Natural disasters, and especially of great scales, have had deep impacts on countries and regions, destroying and disrupting everyday lives of many people. The destructive force negatively affects political, economic and social life, which is almost a cliché to say. However, they also constitute exogenous factors that stimulate deep changes. In the history of civil society in Japan, two big disasters at the turn of the 20th and 21st century seem to belong to this category of events.

The paper analyses the changes in the development and activities of Japanese NGOs after two big earthquakes – the Great Hanshin-Awaji in January 1995 and Tohoku Earthquake in March 2011, looking into similarities and difference of social and political developments after these two disasters. The outburst of civic activity after the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake is being referred to as the volunteers’ revolution (borantia kakumei), leading to rapid growth of NGOs. The consequences of the latest Tohoku earthquake are still to be seen, but the Fukushima nuclear plant radioactive leak following the earthquake influenced not only the development of the anti-nuclear energy movement but also the way of the working of the volunteers and other non-profit groups.

1. Hanshin-Awaji earthquake

The Great Hanshin earthquake, which occurred on January 17, 1995 at 5:46 in the morning in the southern part of Hyogo prefecture, can be described by following statistical data. It measured 6.8 on the Japanese moment magnitude scale (shindo), and 7.3 on magnitude scale. The epicenter was on the Awaji Island, 20 km from Kobe. Approximately 6,434 people lost their lives and 300,000 their homes. The city of Kobe of 1.5 million population was most strongly affected. The total damage is estimated to reach 10 trillion yen, which constituted 2.5% of Japan’s GDP. It was the second worst

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1 Customarily in Japan the term NGO refers to groups involved in international cooperation while the term NPO to groups active at home. In the paper, both terms will be used interchangeably in accordance with the English use.
earthquake in the 20th century after the Great Kanto earthquake in 1923, which claimed 140,000 lives. The scale of the damage in Kobe was comparatively bigger than a similar earthquake that had happened a year earlier in Los Angeles: comparing to over 6,000 victims in Kobe in the Los Angeles area only 72 people died. It is assumed that it was partly due to the type of the ground beneath Kobe, but also to the construction of buildings in Japan, of which many did not have earthquake-resistant structures.

Japan is located on the seismically active islands, but the scale of the earthquake and damages were a surprise for the residents. Nevertheless, one can argue that the more surprising aspect of the situation for the Japanese was the response of the government to the disaster, causing serious political disturbances.

1.1. Government response
The government led by Murayama Tomiichi, the first socialist prime minister in 45 years, responded in a way that was criticized for several reasons. First of all, the authorities reacted late to the event due to lack of crisis management system and administrative obstacles. The dispatch of Self Defense Forces took several days. The government was also criticized for badly managing volunteers pouring from all over Japan to the affected area. Decline of international assistance offered by the US, South Korea, Mongolia, and the United Kingdom, also became a target of criticism. The officials justified the decision by pointing out to the language barriers and lack of medical licensing by foreign volunteers. The criticism was so severe that several weeks later, Murayama resigned from the post after the situation had stabilized.

On the other hand, approximately 1.2 million volunteers fled to the affected area and assisted the relief efforts during the first three months. In face of total paralysis of the transportation and distribution system, the big retailers, such as Daiei and Seven-Eleven used their supply networks to provide necessary goods, while NTT and Motorola provided free telephone service in the affected area. It is said that even the Japanese mafia, yakuza, participate in the distribution of food and other necessities.

1.2. NGOs Activities
The flow of volunteers that reached the number of 1.2 million people was astounding and impressive, but was also spontaneous and thus unorganized. Young people that went to the affected area added to traffic congestion and increased total demand for food and other necessities. In the later period, media began transmitting announcements calling for not going to the affected area due to the shortage of accommodation and food. Nevertheless, the phenomena of spontaneous act of help was so powerful that in
December 1995, the government announced January 17 a national “Disaster Prevention and Volunteerism Day,” and a week from January 15 to 21 a national “Disaster Prevention and Volunteerism Week.” During that week, lectures, seminars, special events are to take place to commemorate the event on one hand, and on the other to encourage and propagate voluntarism, as well as the disaster preparedness.

The volunteers’ revolution, as the phenomenon has been called since then, has changed the perception of the Japanese people on voluntarism, non-profit and other civic activities previously often associated with the anti-government and anti-corporate movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, the events of 1995 have influenced the perception of the state. Many have realized maybe for the first time that institutions other than the state related ones can be more effective and helpful for them. Many young people got involved with volunteerism both domestically and internationally.

The events also stirred public debate about the quality and functioning of democracy in Japan, and the necessity of civic participation in political process, which has began after the end of the cold war. The concepts of participatory and direct democracy, the idea of a citizen (shimin) as a member of a given community versus a national citizen (kokumin) entered the public discourse and changed the perception of politics, as well as the way of justification for political and social action.

1.2.1. NPO Law

The Great Hanshin Awaji earthquake and changing perception of voluntarism and non-profit activities had a substantial impact on efforts by the C’s Association to Create a Support System for Civic Activities (Shimin Katsudō o Saseru Seido o Tsukuru Kai C’s), established in April 1994. The coalition, which included a major NGOs coordinating organization JANIC, called for establishment of a new law, which would simplify formal procedures of registration, and enable broader scope of activities for non-profit groups.

Before introduction of the NPO law organizations had to apply for legal person status (hōjinkaku) according to Civil Code (Art. 34) in order to obtain certain rights to function properly. Without obtaining the status, the organizations could not, for instance,

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2 Homma Masaaki, Deguchi Masayuki, eds., 1996, Borantia kakumei. Daishinsai de no keiken o shimin katsudō e [Volunteers’ revolution: From disaster experience towards civic activities], Tōkyō: Tōyō Keizai Shimpōsha
sign contracts, open a bank account, acquire real estate or apply for grants and subsidies. The application process itself was complicated and time consuming.

In the months following the earthquake, it became almost fashionable for politicians to speak publicly in support for the new law. In March 1996, the governmental coalition split over the issue of tax deductions to be included in the legislation. The talks stopped, but due to the civic pressure of the C’s coalition, several months later the parliament adopted the Law to Promote Specified Non-Profit Activities (Tokutei Hieiri Katsudō Sokushinhō, NPO law) in March 1998. According to the new law, the permissions were given by the prefectural authorities or the Cabinet Office (Naikakufu), if the organization had offices in more than one prefecture.

In the beginning the new law did not provide any kind of tax deductions for non-profit organizations, and only in 2001 new regulations came into effect that improved the situation (Pekkanen 2000: 111-143). However, due to complicated procedures, not many organizations can obtain the “licensed legal corporation NPO” status (ninshō NPO hōjin), which allows for tax benefits. According to National Tax Agency as of June 2012 there are only 257 groups registered as licensed NPO, while the total number of all NPOs, which are referred to as “registered legal corporations NPO” (ninshō NPO hōjin), as of March of the same year, reached 45,146 groups.

The introduction of the law and the substantial increase of number of civic groups did not change the perception of all government officials immediately. The initial governmental responses were in many cases cautious, if not hostile. Exemplary of such attitude was the statement by Suzuki Muneo, a senior lawmaker and member of the ruling LDP foreign affairs division, broadly reported by the media in December 2001. Suzuki voiced his opposition over a government plan to finance an international conference of NGOs on rebuilding Afghanistan organized by a Japanese non-profit group in Tokyo in December that year, arguing that the government had “no money to spare” in the budget.

The initial hostility changed with time into realization that the civic forces could be used by the state organs to lessen the governmental responsibilities for providing public services shifting thereby part of that responsibility on the public with a minimal cost for

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9 Suzuki’s involvement and pressure exercised over Ministry of Foreign Affairs is described in Ōnishi Kensuke, NGO, jōzai senjō [Everyday battlefield of NGOs], Tōkyō: Tokuma Shoten.
the government. The turning point came with the Koizumi Jun’ichirō administration (April 2001-September 2006), which under slogans of shifting power from “administration to public/private” (kan kara min e), pursued neoliberal policies.

The passage of the new NPO law was followed by several initiatives under the guidance of the Cabinet Office (Citizens Activities Promotion Section in the Bureau of Improvement of the Citizens Quality of Life), which created a NPO bureau to register and support non-profit organizations, and also to promote public-private partnership projects. All the other ministries followed the suit creating programs and frameworks for cooperation with the NGOs. The Japanese Government after the first period of suspicion changed its attitude and began seeking an active cooperation with civic groups.

1.2.2. The Growth of the NGOs

The introduction of the NPO law contributed to the dramatic increase of NOGs, as shown on Figure 1, although the biggest changes in terms of increase was between 2002-2007, which parallels with Koizumi administration (Figure 2). We can also observe a big year to year increase between March 2011 and March 2012, in response to the Tohoku earthquake.

Figure 1. Total number of NGOs in Japan 1999-2012.

Source: Based on data from Naikakufu Kokumin Seiketsukyoku, Tokutei heiri katsudō höjin no katsudō bunya nit suite [Fields of activities of special non-profit legal corporations], March 2012; https://www.npo-homepage.go.jp/data/b_history.txt [2012.6.10].

Under the new NPO law, the registering organizations can conduct activities in the following seventeen areas: (1) health, medical care and welfare; (2) social education; (3) community development (machizukuri); (4) science, culture, the arts and sports; (5) the
environmental protection; (6) disaster relief; (7) community safety; (8) human rights protection and promotion of peace; (9) international cooperation; (10) men and women equality; (11) sound nurturing of children; (12) information society; (13) science and technology; (14) revitalization of economic activities; (15) development of working skills and increase of employment opportunities; (16) consumer protection; and (17) support of any of the above NPOs activities. The fields (12)-(16) were added in 2003.

Figure 2. Annual increase of NGOs between 1999-2012.

Source: Based on data from Naikakufu Kokumin Seiketsukyoku, Tokutei heiri katsudō höjin no katsudō bunya nit suite [Fields of activities of special non-profit legal corporations], March 2012; https://www.npo-homepage.go.jp/data/b_history.txt [2012.6.10].

A large portion of those groups declares (based on multiple choice) that they are active in the following fields of: health, medical care and welfare (56.3%), social education (46.8%), NPO support (45.2%), community development (42.7%), and sound nurturing of children (41.2%) (Figure 3). Among those groups, the biggest number of non-profit organizations has been in the field of health, medical care and welfare, which rose from 480 in 1999 to 25,420 groups in 2012.

With the ageing of society, declining birth rate and smaller percentage of working population, the field has been of special concern to the government, which has been promoting the growth of NPOs very actively through subsidies and other measures.


The process of aging that is increase of ratio of people over 65 years old seems to deepen much faster in Japan than in other developed countries. In 2010, it reached 23.1%, while in 1990 it was 12%, and in 1980 – 9.1%. It is estimated that if the trend continues, it will reach 40.5% in 2055 (Naikakufu, “Heisei 2010 nendo kōrei shakai hakusho” [White book on aging society in 2010]. http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/index-w.html [access: 2011.04.22], 2-3: Naikakufu, Kōrei shakai hakusho [White paper on aging society], 2011. http://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2011/gaiyou/html/s1-1-1.html [access: 2012.6.10]). The situation is regarded as serious, and so in 1995 the parliament of Japan adopted Aging Society Law (Kōrei ka shakaihō), which is supposed to slow down the process.
Already in 2000 or one year after the introduction of NPO law, the government stated in the *White Book on Citizens Livelihood (Kokumin seikatsu hakusho)* that it expects the NPO in the field to increase rapidly due to the introduction of insurance for people over sixty five years old (*kaigo hoken*) in April 2000.\(^{12}\) The prognosis became a reality.

Figure 3. Biggest number of NGOs by field 1999-2012 (total number of groups).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Health, medical care &amp; welfare</td>
<td>13147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social education</td>
<td>13036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. NPO support</td>
<td>14767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sound nurturing of children</td>
<td>13036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Community development</td>
<td>7423</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Based on data from Naikakufu Kokumin Seiketsukyoku, Tokutei heieri katsudō hōjin no katsudō bunya nit suite [Fields of activities of special non-profit legal corporations], March 2012; https://www.npoxhomepage.go.jp/data/b_history.txt [access: 2012.6.10].

**Note:** Numbers by the fields signify numbers in the NPO law.

The reform of the social security system (pension, medical care and long-term care) was on the top of Prime Minister Koizumi’s agenda. On several occasions he pointed to the necessity of the reforms justifying it on the grounds that the present-day Japanese should not leave a burden for the children’s and grandchildren’s generations.\(^{13}\) In the process of reviewing the social security system, Koizumi emphasized that the government would “realize a sustainable system with appropriate benefits and burden in order to eliminate the concerns of the people for their future.”\(^{14}\) The motif of “modality of benefits and burdens”\(^{15}\) often occurred in the speeches of Prime Minister although at the same time to lessen the impression of a drastic increase of burden for individuals, he

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\(^{14}\) Ibid.

wrapped it up in the rhetoric of affluent life for all and securing the assurance of daily lives of the citizens.\textsuperscript{16}

The social security systems were reformed increasing the responsibility of the citizens, but at the same time the government has been supporting the establishment of NGOs in this field of health, medical care and welfare. The Bureau of Improvement of the Citizens Quality of Life in the Cabinet Office reported that according to the questionnaires conducted in 2006 over 75\% of NPOs listed as registered legal corporations in this field has been cooperating with governmental intuitions, while 45\% has received subsidies from them.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, according to the same questionnaires, over 85\% of groups declare that they would like to receive financial support from the government in the future. The problem evolved and, as disused below, high dependency on governmental funds became one of the major issues for Japanese NGOs.

It is interesting to note that one of the biggest increases of NPO groups was in the field of “sound nurturing of children,” actually 80\times times, from 232 groups in 1999 to 18,590 in 2012. Another substantial increase has been observed in the area of “community safety,” where the number of groups increased over 83 times from 63 groups in 1999 to 5,265 in March 2012. The first includes small groups of parents that organize themselves to keep guards in turns everyday on the way to and from school of their children or bicycle patrols around the residential area. The second field involves neighborhood associations that walk around the area in the evening making a specific sound of traditionally used wooden blocks. Not surprisingly then, Prime Minister Koizumi referred to both categories in his policy speech in January 2006, stressing their importance on one hand and the governmental support of such actions on the other. “In city-center entertainment districts […], and also in ordinary residential districts across the nation, local residents are actively taking part in crime prevention activities. The number of anticrime volunteer groups, which stood at 3,000 two years ago, is now up to 14,000. And the total number of people carrying out voluntary patrols is on the order of 800,000. In order to protect small children from becoming victims of crime, the Government will proceed with the reinforcement of security during children's commute to and from school, and with the sharing of information on suspicious individuals through cooperation not only with the police and schools, but also with PTAs and local residents.”\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Naïkakufu Kokumin Seiketsukyoku, Heisei jūhachi nendo shimin katsudō dantai kihon chōsa hōkoku (Tokutei heiri katsudō hōjin to kan to no pātonāshippu ni kansuru kiso chōsa), April 2007, 4.
At the same time, one has to remember that governmental support goes also indirectly via other non-governmental organizations. The groups supporting activities of NPOs have been among those that increased most dynamically 86-times from 236 in 1999 to 20,339 in 2012. Moreover, among those groups as many as over 33% declared that over 80% of their budget comes from public funding, 16.7% that the share of the budget is over 60%, another 16.7% that the share is over 40%, while 33.3% that it is less than 20% but non stated that is entirely depended on their own resources.\(^\text{19}\) In other words, the groups in this category do not burden national or local government finances. We can assume that their activities were result of button-up initiative rather than promoted from above by the authorities.

When we look at the sources of income of NGOs by the main field of activity, we can notice that a big portion of income from economic activity comes in fact from national and local authorities. For organizations of the “NPO support,” it reaches 76.9%, for “social education” 74.4%, for “revitalization of economic activities” 62.5%, “local community safety” 62.1%, “men and women equality” 61.2%, “environmental protection” 57.6%, “human rights protection and promotion of peace” 56.8%, and for groups of “community development” (machizukuri) 48.5%.\(^\text{20}\) Moreover, many responders declared that they would like to see even more funds and subsidies created to support activities of non-profit organizations.\(^\text{21}\)

The above data suggests that Japanese NGOs are highly dependant on governmental funding, which became a target of criticism. It has been pointed out that such situation undermines the autonomy of NGOs. On the other hand, one has to remember that the perception of the state itself in Japan and the long history of cooperative relations between the state and civil society in Japan led to development of different from the USA-type civic groups. The NGOs themselves declare that this situation does not limit the independency of their decisions and actions.\(^\text{22}\)

Another problem with the rapid growth of NGOs was pointed out by Tanaka Yayoi, who concluded in her research on NGOs, that approximately 30% of all registered non-profit organizations were in fact established by private enterprises for marketing purpose, another type of public benefit legal corporations (kōeki hōjin) were to receive special funds and subsidies, and still another type to provide post-retirement positions.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 138.

\(^{22}\) Naikakufu Kokumin Seiketsukyoku, Heisei 18 nendo shimin katsudō dantai kihon chōsu hōkoku [Basic investigation report on civic groups’ activities in 2006], April 2007, 37.
for the administration OBs. Similar point was made by Asahi Shimbun on May 2, calling the organizations “non-civic NPOs” (hishiminkei no NPO).

Summing up, the dynamic growth of NGOs can be observed in fields (“NPO support,” “health, medical care and welfare,” “social education”), which are financially or organizationally supported by national and local authorities, as well as those fields (“sound nurturing of children,” “community safety), which are of great importance to local communities, and thus are conducted in spite of lack of any kind of support for this kind of activities. And finally one third of NGOs are the “non-civic” organizations, which establishment is a result of administrative or corporate decision-making.

2. Tohoku earthquake

The second discussed earthquake, known as Tohoku earthquake or Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011 at 14:46, off the Pacific coast of the Tohoku region. It measured 7 on the Japanese moment magnitude scale (shindo), and 9 on magnitude scale. What is striking is the number of aftershocks, which reached over 670 times since the first earthquake. It was the most powerful earthquake to hit Japan, and the fifth in the world in modern times, which have been recorded since 1900. The epicenter was approximately 130 km east from the Oshika Peninsula of the Tohoku region. However, the most disastrous was the tsunami that reached up to 40.5 m in Miyako, Iwate prefecture, while in Sendai area it went up to 10 km inland.

As a consequence of the tsunami, Japanese National Policy Agency reported as of May 2012: 15,854 deaths, 6,080 people injured, and 3,021 people still missing. Almost 130,000 houses collapsed, while another 950,000 houses were half or partially damaged. The estimated cost of damage is between 16 and 25 trillion yen, while the World Bank estimated the economic cost at USD 235 billion, making it the most expensive natural disaster in world history.  

2.1. Government Response

In face of the disaster, the new crisis management system, introduced aftermath the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, seemed to prove effective. The earthquake occurred, as stated, at 14:46, and already at 14:50 Headquarters for the Earthquake Management (Saigai Taisaku Hombu) was established at the Defense Ministry, while seven minutes later at 14:57, the first planes of the Self Defense Forces were dispatched to Tohoku

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area after having received request for assistance from prefectural governors. When compared to the days-long delays after the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, the speed of the response seems impressive.

After the problems during the Kobe earthquake, the Ground Self Defense Forces were given automatic authority to respond to earthquakes over certain magnitudes. As a result, approximately 107,000 service people participated in the rescue, relief and restoration operations, including tasks concerning the Fukushima nuclear plant. At the same time around 28,000 fire fighters and 4,900 police forces were mobilized. The rescue assistance was dispatched also by international organizations like the UN and various countries, including USA and Russia, this time without much delay. The USA dispatched even the nuclear-powered super-carrier Ronald Regan as part of the operation Tomodachi (Friend), serving as a refueling station for Japanese military and coast guard helicopters flying relief missions to the damaged area.

To rebuild the devastated area the parliament passed in June 2011 the new law titled Basic Law for Restoration from East Japan Great Earthquake (Higashi Nihon Daishinsai Fukkō Kihonhō, hereafter East Japan Restoration Law), which is to be managed by a newly established Reconstruction Agency (Fukkōchō). The parliament also passed a highly controversial bill of Special Measures Law for Renewable Energy (Saisei Kanō Enerugi Tokubetsu Sochihō), which prime minister Kan Naoto pushed with against many opponents. The bill was as a response to wide-spread public protests against nuclear power plants and high dependence of Japan on this type of energy source (approximately 30%).

The response of the government thus seemed swift and effective. Nevertheless, the criticism of the government was severe, but this time, mostly due to the initial handling of the nuclear power plant problems. In fact, the crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was one of the major causes of the resignation by Prime Minister Kan Naoto in August 2011. Kan agreed to resign after the Upper House controlled by the opposition parties passed two aforementioned bills. It has been added thought that Kan’s resignation was not without relation to the intra-party rivalry and lack of support for Kan by one of the power makers of the Democratic Party, in fact a suspended member, Ōzawa Ichirō. In other words, the nuclear disaster was just a politically convenient situation for the PD members to reshuffle the cabinet posts. Development in the anti-nuclear movement and the criticism toward the government in relation to nuclear power policy will be discussed more in detail below.

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2.2. NGO activities

Similarly to the situation aftermath the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, the activities of the NGOs were very dynamic and swift from the beginning, although one can observe a great difference in the way of operation comparing to those undertaken in the Kobe area. The biggest change was coordination and integration of volunteering efforts. While in Kobe it was a predominantly spontaneous outburst of activities initiated separately by individuals and a variety of groups, in case of Tohoku earthquake, the NGOs and individual organized themselves instantly using already existing networks. The second feature was the cooperation of NGOs, business groups and public administration in organizing and providing the aid.

The center of activities was carried by the Japan National Council of Social Welfare (Zenkoku Shakai Fukushi Kyōgikai, Zenshakyō or JNCSW). The Council, which in fact is one of the oldest non-profit institutions in Japan established in 1908, posted information in the internet concerning volunteering. All the prospective volunteers were asked to access the home page, check the present situation and demands for assistance, as well as the scope of the area in need of aid (that included prefectures of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Chiba and Sendai city). People were actually discouraged to go to Tohoku spontaneously to avoid confusion and creation of additional problems.

The JNCSW estimates that over fourteen months, between March 2011 and May 2012, approximately 1,920,000 volunteers participated in the aid assistance, including 366,200 people in Iwate prefecture, 493,000 in Miyagi and 150,000 in Fukushima, as registered in each local Disaster Volunteers’ Center (Shinsaichi Borantia Sentā).²⁶ The numbers are impressive, and so is the organizational structure. The Zenshakyō established branches in 24 cities and villages in Iwate prefecture, 11 in Miyagi prefecture, 22 in Fukushima prefecture, and 1 in Ibaraki, Tochigi and Nagano prefectures, each office with homepage and information site.²⁷ The reports show that the work initially included: removing the debris, cleaning damaged houses, clearing rice paddles and rivers from the rubbles and mud, distribution of food and other necessary things, taking care of shelter housing. With the time passing and the temporary housing built, the assistance altered to include more of variety of events, psychological and emotional support for the survivors.²⁸ The latter is of special importance, because as of

June 2012, over 341 thousand people still live away from their houses.

On the governmental side, the Cabinet Secretariat established a Coordination Office for Earthquake Volunteerism (Shinsai Borantia Renkeishitsu), which created a website Tasukeai Japan (Mutual Aid Japan) functioning as one of the major volunteers’ information platform. The side provides practical information on volunteering works, encouraging people on one hand to participate in such activities, and on the other urging to check the updates on several sites such as Volunteers Information Hotline at Yahoo!Japan Earthquake Aid site, Volunteer Recruitment at sinsai.info, East Japan Great Earthquake Volunteer Information at goo and other – before undertaking any kind of action.

Another major initiative including variety of partners was the Japan Civil Network (JCN) for Disaster Relief in East Japan (Higashi Nihon Daishinsai Shien Zennkoku Nettowāku), created on March 30, 2011, by volunteer organizations, NGOs, NPOs and private enterprises. All together approximately 700 groups and organizations cooperate within this framework, providing information and aid. To coordinate the activity, the aid has been divided into volunteering work, material help and financial donations. While the central and municipal governments focused on the recovery of the infrastructure such as electricity, water supply, communication, etc. the Network has paid also attention to problems of individuals, supporting survivors both materially and mentally in their everyday life.

One of the biggest problems with the volunteers this time after the disaster struck Japan was that not all volunteers could actually go to the affected area and participate in the assistance efforts. It was partly due to the fact that the aid was coordinated systematically by NGOs, public and private organizations and hence there was basically no space for individual initiative. To given an example, when the Metropolitan government of Tokyo announced recruitment of 400 volunteers to accompany the metropolitan officials to Tohoku area during the Golden Week, the limit was filled up in 10 minutes by applicants via internet.29 Another problem related to the aforementioned “non-civic NPOs,” was, as strange as it may sound, that certain NPOs are not interested in organizing volunteers or collecting donations due to the reliance on corporate and governmental funding.30

In addition to volunteers’ coordination activities, all the above mentioned organizations involved in assistance to the affected area have carried also fund raising. The sums are quite impressive. The Yahoo!Japan managed to collect over 1 billion 380

29 Tanaka 2011, 6-7.
14 million yen donated by over 937 thousand people between March 2011 and June 2012. On the other hand, the Japanese Red Cross Society collected an astounding sum of total 318 billion yen. The donations to the Red Cross were distributed later via special institutions called Committees to Decide Donation Distribution Ratio (Gienkin Haibun Wariai Kettei Iinakai), established in early April 2011 by the Health, Labour and Welfare that include governmental officials, donation collecting organizations and local representatives from the affected areas. Such arrangements are to prevent misuse and inefficient allocation of collected funds.

2.3. Radioactive Disaster
The most severe consequence of the earthquake and the following tsunami were the nuclear accidents at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant maintained by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). On March 11, 2011 the government announced the nuclear emergency state. The tsunami broke connection to the power grid of the six boiling water reactors (out of which one was de-fuelled), and also caused flooding of the emergency generators rooms. In result, the generators of the pumps circulating coolant water in the reactors ceased to operate. Reactors began to overheat, and within hours and days three of them began full meltdown, resulted in several explosions of the hydrogen gas accumulated in the outer containment buildings. The government ordered to use the seawater in order to cool the reactors, which caused their final and total damage. Eventually the electrical power was restored for some of the reactors, which allowed automated cooling. During the explosions massive radioactive material was released into the environment (air, ground and water).

The government initially assessed the accident as Level 4 on the International Nuclear Events Scale (INES), raising it later to 5 and eventually to the highest Level 7. It is assumed to be the largest nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986, although according to the governmental announcement the amount of radioactivity released into atmosphere was one tenth of the Chernobyl.

In fear of radioactivity, the government ordered the residents within 20 km radius of the Fukushima Daiichi Plant and 10 km of the Fukushima Dai’ni Nuclear Power Plant to evacuate from their homes. The situation continues up to present because many residents continue to leave their homes behind in fear of long-term health effects of the nuclear accident. The government banned the sale of food grown in the area due to the high level of caesium-137, and recommended not to use the tap water for infants. The level of contamination is subjected to discussion with many citizens not trusting the

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official reports, as a result of which the sale of geiger counters rose rapidly.

There were no immediate deaths due to the direct exposure to radiation, although several plant workers had radiation burns and have exceed lifetime legal limits for radiation, and few hundreds have received significant doses of radiation, which consequences are to be seen. The specialists predict the rise of cancer deaths, other disease, as well as long-term psychological effects on the population living in the contaminated area.

2.4. Anti-nuclear Movement

Another effect of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accidents was the mobilization of anti-nuclear protest. The government was criticized by the public, media and international community for withholding the information, poor communication with the public, improvised cleanup methods, playing down the scope of the accident and cover ups.

The anti-nuclear movement has a long tradition in Japan for historically obvious reasons. It is the only country in the world, which has been bombed by nuclear weapons, first time in Hiroshima and then in Nagasaki in August 1945. In March 1954, the Fukuryūmaru accident occurred that stirred much controversy all over Japan, giving rise to a fierce anti-nuclear movement in Japan. One of the crew members of a tuna fishing boat, Fukyūmaru, which encountered the nuclear fallout in the Pacific waters near Bikini Atoll from the American experiment with thermonuclear weapon, died several month later suffering from acute radiation syndrome. The protest continued and it led to the creation of a powerful anti-nuclear organization, Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs or Gensuikyō (Gensuibaku Kinshi Nihon Kyōgikai, 1955). On the other hand, the victims of the atomic bombs established Japan Confederation of A-and H-bomb Sufferers or Hidankyō (Nihon Gembaku Hibaku Dantai Kyōgikai, 1956), which became another influential organizations fighting against the usage and spread of nuclear weapons but also nuclear energy. The two organizations were among the first to raise concerns about the safety of the Fukushima nuclear plant and nuclear energy, declaring that “there is no such thing as 100% safe atomic energy.”

Under the public outcry, Prime Minister Kan Naoto took an anti-nuclear stance. Already on March 20, 2011 the Chief Cabinet Secretary Edano Yukio announced that the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant will be decommissioned once the crisis was over. In May, Kan ordered the aging Hamaoka Nuclear Power Plant be closed over the fears of earthquakes, and promised not to build any new power reactors. The new Prime

Minister Noda Toshiko, who took over the office in August 2011, continues the line, although Noda that nuclear reactors will be restarted until Japan secures new energy resources. Japan has had economic troubles for the past twenty years and the concerns have been voiced that if the energy shortage continues, many companies might shift the production overseas.

One of the most interesting and innovative ways of civic activities in regard to nuclear plant accident has been undertaken by Safecast organization. Safecast was established one week after the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami by a small group of people of various nationalities, who regarded governmental data and reporting on the nuclear accident insufficient. The aim has been to provide environmental data, mostly related to the level of radiation level. For that purpose a group of volunteers checks the radiation with special sensors (handheld, mobile and stationary), sending data that is collected and organized into a map of radiation level. The map is available at their internet site (http://blog.safecast.org/maps). The organization declares that they collect data at 600,000 points in Japan and anyone can sign in and participate in the project.

The organizers explain in detailed how the idea of verifying the level of radiation came into being just after the earthquake struck Japan. The uncertainty of the situation, lack of gigers counters, which were sold out instantly, created a need for action. It is worth noticing how the ideas spread globally due the technological means. Emails, skype call and chats rooms were used as “the project headquarters.” The idea of the map came from the USA, where a mobile/web shop in Portland called Uncorked Studios published radiation data solicited from the public on the site RTDN.org. The group met for the first time in Tokyo on 15 April 2011 and later build its own device to measure the radiation called bGeigie (designed and built in fact by Tokyo Hackerspace), which can be strapped to a car and measurements logged in motion. Thanks to private donations they began the activity, and at present, as noted, they have a net of volunteers, who measure and upload the data to the Safecast central website, providing the newest information on the radiation level in 600,00 various locations.

Closing Remarks
Hanshin Awaji earthquake and Tohoku earthquake both have had a tremendous impact on lives on thousands of people both in Japan and overseas. They also changed the working of civic groups in Japan. The most striking difference in the operation of NGOS between these two events is the accumulation of knowledge and experience, and

33 The Safecast is discussed also by Daniel P. Aldrich in “Post-Crisis Japanese Nuclear Policy: From Top-Down Directives to Bottom-up Activism,” Asia Pacific 103, January 2012.
the usage of them in the latter case, or in other words, the learning effect on the patterns of behavior of NGOs, but also of the governmental and private institutions.

In case of NGOs, we can observe a radical transformation from spontaneous outburst to organized assistance, and furthermore, a transformation from aid and assistance to agenda setting (energy policy), policy making and civic control over the authorities’ undertakings (radiation level measurement, etc.).

Another aspect of the NGOs activities has been the widespread usage of new media: internet, email, skype, chat rooms, twitter, etc. for communication and organization of work. Interestingly, many of the Disaster Volunteers’ Center added twitter address on the web site for contact, which proves that new technologies can be of help in emergency situations.

Almost one and half year have passed since the powerful earthquake struck the Eastern part of Japan in March 2011, and many more will have to follow to make conclusive remarks about the nature of changes initiated by the natural disaster. Nevertheless, politically, the condition, organization and functioning of civil society in Japan have been undoubtedly undergoing deep changes.