



# Social Marketing Strategies to Attract Immigrants to Depopulated Areas: The Case of Hyogo Prefecture in Japan

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## Learning Objectives

1. To explore the social marketing strategies that a prefecture in Japan is employing to attract people to immigrate to its depopulated areas to help sustain these communities.
2. To search for solutions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

## 1 Introduction

Depopulation is a serious problem that many developed countries face, including Japan. After reaching its peak in 2009 (128,555,189 people), the Japanese population decreased in 2010 (Worldometer, 2022). Low birth rates, impressive longevity, and unstable socioeconomic conditions are reasons behind this constant decrease. This trend seriously affects many areas since people, particularly the younger ones, want to live and work in bigger cities. However, due to COVID-19, people in urban areas in Japan have been seriously considering a lifestyle change. In 2021, the population of Tokyo, the most significant metropolitan, reduced for the first time in 26 years because many had left there to live in less populated places (Kobayashi, 2022).

Hyogo, a prefecture in the West of Japan, has been one of the most popular immigration destinations (ITmedia, 2021). Hyogo is a large prefecture (approximately 8400 square kilometers) with a considerable population (about 5.4 million

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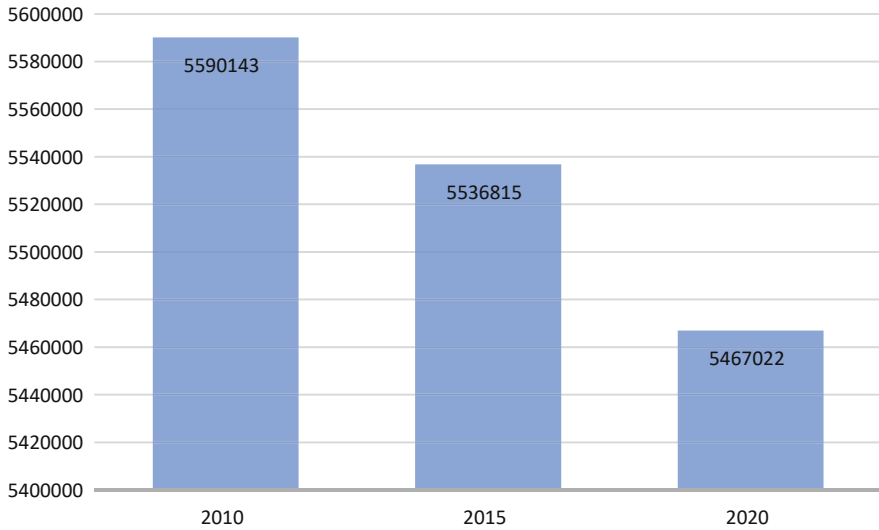
**Fig. 1** Kansai region map.  
 Source: 白地図専門店  
 (Shirochizu senmonten)  
 (2022)



people) (Fig. 1). Nonetheless, the people mainly concentrate in big cities like Kobe, Himeji, and Amagasaki. The situations of other cities and towns are less fortunate than these big cities. Therefore, Hyogo has been implementing many strategies to attract people from other prefectures or local areas to relocate to its communities.

This case analyzes the methods implemented by Hyogo Prefecture from the perspectives of social marketing theory and stakeholder theory to identify the appeals of such practices. It will provide important insights into the management of immigration to depopulated areas to help sustain these regions in the long term.

This case uses primary data gathered at two cities and secondary data found on official websites, promotional materials, and social media platforms. The stakeholder theory guides the data collection process to ensure that the voices of the local government, the locals, and the immigrants are all heard. In addition, the social marketing theory leads the data analysis process to identify the appeals of the immigration promotion methods implemented by the local government. Specifically, this case focuses on locals' and immigrants' attitudes toward such methods. The perspectives of the locals and immigrants involve the internal and external marketing efforts, respectively. If the attitudes are positive, the methods can be regarded as the strong ones, and vice versa.



**Fig. 2** Hyogo's population change. Source: City Population (2022) and Japan Statistic Bureau (2022)

## 2 Case Development

Hyogo's population has decreased over the last ten years (Fig. 2—see Table 2 in Appendix for more detail). Big cities like Kobe and Himeji have lost the most substantial numbers of people. Smaller towns, such as Ichikawa and Kamikawa, have also seriously reduced their sizes. Akashi, a tiny neighbor of Kobe, and Kato, a city located north of Kobe, are the few exceptions, with a somewhat healthy increase in population.

Hyogo Prefecture's government, in their 2030 outlook, predicts that Hyogo's population will keep decreasing. The only population fragments that will increase will be older people (over 75 years of age) and tourists. The prefecture has no feasible solution to improve its natural birth rate. Instead, it has relied heavily on strategies to attract people from other areas, especially those currently residing in larger cities (e.g., Tokyo), to immigrate to Hyogo.

Specifically, the prefecture has been running a website<sup>1</sup> emphasizing solely on this issue. Two offices in Kobe and Tokyo provided consultation to those interested, together with the online service. Advertisements and promotional events have been periodically undertaken, primarily via online channels such as YouTube.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup><https://www.yume-hyogo.com/>

<sup>2</sup>Some examples include:

Hyogo's video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QppJ\\_S8FZZ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QppJ_S8FZZ0)

Itami's video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C18YAutQJuw>

**Table 1** Immigration facilitation strategies

	Akashi	Itami	Kato
Housing		– Up to 500,000 yen for under-40 couples	– Support for newly married couples of up to 300,000 yen – Support for working households of up to 500,000 yen – Support for repairing vacant houses of up to 1,500,000 yen
Childcare	– Free for second and subsequent children	– Free for children aged 4–5 at licensed facilities or financial support of up to 25,700 yen at other facilities	– Free for children under five years old – Financial support of 30,000 yen for children under five years old
Healthcare	– Free for children under 15 years old (junior high schoolers)	– Free or reduced for children under 15 years old (junior high schoolers)	– Free for children under 15 years old (junior high schoolers)
Education	– Small classes in elementary school (up to 30 students per class) – After-class activities provided at 28 elementary schools – Intakes of up to 2000 children at childcare facilities		

Source: Adapted from 夢かなうひょうご (Yumekanau Hyogo) (2022)

In addition, each city has devised and implemented its strategies to attract immigrants better (Table 1). Overall, localities in Hyogo have been focusing on providing support in four major areas: housing, childcare, healthcare, and education. The specific support often depends on the budget and facilities available in each city. If the immigration or the post-immigration life is regarded as a product, such financial and structural support can be considered sales promotion strategies. The agents in charge of these strategies are the local governments and their staff.

Moreover, veteran immigrants have also been participating in these marketing campaigns. In a sense, they can help broadcast the information about immigration on

Kato's video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW42Kn\\_Kx8Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW42Kn_Kx8Q)

Toyoka's video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UPciiyOV44&t=271s>

Taka's video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IADelaFWz0c>



**Fig. 3** A glimpse of Akashi. Source: photo AC (2022)

social media platforms, such as YouTube and Twitter, or via word-of-mouth channels. In another sense, these individuals will support the potential immigrants and newcomers to gather trial experiences, find suitable land, house, and job, and settle in the new environments.

The marketing activities aiming at potential immigrants from the outside are part of the external marketing strategy. They are designed to affect immigrants' intentions and decisions concerning relocation in the short term. In the long run, they are expected to assist the immigrants' daily work, ensure their satisfaction with life, and improve their subjective well-being. Depending on the locality's natural and social conditions and the immigrants' expectations, the appeal of such activities may differ. For example, immigrants to Akashi appreciate the city's geographical location and other support for childbearing and rearing (Fig. 3). Alternatively, immigrations to Kato favor the natural environment guaranteeing a more relaxing lifestyle and the social environment created by the friendly residents (Fig. 4). These observations are obtained after cross-checking the information broadcasted by local governments on their official websites and social media platforms (e.g., YouTube) and the information contributed by the immigrants on their personal social media pages (e.g., Twitter). The following quotes help demonstrate the abovementioned observations.

*Family, 30s, currently residing in Akashi city: I [the husband] chose Akashi because it is easy to commute to our workplaces. Another reason was that Akashi is so close to the sea that my wife is fond of. In addition, I [the wife] heard that it is easy to raise children here. When I was pregnant, I got a free taxi ticket, which helped me to go to the obstetrics and*



**Fig. 4** A glimpse of Kato. Source: photo AC (2022)

*gynecology department. [When the baby was born] the diaper delivery staff checked the baby's condition, so I felt relieved. There also is financial support so you can raise your child with peace of mind.*<sup>3</sup>

Female, 20s, currently residing in Kato city: “*When I first came to the head office [of my company] in Kato, I was surprised because the city was more back-country than I expected. However, I decided [to relocate] without hesitation because the job offer was what I wanted to do. . . [Life here] is convenient because everything you need is within walking distance. Even though there is only one train from Kakogawa Station, the first train, it still is commutable. I think it's easier to have a car, but I'm not confident in driving . . . Maybe I will get in a car someday. [Overall,] Hyogo has a fashionable city of Kobe, is close to the sea, and has mountains and ski resorts in the north. Isn't it attractive that you can find everything in one prefecture, from shopping to the outdoors?*”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, there should be some internal marketing initiatives targeting the locals to inform them about the goal regarding immigration and to gain their support on this issue. Usually, the goals are included in the development plans, and residents may be consulted about these contents to some degree. Nonetheless, the

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Akashi city's website <https://www.city.akashi.lg.jp/> (2022)

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Akashi city's website <https://www.city.akashi.lg.jp/> (2022)

actual internal marketing efforts are largely missing. This observation was reached after analyzing official documents released by the local governments and discussing the issue with a colleague researcher.

Surprisingly, the locals do not care much about the immigration issue. For example, there are only a few opinions of Akashi's residents, while there are none from the people in Kato on Twitter. Among the former's tweets, the majority have a positive attitude. However, one individual criticizes the overspending on immigrants, and another links immigration with tax revenue increase. To further confirm these observations, some fieldwork research was undertaken, interviewing the residents in Akashi and Kato.<sup>5</sup> Below are some relevant quotes.

Male, 40s, currently residing in Akashi city: *I favor [increasing the number of immigrants to Akashi City]. The more residents there are, the better the governmental services will probably be, and the more taxes will generate. . . I also think that the local government should provide some after-sales or follow-up services [in addition to the initial support]. It is necessary to create an environment where it is easy [for the immigrants] to get into local community associations.*<sup>6</sup>

Female, 30s, currently residing in Kato city: *I think it is good [to increase the number of immigrants to Kato City]. If the number of people increases, the service will improve, and the taxes will also increase. [Regarding the promotion policies], since child-rearing support is substantial, I have no complaints about this. However, as a local, I feel bad if people move here only because of governmental support.*<sup>7</sup>

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### 3 Conclusion

Hyogo Prefecture and its communities are applying social marketing to help tackle the prominent issue of depopulation. There are specific strategies commonly implemented by the prefectural government and many policies initiated by the local administrations. Overall, they help attract outside immigrants to Hyogo and its cities and towns in the first place and ensure decent living and working conditions there later on.

However, although the marketing strategies are mostly positively evaluated, they are designed mainly for the attention and benefit of the immigrants, the external audience. An internal marketing approach aiming at the locals, those heavily involved in and affected by any immigration-oriented policies, is

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<sup>5</sup>The author had an assistant who undertook some fieldwork research and interviewed the residents in Akashi and Kato.

<sup>6</sup>Author's fieldwork interview.

<sup>7</sup>Author's fieldwork interview.

largely missing. An extension in the social marketing efforts' focus is particularly needed.

Overall, social marketing strategies can support the promotion of immigration and life after immigration (the product). Nonetheless, the actual economic, sociocultural, natural, and political conditions must be created, maintained, and delivered correctly to guarantee the real product quality. The impacts of social marketing, then, can be maximized.

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## 4 Discussion Questions

**Question 1**—What do you think about the strategies implemented by Hyogo Prefecture and its cities? If you are a Japanese citizen or a foreigner permanently residing in Japan, are you willing to move to Hyogo? What do you think the local governments could do better to attract more immigrants in terms of external marketing? What do you think the local governments should do to inform the residents about their visions and ensure their positive attitudes toward long-term and large-scale immigration?

**Question 2**—Is your current place of living or origin facing the depopulation problem? What does the local government do to address this issue? What do you think they could do better?

**Question 3**—How much do you think social marketing can contribute to addressing the depopulation issue? Do you think similar strategies could be used to manage the overpopulation problem?

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## Appendix



**Table 2** Hyogo population

	2010	2015	2020	2010–2015 change	2015–2020 change
Kobe	1,544,200	1,537,272	1525,152	−6928	−12,120
Himeji	536,270	535,664	530,495	−606	−5169
Nishinomiya	482,640	487,850	485,587	5210	−2263
Amagasaki	453,748	452,563	459,593	−1185	7030
Akashi	290,959	293,409	303,601	2450	10,192
Kakogawa	266,937	267,435	260,878	498	−6557
Takarazuka	225,700	224,903	226,432	−797	1529
Itami	196,127	196,883	198,138	756	1255
Kawanishi	156,423	156,375	152,321	−48	−4054
Sanda	114,216	112,691	109,238	−1525	−3453
Ashiya	93,238	95,350	93,922	2112	−1428
Takasago	93,901	91,030	87,722	−2871	−3308
Toyooka	85,592	82,250	77,489	−3342	−4761
Miki	81,009	77,178	75,294	−3831	−1884
Tatsuno	80,518	77,419	74,316	−3099	−3103
Tamba	67,757	64,660	61,471	−3097	−3189
Ono	49,680	48,580	47,562	−1100	−1018
Ako	50,523	48,567	45,892	−1956	−2675
Minamiawaji	49,834	46,912	44,137	−2922	−2775
Kasai	47,993	44,313	42,700	−3680	−1613
Awaji	46,459	43,977	41,967	−2482	−2010
Sumoto	47,254	44,258	41,236	−2996	−3022
Kato	40,181	40,310	40,645	129	335
Tamba- Sasayama	43,263	41,490	39,611	−1773	−1879
Nishiwaki	42,802	40,866	38,673	−1936	−2193
Shiso	40,938	37,773	34,819	−3165	−2954
Harima	33,183	33,739	33,604	556	−135
Taishi	33,438	33,690	33,477	252	−213
Inami	31,026	31,020	30,268	−6	−752
Inagawa	31,739	30,838	29,680	−901	−1158
Asago	32,814	30,805	28,989	−2009	−1816
Aioi	31,158	30,129	28,355	−1029	−1774
Yabu	26,501	24,288	22,129	−2213	−2159
Fukusaki	19,830	19,738	19,377	−92	−361
Taka	23,104	21,200	19,261	−1904	−1939
Kami	19,696	18,070	16,064	−1626	−2006
Sayo	19,265	17,510	15,863	−1755	−1647
Kamigori	16,636	15,224	13,879	−1412	−1345
Shin-onsen	16,004	14,819	13,318	−1185	−1501
Ichikawa	13,288	12,300	11,231	−988	−1069
Kamikawa	12,289	11,452	10,616	−837	−836
Total	5,590,143	5,536,815	5,467,022	−53,328	−69,793

Source: Adapted from City Population (2022) and Japan Statistic Bureau (2022)

## Teaching/Classroom Notes

### Synopsis

This case adopts social marketing theory to analyze the strategies aiming at attracting immigrants to various localities in a depopulated prefecture in Japan. Also supported by stakeholder theory, this case assesses both external and internal customers' opinions about these strategies.

The lecturers and learners can use the design of this case to examine the situations in their preferred locations. After defining the involved stakeholders (the immigrants and the locals or the external and internal customers, respectively), lecturers and learners can visit these locations and the related organizations' websites and libraries to collect information about their immigration promotion programs. They then can analyze the collected materials to identify the specific strategies focusing on welcoming the immigrants and persuading the locals. Finally, lecturers and learners can refer to other websites, social media platforms, and probably actual fieldwork to gather and authenticate the stakeholders' opinions about these strategies.

This case is suitable for a group of 6–8 students. Two sub-groups of 3–4 students can be formed to address the issues of each of the two stakeholders (either the immigrants or the locals). They can compare or contrast their observations to validate and deepen their understanding.

### Potential Audience and Instructor's Material

#### Target Audience

Undergraduate students interested in social marketing and sustainable development can use this case. It is also relevant for local administrators who want to understand better their customers (the immigrants and the locals) to provide more timely services and support for them.

#### Teaching Methods and Equipment

Each student should have a personal computer and access to the Internet. They can search for information and materials and save them in separate folders. If necessary, they can consider visiting the local immigration administration office or library to talk to the officers in charge and gather more information. They can further implement on-site or online fieldwork to talk to immigrants and locals to understand their opinions.

The instructor helps the students by explaining the purpose and method of the case. They also instruct students to collect and analyze the data. The instructor may also need to help their students contact and talk with the involved officers, locals, and immigrants.

#### Teaching Instruction

The instructor needs to get familiar with the location and its features in advance. They may also need to create and utilize connections with the involved stakeholders to facilitate their students' learning when necessary.

## Learning

1. To explore the social marketing strategies that a prefecture in Japan is employing to attract people to immigrate to its depopulated areas to help sustain these communities.
2. To search for solutions for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

## Time Frame for Class Discussion

### Duration

The case requires three to four 60-minute sessions = 180–240 minutes (Table 3).

**Table 3** Teaching instruction plan

Discussion point	Time required (Minutes)	Teaching strategies
Introduction	10	The instructor begins the case by introducing the depopulation issue and the potential of social marketing in addressing this issue.
Briefing on the stakeholder theory	10	The instructor explains the stakeholder theory. They identify the two main stakeholders in the case: the immigrants and the locals.
Summary of the case	10	The instructor introduces the location. They explain to the students how to collect information about the immigration promotion strategies of the place.
Identification and collection of secondary information	30	The instructor helps the students to collect and store the information.
Analysis of secondary information	60	The instructor explains the analysis method. They show the students how to match the stakeholders' opinions with the specific immigration promotion strategies.
Additional information collection and analysis	60	The instructor asks the students to gather and analyze additional information to validate the previous observations <u>if necessary</u> .
Summary of key findings	50	The instructor asks the students to summarize the essential findings and discuss the discussion questions.
Conclusion	10	The instructor summarizes and concludes the sessions.

Source: Author's composition

## Suggested Discussion Questions

**Question 1**—What do you think about the strategies implemented by Hyogo Prefecture and its cities? If you are a Japanese citizen or a foreigner permanently residing in Japan, are you willing to move to Hyogo? What do you think the local governments could do better to attract more immigrants in terms of external marketing? What do you think the local governments should do to inform the residents about their visions and ensure their positive attitudes toward long-term and large-scale immigration?

**Question 2**—Is your current place of living or origin facing the depopulation problem? What does the local government do to address this issue? What do you think they could do better?

**Question 3**—How much do you think social marketing can contribute to addressing the depopulation issue? Do you think similar strategies could be used to manage the overpopulation problem?

## Analysis

*Answer to Question 1—What do you think about the strategies implemented by Hyogo Prefecture and its cities? If you are a Japanese citizen or a foreigner permanently residing in Japan, are you willing to move to Hyogo? What do you think the local governments could do better to attract more immigrants in terms of external marketing? What do you think the local governments should do to inform the residents about their visions and ensure their positive attitudes toward long-term and large-scale immigration?*

This is an open-ended question with a free response. Each student can freely contribute their opinions. The critical point is that social marketing strategies' internal and external aspects should be acknowledged and adopted.

*Answer to Question 2—Is your current place of living or origin facing the depopulation problem? What does the local government do to address this issue? What do you think they could do better?*

This also is an open-ended question with a free response. Each student should use either their current place of living or origin to demonstrate the (non)existence of the depopulation issue and how it is tackled.

*Answer to Question 3—How much do you think social marketing can contribute to addressing the depopulation issue? Do you think similar strategies could be used to manage the overpopulation problem?*

This also is an open-ended question with a free response. Each student can freely contribute their opinions about the role of social marketing in addressing the depopulation issue. They can compare social marketing with other strategies adopted to tackle the same problem, such as economic and infrastructure development.

On the other hand, students can talk about the overpopulation issue if it exists in their current place of living or origin. They can discuss the use of social marketing to persuade people to move out of or not move into the overpopulated areas. They can

link the depopulation and overpopulation issues together to seek mutual strategies for both.

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