

## Earthquake disaster memorial project

### [Background]

Sendai City has been struck by large tsunamis in the past, and despite the fact that there are shrines and stone markers that tell of this history, the lessons of these past disasters have not been fully learned by in the present.

### [Response]

Various initiatives including the development of memorial sites and disaster ruins and the gathering of records pertaining to disaster reconstruction are being explored in cooperation with citizens of Sendai City, to pass down the lessons of the Great East Japan Earthquake to the next generation.

### 1 Objective

Sendai City has taken various disaster prevention initiatives based on its experience of the Miyagi Earthquake of 1978, but the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 went far beyond anything which could be imagined.

The city has a history of large tsunamis, such as the Jogan Tsunami of 869 and the Keicho Tsunami of 1611. Ancestors of the past have tried to sound the alarm against such large tsunami attacks by erecting shrines and stone markers, but these warnings have failed to be heeded and did not lead to

### 2 Disaster Reconstruction Memorial Committee

In July 2013, Sendai City established the Sendai City Disaster Reconstruction Memorial Committee composed of various experts, and commenced full-fledged deliberations over matters including initiatives to be implemented and their methodology, and the role the city should fulfill. Meetings of the Committee have been held open to the public, where various questions and

#### ① Initiatives of the Committee

The report identified three objectives of the memorial project: (1) "Passing on our local resources", which convey Sendai's community development initiatives done since approximately 400 years ago, such as the pine forests along the coast, the *igune* tree windbreak (also called yashikirin), and the Teizan Canal; (2) "Giving form to our memories" so that the lives lost and the threat of disaster will not be forgotten; and (3) "Cultivating the strength to face tomorrow" by linking the power of culture and arts that have supported our psychological rehabilitation and the lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake to future global disaster prevention. It then specified that the following six initiatives which are required to realize the abovementioned objectives.

#### A Restore greenery in eastern Sendai

The versatile role of coastal greenery in Sendai City was reaffirmed as a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake. This greenery should preferably be planted, grown, and sustained by citizens of Sendai City as a symbol of recovery. At the same time, ongoing initiatives should be taken so that people can feel close to the greenery through diverse forms of interaction.

evacuations being done during the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

Taking this situation seriously, Sendai City embarked on implementing various initiatives, convinced that it has the responsibility to pass down the experience and lessons of the Great East Japan Earthquake to the next generation.

views are raised by the Committee members during active discussions.

The Committee submitted a report to Sendai City at the tenth and final meeting held in December 2014. The report proposed basic principles on the significance of the memorial project, concrete initiatives, site development and project advancement.

#### B Rebuild and use the Teizan Canal

The Teizan Canal is the longest series of canals in Japan. It should be regarded as a key piece in telling of not only the damage from the tsunami, but also the history, the rich natural environment and culture of the coastal area, and be utilized in ways that bring people together.

#### C Pass memories down through monuments and ruins

Monuments should be developed and actual buildings that illustrate the sheer scale of the tsunami should be preserved as disaster ruins so as to not forget the many lives that have been lost, the areas that suffered particularly severe damage, and the threat of disasters. Furthermore, they should be inherited by the entire region as symbols of the erstwhile lives and livelihoods that existed in the region.

#### D Create and use a citizen-run archive

A "memory archive" should be developed that records not only incidents and facts related to the Great East Japan Earthquake, but also people's emotions and thoughts. It should be made widely available across generations and regions with citizen participation so that memories of the disaster can be shared even more deeply with a diverse audience.

#### E Utilize the power of the arts to remember the disasters and the recovery

The power of arts and culture should be utilized to pass down the memories of the disaster in order to share them with the world by overcoming the language barrier, without ever forgetting prayers for the repose of the souls of all victims, bonds with close acquaintances, and feelings of gratitude for the generous support from home and abroad even through the passage of time.

#### F Create learning opportunities

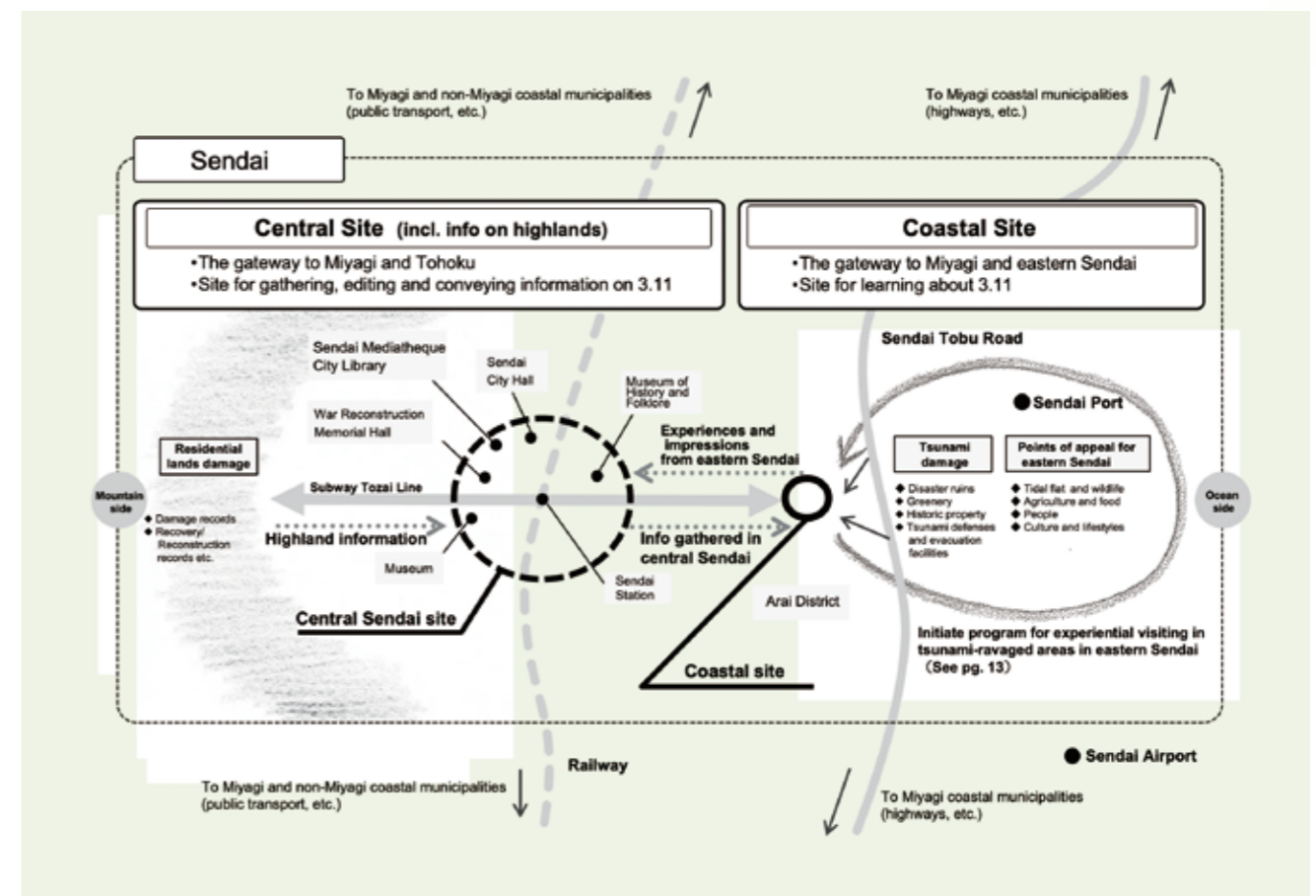
In order for people to nurture the ability to make individual decisions and act on them in the event of a disaster in the future, it is important that they learn about and know the natural mechanisms and background behind the occurrence of disasters as well as the memories and experiences of the Great East Japan Earthquake. At the same time, it is also important to develop an environment where they can always gain first-hand experience through the five senses.

### ② Project site development

The report indicates that sites need to be developed in order to organically link the six initiatives described above and pass down the memories and experiences of the disaster, and that it is important for the central city of Tohoku to serve as a gateway to various areas in the Tohoku region.

More specifically, the report proposes the development of a site "for compiling and sharing memories and experiences of the disaster" in the center of the city where access is convenient

and where people and information are gathered, and another site that "serves as a point of departure for coastal tours where one can learn about the memories and experiences of the disaster by visiting tsunami-devastated locations. It then notes that the memorial project could be promoted effectively by linking the two sites while maintaining their respective characteristics.



▲ Image of project site development



### 3 Initiatives for the creation of memorials

Numerous initiatives are being implemented for the memorials creation in a broad range of respective fields, methods, and entities working towards implementation. The major initiatives are shown below.

#### 1 Establishment of memorial sites

Sendai City is proceeding with the project to establish a two-site framework that links the coastal and central sites based on the report submitted by the Disaster Reconstruction Memorial Committee.

#### Coastal site

Sendai City established the Sendai 3/11 Memorial Community Center inside Arai Station on the Sendai Subway Tozai Line which began operations in December 2015, as a coastal site that serves as a gateway to the eastern area of Sendai City. The term "community center" embodies the hopes that it will not only be a place where people can view exhibits of the disaster, but also a facility that creates new connections among people by bringing together both local and non-local residents and promoting their engagement in various activities. Formulation of the basic plan and exhibit design of the center were begun in



▲ Sendai 3/11 Memorial Community Center

#### 2 Preservation of disaster ruins

The disaster ruins of Sendai Arahama Elementary School, which suffered tsunami damage, and several residential foundations that show how the residential district had spread across the coast, are being preserved for public viewing.

#### Ruins of the Great East Japan Earthquake : Sendai Arahama Elementary School

Arahama Elementary School, located some 700m from the coast, sustained tsunami damage in the Great East Japan Earthquake, but 320 children and neighborhood residents who evacuated to the roof of the four-story building escaped danger. The ceiling that was thrust upwards by the tsunami, destroyed iron fences, walls displaying traces of the

August 2015, and the first floor was opened in advance in December to coincide with the opening of the Subway Tozai Line. The rest of the center was opened roughly two months later in February 2016. A cumulative total of 262,000 people have visited the center as of August 31, 2020.

#### Central site

The Central Earthquake Memorial Site Study Committee was established in January 2019 and composed of experts in such fields as philosophy, disaster oral tradition, and architecture, to discuss the basic concept of the memorial sites. The experts presented the view that "the central site should not only convey the experiences of the Great East Japan Earthquake, but should also be a place for creating a social culture that accepts future disaster experiences and coexists with disasters," and submitted a report in October 2020 defining "the creation of a culture that coexists with disasters" as the basic philosophy of the central site.

Sendai City will hereafter aim to formulate a basic plan and aim for the early establishment of the site based on the report by the Study Committee.



▲ Workshop for planning the Central Earthquake Memorial site

tsunami water level, and other such evidence speaks of the power and danger of the tsunami. The school ruins were opened to the public in April 2017, and have received a cumulative total of approximately 247,000 visitors as of August 31, 2020.



▲ Sendai Arahama Elementary school on March 11, 2011

#### Disaster ruins of residential foundations in the Arahama district in Sendai City

Within the Arahama district that lies along the coast of Sendai City, the remains of former residences that were particularly close to the coastline have been preserved. Residential foundations that lay bare after losing their buildings and the tsunami-eroded terrain have been left nearly exactly as they were found, and signboards have been erected to provide insight into the mechanism of how tsunamis function and the damage wrought by them, and daily lives of those who have been lost. The ruins were opened to the public in August 2019.



▲ The 2nd floor of Sendai Arahama Elementary School



▲ Disaster ruins of residential foundations in the Arahama district in Sendai City

#### 3 Creation of local monuments

Monuments have been created in six districts along the coastal area of Sendai City as places to mourn the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake and reminisce about the lost community. Details of the monuments were decided upon while

giving utmost respect to the history of the region and the thoughts of local residents, such as by holding numerous meetings to exchange views with concerned local parties. All monuments in the six districts were completed by March 2019.

#### 4 Creation and utilization of an archives

Sendai City has published records of activities and reconstruction initiatives that have been implemented since the occurrence of the Great East Japan Earthquake. It is also pushing forward a disaster archive project that aims to collect, preserve, and utilize administrative materials and books, testimonies, videos, photos and other such materials.

#### Compilation of disaster records, etc.

In fiscal year 2012, The City of Sendai published a disaster record (in Japanese) summarizing the activities of Sendai City over one year following the Great East Japan Earthquake, and in fiscal year 2016, released a "five-year record of recovery from the disaster" (in Japanese) summarizing the city's five years of activities and reconstruction initiatives. Additionally in fiscal year 2017, it published "Road to Recovery," to introduce the activities and initiatives of regional organizations, NPOs and volunteer organizations. These records are also available for viewing on the city's website.

#### Remember 3/11 Center

The Remember 3/11 Center was opened inside the cultural facility Sendai Mediatheque in collaboration with citizens of Sendai City, experts, and the staff of Sendai Mediatheque. It serves as a base for recording and disseminating the post-disaster recovery and reconstruction process, in

addition to providing a place to allow people to think about and confront the issue of natural disasters. People who approve of leaving records for posterity and making them available to the public are invited to participate in recording what they have seen or heard in the face of the disaster by video, photos, or sound clips. These records are used at events held to share the memories and experiences of the disaster through exhibitions.

#### Resource rescue activities

Sendai City, in collaboration with the Agency for Cultural Affairs, nationwide museum facilities, NPOs and other such organizations, rescues cultural properties and historical materials that have been damaged in disasters and applies preservation treatment or places them in temporary storage. It also engages in activities to spread information such as publishing articles in journals, issuing pamphlets and holding exhibitions.

#### Disaster ethnography survey

Sendai City interviews city officials who experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake about their hardships, efforts and lessons learned, recording their testimony on video to be shared with currently working officials so that those who were employed afterwards or were not present during the disaster can gain a deep understanding of possible situations that may occur in a future disaster.