In 2011, Japan, a nation renown for its robust earthquake and tsunami disaster risk management system, experienced the largest earthquake and tsunami in its history. These events greatly exceeded the nation’s worst-case disaster planning scenarios. A year after the event, the presenter and a team of disaster management specialists examined regional impacts and recovery through on-site interviews with a range of experts and actors in house and infrastructure recovery. Emerging from this reconnaissance is a picture of how engineered solutions and unique northern Japanese cultures combined, often in surprising ways, to impact human behavior and recovery potential. This region’s experience suggests community resilience may need to better combine robust strategies of disaster prevention and flexible strategies for “graceful” community failure.

About the speaker

Dr. Rebekah Green is the Associate Director at the Resilience Institute of Western Washington University. She received her Ph.D. from Cornell University where she combined structural engineering and anthropology to study physical and social vulnerability in the squatter settlements of Istanbul, Turkey. Dr. Green is acting co-director of Risk RED, a non-profit organization aimed at improving public education for disaster risk reduction. She has worked with community organizations in the US, Asia and Latin America, as well as national and international agencies and organizations. At the Resilience Institute, Dr. Green researches ways community can become more resilient to natural hazard events.