

THINK FOR JAPAN

A Question Campaign for Japan

Summary of Activities

Mar. 2011~Jan. 2012

WHY WE THINK

BACKGROUND

Since the earthquake and tsunami hit Japan on March 11, 2011, people in the country and throughout the world have contributed to the relief and recovery process of the Tohoku region of Japan. While many students have participated in fund-raising, volunteering, collecting photos, or disseminating information, it has been a challenge to capture the true needs of the people most impacted by the disaster and think of appropriate actions we can take to help revitalize the damaged communities.

At the University of Tokyo, students have come together to focus on asking questions.

Because as youths, we believe that in addition to engaging in the direct immediate relief, we are tasked with the opportunity and responsibility to think and voice our ideas for the long-term rebuilding and reconstruction of Japan.



Initial questions:

How can we, as university students, utilize our networks and resources to engage in the process of re-imagining Japan?

What can we do to make the reconstruction process and communities sustainable in the affected regions?

GOALS

- By fostering the ability to address and critically explore various issues at hand, gain useful tools, knowledge, and perspectives necessary in envisioning a future that is more resilient to disasters
- Create a network among students in Tokyo, people in the disaster-hit areas and those in other parts of the world by coming together to reflect on experiences and share thoughts related to the rebuilding of Japan



METHODOLOGY

QUESTION CAMPAIGN

We use the approach of conducting a "Question Campaign" developed by Engage the Power (eTp). eTp is headed by MIT professor Cesar McDowell.

Question Campaign invites people into conversation through asking questions.

We use the eTp model of creating and publishing Question Ads, which present powerful questions from the public and visualize them together with compelling photos. We encourage people to reflect back on their own experiences and think about different questions and ideas. Spaces are provided online and on the ground for people to discuss actions that are needed to address the issues.



PROCESS

2011

March

- 3.26 Think for Japan officially formed
- Questions collected from student members
- Question Campaign website created

April

- Question Ads published online

100 Questions Campaign

4.22 @ Univ. of Tokyo
Komaba Campus



May

- Mini-discussions held on campus

May Festival Dice Talk

5.28-29 @ Univ. of Tokyo
Hongo Campus



June

Photo Exhibition

6.25-7.3



July

Trip to Miyagi Pref.

6.13-14



2012

August

- Dep. of Civil Engineering Professor Interview
- Discussion event
- Think for Japan receives an award for the University of Tokyo's student project contest

September

October

- Dep. of Economics Professor Interview

Trip to Iwate Pref.

10.21-23



November

Komaba Festival Event

11.25-27 @ University of Tokyo
Komaba Campus



December

- Dep. of Agriculture Professor Interview

January

Trip to Fukushima Pref.

1.27-1.28

ON CAMPUS

COLLECTING QUESTIONS AND IDEAS

While a broad range of questions are collected from students, we select particular issues to be further explored in discussions, events and professor interviews. We have recently focused on themes such as city planning, agriculture and business, and youth participation.

Events:

100 Questions Campaign We collected questions and stories from 100 students at the Univ. of Tokyo and MIT.



May Festival Dice Talk Event We had people roll a die with questions collected through the campaign on events and activities.



Komaba Festival Event We displayed past question ads



Professor Interviews:

Department of Civil Engineering

*For whom do we rebuild communities?
What does "equality" mean in the process of reconstruction?*



Department of Economics

*What are the limits and possibilities of social systems?
How can the Tohoku region become appealing to youths?*



Department of Agriculture

*Do we need to rebuild the fishing industry?
How can businesses thrive in remote parts of Japan?*



Photo Exhibition:



Discussions:



ON SITE

BUILDING RELATIONS

Receiving input and feedback from people who have been directly affected by disaster is a crucial part in deepening our understanding of issues and developing our ideas on how we can take action.

Trip to Miyagi

In Kesennuma city, we went around several evacuation centers and temporary homes to deliver goods. We talked to the local people running the centers and discovered various needs within a small community such as..... People met us with great hospitality and while they kindly shared us their experiences. Through this process, we rediscovered the difficulty of grasping the true situation and feelings in the Tohoku region.



Trip to Iwate

In Kamaishi, we participated in the Japanese soup kitchen event organized by @ Rias NPO Support center led by local youths. We found that youth participation and leadership has been low in the communities and there is a need for collaborative efforts between youths across the country to take initiative. We also learned about the difficulties in overcoming the frictions that exist between generations to envision a common future for their community.



Trip to Fukushima

We will visit the IHI Factory and the local sake business in Souma city. Interaction with students and teachers of Souma High school is also planned.

ON THE WEB

DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK

We have utilized the social media to collect questions and ideas, publish question ads, and communicate the voices we have gathered in events and activities back to the public.



REFLECTION

Introducing the Question Campaign in Japan

It is not common for students and citizens in Japan to address social issues through school or public campaigns. Furthermore, questioning something may be perceived as a sign of ignorance rather than having a critical eye in exploring issues. However, as much aspects of the disaster has been unimaginable and the road to reconstruction remains full of uncertainties, people have shown interest in Think for Japan's initiative. Getting people to actually voice their questions and opinions has been difficult, but the use of question ads has been one of the effective ways.

The Significance of Questioning

The public's interest in post-disaster Tohoku is rapidly fading. As we enter a stage of reconstruction where the need of volunteers for physical labor is diminishing and the rebuilding of communities is getting underway, there is a growing need to involve more people in reanalyzing the different issues to determine the next steps. We feel that reexamining the various actions which were undertaken since the disaster is also important in preparing for future emergencies. Questioning is a powerful tool that allows us to network with other people and share experiences, ideas, and views on how we can take action to build resilient communities.

The Use of Social Media

Motivating people through the media to take time and discuss significant issues has been a great challenge. Creating interesting contents online is necessary in outreaching a wide audience and thus gain a wider perspective. We would like to continue exploring ways to initiate discussions among people of various backgrounds.

PARTNERSHIPS BUILT

Academic Institutions:

MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning

東京大学 | University of Tokyo

Organizations:

Engage the Power (eTp)

Photographer:

小原一真 | Kazuma Obara