

Interactive comment on “Investigating rural community behaviour after the 2004 Chuetsu earthquake: a case study of Kawaguchi town, Japan” by M. Gismondi

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Like Prof. Philo, I have already reviewed this paper, and the version of the paper now posted on SG Discussion responds in part to the questions I raised. Thus the current version of the paper is in part a response to the comments presented here.

The questions I have posed to the author chiefly have to do with research design. These questions can be summarized as follows: the regional delineation of study areas dictates a regionally circumscribed explanation of success or failure of the different areas in responding to the earthquake. But such a regional delineation may not be equally appropriate to the kinds of social configurations characteristic of the three study

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areas. To revive the supposedly dead notion of scale, the scale of human connections in the rural area may be capable of being circumscribed in something like the author's study area, but it is likely that urban residents have much more far-flung networks of interaction, trust and cooperation, networks not adequately captured in the urban study area. Something in-between would be the case for the 'peripheral' study area.

The author asserts that central city responses were hampered by lifestyles organized around atomic individualism, while the isolated rural population cooperated more easily on the basis of an agricultural lifestyle based more strongly around shared activities. However, what may look like behavior based on atomic individualism within a defined contiguous area may actually indicate a mismatch between the scale (or 'scope' or 'reach'... some such notion is unavoidable) of human networks of trust and cooperation, on the one hand, and the much more proximity-oriented cooperative networks necessary to cope with an earthquake. Urban residents may have been more hesitant to work together than their rural counterparts, but this is not necessarily because urban residents live lives based any less than those of rural residents upon trust and cooperation. It is simply that the relations of trust and cooperation typical of urban residents proved useless in that situation because they involve the kinds of distant connections severed by the earthquake.

This can all be summarized by saying that the research design leads the author to essentialize a difference between rural and urban lifestyles in a way that is unnecessary and possibly misleading. Again, the policy conclusions are probably valid. But the explanatory path the author takes to get to them is highly questionable.

Interactive comment on Soc. Geogr. Discuss., 7, 39, 2011.

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