

Message from Professor David Alexander

21th November 2019

In many countries there is official opposition to preserving the memory of disasters. It is often said that a museum or conspicuous monument would "detract from the positive image" of a place. However, it is vital to remember the negative as well as the positive imprint of history. Memory of disasters tends to fade as one generation succeeds another, and a consequence of this is that the lessons of disaster easily become lost. The greatest lesson is the need to take the risk of catastrophe seriously and maintain appropriate levels of preparedness. This requires that the general population, as well as officials and technical staff, understand what can happen and what the consequences may be.

Japan's - and Rikuzentakata's - culture of preserving the memory of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami is admirable: a new museum, sensitively laid out, well designed, elegant, intelligent, neither understated nor overstated. Visual impact, oral testimony, written and video material and relics of the event are combined to tell a story that is both powerful and relevant to everyday life. The museum is a fitting memorial to

those who lost their lives and a grand testimony to those who have struggled with adversity during the long aftermath of the disaster.

Cultural change is difficult to effect. It requires patience, resources, persistence and finesse. We need a society that continuously grows its culture of awareness, knowledge, preparedness and readiness for disasters, not one which lapses into amnesia about ever-present threats. Rikuzentakata's tsunami museum is an elegant and appropriate means of reinforcing and disseminating the message about disaster preparedness. It is also a way of achieving some sense of closure for the people of Rikuzentakata. It chronicles an episode in history, marked by heroism, self-sacrifice and suffering. It offers a message of hope for a future in which, hopefully, the suffering will be less the next time a tsunami strikes.