

JSPS London Fellow's Research Experience Report

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Current Position: Senior Research Associate in the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University

Host Institution and Department: Fukushima Medical University (FMU), Center for Integrated Science and Humanities

Host Researcher: Prof. Aya Goto

Period of stay in Japan: 01 October - 30 November 2016 (2 months)

Research summary

I am interested in the uses of participatory arts in education and community development. This short-term postdoctoral fellowship gave me the opportunity to build on recent work I have been involved in at Lancaster University, investigating children's and young people's experiences of flooding and finding ways to bring their voices into UK disaster risk management. During my visit to Japan, I worked with a class of elementary school children and a group of university students to research how children and young people can contribute to community resilience building in the wake of the 2011 Fukushima disaster. We ran a series of participatory workshops, exploring how the participants and their communities can grow and become, in the children's words, 'stronger and smarter,' culminating in a theatre performance that presented the children's ideas for change to a local audience. I also interviewed FMU staff and local government workers to learn more about their experiences during the disaster.



Workshop with the school children in Fukushima

The work highlighted particular ways in which children's everyday lives have been affected by the disaster, as well as revealing how children can express their thoughts and ideas through the participatory methods used. We hope to do a follow-up study later this year to investigate the longer-term impact of the project activities. Following my visit, Prof. Goto has joined the advisory board of a three-year EU Horizon 2020 project, coordinated by our team at Lancaster University, that aims to develop a European framework for children and young people in disasters.

Reflections on my time in Japan

I immersed myself as much as possible into life in the local community in Fukushima, attending various classes, both at the university and in the city, and joining the student choir. It was a great way to meet people and gain more of an insight into life in Japan. I also did some travelling at weekends and enjoyed discovering more about Japanese culture and history, which was very helpful to my research. For example, I went to theatre performances and museums to learn about Japanese arts and visited Hiroshima, which brought an important historical perspective to my study. Everywhere I went I found people to be overwhelmingly kind, friendly and welcoming so a good tip is to take a selection of small gifts to give to people in return for their many kindnesses, as gift-giving is very popular in Japan.

I would like to say a huge thanks to JSPS for supporting me with this fellowship and to Prof. Goto and her colleagues in Fukushima who worked with me on the project. It has been an immensely valuable experience, both personally and professionally, and is, I hope, the start of a long and fruitful collaboration with FMU.



My 'farewell dinner' with staff and students at FMU including my host, Prof. Goto, seated on the far right of the front row