# What research enables: Ethnography by high-school students catalyzing transformation of a post-tsunami community

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*We are beginning to witness a broadening of the contribution, positioning and purpose of ethnography in industry, catalysed by questioning what it can enable for communities and societies. By going beyond boundaries and disjuncture of corporate forms and viewing it within an entangled fields of economics, culture and society, this paper discuss how we become aware of what we do, and to enable others to make sense of the transformations that are occurring around them and within them, and how can we all participate in that process of being and becoming. In doing so, we question how to self-reflexively explore how we, as ethnographers, can be empowered to embark on such endeavours.*

> Twenty months have passed since then
> Many things happened,
> Many people I've met
>
> Now I like Kesennuma. Honestly.
>
> The only thing I have been thinking before,
> Was once I graduate high-school,
> Would head for 'Too-kyoo', not to come back.
>
> But maybe, I'm going there to learn all sorts of things
> So there will be things I could bring back;
>
> A small step, but I now have hopes to make Kesennuma attractive.
>
> - 16-years-old i.club alumunus, Kesennuma, 2012

## WHERE WE STAND: THE RIGHT TO RESEARCH AND TO PUSH THE BOUNDARIES

Since the 1970s, many pioneering anthropologists and ethnographers have entered the industry, embedding people's stories and aspirations into business practices. Wittily put by Nafus and Anderson (2006), the ethnographic role and position in industry has become a

successful 'brand' that is now widely recognized in the value it can create. There is on-going debate in this landscape to resist ethnography being reduced to an application of techniques and data gathering for proprietary knowledge, to help develop better products and services (see Cefkin 2006; Dourish 2006). Seminal scholars in EPIC have been questioning what contribution ethnography and ethnographers can offer to society, beyond corporate boundaries, and to view 'the corporate form as a particular rendering of organizational, economic and social action' (Cefkin 2012, p. 108). Here, Cefkin is particularly eloquent in describing the inseparable and entangled fields of economics, culture and society and brings further reading into the 'multi-located / sited' nature of ethnographic projects (2006). Building on Marcus and Fischer's work, she cautions against the 'multi' natured placements being interpreted as mere physical locations, and reminds us that its '[t]he contexts, resources, networks and infrastructures which make up and surround peoples' social and cultural lives', and that these 'exist in multiple "sites" of action and discourse.' These are the rich complexities and hybrid dimensions in which ethnographers enact their thinking, knowing, and doing in industry. In Cefkin's view, ethnographers in industry have a unique position and advantage of 'working from within systems and networks of cultural production' and from these, produce visible difference in understanding, design, challenges and concepts for mobilization across boundaries and audiences. Zooming in-and-out, from inside to the outside, and from the micro to the macro, are traditional strengths in ethnography. Building on this strength, this paper sets out to explore multi-layered domains where ethnography can become a potential catalyst for change.

The triggers for change can be many things. And this story is told by authors who are industry-employed ethnographers and their colleague in participatory action research who were motivated to help a community re-build its social and economic capital after the Great Eastern Japanese Earthquake. The March 2011 (commonly referred as *3.11*) earthquake caused a tsunami beyond every preventive measure and coastal municipalities were destroyed, some as much as 80% of its town, killing nearly 20,000 people across three prefectures in Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima (Science Insider, 2011). In the aftermath of such a disruptive event that shocked Japanese society as well as the international community, the authors were compelled to act, and to co-design interventions that could be of benefit to the people that were affected. Pioneering disaster anthropologists like Oliver-Smith (1996) and ethnographer David Gow (2008) have already pointed out that the extraordinary and critical situations such as post-disaster times can bring opportunities for researchers to shift their attention from 'the ordinary, the everyday, the routine' (Malkki, 1995, in Gow) to the extraordinary, where it could become an opportunity for people to remake themselves and their culture.

Similarly, there is a healthy discourse on the notions of empowerment, activism and transformation in participatory design research (Simonsen & Robertson 2013). The social activist and interventionist stance has been more pronounced in design due to its core premise to transform situations to preferred ones (Simon 1968). Design has a long history of contributing to people's well-being through innovating new products and technology (see for example, Margolin 1989; Papanek 1985). The role of design research can 'evoke discussion of how the world could be' (Grocott 2005) and can create knowledge that is 'lying in the future, possessed by the uncertainties of the future… disposed to bring into being –

not only as provocation or reflection on our world – but in order to make the world or a small measure of it differently' (Rosenburg 2007). This re-situates the question from 'what is / has been' which lies in the current or the past – the traditional knowledge domain for research and ethnography – and takes the Heideggerian view of 'becoming' as central to the emergent of what could be possible. The future-oriented interventions in design is reflected in the notion, 'transformation design' (Burns et al, 2006; Sangiorgi 2011) to emphasise the importance of multi-disciplined professionals working with people in organizations and the community to adapt themselves in an environment of constant change. It is based in participatory action research (PAR) – research conducted 'with' as opposed to 'on' people (Reason & McArdle 2004). PAR demonstrates the value of researchers who work in partnership with community members, where young people (Freire, 1982; Martín-Baró, 1994); women (Maguire, 1987); the indigenous minority such as the Maori (Smith, 1999); and prisoners (Weis and Fine, 2004) became researchers themselves, and by being empowered and informed, championed the force for further changes in the community. Resonating with this activist stance, Pink (2011) calls for an ethnographic practice that positions the ethical and political orientation of the researcher as engaging in problem solving and cultural brokerage when participating in projects of social intervention. She uses visual anthropology, an emergent field of practice, as an example that can open up contemporary pathways to make critical interventions beyond academia and intervene with the concerns of the public. Pink argues that it is a critical stance that can open up and re-frame 'problems', and 'its "doing" is a collaborative task, sometimes an activist enterprise. It seeks to make interventions that are based on the knowledge and needs of collaborators, and as such is critical of existing hierarchies of power and knowledge…'. These exemplify what Appadurai (2006) called as the 'right to research'. Research can have a tremendous power for empowerment and education and can catalyse changes to both individuals and communities, including the researchers themselves.

The paper has three main contributions. Firstly, in the spirit of critical ethnography or 'new ethnography' (Goodall, 2000), we reflect upon the rich learnings offered to us by working alongside an 'extraordinary' post-disaster community. This work demanded us to enact ethnographic praxes that extended beyond the traditional boundaries of a corporation, because people's lives, livelihoods, local industries and community are all entangled together, and the efforts for recovery necessitated participation and support on all fronts. Secondly, we highlight the local high-school students who were critical to the community's transformation in Kesennuma through an after-school program called i.club. Here, instead of the ethnographers being the agent of change, we describe the role ethnography enabled through the students and the stories of connection, re-discovery, learning and empowerment it catalysed. And lastly, by sharing this story, we hope to ignite a discussion among our peers for the need to create and explore new terrains of ethnographic praxis. These terrains call us to examine ethnography through social activism, participatory social innovation, action research and transformation design. In doing so, we question how to self-reflexively explore how we, ourselves, can be empowered to embark on such endeavours.

## TRANSITION OF POWER FROM PROFESSIONAL STRANGER TO PARTICIPATORY INNOVATION – THE BIRTH OF I.CLUB

The post-disaster landscape presents a peculiar power-dynamic where people in one geographical place are fundamentally divided into two camps: the ones *to save* and the ones to *be saved*. Particularly in the first several months, the ones who entered the disaster areas were unanimously considered for being there for the purpose to save people. These outsiders were mostly professionals from the government or certified non-profit organizations, and others who had humanitarian motivations. Regardless of their skill set, they were all there to serve the community as *professional strangers*.

As these 'strangers' flowed into affected areas to provide immediate relief effort, the national discourse was shifting from 'how we save *them'* to 'how *we* can be saved', as the repercussions of the disaster began to affect the country as a whole. In addition to the tsunamis that had swept away countless factories and workplaces on the coast, the earthquake had shut down 55 nuclear power plants. This caused a chain-reaction for major industries, including the automotive production, which had to slow down their operations, leading to a significant blow on the Japanese economy. The term 'recovery' shifted from the residents of the affected area to the overall economy, and soon, the region's voice started to dominate the national discussion on how the nation could recover (Ichikawa & Tamura, 2012). Reinforcing the point made earlier in the introduction, the tightly woven inter-relationships between the economy, various industries, systems of food and energy production and distribution, regional communities and urban citizens were suddenly made visible, but also threatened to fray apart. As centralized government efforts, encumbered by bureaucratic processes, revealed inadequacies, organic constellations began to form between communities, non-profit aid organisations, academic institutions and businesses as a way to kick-start localized initiatives.

In this landscape, i.club, an after-school program for high-school students took place in a town called Kesennuma, Miyagi prefecture, on the northeastern coastline, about 500kms north of Tokyo. i.club is facilitated by a multidisciplinary team of staff, students and alumni of i-school, University of Tokyo, industry professionals and international researchers. The program started a month after March 2011, and is sponsored by Save the Children Japan and Restart Japan, a non-profit arm of SONY. But before the i.club initiative fully swung into gear, there were many derailments that became lessons for reflexive learning for the team and forced them to reconcile the awkward privileges and biases that came along with it.

The first of these lessons came when the team noticed that the locals were referring to them as *sensei*, meaning 'teacher'. This is a commonly used term of respect and knowledge, probably owing to the make-up of the team who were associated with educational institutions and professional domains. This labeling was conducive in the first instance as it accentuated their educational positioning that sidestepped any political and business-oriented agendas. This meant that the residents were less guarded in speaking with the team. Secondly, this positioning also separated the team from the rest of the aid-workers and volunteers who, through their hard-work and sacrifice, were inadvertently becoming martyrs, placing emotional burdens upon the local people to constantly give 'gratitude'. However, the team's positioning, which wavered between being seen as experts or neutral researchers,

eventually became an obstacle. For example, one of the owners of a fish company regularly gave a customary greeting, 'good luck with your studies'. After a while, this became a concern for the team – that the locals' perceived their intention as purely academic, to gain from the locals and having little to offer back to the community or create any knowledge that were relevant or actionable in people's everyday lives.

Throughout the fall of 2011 to spring of 2012, the team's ethnographic studies rolled out several key insights that were based on identifying indigenous qualities and resources that the team believed had potential for regenerating the local industry. These insights were built on the community's personal and professional knowledge and networks that could provide a basis for business in tourism, fishing, retail and food (Ichikawa & Tamura 2012). These were presented to the local community and discussed for potential implementation. This had initiated a series of further dialogue, however, none of the residents seriously considered them beyond 'great ideas.' Even though the team was not perceived as 'those who save', they were still being perceived as 'professional strangers'. And this was reinforced even further by the team's effort to *hand over* their research and implications of actions to others, where no one was willing to receive it on the other end.

This critique and realisation stimulated fundamental changes to their approach and role. Learning from participatory action research that situates people as research partners and agents of transformation, the team shifted their strategy from generating new business insights to supporting education. This then meant the need to work with high-school students instead of just the adults in industry, so the students can play an active role as ethnographers – not the team. What this germinated was an experimental model of participatory social innovation, which became the guiding principle of i.club. It coalesced the knowledge, skill-sets, experiences and networks from diverse actors. As discussed earlier, referring to Cefkin (2006), by bringing multiple 'sites' – players, institutions, contexts and relationships – together, this could generate an open process of discovery, learning and transformation. The inflection of design is also significant here. As seen in transformation design for social innovation, it accentuates the creativity and inventiveness of 'ordinary people' to tackle problems in their daily life, where the researchers scaffold the tools and transformative capacities for a human-centred innovation (Sangiorgi 2011).

Whilst many education-led initiatives were established in the locality, emphasizing academic scholarship as a way to advance to better universities or vocation-based colleges, i.club differed significantly by locating the focus of the study in Kesennuma. Kesennuma is a small fishing town, with families reliant on businesses and factories that centred on seafood, as their main source of income. The offering by i.club was aimed towards young people to unearth the hidden qualities and resources in their local town through learning ethnographic approaches, such as conducting observations, home visits, and interviews. Students were encouraged to identify indigenous knowledge, traditions and industry practices to rediscover unique characteristics of their hometown. They had little knowledge or experience of this because the centralised and government-endorsed education system excludes localised content from the curriculum. More troubling was the curriculum's emphasis to advance academically into higher education, that meant, for many of these high-school students, they would have to go out of town to study in bigger cities. This trend has impacted significantly on many regional towns where young people have moved on by permanently leaving their

communities, accelerating entrenched social issues, such as aging, depopulation and employment scarcity to sustain the local economy (Ichikawa & Tamura, 2012). In an effort to build and sustain local connection and businesses, i.club supported the students to 'understand > create > present'. From what they've learnt, the students were inspired to co-design new ideas, prototype them, and present them back to a collective of local businesses, which, in this town, were mainly related to seafood industry from fishermen, factory owners, retail and restaurant owners. i.club underwent an iterative process of action and learning, design and reflection. The accounts below give a snapshot of some of the activities, first-hand stories of people's experiences and the general impact of i.club, which have been observed in the broader community so far.

## Stories and impact of i.club: Shifts in perception of a 'loser' to an 'expert'

In the summer of 2012, students participating in i.club were given the challenge to develop a new bento (lunch) box that could be prepared with local ingredients that they had identified through interviews and field visits. The intention for this particular theme was to use the bento-box as a vehicle to drive their fieldwork and to help them rediscover indigenous and traditional knowledge of the processes involved in catching, farming and cooking seafood, which could them be told as stories through different bento-box flavours.

This workshop invited approximately dozen participants from three local schools – Kesennuma High, Koyo High, and Kesennuma West High. This diversity and mixture of students from the three schools were crucial to integrate various experiences and backgrounds into teams for the bento-box task. However, when the team composition was announced, many students were reluctant and awkward – prior to this workshop, none of them had really engaged with one another before, even though they lived in a relatively small township. Upon making further enquiries to reveal the cause of this discomfort, it soon became clear that there were entrenched hierarchies between the schools, where there were divisions between the 'elite' and the 'losers'. For example, Kesennuma High is regarded as one of the best high schools in the prefecture. It has students who are bright and had learned abilities to express themselves to adults. They stood out from the others, and showed enthusiasm and discipline towards the bento-box challenge from the start. In comparison, Koyo High is considered a vocation-based school that produced great fishermen and seafood product professionals for the local industry. These students demonstrated their reluctance through their attitude in the i.club workshop that suggested, 'why should I "study" on weekends?' It wasn't really in their interest to attend the program and they appeared to be forced by the adults to come along.

As the workshop progressed, the students began conducting fieldwork and spoke with many people associated with the seafood industry – fishermen, oyster farmers, seafood factory owners, shopkeepers and restaurant owners – and slowly the dynamics between the students from their respective schools began to change. Kesennuma High students, in their diligence, learnt a great deal from this experience and openly shared their realization that, when it came to local knowledge of their seafood industry, they didn't know very much. In comparison, Koyo students were able to articulate fish names, differentiate seaweed

varieties, how and when they could be caught, and how they should be cooked for best taste and nutrition. This discovery surprised all the students, especially the Koyo students themselves, who were perceived as being less academically accomplished than the rest. One male Koyo student, who showed the greatest displeasure of being there on the first day was now proudly nicknamed 'the chef' by other students in recognition of his extensive knowledge about seafood. He subsequently became the most proactive participant in the latter workshops. Such transformations in the students, from being seen and self-identifying as a 'loser' to then shift to an 'expert', were encouraging signs of empowerment by recognizing inherent or acquired skills and knowledge.

## Stories and impact of i.club: enabling pathways into local industry

The second series of the workshop was a challenge to innovate dry-food products. The workshop once again started off with home and factory visits, followed by creating new product ideas and prototypes. A local business owner had generously offered their kitchen space, and students worked on realizing and improving their ideas, aiming to give the locals a taster of their potential products.

Just as fieldwork sometimes requires guidance from professional researchers, prototyping dry-food products also required professional food designers to give advice along the way, and these professionals were invited to join the workshop to help the students create and explore different tastes. That such professions existed was a happy surprise for some students who, until this point, never had the opportunity to work alongside one, let alone realizing that it was a viable career path. One of the female students discovered that this could be 'her dream job', igniting a desire for employment in the local seafood industry after graduating high-school. Kazue-san, manager of *Saikichi* Corporation and a supporter of the i.club program exclaimed, 'I've never seen anyone with so much passion and willingness to be hired by us!' Her remark revealed the trend for many who aspired to find employment outside the town. Enabling the female student to find her future path with *Saikichi* was an unexpected, positive outcome. As touched on earlier, the national curriculum excluded opportunities for students to learn about their local traditions, community and businesses practices, and as a result, there is a general lack of awareness of what value these held for the future. Through ethnography, participation and action research, the students were able to learn about the potentials their town held. This in turn gave the local businesses a chance to offer alternatives for employment, enabling the students to make an informed choice in their future pathways, rather than automatically heading for the big smokes. The ethnographic research process became a vehicle for igniting curiosity and unexpected rediscovery, kindling local pride in students for their hometown and industry – a pride that local business owners also shared.

## Stories and impact of i.club: catalyzing inter-generational action

During the dry-food workshop, the high-school students interviewed Konno-san, an elderly business owner who, for decades, had been making semi-dried bonitos (*katsuobushi*).

The students were astounded that, despite being born and raised in this town, many hadn't seen how semi-dried bonitos were produced and were fascinated by its preservation techniques. Dry bonito has a long history and tradition in Japanese culture. Before freezing technologies and distribution network were developed, bonitos were semi-dried by skilled artisans who were able to accentuate the bonito flavour. They were, and still are, considered as delicacies. Konno-san is one of the remaining artisans in Kesennuma, and alongside other factories, his business had flourished for many decades and contributed significant income and security for his numerous employees.

In the interview, Konno-san shared his life story and determination to rebuild his business when all was lost in the *3.11* disaster. His factory was completely destroyed and his house was flooded to the ceiling. Other bonito factories were similarly affected and most gave up their business, owing to the dealers and distributors going elsewhere for their bonito supplies. However, Konno-san soldiered on, despite his sales reducing to 30%, intuiting that such skills and knowledge was rarer than ever, with only three other bonito factories remaining locally. He was very proud of his high-quality product and generously invited the students to taste its delicate flavours. His support for i.club provided a unique opportunity to engage and communicate with a younger generation, to share his knowledge and skilled wisdom about bonito.

This inter-generational exchange through the bonito tasting and Konno-san's story, inspired the students to develop a prototype for a spicy, seasoning oil containing his product. The students reciprocated his generosity with a tasting of their new idea, and his delight was such that he offered them as many bonito as they needed to turn their ideas into a viable product. And today, alongside the product branding and crowd funding development, his factory is gearing up for the production of this seasoning oil. Many other stories like this had also blossomed and i.club students are continuing to participate and develop local businesses, by attending product development meetings held by local manufacturers, and being invited to local food fares to sell their products to customers.

## i.club: A 'third' box / space for potentiality and collective creativity

Communities are inherently political and are often segregated into geographical, racial, financial, intellectual, or generational clusters. By actively opening up a 'third' hybrid space for different people to participate in, it can help them to step out beyond entrenched and restrictive boundaries that can hinder meaningful connection. As seen here, the students were able to dissolve their differences and renew their perceptions of one another. In their research and development, through sensory ethnography, their willingness to share insights and prototype new food ideas, they have displayed their competency and latent skills. They are no longer perceived by the community as being young and inexperienced, and instead, they demonstrate a hope for the future. The students had crossed over boundaries between generations, between 'inexperienced' and 'professionals' and between the past and the future. They had over-turned the assumptions and skepticism of some, excelling in ways that were never imagined to be possible at the outset. This demonstrates the empowerment of young

people, who in turn, are empowering others and the local industry, igniting a willingness to transform their businesses and embark upon new initiatives in the post-disaster landscape.

This 'third' hybrid space that i.club created, enabled a place for exploration and discovery for the students and beyond. And it is a beautiful serendipity that one of the exercises undertaken by the students was to create new bento-box themes, which in hindsight, could be seen as a metaphor for the i.club project. The culture of bento-box in Japan is creative and playful, often incorporating regional ingredients and flavours that allow its diversity. Its limitless possibilities, combination and variety are its charm. In contrast to western notions of a 'box' that gives it a restrictive, bounded, 'boxed-in' feeling, a 'box' (*hako*) in the Japanese context is almost its opposite. In the Japanese context, a 'box / hako' is, in fact, a receptacle that has the capacity to be filled with anything. It is openness. It can create the potential for things to occur, and that space of 'emptiness' can invite something to enter. This notion is strongly inspired by Kenya Hara's (2010) design philosophy that draws on ancient Japanese concepts of Shinto and Zen Buddhism. He describes the 'hako' in which emptiness resides providing a space within, 'which our imaginations can run free, vastly enriching our powers of perception and our mutual comprehension. Emptiness is this potential.' And the i.club is proactive in the creation of such spaces for 'scaffolding' learning (Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976), a temporary structure to provide alternative routes to problem solving and enable cooperative learning activity with one another. Permission is given to break out from one's boundaries in the pursuit for a collective, generative process.

The benefit and impact of i.club extends further beyond, to the authors of this paper. Being part of the process of enabling transformation for the students and community had inadvertently ignited passion and the need to be empowered *themselves*. This project had enabled them to think about how to create such spaces for learning, to nurture potentials for change, and give themselves the permission to break out from their own form of corporate boundedness.

## BROADENING THE HORIZONS OF ETHNOGRAPHY

The world we live in is in a constant state of flux, and disasters are nature's reminder that we are embedded in this dynamic flow. We are already part of it. Disasters will no longer be extreme events, but will become normative. Transformation, in this regard, is constant and it is always happening. We, and the world we live in, is constantly changing and so the question we pose in conclusion is not only how ethnography can enable transformation, but how we become aware of what we do in this process of transformation. And as ethnographers, if we already know the value we can create for corporations and communities alike, we can also help them make sense of the transformations that are occurring around them, and within them, and enable them to become more conscious and deliberate in how *we are all* participating in this process of being and becoming.

When disasters are predicted to become more frequent and severe, especially in the Pacific rim, with knock-on effects that will be felt by communities and governments for years to come, it seems rather limiting, and perhaps insignificant, to talk simply about ethnography confined within the boundaries of industry. Perhaps we need to attempt to re-locate our role and contribution more broadly beyond it. Through our case study in

Kesennma, we have demonstrated the entanglement of economies, industries and communities that cannot be separated, and the negative chain-reaction that can occur when those connections are severed. Small, regional towns cannot exist in the future without the collective efforts of these constituents. i.club can be seen as a form of publics, that coalesce to 'specifically address the ways in which participants endeavor to enact desired futures and prompt change' (Le Dantec & DiSalvo, 2013). Despite Japan being one of the affluent countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the economic decline is imminent. Some observers say it has accelerated due to this catastrophe, compounded by the actions of many, including governments, corporations and public services that failed to innovate by being entrenched in the old industrial-development model. Are ethnographers, then, merely the canary in the coalmines, or can we become more empowered to actively create the hybrid spaces – a new 'box' – for our discipline and others?

Maybe, cautiously, we need to take the *3.11* disaster as a blessing in disguise. It was a wake-up call to re-examine the transcendent nature of our work, to re-stitch ethnography in business, back into the meshwork of 'living', re-connected more broadly to the lives and contexts of people, community and societies. It was always an imagined separateness from society – the 'implied exogeny' that Nafus and Anderson has alerted us to (2006). Again, referring to Cefkin (2012) we need to broaden the aperture to consider how ethnographic work in industry is in dialogue with broader social and cultural discourses. If we see our positioning in hybrid or 'multi-site' places as the condition for ethnography, we could also then begin to see multiple ethnogra*phies* and multiple *praxes* being enacted by many people, as seen by the students in Kesennuma, that can ignite and catalyse other actions to take place. Freire conceptualized praxis as "the reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1997 [1970]), bringing the undeniable political orientation (personal or socio-cultural) to bear. Extending this further, multiple praxes is not just about our application of theory and practice but how that can enact participation or is participated by others more broadly in the cyclical process. Martín-Baró (1994) describes:

> If our objective is to serve the liberation needs of the people [in Latin America] … [We must] involve ourselves in a new praxis, an act of transforming reality that will let us know not only about what is but also about what is not, and by which we may try to orient ourselves toward what ought to be.

The three authors of this paper have a variety of praxes, crossing domains of education, business, research, ethnography and design. This plurality and transdisciplinarity is our strength, blended and entangled in what we do. And there is also a Japanese cultural nuance to what we do too, where notion of a person 'ningen' is etymologised by 'between-person', situating the human as relational beings where each person's identity is integrally related to that of others (Watsuji 1996). Seen this way, other people also become our strength, nourishing our sense of well-being. The transformation we undergo is the removal of such boundaries, particularly the detached selfness and the distance to others, and instead, an acceptance of being in the between-ness (Akama 2012). The adaptive capacities and social cohesion we witnessed in Kesennuma and many Tohoku communities in the wake of the

disaster demonstrates the resilience that can come through collaboration and participation. Japanese concepts like 'in-betweenness', 'box/hako', 'emptiness' that were introduced in this paper had helped our ways of thinking, our actions and our being, and by sharing this with the international community of practitioners, we hope these can become potential frameworks for further discussion.

In conclusion, returning to i.club again, despite being in its infancy, the process is on-going and has been incubated in other parts of Japan. It is now also operating in Aizu, Fukushima prefecture, since March 2013. Aizu is known for its traditional craftsmanship in wood and lacquering techniques and the high-school students are studying these traditional crafts, its indigenous knowledge and current practices. i.club is continuing the program to empower young people to learn and take action, and to develop a platform for the community where knowledge can be passed on across generations. Our hope is that as the program expands, we are able to further reflect on these learnings and to strengthen the participatory innovation process beyond geographical and cultural boundaries.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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