

Integrating Art and Design with Disaster Relief Work: a Case study of Creative Reconstruction by the University of Tsukuba

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The Creative Reconstruction Project (CR projects) by the University of Tsukuba started in April 2012, a year after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The aim of this project is to contribute to relief work in the disaster area through art and design-based projects.

In this paper several completed CR projects are discussed as case studies, as well as the future potential of the project. There is also a survey of the objectives and achievements of other art activities pursued in support of the reconstruction of the disaster areas, and a more general discussion of the social function of art.

It is concluded that it is necessary to prioritize two things; firstly to try to come to an empathetic understanding of what people who live in the affected areas are going through, and secondly to cultivate a proactive, radical vision for future reconstruction/relief work, with a critical assessment of the current reality of the situation.

1. Background

(1) Rebuilding structures and communities

The 2011 earthquake off the Pacific coast of the Tohoku region on March 11, the resulting tsunami, and the emergency at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant wrought unprecedented damage on the area. Over 15,000 people were killed and almost 3,000 people are listed as missing. Furthermore, over 310,000 people have been forced to live in provisional housing, having been made homeless by the tsunami and possible radioactive contamination.

In the wake of this disaster, Japan is pushing forward with reconstruction, though it is not enough for this reconstruction to focus only on structures. It will become as, if not more, important to address relief work which brings hope not only to people in the immediately affected areas, but also to the nation as a whole by reinvigorating communities, through preserving and promoting local history and traditional festivals, as well as constructing towns that are in harmony with their natural environment and are sensitive in their design to the needs of the residents. Moreover, it is necessary to develop human resources with foresight, creativity and leadership, in order to restore the disaster areas, increase the nation's vitality, and enable Japan to continue to contribute to international society. The challenge of addressing a complex range of problems that the disaster has left us with requires an interdisciplinary approach and the development of better forms of collaboration.

Many cultural facilities on the Sanriku coast were hit by the tsunami and heavily damaged. In response, the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō) launched the Project for Rescuing Cultural Heritage Damaged by the Tohoku Pacific Coast Earthquake (Cultural Heritage Rescue Project) at the end of March 2011, and sent a number of experts to the areas affected to immediately help in protecting/restoring

damaged cultural properties and art work, by securing them from possible theft, loss, or inadvertent destruction in the demolition of damaged buildings.

(2) Art Practice and Bringing People Together

Soon after the disaster, artists and musicians, working on their own initiative, hosted events such as concerts, workshops, and theater performances to help alleviate the distress of people living in difficult conditions in evacuation centers^{1, 2)}.

In the project *Daylily Art Circus* (Fig. 1), for example, artist Kaihatsu Yoshiaki packed his and his friends' artwork into a truck and held exhibitions traveling around the evacuation centers and temporary housing, to be enjoyed by people of all ages. Other examples of activities immediately after the quake were charity projects such as the internet-based Japan Art Donation which raised financial support for projects in the disaster areas, the GB Fund organized by the Association for Corporate Support of the Arts, which called for corporate and private donations to support cultural activity, and “Art for Life” which acted as a network to connect supporters of arts and culture. As well as these groups, charity exhibitions and auctions, where the profit from sales was donated to the disaster area, have been held both in and out of the country. One of the higher profile examples of this was an auction in New York organized by Murakami Takashi in collaboration with the auction house Christie, Manson & Woods Ltd., featuring top international artists such as Damian Hirst, Jeff Koons and Cindy Sherman, which recorded sales of almost 700 million yen, all of which was donated to the disaster area.

Heart Mark Viewing (Fig. 2), devised by artist Hibino Katsuhiko, is a workshop-based project where participants make recycled cloth hearts which are then turned into flags. Initially in this project the flags were made outside the disaster zone and delivered to evacuation centers. Subsequently workshops were organized for evacuees to get together in meeting halls, which helped prevent people from being stuck in their rooms by themselves, and encourage them to communicate through sharing the same work. Other workshops held in evacuation centers and provisional housing aimed at producing the same outcome as *Heart Mark Viewing*. This kind of activity could be called support through basic artistic activity, or simply making something.



Fig. 1 *Daylily Art Circus*



Fig.2 *Heart Mark Viewing*

At the same time, *Project FUKUSHIMA*, launched by three artists, musician Otomo Yoshihide, Endo Michiro, and poet Wago Ryoichi, aimed to provide a venue for people to talk about the future of the prefecture, as well as to keep up to date on its present status through music and art activities. *Project FUKUSHIMA* (Fig. 3) also gave rise to *Festival FUKUSHIMA* at Shiki-no-Sato in the town of Fukushima over four days in August 2011, with live music and interactive events which attracted many supporters and

participants. *Project FUKUSHIMA* is quite different from the other workshops that took place in provisional housing areas mentioned above, in that it targeted a wider range of people, and had a distinctive regional focus, though they share the common aim of bringing people together. These projects, regardless of scale, function as a platform where communication and interaction are encouraged through art and music.



Fig. 3 *Project FUKUSHIMA*

(3) Relief Work Directly Related to Quality of Life

The earthquake and tsunami destroyed or washed away thousands of houses, consequently many people were forced to evacuate and live in emergency housing. A few architects took action soon after the disaster and proposed ways to make evacuees' lives as comfortable as possible, given the circumstances. Among other things, they designed temporary housing, and drew up plans for the reconstruction of tsunami-stricken areas.

Ban Shigeru developed a partition system to be installed in evacuation centers, providing evacuees with more privacy and hopefully relieving some of their stress as a result. Itō Toyoo launched the *Everyone's House* project in which a community center was designed around residents' needs and suggestions. Ando Kunihiro constructed temporary housing in Aizu and Iwaki using traditional wooden Itakura construction methods.

From this kind of relief work, which has a direct and immediate effect on peoples' lives, we can see that architecture performs a different function from that of art or music. At the time of writing, architects are proposing reconstruction plans more aggressively than ever before, however, in order that they are involved in relief work and reconstruction efforts at a comprehensive level, it will be essential for them to understand the decision-making process of administrative bodies and pay careful attention to the actual needs and circumstances of residents while keeping in close communication with them. It is our expectation that many architects will be involved in the rebuilding of disaster-stricken areas so that they will be safer and more comfortable places to live.

(4) Creating and Distributing a Record of the Disaster

It is important to establish a comprehensive record of the Great East Japan Earthquake, to disseminate this information outside the disaster-stricken areas and maintain it for future generations. An enormous amount of information needs to be archived, including scenes of the devastation soon after the disaster, the testimony of people who were affected by it, and the relief work and reconstruction that

followed. Video and photography are the main forms of media in this archive, as after the earthquake many photographers and documentary filmmakers have been to the disaster areas.

Komori Haruka and Seo Natumi, who were graduate students of Tokyo University of the Arts, moved to Iwate after the disaster, and have been using video, photography, words and drawing to document the aftermath. *Sound of the Waves* directed by Kō Sakai and Hamaguchi Ryusuke is a documentary of the disaster which focuses on the testimony of the victims.

It has become a widespread practice to create archives of such video material. Sendai Mediatheque has established the Center for Remembering 3.11, where residents, experts and staff collaborate in recording and preserving data for the *Record of the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster - Public Collaborative Archive* utilizing various media such as video, photography, voice and text, provides an information resource in the attempt to revitalize the area.

The form and content of these records varies widely depending on who created them, and such factors as motive, focus, objectives and time frame. Materials recorded with such different approaches, and from such varying points of view are extremely important, when considered in the context of the standardized format of the mainstream Japanese media. Therefore the people working to create these different records and those who work in archiving them play an important role.

(5) The Role of the Arts

As we can see, various art-based activities have been created in response to the earthquake and tsunami, though this has been accompanied by a discussion among art professionals as to what the arts can hope to achieve. It is natural in this kind of atmosphere that some have been uncomfortable, or skeptical about the idea of connecting art with practical relief work. Artist Miyajima Tatsuo has said, "We take medicine when we get a cold. It is nonsense to try to recover from a cold through art," and "What we should think about in the aftermath of the earthquake is what we can do just as an individual people not as artists." In fact, students and faculty of Tohoku University of Art & Design, of which Miyajima is the Vice-President, hired a coach to go to Sanriku to carry out relief work, such as cleaning-up flooded houses and removing rubble. Artist Tanotaiga, brought up in Sendai, organized the 'Tanontia' volunteer team that continues to perform relief work in the area. Another artist Endo Ichiro, who has traveled around the country by van performing *Mirai-e-go (Go to the future)*, has been working on support activities and hosting events at the evacuation center in Tohoku with a van full of volunteers since soon after the earthquake. These activities are not art *per se*, though it is clear that the artists do not subscribe to the negative view that art is powerless. It is important for art professionals to consider that while art is not a panacea, it is important to consider, in an objective way, when and where art can have a beneficial impact.

Unlike economics, politics or science, art cannot change society directly, however, it can change individual consciousness, mind-set or how we perceive the world. If a society is the aggregate of individuals, the usefulness of art, which starts from the individual, is, needless to say, important. Especially in situations of unprecedented disaster, when people are forced to radically reassess their lives and values, the role of art in constructing new values and changing perceptions is immeasurable.

2. Objectives and Methodology

With these issues in mind, faculty and students of the University of Tsukuba have been

involved in several different kinds of projects to assist reconstruction after the disaster. In March 2012, one year after the quake, the Creative Reconstruction Project (CR Project) was set up, which aimed to contribute to the reconstruction of the disaster area, provide psychological support to victims, and help develop human resources who can independently participate in emergency relief activities³⁾.

One of our main objectives is to determine whether art and design projects can be of value to those affected by the disaster, and assess what kind of activity is more effective. This part of the paper gives examples of our university's projects and a comparison with other art and design projects. From these discussions, we will conclude how art and design projects can be applicable to disaster relief work.

3. Summary of programs

3.1 Outline of CR educational program

The CR Project is an educational program at the University of Tsukuba. It conducts specific activities to promote creative reconstruction through collaboration between students with expertise in different disciplines, and art and design students with adaptable intellectual skills and sensibility. It also organizes educational programs to develop human resources that will take on pivotal roles in society in the aftermath of the disaster, applying excellent problem-solving abilities, creativity, networking, information transmission capability, and drive. Another goal of this project is to build up a sustainable support system centered around the university through developing relationships for reconstruction, based on past performance, with overseas universities which research disaster mitigation, and joint projects with companies and municipalities with an interest in networking. Master students, and junior and senior undergraduates from all departments in the University of Tsukuba will be eligible for the program, and after successful completion of a CR course undergraduates and masters students alike will receive a certificate.

In 2012, contributing to reconstruction efforts, we carried out research in the disaster areas, planned and implemented the educational curriculum, developed human networks, and helped restore the infrastructure. One of the identifying features of this project is that teachers and students work together in the disaster areas, responding to constantly changing needs and problems, by planning and implementing appropriate action to solve them. A series of lectures for disaster victims is also part of the program, which features artists, designers and architects who are engaged in relief work. As an institution of tertiary education the University of Tsukuba can take advantage of having numerous departments from which to draw students working in various disciplines. Another important feature of the project is therefore being able to offer multiple perspectives to the issues of relief work.

Our project was divided into three aspects; festivals, workshops, and archives. A summary of which is as follows.

3.2 Festival projects

(1) "Create a Festival, Go for it" in Aizu

With the rubric of 'Create a Festival, Go for it!', a festival involving various diversions was hosted at the North Emergency Temporary Housing, which had been built on the site of the Johoku Elementary School in the town of Aizuwakamatsu. This project was designed to provide a casual space where interaction between the residents of the temporary housing and the university students could be

facilitated and also used as a research opportunity to gather data for future projects.

The North Emergency Temporary Housing of Johoku Elementary School (abbreviated to Johoku Temporary Housing below) is now home to the people who were evacuated from the town of Okuma. Okuma is in the central area of Hamadori in Fukushima Prefecture and is also the site of Fukushima Nuclear Power Plants No.1 through 4.

According to the sobering information on the official Okuma Council website⁴⁾, 11,366 citizens were evacuated after the disaster and are now living in 42 prefectures, including Fukushima (43 municipalities), and also overseas, as of November 30th 2012. The people who used to live in Okuma, had no choice but to escape and to seek refuge anywhere they could. As a consequence, the town itself is now deserted.

Though they have lost their community and their homes, they remain full of memories accumulated over many years in their hometown. Of the evacuees from Okuma, there are 2,816 who live in Aizuwakamatsu, which compares to 3,417 in Iwaki as of December 31st 2012⁵⁾. Johoku Temporary Housing is composed of 54 units in which about 100 people are living. All these people are citizens of Okuma, but it does not mean that they come from the same areas or were evacuated with people with whom they are familiar. Furthermore, they do not know how long they will have to live in temporary housing, which is a source of anxiety and feeling unsettled. The organization of the different places in which the evacuees live also suffers from being makeshift.



Fig.4 Aizu Project

The Aizu project aimed to promote a sense of community amongst the residents living in these conditions, starting with a festival hosted by the university students. Described below is how we put the idea of 'Create a Festival, Go for it!' into practice.

Festivals are an important regional form of cultural expression. However the evacuees who were relocated to the Johoku Temporary Housing, who were from different areas, did not necessarily share the same experiences or local traditions, such

as festivals. Neither did they have common assets like portable festival shrines, or utensils used for *sato-imo* (taro) cookouts.

The idea of 'Create a Festival, Go for it!' became a *sato-imo* cookout (Fig. 4); the goal being to simply create an extremely positive occasion that people would feel like repeating. To create a enjoyable occasion may seem easy on the face of it, but, as it turned out, was actually quite difficult to accomplish. We did our best to maximize the various different talents of the university students while also trying to be flexible in dealing with the situation at hand. This worked well, and was another factor in the university students successfully being accepted by the people living in the Johoku Temporary Housing.

(2) “Crappe” shop at the festival in Hojo Area

On May 6, 2012 a tornado caused significant damage to many historical buildings in the Hojo district of Tsukuba. Our Hojo team, collaborating with the Hojo Reconstruction Management Committee,

had the idea of helping the relief work by creating a temporary food stall that would provide *onigiri* (rice balls) and *tonjiru* (pork miso soup).

The tornado, which hit Tsukuba on May 6, 2012, killed one person, injured 37, and damaged 1,129 buildings⁶⁾ (Fig. 5). Moving from the southwest to the northeast, it cut across the main shopping street of Hojo, which used to be a prosperous town based around the temple dedicated to the worship of Mt. Tsukuba. It has a traditional ambiance, with historical buildings dating back to the Edo period. According to research by the National Institute of Land and Infrastructure Management and the Building Research Institute⁷⁾, 51 structures were extremely damaged, 78 severely damaged and 149 suffered moderate damage, according to the High Winds Damage Scale. Amongst these were about forty buildings that had been built between the Edo period and the Second World War.



Fig.5 Tornado attack in Hojo area

Miyamoto Takashi, the owner of Miyasei-Okura, which has existed since the Edo period, saw the tornado, and commented that timber and metal coiled up in the tornado winds like fish swarming around a circular aquarium. *Kura* (warehouses) owned by Miyamoto were also damaged, with doors and windows broken and earth walls torn away. Iwasaki-ya, another traditional warehouse with a shop dating back to the Edo period, was also damaged; mainly the first floor, most of which was destroyed except for some heavy beams and pillars. The warehouse had previously been renovated as the Hojo Fureai-kan, a community space, by the Hojo Town Management Association and the Art Design Produce (ADP) program of the University of Tsukuba.

Because it was just after the East Japan Earthquake, a volunteer group was soon organized after the tornado and helped with removing debris. With no electricity, locals could not get information through television and radio, so public noticeboards were set up to consolidate questions and requests from residents, and disseminate information from the council and volunteer staff.

The Hojo team set-up a temporary food stall (selling *onigiri*) as part of the Hojo Relief Fair that was to be held on November 3rd and 4th, as a way of testing whether a community pop-up restaurant would be a useful addition to the reconstruction of Hojo (Fig. 6).

With the results of the research, and data from previous cases in mind, the team brainstormed potential problems and soon visualized how to proceed giving several presentations at meetings of the Hojo Reconstruction Management Committee. This process took advantage of the fact that the university is quite near Hojo. The reconstruction committee had conducted a survey by questionnaire, from which the team knew that local residents were asking for a dining facility or food service. It was therefore clear that it would be useful for the district to



Fig.6 “Crappe” in Hojo Area

have a pop-up restaurant, having had a trial run with a food stall to ensure the project's workability.

A workshop was first held to clarify the idea behind the restaurant, starting with the question of how to express the idea of a restaurant in one phrase. In order to visualize our ideal community restaurant in Hojo, we created a collage of an ideal customer using images from magazines. In this workshop, the ultimate goal of the project was to create a lively atmosphere in Hojo, and for this to happen it entailed creating a place where Hojo residents and Tsukuba students could interact.

The name *Crappe* was chosen from thirty suggested shop names, and a brand was developed with various designs such as a logo, shop front and poster, within a short time. A menu was also created as well as an overall concept for the venue. To succeed in creating a positive exchange between Hojo residents and students, we held an *ad hoc* rice tasting event on campus, so as to get students interested, and make sure of the workflow from cooking the rice to making the *onigiri*.

3.3 Workshop Projects in the disaster zone and with disaster victims; Workshop with Schoolchildren in the Joso Area

Ishige Nishi Junior High School is in Joso, which is adjacent to Tsukuba. As the school was severely damaged by the Great East Japan Earthquake (Fig. 7) it was condemned by an emergency assessment of structural integrity. While CR Project research was being conducted in April, the Joso Board of Education proposed the demolition of the old school building by August 2012.



Fig.7 Damage of the Junior High School Building

Knowing that the old school building was to be demolished, the Joso team interviewed the staff of Joso Board of Education and the teachers and students of Ishige Junior High School, who were using a temporary school building. The team asked about the students' experience of being evacuated after the disaster, what the situation of classes at the temporary school building was like, and how they felt about the old school building.

The activities of Ishige Nishi Junior High School Art Collaboration are summarized below.

1. Providing an opportunity for artistic self-expression using recovered everyday objects and remaining parts of the school buildings due to be demolished.
2. Planning and facilitating workshops in which the students of the University of Tsukuba and the junior high school work together to create art work in the learning space of the temporary school in the interim period before they move into the new school building. In the workshops, art



Fig.8 Workshop at the Junior High School

objects are created using resin, and wall hooks are made by recycling the helmet storage racks from the old building (Fig. 8).

3. The outcome of 1 and 2 are open to the public; at the University of Tsukuba Soho Festival and at the culture festival of Ishige Nishi Junior High School.

The practical activity of making art created from spaces and objects damaged by the earthquake, and the interaction with the junior high students in the workshops were a very positive experience for the individual university students. Various needs for post-disaster relief work may still arise and it is hoped that the activities will be of some help at least in meeting future challenges. The activities of the CR Project at Ishige Nishi Junior High School came to an end with this program. However, we hope this will lead to future opportunities for educational relief work through art-based collaboration between the students of University of Tsukuba and Ishige Nishi Junior High School.

3.4 Archive; CR Project *Fukushima Voice*

Fukushima Voice is a joint project by the University of Tsukuba and the film production/distribution company Uplink working with volunteers from the university as part of the extra-curricular CR Project. The aim of *Fukushima Voice* is to film Fukushima residents and disseminate these narratives as widely as possible. The project leader is Asai Takashi, of Uplink, who conceived the project using his extensive network and experience of filmmaking. While Asai directs the project as a whole, Osawa Kazuo, documentary film producer, manages the students directly, providing technical instruction, such as advice on cinematography and editing.

In December 2012, a briefing session was held at Tsukuba University, in which about forty students expressed an interest in participating in the project. Students watched *Prpyat*, a documentary film on the town 2 km from the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, and had a lively discussion with Asai, Osawa, the director. Students will visit Fukushima to research the area, meet people, and make audio recordings of Fukushima residents in the wake of the meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Through these activities, the project also aims to present students' own perspectives, give a platform to the emotions of people affected by the disaster through the medium of film, and distribute the films both in Japan and internationally.

As part of *Fukushima Voice*, a screening of six films produced after the Great East Japan Earthquake was held, with a roundtable session *After 3.11 – Sounds and Voices* with six film directors on February 16th and 17th. The purpose of this event was to ensure the continued remembrance and awareness of the disaster.

4. Discussion

Looking back at how the project went, the issues that need to be discussed for the future are; firstly, how to clarify where responsibility lies and how to establish effective channels of communication between collaborators, and secondly, how to help people, in a creative way, restore some normality to their lives.

At the workshop project with students in the Joso area, experiencing what it's like to be a refugee at the damaged school building, and the educational activity at the temporary school building, the teachers of Ishige Nishi Junior High School seemed to be torn between remembering the disaster and being active in

getting the new school building finished. This was the context for the CR Project's involvement with the school. There we witnessed the conflict between the two emotions; on the one hand they felt that they should not forget that the art was created using objects that brought back memories of the old school building. On the other hand they also felt they needed to establish an environment that allowed people to forget and move forward as much as possible, by getting rid of things that reminded them of the disaster. Of the junior high school students at the temporary school, it was the second and third grade students that had had classes in the old school building. Although they might be experiencing some inconvenience in their lives, they looked quite normal and well, as far as we could tell.

Through these projects the students of the University of Tsukuba have had the chance to learn what everyday life is like for some people outside the university, what it means to create something extraordinary from the ordinary, and what it means to help people in need. Through continuing proactive activities, we will continue to make it our goal to keep on asking how we can achieve a form of assistance that allows people to maintain their dignity, is creative and upholds the public trust.

5. Conclusion

Our primary goal in this project is to support the disaster area and its residents by proposing and implementing effective programs. At the same time these activities function to convey the message that the Great East Japan Earthquake has not been forgotten. The various experiences that students had through their work in the area will stay with them as powerful memories. In this four-year project, several innovative programs have been conceived through trial-and-error and daily discussions, so as to generate genuinely creative and successful support activities for the post-disaster reconstruction efforts. In this context, it is necessary to prioritize two things; firstly to try to come to an empathetic understanding of what people who live in the affected areas are going through, and secondly to cultivate a proactive, radical vision for future reconstruction work with a critical assessment of the current reality of the situation. From this, the power of art as a tool crucial to society can be optimized.

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