

Archiving and Memorializing Disasters International Workshop, UN World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015/3/16)

Subject: The role of archives and memorialization in Disaster Risk Reduction
Location: Tohoku University

The Digital Archives of IRIDeS held a public forum on *Archiving and Memorializing Disasters* at the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (March 14-18, 2015). For this international and interdisciplinary workshop, Dr. Akihiro Shibayama and Dr. Sébastien Penmellen Boret (Disaster Information, Management and Public Collaboration Division) invited experts from the USA, Europe and Asia. These researchers drew from their respective fields of expertise including anthropology, history and information science making it an interdisciplinary discussion. Together they attracted an informed and enthusiastic audience as well as national media.

In their opening address, Dr. Shibayama and Dr. Boret began the discussion on the roles of digital archives and memorialization of disasters by reminding the audience that large-scale disasters not only caused incommensurable losses but also provided important information and critical knowledge for Disaster Risk Reduction. This information materializes in the form of digital archives and memorialization (i.e. any tangible and intangible acts of remembrance, such as private and public ceremonies, secular and religious memorial monuments and sites, and also story telling and formal disaster education). The wealth of data recorded and the memorialization of disasters must serve to improve local and international policy in order to reduce the impact of future natural hazards.

During a well-balanced discussion, the participants drew from their respective activities and research on disaster archives and memorials. Focusing on digital archives, Prof. Andrew Gordon and Prof. Ted Bestor (Harvard University), Muzailin Afan (Syiah Kuala University) and David. H. Slater (Sophia University) discussed the impact of digital information and technology in four disaster archive projects: Japan's 2011 Disasters, Digital Archives of Tsunamis in Aceh (DATA) and Voices from Tohoku. Investigating disaster memorialization, Susann Baez Ullberg (Sweden National Defense College), Ryo Morimoto (Brandeis University) and Sébastien P. Boret (Tohoku University) demonstrated the process and role of memorialization in post-disaster communities of Japan and Argentina. Perceptible in all these presentations, the presentation of Susanna Hoffman on the representations of disasters in art and legends across time and cultures confirming the idea that archiving and memorializing have been two long-lived practices forming the social memory of human disasters.

The synergy created during this public forum ignited a real reflection on the role of digital archives and memorials in disaster risk reduction. The first challenge identified is to keep the memories of disasters alive within and across cultures. The second necessity is therefore to treat archives and memories as dynamic processes requiring both technological knowledge and creative thinking. In order respond to these two challenged, this workshop concluded with an immediate call for the creation of an international meta-database and research group of disaster archives and memorialization.



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