

Case Study on Cultivating Place Attachment in Communities Facing Population Decline and Aging

Cultivating place attachment is essential for revitalizing communities. While various methodologies have been proposed, this study investigated the determinants of place attachment in two Japanese regions: a mountainous area facing population decline and a suburban community of a major city facing aging.

In the mountainous area Kamikita village in Nara prefecture, questionnaires were distributed to all households residing in the village (N=116). The survey was conducted by asking current village residents to forward the questionnaire to individuals who had already left the village. Responses from those who had left the village and returned the questionnaire (N=44) were used to examine their hometown attachment. Statistical analysis revealed a significant positive correlation with the frequency of contact with the sender. Furthermore, participation experience in hometown community development activities was shown to enhance hometown attachment. This suggests that for those who have left the village and reside relatively nearby, facilitating participation in local events may be effective. For those residing farther away, maintaining frequent contact may be effective in cultivating hometown attachment. The study also suggested that enhancing the hometown attachment of those who have left the village could be an effective way to encourage their support.

Meanwhile, in suburban areas of large cities, the aging of housing complexes developed decades ago is significant, and ensuring travel modes for residents unable to drive private cars is a challenge. In Matsudo City, Chiba Prefecture, a Neighborhood Electric Vehicle System (ELMS) has been established. Using city funds, golf cart-type electric vehicles are loaned to neighborhood associations and managed by residents. This system supplements the last-mile travel needs of residents. To understand the impact of this ELMS on place attachment, a questionnaire survey was conducted among residents (N=95). The results showed that ELMS users experienced increased place attachment through increased frequency of going out. Furthermore, it became clear that the community's autonomous operation of the ELMS positively influenced users' attitudes toward the system. For a sustainable ELMS, it is crucial that municipalities give each district discretion, allowing them to operate according to their specific characteristics and cultivating trust between municipality residents.

These cases suggest that the degree of residents' involvement in their community may

positively influence the cultivation of community place attachment. As the challenges associated with declining birthrates, aging populations, and population decline vary by region, it is necessary to continue accumulating and sharing case studies going forward.