

LARGE SCALE DISASTER AND COMMUNITY SPORTS CLUB A CASE STUDY FROM THE GREAT EAST JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

Kazuhiko Amano
Tohoku Gakuin University
Japan
amano@izcc.tohoku-gakuin.ac.jp

Aim of abstract

In Japan, approximately 3,400 community sports clubs (CSCs) modeled on European, particularly German design, have been built since 1995 under the initiative of the Japanese government. These Japanese CSCs are built in the promise that they will contribute not only to the promotion of local sports, but also improve regional health and foster renewed urban development as they serve to increase social interaction among community residents. Thus CSCs in Japan serve as the “New Public Commons” in this age of austerity as oversized governmental projects are reduced and administrative and financial reforms are implemented.

On March 11, 2011, Japan, especially the Tohoku (northeastern) district, suffered catastrophic damage from an earthquake and subsequent tsunamis, from which it has not even now fully recovered. From the perspective of regional sports studies, it is of great importance to examine the roles and activities performed by CSCs in Japan, which normally are supported through the voluntary activities of local residents, under disaster conditions.

Therefore the main purpose of this case study is to show how CSCs perform from the time a disaster hits up through the reconstruction period, while comparing large-scale government administered with small-scale community managed CSCs.

Theoretical background

Researchers have noted the value of sport facilities in disaster management specifically, Matheson (2006) points out the roles played by sports in times of large disaster such as hurricanes. And Ozaki (2004) suggests that local sport activities were useful when handling mental health issues of disaster victims.

However, Kawata (2003) divides emergency management into prior preparation as risk management and afterward action as crisis management. He subsequently arranges crisis management into a chronological order: 1.Direct, 2.Urgent, 3.Emergency, 4.Recovery, and 5.Social Mitigation. The research presented in this paper employs his proposed chronological frame.

Methodology

In this case study several longitudinal interview surveys conducted from April 2012 to March 2013 targeting the managers of CSCs in the afflicted areas are presented. The clubs studied represent six of 38 clubs found in Miyagi Prefecture, which is one of three Tohoku district prefectures directly affected by the tsunami. The survey area is divided into coastal and internal regions.

The interviews focused on the concept of crisis management and were conducted for approximately an hour each, recorded in verbatim reports, and then analyzed. The text data is organized into five chronological periods, and sorted into a descriptive taxonomy according to the size of CSCs. Finally, the data is analyzed taking into consideration the size and location of the CSCs.

Results

To put it simply, the post-disastrous support differed greatly according to the scales of the clubs. No club faced problems at the onset of the disaster, but soon after the disaster many clubs were prohibited from continuing their activities because the public sports facilities were turned into evacuation centers, morgues, or places to collect disaster debris. Moreover, club members fulfilled additional role as members of the local fire brigade or other bodies involved in life-saving activities immediately following the disaster. In a sense, CSCs were forced to develop; the disaster became a key opportunity for the CSC members to recognize the public responsibility of their clubs.

Club member's participation in disaster-related activities started from an appreciation for the importance of recreation and health maintenance by means of physical exercise at evacuation centers and within local communities, but at the earliest this did not occur two weeks after the disaster. Four clubs had resumed their activities six months after disaster, but the activities of two clubs in the coastal region were extremely limited because of damage that even now has yet to be repaired. Moreover, while the clubs in the internal region had a smaller degree of damage and had more members than before the disaster, those in the coastal region had no more than half of the pre-disaster number of members. A survey from one year ago on activity resumption by local residents provides similar findings and raises concern over the post-disaster exercise performance gap between the internal and coastal areas within Miyagi Prefecture.

References

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