

Changing Places Case Study: The 2010-11 Canterbury (NZ) Earthquakes

Resource

The following video resource explores how places change after disaster, with specific reference to the city of Christchurch after the 2010-11 Canterbury Earthquakes (New Zealand). In the video the presenter discusses how the *meaning and representation* of Christchurch as place has been challenged as recovery from the disaster takes place.

Please watch the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go9zbWYBizg> in order to answer the following questions.

Activity

After watching the above video, answer the following questions. Some of these are discussion-based questions that may require longer responses than the space provided here.

1. Which shake in Canterbury resulted in the largest amount of fatalities? Include the fatality statistics, date, and magnitude of the event.
2. Approximately how many aftershocks has the region experienced since the first earthquake in 2010-11?
3. Recognising that these aftershocks continued to impact the city and surrounding region for a number of years following September 2010 means that some argue the term 'Canterbury Earthquake sequence' is more useful (rather than, 'the earthquake' for example). What challenges have the ongoing aftershocks created for people in the city/region?
4. What examples are presented in the video for Christchurch being designed as a model 'British urban landscape'?
5. The presenter argues that Christchurch was viewed as a 'conservative' place before the earthquakes. What characteristics of the city were argued to contribute to this sense of place?
6. What examples of 'political discontent' does the presenter argue emerged after the initial earthquakes?
7. **Discussion question:** Towards the conclusion of the video, the presenter notes that – even now – it is difficult to see if the character, meanings and representations of Christchurch as a place will have changed in the long-term. Some locals are concerned that, in the longer-term, the city might go back to the way it was. How do you think you might research these concerns in the longer term? What sorts of data do you think would be helpful? Who might you wish to speak to?
8. **Discussion question:** You have been presented with an example of a context where place-meanings are being negotiated, contested and arguably *changed*. What is it about a disaster that has allowed these changes to take place? What do you think it is about a disaster that allows people to form new attachments to places?

Suggested further work

Briefly mentioned in the video was a government decision to compulsorily acquire some people's homes after the earthquakes – a process called 'red-zoning'. The following interactive news stories (with drone footage and time-lapse photography that you can scroll through) is an excellent resource to visualize the impact of this on the city:

<https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2019/09/christchurch-red-zone-to-green/>

The following TedX presentation is given by one of the founders of Gap Filler – perhaps the most widely known community organisation active after the disaster. Here she discusses how the earthquakes themselves enabled them to challenge the representations of Christchurch as a city: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_6b7QpsLcA

The following Guardian newspaper article is an interesting reflection on some of the debates and contestations surrounding what the rebuilt city should look like. Although focused specifically on infrastructure, it raises important questions about what place-meanings are being constructed and put into action during recovery:

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/jan/27/christchurch-after-earthquake-rebuild-image-new-zealand>

The following documentary is a fascinating exploration of unusual projects and organisations that emerged after the recovery – all focusing on changing the place identity of Christchurch in different ways. Please note that it costs around £3 to rent this online for a 48-hour period:

<http://artofrecoveryfilm.com/>

The presenter has written a short article aimed at secondary school students, discussing in more depth the themes introduced in the video. These can be found in the following Geographical Association magazine (if you do not have access to the magazine, please contact the presenter using the email from the video): **Dickinson, S.** (2019). Changing places: geographies of post disaster landscapes. *Geography*, 104(Autumn), 116-124