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RENEWING PLACES

Maru: An ethnographic approach to revive local communities

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How would Japan's rural communities renew oneself when the nation's economy no longer holds the absolute financial and technological powers in the global sphere? Through our post-3.11 recovery effort in local communities of Kesennuma, Japan, we discuss - a gap between the perceptions of Japan's rise from the 1950s and how in fact rural economies, such as the one in Kesennuma, have lost independency through its process. This paper seeks to capture the power of Maru, an inter-local activity, seeking an alternative to the conventional model of development based on the economy of capitalism, and how ethnography and design would play a central role in the success of community revival.

> "Ethnographic fieldwork clearly reveals that disasters affect religion and ritual, economics and politics, kinship and associations … they stir conflict. If not actual change, disasters certainly bring about the potential for change."
> Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 1999: 10

Introduction

"From recovery to reconstruction," is an iconic phrase that appeared in 1995, when a great earthquake hit the town of Kobe killing more than 6,000 people. The statement entails a criticism towards the government at the time, which in haste restored the city but eventually left its citizens paying off the debt through heavy taxation. Since then, the word reconstruction has been used over recovery, emphasizing that fundamental measures should be taken upon the restoration of the town to transform the catastrophe caused by the earthquake into an opportunity for change. After the great earthquake on 3.11 hit the Northeastern coast of Japan, it was no surprise that the government immediately named the new institution engaged in a recovery effort The Reconstruction Agency.

When IMF First Deputy Managing Director, David Lipton, visited Japan in June 2012 and stated, "Japan is experiencing a solid recovery (IMF, 2012)." Lipton continued, "The *country's recovery* would be sustained by the *reconstruction spending*," he sounded as if the *reconstruction* in disaster area is to help the country recover. Here in this short statement lies confusion between a number of notions, between who needs saving and who are saved, the cause and the consequence, and the nation and its regions. In the end, *whose* recovery was it? And what actually determines these acts of "recovery?"

While we could continue debating on what defines the recovery, the situation in the disaster area was changing rapidly and a decision has to be made how we, as researchers, were to enact. Our visit to the disaster area started in April 2011, approximately one month after the disaster struck the region. Little were we aware at the time, as we made a decision to enter the disaster area, which was devastated by the loss of lives, livelihoods, and the industry, that our commitment would take a form of participatory research. In this situation, we the researchers became a part of the action where we together with the locals seek for the alternatives on how local communities can be actually restored.

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The events, challenges, and discussions in this paper centralize in Kesennuma, one of the Northeastern towns located in Miyagi prefecture, where 3.11-disater had a devastating impact, and where the research has been taking place. By deconstructing what initially appeared as the 'unusual' event that struck the town, we describe how globalization, particularly within the context of fishing, has been affecting the town in good times and bad. Through the inferior situation that the town is placed today, we would describe why the town needs to depart from economy-driven recovery, and to seek its way through alternative paths by strengthening their own discourse and to enhance exchanges between other locals of the world.

Our Approach

Authors of this paper take two professional roles, one as corporate ethnographers and another, as educators. The research and the following activities are the outcomes of these two roles, and in many cases, beyond them.

As corporate ethnographers, we were stumbled upon the fact that due to large aftershocks, most corporations, including ours, were cautious to have any of their employees to enter the region for business for the first few months since the 3.11. Meanwhile, as the time passes by, the situation and the issues around the disaster area were changing rapidly: authors eventually made a personal decision to enact nevertheless.

As educators, Tamura, one of the authors, in particular is a founding director of i.school in the University of Tokyo (i.school, 2012). Since 2009, every year at i.school, around 20 students are accepted in the annual program. Through series of human-centered innovation workshops, organized by both the global educational and business bodies in field of design and innovation, students are asked to work on issues, which often addresses the social and the industrial challenges we face at present: As the 3.11 disaster took place, students of the program have gone through a field visit and together tackled the theme 'Future of work in the disaster area.' Although the workshop itself has been completed during September 2011, seven students continued to work on the topic until today.

As we visited different municipalities, we learned that among the disaster areas, some areas seem to be in a critical state more than the others. Among 44 municipalities in four prefectures, where damages were most severe, 26 municipalities had ratios of workforces engaged in agriculture and fishing higher than the national average (Watabe, 2011), indicating that both their lives and the livelihoods were affected. With so much impact from the sea, it was obvious that the fishing would have had the biggest damage as its infrastructure and naturally, the residents residing nearby. Through these initial insights and engagements we have made, Kesennuma, despite of its location being far from Tokyo, where we reside, and difficult to access as local railroads were swept away and seemingly never to be rebuilt, became our field.

Together with students from i.school, authors' periodical visit to Kesennuma has begun, through which the team was able to see how the political and physical processes are taking place and affecting the community until today. Among the visits we have made, particularly two visits we have made in collaboration with our partnering education bodies are worth the emphasis, as students and professors of Royal College of Art in London, UK joined in September 2011 and Polytechnic of Milan, Italy in February 2012, which led us to think as their visit to the town inspired both the locals and the team to pursue the inter-local activities.

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As much as we would like to describe our approach as proper, organized, and executed in an orderly manner, it was hardly the case for this research. As commercial accommodations were hardly operational, many of our studies took place with the help of the locals offering their homes to accommodate our students; Transportations were challenged, with roads are to be rebuilt due to land subsidence and railroads never to be recovered. A situation that has been affecting the disaster areas has also affected our research creating a rather chaotic logistics. But because of this chaotic situation where the team was dependent on the locals, we were offered with openings to learn so much more than what typically a commercial ethnographic research is permitted to exist. Through additional time the team stayed with the locals, many of the team members learned about their everyday lives, livelihoods, as well as the abundance of the natural resources and geographical characteristics that made the town as it is today. In that sense, we acted as Graham-Gibson cited Latour, among others, 'learning to be affected'. Graham-Gibson particularly describe this notion of learning as:

> Not learning in the sense of increasing a store of knowledge, but in the sense of becoming other, creating connections and encountering possibilities that render us newly constituted being in a newly constituted world. (Graham-Gibson, 2009:322).

Our dependency at site enabled us to build a relationship with the locals and made us understand a complex social relationships and underlying issues, which were often untouched with the local community. The team has made an effort to visit people of 'extremity' in that sense, as our interviews took place between local politicians, the old wise, people in temporary shelters, fishermen, historians, oyster farmers, and the students. What we are about to describe below is what we mostly constructed through these countless engagements we have made throughout the period of research.

From Local Bonito to Global Tuna: Kesennuma History

The Bonito

For most Japanese, Kesennuma ('ke-sen-nu-ma'), a town located at Japan's northeastern coastline, is a synonym with its great harbor and fishing. Facing the Pacific where warm and cold currents meet, the town and the surrounding Sanriku Coast has one of the best conditions for fishing. In particular, Kesennuma has been known for trading the biggest amount of *katsu-o*, bonito every year, during its high season between June and November. While there are varieties of fish consumed in Japan, bonito is special: *Hatsu-Gatsuo*, the very first bonito catch of the season, has been considered one of the best delicacies by the people of Edo, a city which is today known as Tokyo since the 18th century. Although it maybe difficult to measure its values, the record shows that in today's value a single bonito would

FIGURE 1. ***Former city center of Kesennuma half a year after from the disaster.***

have cost 50,000 yen (630 USD); People of Edo described "Hatsugatsuo / to pawn one's wife for this is / a worthwhile exchange (Tokyo Metropolitan Library, 2012)," indicating how important it was for the urbanites to enjoy the fish in a timely manner, and how the industry has flourished around this particular fish.

The Fish Industry: The Impact of 3/11-Disaster in Kesennuma

On March 11, 2011, this town of fishing industry was hit by a massive earthquake, which measured the magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale 70 kilometers (43 miles) offshore. Although large earthquakes have periodically attacked the city, the recent ones being in 1893 and 1933, long intervals in between and the scale has not been experienced for 600 years (Imamura, 2011). The impact has been described as 'unprecedented' and 'beyond our assumption,' making scientific records and multiple preventive measures insufficient to protect the community from being harmed.

The 3.11-earthquake had a devastating impact to the entire region where Kesennuma was no exception. The earthquake generated a powerful tsunami, which exceeded far beyond the scientific records and calculations based on the past 200 years. In Kesennuma, the tsunami reached the height of 10 meters (33 feet), and massive water and swaying fishing vessels together attacked the town,

destroying 45% of their entire architecture. In the harbor, trawlers and fuel tanks were destroyed spewing fuel. Eventually, the mix of fuel and water caught fire, burning down the remaining. Kesennuma had a population of 74,387, and on that day lost approximately 1,400 people, two percent of the entire population, through these series of disasters. In addition, 9,000 households lost their homes and nearly 20,000 were forced to live in evacuation centers (Kesennuma City, 2012).

If there is one thing that distinguishes the 3.11-disaster from other major earthquakes that previously hit the town, it is the scale of economic impact it had upon the town. In Kesennuma, fishing industry provides 85% of the jobs (Bloomberg, 2012); Among 3,100 fish boats registered, more than 90% were either destroyed beyond repair or missing; all of the 102 fish processing factories were destroyed and 90 ice factories producing ice essential to deliver fresh fish to consumption became inoperable; among 23 fuel tanks (Kesennuma City, 2012), all tanks except for one has been destroyed, which made fuel supplies to fish boats a great challenge. Many authorities and experts publicly commented it would take three years, if not five, until the town would regain its function for proper fishing business. Bloomberg (2011) reported that the impact of 3.11 is today leading this fish town into 'a terminal decline.'

While Kesennuma needs an urgent support to get itself back on track, the government, both the local and the national, seem not to have an economic capability to do so. The national government reports that the damage caused by the 3.11 disaster is estimated as 16.9 trillion JPY (216 billion USD), and has been facing financial challenges as they have used up surplus funds during the 2011 as they tried to deal with the urgent reconstruction and the crisis at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear power plant (The Japan Times Weekly, 2012). Everyday, the articles and online posts remind us that Japan no longer holds the superiority in the industries where once was so dominant, whether gaming, electronics, or automobile industry. In fact, according to the nation's public release, the average economic growth rate of the nation between 1999 and 2011 mark a mere 0.9% (Government of Japan, 2012). While the American Economist Tyler Cohen speaks of 'the lost decade,' here in this nation talks of 'the lost two decades,' where nation is struggling to sustain oneself regardless of the disaster.

The Anchovies: Behind Kesennuma's Amazing Recovery

"Reconstruction needs to happen fast to prevent workers from leaving the town for good," mentioned Itsunori Onodera, a Diet Member representing Kesennuma in April. Around mid-June, only three months after the disaster, Kesennuma fisheries cooperative made the harbor a partial recovery and started trading the bonito. By late November, Kesennuma once again announced that the harbor managed to record another biggest bonito catch of the year. The news was overall merry, and gave the readers an impression that the town is in a better condition than many other municipalities hit by the disaster.

As we entered Kesennuma for the first time in early June, three months after the 3.11-disaster, we realized that the depicted image was in fact hardly true: Although Kesennuma harbor maybe popular for bonito, there in fact was no bonito boat left from Kesennuma; Bonito were, instead, caught by the boats from other regions. As we stood by a small harbor in one district of Kesennuma, we saw a small boat going back and forth between the shore and the harbor. Tomotaka Kumagaya, who operates the boat and hires 17 local fishermen, described that even this small boat was a donation from another region.

FIGURE 2. ***Local fishermen busy unloading the fish in a small harbor in Karakuwa district of Kesennuma, taken in November 2011.***

While there are many fish that is coming back to the shore, their priority has been on placing fish net to catch Japanese anchovies. This particular fish has little value for consumers, the wholesale price of which being mere 43 JPY (0.55 USD) per kilo (JAFIC, 2012). Nevertheless, this is not to state that the fish has no value but on the contrary: the fish is essential for the bonito fishermen as it is used as live bait for bonito upon line fishing. Meanwhile, it was clear that the sea was filled with other possible catch; as the winter approached in November, a school of salmon was visible even for an ignorant eye. With its quality and the consumer's high appreciation to the female salmon carrying eggs, the wholesale price can easily reach 800 to 1000 JPY (10 - 13 USD) per kilo.

When there are obviously more expensive fish waiting in the sea, how come these local fishermen catch Japanese anchovies over salmon? We were left in confusion as to why so much time and effort were spent for cheap anchovies. Referring to the bonito fish boats, Tomotaka told us that they are waiting. Instead of focusing on the business for them to earn money, he and his crews were making sure that the traveling bonito fishermen had sufficient bait to continue their business. "Catching salmon may be a proper thing to do, but without anchovies, Kesennuma will be in trouble." His statement showed that despite of his own circumstances, it was the harbor and the community that need saving.

Meanwhile, Kesennuma appeared to be going through a slow yet steady restoration, which centralizes in the removing debris, and restoration of the facilities and infrastructure. Today there are 90 locations in Kesennuma where temporary shelters are built; emergency evacuation centers, which were at normal times serve as school gymnasiums and public halls that were occupied to accommodate 20,000 evacuees, are now emptied. The industry was vigorously trying to put itself back on track, as some fish processing plants restarted its operation and the city announcing a construction of a new industrial complex.

Despite of all these efforts, statistics shows that the people are leaving the town in much greater speed: In a town of 70,000, more than 5,000 residents have left Kesennuma since 3.11, many of which are in 20s and 30s the prime age for the work and to start their own family (Sanriku Shinpo, 2012). With young workers and their children leaving altogether, the Kesennuma population is aging rapidly: Today, 40% of its residents are over 60 years old.

Failed transformation of the local industry, depopulation of the rural, and ageing society are the key issues at hand. Suddenly, we come to realize that issues in this small, post-disaster town, sounds all too familiar. These are issues that almost any rural area has been experienced in Japan, or in many developed industrial nations. 3.11-disaster did not bring issues, it only accelerated the ones existing. As issues at the core are not resolved, the government's initiative and public spending on the physical restoration may restore how the community was before the current disaster, it would not be sufficient to prevent people leaving the town.

The Tuna: Kesennuma's Modern History in the "Hegemony" of Global Fishing

As we deconstruct how the town has come to its critical situation since 3.11, we can in fact trace back its history of globalization of fishing industry since the end of World War II. In 1951, as the nation recovered from the war, the Kesennuma harbor was appointed as a Grade Three Port, one of 13 strategically important harbors for the nation. The harbor was then built at the current location in 1956, and its architecture, stretching for 320 meters (350 yards) in length, was praised as being "the biggest of the Orient (Kawashima, 2012)."

In the 1960s, along with the evolution of freezing and storage technologies came the pelagic tuna fishing. Like many other harbors in Japan, Kesennuma had been appointed for dealing certain kind of fish, tuna, saury, and bonito, among some others. The town enhanced its facilities particularly for the large pelagic fishing vessels, as the coastline was equipped with boat maintenance workshops, fuel tanks, accommodations, restaurants, and ship agencies.

The vibrant atmosphere and the affluence of the town at the time is well described by Jun Ikushima (2012), a journalist who has revisited the history of Kesennuma after the 3.11 earthquake, the harbor was by then so well equipped that 58% of all pelagic fish boats departing from Kesennuma were from other parts of Japan; Local agencies would make arrangements so that every boat would be sufficiently equipped with fuel, food, and most importantly, the crewmembers, which many fish owners would request for "all Kesennuma," a dream team of fishermen, engineers, and chefs all from Kesennuma, as they were known their skills and for their resilience for a journey, which could take for 10 months, if not longer. And after such a long and demanding journey, crewmembers and their waiting family members were rewarded graciously. Kesennuma's local fishermen's incomes were so high that people often compared their salary with the ones of professional baseball player's, and can be seen in their luxurious sedans and the houses they lived.

By 1970s, many political and economical factors started to change the course of Kesennuma: 200-mile fishing limits around the world eliminated foreign fishing vessels from where their primary fishing took place; The environmental awareness towards the marine resources also forced many of the Japanese fishing fleets to scale back; The ever-increasing fuel costs in comparison to the stable fish prices meant fewer round trips for the pelagic fish boats; And ironically, it was the freezing technology, which once helped pelagic fish boats carry tuna from the seven seas, enabled jumbo jets to carry tuna like any other commodity in a single day. In sum, fishing was no longer a business for the ones who fish, but rather for global traders who transfer commodities beyond borders. Kesennuma's once highly praised resources, whether they are crewmembers or maintenance facilities, no longer became vital.

Today, as we became acquainted with the fishermen, they have told us that their annual household income is around 2.5 million JPY (32,000 USD), below the national average; With income ever decreasing, fishing has become a job aspired by neither the aged fishermen nor their successors; With so few people to aspire the job, local high schools no longer offer educational program for fishing, but instead, teaches fish processing at factories; the shortage of fishermen has become so serious that today, "all Kesennuma" nor "all Japanese" became the mission impossible; many Japanese pelagic fish boats today operate with staffs from Indonesia and the Philippines; And with no locals leaving, *defune-okuri,* Kesennuma's local culture of sending the boat off by dancing and singing, is a tradition of the past.

Sushi Success: Will it Bring Future To Kesennuma?

While the fishing industry struggles to thrive, it is interesting that the culture around raw fish and sushi seem to enjoy its popularity around the world more than ever: Sushi was, though arguably, ranked fourth most delicious food of the world (CNNGo.com, 2011); Restaurants serving sushi can today be found in hundreds, if not thousands cities, and from businessmen in New York to high-school students in Thailand. Sushi is no longer exotic or unfamiliar. The aspiration towards sushi is found everywhere, one of the recent being an American documentary called "Jiro dreams of Sushi." The film features an 85-year-old sushi chef Jiro Ono, who runs Sukiyabashi Jiro, a humble 10-seat sushi restaurant inside the Tokyo subway. The restaurant has become one of the very first three Michelin star restaurants in Tokyo, and since then, his skills in preparation of sushi is considered to be the best in the world. The film depicts how Jiro pursues his *do*, his art form, and teases the audience by the appearance and the description of beautifully prepared sushi, which led some reviews to comment the film as being the "high-end food porn." The fact that many overseas media consider the film so desirable and tempting is another example of how sushi, a simple dish consisted of rice and raw fish, became a global aspiration.

"Globalization doesn't necessarily homogenize cultural differences nor erase the salience of cultural labels. Quite the contrary, it grows the franchise." describes Bestor (2005), as he investigates how blue fin tuna, along with the success of sushi became the globally aspired commodity. Due to its cultural and economic power symbolized in the craftsmanship of fish buyers and sushi chefs, Bestor describes Japan being "the core," while harbors, whether at the Adriatic, the Australian, or the Atlantic seaboards, remains as "distant peripherals." Although Kesennuma may geographically be located at the core of this hegemony, such affluence is obviously not enjoyed in the town. Indeed, a typical sushi enjoyed overseas, with fish on top of bite-size rice, is in fact, what Japanese call as *Edo-mae*, which inevitably suggests that the style is originally from Tokyo. Despite the hope that the global success of

sushi would place the nation's fish industry to flourish, the core is surprisingly small and seems to stay this way: Tsukiji, the Tokyo's fish market, and Sukiyabashi Jiro, a 10-seat, three-Michelin-starred restaurant, both of which cater to the capital of consumption and the culture of fish, are the core of the core. In the meantime, towns like Kesennuma, one of many rural fishing towns trying to thrive by producing and delivering fish, is as far as any other distant peripherals that hardly benefit from the cultural and the economical success worldwide.

Maru: Challenging the Global/Local Binary

If Kesennuma can only be a part of globalization as the lower stratum within its competence in fishing industry, what would the future of Kesennuma hold? If the town cannot escape from the hegemony of globalization, should Kesennuma try to detach oneself from it?

While the modern history of Kesennuma may seem less promising to endure the hegemony of globalization, there are other clues, which prove otherwise. According to local ethnologists Kawashima and Yamaguchi (2002), Kesennuma has always been a society connected with 'out there' through the sea. Though the town is today often referred as the 'inaccessible land,' ethnologists describes this is merely a 'logic of the land,' which became possible only after the late 19th century, where modernization brought railroads and steam engines that connected locals with major cities as their hub. Until then, distribution of goods and travel took place via sea and there are many traces left that Kesennuma was in fact well connected with other parts of Japan, if not with the world. Through the sea, the line-catching technique of bonito came to Kesennuma nearly four centuries ago. Through the sea, people of this region exported seed oysters and scallops as far as Seattle in the 19th century; and when oysters of France was nearly extinct due to the virus 40 years ago, it was their oysters that saved the industry. You can still find the physical characteristics of these oysters eaten in Bretagne even today. And because of these connections, fishing cooperatives from other parts of Japan and French luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton came to the region after 3.11 to support them in going back in business.

And Kawashima writes that here in Sanriku Bay, there is a saying "It is travelers who suffice us after tsunami." For a small community like Kesennuma, most people are not only acquainted with each other, but are aware of your entire family members, easily across three generations: Although the term word 'traveler' may sound as if they are here for the temporary, the saying in fact refers to the people who have origin outside of Kesennuma yet settled there. The saying suggests that whenever there was tsunami destroying the area, it was these strangers or newcomers who eventually brought new blood, new culture, and new technologies from elsewhere that enabled Kesennuma to change or to revive.

The history of Kesennuma suggests that globalization, or simply put, being connected to the world, is not the very cause of the town's inferiority. What we need to revisit is not whether the town should be connected, but rather, *how* and *with whom* the town should be connected: How might Kesennuma revive oneself, without being dominated by the globalized world and be considered as one of the distant peripherals? How could the town regain their 'permission to narrate (Said, 1984)' when public media or the political leadership fail to tell the story from their side? With whom could people of Kesennuma be connected so that it would not be a hegemonic relationship, but rather, with mutual respect?

Indeed, Herod and Wright (2002) have already put this in the center of discussion in their editorial book called "Geographies of Power: Placing Scale." Referring to it as the 'scale question,' they pose the question of why certain events, such as September 11, 2001, the bombing of the World Trade Center

was considered "global" terrorism, while a bomb attack in an Israeli station, which took place on September 9, was considered a "local" threat. How are each constituent of these bodies determined and what actually constitutes the global and the local? How are the local and the global related? Will a community of 70,000 people be ever sufficient to gain its autonomy when other municipalities like Tokyo would hold nearly 20 million? The discussion clearly challenges our simple notion of the world:

> "[The world] should not be thought of as being made up of discreet levels of bounded spaces which fit together neatly, as if scales could be stacked one above the other or fitted together in much the same way that Matryoshka dolls are contained one within another" (Herod and Wright 2002).

Whether metaphor being the ladder, or circles of different radius, or Matryoshka dolls, all of these representations force us to think that these small locals have no direct contact with the world, the largest, despite of the fact that there in the global sphere lies other smaller ones: And indeed, although it may be taking place within the nation, the post-3/11 disaster recovery has been driven in the manner, where the ladder metaphor most fits, as from water and food emergency supplies, recovery of telecommunications, permission to rebuild one's homes inside the city, to the distribution of the donation, we saw larger municipal bodies receiving the priority. Instead, Herod and Wright continues to cite Bruno Latour (1996: 370), and describe that the world's complexity cannot be captured by "notions of levels, layers, territories, [and] spheres," and instead, should be perceived as a network of "fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, [and] capillary [.]"

If we accept this description of how places are networked in fibers, threads, wires, or strings, an active network of inter-locals where they are constantly bound to change as a result, we suddenly see an advantage where rural, small 'locals' in fact can be more prone to change. In particular for towns like Kesennuma, where fishing is so engraved into their livelihoods, this metaphor of active lines works particularly well as people are familiar with the notion that fish boats have been drawing *lines* on the campus of sea, as sea routes. In Japan, every fish boat bears a name that ends with *maru,* meaning circle. According to Kesennuma people, the word 'circle' represents hope, a hope of every fisherman and family member, that the boat would draw a circle with its sea route as departs and returns with success and safety. Together with the saying that "It is travelers who suffice after tsunami," it comes to our belief that Kesennuma people have been fully aware of the values of *maru*, to have travelers within and to welcome travelers from outside, they have learned to exchange technologies and eventually knowledge, which helped them update or renew themselves at times of crisis. With this enactment that is represented in circular lines, the town perhaps once again could renew oneself despite of its inferiority.

Maru Activities: Connecting between Locals of the World

Through the research work, we have come to realize, that here in the disaster area we find another local, where hegemony of globalization is once again taking away their 'permission to narrate', placing them under the everlasting inferiority. The most serious consequence of this could be what we have feared for: despite of our learning from Kobe in 1995, the *reconstruction* will only be a narrative, and will only bring a fixed pathway, or rather a closed future for towns like Kesennuma.

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Yet as we realized the potential of *maru,* a cyclic movement between one's local to another, we realized there was an opportunity to bring more alternatives to Kesennuma. And under the circumstances, where people who shared these stories were facing such challenges, it was natural for the team to practice our theoretical outcome. What was fortunate for us is that many among our international network of universities have raised their hands, not to *speak,* but to act. In particular, as Politechnic of Milan in Italy have described their effort in the community renewal in Tramutola, a town in Basilicata of Southern Italy, we realized that this could potentially become the first *maru* act. Here, instead of ethnographers continuing to narrate, we became a mediator so that locals themselves could become the agent who observes, feels, and narrates: From Milan, a professor and a student have visited to engage in home visits and interviews in February, 2012; From Kesennuma and from Tokyo, a team of researchers, students, and most importantly, a student whom we referred to as 'local ambassador', visited Tramutola early 2012 to conduct the equivalent.

While many solutions were created as a result of conversations and visits between the two communities, one particular example highlights the impact of this endeavor in particular, which was, a discourse around the fish. As the Japanese team visited Tramutola, the team was stunned with the town's rich food culture, filled with locally produced ham, cheese, and vegetables. However, essentially none of them came *raw,* and instead came dried or processed. In particular, this triggered the team to suddenly rethink the belief that it is the rawness of the fish that enjoys the status of being superior and having the best taste.

As we returned to Kesennuma and shared our insights, the idea of placing dried food in such a high status in one's meals, was at first taken as disbelief, but caused a ripple effect to reflect on one's businesses. In Kesennuma, where raw fish has not only been the food but the commodity, eating and distributing fish in raw and complete form had always been their ultimate goal. While Kesennuma has its own dried fish, it was never considered as equivalent of raw fish, whether it being bonito, salmon, or tuna. "Because raw tastes the best," were the unanimous opinions from the Kesennuma fishermen; "Because the people in the city come here for raw fish," said Kesennuma seafood restaurants; through this belief of ultimate superiority of raw, the entire fishing industry was in operation. In a nation where the rawness has the utmost respect, dried food was, regardless of its taste, always nothing but an inferior.

Started from the team's acquired taste, or as Gibson-Graham has mentioned the significance of "Starting with the body" (2002: 324), both locals and the team gradually come to realize what benefits the dried food would bring: First, the distribution becomes much more sustainable as it will not require the town to produce ice, which is required in a unit of tons to deliver fresh fish to larger cities; Second, the dried food, give opportunities for creativity, unlike simply offering the raw and complete fish only to be cut and prepared by the chefs at the destination; Thirdly, fishermen as producers of fish gain only 24.7% of the final revenue as with vegetables (Fisheries Agency, 2012): However, should local producers would gain knowledge to distribute processed food, these producers could regain its position in this chain of distribution. As many advantages become imminent, the team has set up Dry Food Lab, where a hybrid of researchers, designers, nutritionists, a chef from Tramutola, local food producers, fishermen and their wives, and students, are getting together in Kesennuma and working to reinvent the possibility of dry food.

CONCLUSION

As the act of *maru* has only started, it is too early to conclude whether this is viable. However, as we prepare ourselves for the next action, we see exchanges between these locals, not as a relationship of who helps whom, but as partners who try to make this happen. As we are now about to expand this act beyond these two particular cities, we believe the network would continue to grow and will be able to see more in detail how they together would have an impact on each other.

As Graham-Gibson (2009) describe their practice of putting together the hybrid research collective consisted of researchers of multiple disciplines and locals in creation of community economy for the Anthropocene, they have become our inspiration. Yet in the context of disaster, it is immediacy we emphasize: As people are leaving, which could lead the town to a terminal decline, an action needs to take place now. In that sense, unlike Graham-Gibson, we hardly function as a collective of researchers, or let alone ethnographers: much of what we do is closer to designers, whose target of design is the local community.

'Speak now and hasten future' (2002) – concludes these two economy geographers as they deconstruct the discourse around the global vs. local binary. While it can be travelers, who might bring the alternative paths to the future, it is the locals who ultimately should regain the permission to narrate so they would be the ones to regain the power to affect one's own future. This is not to say that the ethnographers has no role to play: As we are to construct the network, ethnographers would continue to be the ones to 'articulate (Ota, 1988),' not in the sense of refining the narratives but to actively become a joint where various locals, often dislocated under the hegemony of globalization, would once again be connected. And hopefully, through these acts, the local would regain the permission to narrate and will have alternatives on how to revive oneself. - *Let them* speak now and hasten *opened* future.

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