



Research Report

Making old friendships match more: Strategic development of Japan-Australia sister city arrangements

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Methodology

Questionnaire survey to the Japanese local governments

This research focuses on municipal-level international sister links between Japan and Australia. A survey questionnaire was sent to 103 Japanese local governments who have one or more sister city or friendship agreements with Australian local councils,¹ according to the lists of the Japan-Australia sister and friend city agreements provided by the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (hereafter CLAIR) in 2019. While almost all local governments established only one agreement, one town government has in total two relationships with each Australian city. The preliminary survey of this study found that one city in central Japan has terminated its agreement with its Australian counterpart.

The total number of responses was 78 (the number of responded agreements was 79), and all the responses completed the questionnaire form. This study examines the survey results in terms of the agreement rather than the municipality.

Interviews to the staffs and the local leaders in charge with a sister city in Japan and in Australia

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with some local authority staff members and citizen leaders who are involved in sister city programs between Japan and Australia. The respective interviews were held for at least 30 minutes and at maximum 90 minutes.

Research Ethics Compliance

This study is compliant with *the Guideline concerning Research Ethics at the University of Kitakyushu*.

¹ In this paper a Japanese municipal-level authority is referred to as “a local government” and an Australian municipal-level authority is referred to as “a local council”; this is in line with previous research and other documents.

Characteristics of Questionnaire Respondents

A wide range of Japanese local governments have the agreements with Australian local councils. The average population is 210,000 (Census 2019), ranging from three designated cities to some small-sized towns. The majority of the responses came from cities (77.2%), followed by towns (22.8%).

On the flip side, Australian local governments are smaller than their Japanese counterparts. The average population is 110,000 (The 2016 Census), including larger capital cities such as Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

Japan and some Australian states implemented large-scale local government amalgamations in 2000s. However, many of respondent Japanese municipalities were not amalgamated during 2000s, while 57.0% of their Australian counterparts have amalgamated. The largest number of respondents has the relationships with Australian local councils in New South Wales (NSW) (40.5%). Therefore, the amalgamation led by the NSW state government had a significant impact on some sister city activities.

In 1963, Yamato-Takada City in Nara established an affiliation with Lismore City, NSW, which was the first Japan-Australia sister city agreement. Some previous studies identify the rapid increase of sister city relationships during 1990s promoted by the central government's "*Kokusaika*" (internationalization of local governments and communities) policy. This survey also clarifies that several local governments established their agreements from the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

Results

Why did Japanese local governments choose their current counterparts in Australia?

Figure 1 (%)

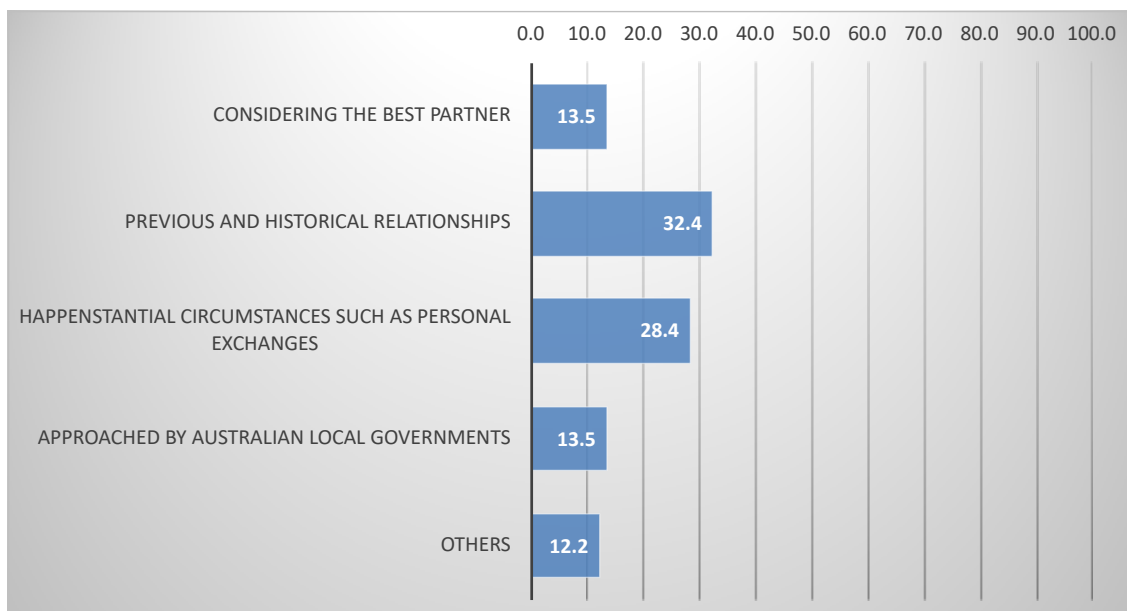


Figure 1 illustrates that many governments chose their partners based on contingent conditions rather than a strategic approach. As for the reasons behind which Japanese local governments most established international links, “Previous and historical relationships” (32.4%), ranked the highest, followed by “Happenstantial circumstances such as personal exchanges” (28.4%). An example of such a circumstance would be that JET program participants happened to connect both countries. On the other side, “Considering the best partner” and “Applied by Australian local governments” were in the minority (13.5%, 13.5% respectively) through all eras.

Sister City Policy

Of the respondents, 97.3% had not established a general policy regarding their international link and sister city. Recently, in Australia several local councils have developed a sister city policy specifying some conditions in order to choose international and domestic partners, the way of evaluating the current relationships, and so on.

Which entities implement the programs of a sister city agreement?

Figure 2 (Multiple answer, %)

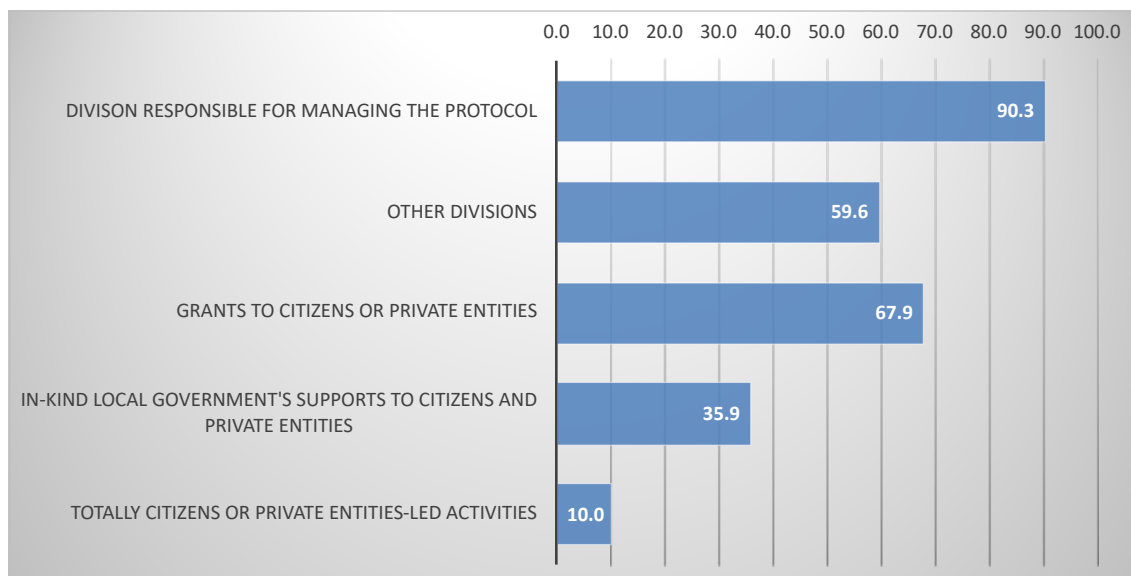


Figure 2 shows about the kind of entities implementing programs based on a sister city relationship in each city and town.

Firstly, several local governments implement the programs directly. Sections dedicated to policy planning and civic affairs are mostly divisions responsible for dealing with a protocol. In many cases, educational divisions (“the boards of education”) tend to cooperate with those protocol departments in order to conduct student and school exchange programs.

Secondly, in terms of programs indirect implementation, many respondents chose “grants” and “any other in-kind supports.” In those cases, international exchange associations (IEAs), which were mostly established by local governments, were likely to have played important roles in maintaining the sister city relationship. In most cases, a clear division of labour can be seen in implementing sister city programs. In short, local governments are responsible for organising a protocol or hosting mayoral delegations, while IEAs, citizen associations, or private companies drive individual exchange practices, receiving one or more grants from the local governments. While many agreements are managed mainly by departments of local governments, some are handled primarily by citizens. For instance, the sister city agreement established by Susono City, Shizuoka, and Frankston City, Victoria, has been managed by citizen volunteers. The Susono Overseas Friendship Association (SOFA) in Susono and The Frankston Susono Friendship Association (FSFA) in Frankston have been maintaining a long-lasting and matured relationship. Both have been organising several exchange programs themselves, including student exchanges. SOFA and FSFA have been able to build a robust friendship with each other for a long time. The incumbent

president of FSFA was in Susono as the first exchange student (SOFA, 2017). FSFA has been playing proactive roles for activating and maintaining the affiliation with Susono.

Finally, programs without any support by a governmental section are few (10%). Most of programs are more or less managed and supported by local government departments.

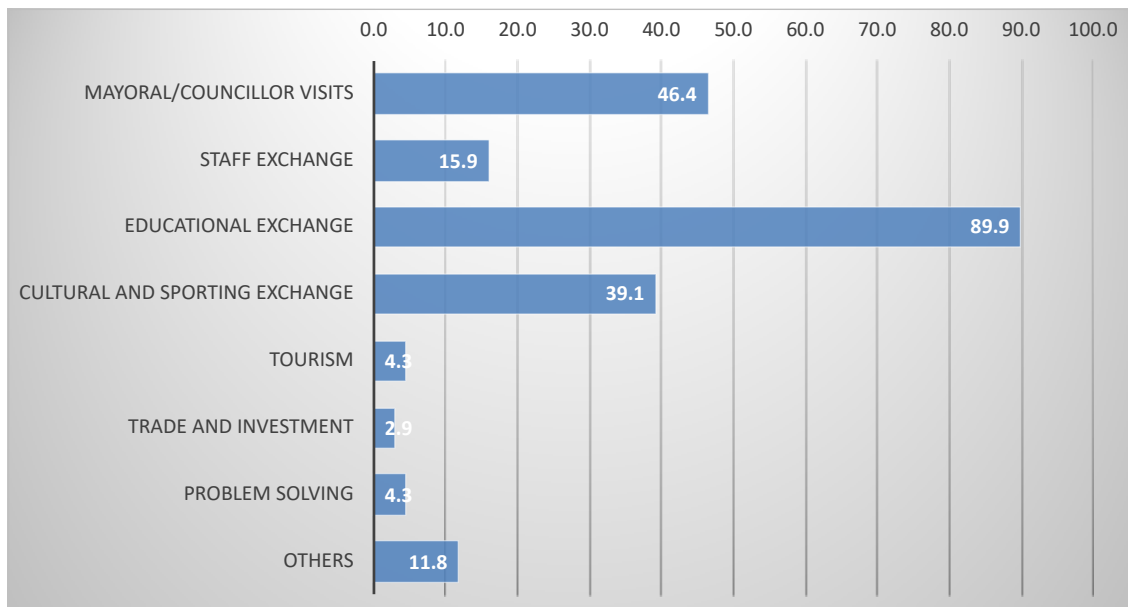
Number of staff in charge of a sister city relationship

In Japan, local governments have the closed-career personnel system different from local authorities in western democracies, including Australia. Based on it, mayors allocate the staff dealing with a city twinning. Therefore, all Japanese municipalities have full-time personnel in charge of the sister city relationship. Most of them have two full-time staff members per a municipality. However, only the one largest city has the staff dedicated to managing their sister cities. Normally the staff in charge of a sister city are responsible for some additional work in their local governments.

According to the respondent staffs, they feel that as a staff in charge of an international link, they need good communication skills and a high level of English proficiency to make the link successful.

Portfolio of activities based on a sister city relationship

Figure 3 (Multiple answer, %)



The results showed in the figure make clear that most Japanese local governments focus almost entirely on educational exchange (89.9%). This is followed by mayoral/councilor’s official visits (46.4%), cultural and sporting exchange (39.1%), and staff exchange (15.9%). Also, this figure illustrates that the respondents are not interested in economic development such as tourism promotion, trade and investment from overseas. Less than nearly 10% responds with local economic expectations. According to a survey conducted by Kevin O’Toole in 1999, the Japanese considered international understanding and educational exchange to be important rather than trade, investment and tourism (O’Toole, 2001). They have relied on the same idea since 1990s.

Additionally, they are not interested in problem-solving activities such as policy making related to many local issues, including environmental protection, elder care, technology transferring, and so forth. Takao (2010) emphasises that contemporary sister city relationships should treat public issues, in addition to traditional exchange programs, to a greater degree. The current relationships between Japan and Australia, however, have continued to be associated with the people-to-people approach.

Total and median amounts for sister city programs

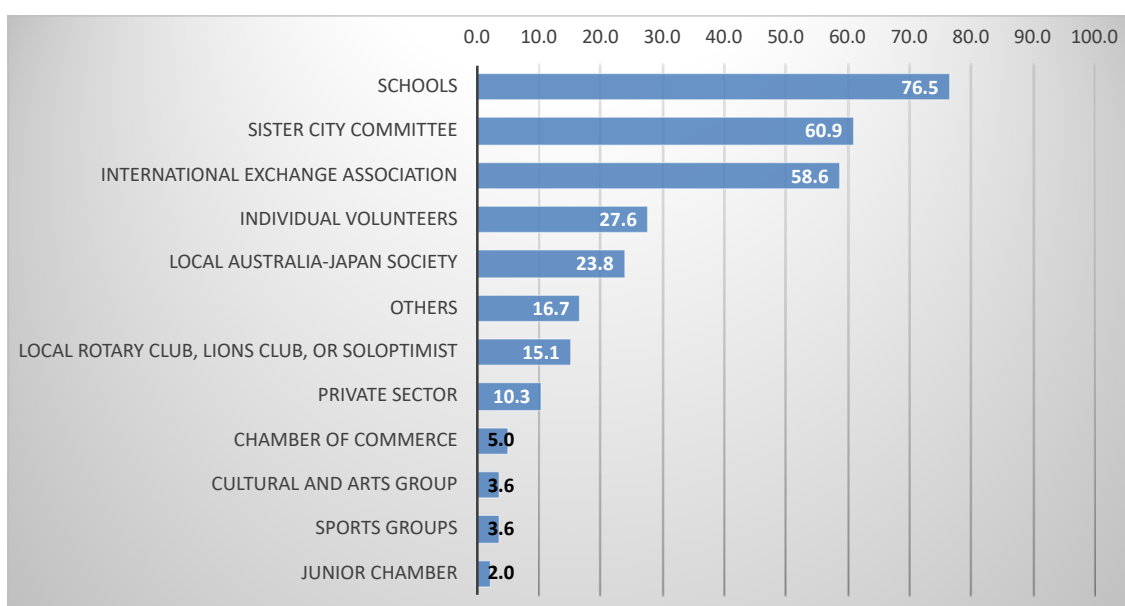
Table 1

	Total	Median
FY 2015	265,986,000 (AUD 3,417,525)	3,000,000 (AUD 38,546)
FY 2016	280,146,000 (AUD 3,599,460)	1,798,000 (AUD 23,102)
FY 2017	278,759,000 (AUD 3,581,639)	2,622,000 (AUD 33,689)
FY 2018	304,597,000 (AUD 3,913,619)	3,103,000 (AUD 39,869)
FY 2019	312,873,000 (AUD 4,019,954)	3,000,000 (AUD 38,546)

Table 1 illustrates the total amount and the median number of annual budgets allocated to sister city relationships each financial year (JPY and AUD², respectively). Overall, in terms of the median data, local governments have been tending to spend nearly 3,000,000-yen (about AUD 38,500 dollars) par year. The amount of money has grown over the past five years.

Participation of local entities in sister city programs

Figure 4 (%)



It is essential that a wide range of local entities, ranging from individual volunteers, community groups, and schools to local industry, participate in implementing exchange activities in order to create successful international links (Franco and Marmelo, 2014). What entities are participating in

² The AUD calculation bases on the data of yearly-average Telegraphic Transfer Buying in 2019, retrieved from the Mitsubishi UFJ Research & Consulting website (http://www.murc-kawasesouba.jp/fx/year_average.php).

sister city programs in each local community?³

The figure illustrates that the most significant participant comes from the educational sector, mainly including junior high schools and high schools that have the purpose of enhancing educational exchanges. This is followed by sister city committees and international exchange associations (IEAs).

Noteworthy is the activities of local Australia-Japan societies. These are organised in some places in Japan and play a significant role in promoting their mutual exchange. Although at first this study hypothesised that local Australia-Japan societies would not get involved in any official programs undertaken by the government sector, 23.8% of them are at least participating in the programs with some frequency.

On the other hand, corporations from the economic section, such as chambers of commerce, are unlikely to get involved in sister city programs.

Total and median number of visitors

Table 2

Visitors from Japan to Australia	Total	Median
2015	1,275	13
2016	1,076	12
2017	1,001	13
2018	1,153	14
2019	847	9
Visitors from Australia to Japan	Total	Median
2015	692	5
2016	585	5
2017	426	4
2018	763	6
2019	545	2

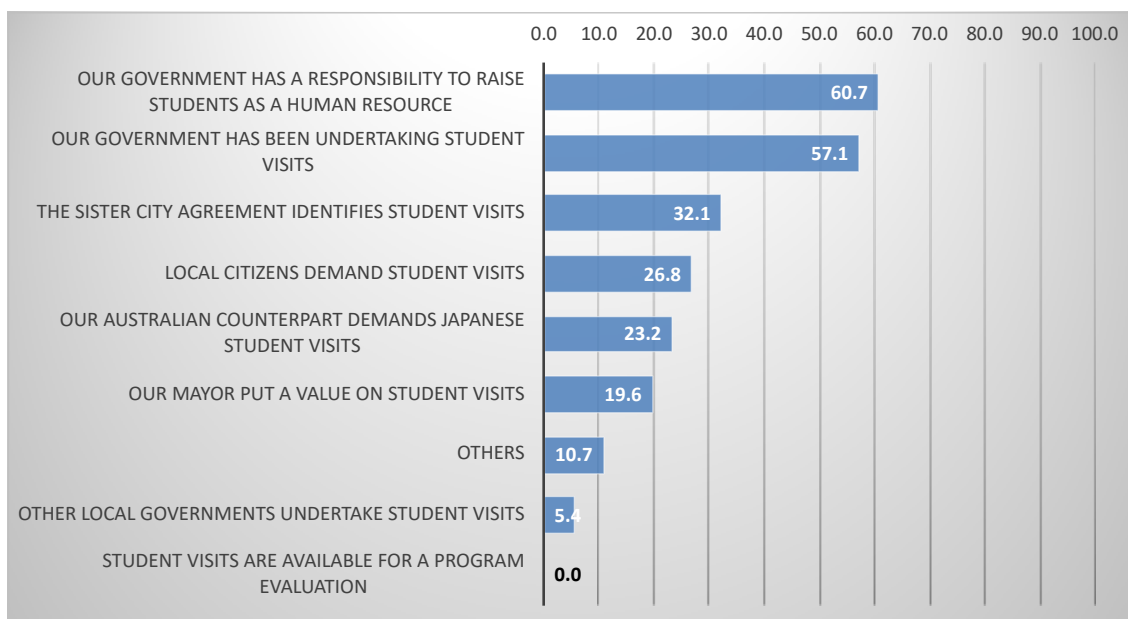
As indicated in Table 2, the number of Japanese visitors is larger than Australian visitors to Japan. This result reflects the essential difference between local governments in Japan and local

³ The question uses a five-point Likert scale, "usually involved," "often involved," "sometimes involved," "rarely involved," and "not involved." Figure 4 shows the data summing "usually involved" and "often involved." Each entity's parameter is different because all the entities mentioned in the questionnaire are not established in all the local government areas in a same way. For example, a junior chamber, organised by local young businesspersons, is generally established only in urban areas.

councils in Australia. The former is usually larger than the latter in terms of population size and budget scale. Therefore, Japanese can afford to spend money for visitors to some extent and have departments dedicated to sister city programs, compared to most local councils in Australia that service their sister city relationships on a very part-time basis (O’Toole, 2000).

Student visit programs to Australia

Figure 5 (Multiple answer, %)



Of the Japanese programs, 81.2% engages in student visits to Australia. The result coincides with the portfolio showing the importance of an educational exchange in Figure 2. Figure 5 indicates the reasons why the respondents undertake a program that focuses on student visits. Over 60% chose that they have a responsibility to develop local human resources. For example, Miura City at Kanagawa Prefecture emphasised the meaning of a student visit program to Warrnambool as it can bring participants inter-cultural awareness, international understanding and more students exchange opportunities (Committee for International Student Exchange Program at Miura City, 2020).

In contrast, no respondents recognised the program as being available for policy evaluation. Although the number of participants in any overseas visit programs would be a useful KPI for policy evaluation at a governmental sector, anyhow it is evident that the Japanese local governments do not recognise policy evaluation as a reason for engaging in student visits overseas.

Have sister city programs ever been terminated or become dormant?

Since each agreement was established, 42.0% of those have been terminated temporarily or become dormant. Respondents indicated several reasons as follows.

First is the spread of virus infection and a natural disaster. Notably, the new N1H1 influenza virus in 2009 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 ceased many exchange programs. In 2020, the coronavirus has also been responsible for suspending all overseas visit projects.

Second is the large-scale and rapidly progressing amalgamation of local councils in NSW. Some respondents have not been able to contact any Australian staff in charge of a sister city connection after amalgamation. While, according to the Sister Cities Australia's document, the Central Coast Council, NSW, terminated the agreement with Tanabe, Wakayama (Sister Cities Australia, 2020), it seems that some Australian local councils did stop contacting their counterparts and have not yet clarified the termination of their sister city agreements.

Third is resource shortage in secondary schools in Australia. In all states, they run on a stand-alone basis, depending in part on financial support from each state government. Therefore, schools must decide whether they will participate in a sister city program, considering how their resources are to be distributed to the programs.

This study also found some cases related to the reactivation of a dormant relationship. The most notable is the case of Marion City, SA, which established a sister city agreement with Kokubunji City, Tokyo in 1993. They commenced student exchange as well as an economic exchange. While the latter was terminated after a while, the former program continued for over 20 years, albeit changing hosting schools (Gooding, Gibbs & Pillora, 2015). In 2015, however, the relationship entirely became dormant because the school in Marion that was hosting the Kokubunji's students had decided to stop its involvement in the program. Nevertheless, the city council decided to keep the link with Kokubunji as a result of an evaluation process that was based on the Sister City Policy adopted in 2013 (The City of Marion, General Council Meeting, 2015). According to the agenda of the Marion council meeting, they chose to "pursue a relationship that explores opportunities for schools/other educational organisations to participate" (The City of Marion, General Council Meeting, 2015).

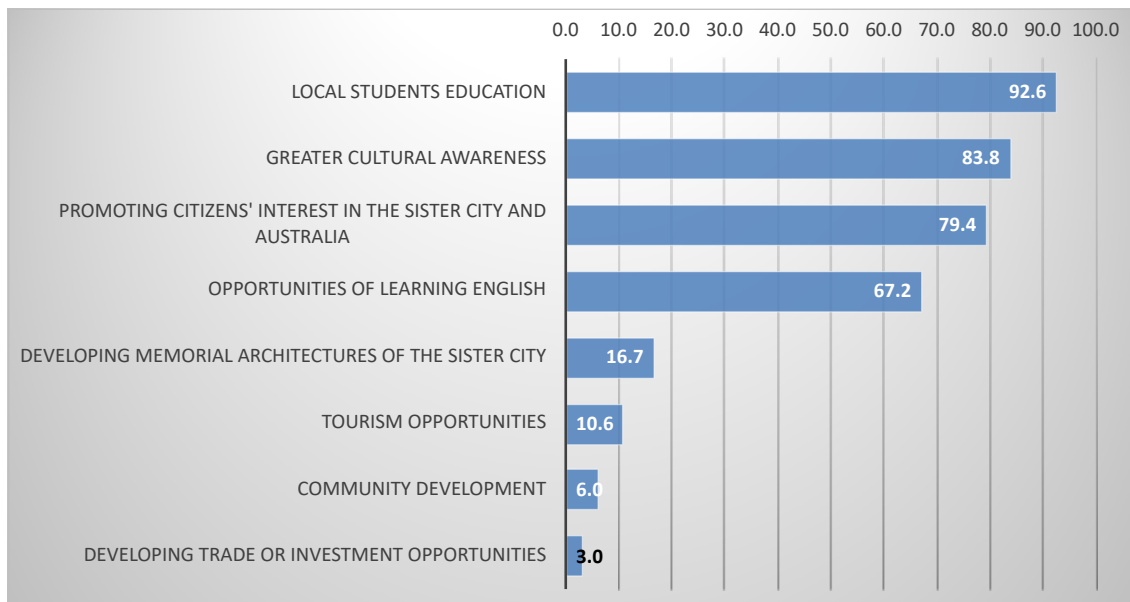
Activity level of sister city programs

In an evaluation of the activity level of programs undertaken by each local jurisdiction, based on a five-point Likert scale, 21.2% of the respondents told their programs are "strongly active" followed by "somewhat active" with 43.9%. It should be noted that most of the respondent local

governments consider their sister city links with Australia successful.

Major benefits of sister city relationships

Figure 6 (%)

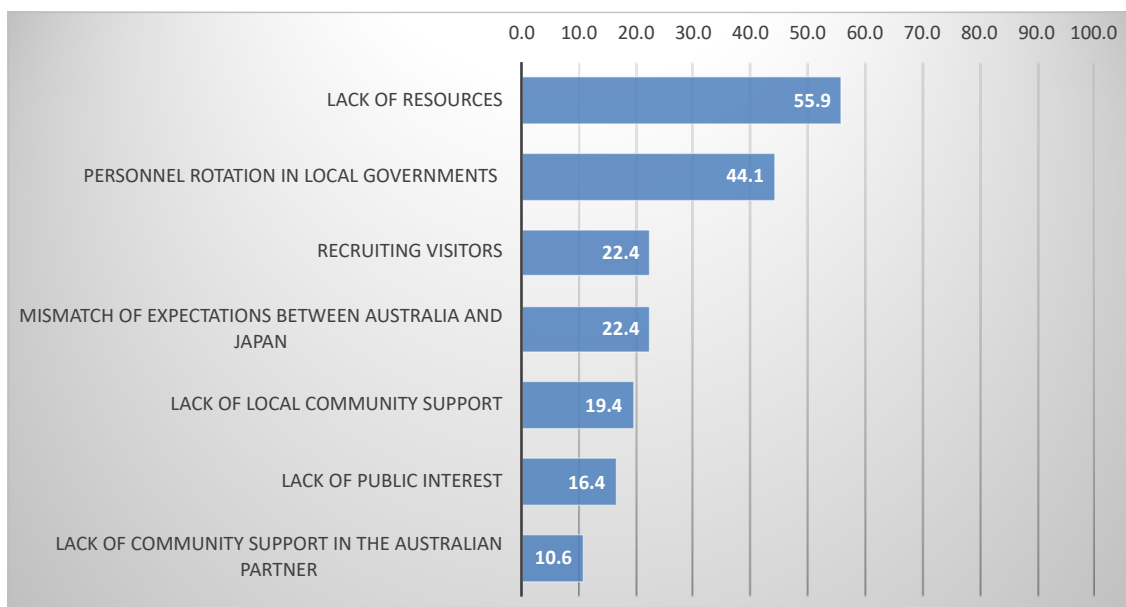


What are the major benefits attained by a sister city link?⁴ Most local governments saw local student education as a major benefit of sister cities (92.6%). This was followed by a greater cultural awareness (83.6%), citizens’ interest to the sister city and Australia (79.4%), and opportunities to learn English (67.2%). On the flip side, economic benefits, such as trade, investment, and tourism, were not attained by sister links.

⁴ The question uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Figure 6 illustrates the data summing “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree.”

Problems associated with sister city relationships

Figure 7 (%)



Several local governments felt that their twinning with Australia had some problems⁵. Of the respondents, 55.9% highlighted a lack of resources as a problem with their sister city arrangements. The next was a frequent rotation system of local government personnel. All of municipalities adopted a closed career system in which most staff usually rotated the positions up constantly until their retirement. That is why it was difficult to keep any partnerships with the stakeholders highly intimate (O'Toole, 2000).

This is a very telling figure as it finds that Japan-Australia sister city arrangements might not be mismatched. Previous studies (O'Toole, 2000; 2001; Jain, 2005; Tsutsumi and Mouer, 2010) argued that there is "mismatch" between Japanese municipalities and Australian local councils. In short, whereas Japanese seek to promote intercultural awareness and mutual understanding, Australian emphasise economic development as well as greater cultural or educational opportunities. However, in this survey, only 22.4% reported mismatched expectations between them.

Chung and Mascitelli identified that the Australian sister links with Japanese municipalities are the most successful compared to other countries (2009, pp. 231-232). In line with their finding, the Japan-Australia city twinning is one of prosperous international links in the world.

⁵ The question uses the five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Figure 7 illustrates the data related to "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree."

Factors that influenced sister city agreements and those programs

Figure 8 (%)

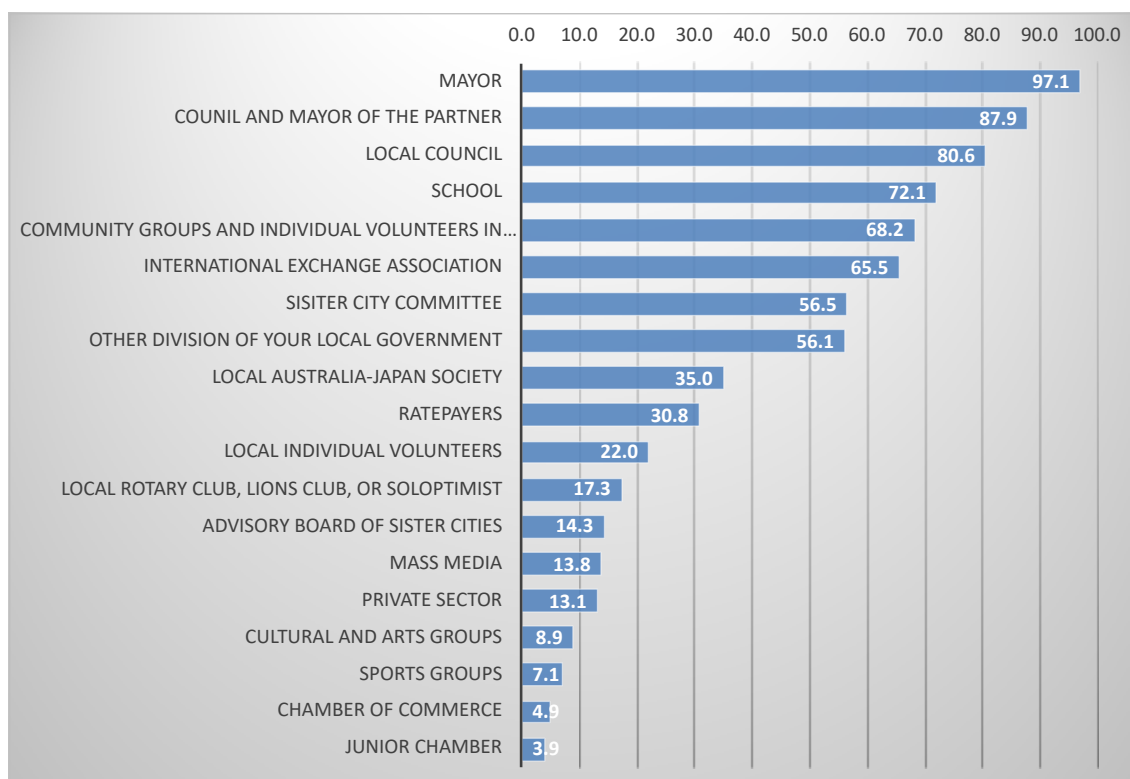


Figure 8 demonstrates the result of the question about who has an influence on deciding the direction and the content of sister links⁶. Most respondents report that their mayors have a far greater impact on a sister city arrangement (97.1%), followed by councils and mayors of the Australian counterparts (87.9%) and Japanese local councils (80.6%). Schools also have an immense power relative to implementing student exchanges.

This research should focus on mass media's power. Only a few municipalities feel the influence of local media (13.8%). There has not been any coverage in the Japanese press identifying any problems regarding sister city programs. On the other hand, Australian news media is likely to criticise the money spent on some sister city programs, in particular, mayoral trips to overseas as a "gravy train junket." For example, an editorial in the *Herald Sun* argues that "sister cities sound like a nice concept but you have to ask how the relationships are benefiting the humble ratepayer", revealing some sister city programs may waste a significant amount of money (Editorial, Sunday Herald Sun, 2014). In line with Gooding, Gibbs, and Pillora (2015), local councils may feel a massive amount of pressure from news coverage when designing and implementing their

⁶ On a five-point Likert scale, the Figure 8 illustrates the data related to "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree."

city-twinning programs. In general, both local councils and the news media in Australia tend to consider a “value for money” principle in terms of new public management, a popular managerial philosophy in contemporary public administration that emphasises the efficiency and effectiveness of public services (O’Toole, 2001, p. 406).

Formal arrangement for evaluation

The Marion experience, mentioned previously, indicates that it is significant to acknowledge any formal arrangement for evaluation of sister city programs, other than the normal accountability of how the budget was spent (see O’Toole, 2000, p. 52). In the early 2000s, very few councils had formal evaluation procedures in Australia as well as in Japan (O’Toole, 2001, p. 413).

The questionnaire survey identifies that 29.0% of the Japanese respondents have formal policy evaluation processes regarding sister links. But of those respondents, most point to an evaluation as being part of an annual budget process instead of an opportunity in which outside entities are able to get involved. More significant is to constantly review a sister city agreement as a means of realising a prosperous international city twinning. For instance, Inagawa Town, Hyogo, and their counterpart, Ballarat City in Victoria, sign a memorandum of understanding whenever mayoral delegation visits each other every five years (Inagawa Committee of 25th Anniversary of the Sister City Agreement, 2014; Inagawa Town Government, 2019). Reaffirmation functions as an evaluation process of sister city programs.

According to a survey regarding China-Australia friendship links conducted by Fan et al. (2019), in cities where relationships are regularly evaluated and where there is a formal set of criteria to evaluate the success of the relationship, there is generally a perception of greater sister city relationship success (Fan, Huang, Walker, & Bartram, 2019, p. 26). This study reveals that a formal evaluation process is one of the significant factors that helps to activate city twinning.

Cost sharing

Of the respondents, 30.9% have rules clarifying cost sharing when implementing the sister city programs. Unless sister cities put in place rules about how funds are to be spent for programs, they should implement good ways of spending money in a flexible manner.

Regarding flexible responses by entities, this study came across a good example that was initiated by Mobarra City, Chiba, to prevent their exchange program with Salisbury, SA, from becoming dormant. Both cities have put a value on educational exchange since the establishment of the agreement in 2002. Implementing the exchanges, they decided that all costs associated with

a student visit would be covered by the hosting side. As for the student delegation from Mobara, the Salisbury council has had all responsibilities, including organizing host families within that locality. In 2015, however, the Salisbury council advised Mobara that they would be unable to host students for a number of reasons. Of those, the most significant was the introduction of a new police screening process led by the Department of Education and Child Development in 2014. According to the agenda of the council, host families participated in the 2014 delegation were contacted if they would be willing to host again in 2015, but only three families had registered an interest, although the program needed at least about 14 families to host visitors. The council argued that it is highly unlikely that sufficient host families would be secured in time to enable all the new police screening to occur, and subsequently proposed that the delegation in 2015 be cancelled. After receiving the proposal, Mobara replied to Salisbury that they would like to enable the student visit to be undertaken via an independent home stay agent in Australia. As a result, the visit was made possible due to both government's efforts. Mobarra city reconsidered and changed the way of organising host families. On the other hand, the Salisbury council decided to cover costs associated with the police screening for host families (The Council of Salisbury, 2015a; 2015b).

Prospects of sister city links between Australia and Japan

Table 2 (%)

Continuing the current programs	82.6
Making a major modification	1.4
Making a partial modification	7.2
Ceasing the programs	1.4
Terminating the arrangement	0.0
Do not know	7.2

Table 2 indicates that 82.6% of the local governments perceives that they would like to maintain the current arrangement and programs. There may be two different reasons for this. First is the robustness of Japan-Australia sister city arrangements. Second is simply the path-dependency of each program due to the lack of evaluation. This survey was not able to clarify which point is significant.

This table also offers telling information regarding the points related to “ceasing the arrangement” and “do not know”, which strongly impacts the local amalgamation of the sister city arrangements. In particular, the NSW local council amalgamations in 2016 led some sister links to

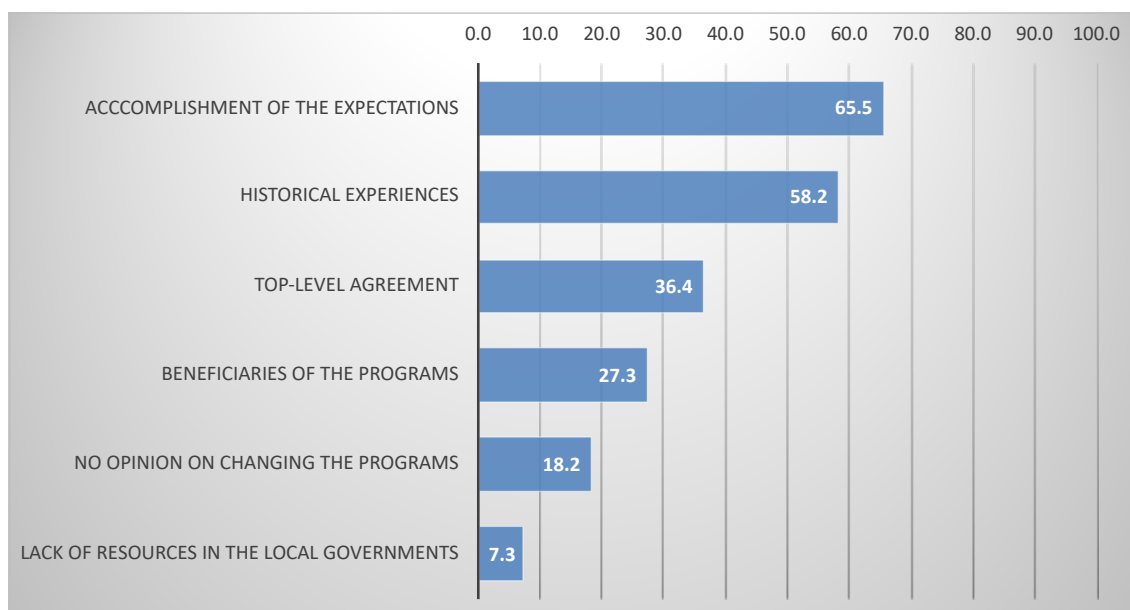
be terminated or inactivated. Firstly, there was the one termination case. Central Coast Council terminated the agreement that the ex-Wyong council established with Tanabe, Wakayama after the amalgamation. Secondly, several inactivated cases can be seen. In all those cases, the new jurisdictions resulted in dealing with agreements with Japan, in the aftermath of the merger of the local councils who had formalised the sister city with their Japanese counterparts. Each city seems to have chosen the one agreement with Japan. Northern Beaches City, where three cities who had established links with Japan had merged, now shows the agreement with Taito, Tokyo, on the website. Also, Snowy Monaro Regional Council seems to have maintained exchange programs with Yamaga, Kumamoto⁷, whereas the agreement established by the former Snowy River Council with Kusatsu, Gunma, cannot be seen on the council website.

In contrast to the above cases, Dubbo Regional Council reactivated a link with Japan that once had become dormant. This link was established between ex-Wellington City and Toyama City, Toyama Prefecture, in 1992. Whereas, since 2012, there had been no activities between the two cities, the council has been undertaking an exchange program with Minokamo City, Gifu. In 2018, the Mayor Ben Shields visited Toyama to discuss the sister city relationship, focusing on seeking to develop an industry-based link. Mr. Shields explained his trip to Toyama as follows: “the Dubbo region delegation visit was to reconfirm our relationship with Toyama post amalgamation [...] our reconfirmed Toyama relationship gives us a sophisticated opportunity to focus on both agricultural and environmental outcomes. [...]Dubbo and Toyama clearly have a great opportunity to share knowledge and skills for the benefit of both of our communities” (Shields, 2018; see also Running, 2018).

Figure 9 illustrates the reasons why the local governments will continue the current programs. Evidenced from the figure, the Japan-Australia sister links are a successful international arrangement as over 60% of the respondents indicates that their programs with their Australian counterparts have been able to achieve the aim of their agreements. The next is historical experiences with 58.2%. This result suggests that, from the viewpoint of the Japanese local governments, the current programs for education exchanges have been able to realise a significant number of benefits for their communities.

⁷ See also the Snowy Monaro Council (2019).

Figure 9 (Multiple answer, %)



Municipalities who did not undertake any programs for this half-decade

Nine respondents report they did not engage in programs from 2015 to 2019. This study identifies three reasons for that.

First is “missing contact” with Australian counterparts. The important factor identified is the statewide local amalgamations in NSW, as had been discussed above. After amalgamated, some Japanese could not stay in touch with the staff of their partners and therefore could not reaffirm their agreement. Another is the retirement of one council staff who put a value on the sister affiliation with Japan. According to the respondent, his/her successor has been stressing other international links.

Second is a political or diplomatic reason concerning Japanese scientific whaling in the Antarctic and dolphin fishing in Taiji town, Wakayama. One municipality received the letter of disapproval of the Japanese whaling as well as dolphin hunt from its partner’s mayor, and, from that point on, their mutual relationship rapidly declined.

Third is the lack of financial resources. The smaller the size of the municipality size, the more governments cannot afford to spend much money on enhancing their sister city relationships.

Of those cities, three municipalities will not change, improve, or terminate their agreements at all, while four respondents report that they have no idea about how they will cope with the agreements in future.

Conclusion

This study concludes that sister city arrangements between Japan and Australia have been currently able to realise successful matching rather than the mismatching pointed out repeatedly by previous research. This strong matching is twofold. Firstly, larger cities have been promoting multi-dimensional relationships, ranging from traditional people-to-people exchanges to economic development. In short, the linear evolutionary development theory that hypothesises a sister city relationship will process the stages of development from intercultural understanding to trade, investment, and tourism promotion (Cremer, Buruin, and Deput, 1998; Ramasamy and Cremer, 1999; O'Toole, 2000; 2001; Baycan-Levent, Kundak, and Gulumser, 2008) is true mainly for those larger cities' links like Osaka's arrangement with Melbourne. Secondly, most of the small- and middle-sized municipalities in both countries tend to achieve a matched partnership in terms of educational exchanges. It is very difficult for them to promote robust economic exchanges because there are no industries able to adequately prepare international trades and investments. As a result, it seems that the Japanese and Australian focused on the advantage of student exchange programs as the legitimate purpose for their sister city arrangement (Ota, 1990, pp. 235-236; O'Toole, 2000, pp. 50-51; Mouer, 2011).

Mouer proposes a very interesting scenario in which local communities should provide opportunities for younger citizens to be involved in cross-cultural training and enhance their capacity to be part of larger cross-national networks (Mouer, 2011, p. 83). He also reveals that they should also prepare retraining so that the youth involved in the exchange can be trained as human resources who identify with their communities and can serve to revitalize it (Mouer, 2011, pp. 83-84).

His argument suggests that a sister city arrangement, a simple style of personal exchanges, can help younger citizens get the skills required for globalisation as well as their attachment to the local community. One respondent emphasises an important outcome from the sister city programs as follows. "Our students who experienced overseas things are able to immensely grow and strengthen their deeper attachment to our community as well as the partner city." In other words, international links of subnational communities help cultivate human resources realising the "glocalisation" (e.g., Robertson, 2006). This theoretical term assumes that a local community or municipality should be a significant unit even in the globalised society, functioning as a gateway that can autonomously promote and reinvigorate the locals in the 21st century. In the glocalisation, "the local is not simply a passive recipient of single, unitary global processes. Processes flow from

the local to the global as much as from the global to the local “(Short, Breitbach, Buckman, & Essex, 2000).

In addition, a government staff exchange program has significant benefits for sub-national governments, empowering their administrative responsibilities in terms of information exchange and technology transfer in local administration. However, as showed earlier, this has not been an important domain in the current Japan-Australia sister city arrangements. However, this type of exchange can be seen as a tool for municipalities to strengthen their abilities to cope with glocalisation.

The global spread of the COVID-19 has stopped all overseas visit programs and also made international relations unstable and turbulent. Grassroots-level links, including a traditional city twinning, help ensure the realization of robust and long-lasting international networks. Therefore, based on the friendships cultivated over years, Japan and Australia must consider any desirable way of mutual exchange if they are to be effective in the new coronavirus era. This study would be helpful to any stakeholder seeking to elucidate ways of strengthening the old friendships between Japan and Australia.

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