

Doctoral Students in Urban Planning

PhD Seminar

Announces a Seminar by

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“Flat lands or mountains? Resettlement decisions of villagers after a devastating disaster”

Wednesday, November 4th, 2009
19 Temple Buell Hall
12:00 pm

Abstract:

Higashiyama and Yamakoshi districts suffered a devastating earthquake that struck the region in 2004. Both Ojiya City that administers Higashiyama and Yamakoshi Village*1 envisioned regional sustainability upon providing resettlement policies; Ojiya City through providing relocation incentives for villagers moving into the city so that they can join the economic activity. Yamakoshi Village, on the other hand, provided incentives for villagers to collectively return so that their community will not be dismembered.

This part of research tries to unpack villagers' resettlement decisions in light of the different policies of two governments by observing five village communities. Nijumurago area, where both Higashiyama and Yamakoshi districts are situated, has experienced similar scale of devastating damage from the earthquake. Both districts also share history, economy, and culture in common and called “Isolated island on land [rikuno kotou]” as they were long marginalized from infrastructure and economic development due to its mountainous geography. Post-earthquake displacement procedures – evacuated to city for temporary shelters and housing for two-three years – are also similar to each other.

Semi-structured interviews of 48 village leaders and residents suggest that majority of individuals make resettlement decisions based on reasons outside economic opportunity, in contrast to our standard expectations. Majority of those who relocated provided reasons as geographic hazard and difficulty of living in the mountainous villages, while those who repopulated considered the inexpensive cost of living and joy in non-economic activities (i.e. cultural activities and home vegetation). Furthermore, both relocated and repopulated population provided psychological/emotional reasons; relocated population mentioned about their inferior feeling about mountainous villages while having aspiration to live in a flat land. On the other hand, those repopulated commented on their comfort of the village as opposed to the cities. Other reasons that were provided by both relocated and returned population included: ease of commuting, continuation of own business, and schooling. Moreover, age of the decision maker affected the decisions. Finally, it is important to note that economic incentives provided by two governments in rebuilding home did not play a great part in villagers relocating or returning.

*1 Yamakoshi village merged with Nagaoka City in 2005

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