



TITLE: Mobile Disasters: Comprehending Today's Catastrophes

Author/s: Steve Matthewman

Affiliation/s: University of Auckland

We live in disastrous times. Simply put, we find ourselves in a disaster glut. Disasters are increasing in frequency, scale, cost and severity. They are part of the modern condition, a source of physical anxiety and of existential angst. Paradoxically, at the height of their necessity, disaster scholars find themselves on the intellectual periphery. They typically cite a lack of theoretical and conceptual progress across the decades for their marginality. For more than half a century definitions of disaster have remained unchanged; this during arguably the greatest period of change in all of human history. Disasters have been defined as spectacular events that are concentrated in time and space. Should they be so contained? In this presentation I will make a case for broadening our conceptual horizons, for thinking about the ways in which disasters themselves are mobile rather than fixed. That is to say that disasters combine different temporalities and spatial arrangements, fates and opportunities; that they are more fluid than is commonly supposed. The argument will be made that we consider disasters as processes rather than events, ones which do large scale damage to both life and living systems. This will be illustrated with reference to Fukushima.