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Building Resilience of Coastal Destinations after The Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami 2011



Disasters come back when we forget (Terada Torahiko)

The tenth anniversary of the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami (hereafter ‘GEJET’) is a critical milestone to evaluate post-disaster recovery of an affected region. How has a destination devastated by natural calamity transformed and built resilience? Publications on resilience have recently proliferated. However, the conceptualisation of resilience in tourism studies is questionable as tourism research in relation to crisis and disaster management is not well-connected to the literature on resilience.

Recovery from a mega disaster is a long-term process which requires a longitudinal approach through close engagement between different public and private sectors of the disaster affected area. Post-disaster recovery might open up a window of opportunity for building transformative resilience with tourism playing a transitional role. Interwoven in a complex system of redesigning a region devastated by a mega disaster, the study of tourism cannot be separated from disaster-risk management, regional planning and revitalisation.



Acknowledging these gaps in existing literature, the current study links resilience and tourism within a broad socio-ecological context of destinations devastated by GEJET. Having analyzed the case of Kesenuma city, which has recovered from GEJET, researchers discuss the extent to which tourism is utilized as a driving force for post-disaster recovery.

Findings from the study contribute by bridging existing gaps of knowledge to understand the Japanese approach of using tourism as a pillar for recovery, an area where English literature is relatively in shortage. Practically, tourism for the recovery of a destination heavily affected by a mega disaster provides important lessons for other destinations, including the need to build resilience from the bottom-up level and combine resources and initiatives to solve multiple problems. At the heart of successful recovery is a keen understanding of interdependency between economic sectors and between human and nature, as well as the capacity of local people to adjust, adapt and transform to face any crisis in the future.



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