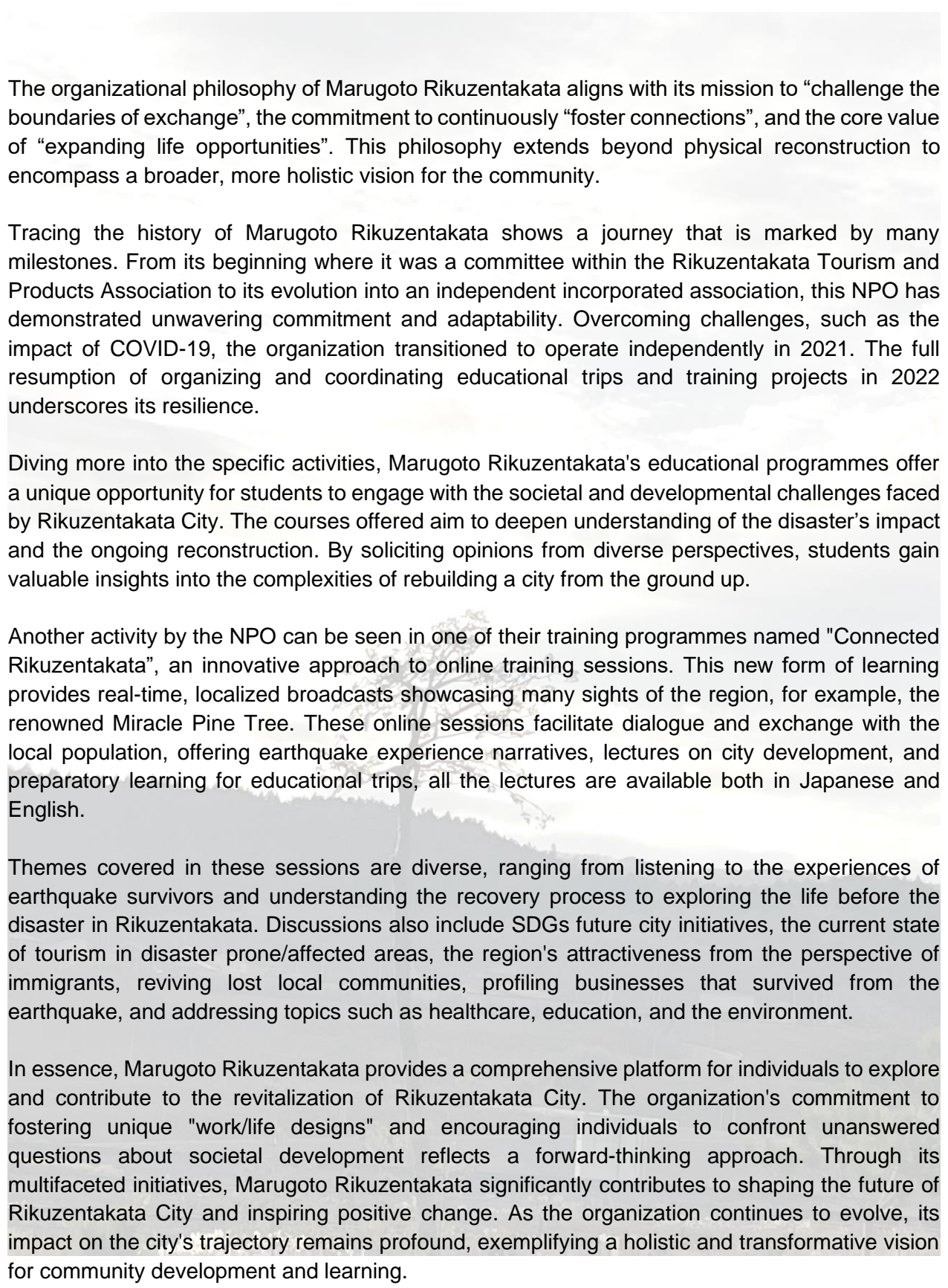
Marugoto Rikuzentakata, established in 2016, stands as a pivotal non-profit organization (NPO) actively contributing to the ongoing rejuvenation of Rikuzentakata City. Beyond the reconstruction efforts of the post earthquake and tsunami of 2011, this organization plays a vital role in cultural preservation, education, and community development. By drawing insights from the online lecture by Mr. Keiichi Furutani and additional information from the NPO's website, this report delves into the diverse activities and initiatives undertaken by Marugoto Rikuzentakata, showcasing its profound impact on the city's development and progression.



Retrieved from: <http://marugoto-rikuzentakata.com/>

Since its foundation, Marugoto Rikuzentakata has been working to establish a robust system and hub for individuals visiting and choosing to reside in Rikuzentakata City. Going beyond physical reconstruction, the NPO actively embraces corporate training programs and organizes educational trips for both students as well as tourists or companies, strategically fostering connections with individuals expressing interest in engaging with and learning about the Rikuzentakata City. This also includes organizing activities for post-earthquake volunteers. In doing so, Marugoto Rikuzentakata has positioned itself as a catalyst for meaningful connections and engagement with the city's ongoing development.

At the heart of Marugoto Rikuzentakata's mission lies the industrialization of "learning." This distinctive approach leverages local resources, trade, industry, and human capital to disseminate the diverse charms and values of Rikuzentakata City and the Kesen District region to the whole country. Furthermore, the NPO also holds a strong commitment in improving the environment for foreign tourists to feel welcomed in Rikuzentakata.



The organizational philosophy of Marugoto Rikuzentakata aligns with its mission to “challenge the boundaries of exchange”, the commitment to continuously “foster connections”, and the core value of “expanding life opportunities”. This philosophy extends beyond physical reconstruction to encompass a broader, more holistic vision for the community.

Tracing the history of Marugoto Rikuzentakata shows a journey that is marked by many milestones. From its beginning where it was a committee within the Rikuzentakata Tourism and Products Association to its evolution into an independent incorporated association, this NPO has demonstrated unwavering commitment and adaptability. Overcoming challenges, such as the impact of COVID-19, the organization transitioned to operate independently in 2021. The full resumption of organizing and coordinating educational trips and training projects in 2022 underscores its resilience.

Diving more into the specific activities, Marugoto Rikuzentakata's educational programmes offer a unique opportunity for students to engage with the societal and developmental challenges faced by Rikuzentakata City. The courses offered aim to deepen understanding of the disaster's impact and the ongoing reconstruction. By soliciting opinions from diverse perspectives, students gain valuable insights into the complexities of rebuilding a city from the ground up.

Another activity by the NPO can be seen in one of their training programmes named "Connected Rikuzentakata", an innovative approach to online training sessions. This new form of learning provides real-time, localized broadcasts showcasing many sights of the region, for example, the renowned Miracle Pine Tree. These online sessions facilitate dialogue and exchange with the local population, offering earthquake experience narratives, lectures on city development, and preparatory learning for educational trips, all the lectures are available both in Japanese and English.

Themes covered in these sessions are diverse, ranging from listening to the experiences of earthquake survivors and understanding the recovery process to exploring the life before the disaster in Rikuzentakata. Discussions also include SDGs future city initiatives, the current state of tourism in disaster prone/affected areas, the region's attractiveness from the perspective of immigrants, reviving lost local communities, profiling businesses that survived from the earthquake, and addressing topics such as healthcare, education, and the environment.

In essence, Marugoto Rikuzentakata provides a comprehensive platform for individuals to explore and contribute to the revitalization of Rikuzentakata City. The organization's commitment to fostering unique "work/life designs" and encouraging individuals to confront unanswered questions about societal development reflects a forward-thinking approach. Through its multifaceted initiatives, Marugoto Rikuzentakata significantly contributes to shaping the future of Rikuzentakata City and inspiring positive change. As the organization continues to evolve, its impact on the city's trajectory remains profound, exemplifying a holistic and transformative vision for community development and learning.

A Universal City

Learning about Reconstruction from Mr. Masaru Abe

Nathan Thomas

It was shocking to see the outline of dozens of people crowded on top of the City Hall of Rikuzentakata and then to learn that the man speaking to us, Mr. Masaru Abe, was one of those people. A civil servant at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Mr. Abe was one of the people who took the initiative and helped to rebuild the city of Rikuzentakata in the aftermath of the horrific disaster in which 80% of the buildings of the city were damaged or destroyed, and 7.3% of the population lost. Few urban designers could have such a horrific opportunity—both to watch their city be washed away before their very eyes and to be one of the people *to build it back better* (BBB). Priorities, including safety, compactness, and disabled person accessibility, were clear success stories as the city reinvented itself under the watchful eyes of Mr. Abe and a coalition of public and private sector firms. The city design was referred to as *universal* due to its considerations for disabled people. However, considerations like gender, minorities, and, most surprisingly, women did not seem to feature heavily within this conception of universality. Nonetheless, having visited the city that Mr. Abe described to us, we can attest to this clear example of BBB regarding safety, livability, beauty, and inclusion of the disabled.



Mr. Masaru Abe currently is an advisor for Honmaru Inc. and Former Director of the city urban planning unit of Rikuzentakata



Proof of the city's handicap accessibility as part of the *Universal* design. One of the women on our trip had a knee injury, but due to the city's inclusive approach, she was able to participate in almost all activities.

The priority described was the concept of the city being a *Safe City*. Despite being famous for its beautiful pine forest, fishing, culture, and industry, much of this was washed away on that tragic day in March of 2011. Therefore, Mr. Abe discussed how the priority was to make the city safe. The primary way this was accomplished was through an improved 12.5-meter sea wall and by concentrating and locating the city on higher ground so that if another one-in-one-thousand-year earthquake and tsunami struck, Rikuzentakata would be ready. After its safety was ensured, the next priority was to create a concentrated city center (*a Compact City*) that would be walkable, handicapped accessible, and friendly for the elderly and people from all walks of life. Finally, parks, public facilities, and, most recently, the increased development of unused flood zone areas are

enabling the inhabitants to enjoy their lives and the beauty of their city.

It was a bit surprising when several questions were posed about how the concept of universality took in the voices, not only of the disabled and elderly, but also of groups such as women; it seemed that this had not been a focus at the time. Of course, 12 years—while short, in some ways—may be a long time in terms of cultural changes. The United Nations Sustainable Development (SDG) goals had not even been introduced at the time of the disaster. So, perhaps, while it may seem surprising for gender to have been left out of a term like *Universal*, it is also important to realize that time and focus have changed. Mr. Abe seemed to suggest this when he suggested that perhaps women’s voices were not focused on too much and that women’s ideas should be better incorporated.

In all cases, the city development that Mr. Abe helped lead was an impressive testament to the strength of a private-public partnership and its capacity to *Build Back Better* in the face of great adversity and challenges. After being mostly destroyed by the 2011 disaster, the city had to be reconstructed from scratch, providing an opportunity not only to build a safer city but a more inclusive city. While perhaps focusing a bit less on the definition of universality that many of us consider today, the city nonetheless made huge improvements to increasing the city’s accessibility for the disabled and elderly. The attempt to “Create a gentle and vibrant town that conveys Takada’s culture to future generations has been a great success,” and it was incredible to meet one of the people who made this happen.



Visit to the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum

Bipasha Alam



Retrieved from: <https://www.nippon.com/en/guide-to-japan/gu900165/>

The Iwate Tsunami Memorial (いわてTSUNAMIメモリアル) museum is located near the waterfront of Rikuzentakata. In a long-shaped classy building, the museum occupies half of the building, and the other half of the building is occupied by a large souvenir shop. The museum was built with the mission of displaying the wisdom of the predecessors of Iwate prefecture, the reality of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, and sharing the lessons learned from the disaster with the world about how a society can become strong against natural disasters. The exhibition theme of the museum is, “Protecting lives, living together with the ocean and earth to never again experience the sadness of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami”. The museum was opened in September 2019, and it also serves as the new Michi-no-eki roadside station.

It was the very first visit site of our three-day ‘study tour’. The visit started from the entrance hall of the museum, where there was an information zone to greet visitors and provide information on such areas as the park, Rikuzentakata City, the Sanriku Coastal area, and the 3.11 Road Map. We visited the museum with the help of tour guides who explained to us all the information regarding the museum, and they also provided a booklet to every member of our study tour, which contains a record of the reconstruction of Iwate prefecture from March 2011 to March 2023. There was no entrance fee for the visitors to visit the museum.

Besides the entrance hall, the museum is divided into four zones, and it has two theaters. The entire area of the museum has also been separated into two categories; one is the normal floor area, and the other is the carpet area. Photography is allowed in normal floor areas and on the other hand, taking pictures is prohibited in the carpet area. Except for zone three and the two theaters of the museum, all other areas are normal floor areas where visitors can take pictures.

The museum was entirely bilingual in Japanese and English. It covers not only the 2011 tsunami in detail but also illustrates the science behind the tsunami, past tsunamis that happened on the Sanriku Coast, and a general overview of natural disasters in Japan.



First, zone one was about 'Tracing History', where tsunami disasters have been uncovered from historical and scientific perspectives. Furthermore, this zone describes the knowledge, techniques, and culture that have been nursed since ancient times for living together with nature.

Retrieved from <https://iwate-tsunami-memorial.jp/en/about.html>

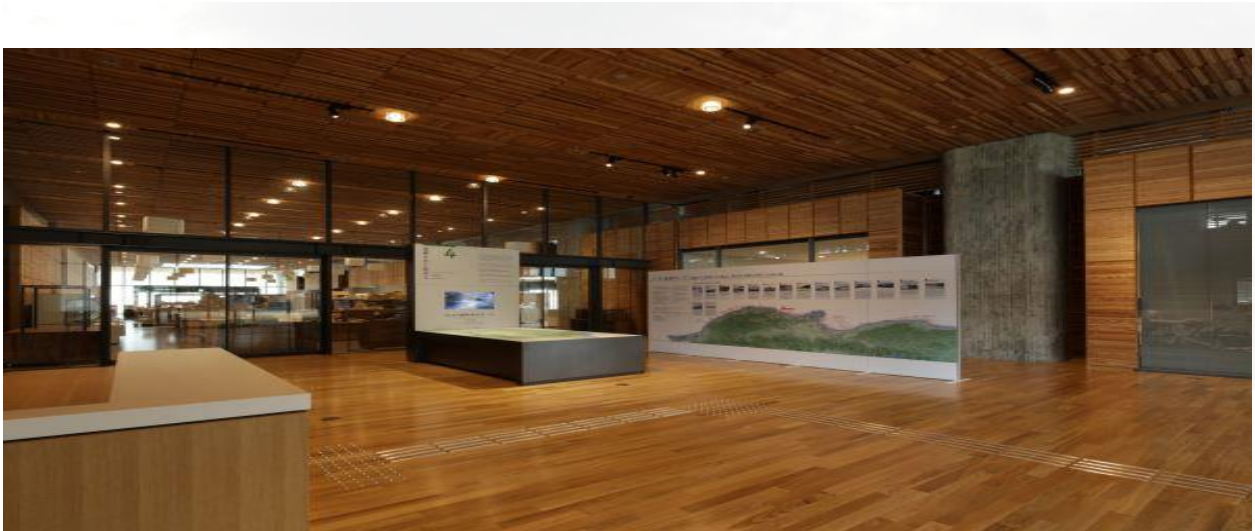
Zone two was about 'Learning the Facts', and it provides information about the reality of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami by exhibiting actual objects that were damaged, photos of damaged sites, and memories of the victims. When I saw the 'keyboard harmonica' from the Kamaishi City Unosumai Elementary School, the first thing that came to mind was some happy faces of the children who might have been playing the harmonica right before the tsunami came. I felt very emotional at that point.



Another touching moment was when we saw documentary videos in the two theaters of the museum, where we saw the live scenarios and photos of the areas before, during, and after the disaster. It showed the tsunami's destruction and how people faced the disaster on March 11, 2011. Actually, the whole museum holds very emotional memories of the 2011 disaster.

Zone three, known as the 'Learning Lessons' zone, shows videos about the lessons learned from the 2011 tsunami and earthquake on how to apply those learning and protect lives. The videos showcased the people who escaped, helped, and provided support to others. There was also a replica of a disaster management office which shows how decisions were made to prioritize the actions after the disaster to start the recovery process.

By highlighting 'Moving towards reconstruction together', zone four is for expressing gratitude to all the supporters inside Japan and the world who helped to reconstruct the affected areas and overcome the destruction of the disaster.



Retrieved from <https://iwate-tsunami-memorial.jp/en/about.html>

It was a nice start to our study tour by visiting the Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum. By visiting this museum, we were able to have an overall idea about the consequences of the 2011 Great East Japanese Earthquake and Tsunami, the area, people, their vision, and definitely about the reconstruction of the whole prefecture after the disaster.



Takata Matsubara Memorial Park for Tsunami Disaster: A Private Guided-Visit with ICU Students

Abigaëlle Guazzelli

The journey through the Takata Matsubara Memorial Park for TSUNAMI Disaster is an immersive experience, with the "Tsunami Memorial Museum of Rikuzentakata" acting as a vital chapter within this larger narrative. Nested within the expansive folds of the Sanriku Fukko (Reconstruction) National Park, our exploration seamlessly transitioned from the museum to the broader park and its serene surroundings. Join us as we traverse this landscape, unraveling the stories etched in its features and feeling the resonance of resilience and reconstruction that permeates every corner.



What is Takata Matsubara

A decade has passed since the tragic events of March 11, 2011, and the Takata Matsubara Memorial Park for TSUNAMI Disaster stands as a poignant testament to the City of Rikuzentakata's resilience and reconstruction efforts. Unveiled in September 2019, this memorial park is a response to the profound impact of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and the ensuing tsunami, which left a substantial part of the city in ruins.

Comprising three integral facilities, the park embodies a collaborative endeavor for remembrance and rebuilding. The National Memorial Facility, sanctioned by the Japanese government, serves as a solemn homage to the lives lost in the 2011 disaster.



Step 1: Entering into the Serenity Gateway

As we stepped into the park, a sense of tranquility enveloped us, immersing us in a space that exuded purity and serenity. Below the sleek lines of the hall, a square water feature added a soothing symphony to our guide's narrative.



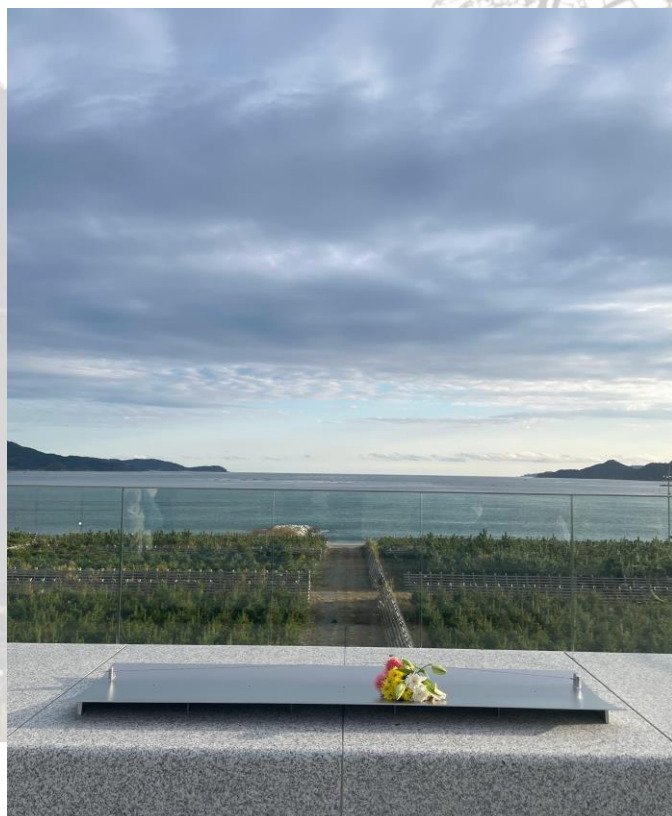
Inviting us to venture forth, our guide led the way into the vast expanse that unfurled before our eyes. A grand paved alley stretched out, bordered by expansive fields and farmlands extending as far as our vision could reach. A line of trees guided us toward the seawall. The landscape, though seemingly deserted, revealed a mystical allure through its simplicity and thoughtful design.

Within this serene tableau, two marble islets stood silently, their surfaces unmarked by names. Yet, they bore a solemnity reminiscent of war memorials in France, honoring those who had fallen in battle. In this instance, their purpose was to pay homage to the victims of the tsunami. The absence of names etched in stone hinted at the overwhelming challenge of commemorating each lost life, underscoring the profound magnitude of the losses endured. At the ends of these islets, only two bouquets of fresh flowers stood, underscoring that this park transcended mere commemoration. It emerged as a space for deep reflection and prayer, resonating with the souls of the residents of Rikuzentakata.

This emotional undertone intensified against the backdrop of the almost surreal landscape that surrounded us. A gentle watercourse now lay between us and the seawall, beckoning us to cross. Stepping onto the bridge, a breathtaking panorama unfolded with majestic mountains loomed in the distance.



Step 2: Walking On the Edge of the Seawall



Upon reaching the top of the impressive seawall, the sea finally came into view, strangely calm, framed by two columns of mountains, offering a unique panorama of the City of Rikuzentakata's Hirota Bay. A moment of prayer was requested from each of us in respect for those who perished in the disaster, momentarily plunging the visit into a serene silence.

The height of the wall was a subject of debate. The government fixed it to 11.5 meters, but because the land went down by 1 meter after the earthquake, the seawall was ultimately fixed at 12.5 meters above sea level. An odd decision considering the tsunami measured over 14 meters high, but it still stood taller than the previous 5-meter wall.

At the base of the seawall facing the sea, a row of 40,000 young pine trees could now be seen along its foot. The planting of



these trees in 2017 was an integral part of the reconstruction efforts initiated by the city of Rikuzentakata, hoping to restore the Takata-matsubara Pine Grove, which contained approximately 70,000 pine trees. Moreover, the Takata Matsubara used to be a magnificent sandy beach and was the biggest tourist attraction in the City of Rikuzentakata, designated by the national government as a scenic spot and said to be one of the hundred best sceneries in Japan. That's why they brought sand from the mountains trying to reconstitute the former beauty of this bay.

Step 3: Contemplating the Miracle Pine Tree

As we approached, a vibrant rainbow graced the backdrop, weaving a mythical ambiance and amplifying the miraculous narrative encapsulated by the Miracle Pine Tree (奇跡の一本松, Kiseki no Ippon matsu).

The preservation of this tree posed an arduous challenge for the resilient residents of the city. The arid and ravaged soil post-tsunami tragically led to the eventual demise of the original tree. Yet, the indomitable spirit prevailed as the original trunk stood undeterred, meticulously conserved, with branches authentically replicated. Even in the shadow of this remarkable tree, one found it challenging to grasp its artificial genesis.

Thus, this tree has metamorphosed into an emblem of Rikuzentakata's rebirth, now enshrined as a monument to impart the profound lessons of the seismic catastrophe to succeeding generations.



Step 4: Passing around the Rikuzentakata Youth Hostel and the Reconstructed Watergate

As we moved away from the Miracle Pine Tree, its enduring symbol of hope still visible in our rearview, the collapsed view of Rikuzentakata Youth Hostel served as a poignant backdrop.

The journey continued, guiding us towards the reconstructed watergate—a critical element in the city's defenses against the relentless sea. Here, the reconstruction efforts stood as a testament to Rikuzentakata's commitment to fortifying itself against future challenges. Yet, the solemnity of this location echoed with the haunting memory of the tsunami's fury. The rebuilt dam bore witness to

the tragic failure of its predecessor during the catastrophic events of 2011. In those desperate moments, numerous firefighters lost their lives while fervently attempting to close its floodgates, an act of valor eternally etched in the city's history. This one was therefore created to be automatically closed in case of a tsunami scenario.



Step 5: Exploring the remnants of the Kesen Junior High School

Adorned with helmets, we stepped into the forsaken corridors of Kesen Junior High School—a once vibrant institution that nurtured the dreams of young minds. Now a haunting relic, this educational haven stood as one of the tsunami's initial casualties. Although no souls were claimed within its walls, the enduring scars etched upon the edifice spoke volumes about the ferocity and dominion of the 2011 tsunami that assailed the coastal haven of Rikuzentakata.

Despite the structural resilience that held the building in a skeletal embrace, the windows bore witness to the relentless onslaught of a cascade of calamities. Shattered by the tempest's breath, they told tales of a natural force that brooked no resistance. As we explored the interior, our gaze was drawn upward to the ceiling—a repository of suspended remnants. Debris, remnants of the tsunami's passage, clung like spectral memories to the skeleton of the school's former life.



Each object, each artifact, seemed to cling to its place, each narrating its silent testimony. Among these unyielding relics, the piano stood in solemnity, a harmonic survivor amidst the chaos. The paintings, though shaken by the tremors of disaster, persisted in haunting the walls, depicting fragments of the school's former life.

These works of art, frozen within their frames, endured as silent witnesses to days when creativity and learning filled these now deserted halls.

Meeting with the youths and those who migrated to Rikuzentakata after 3.11

Hiyona Otake and Daliah Breit

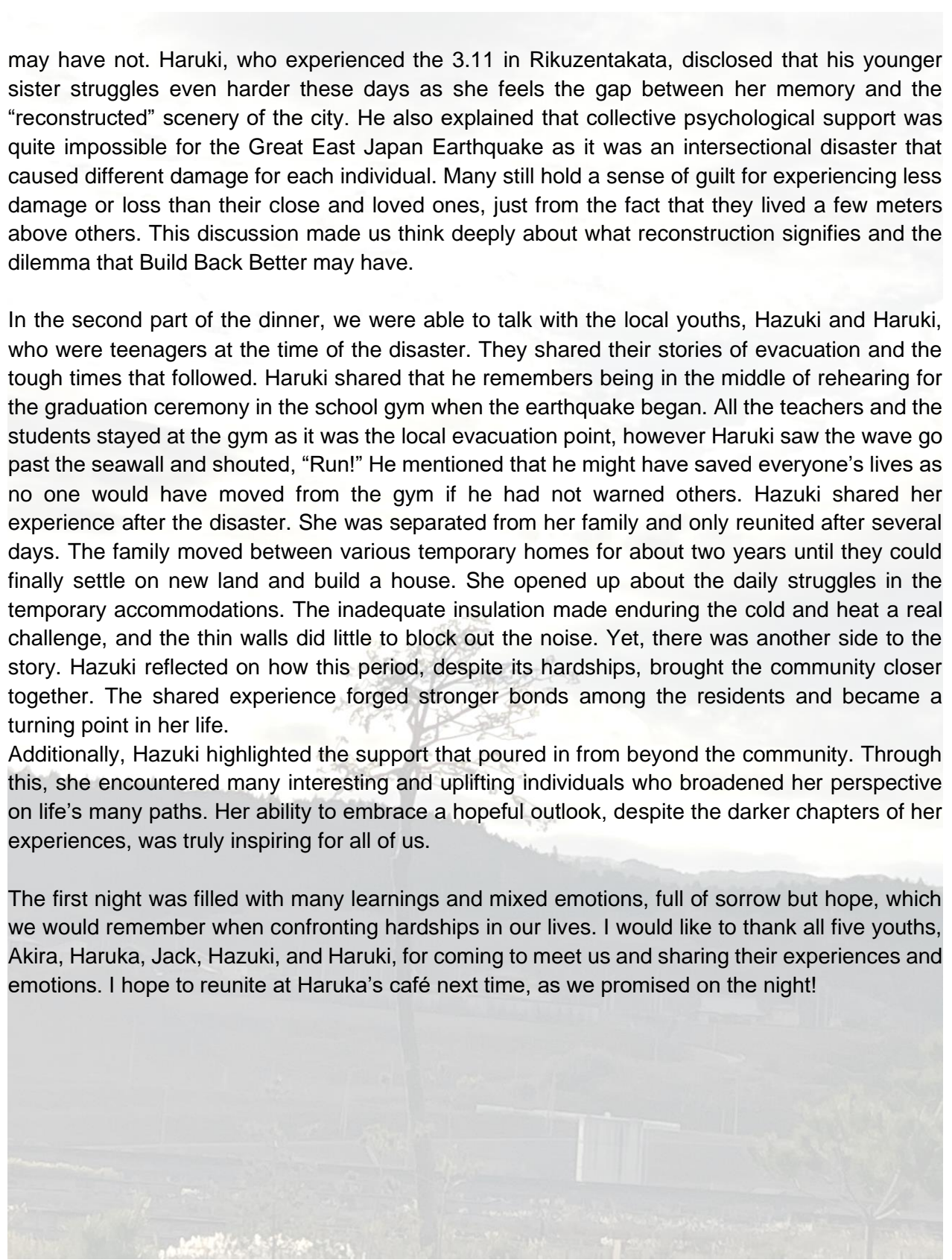
Our first dinner was filled with memorable and meaningful conversation, as we were joined by three youths who migrated to Rikuzentakata after 3.11 (Akira, Haruka, and Jack) and two young locals who experienced the disaster (Hazuki and Haruki).



During the first part of the meal, we had an opportunity to talk to the local politician Akira, his wife Haruka who owns a café in Rikuzentakata, and Jack who works on foreign workers' inclusion at the city hall. We were able to hear why they all migrated to Rikuzentakata after the disaster and their motivations to make the city more inclusive, sustainable, and a better place for everyone. Akira was in Tokyo when the disaster occurred and felt ashamed of being unable to do anything back in 2011. Therefore, after joining the university, he visited Rikuzentakata every month during the weekends between his lectures and worked closely with local people on reconstruction. As I was in the UK at the time of the disaster, I resonated with Akira for feeling a sense of guilt in viewing the disaster from afar; however, I was impressed by his ability to transform his motivation into action. He and his wife explained that they currently work to bring young adolescents from the Kanto region to Rikuzentakata as a form of “domestic study abroad” to increase youth inclusion in the Rikuzentakata community for the city’s sustainable development. Jack, who came from Alaska with the JET programme, also worked on expanding the Rikuzentakata community to a more diverse population. With his base work on interpretation and translation, he also voluntarily conducts Japanese conversational classes with foreign workers in Rikuzentakata. He mentioned that although 1% of the population is currently foreigners, most citizens are unaware of this. He feels that this ignorance is hindering Rikuzentakata from being an inclusive community. Therefore, he aims to work on representing the foreign community so that local and foreign people can work together for the betterment of the city. We were able to learn that the young migrants were not only aiming to work for the city as a member of the community, but were also acting as a bridge between Rikuzentakata and the outside world.

I would also like to highlight the interesting discussion we held with all five youths on whether Rikuzentakata has been reconstructed. All five mentioned that on the physical infrastructure level, many agree that Rikuzentakata has reconstructed and even innovated on the concept of Build Back Better. However, many of them also admitted that the psychological minds of people still

I would also like to highlight the interesting discussion we held with all five youths on whether Rikuzentakata has been reconstructed. All five mentioned that on the physical infrastructure level, many agree that Rikuzentakata has reconstructed and even innovated on the concept of Build Back Better. However, many of them also admitted that the psychological minds of people still



may have not. Haruki, who experienced the 3.11 in Rikuzentakata, disclosed that his younger sister struggles even harder these days as she feels the gap between her memory and the “reconstructed” scenery of the city. He also explained that collective psychological support was quite impossible for the Great East Japan Earthquake as it was an intersectional disaster that caused different damage for each individual. Many still hold a sense of guilt for experiencing less damage or loss than their close and loved ones, just from the fact that they lived a few meters above others. This discussion made us think deeply about what reconstruction signifies and the dilemma that Build Back Better may have.

In the second part of the dinner, we were able to talk with the local youths, Hazuki and Haruki, who were teenagers at the time of the disaster. They shared their stories of evacuation and the tough times that followed. Haruki shared that he remembers being in the middle of rehearsing for the graduation ceremony in the school gym when the earthquake began. All the teachers and the students stayed at the gym as it was the local evacuation point, however Haruki saw the wave go past the seawall and shouted, “Run!” He mentioned that he might have saved everyone’s lives as no one would have moved from the gym if he had not warned others. Hazuki shared her experience after the disaster. She was separated from her family and only reunited after several days. The family moved between various temporary homes for about two years until they could finally settle on new land and build a house. She opened up about the daily struggles in the temporary accommodations. The inadequate insulation made enduring the cold and heat a real challenge, and the thin walls did little to block out the noise. Yet, there was another side to the story. Hazuki reflected on how this period, despite its hardships, brought the community closer together. The shared experience forged stronger bonds among the residents and became a turning point in her life.

Additionally, Hazuki highlighted the support that poured in from beyond the community. Through this, she encountered many interesting and uplifting individuals who broadened her perspective on life’s many paths. Her ability to embrace a hopeful outlook, despite the darker chapters of her experiences, was truly inspiring for all of us.

The first night was filled with many learnings and mixed emotions, full of sorrow but hope, which we would remember when confronting hardships in our lives. I would like to thank all five youths, Akira, Haruka, Jack, Hazuki, and Haruki, for coming to meet us and sharing their experiences and emotions. I hope to reunite at Haruka’s café next time, as we promised on the night!

Lecture by Sakura Line 3.11 and tree-planting

Daliah Breit

Spending the morning with the nonprofit organization Tonarino, which used to go by "Save Takata," was incredibly insightful and motivating. We gathered in a welcoming space that served coffee and offered co-working spots, housed in buildings that had once been bustling with pubs and restaurants before the disaster struck. This choice of location was meaningful — it aimed to revive the communal spirit that once flourished here.



Mister Shoma Okamoto, the founder and driving force behind the group's ambitious plans, led us through a very interesting talk. He introduced us to his "Sakura Line 311" project, which has two main goals: to share the important lessons learned from the 2011 disaster and to get young people involved in rebuilding their communities. After the initial shock and the struggle for survival faded, people like Mr. Okamoto began to think creatively about how to reconstruct the area. One of his biggest plans now is to plant 17,000 cherry blossom trees along a 170-kilometre stretch that was affected by the tsunami. For every 10 meters, a tree will be planted, and so far, the NPO successfully planted thousands of trees. The idea came about when the founders, Mister Okamoto and his friends, realized that about half of the land was still unused and remembered that many locals felt the memory of the disaster was slipping away. These trees, blooming in their distinctive pink colour, would be a strong reminder

of what happened, the lessons learned, and where the safer areas lie. Plus, this project invites young adults to take part and contribute by planting the trees themselves.

Three types of cherry blossoms are planted to diversify and reduce the risk of the spread of diseases. The project involves three main steps: finding the right places to plant, the actual planting, and then taking care of the trees, which can be quite challenging due to storms and other factors that could damage them.



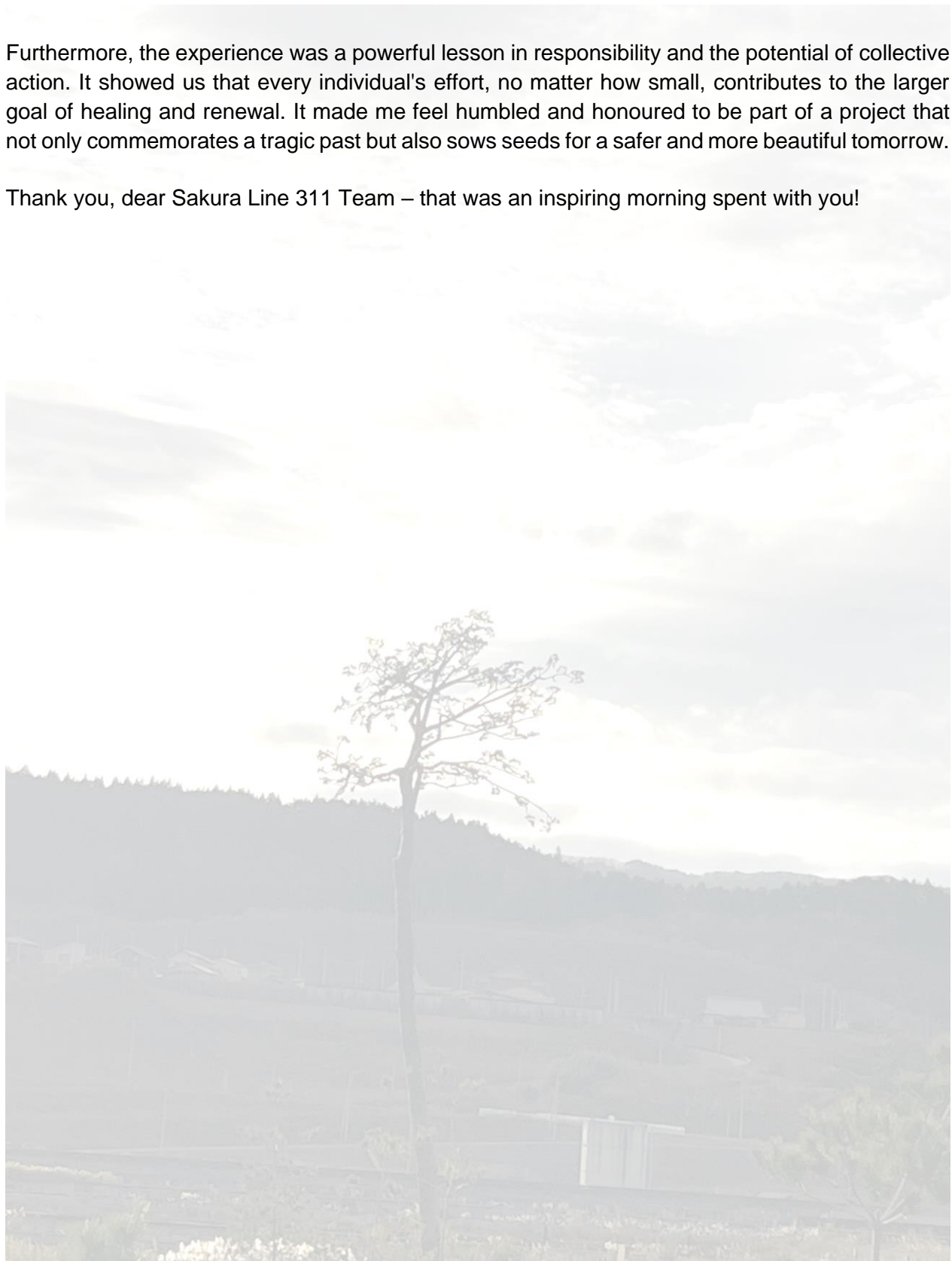
Listening to Mister Okamoto, I was struck by his positive and forward-thinking approach to dealing with disasters. He and his team chose to see the event as a chance to reflect on their life's purpose and how they could contribute to their hometown's future. Their critical self-reflection and willingness to start effective initiatives like the Sakura project could serve as an example for other regions around the world. Toward the end of his talk, Mr. Okamoto shared the broader visions and goals of his initiatives, giving us a clearer picture of his commitment to these causes. He explained that their NPO's vision and aim for the future is to never repeat the sadness of losing lives in natural disasters. Moreover, they define their mission as “changing the perception of those who have not experienced disasters from someone else’s problem to their own problem.” I am convinced that involving children and young adults from various regions of Japan, as well as from around the globe, in initiatives like the Sakura Line 311 project could significantly raise awareness about the universal vulnerability to disasters. It emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility and the willingness to learn from those who have faced and overcome such adversities. By drawing lessons from those who have a wealth of experience in dealing with such events, young people can become better equipped to contribute to a resilient future, no matter where they may find themselves.



After Mister Okamoto concluded his lecture, we were offered a tangible way to contribute to the legacy of Tohoku’s renewal: planting a cherry blossom tree. As we dug into the earth, there was a deep sense of participation in something far larger than ourselves. Each shovelful of soil was a small commitment to the future and a personal contribution to the “build back better” approach followed by the region and specifically the Sakura Line 311 project. This hands-on experience was surprisingly moving. There was a collective energy among us as we worked together, which transcended language and culture. It felt very empowering to be part of such a great initiative, which not only aims to restore the landscape but also wants to increase the community’s resilience. For me, it wasn’t just about planting a tree – which per se is an already powerful and beautiful process – but even more, it felt like an act of solidarity and an important gesture toward healing and growth. It was a reminder of how beauty can emerge from tragedy, and how hope can take root in the most devastated of places.

Furthermore, the experience was a powerful lesson in responsibility and the potential of collective action. It showed us that every individual's effort, no matter how small, contributes to the larger goal of healing and renewal. It made me feel humbled and honoured to be part of a project that not only commemorates a tragic past but also sows seeds for a safer and more beautiful tomorrow.

Thank you, dear Sakura Line 311 Team – that was an inspiring morning spent with you!



Discussion with Nadeshiko Kai & Crossroad Game and Talk by Mr. Seiji Murakami

Sopho Kharazi

Discussion with Nadeshiko Kai



During our visit to the Nadeshiko Association, which was established after the earthquake and has been operating for 12 years, senior members greeted us warmly. They prepared and served us delicious homemade meals and also gifted us with packages of seaweed. Following the lunch, we engaged in a discussion with one of the association's senior members who had lost her home due to the tsunami and had to reside in temporary housing for some time.

It is worth mentioning that the association has been named after the Nadeshiko flower, which is a symbol of strength and resilience in Japanese culture. The same year, when the tsunami hit the city, Japan won the women's world cup. The name of the Japanese football team was Nadeshiko, a word used in Japanese to express gentle, strong, and incredible women. The association's slogan is *Energetic and Enjoying* because

when women gather, they have a fun and enjoyable time. The creation of this mood was very natural because all women were friends even before the disaster. The association works based on the membership system, which costs 20,000 JPY per year. Right now, 50 association members prepare and send unique homemade products as presents to the people in the area four times a year.

According to the lady we had a discussion with, a lot of elderly people lived in this area, but after the earthquake, they moved to live higher to avoid the risk of being hit by tsunami again. When the tsunami happened, the lady we talked to was in junior high school, as she taught math there. At that time, everyone was having a graduation rehearsal in the gymnasium building. When the earthquake hit, Mr. Haruki, a junior high school student, told everyone to run, so people went to the school's playground first and then moved to the elementary school.



The members told us that due to the seawall, the volume of fishing and seaweed culture has decreased in the region, which is also experiencing an aging population because young people tend to live and move to larger cities. At the same time, older people cannot keep the rice paddies growing anymore. For this reason, people ask companies to do rice growing.

This story of the Nadeshiko Association is an inspiring testament to resilience in the face of tragedy. The warmth and hospitality extended to visitors, the homemade meals, and the symbolic gift of seaweed reflect not just generosity but a deep-rooted cultural ethos of care and community support, especially in the aftermath of such a devastating event. The association's name, inspired by the Nadeshiko flower and the Japanese women's soccer team's victory during the tsunami year, embodies the strength and grace exhibited by the women leading this group. It is heartening to see how a shared sense of camaraderie and friendship, which existed even before the disaster struck, has evolved into a support network focused on rebuilding and sustaining the community. However, the challenges faced by the region post-disaster are poignant. The shift of elderly residents to higher ground due to fear of future tsunamis, the decline in traditional fishing and seaweed culture due to infrastructure changes, and the migration of younger generations to urban areas all paint a complex picture of a community in transition. The reliance on companies for rice cultivation instead of traditional methods highlights the changing landscape and the adaptation necessary for survival. It is a bittersweet reminder of the shifts in livelihoods and cultural practices due to both environmental changes and societal dynamics.

Crossroad game and talk by Mr. Seiji Murakami



Mr. Seiji Murakami introduced us to three principles of tsunami evacuation: do your best, do not make assumptions, and lead others in evacuation. After the disaster, the Hirota Peninsula became isolated due to the devastated critical infrastructure. At the same time, many of the disaster victims acted independently to ensure their family members were safe. After the disaster, the Nagahora community club took action in different ways: first, they tried to confirm someone's safety by checking who was missing; second, they attempted to secure food by surveying stockpiled rice and distributing rice balls; and third, they tried to guarantee security of refuge either in accommodations or evacuation centers through organizing separate stay and evacuation at private houses.

Mr. Seiji Murakami also shared about a Miracle in Kamaishi where children persuaded their parents who thought the tsunami would not reach their houses to run. This saved their lives because the tsunami washed away their houses.

When the tsunami hit, Mr. Murakami was in a junior high school with 1,200 students. According to him, out of 300 children, 160 lost their houses, 40 lost one parent and 6 lost both parents. For the first night, people in evacuation centers did not have electricity.

Mr. Murakami asked us some interesting questions throughout the lecture pointing out that there is no right answer. One of the questions was whether any of us would take food from a half-destroyed convenience store in the post-disaster period. The majority gave a positive response. Afterward, Mr. Murakami shared that 50 lunchboxes were taken from such a store and distributed to 100 children.

The ethical dilemma posed by Mr. Murakami's questions prompts introspection about moral choices in desperate situations. The majority's responses reflect the stark reality of survival instincts prevailing in times of crisis. In other words, Mr. Murakami's lecture not only provided a glimpse into the harrowing experiences faced by individuals during the disaster but also challenged listeners to grapple with moral quandaries and the complexities of decision-making in extreme circumstances. It highlighted the importance of preparedness, community solidarity, and ethical considerations in the face of unforeseen challenges.



Reconstructing a City, SDGs in the Process: Lecture by Mr. Shinji Hashizume at WaWaWa

Kristine Fleur Pagayona

Mr. Shinji Hashizume, a visionary entrepreneur born and raised in Rikuzentakata City, shared a remarkable journey of rebuilding after the March 11 disaster. His endeavors focus on not just reconstructing physical structures but revitalizing the community and fostering sustainable development. Before the disaster, Mr. Shinji ran a wholesale food business with 300 clients. However, the disaster reduced clients to 250, leading to a 60% decline in sales. Faced with challenges, he sought innovative ways to contribute to the community.



to

Mr. Shinji's first response was to visit shelters, discovering a need for diverse food options for children. This realization prompted the creation of the Kesen Asaichi market, providing essential food items to affected families. The market evolved to address the broader issue of the lack of shops post-disaster. The Kesen Asaichi market became a hub for distributing donated goods, emphasizing the importance of self-sufficiency. The market's core concept was to encourage independence by selling affordable produce, promoting local businesses, and fostering a sense of community.

Mr. Shinji expanded his vision by establishing the Rikuzentakata Future Shopping Street, aiming to generate funds for rebuilding. The evolution from temporary stalls to permanent establishments exemplifies the resilience and adaptability of the community. This also resulted to the building of Okazu-Ya WaWaWa Restaurant (おかず屋 和笑輪) with a special focus on the environment.



Recognizing the environmental impact, Mr. Shinji addressed waste management issues by requiring customers to bring their own takeout containers and recycling WaWaWa restaurant's waste into compost. In addition, he made agreements with local farmers to sustain and motivate them. These initiatives not only reduced the burden on local facilities but also contributed to soil improvement and sustainable farming practices. Further, he aims to encourage other restaurants to join the composting initiative. Another initiative by the restaurant is the employment of mothers, creating a supportive work environment. Moreover, efforts are made to attract young people back to the town, providing employment opportunities and a chance for them to contribute to the community's development.

Mr. Shinji's mission encompasses three crucial aspects: creating a safe environment for children, ensuring the happiness of the elderly, and fostering a town where everyone can live and work joyfully. The initiatives align with these goals, aiming to make Rikuzentakata a model for sustainable, community-centric living. Inspired by the German concept of *energie wende*, Mr. Shinji emphasizes the need for lifestyle changes to achieve a holistic transformation. His experiences in Germany shaped his vision for a future where the town not only rebuilds physically but also shifts towards sustainable practices.

Upcoming events like the Christmas market and continued efforts to involve local businesses and residents showcase Mr. Shinji's commitment to long-term development. The goal is to make Rikuzentakata a place where people live happily, setting a benchmark for revitalizing disaster-stricken towns. Mr. Hashizume Shinji's journey in revitalizing Rikuzentakata reflects the resilience, innovation, and community spirit necessary for rebuilding after a disaster. His initiatives encompass economic sustainability, environmental responsibility, and social well-being, providing a holistic model for towns facing similar challenges. As Rikuzentakata evolves, it stands as a testament to the power of community-driven transformation.



Fumon-ji Temple and Reconstruction

Satomi Yamada



Image 1. Fumon-ji Temple

Fumon-ji Temple is a religious establishment that affiliates with the Soto Zen sect. It is located in Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture. The temple celebrated its 500th anniversary in 2006. It is known for its three-storied pagoda, Oyako Jizou (colloquially referred to as the Mimamori Jizou), Statues of the 500 Rakan, Negai Zakura, and crape myrtles. Statues and Negai Zakura are closely tied to the disaster Iwate prefecture experienced in 2011.

During the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, various buildings and places offered or were requested to provide exceptional support. Fumon-ji Temple was one of them.

As the survey result published by NHK in 2019 suggests, the Japanese population tends to see themselves as secular² – insisting they do not affiliate with particular religions, and functions of establishments like temples and shrines are more symbolic or cultural than religious. Consistently, the role Fumon-ji Temple took during and after the disaster did not necessarily concern its nature as a religious place.

Mr. Kumagai - the vice priest of Fumon-ji Temple - shared his experience during the 2011 earthquake. The temple was not used as a shelter after the disaster. Instead, the city requested the priest –Mr. Kumagai's father – to temporarily keep the remains of disaster victims, and Fumon-ji Temple kept the funeral ashes of more than 400 people. The situation at the temple was broadcast via Japanese TV programs, and people sent Buddha statues to show their support. The temple also served its purpose as a base camp for volunteer activities for about three months.

Fumon-ji Temple served another substantial function after the disaster. Mr. Kumagai explained that the temple was moved from one place to another 500 years ago. Then, it was built on a unique landscape where soft and hard layers lie over one another. However, it

² 小林利行 (2019) 『日本人の宗教的意識や行動はどう変わったか ~ISSP国際比較調査「宗教」・日本の結果~』 (放送研究と調査 2019年4月号) (p.53)
<https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/research/yoron/pdf/20190401_7.pdf>

turned out the establishment was not destroyed or did not experience severe destruction when the 2011 earthquake hit the Tohoku region. Mr. Kumagai is curious to know how people from 500 years ago knew which areas were safe from the threat of tectonic hazards. He added that it was one of several aspects of the temple he wanted to advertise to visitors.

Indeed, a temple that endured the challenges of the 2011 earthquake is inspiring and provides meaning, much like the resilience embodied by the Miracle Pine Tree. Assuredly, it is essential to preserve particular buildings (e.g., Former Rikuzentakata Youth Hostel, Kesen Elementary School) that suffered major damages from the 2011 earthquake to keep memories of disaster vivid for everyone. Meanwhile, promoting a human-made structure that endured the 2011 earthquake and remained almost intact would symbolize the significance of the ancestor's wisdom and the sentiment of "not everything is lost."

Other than the miraculous story about the structure itself, Fumon-ji Temple provided social and psychological support for affected people. Statues of the 500 Rakan, for example, result from activities associating the spirit of zen with recovery from the disaster. One of the volunteers who came to the temple happened to be a sculptor, and the person initiated a project to sculpt stone Buddhist statues. The project not only aimed to pray for victims but also to provide therapeutic services for those who lost their loved ones. Although it was an utter coincidence, the total number of devoted statues and 500 Rakan statues is the number of victims in Rikuzentakata City.



Image 2. Statues of the 500 Rakan

Negai Zakura is a product of another project that intended to pray for victims and encourage the recovery of affected people. Initially, an NGO from Kyoto started the project. The project gathered traditional Japanese clothing (Juban) from all over Japan, and local women in Rikuzentakata City turned those clothes into hanging ornaments. Fumon-ji Temple provided the space for people to work to support the project.



Image 3. Negai Zakura

Oyako Jizou also has a significant connection to the disaster. These statues are made of driftwood that used to be part of the pine grove. It symbolized a revival since the pine grove - the scenic beauty destroyed by the 2011 earthquake - is now brought back to Rikuzentakata City as statues. Fumon-ji Temple keeps the mother and children, and Zenko-ji Temple in Nagano Prefecture keeps the father. These two temples have different affiliated sects, but they cooperate, and the father statue is annually brought to Fumon-ji Temple. The event is called "Jizou-bon", attracting local visitors.



Image 4. Oyako Jizou

In addition to the overall contributions of Fumon-ji Temple, Mr. Kumagai's perspectives and experiences opened up new discussions about the 2011 earthquake. He shared how he became the vice priest, "Before the 2011 earthquake, I had a different job. I found it meaningful and worked hard. However, after the 2011 earthquake, I could no longer see the meaning and significance of what I did. Then, I decided it was time to pursue a path as a priest."

The 2011 earthquake is absolutely not a joyous event. On the other hand, life changes that trigger people to start new things cannot be ignored. Rikuzentakata City had rich cultural and historical charms even before the disaster. However, the devastating and shocking incident gathered further attention from outsiders and those who used to live in the city. It also led locals to start new activities to promote recovery.

It can be described as a "forced" process since people committed to the recovery and transformation of the city because they did not have choices. Nonetheless, the people of Rikuzentakata City ultimately determined whether they would make something out of the disaster.

To summarize, the contributions of Fumon-ji Temple during and after the 2011 earthquake are multilayered and pretty symbolic. They showcased the strength and resilience of locals in Rikuzentakata City and the unity among people all over Japan as activities and projects in Fumon-ji Temple invited participation across different sects and prefectures.



Activities of Riku Café

Ms. Kazuko Yoshida and Ms. Atsuko Unoura

Dara De Vera

The Riku Café in Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture, is a community cafe operated by the Nonprofit Organization (NPO) Riku Cafe as part of the "Rikuzentakata Town Living Project" and has become a symbol of hope and community strength after the devastating earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Ms. Kazuko Yoshida and Ms. Atsuko Unoura, inspired by Assistant Professor Koizumi from Tokyo University – a town planning expert – envisioned the café as a place of resilience and support for the community.



The Riku Cafe established as a community cafe after the 2011 disaster. Photo grabbed from Riku Café website: <http://rikucafe.jp/about>

Named after Rikuzentakata City, the café's roots go back to when Assistant Prof. Koizumi and friends visited for cycling competitions, finding comfort and respite at Ms. Yoshida's home. After the disaster, her home became a distribution center, sparking the idea of a central gathering place. Tokyo University students, led by Assistant Professor Koizumi, teamed up with Ms. Yoshida to create the Riku Café on land provided by Ms. Unoura. The collaboration with construction company Sumitomo Mitsui highlights positive corporate involvement in post-disaster rebuilding.



Community members of Riku Café. Photo grabbed from Riku Café website: <http://rikucafe.jp/donation>

The café went beyond being a physical space, becoming a hub for events and community activities that attracted artists and dignitaries like Ryuichi Sakamoto and Prime Minister Abe. This engagement goes beyond a simple endorsement. Their presence signals the café's importance

within the local community and, on a broader scale, becomes an inspirational symbol for others facing similar challenges worldwide.

Due to the significance of Riku café in the community's recovery, a crowdfunding campaign supported the construction of an improved café, emphasizing collective efforts in the rebuilding process. Adaptable and dynamic, the Riku Café transformed into a sanctuary, offering comfort through various activities and storytelling. Its influence



Community elderly members enjoying food prepared by Riku Café. Photo grabbed from <http://rikucafe.jp/smartclub/contents>

extended to the local economy, drawing visitors through events. The café's philosophy of providing healthy food and activities, especially for the elderly, promotes well-being. Initiatives like yoga, cooking, and herb gardening showcase its diverse offerings.



Riku Café's Smart Club promotes healthy and active life. Photo grabbed from <http://rikucafe.jp/smartclub/contents>

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the café adapted with a delivery service, checking on the elderly, and initiatives like the "Kodomono Show" for single mothers. The café's unwavering commitment to community well-being reflects its enduring advocacy to help the community.

The narrative of the Riku Café exemplifies the power of community collaboration in recovering from adversity. With its activities, such as serving as a hub for various activities and attracting renowned figures, Riku Café challenges conventional disaster recovery narratives, emphasizing the restoration of the human spirit alongside physical infrastructure. This narrative highlights the significance of such spaces as more than just physical structures; they become environments that foster a sense of healing, resilience, and collective strength. Moreover, the collaboration with Sumitomo prompts reflections on the role of corporate entities in recovery, going beyond financial contributions to active community participation.

In conclusion, the Riku Café is a testament to the resilience of community spirit. From a distribution hub to a symbol of recovery, it showcases the strength that comes from collective efforts. The café's story inspires a reevaluation of disaster recovery approaches, highlighting the impact of community-led initiatives on rebuilding infrastructure and lives after a devastating disaster.



Tohoku Tour Group Presentation and Discussion

Pitia Alex

On the final day of the study tour in Rikuzentakata, the students formed three groups to present the lessons they had learned, their insights, and practical recommendations for the city's ongoing recovery and development efforts. The students were honored to have the opportunity to share their thoughts in the Rikuzentakata city hall with respected local and community leaders who have been instrumental in the reconstruction and revitalization of Rikuzentakata following the disaster. The presentations underscored a deep sympathy for the lives impacted by the disaster in Iwate prefecture, as well as respect and appreciation for the resilience and concerted efforts of the city's residents, governmental bodies, and various organizations in navigating the challenges of reconstruction. The presentations spanned various fields with a particular focus on mental health support, youth empowerment, and the continued economic rejuvenation of the city.

All three groups recognized that the reconstruction process in terms of hard or structural measures has almost been completed (nearly thirteen years have passed since the disaster). Thus, they emphasized the soft measures and how the city might be more attractive with its existing resources.

Enhanced mental health support emerged as a common topic that each group discussed. The groups commended the impressive work already done by programs like Riku Café and Nadeshiko Association in providing well-being activities for the elderly. Yet, the groups also thought that both a more targeted and broader community-building approach could help to ameliorate the existing culture of healing and strengthen community bonds. One recommendation was the deployment of mobile mental health teams so that the specific needs of people can be addressed with appropriate intervention and those who are facing mental health and psychosocial issues receive the targeted support they need.

According to the students, during their three-day visit to Rikuzentakata City, they found a small gap in community engagement between the young and elderly generations. The recommendation from the student's side was that through collaboration with local schools, events could be held that would bring multiple generations together for open dialogue, which would facilitate the exchange of ideas, experiences, and empathy and may contribute to the process of healing and ensure that the lessons are not forgotten. The vision of intergenerational community engagement draws inspiration from a German model, as illustrated by a student's account of their 93-year-old grandmother's active participation in a community center. Her involvement in this activity, designed for all ages, enabled her to meet individuals from different generations and often share knowledge and experiences with young members. These activities at an intergenerational house or community center could bridge the gap between the elderly and the youth, thereby creating collective resilience and mutual support.

The student groups also mentioned that when they met with the young people in Rikuzentakata city, they discovered that the city still faces challenges in attracting the young generation. They pointed out that one reason for this might be that there is no university or college in Rikuzentakata, and students have to move to large cities like Sendai or Tokyo to achieve higher education. After

completing their studies, young students might get a different lifestyle and entertainment facilities in Rikuzentakata than big cities can offer. Thus, the recommendation was to introduce a youth center as a strategy to engage younger generations, offering a spectrum of activities, from sports to cultural events, designed to foster community spirit and personal development. Regular entertainment and positive social engagements may also act as stress relievers. In addition, the students also suggested a governance model for the management of the proposed youth center that empowers local youth through direct involvement in leadership and operational roles, supported by local government resources and collaborative fundraising efforts. This center could also serve as a vibrant hub to cultivate business and leadership skills among the youth, contributing to Rikuzentakata's social vitality and serving as a cradle for future entrepreneurial success within the city.

The students also focused on the economic growth of the city as well as the community. They mentioned that though there are some existing facilities from the local government for new entrepreneurs, further reducing taxation and maintaining affordable business rents will be key to fostering an extended and more compatible environment conducive to growth and making the city a magnet for talent and investment. Furthermore, regarding the general job opportunities for the young people, the collaborative efforts from the national and local governments, alongside nonprofit organizations, individual investors, and companies, could put more glamour on Rikuzentakata city to the young generation who wants to stay and settle in Rikuzentakata. The students added that the reconstructed beach, new campground, and Christmas market are all examples of the momentum already underway. However, continued infrastructure development, such as the reconnection of the city to the main transportation network running in the Tohoku region, would help to boost tourism and enhance mobility for residents. By lowering barriers for entrepreneurs and strategic infrastructure improvements, Rikuzentakata can continue to drive business innovations and bolster its appeal to residents, tourists, and businesses.

The presenters from the student groups also pointed out that during their visit to Rikuzentakata, it became evident that, even a decade after its installation, the residents of Rikuzentakata are facing challenges in fully embracing the presence of the sea wall. Beyond its perceived aesthetic shortcomings, the locals expressed discomfort, deprived of the ability to observe the horizon and the sea receding, essential for anticipating potential tsunamis. In response to this observation, the students proposed an initiative aimed at fostering acceptance of the wall in the post-tsunami landscape, and it was to involve implementing an art project within the city, inviting residents to actively engage with the wall by painting on it, thereby reclaiming its existence. Additionally, collaboration with local artists could result in the creation of tsunami-themed artworks or the reproduction of the sea horizon, incorporating community input. This multifaceted approach not only adds cultural significance to the city but also serves to reconcile residents with the wall. Furthermore, it holds the potential to enhance the town's tourist appeal, providing a positive impact on the local economy.

In conclusion, the presentations by the students highlighted the city's resilience, the community's dedication to recovery and growth post-disaster, and the potential for continued revitalization. The audience's engagement and constructive feedback underscored the value of this international exchange. Furthermore, the presentation and discussion enriched the students' perspectives and inspired them to apply Rikuzentakata's lessons within their own communities. At the session's closing, audience members encouraged the students to act as ambassadors for Rikuzentakata,

spreading its recovery strategies and contributing to the discussion on overall disaster risk reduction management.



Conclusion

Bipasha Alam

Our three-day study tour in Rikuzentakata City enlightened us in many ways. By visiting different places in the city and hearing from many important people in this city, we were able to learn lessons from their experience of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami through the lens of disaster risk reduction, which offers profound insights into how communities resiliently respond to natural disasters. The city, which was badly affected by the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, has become a symbol of recovery and rebuilding. The tour not only showcases the physical reconstruction but also underscores the intangible strength embedded within the community. From this tour, we could connect the relevance of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, particularly the Build Back Better concept, to the activities implemented in the affected area of Rikuzentakata city.

A pivotal lesson from this experience is the importance of proactive measures and preparedness. Rikuzentakata's implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies, such as elevated evacuation routes and strategically placed shelters, underscores the significance of early warning systems and effective planning. These initiatives significantly enhance the city's capacity to respond promptly to imminent disasters, ultimately minimizing potential casualties. Furthermore, we also had the opportunity to learn about the post-disaster management approaches of this city, where we understand the multiple layers of rehabilitation activities in the area, the challenges faced by the implementing authority and the people of this area in the process of rehabilitation, and about the efforts those have been taken to overcome such challenges.

The tour highlights the essential roles of community engagement and education in the success of disaster risk reduction initiatives. One of the most marvelous parts of this tour was seeing the active involvement of its residents in awareness programs, cultivating a culture of readiness and collaboration. This communal resilience not only assists in the immediate aftermath of disasters but also contributes to the sustained well-being of the region.

Another very noticeable fact of this tour was that the people of Rikuzentakata have integrated both traditional and modern approaches to disaster risk reduction, which was another learning of this study tour. By preserving and incorporating local cultural practices, the city achieves a harmonious blend of heritage and innovation. This comprehensive approach fortifies the social fabric and ensures that disaster resilience strategies align with the community's cultural identity.

In conclusion, the Rikuzentakata city tour was a complete package of disaster risk reduction case study. The city's transformative journey from devastation to recovery imparts valuable lessons to not only the people of this region but also it is a role model for people from all over the world. Through strategic planning, community involvement, and the preservation of cultural heritage, Rikuzentakata serves as an inspiring example of the ability to rebuild and flourish in the face of adversity.