

# V4 + Japan: Paradiplomatic activities

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## Abstract

Modern analysis of relations between countries cannot be complete without adding additional dimension to the research – relations on subnational level. Due to the advancement of globalization and regionalization processes this new dimension has been actively influencing the shape of relations between countries.

This study focuses on analyzing relations between local authorities from Japan and Visegrad Group countries. How Japanese subnational governments view this area? Do they form partnerships with regions from those countries? If yes, what are the main fields of exchange? If not, is there any possibility to form partnerships in the future? The purpose of this study is to seek the answers to abovementioned questions as well as to provide some recommendations for future relations.

**Keywords:** Japan, Visegrad Group, Paradiplomacy, International relations

## Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to present cooperation between Japan and Visegrad Group countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) on subnational level. For the purpose of this study, research survey has been sent to 12 Japanese local authorities which, according to Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), maintain partnership relations with subnational governments located in Visegrad Group countries. Through the survey the following information has been obtained: for how long relations were kept; what are areas of cooperation; its benefits and obstacles; what institutions were involved in partnership etc. Gathered data allowed to present in details current relations between local authorities from Japan and V4 countries.

This article is dedicated to the cooperation conducted on subnational level which is part of research field called paradiplomacy. It refers to the international activities of subnational governments which can be viewed as: “a form of political communication for reaching economic, cultural and political or any other types of benefits, the core of which consist in self-sustained actions of regional governments with foreign governmental and non-governmental actors” (Kuznetsov, 2015). Typical paradiplomatic activities undertaken by local authorities include: opening trade and cultural missions abroad, signing treaties and agreements with for-

eign state and non-state actors, forming sister relationships, participating in international networks of regional cooperation.

In studies concerning international relations paradiplomacy is relatively new phenomena, however, it is beginning to gain irreplaceable position. It has become necessary to include abroad activities conducted on subnational level in order to fully grasp the relations between countries, especially since more and more initiatives have bottom-up character.

For the purpose of analyzing relations between subnational governments from Japan and Visegrad Group countries modified version of Kuznetsov's the explanatory framework of paradiplomacy based on a multiple response questionnaire (MRQ) technique has been applied (Table 1).

**Table 1** Modification of Kuznetsov's analytical framework

| <b>Kuznetsov's analytical framework</b>   | <b>Modified analytical framework</b>  |
|---|---|
| 1. What are the causes of blooming of paradiplomatic activities?                                      | 1. What are the causes of keeping paradiplomatic activities by Japanese local authorities with regions from Visegrad Group countries?                                     |
| 2. What are the legal grounds of paradiplomacy?   | 2. What are the legal grounds of the paradiplomatic relations between Japanese local authorities and regions from Visegrad Group countries?                               |
| 3. What is the predominant motive of the regional government to be involved in international affairs? | 3. What is the predominant motive of the Japanese local authorities to be involved in international affairs with regions from Visegrad Group countries?                   |
| 4. How has paradiplomacy been institutionalized?  | 4. How have the region-to-region relations with regions from Visegrad Group countries been institutionalized by Japanese local authorities?                               |
| 5. What is the attitude of central government towards the paradiplomacy of the region?                | 5. What is the attitude of central government in Tōkyō towards the paradiplomatic relations between Japanese local authorities and regions from Visegrad Group countries? |
| 6. What are the consequences of paradiplomacy for the development of the whole nation?                | 6. What are the consequences of the Japanese local authorities' paradiplomacy for the development of relations with Visegrad Group countries on national level?           |

Source: own compilations based on Kuznetsov (2015).

## Overview of Japanese paradiplomatic activities

This section presents involvement of Japanese local authorities in paradiplomatic activities. In accordance with Japanese administrative and legal systems, below the national government, there are various types of subnational governments, which include: prefectures, cities, and municipalities (towns and villages). Japan is divided into 47 prefectures, in which there are

792 cities, 743 towns, and 183 villages.<sup>1</sup> There are also 23 special wards in Tokyo. Detailed information regarding foreign activities conducted by each type of local governments has been included in Table 2.

**Table 2** Number of sister city relationships in Japan

| Type of loc. gov. | No. of sister city relationships | No. of loc. gov. with relationships | No. of loc. gov. with more than 1 sister city relationship |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Prefecture</b> | 169                              | 43                                  | 38   |
| <b>City</b>       | 1,257                            | 571                                 | 330  |
| <b>Ward</b>       | 41                               | 21                                  | 13   |
| <b>Town</b>       | 270                              | 216                                 | 48   |
| <b>Village</b>    | 39                               | 36                                  | 3  |
| <b>Total</b>      | 1,776                            | 887                                 | 432  |

Source: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. *Number of sister city relationships in Japan*. Retrieved from: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020).

As it can be seen from above Table, out of 47 Japanese prefectures, 43 of them have established international relations with partners from abroad. Moreover, 38 prefectures keep more than one partnership. In total 43 prefectures have signed international agreements with 169 foreign local authorities. On city level, there are partnerships with 1257 foreign partners established by 571 Japanese cities. 216 Japanese towns have established relations with 270 foreign local authorities, while 36 villages have 39 international partners. Moreover, 21 special wards signed agreements with 41 local authorities from abroad. In total 887 Japanese subnational governments have signed 1776 sister city relationship agreements.

Figure 1 contains information regarding the division of international partnerships among Japanese prefectures. Data shows that subnational governments from Hokkaido prefecture have signed the most affiliation agreements with foreign partners – 126. 10 partnerships were signed by prefectural government, 67 by the cities, while 49 by towns and villages. The overall number of local authorities with foreign affiliations equaled to 73. Second place in terms of number of sister city partnerships was Osaka prefecture with 80 agreements, out of which 9 were conducted on prefectural level, 68 on city level, while 3 on town/village level. In Osaka prefecture 34 local authorities have engaged in international activities. Third place was taken by Hyogo prefecture with 74 agreements: 7 on prefectural level, 62 signed by cities, and 5 by other municipalities, 32 local authorities have signed sister city relationship agreements.

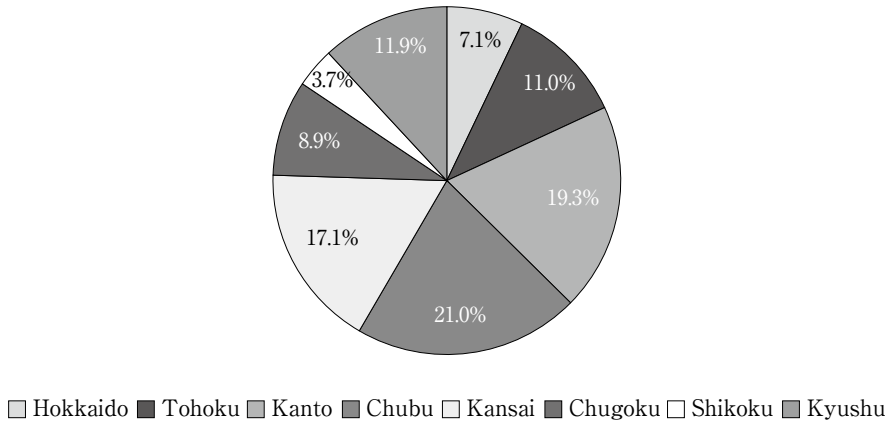
On the other hand, prefectures with the least number of foreign partners abroad were as follows: Miyazaki prefecture – 17 agreements: 15 on city level and 2 on town/village level. 10 local authorities were involved in international activities. Next was Kochi prefecture with 16 partnerships, out of which 3 were signed by prefectural government, 10 by cities and 3 by towns and villages. Overall, 11 local authorities were engaged in foreign relations. Lastly, Tokushima prefecture with 13 agreements: 3 on prefectural level, 8 on city level and 2 by other municipalities. 7 local authorities had established international relations.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1** Number of international partnerships established by local authorities in each prefecture  
 Source: own compilation based on: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations,  
<http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020).

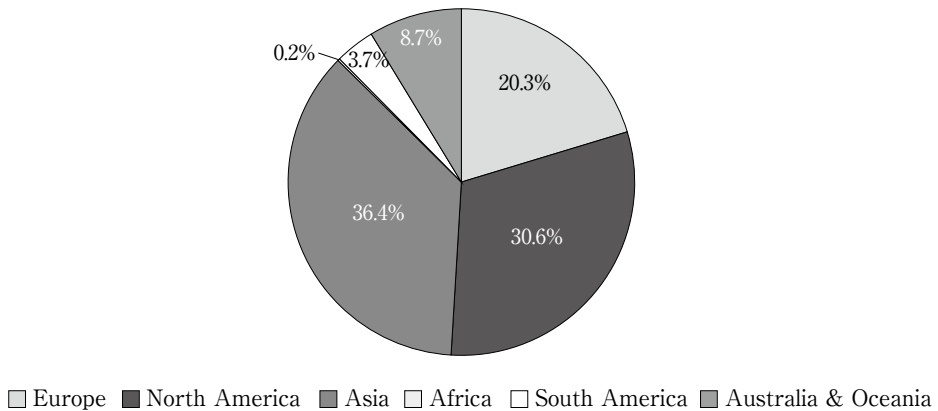
Figure 2 shows how each of Japanese traditional regions participated in international exchange. Local authorities located in Chubu region have signed the biggest number of sister city partnership agreements – 373, which accounted for 21% of the whole established relations. Subnational governments from Kanto area had 342 affiliation agreements (19.3%), while local governments from Kansai region established 304 partnerships (17.1%). On regional level the least active in pursuing international relations were local authorities located at Shikoku island. Subnational governments from 4 prefectures have signed 66 sister city partnership agreements, which accounted for 3.7% of the whole established relations.<sup>3</sup>

Japanese subnational governments have been cooperating with local authorities from different part of the world. Detailed information regarding breakdown of agreements by continent has been presented on Figure 3. Data shows that Japanese local governments have established the biggest number of partnerships with partners located in other parts of Asia. Out of 1776 signed agreements 646 took place with Asian partners, which equaled to 36.4% of the whole agreements. Partners from North America took second place with 544 agreements (30.6%), while with European partners Japanese local authorities signed 361 partnerships (20.3%). On the other hand, with local governments from Australia & Oceania Japanese side has established 155 sister city partnerships, which accounted for 8.7% of the whole agreements. Much weaker was the cooperation with South American partners – 66 agreements (3.7%). However, the weakest links were observed with local authorities from Africa. Japanese subnational governments have signed only 4 sister city partnership agreements with African



**Figure 2.** Japanese Local Governments with Affiliation Agreement by region (%)

Source: Own compilation based on: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. *Japanese Local Governments with Affiliation Agreement by prefecture*. Retrieved from: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020).



**Figure 3** Japanese local governments with Affiliation Agreements breakdown by continents (%)

Source: Own compilation based on: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. *Japanese Local Governments with Affiliation Agreement by Country and Territory*. Retrieved from: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020).

partners. The share of partnerships with Africa stood at 0.2%.<sup>4</sup>

As it has been already pointed out, Japanese local governments have signed 361 sister city partnerships with European partners. Considering the number of cooperation agreement, European continent was the second biggest destination for paradiplomatic activities of Japanese subnational governments. Detailed information regarding number of partnerships by European country as well as involvement by Japanese subnational governments has been presented in Table 3.

As it can be seen from data included in Table 3 not in every European country, Japanese local authorities have their partners. Partnerships have been signed with local governments from 33 countries located in Europe. Among all of European countries Japanese subnational governments have established the most partnerships with local authorities from Germany. Out of 56 agreements, 6 have been signed by Japanese prefectures, 41 by cities/wards, while 9 by

**Table 3** Number of partnerships with European countries by type of Japanese subnational government

| <b>Country</b> | <b>Prefectures</b> | <b>Cities/Wards</b> | <b>Towns/Villages</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Austria        | 0                  | 28                  | 5                     | 33           |
| Belarus        | 0                  | 1                   | 0                     | 1            |
| Belgium        | 0                  | 8                   | 0                     | 8            |
| Bulgaria       | 0                  | 2                   | 0                     | 2            |
| Croatia        | 0                  | 3                   | 0                     | 3            |
| Czech          | 0                  | 2                   | 2                     | 4            |
| Denmark        | 0                  | 5                   | 2                     | 7            |
| Estonia        | 0                  | 1                   | 0                     | 1            |
| Finland        | 0                  | 2                   | 3                     | 5            |
| France         | 7                  | 39                  | 8                     | 54           |
| Germany        | 6                  | 41                  | 9                     | 56           |
| Greece         | 0                  | 5                   | 3                     | 8            |
| Hungary        | 0                  | 4                   | 1                     | 5            |
| Ireland        | 0                  | 1                   | 0                     | 1            |
| Italy          | 5                  | 27                  | 7                     | 39           |
| Latvia         | 0                  | 1                   | 1                     | 2            |
| Lithuania      | 0                  | 1                   | 0                     | 1            |
| Moldova        | 0                  | 1                   | 0                     | 1            |
| Netherlands    | 0                  | 9                   | 2                     | 11           |
| Norway         | 0                  | 2                   | 1                     | 3            |
| Poland         | 0                  | 0                   | 2                     | 2            |
| Portugal       | 0                  | 7                   | 0                     | 7            |
| Romania        | 0                  | 2                   | 1                     | 3            |
| Russia         | 11                 | 33                  | 4                     | 48           |
| Serbia         | 0                  | 1                   | 0                     | 1            |
| Slovakia       | 0                  | 0                   | 1                     | 1            |
| Slovenia       | 0                  | 1                   | 0                     | 1            |
| Spain          | 3                  | 9                   | 0                     | 12           |
| Sweden         | 0                  | 3                   | 1                     | 4            |
| Switzerland    | 1                  | 9                   | 2                     | 12           |
| Turkey         | 0                  | 5                   | 2                     | 7            |
| Ukraine        | 0                  | 2                   | 0                     | 2            |
| United Kingdom | 4                  | 8                   | 4                     | 16           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>37</b>          | <b>263</b>          | <b>61</b>             | <b>361</b>   |

Source: Own compilation based on: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. *Japanese Local Governments with Affiliation Agreement by Country and Territory*, Retrieved from: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020).

towns and villages. France took second place with 54 agreements: 7 by prefectures, 39 by cities/wards, 8 by other Japanese municipalities. Russia with 48 partnerships stood at third place, while Italy took fourth place with 39. In case of cooperation with Russian local authorities, 11 agreements have been signed by prefectures, 33 partnerships have been established by cities and wards, remaining 4 have been established by towns and villages. For Italian partners, partnerships' diversification stood at 5, 27, and 7 respectively. Next important destination for establishing sister city relations was Austria with 33 agreements: 28 were signed by Japanese cities, while remaining 5 by other municipalities. Significant partners for Japanese subnational governments were also local authorities from United Kingdom, Spain, Switzerland and Netherlands, with number of partnerships: 16, 12, 12, and 11 respectively. With remaining European countries Japanese side was less active in establishing foreign relations. Only 80 agreements have been signed with local authorities from the rest part of Europe.

Above analysis of paradiplomatic activities undertaken by Japanese subnational governments leads to the following conclusions: Firstly, the higher the level of subnational government, the more active it is in establishing foreign relations. 91% of Japanese prefectures have partner abroad, in case of cities, it is 72%. On the other hand, only 29% of Japanese towns have undertaken foreign relations. Meanwhile, 19% of villages have established sister city partnerships.

Secondly, Japanese subnational governments focus on establishing partnerships with local authorities located mainly in Asia and North America. 67% of agreements were signed with partners from those two continents. Cooperation with Europe with 20% of partnerships comes in third place. On the other hand, links with rest of the world are relatively weaker. Partnerships with Africa, South America and Australia & Oceania stand at 13% combined. Distribution of affiliation agreements by country does not come as a surprise since it reflects priority areas of Japan's Foreign Policy. On national level focus is put on developing closer cooperation with North American and Asian countries, especially United States as well as Republic of Korea and China. On subnational level we observe the same tendency. Moreover, in Japan's Foreign Policy relations with Russia are also emphasized which explains why there are so many partnerships with Russian partners on subnational level. There is a very strong relation between national policy and foreign activities conducted by subnational governments.

Thirdly, there is a huge disproportion in number of foreign partnerships between Japanese prefectures, with some prefectures having more active local governments than others. However, the following trend can be observed: the more exposed to westernization the region was, the more active in developing foreign relations subnational governments from this region are. Local authorities from Hokkaido, Osaka and Hyogo prefectures have established the most sister city relations among all Japanese regions.

Lastly, regarding cooperation with subnational governments located in European countries, with the exception of Russia, Japanese local authorities mainly develop relations with partners from Western Europe. With regions from Germany, France and Italy being the main

partners for Japanese side. Exchange with areas from Eastern Europe also exists, however, it takes place on a smaller scale. Next section presents analysis of cooperation between local authorities from Japan and Visegrad Group countries.

### **Cooperation between Japanese subnational governments and local authorities from Visegrad Group countries**

As it has been mentioned in previous section, cooperation with local authorities from European countries comes as a third most important destination for foreign activities of Japanese subnational governments. Even though the focus is put on developing relations with partners from Western Europe and Russia, Japanese side also has partners in other parts of the continent as well. According to data presented by Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) local authorities from Japan have established 12 partnerships with municipalities located in Visegrad Group countries: 5 in Hungary, 4 in Czechia, 2 in Poland and 1 in Slovakia. For the purpose of this study, the research survey has been sent to involved Japanese local governments regarding their cooperation with partners from Visegrad Group countries. Questions concerned areas of cooperation, entities engaged in exchange, forms of cooperation, the main benefits as well as obstacles that hinder partnership. Research data has been obtained regarding 10 partnerships. The summary of partnerships has been presented in Table 4.

According to obtained data, apart from Minakami Town's case, all the other partnerships were valid and active as well as the exchange has been taking place on regular basis. Minakami Town has stopped its partnership with Uhersky Brod in 2005 as a result of merger of towns and villages.

Japanese subnational governments cooperate with partners from Visegrad Group countries based on formal agreement. The only exception is Takasaki City – Poznań City partnership, which has informal character. What is more, this partnership has not been included in Council of Local Authorities for International Relations data.

Year in which partnerships have been established provides an interesting in-sight regarding cooperation between local authorities from Japan and Visegrad Group area. All the agreements with Hungarian, Czech and Slovakian partners have been signed before those countries have entered European Union (before year 2004), with cooperation between Yuza Town and Szolnok going as far as the 80s (though official agreement has been signed in year 2000). On the other hand, relations with Polish local authorities have been established only recently – starting from year 2016. It shows that Japanese local authorities are willing to develop new partnerships with other countries as long as they find an appropriate exchange partner.

Cooperation between Japanese and Visegrad Group's subnational governments spans across many different areas. As it can be seen from Figure 4, general education was the most popular one, followed by sport and tourism. Higher education and research as well as cultural



**Table 4** The summary of partnerships between local authorities from Japan and Visegrad Group countries

| Japanese subnational government    | European local authority | Year in which partnership was established | Agreement/<br>no formal agreement | Active/<br>Not active | Initiator of partnership  |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Okinoshima Village (Shimane Pref.) | Krotoszyn (Poland)       | 2016/6/25                                 | Formal agreement                  | Active                | Polish side               |
| Oarai Town (Ibaraki Pref.)         | Otowck (Poland)          | 2019                                      | Formal agreement                  | Active                | –                         |
| Takasaki City (Gunma Pref.)        | Poznań (Poland)          | 2017                                      | No formal agreement               | Active                | Polish Olympics Committee |
| Takasaki City (Gunma Pref.)        | Plzen (Czechia)          | 1990                                      | –                                 | –                     | –                         |
| Kyoto City (Kyoto Pref.)           | Prague (Czechia)         | 1996                                      | Formal agreement                  | Active                | Kyoto City                |
| Kusatsu Town (Gunma Pref.)         | (Czechia)                | 1992                                      | Formal agreement                  | Active                | Kusatsu Town              |
| Minakami Town (Gunma Pref.)        | Uhersky Brod (Czechia)   | 1995                                      | –                                 | Inactive              | –                         |
| Kazuno City (Akita Pref.)          | Sporon (Hungary)         | 2002                                      | Formal agreement                  | Active                | Kazuno City               |
| Aomori City (Aomori Pref.)         | Kecskemet (Hungary)      | 1994/08/04                                | Formal agreement                  | Active                | Aomori City               |
| Yurihonjo City (Akita Pref.)       | Vac (Hungary)            | 1996                                      | Formal agreement                  | Active                | –                         |
| Yuzawa City (Akita Pref.)          | Csurg (Hungary)          | 2003                                      | –                                 | –                     | –                         |
| Yuza Town (Yamagata Pref.)         | Szolnok (Hungary)        | 1983                                      | Formal agreement (in 2000)        | Active                | Yuza Town                 |
| Nosegawa Village (Nara Pref.)      | Vysoke Tatry (Slovakia)  | 2003                                      | –                                 | –                     | –                         |

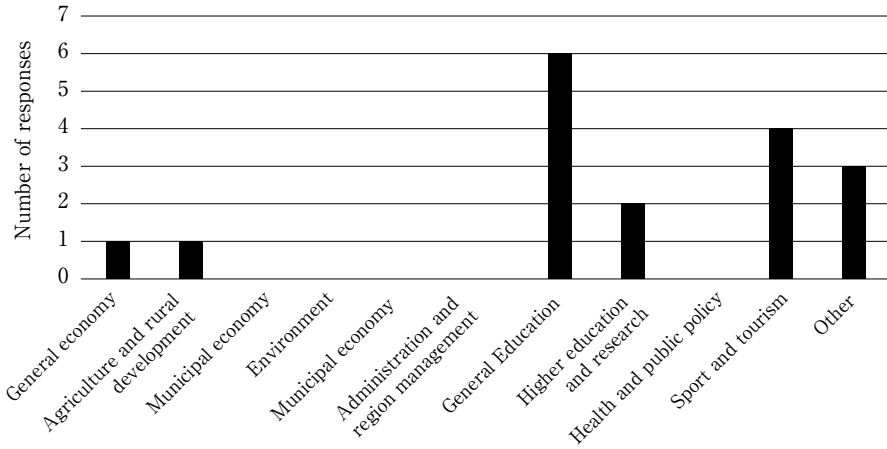
Source: Own compilation based on: research survey: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. *Japanese Local Governments with Affiliation Agreement by Country and Territory*. Retrieved from: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020) as well as official webpages of Yuzawa City, Takasaki City and Nosegawa Village.

exchange (other) are also essential areas of partnerships between analyzed subjects. Interestingly, cooperation in the economic field is of relatively low importance. Only one Japanese SNGs indicated this area.

As general education is vital area of cooperation between SNGs from Japan and Visegrad Group area, it is no wonder that educational institutions as well as universities are also actively engaged in partnerships (Figure 5). Although city authorities remain the center of mutual relations. Moreover, cooperation the field of cultural exchange leads to the engagement of cultural institutions from analyzed regions, which also enthusiastically participate in the partnership. In case of one partnership, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also involved.

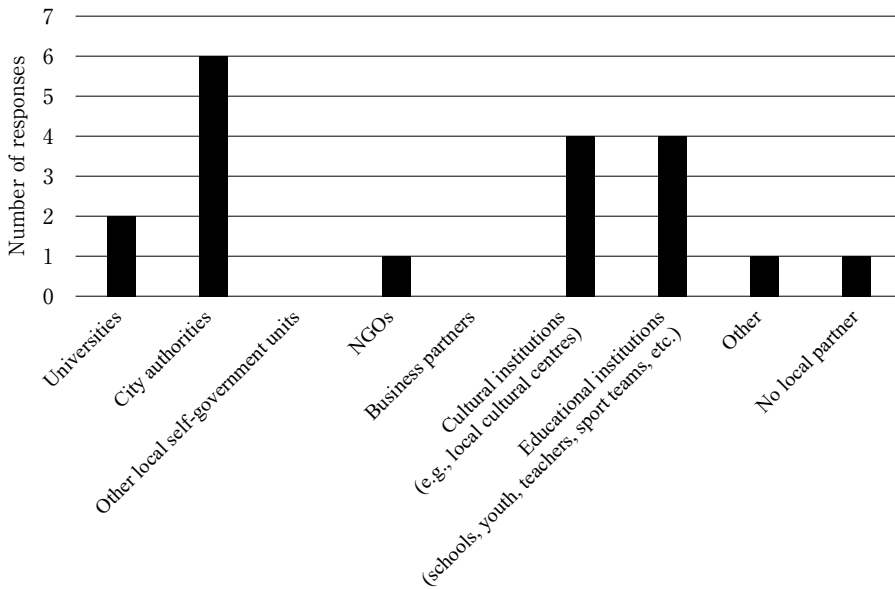
Figure 6 presents forms of cooperation between analyzed SNGs. The most popular one is conducting official visits. Other forms included: cultural performances, dispatching language instructors to partner city, pairing exhibitions as well as dispatching engineers for restoration work.

Next figure – Figure 7 contains information regarding main benefits of mutual exchange.



**Figure 4** The areas of cooperation between Japanese subnational governments (SNGs) and partners from Visegrad Group countries

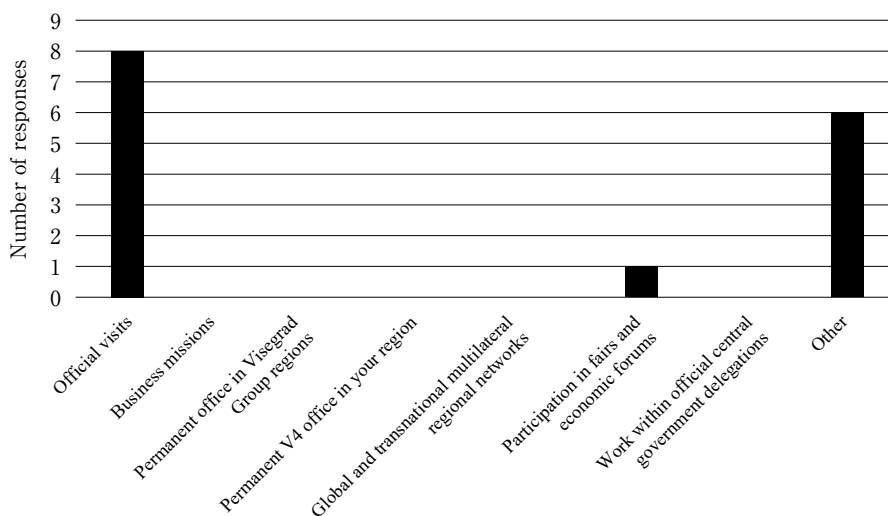
Source: Own compilation based on conducted research study.



**Figure 5** Other local entities engaged in cooperation between Japanese SNGs and partners from Visegrad Group countries

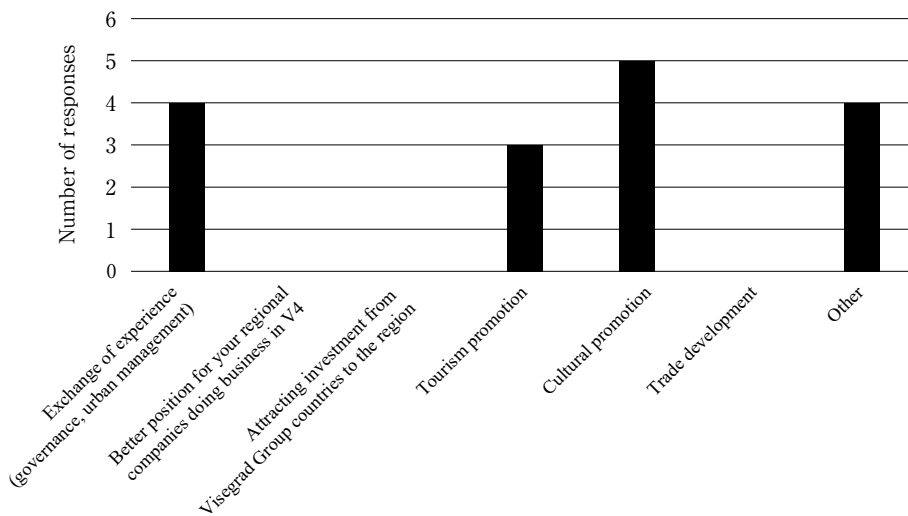
Source: Own compilation based on conducted research study.

Since in cases of few partnerships, cultural exchange is essential area of cooperation, with many cultural-related events being organized, it is no surprising that overall collaboration leads to cultural promotion in partner region. Spreading Japanese culture and customs in European cities connects to deepening knowledge about Japan in general. In similar way, citizens



**Figure 6** Forms of cooperation between Japanese SNGs and partners from Visegrad Group countries

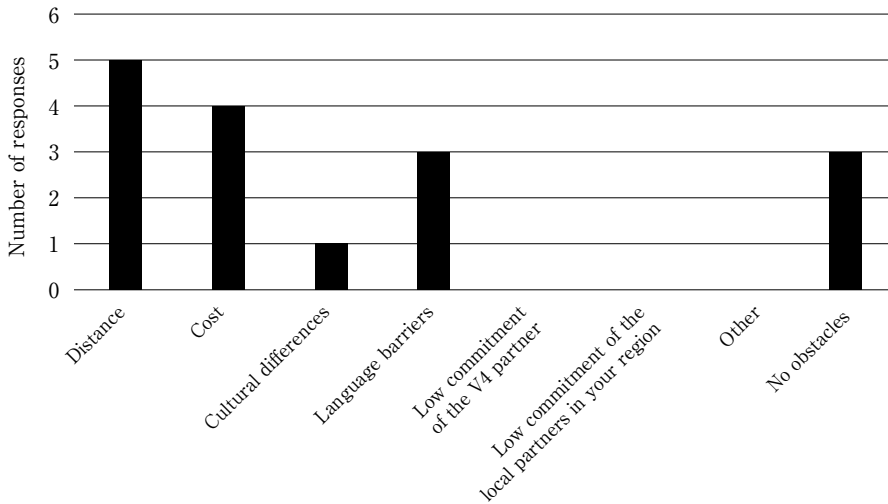
Source: Own compilation based on conducted research study.



**Figure 7** Main benefits of cooperation between Japanese SNGs and partners from Visegrad Group countries

Source: Own compilation based on conducted research study.

of Japanese cities engaged in foreign exchange are provided with opportunity to broaden their knowledge about Visegrad Group countries and their traditions. Enhanced knowledge leads to an increase in interest in partner city, which has a positive effect on tourism promotion as well.



**Figure 8** Main obstacles of cooperation between Japanese SNGs and partners from Visegrad Group countries

Source: Own compilation based on conducted research study.

Lastly, Figure 8 presents main obstacles of cooperation between partners from Japan and Visegrad Group countries. Distance between partners is a factor which hinders mutual partnership the most. 4 Japanese SNGs indicated cost as a main obstacle for exchange, while for 3 language barriers made it difficult for enhancing relations. On the other hand, 3 Japanese SNGs did not encounter any difficulties while cooperating with partners from Visegrad Group countries.

## Summary and recommendations for future relations

Conducted research study shows that for Japanese subnational governments, Visegrad Group countries are not a priority area for establishing foreign relations. Among 361 sister city partnership agreements signed with European countries, only 12 took place with partners located either in Czechia, Hungary, Poland or Slovakia. That shows how low level of interest Japanese SNGs have in that region. Factors such as distance and cost seem to play crucial role in this. However, as it has been seen in research study, it is possible to successfully establish relations between local authorities from Japan and Visegrad Group countries. What is more, 3 of the aforementioned partnerships were signed in the last few years.

Experience from existing partnerships shows that for local authorities cultural and tourism promotions are considered to be the main benefits of cooperation. With organization of various events such as exhibitions and workshops, it is possible to get acquainted with foreign customs and traditions as well as to spark interest in partner's country, which leads to possi-

ble increase in inbound tourism. Moreover, as educational field is an important area of cooperation, schoolchildren are able to experience multiculturalism which has a positive effect on their overall growth.

Recently, Japanese local authorities have been increasing their links with foreign countries. However, most of the new exchange agreements were established with partners located in other Asian countries and United States. Europe, especially East-Central Europe has been widely omitted in their foreign strategies. Though, as it can be seen from the analysis, there are many benefits that can be obtained through mutual cooperation. However, limited number of partnerships between Japan and partners from Visegrad Group countries suggests that many local authorities are not aware of positive effects of exchange with each other. Creating platform to share successful experiences on subnational level combined with better promotional campaign on both sides, would definitely contribute to establishing more partnerships between those two areas. Research study shows that it is possible to establish successful relations between local authorities from Japan and Visegrad Group countries, however, effort on both sides has to be undertaken in order for make it happen.

#### Notes

- 1 Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 広域行政・市町村. Retrieved from: <https://www.soumu.go.jp/kouiki/kouiki.html> (Access: November 2020)
- 2 Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. *Japanese Local Governments with Affiliation Agreement by prefecture*. Retrieved from: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020).
- 3 Own compilation based on: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. *Japanese Local Governments with Affiliation Agreement by prefecture*. Retrieved from: <http://www.clair.or.jp/e/index.html> (Access: November 2020).
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