

Not defined by the numbers: Distinction, dissent and democratic possibilities in debating the data following Tokyo Electric Power Company's nuclear disaster



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Abstract: This paper considers how metrics and standards deployed by states to govern food systems are negotiated and challenged by citizens. In conditions of risk and uncertainty, measures are intended to guide the activities of producers and consumers, categorizing practices and substances as safe or unsafe, good or harmful, and ensuring the maintenance of a stable and predictable pattern of life. In post-Fukushima Japan, government efforts to establish safe levels of radiation in food can be seen to participate in this stabilization, which both reproduces the existing economy and the political system in the face of a radical participant: the radionuclide. Yet, people are not passive participants in their governance, and have established their own ways of navigating food safety in opposition to government standards. In this chapter, we suggest that those who must live by the numbers also negotiate and define themselves against them. In this way, numbers can be seen to instigate dissent, distinction and deliberation, as participants strive to establish their authenticity outside reductionist parameters. Taking an assemblage approach to state defined safe radiation levels in Japan, this paper discusses the ways that numbers are actively engaged with to create and vocalize a more emancipatory political subjectivity through the assemblage of deliberative publics (paper co-authored with Katharine Legun, and Hugh Campbell).



Speaker: **Karly Burch, Center for Sustainability, University of Otago,**

Karly is a PhD candidate at the Center for Sustainability, University of Otago, working for a thesis titled "Fighting for food safety in post-Fukushima Japan". She holds an MSc in agroecology from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) and the Engineering School of Agriculture, Alimentation, Rural Development and Environment (ISARA-Lyon). While studying agroecology, Karly became interested in the intersections between food systems, food cultures, energy systems and pollution, an interest that intensified with the onset of Tokyo Electric Power Company's (TEPCO's) Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (FD1NPP) disaster in Japan. As a result, she decided to focus her MSc research on the experiences of people living in the Kansai region of Japan (where she had lived for two years prior to commencing her studies) and their perceptions and behaviors relating to food safety following the onset of the March 2011 nuclear disaster. After living for another three years in Japan following the submission of her MSc thesis, Karly decided to begin a PhD program at the University of Otago to gain a deeper understanding of the disaster's management and wide-reaching social impacts, particularly those related to the transfer of radionuclides via the food system.

Contact: CTR Adam Doering

観光学部 加藤久美

国際観光学研究センター

adam@center.wakayama-u.ac.jp (7880)

kumikato@center.wakayama-u.ac.jp (8558)

ctr-info@center.wakayama-u.ac.jp (7887)

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