

Panel Discussion Part 1

“The Role of Museums in Remembering and Recording Tsunami”

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Panelists :

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Sakamoto Today’s panelists have close connections to museums in Tsunami Disaster areas. Through gathering, preserving and displaying documents and materials, we can think about passing on the memories and lessons of disasters. There are various methods to preserve the memories of disaster and pass them on to future generations. By gathering, preserving, and exhibiting various items, museums have a unique ability to pass on the lessons of disasters. One part of these activities includes the sharing the memories and history of the region, and the story of recovery, through museum exhibits. Gathering and preserving documents and materials is critical for holding exhibitions, which is the core activity to transmit the knowledge and lessons of disasters. I would like to ask each of the panelists, from museums in disaster area, to explain about their exhibitions, exhibition methods or challenges they face.



Ramadani I am the director of the Tsunami Museum in Aceh. The Museum does not belong to Aceh or Indonesia, but I think it is really a global museum. By sharing the experience of the Indian Ocean Tsunami with visitors from around the world, I hope that the museum to be useful in increasing awareness for disaster reduction. Caused by an undersea earthquake of magnitude 9.2, the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami caused record damage in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other countries. With over 250,000 casualties, the historic devastation from this natural disaster is also much larger than anything we have experienced in Indonesia in recent years. Now, people in Aceh gather, speak about the disaster, and with local learning the area has been recovered. After overcoming this great disaster, and based on the live lessons from the disaster, people are moving forward. In a strange way, we can say that the disaster was a blessing. Until that time, Aceh area had suffered a long period of conflict, but after the disaster, everyone worked together towards



recovery. Government, infrastructure maintenance, and economic situations all improved. It was a chance for us to remember that we are located on the Pacific Ring of Fire, where disasters can easily occur.

I feel that with the activities of TeLL-Net, gathering and collecting the memories and information about the disaster, we mustn't fail to share them. TeLL-Net reminds us of the importance of our lives. Now, we want to future develop our museum with TeLL-Net activities at the center of what we do.

The Tsunami Museum, symbol of the endurance of Aceh people in the face of the power of the tsunami, was established with support from many countries. Hopefully it will contribute to increased awareness of disaster risk around the world. The Aceh Tsunami Museum is built on the concept of 3 principles: the disaster itself, religion, and culture. From above, the form is like the tsunami, and the intent of the design is for visitors to recall the tsunami of 7 years ago. The museum includes the meanings: connection between people and the omnipotent God of the Islam faith; the connections between people; mutual aid at the time of the tsunami; love; faith; and the Acehnese culture. The Aceh Tsunami Museum includes the 3 spaces of fear, sorrow, and relief. In the first space, that of fear, you can feel the terror of the tsunami. Next, in the space of sorrow, including images and the wall, the names of the disaster survivors are shown, creating an experience of sorry. The final space, that of relief, shows the support received from around the world, personal experiences, and messages for disaster reduction such as TeLL-Net. Overcoming many challenges, we want to strengthen the power of TeLL-Net towards a future with reduced disaster risk. Towards this goal, there is nothing more important than the support that we received from around the world, including from Japan, and accordingly we hope for more collaboration and cooperation with our Museum going forward.

Kumagai

Before I enter the discussion, I want to first express my gratitude for the really significant support we received from Kobe, first of everywhere in Japan, after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

From the point of view of Cultural Property rescue, I would like to introduce our museum's activities that are possible even without a physical building. Cultural property rescue started about 3 weeks after the disaster. At that time, there was a note left in front of the only room of the museum that remained. It read "please don't remove the museum materials. They are precious and important for the nature, history, and culture of Takada," and expressed exactly how we were feeling.



At the bottom is said City Board of Education, but only 2 of the Board Members had survived, so I think the person who wrote it was just a local resident. For us, this one piece had a very heavy significance.

First, on March 11th, there was really strong shaking that continued for about 6 minutes. I evacuated to Rikuzentakata City Hall, and went up on the roof, but it was also covered by water. The situation was that a 15 meter high wave, more like the sea itself, came. As of this year, Feb. 1, there were 1554 casualties, and 294 missing. 10 percent of residents, and a third of city staff were killed; government functions were completely stopped.

The four cultural institutions--the Rikuzentakata City Museum, Rikuzentakata Sea and Shell Museum, Rikuzentakata City Library, and Archeological Center—were all completely destroyed, almost all the employees were lost, and I was the only curator who survived. 150,000 items from the Museum, 110,000 from the Sea and Shell Museum, and 700 boxes and 500 bags of artifacts from the Archeology Center was found. Of the library's 800,000 volumes, about 310,000 were rescued.

At the Sea and Shell Museum, display cases were deposited and left on the rafters. The City Museum has a collection of 150,000 artifacts including those related to Natural History and Civilizations, but at the time of the disaster, they were put into 2 cars and 2 houses.

In terms of just the building damage, it's possible for the materials to survive, but with tsunami, they are washed away, and gathering them again is extremely difficult. The exhibition rooms on the first floor, on the ocean side of the building, have almost no windows. So the wall could somehow withstand the tsunami wave when it came, but the receding wave which carried all the debris, entered, like a whirlpool, tore off the doors, and receded.

Under the debris, the tsunami deposited sand more than 50 centimeters deep on the floor. One by one, we dug out the artifacts of the sand.

For insect specimens in poor condition, the glass was gone, and a lot of sand had entered the cases. Sea water had entered surprisingly few of the plant specimens that were each in their own plastic bag, and many could be rescued. We did not throw away the sand that had been deposited on the floor, instead saving it in bags behind the museum. Many artifacts were found after sifting through the sand.

We used an elementary school that had been closed since April last year, in the mountains 16 kilometers from the downtown area, for preservation activities.

At first, we could only take the items still covered with sand and lay them out flat. Next, I will talk about the long process to arrive as a processing situation that was stable

The sea near the Sanriku coast is originally clean water, and in a simple flooding disaster, washing with fresh water would be enough, but this time everything had been

covered with flood water that was pitch black. First sterilization, then salt had to be removed. At the minimum, labels were rinsed with tap water. Then, after drying, real preservation or serious repairs could be done. This was necessary for about 310,000 items, which was completely overwhelming.

From the 1st stage of rescue to the 2nd, we received help from universities and research facilities, etc., from all over Japan. We especially relied on the network of other museums in the prefecture, centered at the prefectural museum, to continue the rescue processes smoothly.

At last years' "Dinosaur Exhibit 2011" held at the National Science Museum, the situation of cultural property rescued was explained in the 2nd exhibition room, including the exhibition of rescued materials.

After that, Rikuzentakata children went to Tono City Museum as a field trip, and had the experience of washing earthenware damaged in the disaster. They could directly experience the cultural treasures from their own hometown, and by touching them with their own hands, hopefully could take home a little of the feeling that these special treasures were saved from their town. In addition, we also created a mobile exhibit "Rikuzentakata City Museum Disaster Damage Situation."

Through the themes of tsunami damage and the meaning of preservation of cultural property, we also recovered as a lending museum after the disaster.

At the current stage, I am not thinking about how to gather and exhibit the damaged materials, but only try to understand what to take where; I think that our job is to just to collect the materials.

A recovery that does not preserve cultural property cannot be called a real recovery. The identity of Rikuzentakata is bound up with these materials. Life and cultural properties exist together.

In terms of plans for exhibitions that including the fact of disaster damage, I think just building a simple museum is not enough. We have the fact of suffering from the disaster, but we have also received abundant blessings and culture from the Sanriku Sea. I think that we need to acknowledge both our gratitude for the sea, but also pass on the message of the scary aspect of the sea.

Hashimoto Today, I want to talk about the exhibit I was involved in at the Misawa Folk History Museum, as one way not to forget the disaster. There are many factors that resulted in this exhibition being realized. First, damage in Misawa City was relatively light. There was no cesium contamination, so this kind of exhibition was possible. As it is in the nearby area, I think that is why it could have the first exhibition after the disaster dealing

with the Great East Japan Earthquake.

I am a member of the investigation committee for revitalization activities at the Misawa Folk History Museum, so I was involved in recovery of the Museum. We thought of an exhibition related to tourism, but after the disaster we felt that with the mission of the museum towards society, we must do an exhibition dealing with the disaster.

Seeing the disaster situation of Misawa Bay, in discussion learned of the existence of a monument that says "Earthquake, rumbling of the sea, look! Tsunami."

On the coast of Aomori Prefecture, after the Great Tsunami in 1933, Misawa City, Hachinohe, Hashikami, etc. had relocated to higher ground. However, the monument was dirty, under a plastic sheet, and in that condition it was hard to even know what it was. The first phase of the exhibition was cleaning up the stone monument, and as planning for the exhibition continued, we focused on the challenge of using the stone monument to tell the lessons of the disaster.

The exhibition was realized with the cooperation of the fishing cooperative, in included the message of promotion of Misawa's finishing industry, and encouragement for the fishermen.

After entering the building, there is the cardboard monument made by volunteers.

At the entrance of the exhibition room, as a symbol for the future of the fishing industry recovery, there was 'large catch' flag, the kind that is traditionally used by the fishermen. It was illuminated by the light of a flashlight. It was not an exhibition space, but instead used the cooperative's meeting room, as part of the space design concept. The walls were covered with boxes used for harvesting squid, which had been picked up from the beach. There was a pile of debris, and in the center a TV set that was made to seem like it was broadcasting. Because we had used debris, there was the strong stench of salt water with the garbage. It's not possible inside a museum. There were real insects. If the exhibit is moved somewhere in the future, it would need to be fumigated to avoid serious problems.

In addition, the message "Earthquake, rumbling of the sea, look! Tsunami, at that time I..." was presented. Messages from Misawa, and to Misawa, could be written. The ability for these messages to communicate with each other in and of itself was a significant meaning for the exhibit. In the messages, there were for example "do your best, Tohoku!," "strong connections," typical almost clichéd comments, as well as messages that were inappropriate, like "its like a Hollywood movie, amazing!" That was the actuation situation. Frankly, there were many different voices, and we thought to share them.

We also displayed materials that were left after the 1933 tsunami. They can be said to be valuable as cultural properties. As a permanent exhibition as well, we also established

with the theme “It’s true: a tsunami hit Misawa 80 years ago too,” a connection to a permanent exhibition that can continue.

To tell the truth, actually there were many problems with the exhibition. It was decided after March 11, that the exhibit would be discarded. So many people shared the opinion that that they wished it could be kept so that more people from all over Japan could have the chance to come and see it. I think that it’s obvious that we have that mission. I think this exhibition has that meaning for the children 50 years from now, or 100 years from now, but of course the city office and managers also have their opinions, and my term of duty is over, so I don’t have a right to say anything. For sure, I would like to preserve it. For example, couldn’t we move it to DRI or to a large museum in Tokyo or Osaka. Rather than spending a lot of money on making replicas of debris, we have the real thing. This time’s exhibition is made of things we rescued, from now, my appeal for all of you to rescue it.

Sakamoto Mr. Ramadani and Mr. Hashimoto shared a lot of their experience with setting up exhibitions. Especially, Mr. Ramadani, at last year’s TeLL-Net forum, explained how they have a plan to make a museum, but face many challenges to open it. After that, can you tell us about your activities leading up to the establishment of the museum?

Ramadani With the support we received, we were able to make a museum, exhibits, and to open the museum. I am very grateful for that. For dealing with the problem of raising the needed capital we used some creative methods. For example, we made our own dioramas, introduce the activities of TeLL-Net, relied on local people’s involvement, introduced local festivals. In addition, we had contests, etc., for the museum exhibitions. Towards the involvement in telling stories, we involved young students in speech and essay contests.

Also, in the area where we live, is one where we have a high risk of encountering a natural disaster. So we must be continuously prepared, and especially to encourage preparedness of the next young generation, we much pass on the lessons. For this purpose, of course, along with the exhibitions of our museum, we also must use TeLL-Net activities effectively, I think.

Towards these aims for the future, using our exhibitions to teach many things, we are thinking about how museum can become a place of education as well..

Sakamoto In the Misawa Exhibit that professor Hashimoto created not only is there a strong feeling of handmade spirit, but at the same time, the 5 senses area also deeply engaged, leading to a very unique combination. Please tell us about your motivations and

methods for creating this exhibition, and the challenges you faced along the way.

Hashimoto I think that mission of the museum is to share these kind of memories with the next generation, their children, and to pass on the information in a way that even people who are unfamiliar can experience it. I feel very strongly that the museum can accomplish this role. Without money, we just picked up items that exist. We thought about how to reach the 5 senses. With the darkness, using the flashlight, the smell of garbage and the smell of saltwater, memories like “oh yeah, at that time we used flashlights, right,” will come back. It was dark and scary, it was cold, are connected to our individual feelings, and through our personal attachment, we can understand not through our brains, but through the senses of our bodies, is the way I was thinking about the exhibit. For difficult problems, there were the insects, but we shook that problem off.

Sakamoto Disaster museums preserve and exhibit archeological relics; I think that Mr. Kumagai and Prof. Hashimoto are the most familiar with the difficulties of this. For Mr. Kumagai, at the Rikuzentakata City Museum, in the middle of a situation where all the materials were destroyed, was involved in recovering these artifacts, can you tell us about how your feelings being involved in these activities?

Kumagai In my case, I was born and raised in Rikuzentakata, and got involved with the museum when I was in High School. My university thesis was also about museum practice, and had a strong emotional attachment to the museum, in a way you can say I was partly raised by the museum. The backbone of the museum, the part facing the ocean, we don't know what hit it, is like a painful wound. When I see that, I think “Oh, this museum stood up against the powerful wave, although some were washed away to protect its materials, it did its best to protect these objects that are precious for Takada.” And somehow protected them. Between 70 and 80 percent of materials are estimated to have been recovered. Of course, that doesn't mean that all of them are in a condition that they can be displayed in an exhibition. The battle from now will be to see how many we can restore, I think.

Sakamoto Next, I would like to ask you about the issues surrounding the display of disaster damaged artifacts as exhibits, what you need to pay attention to, or what was involved.

Kumagai People from Tokyo are doing an exhibit at the Museum in Tono. At that time, I

really debated about whether or not to contribute items to that exhibition. There was the problem of mold. When we took the many old books and manga to the closed elementary school, and put an electric fan on then because in any case they need to dry, all the paper materials became moldy.

Paper materials will become stained, so they can't be kept with other kinds of materials. We made a request to the Bureau of Cultural Affairs Cultural Property Rescue committee, and about 600 cardboard boxes worth, all the paper documents were put in cold storage in a freezer. In the meantime, we cleaned the school building and prepared them so they could be used to process the materials, and eliminated bacteria. The most terrifying thing for museum materials is mold, or insect damage. In this case because of the damage from seawater, the processing method was probably the first example of its kind in the world. Even experts of materials preservation did not have an established method for dealing with this situation, which I think made it a very difficult and problem that we were involved in.

Hashimoto Many people visited the Misawa Museum from all over Japan, and we also received a lot of positive feedback. There was criticism as well, and I think that it is important to pay attention to that too. For example, people from radiation contaminated areas of Fukushima pointed out that there was no explanation of what happened or the current situation in Fukushima. One couple said, it is a great exhibition and feels very meaningful because it explains what can happen as a result of an earthquake disaster.

After that, visitors from Miyagi Prefecture said that they thought they would enjoy an extraordinary world at the nearby Termoto Shouji Memorial Hall, but instead they could see something really amazing. They said it's like making a traditional Japanese ikebana flower arrangement using gravestones. There was the comment, 'isn't it a is strange exhibit!' It is crucial that these comments are received sincerely. After receiving those kinds of comments, a museum must continue activity while improving. We made and added a new panel to explain the purpose of the exhibition.

One more thing, in the case of this kind of exhibit, is the difficulty with presenting a unitary view of the disaster area as the focus on an exhibition. It becomes seen in just that way. That's why from the beginning, our stance was that we are co-sponsors, along with the fishery cooperative organization. With the desire to support the fishermen with the actual revival of their industry, we held to the principle that this exhibit was not '*in* the local area' but rather 'exhibited *with* the local people.' The largest problem with this kind of project is, make no mistake, that the memorial stone that says "Earthquake, rumbling of the sea, look! Tsunami" will not survive for 60 or 80 years. Will this exhibition survive is the

issue. If it ends after 3.11, if we stop, it is the end. That's why I am thinking if we can move it to somewhere like an empty room in a local school; and I've been asked by the PTA to give a lecture about this too.

However, as I mentioned earlier, the management system is fixed, and the City's position is that the exhibit is garbage, and they would like it cleaned up soon. It's an unbearable feeling, but the real situation. My biggest concern is how to maintain this exhibition.

Sakamoto The reality of creating a disaster museum is often the lack of materials at that time. After going through the trouble and having the materials, I think we want to think of a way to keep them. TeLL-Net and has been working towards the collection and preservation of artifacts from disaster areas until now. This time, with the experience of the Great East Japan Earthquake, I think we can see many various exhibitions, different ways of gathering and preserving materials, along with exhibition methods, ways to collaborate with local people, and also challenges and the need for future involvement. In the case of Rikuzentakata Museum, the museum itself was destroyed, and the following revival and recovery was so difficult, and presented to us with huge problems. Including those points, I know we want to continue our involvement in these issues.