

Museums
and
the
Great
East
Japan
Earthquake

Introduction

With respect to the Great East Japan Earthquake, which occurred at 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011, and its associated disasters of tremors, tsunami, and nuclear accidents affecting a vast area, the circumstances and effects of damage varied extremely and complicatedly among many locations. Some damage, including that caused by the nuclear accidents, is still progressing, so it is difficult to gain a full perspective today, even four years after the earthquake. Amidst that extreme crisis confronting our society, what happened to the museums? What did they stand to lose? What were they able to learn? Looking back, one must be able to grasp once again the roles which our museums play in our society.

The Sendai Miyagi Museum Alliance (SMMA) investigated the resumption of operations of the museums located across the six Tohoku prefectures immediately after the great earthquake, publishing the results in *Sendai*

Note. The SMMA participating museums have presented data related to each damage situation and resumption process through a web service (<http://www.smma.jp>). Keeping the above in mind, the panel exhibition is intended to address some events related to the earthquake disaster to the museums in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima and to present a retrospective, outlined by subject. Of course, the possibility exists that what can be taken up here might be only part of the whole, that the way of presenting this information might be not sufficient in words, and that it might be one-sided. Because the fields of art and culture including museums have no direct effects on the life and daily living of people, they tend to be put off in times of crisis. Moreover, they cannot play an important role in preventing disasters. Nevertheless, I am gratified that the process through which museums had to face society again might trigger a review of museums' *raison d'être* in our society.

Overview of the Disaster

The damage inflicted by the earthquake disaster on museums was diverse in scale and scope. Herein, we strive to present an outline of the disaster by selecting from the museums in three prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima those facilities which took more than 100 days to resume operations.

The differences in their situations in terms of the damage they incurred from the earthquake, the tsunami, and the nuclear plant accidents have proved to have great effects on the subsequent recovery processes.

It need not be said that important memories might also remain in the facilities that could be reopened earlier.

The present list might not always tell the whole story.

In light of those possibilities, please view this map.



Damage Situations of the Museums of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures after the Great East Japan Earthquake

Selecting the museums which took over 100 days to reopen (the museums which we could confirm the status of damage and resumption as of February 2015 are posted).

- Seismic Intensity (Japanese seismic scale)
- Tsunami Damage
- Cultural Properties
- Rescue Operations
- Days Taken to Reopen

- The name and location of each museum is as of March 11, 2011.

* Renamed as Kesennuma Shark Museum after the disaster.

** Relocated and renamed after the disaster.

1: P08

MOGURANIA

Kuji Underground Aquarium



2

Whale and Sea Science Museum



3

The Kamaishi

Historical Materials Display



4

Ofunato City Museum



5

Rikuzentakata Sea and Shell Museum



6: P29

Rikuzentakata City Museum



7: P07, 24, 27

Rias Ark Museum of Art



8

Kesennuma Rias Shark Museum*



9: P12, 23

Utatsu Gyoryuukan



10

Oshika Whale Land



11: P07, 22

Miyagi Sant Juan Bautista Museum



12

Ishinomaki Culture Center



13: P07, 17

Ishinomaki Mangattan Museum



14: P17

The Historical Museum of Jomon Village OkuMatsushima



15: P09

Marinepia Matsushima Aquarium



16: P18, 23

Sendai City Science Museum



17

Tohoku Fukushima University
Serizawa Keisuke
Art and Craft Museum



18: P07, 12, 23

The Tohoku University Museum



19

Sendai City Museum of
History and Folklore



20: P19

Fukushima Museum of Art



21

Fukushima city museum
of photography



22: P07

Soma City Museum
of History and Folklore**



23

Minamisoma City Museum



24

Futaba town Museum
of History and Folklore



25

Okuma Town Folklore Museum



26

Tomioka Town Museum
of History and Folklore



27

Naraha Town Museum of History



28

Koriyama City Museum of Art



29: P09, 17

Aquamarine Fukushima,
Marine Science Museum



What the Museums Experienced and Did during the Crises



1

Situation Immediately after the Earthquake

Evacuation Guidance

Even though the disaster struck the museums on a weekday, at a time when there were fewer visitors, it must have been true that all the staff members and visitors were able to avoid the dangers confronting them with the sudden occurrence of the strongest tremors they had ever felt, followed by falling and broken exhibits, power failure, and as if to add insult to injury, coastal inundation by the giant tsunami soon thereafter. Fortunately, no report described any visitor being injured by the earthquake disaster at any facility. However, staff members

at the museums in Rikuzentakata City and Ishinomaki City were killed by the tsunami.

Although each district and facility was to have prepared a disaster prevention manual for earthquakes and tsunamis, the destructive power of the Great East Japan Earthquake turned out to be far greater than any person had expected. No one had been able to imagine such powerful tremors and such large waves, much less the accidents at the nuclear power plants. Although sendai mediatheque had been designated as a facility required to produce disaster action manuals and conduct disaster prevention training with respect to powerful earthquakes, the malfunction of a fire alarm because of the tremors caused the procedures in the manuals to be much less useful: a point that must be remembered. Certainly manuals and training are important, but the question remained: “To what degree can people properly respond in such a scenario that far exceeded the imagination—with disasters occurring frequently and almost simultaneously—that many people faced on that day?”



sendai mediatheque, people sheltering under desks (March 11, 2011)

Photographed by Izuru Echigoya, provided by center for remembering 3.11 (sendai mediatheque)

Protecting Human Life

When homes and infrastructure such as electricity, transportation, and information, which had been used daily as a matter of course, were damaged or degraded, many people sought shelter to pass the night as safely as possible. Public museums, with durable construction, attracted quite a few people for use as an urgent shelter. At the observation block of the Miyagi Sant Juan Bautista Museum at Ishinomaki City, which was relatively unaffected by the tsunami, the community's evacuees remained in shelters for over five months. Similarly, about forty displaced people drifted to the Ishinomaki Mangattan Museum, located on a sandbank in the Kitakami River, or failed to escape and were left behind there, remaining in the café on the highest floor for five days until they were rescued by Self-Defense Forces. The Soma City Museum of History and Folklore was also used as a shelter for the regional people who had fled the tsunami and nuclear power plant accident for five months. The Sendai City Tomizawa Site Museum assigned its lounge as a shelter for community residents for five days. Additionally, the Miyagi

Museum of Art and the Tohoku University Museum temporarily provided an emergency evacuation location for residents and students who had difficulty returning home.

In fact, because museum facilities often had unique construction, it was suggested that some cases should have undergone a safety check by specialists to use as a shelter. The Rias Ark Museum of Art in Kesennuma City was judged to be unsafe before its use to accept evacuees because its safety had not been confirmed. In addition, although a volunteer center was to be installed in sendai mediatheque, there was no time for specialists to confirm the building safety, so it was instead installed at the second candidate site. Such judgments were reasonable. However, because museums are public facilities, they should be places to protect the lives of visitors and passers-by beyond the purposes and management responsibility of each facility. Museums must not neglect preparation to do so. It might be necessary to extend design concepts such as “barrier free” access, which has been widely known and improved, for “everyone in a disaster” as well as handicapped people.



Laundry of disaster-affected people was hung out at the Miyagi Sant Juan Bautista Museum.
Image provided by
Keicho Diplomatic Mission Ship Association

2

Disaster Information Collection and Rescue Action

The Day After the Earthquake and Beyond

At areas not severely damaged by the tsunami, authorities had started to confirm the safety of the museums and the visitors concerned and to collect disaster information from the day after the earthquake. The gravity of the situation was looming slowly. Many thought of what activities to start, but found that their capabilities were limited because the lifeline to the disaster-affected areas was cut off. For all but tsunami-devastated areas, restoration of the power supply took three or four days. Up to that time, many people had been stuck with nothing to do, and with very little reliable information.

In contrast, anywhere the tsunami had washed away a whole town, although the residents were unable to confirm their mutual safety, they were compelled to continue to struggle to live on and help others subsist for as long as necessary. Additionally, the emergency at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant was publicized during the night of March 11. Eventually, the first hydrogen explosion occurred on March 12. Evacuation orders were issued for residents within a 20 km radius of the plant. People were asked to leave their homes and

offices with very little preparation. Because of the nuclear accidents, the tsunami-devastated museums and the museums in restricted areas remain closed to the present day, although four years have passed.

The top priority in disaster-struck areas then was to restore the lifeline, help the victims, and support efforts for urgent shelters. Consequently, the public museum staff members were engaged in activities as personnel of their respective municipal governments, which had continued even beyond the peak as shelters.



sendai mediatheque's notice of closure
Image provided by sendai mediatheque



Heavily damaged MOGURANPIA - Kuji Underground Aquarium
Image provided by Danass Planning

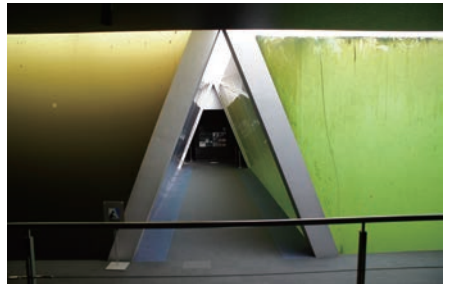
Lifeline Necessary for Exhibits

Not only facility damage, but also power and water grid failures severely affected zoos and aquariums, which have the task of displaying living creatures.



Logistics stopped. It became impossible to supply food for animals of all kinds. Sendai Yagiya Zoological Park asked the Japanese Association of Zoos and Aquariums to support them to supply food. Supporting shipments were conducted four times during March 18 – April 4, 2011.

Image provided by Sendai Yagiya Zoological Park



The Aquamarine Fukushima lost many of exhibited plants and animals because of the loss of power as a result of tremors with intensity of 6 on the Japanese seven-stage seismic scale and four-meter tsunami. The surviving specimens of 38 species and 222 items were sent to facilities all over the country to keep them alive. The photograph shows "Big Fish Tank of Shiome, also showing a line where ocean currents meet," with the water current stopped. Image provided by Aquamarine Fukushima



At the Sendai City Tomizawa Site Museum, which conserved and exhibited remains from the Paleolithic era, because power failure caused a pump to stop, the remains' surface were almost entirely soaked by ground water. Fortunately, the power supply was restored almost immediately.

Image provided by Sendai City Tomizawa Site Museum



Marinepia Matsushima Aquarium was also hit by the tsunami, which killed quite a few fish. Nevertheless, the power facility was spared, so the damage to fish tanks was minimal. The remaining pumps were repaired with tools at hand. Workers managed to reopen the facility on April 23, 2011.

Image provided by Marinepia Matsushima Aquarium

3

Nationwide Support Efforts Launched

First Step

As concrete reactions to damaged museums or important cultural properties, urgent supports to overcome the dangers of living exhibitions were launched immediately. When minimum lifeline services to each community were restored, they barely managed to start the restoration of a whole museum. Because the circumstances in disaster-stricken areas changed rapidly, nationwide support actions began instantaneously.

During the latter half of March, using information networks, circumstances were confirmed, and sharing of the museum facilities in disaster-stricken areas was started nationwide. In addition to “Great East Japan Earthquake and Museum Information (<http://japan-museum.com>)” listing information links on the web, “saveMLAK (<http://savemlak.jp/>)” was aimed at

sharing various information related to the damage situations of cultural facilities such as museums, libraries, archives, and community learning centers. Support activities were conducted to transmit information with the help of collaborators across Japan. At the same time, various museum-related groups started to collect and transmit information about damaged facilities.

I cannot forget that I felt somewhat frustrated in starting up the support action. First, aspects of information presented a daunting hurdle. We did not know what the conditions in disaster-hit areas were actually like. For that reason, the actions such as those of saveMLAK were launched first of all. Second, emotional concerns were important. While they did not have an exhaustive grasp of the damage situations from a distance, quite a few people wondered to themselves if local people should be the originator or targets of efforts to restore the museums. That feeling created some hesitation about undertaking activities. Finally, donation was an issue. Large contributions for reconstruction support were collected from all over the world as well as from other areas of Japan. Some made concrete donations hoping that their money would be used to support and restore local culture and museums. At that time, however, we were poorly prepared for such donations. We were unable to accept and realize their intentions directly.



Urgent Discussion about Great East Japan Earthquake, Disaster Support and MLAK, April 23, 2011
Image provided by “Musée” UM Promotion Inc.



Website of saveMLAK
Image provided by “saveMLAK Community” (<http://savemlak.jp>)

Local Community Roles

In cooperation with, or concurrent with, the Cultural Properties Rescue Operations sponsored by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, some groups tried to rescue their community's historical materials and cultural properties in community, museum, or volunteer network units.

NPO Miyagi Shiryou Net (Network for Preserving Historical Materials) was established to protect historical materials that had been left in old houses in local areas from being lost to the disasters and the resulting demolition from the earthquake that hit northern Miyagi Prefecture in 2003. With a central focus of specialists in history and cultural properties, local volunteers have been working actively to investigate over 500 old houses in the 10 years since beginning, salvaging historical materials as necessary. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, collaborating with the Cultural Properties Rescue Operations sponsored by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, they have been conducting their own unique rescue activities. Additionally, they have been engaging in various activities in cooperation with communities, for instance, by participating in the rescue project that Sendai City Museum itself has started up.

Many natural historical specimen data were damaged by this disaster, too. Because there are fewer public facilities specializing in this field than in history or art, the damage in the field attracted little attention after the Hanshin Awaji Earthquake Disaster. For that reason, no network such as that for historical documents yet existed. In the midst of this, the Tohoku University Museum, which quickly rescued fossils of the Utatsu ichthyosaur, and Iwate Prefectural Museum stand out for their active rescue work.



NPO Miyagi Shiryou Net salvaging old documents from a tsunami-stricken old storehouse with thick walls at the Honma family at Ishinomaki City.

Photographed by Shuichi Saito

Image provided by NPO Miyagi Shiryou Net



Insect specimens waiting for rescue

Image provided by Makoto Manabe



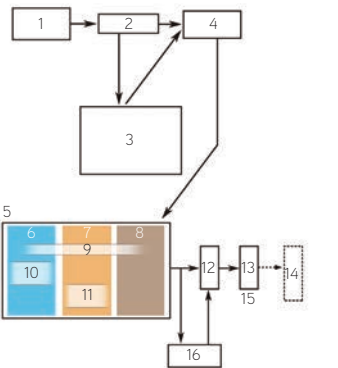
Insect specimen restoration work

Image provided by Iwate Prefectural Museum

Struggle Against Mud

Covered by mud and seawater from the tsunami, cultural properties were not only broken or deformed: they were also stuck to various tsunami flotsam and debris. Especially when such properties made of paper, which is likely to absorb water, were left with no treatment, they were likely to be additionally damaged by mold, chemical changes, and so on. Enormous efforts were necessary to stabilize their preservation conditions: cleaning by washing in water to remove mud and attached matter; desalination by soaking in clean water for a certain period of time; drying by a vacuum freeze dryer; sterilization treatment with ethanol or by smoking, etc.

Iwate Prefectural Museum was equipped with various facilities and devices for preservation treatment. Additionally, it was assigned staff members specializing in preservation science. For those reasons, it collaborated with research institutes for cultural properties in Tokyo and Nara to examine the stabilization treatment for tsunami-damaged materials and provided results for each disaster-hit area. In cooperation with many participants from various backgrounds in addition to specialists, their crucially important achievements achieved thorough a process of trial and error in a race against time to save huge volumes of tsunami-affected materials was invaluable in terms of collaborative effort and technological expertise.



- 1: Condition observation of seawater-damaged materials
- 2: Material selection
- 3: Storage at a temporal storage place or in a refrigerator or freezer
(Materials requiring no urgent treatment)
- 4: Stabilizing treatment
(Materials requiring newly structured stabilizing treatment method)
- 5: Stabilizing treatment
- 6: Wash
- 7: Dry
- 8: Smoking
- 9: (Removing biological degradation factors)
- 10: (Removing chemical degradation factors)
- 11: (Removing physical degradation factors)
- 12: Present condition record
- 13: Follow-up
- 14: Radical restoration
- 15: (Setting up proper conservation environment)
- 16: Emergent restoration

*Translated by the publisher

Procedure of stabilization treatment for seawater-damaged materials at Iwate Prefectural Museum



Washing old documents using an ultrasonic cleaner



Material check and removal of soil remained within them

Images provided by Iwate Prefectural Museum

Different Measures

The Cultural Properties Rescue Operations started to get itself on track after mid-April, 2011. Temperatures increased as the season moved eventually to summer. In a race against time, during which measures were delayed and secondary damage had advanced because of those delays, staff members at respective sites had no choice but to try their best to achieve whatever good outcomes were possible. To slow or halt secondary damage advancing, quite a few salvaged materials were kept temporarily in a private freezer and were then taken to Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties for vacuum freeze drying treatment.



Drying treatment for paper materials damaged by water using a large vacuum dryer equipped with a freezing mechanism
Image provided by Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties



Cleaning of paper materials dried in the process shown above
Image provided by Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties

However, for valuable properties in areas where people's entry was restricted because of the nuclear plant accidents, the rescue program started about one year later. Although preservation environments had been degraded by the power supply failure and although measurements were required in a hurry, packing and processing of the materials for which contamination was within acceptable values was undertaken in the summer of 2012 after safety confirmation for radioactive contamination and then careful examination of work procedures and methods. The materials taken from the areas were kept at the Fukushima Cultural Property Center, Shirakawa Branch (MAHORON). Some were opened to the public as of January 2015.



Carrying out work of disaster-affected materials in Tomioka Town
Image provided by Fukushima Cultural Property Center, Shirakawa Branch



Restoration Exhibition of Disaster-Affected Cultural Properties:
Rescued Cultural Properties in Futaba County III, Fukushima Cultural Property Center, October 4, 2014 – January 12, 2015
Sponsored by Fukushima Cultural Property Center, Shirakawa Branch

Reopening



1

Damage Survey and Restoration Work of Museum Facilities

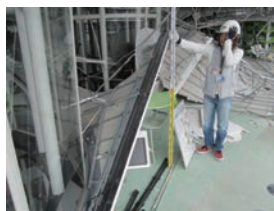
In countless damaged buildings throughout the disaster-affected areas, the damage survey of museum facilities and technical examination of restoration works did not go as expected. Saving lives and lifeline restoration were assigned priority, of course, but because museum efforts were hindered by a shortage of people who were able to respond when damaged transportation infrastructure prevented helpers from easily coming to sites, even from Tokyo. Typically, specialists who know about such special structures as museums well and who can diagnose problems are not stationed in the local areas. First, the staff members had to spend several days unable to judge whether their facilities were safe or not. Fortunately, however, public museums were treated preferentially. Some construction costs were also covered under the “Disaster Restoration Program of Public Social Educational Facilities” sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Ahead of restoration work, damage situations were recorded carefully. When a facility is subsidized by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the work must be restricted to damage caused by the disaster, so what was damaged by the

disaster had to be identified first. It was difficult for inexperienced staff members to take pictures of damage conditions using a target rod. At sendai mediatheque, where the suspended ceiling of the seventh floor collapsed, the cause was investigated simultaneously with an assessment of restoration improvements against future disasters. Consequently, although the lower floors were reopened in May 2011, it was not until autumn that full-scale restoration of the whole building was launched.



Scene of damage on the seventh floor of sendai mediatheque



People taking pictures of damage on the seventh floor of sendai mediatheque



Specialists inspecting damage on the seventh floor of sendai mediatheque



Scene of restoration on the seventh floor of sendai mediatheque

Images provided by sendai mediatheque

2

Road to Reopening

Budgets related to cultural affairs including museums' project programs were halted across the board immediately after the earthquake disaster. Instead, they were used for urgent expenses related to restoration. In such an emergency, some of those concerned with museums hesitated to reopen them.

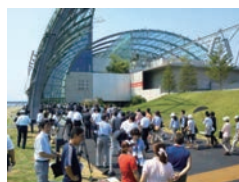
All quarters offered their sympathy, support for reopening, and donations, which pushed the museums towards reopening. That necessity dictated that we would have to restore ourselves before contributing to restoration. Indeed, staff members would have to address

their own rehabilitation first. People getting over the shock immediately after the disaster, and gradually sensing the accelerating restoration, and wanting to listen to pleasing subjects came to convince us that we should reopen museums as soon as possible, even if they were not perfectly but only partially restored.

On the first day each museum reopened, many people who had looked forward to the event visited. Although there remained some effects such as shortened business hours and saved illumination power because of power shortages, the visitors were apparently calmly pleased that part of their daily life had returned. When Aquamarine Fukushima, Marine Science Museum was reopened, a spotted seal baby, which had been born at the evacuation facility, was named Kibo (meaning hope in Japanese). The restoration process of Ishinomaki Mangattan Museum, located at a severely tsunami-damaged area, and which had taken one and half years to reopen, was symbolic for the town.



The hall, which had been damaged by mud flow, was filled with visitors celebrating its reopening 20 months later, in November 2012. Image provided by Ishinomaki Mangattan Museum



On July 5, 2011, 126 days after the Great East Japan Earthquake, Aquamarine Fukushima reopened. On that day, the museum held its reopening ceremony, with many people forming a line waiting for the opening.

Image provided by Aquamarine Fukushima



A female spotted seal, Clara, was pregnant at the earthquake disaster. On March 16, 2011 it was sent to Kamogawa Seaworld for evacuation. There it gave birth without complications on April 7. On June 26, it was returned to Fukushima with the baby, named Kibo. In June 2013, it was also sent to Asamushi Aquarium for breeding loan.

Image provided by Aquamarine Fukushima



At the Satohama seashore, where the Historical Museum of Jomon Village OkuMatsushima is located, many scholars and culture supporters started a project to contribute to the restoration by planting buckwheat.

Provided by Restoration project of Jomon Village OkuMatsushima (Historical Museum of Jomon Village OkuMatsushima)

3

Cultural Support and Cooperation

Many large to small projects to console and encourage people affected by the disasters in different fields of art and culture were drawn up and brought to the disaster-hit areas after the disaster. Large concerts were held and prestigious artists and popular stars visited the areas too frequently to have been expected before. To support the disaster-affected areas, core museums have also been holding large-scale exhibitions one after another.

Moreover, as rescue activities for cultural properties, staff members of the museums have also led such plans in cooperation with other museums in their network. The Kodomohikari project is a network of museums and volunteers extending throughout Japan, but centered on the Museum of Nature and Human Activities, Hyogo, bringing programs to children in the disaster-hit areas. It has a system for college student volunteers as well as museum staff members to participate in projects irrespective of areas and museums, in which we might be able to find a new possibility to develop the meaning of museums to the external world. After the disaster, many students actively participated in volunteer activities in the areas. Such activities also included museum support or rescue of cultural properties, encouraging students to work as volunteers. Museums are now being asked whether they will be able to continue to foster the activities with care.



Exhibition Circulated in Tohoku's Three Cities, Rencontres: le groupe dans les collections du Louvre, The Miyagi Museum of Art, June 9 – July 22, 2012

Sponsored by Musée du Louvre and The Miyagi Museum of Art
Image provided by the Miyagi Museum of Art



Special exhibition: Jakuchu's here! The joy and beauty of Edo period painting from the Price Collection, here to support and energize Tohoku recovery, Sendai City Museum, March 1 – May 6, 2013

Sponsored by "Jakuchu's here!" Sendai Exhibition Executive Committee, The Shin'enKan Foundation, Nikkei Inc.
Image provided by Sendai City Museum



Kodomohikari Festival in Sendai 2013, Sendai City Agriculture and Horticulture Center, June 8, 2013

Sponsored by Kodomohikari Project



Earthquake Recovery: National Museum of Nature and Science Collaboration Museum in Sendai; Allosaurs have come!, 3M Sendai City Science Museum, March 18 – April 20, 2014

Sponsored by National Museum of Nature and Science, National Science Museum Promotion Foundation, 3M Sendai City Science Museum
Image provided by 3M Sendai City Science Museum



Special Exhibition Supporting the Great East Japan Earthquake Recovery: Buddhist Images from the National Treasure Muroji Temple in Nara, Sendai City Museum, July 4 – August 24, 2014

Sponsored by Muroji Temple, Exhibition Executive Committee
Image provided by Sendai City Museum

4

Long Road to Reopening

Although the fruits of different support to the museums after the disaster were especially helpful, naturally, such support will not continue forever. Issues facing the museums in disaster-affected areas include plans to reorganize their own future activities with this support as a turning point.

Actually, small-scale private museums, to which public financial assistance is less likely to be passed, face special difficulties. Fukushima Museum of Art, located in Sendai City, is a private museum exhibiting old works of art collected by Teizo Fukushima. It had troubles dealing with damage to the facility and exhibitions, but managed to reopen in December 2012, with close support from Miyagi Gakuin Women's University and funds raised independently.

Most museums, irrespective of size, received the warm wishes of many people on their days of reopening. With few exceptions, however, they have had fewer visitors than they had before the disaster. Especially in Fukushima Prefecture, partly because of the nuclear power plant accidents, even the users of attractions such as aquariums have not increased in number as expected during the long period to the present time. Museums had suffered from financial problems related to operations before the disaster. Although measures to introduce financial assistance and knowhow from private businesses to public facilities have been taken,

only functioning as a stimulus, the museums have had no long-term vision for them to work in society with a sustainable management model yet.

The SMMA, established in 2009, has also made efforts to show how new museums should address the needs of their respective communities by having such difficult conditions shared as each community's cultural and intellectual resources among museums, instead of minimizing them as each museum's problems. Additionally, we are considering the possibility of improving the approach not by confining it within the field of museums but by collaborating with various educational facilities including libraries in each community.

The facilities which were devastated by the tsunami or to which entry has been prohibited because of the nuclear power plant accidents have no prospects of reopening even now. Because the disaster involved the whole community, instead of dealing with the difficulties as those of museums, it is necessary to consider what can be learned from them as a local museum and whether we can find a certain meaning of our existence in the community.



Request for contributions from Fukushima Museum of Art
Image provided by the Japanese Council of Art Museum, Fukushima Museum of Art



"Postcards of Shichifukujin (Seven Deities of Good Luck)" to invite donations
Image provided by Fukushima Museum of Art

What Museums Can Do



1

Exhibition as a Method

Since the earthquake disaster, how museums should cope has arisen as an important and subtle conundrum. To the extent that the mission of museums is to transmit and spread knowledge and culture in the society, all museums have a solemn duty to describe the disaster from their respective specialized standpoints. All the museums across the country, including the facilities that have been able to reopen in disaster-hit areas, have adopted efforts to transmit and disseminate information about the disaster by taking up the subject from their respective specialized viewpoints. The approaches include lectures, symposia, and tours as well as exhibitions. Here, we briefly introduce the contents and conduct of exhibitions.

Academic Understanding of the Disaster as a Phenomenon

Although we had considered such widespread damage caused by the earthquake and radioactive contamination “unexpected,” the disaster has shown that some reasons to expect those hazards were concealed in the fields of archeology and history. An earthquake disaster of similar scale affected areas of Tohoku district’s Pacific coast about one thousand years ago. A similarly powerful tsunami struck the area four hundred years ago. An earthquake and tsunami are expected

to strike areas south of Tokaido in the future, possibly exceeding the Great East Japan Earthquake in devastating power. Therefore, a trend to learn not only the mechanisms of earthquakes and tsunamis, but also the histories of past disasters has been developing rapidly.



Still, We Live: Vestiges of disaster seen from archeology, Sendai City Tomizawa Site Museum, October 12 – December 2, 2012
Sponsored by Sendai City Tomizawa Site Museum
Image provided by Sendai City Tomizawa Site Museum



Feature Exhibition: The Gamou Tidal Flat Then and Now, 3M Sendai City Science Museum
Sponsored by 3M Sendai City Science Museum
Image provided by 3M Sendai City Science Museum



Earthquake Disasters throughout History, March 11 – May 6, 2014, the National Museum of Japanese History
Sponsored by the National Museum of Japanese History
Image provided by the National Museum of Japanese History

To Comprehend the Disaster from Perspectives of Local and Cultural Histories

With the Great East Japan Earthquake providing momentum, some project exhibitions

reviewing local effects of the disaster and the subsequent restoration history have been held all over the country. In addition, project exhibitions to introduce lost streets and life scenes by the tsunami have won the sympathy of many visitors.



Oshika Peninsula: Exhibition of sea life scenes, Miyagi Sant Juan Bautista Museum, October 11–26, 2014
Sponsored by Tohoku Gakuin University Museum
Image provided by Tohoku Gakuin University



The Great East Japan Earthquake and the Life and Culture of Kesennuma, The National Museum of Japanese History, March 19 – September 23, 2013
Sponsored by the National Museum of Japanese History
Image provided by the National Museum of Japanese History



RE: Project Record Exhibition, Gallery Hall on the first floor of the main building of Sendai City Hall, February 5 – 28, 2014
Sponsored by Sendai City, the Sendai Cultural Foundation
Image provided by RE: Project Secretariat



The First Meal After the Earthquake – When, Where and What Did You Eat?, sendai mediatheque, October 1 – November 16, 2014
Sponsored by NPO 20th Century Archive Sendai, sendai mediatheque.
Image provided by Center for remembering 3.11 (sendai mediatheque)

Introduction of Rescue Activities for Cultural Properties

Numerous reports have described cultural property rescue activities to salvage the collections regarded as the spirit of a museum from the mud. Introducing the disaster situations and rescue work and exhibiting the salvaged materials, they demonstrate that the program was conducted not only as museum rescue activities,

but also as a struggle to restore the local identity of a community along with collaboration with specialists and numerous volunteers from around the country. The exhibition of cultural properties rescued from an archive located in Futaba County, Fukushima Prefecture, to which entry has been restricted because of the nuclear plant accidents, and now temporarily exhibited in Shirakawa City, is especially significant of this ongoing struggle.



Exhibition of Cultural Properties of Tohoku Regenerated from the Disaster,
The Tokyo Metropolitan Library, February 26 – March 11, 2012
The Tono Municipal Museum, March 16 – 28, 2012
Sponsored by the Executive Committee of "Exhibition of Cultural Properties of Tohoku Regenerated from the Disaster"
Image provided by Tono Culture Research Center



Restoration of Utatsu Gyoryuukan (Ichthyosaur Museum), Sendai City Science Museum, February 7 – March 25, 2012
Sponsored by the Tohoku University Museum and Sendai Science Museum, Minamisanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture
Image provided by the Tohoku University Museum



One Year after the Great East Japan Earthquake: Rescue Activities for the Historical Materials, Sendai City Museum, March 6 – 25, 2012
Sponsored by Sendai City Museum
Image provided by Sendai City Museum



Rescued Cultural Properties of Futaba County, March 7 – June 9, 2013
Rescued Cultural Properties of Futaba County 2, January 18 – March 23, 2014
Rescued Cultural Properties of Futaba County 3, December 1, 2014 – January 12, 2015
Fukushima Cultural Property Center, Shirakawa Branch
Sponsored by the Fukushima Prefectural Culture Foundation

How Can Art Confront Devastation?

Many artists visited the disaster-hit areas, continuing to search for what each should do, including genuine volunteer work. Quite a few projects were conducted to introduce their activities, considering how the earthquake disaster and art, i.e., the situations deriving from disasters and acts of representation or

persons who represent them, can meet each other. Although the exhibition “Lieko Shiga RASENKAIGAN” held by sendai mediatheque in 2012 was not a project with a theme directly related to the earthquake disaster, the project also attracted attention because the production site was devastated by the tsunami and the experience became a large component of the produced works.



Artists and the Disaster – Documentation in Progress -, Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Gallery, October 13 – December 9, 2012
Sponsored by Mito Arts Foundation
Image provided by Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito



Making as Living – The Exhibition of Great East Japan Earthquake Regeneration Support Action Project, 3331 Arts Chiyoda, March 11–25, 2012
Sponsored by WAWA Project (commandN)
Image provided by WAWA Project (commandN)



The Earthquake Disaster and Representation: BOX ART; metaphors to share, Rias Ark Museum of Art, September 17 – November 3, 2014
Sponsored by Rias Ark Museum of Art
Image provided by Rias Ark Museum of Art



Installation View: Yuki Nakamura [Kitakama Community Center, Natori, Miyagi] from the exhibition “Records and Recollections: Walking through House of Images,” sendai mediatheque, November 15, 2014 – January 12, 2015
Sponsored by Sendai Cultural Foundation
Photographed by Izuru Echigoya, provided by sendai mediatheque

2

Collecting, Conserving, and Conveying Cultural Properties to the Future

Museums have functions not only to collect and release necessary documents, cultural properties, and works widely, but also to convey them, handing them over to future generations. In that meaning, primarily, collecting and widely releasing the records of the disaster is the work of museums. However, ensuring a flexible response to treat objects which have never been regarded as collection targets might be an important problem facing museums in the future.

The records related to the disaster include photographic records, video records, bulletin objects related to the disaster, leaflets, administrative documents, relics, structural remains and others. Some are original materials. Others are reproducible data. Each community, each workplace or school, each group, and even each person has distinct memories and thoughts. Therefore, what they want to transmit, to whom they want to transmit them, and how they can transmit them should be different. To consider that the earthquake damaged wide areas and that the damage was complicated, it might become more impossible to transmit them one by one in a skillful manner to as many people as possible.

Even though the earthquake disaster is special for us, it will persist as a historical event over a long period of time. Although it might be called a “fading memory with the passage of time,” it is also originally natural. It might be necessary to build something large to remember it, but it might be more important to weave the fact that our daily life must always include quiet cognizance of the possibility of a cataclysmic disaster intruding into our daily life. Can we not think about sharing what experience we have, to take measures for it within our community, and then take a portion of our work, applying each specialty and work activities to those measures? By putting matters related to a community in the hands of the community residents and putting matters related to a special field in the hands of specialists, the people with skill to transmit them compile those materials into a record with their collaboration. The problem is how to coordinate and share the approach comprehensively.

For four years since the earthquake, upon collecting and using the records of the disaster, we have been doing as much as we can from our standpoint. However, unfortunately, there has been no function to survey and coordinate the efforts yet. Given the opportunity, to use the expertise of museums for the benefit of greater society, museums are actively seeking recommendations about what they should do in recording and using the disaster in cooperation with libraries, public archives, digital archives, and communities in the disaster-affected areas and how they can take the lead in such activities.

3

To Continue to Tell the Story

Our thoughts and memories can only exist in individual life. For that reason, we cannot know other people's thoughts and memories directly. To overcome that constraint of ultimate isolation, we have developed and learned gestures, words, and various representations. To fix them in a form, we have different ways of recording them by words or images. They have enabled us to take over the thoughts and memories from distant ancestors or distant people as our memories or idea. The culture might be designated as systems which become a necessary condition for us to be what we are.

Museums, as one system, have presented

exhibits, i.e., "objects" by which knowledge, memories, or thoughts have been fixed in a certain form, to the public and passed them from the past to the present. However, the earthquake disaster has demonstrated to us again how much we do not know. To consider that the knowledge accumulated in museums is understood as only part of the world in which we live, can we not find another role of museums aside from the spreading and enlightenment of established theories or things for which evaluation has fixed?

To show what we do not understand, to show that there are numerous and diverse ideas and thoughts, to talk about and listen to a certain subject together, and to accumulate and deepen what is talked about and listened to, museums can serve as sites where the exhibited "objects" will develop the possibilities of such new knowledge or ways of thinking and function as a chance for the circulation of knowledge to start. Through the earthquake disaster, some cases have been revealed, indicating to us how such new museums might be.



"To Start to Walk," held when sendai mediatheque was partially reopened (May 3–8, 2011).

Photographed by Izuru Echigoya, provided by sendai mediatheque

Dare to Share Memories

“Documentary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and History of Tsunami” released as permanent exhibition by Rias Ark Museum of Art after reopening consists of realistic exhibits such as record photographs of damage situations and tsunami-affected materials washed away by tsunami. The captions are remarkable. In the captions added to the record photos, not only usual explanations but also the thoughts of those days, even including memories formed before the disaster, are written. With the tsunami-affected materials such as rubble, the memories about the objects are described in the words of each person. From every photograph and material, the different lives and thoughts of different people have come to life. The excessive narrative of the materials is enhanced by curators in the art museum, so the words added to the exhibits are fiction in a strict sense. In the exhibitions of museums, for which explanations should be objective, it is extremely rare to add an explanation mixed with fiction, by which the meaning of the earthquake and telling it would touch the heart of a viewer far more deeply.



Permanent exhibition: Documentary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and History of Tsunami



"Bicycle, found at Kajigaura shore, Kesennuma, on December 1, 2011"

My bicycle my grandfather bought me. My mountain bike. My grandfather bought it for me when I became a fourth grader. Before then, I had used hand-me-downs from my brother. Therefore, then I was bought a brand-new one for the first time. Well, it was a twelve-speed derailleur. I was able to climb steep slopes with it. My grandfather went to the port after the earthquake, saying that he would take his boat to sea. He has not come home yet. My father is looking for him. I'd like to ride a bicycle.



The situation of Nakamachi, Kesennuma City on April 5, 2011. On a platform of the JR Minami Kesennuma Station. The Kesennuma Line was the important means of public transportation to and from the area: essential to move onward to Sendai. It was the very daily route taken especially by elderly people and students. On Saturday and Sunday, the people got on the train commonly called the "shopping train," which started to Sendai at around 8 a.m. and which came home on the train which left from Sendai at around 5 p.m. Young people dressed in fashionable clothing went off the train with paper bags with a brand logo.

Images provided by Rias Ark Museum of Art

As a Chance for a Person who Sees Them to Tell Them

According to the Tohoku Gakuin University Museum, in charge of rescuing a local folklore museum located on the Oshika Peninsula, partly because the documents of the museum were swept away with the homes, they were unable to identify a considerable amount of rescued materials. In working to tag the materials which were not identified by accounts with local peoples, we were able to see a certain change in the participants. While explaining how to use the folkcraft articles they knew, talking about what they did not know in a company, solving the questions, their talk becoming animated and increasingly expansive; one participant after another started to talk about the local life and each life. Apart from whether it is directly related to the background of cultural properties, it is significant that the cultural properties function not as the existence which itself transmits something but as an important cue for people to start to talk about local life and culture.



Hearing at the exhibition "Life in Oshika Peninsula"
Image provided by Tohoku Gakuin University



Materials with documents about the hearing at the exhibition
"Life in Oshika Peninsula"
Image provided by Tohoku Gakuin University

Scale Model Project for Restoring "Lost Homes" was started as an approach that also served as training for students learning architecture at Kobe University. They represented the communities and houses lost by the tsunami using a 1 : 500 scale model, on which they placed accounts of people's memories. First, the students made white models referring to data. Then, they brought them to the respective areas, conducting the "Town of Memory–community participation workshop" with the residents, painting the roofs and placing different memories and records with memorial flags on the model. The memorial flags stood closely on the model, each flag expressing each feeling to a hometown resident. We never tired of looking at it. Here, the model functions as an important cue to remind the people of their hometown and elicit stories from them.



Visitors participating in "Town of memory–community participation workshop in Shizugawa"
Image provided by Scale Model Project for Restoring "Lost Homes"



Memorial flags from "Town of memory–community participation workshop in Shizugawa"
Image provided by Scale Model Project for Restoring "Lost Homes"

Conclusions

After the earthquake disaster, as the first summer approached, movements to restore folk entertainment accompanying local festivals started among the people who had lost their home towns to the tsunami and who lived at shelters or temporary residences. Because instruments for festivals were washed away in many communities and because people naturally hesitated to conduct a festival during times of such emergency, it was not easy to restore the festival. The fact that the movements to restore folk entertainment as community events to mourn the victims and hope for the restoration were set up one after another has become a memorable episode in talking about the Great East Japan Earthquake. Such activities allowed the people to connect the relation to the past or the community, which had been cut off by the earthquake disaster, and to reconfirm where they had come from, who and what they were able to share as companions and neighbors, and to no slight degree, to reconfirm their own identity in close relation to others.

Similar phenomena occurred in the world of museums. The reopening of the museums and the rescue of local cultural properties were the power to encourage the people, remind them of their own identity, and support them. In addition, because we almost lost our museums through the earthquake, we were able to rediscover their social function: maintaining the identity of our community is the essential task of museums.

It goes without saying that it is important to pass down to the future the disaster-prevention lessons learned through

the earthquake to decrease the future victims of disasters to the greatest degree possible. Nevertheless, it is not the only information that must be transmitted and remembered. Finding truly important subjects and being able to find them again despite their sudden loss or transformation provides important lessons. We cannot forget the meaning of museums which we glimpsed when they were in danger and also miss this new possibility we are seizing now. Not only for each museum but also the SMMA, a collaborative body of local museums, we must strive for progress by considering the meaning and possibility that have been clarified for us again through the earthquake disaster.



"Do not take away the materials of this museum.

They are precious treasures to restore the nature, history, and culture of Rikuzentakata City.

By Rikuzentakata City Board of Education."

(Note placed at Rikuzentakata City Museum)

Image provided by Tono Culture Research Center



石巻文化センターの記憶(記憶の街ワークショップ)

Memories of Ishinomaki Culture Center (Town of memory - community participation workshop)

To close this report, our sincere gratitude goes to the editors and associates of many data and documents, the contributors of photographs, and those who commented on our work.

Limitations of space and lack of our ability might have biased our selection of events or caused shortages of certain kinds of events to be highlighted. If so, we would just beg your forgiveness.

Anyway, the Sendai Miyagi Museum Alliance will continue research on the damage caused to the museum in the Great East Japan Earthquake and the process of restoration. For our further research activity, we would appreciate any advice or comment on this report.



Sendai Miyagi Museum Alliance (SMMA)

SMMA is a joint project wherein various museum from the Sendai and Miyagi area put together their intellectual resources to achieve better functionality for the region. SMMA aims to create a new-era museum network that meets the needs of the region. To achieve this, SMMA intends to gather knowledge and know-how from each museum's curators and specialists through joint events spanning several fields. SMMA also aims to do this by collaborating for education, nurturing and assisting the talented people engaged in the cultural activities of the region and by opening tourist attractions, efforts that were before hard to realize a single museum.

SMMA member museums: 3M Sendai City Science Museum, Sendai City Jomon Site Park, Sendai Astronomical Observatory, Sendai City Tomizawa Site Museum, Sendai City Museum, Sendai Yagiyama Zoological Park, Sendai City Museum of History and Folklore, Sendai Literature Museum, sendai mediatheque, The Tohoku University Museum, Tohoku Fukushi University Serizawa Keisuke Art and Craft Museum, The Miyagi Museum of Art (as of March 2015).

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