Memory as a Sustainable Resource?
Disaster Memory of Kocaeli Earthquake, Turkey

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This paper attempts to examine “sustainable use” of memory of Kocaeli Earthquake, Turkey, through using “cultural resource” as a metaphor.

Natural disaster is one of the central problems for each society. After 1990s, it is insisted that state or local government cannot do all and that local people should fulfill an important role in disaster prevention or mitigation. Recently people engaging in disaster management have focused on disaster memory, which would lead local people’s proper action. Therefore to make past disaster experience or memory sharable and available for the purpose of disaster preparation can be said one of the ways to use local landscape as a “cultural resource”.

On August 17th 1999, at 3:02 in the morning, a great earthquake hit the northwest part of Turkey claiming more than 17,000 lives. This disaster was a great shock to Turkish society physically and economically, as well as psychologically. It changed the awareness of disaster risks and, as a consequence, contributed to the transformation of the disaster management system. I pick up and analyze a monument of the earthquake in Gölcük, a disaster museum in Adapazarı, and annual ceremony in Körfez in detail.

Through case study analysis, I claim that “cultural resource” metaphor need a certain framework; the subject(s) to make it resource, the subject(s) to use it, and the purpose(s) to use it. In disaster memory, the purpose of the resource is to create a community that shares memory of past disaster and do prepare for future disasters. It is therefore the subject(s) to use resource coincide with the purpose of the resource. It indicates the difficulty to treat memory as a resource; memory is a resource and at the same time, a trigger to subjectification of the users. As a conclusion, I point out the dubiousness of the subject(s) that are assumed to use memory as resource and to become subject(s) who concern with disaster preparation in the discourse of disaster management.

Key words: Cultural resource, Sustainable use, Disaster memory, Turkey, Kocaeli Earthquake