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# The Great East Japan Earthquake, and Resilience as a Component of Sustainability

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## Abstract

On March 11, 2011, a massive earthquake of magnitude 9 and tsunami up to 38 meters in height struck eastern Japan. That disaster, followed by the accident at the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant gave us many lessons. One of them was that our society had lost its resilience – the capacity to flexibly recover in any circumstances. Traditionally, Japan had been a resilience society for centuries but we had lost resilience because of the pursuit of short-term benefit in the past several decades. After the earthquake, the production and distribution of goods ground to a halt across a wide region of Japan. Industries had been structured in a way that ended up bringing things to a complete standstill in the event of a major disruption. They had adopted the ultra-efficient just-in-time system that eliminates inventories, and in some cases had trimmed the number of parts suppliers down to just one, in order to cut costs. This clearly showed that Japan lose buffers and other resilience mechanism in order to pursue short-term efficiency.

Also, another lesson learned from the tsunamis is that we need to leave some buffer zones for nature, instead of constructing high coastal dikes and levees and then putting houses and factories right next to them in order to use all the space on the land for human purposes. Setting aside some space will lead to long-term resilience.

And even before the disaster, Japan started witnessing the emergence of a movement of what I call the "Three 'Ds'", in particularly, among young people. The "Ds' movement" also can be regarded as attempts by people to raise their resilience.

The first De is "De-ownership" – the shift from owning things, to sharing things. And the second "De" is the "De-materialization" of happiness – instead of seeking happiness by buying and owning material goods, people find the happiness in person-to-person relationships, contact with nature, and being in harmony with themselves.

The third "De" is "De-monetization" of life– creating happiness in our own lives without being ruled by the monetary economy. Examples include "Half-farmer, half-X" type of lifestyles and its concept is that people pursue farming to grow food not for sale but for their family, while spending the rest of their time on their life's mission, or what is most important to them. Examples around me include a "half-farmer, half-singer," a "half-farmer, half-writer" and a "half-farmer, half-NGO worker."

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Such lifestyle revolution found in Japan can be seen as movement to seek alternatives in the Japanese society which just focus short-term efficiency measured by money. And it can be also regarded as important initiatives to think of resilience in the future.

I will present resilience embraced by the Japanese society for long time, its "lost and found" before and after the 2011 earthquakes and what we can learn from such cases in Japan to raise resilience in society toward sustainability and well-being of people.

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