

## **Freie Universität Berlin – IRIDeS Summer School**

### **Navigating Narratives: Understanding Institutional Dynamics in Disaster Recovery (2024/9/23-28)**

Theme: Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster; disaster recovery, narratives, institutional theory; inclusive BOSAI; international exchange  
Place: IRIDeS; Natori, Ishinomaki, Minamisanriku, Futaba, Okuma, Tomioka

From September 23 to 28, 2024, the International Research Institute of Disaster Science (IRIDeS) hosted a joint summer school titled “Navigating Narratives: Understanding Institutional Dynamics in Disaster Recovery,” in collaboration with the Graduate School of East Asian Studies (GEAS) and the Japanese Studies Department of Freie Universität Berlin. The GEAS summer school is an annual program that focuses on various institutional topics, with each year’s event held in a different country in East Asia.

A total of 17 faculty members and doctoral researchers from Freie Universität participated, including Vice President Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott, Prof. Gregory Jackson (Department of Management), and the Associate Director of the Graduate School, Dr. Katrin Gengenbach. The program centered on the Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent recovery processes. It featured a blend of academic presentations on disaster science and disaster risk reduction in Japan, along with field research in Natori, Ishinomaki, Minamisanriku (Miyagi Prefecture), Futaba, Tomioka, and Okuma (Fukushima Prefecture).

On the first day, IRIDeS director Prof. Shinichi Kuriyama, Prof. Blechinger-Talcott, Dr. Gengenbach, and Assoc. Prof. Julia Gerster (Disaster Culture and Archive Studies/ Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Lab/ Communication Science for Disaster Risk Reduction Lab) addressed the Summer School participants with a warm welcome. Over the week, presentations by Tohoku University faculty members—Prof. Fumihiko Imamura (Tsunami Engineering Lab), Assoc. Prof. Julia Gerster, Assoc. Prof. Elizabeth Maly and Researcher (Specially Appointed) Miwako Kitamura (International Research Collaboration Office), Assoc. Prof. Erick Mas (Disaster Geo-informatics Lab), Assoc. Prof. Alyne Delaney, and Prof. Jun Mitarai (Disaster Resilient Society Promotion Lab)—covered a wide range of topics, including the impacts of the Great East Japan Earthquake, changes in the living environment of survivors due to recovery and relocation policies, decontamination and revitalization policies in Fukushima, and disaster risk reduction from the viewpoints of minority groups. Additionally, Prof. Tamaki from Fukushima Medical University provided an overview of radiation health effects, with specific emphasis on the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Prof. Yanai from Tohoku Gakuin University gave an insightful presentation on the economic repercussions of the triple disaster, focusing particularly on the city of Ishinomaki in preparation for the field research.

On September 24, participants were divided into two groups for fieldwork: the “Natori Group” and the “Fukushima Group.” The “Natori Group,” led by Researcher Kitamura, explored the damage in the Yuriage district of Natori City and visited the disaster memorial Mémoire de Yuriage. The walking tour, guided by local resident Toshiyuki Naganuma, offered personal insights into the region’s recovery and his story of survival. Participants then engaged in a discussion with Miwako Takahashi and her daughter Momoko, who lives with Rett syndrome, to address the challenges faced by people with disabilities during disaster recovery and risk reduction.

Meanwhile, the “Fukushima Group” began with a walking tour in the reopened area of Futaba Town to learn about the nuclear disaster, life before the disaster, and the current state of recovery. They visited the TEPCO decommissioning museum, where they received a guided tour providing information about the nuclear accident and the ongoing recovery and decommissioning efforts. In the afternoon, they toured the interim storage facility in Okuma, where they observed how decontamination policies are implemented firsthand. Equipped with Geiger counters, participants

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measured changes in the environment and localities, depending on procedures such as reusing contaminated soil in street pavements or burying it underground, and reflected on radiation measurements they took outside Fukushima Prefecture. The fieldwork concluded with a discussion with Norio Kimura, a former resident of the area turned into the interim storage facility, arranged by F-ATRAS. In his talk, Kimura shared his feelings about the loss of his family in the tsunami, his thoughts on the nuclear disaster that prevented the search for missing people, and what the provision of the former residential area to the interim storage facility means to him, exemplifying the ongoing human impact of the nuclear disaster and recovery policies.

The final fieldwork, spanning two days, was conducted with all participants. On the first day, the group visited Kadonowaki Elementary School in Ishinomaki, where they learned about the history and current state of recovery of the city, as well as disaster memorials in general and the Kadonowaki Elementary memorial in particular, from memorial director Richard Halberstadt. On the way to Genki Ichiba, local residents Hajime and Naomi Chiba shared their insights on the history of Ishinomaki, the recovery efforts, and their personal research. After moving to Minamisanriku, hotel owner Noriko Abe gave a presentation on Hotel Kanyo's role in disaster relief as a shelter and the importance of tourism in long-term recovery.

The last day of fieldwork began with participation in the kataribe bus, during which Kazuma Goto shared his experiences and thoughts on the 3.11 disaster and recovery at places affected by the tsunami. He also guided the group through the Takano Kaikan, a wedding hall that was turned into a private disaster memorial. The fieldwork concluded with a barbecue at the "hill of life," which serves not only as a leisure facility but also as a place of learning about living with nature and disaster risk preparedness.

Throughout the week, participants, divided into three different groups, analyzed the presentations and explanations during fieldwork from the viewpoints of:

1. National and local narratives;
2. Narratives of diversity
3. Narratives of natech disasters and natural hazard disasters.

In the final symposium held on September 28, they discussed their findings and thoughts with an audience that included some of the local guides and presenters. Assoc. Prof. Sebastien Boret (International Research Collaboration Office) and Prof. Christopher Craig (Center for Integrated Japanese Studies) provided insightful comments on disaster narratives and the content of the presentations. It was especially highlighted that participants identified key topics and challenges in recovery discussed in disaster science and demonstrated the ability to discuss these issues from the background of their respective research disciplines. Some of the findings included discrepancies between desired forms of recovery from local people's points of view and build back better policies and communication challenges and dilemmas regarding recovery policies in Fukushima Prefecture. The Summer School also provided a unique opportunity to understand the impact of a triple disaster and to correlate with disasters, climate change and institutions in the East Asian region in particular, and overall on a global scale.

The summer school was jointly organized by IRIDeS faculty Gerster, Maly, and Kitamura; along with Freie Universität Berlin faculty Prof. Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Dr. Katrin Gengenbach, with assistance from doctoral researchers Elena Korshenko and Nakako Hattori. The organizers express gratitude to the generous sponsors, Center for International Cooperation at Freie Universität Berlin, the international mobility funding at Freie Universität Berlin (PROMOS), GEAS, IRIDeS, and F-REI.

Report by:

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(pictures on the next page)



Opening remarks were delivered by Prof. Blechinger-Talcott, Dr. Gengenbach (Freie Universität Berlin), and Prof. Kuriyama (IRIDeS).



The participants listening to a presentation by Prof. Imamura.



The Natori group with Miwako and Momoko Takahashi.



Field research in the Yuriage district guided by Toshiyuki Naganuma.



The Fukushima group looking over the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.



Conducting radiation measurements in the interim storage facility.



The Fukushima group in front of Shohatsu shrine in Futaba Town.



Memorial director Richard Halberstadt explains the fire damage at Kadonowaki Elementary School.



The group comparing photographs prior to 3.11 to the reconstructed area of Kadonowaki.



Assoc. Prof. Maly translating explanations of kataribe Kazuma Goto in Minamisanriku.



At the "hill of life" in Minamisanriku.



The audience listening to the group presentations at the final symposium on Sep 28, 2024.