

## ***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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Investigating rural community behaviour after the 2004 Chuetsu earthquake: a case study of Kawaguchi town, Japan

Editor's report (also doubling as a referee's report) (a composite report from the handling editor, who acted as a referee for this paper, and please note that the version of the paper now published in SGD has already responded to these comments)

Overview This is a paper with considerable strengths and interest, offering a sustained case study of the earthquake hazard – or, more specifically, addressing the differentiated character of human responses to such a hazard – in a part of the world recently,

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and tragically, ravaged by earthquakes and accompanying physical-environmental phenomena (tsunamis). There is hence a special pertinence about the paper, and also potential policy implications in contrasting communities and neighbourhoods with seemingly different capacities for responding effectively to an earthquake event

In this report, the following can be seen: (1) a first set of comments on the original submission; and (2) a second set of comments on the resubmission.

First set of comments (on original submission) The paper as first submitted arguably needed to do the following:

(1) explain more clearly why the study is a SOCIAL geography of earthquake response (in that it attends directly to variations in 'social structure, relations and practices', including an urban-rural contrast, in responses to an earthquake);

(2) give some more historical context: surely this will be a region where earthquakes have occurred before, and it would be interesting to hear more about how well/badly the region fared under such challenges previously - and were there any obvious spatial differences between different parts of the region?;

(3) offer more guidance about the methods used, spelling out how many household interviews took place in each of your three 'areas', perhaps including a table of interview topics/questions, with emphasis on who exactly in each household was enlisted to speak on behalf of the household;

(4) provide a clearer profiling of the three case study 'areas' (central, peripheral and remote), and ensure that it is easier to appreciate the comparative dimension in the 'Analysis';

(5) relatedly, though, distinguish very clearly between specific claims relevant to each area (the basis for comparing them) and more generic claims pertaining to the overall region of Kawaguchi Town (and would this be classified overall as a 'rural' region?);

(6) try to arrive at a sharper final evaluation of which of the three areas was/is most

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'vulnerable' (regarding preparedness, quality of response, etc.), linked to a clearer assessment of whether more 'urban' ('modern') or more 'rural' ('traditional') social structures, relations and practices were most helpful in countering 'vulnerability' (although I realise that the actual picture may be more complex, with strengths and weaknesses relevant to earthquake 'vulnerability' spread across the three areas [central, peripheral and remote]);

(7) probably avoid having distinct 'Discussion' and 'Conclusion' sections: indeed, I would recommend combining elements from the present 'Discussion' section in an enlarged 'Analysis' of the empirical findings (and, indeed, would also wish to hear more from the qualitative research: more summary of the findings, more insertion of quotes from interviewees, etc.).

(8) and in 'Conclusion' spiral back to the issue of what a social geography of earthquakes can tell us, and how in so doing your study can maybe speak back to the more conceptual claims about 'vulnerability' and 'disasters' made by the likes of Cutter and Wisner.

Second set of comments (on the resubmission) I would suggest that, in your final Discussion and when summarising the significance of urban-rural contrasts, you do acknowledge a certain danger of 'essentialising' a vision of close-knit rural communities in contrast to less socially coherent urban communities: this is, in effect, to risk a simple mapping of Tonnies 'Gemeinschaft' construct on to rural areas and his 'Gesellschaft' construct on to urban areas. For a quick but good summary in this respect, see Cater, J, and Jones, T. (1989), *Social Geography: An Introduction to Contemporary Issues* (Arnold, London), esp.pp.169-171, but also more generally Chaps.6 & 7. Now, there is doubtless much that is 'true' about this distinction, and its relevance for your own study, but we need to beware supposing that urban-dwellers are indeed more alienated from sources of support than are rural-dwellers. Indeed, while there have been more immediate community-based mutual support for one another in the rural district initially after the earthquake, as you demonstrate, it cannot be discounted that, in the longer term,

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the greater connectedness of the urban-dwellers to wider networks of support might actually lead them to 'survive' better than their rural counterparts. To an extent, you do address this complication, when discussing matters of accessibility, but it strikes me - and Matthew Hannah - that your paper would benefit from being more self-critical about your claims, and in effect opening up the possible terrains of debate still further (with, as you say, complex policy implications).

Also: I still want you absolutely to clarify that 'town' in 'Kawaguchi town' refers to an administrative-territorial division, within which there are what can conventionally be characterised, quite straightforwardly, as urban and rural zones (and, indeed, you divide it into 'central', 'peripheral' and 'isolated' locations). I would hence also take 'town' out of the paper title, since you are indeed speaking about urban and rural zones, and you want scholars interested in rural matters to read your paper. You say that the overall population of Kawaguchi in 2004 was 5,572, but in table 2 the three research areas together only amount to a population of 1,863: please explain this discrepancy - it is probably obvious, but needs a word or two. Finally, avoid the phrase 'natural impulse' in paragraph starting "Neighbourhoods with older residents ..." in the Discussion section. There is nothing 'natural' about this: we are dealing solely in the realm of social constructions here, I would suggest, not with any innate 'bio-psychological' processes (and, indeed, many older people also often wish to separate themselves off from others, to be relieved of the burdens of wider family/community responsibilities). More generally, then, do review your paper for any slips into simplistic naturalistic explanations.

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

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