

Civic Engagement Patterns in Shrinking Cities: Rural and Urban Japan

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Abstract:

This project investigated possible differences in civic engagement in urban and rural depopulating Japanese cities. Data from 13 municipalities participating in the J-JIGS4-NHA survey were analysed, paying particular attention to participation tendencies and associational initiatives.

The analysis highlighted the relevance of community welfare activities in shrinking municipalities in rural areas, whereas, in urban ones, activities fostering a spirit of belonging were distinctive. Furthermore, the results exposed greater participation in activities within urban contexts, though household affiliation to neighbourhood associations resulted higher in rural shrinking communities. Finally, the study also indicated a possible relation between depopulation and affiliation in citizen groups.

Research Question:

How does civic engagement in shrinking Japanese cities differ in urban and rural contexts?

Aims:

- Investigate different social milieus' influence on local participation.
- Support the development of shrinkage theories comprising social perspectives and changes stemming from depopulation.

Methods:

- Categorisation of 13 Japanese cities as rural or urban based on OECD standards for regional urbanisation and as growing or shrinking based on population changes between 2016 and 2020.
- Quantitative secondary data analysis of the 2017 J-JIGS4-NHA survey on Japanese *jichikai* (neighbourhood associations) and cities' reports on local membership rates and population change.

Fig. 1: Linear Regression between Affiliation and Population Change

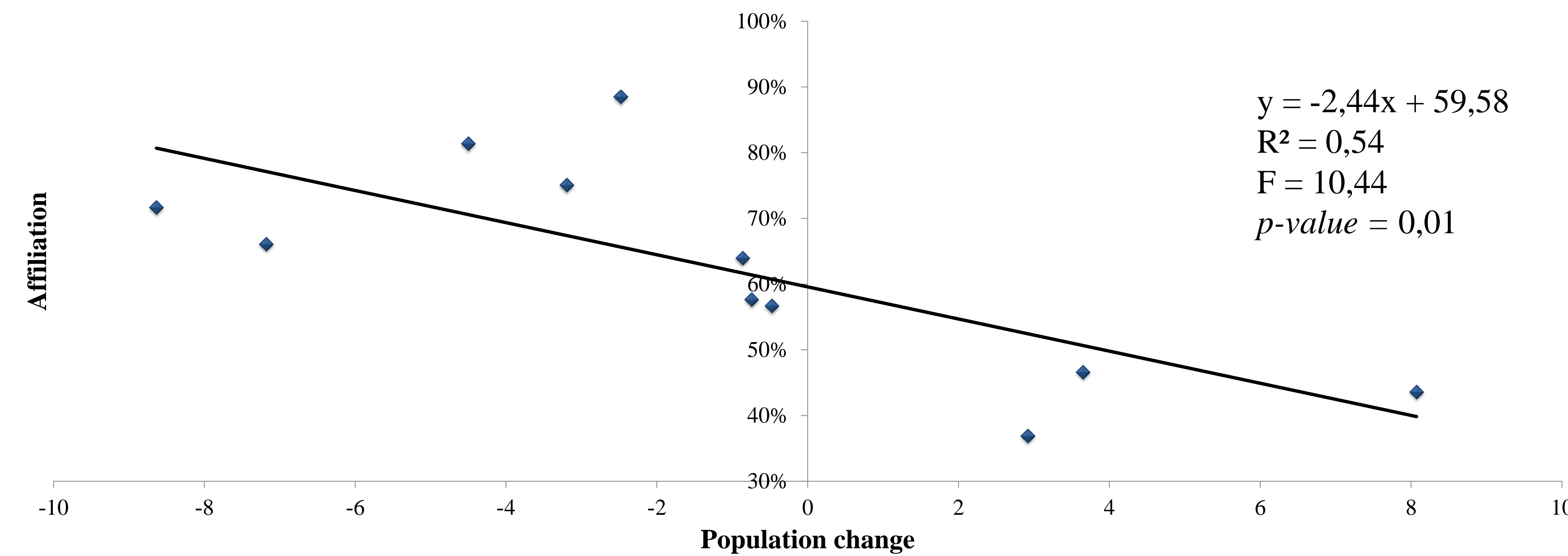


Fig. 2: Participation to Activities (% of households)

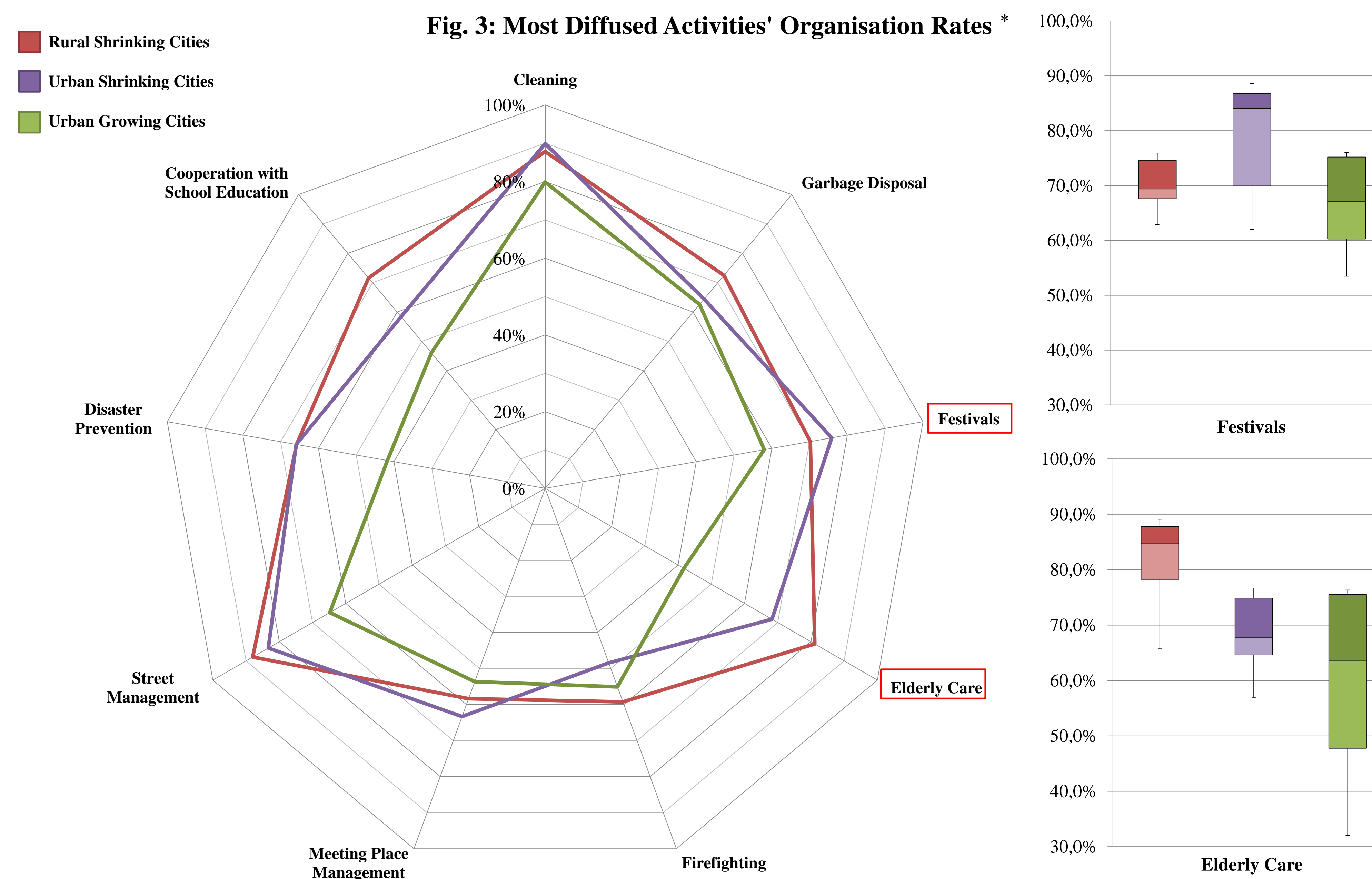
Categories	Activities					
	General meetings	Cleaning and recycling	Patrolling	Disaster prevention	Traffic safety	Festivals
Shr. Rural	48,9	53,9	23,4	34,9	22,3	46,0
Shr. Urban	61,7	65,7	28,6	40,5	25,1	52,9

Main Results:

- Introduction of evidence backing the existence of a moderate correlation between depopulation and household registration to neighbourhood associations.
- Community engagement, as reported by the associations, recorded higher levels within shrinking contexts.
- Shrinking cities in rural regions presented high membership and involvement in a broader set of activities but low formal participation. Community support and service provision to meet evolving needs are particularly relevant.
- In urban shrinking cities, the outline presents higher effective participation in activities and a predilection for activities fostering the sense of community.

Final Considerations:

- Research on singularities and specific contexts can improve the understanding of shrinkage and the development of more inclusive theories.
- Different shrinking frameworks impact communal needs, shaping civil society's action to meet them.
- More detailed research on how and to what extent shrinkage might influence affiliation to civil society organisations is needed, in particular, to address causality.
- Shrinking cities' greater dedication to elderly care is interesting within the discourse on urban population decline and civil society participation in community-based healthcare systems.



*Selection of the nine most organised activities based on the survey data



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