

## Post-Disaster Reconstruction and Tourism –the case of Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture

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This paper consists of sociological and socio-psychological observations on the situation and trends of the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11th 2011, from the author's perspective as a victim of the disaster. It examines the daily lives of the people within the reconstruction process of the communities devastated by this terrible disaster, paying particular attention to movement in and out of those areas, and interaction between people from inside and outside the communities. It also considers the role of tourism within this framework. The paper takes as an example the case of Ishinomaki City in Miyagi Prefecture, from which the disaster exacted one of the highest tolls in both physical damage and loss of life.

### 1. The disaster victims and the 4 recovery levels of the disaster areas

With regard to the situation the disaster victims found themselves in, the recovery process in the space of one year can be divided into 4 distinct phases: survival, securing basic needs for living, securing a financial livelihood, and regaining a more complete living environment.

### 2. The victims' state of mind and relief aid

Stress levels (degree of tension) of the victims become lower as time passes. Those same stress levels, however, have the effect of increasing the degree of sensitivity of the victim. There is a very close connection between this point and how the victims felt towards visitors to the disaster areas.

### 3. Volunteer or tourist?

Directly after the disaster, large numbers of volunteers came to the affected areas, playing a vital role in recovery efforts. Many organizations, including major travel companies, offered "volunteer tour" packages. Some victims, however, are unhappy about being used as what they feel is a tourist attraction. On the other hand, tourism can play a major role in reconstruction efforts.

### 4. "Reconstruction Support Tourism"

With regard to the role of tourism in reconstruction of disaster-affected areas, the author proposes using the term "Reconstruction Support Tourism" (RST) to describe it. There is a tendency to use the phrase "dark tourism" to describe tourism around victims of natural disasters or unpleasant events. However, using this term for every kind of visit to disaster areas can be considered to be extremely inappropriate.

### 5. The necessity of a wide-ranging knowledge base

Volunteer tourism is one example of RST, but another possibility is disaster prevention study tours. In order to successfully carry out such study tours, though, a wide-ranging knowledge base concerning both disasters and disaster prevention is essential. The author sincerely hopes for the cooperation of members of this meeting.

Keywords: post-disaster reconstruction, tourism, volunteer, reconstruction support, stress level (degree of tension), sensitivity of disaster victims