



# FACTORS FOR AND CONVERGENCE STRUCTURE OF THE LEVEL OF REGIONAL CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES - ANALYSIS OF PREFECTURE- BASED PANEL DATA (2015 – 2024)

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## **Abstract**

*In 2015, we conducted a survey by having a group of experts evaluate regional cultural and artistic activities that had positive impact on local community revitalization and those that did not, to analyze the relationship between those activities and the prefectures and municipalities that hosted them, particularly in terms of enthusiasm as reflected in their policy measures for arts and culture. In the present study, we followed up on that survey by conducting a new survey on the level of regional cultural and artistic activities in FY2024. The analysis confirmed that, as in the 2015 survey, the level of cultural and artistic activities in a region is more strongly determined by supply-side factors such as public spending and the concentration of human resources such as professional artists and performers than by demand-side factors such as residents' income and leisure time. Furthermore, regarding the level of cultural and artistic activities across regions, defining as "deviation" the difference between the actual observed level and the theoretical level estimated from variables representing local government expenditures and the residence and settlement of artists, we examined change in the level over time by dynamic panel analysis. The coefficient of the lag term of deviation showed a statistically significant negative value, allowing us to confirm the tendency of regional differences to converge to the average over time, pointing to the existence of a mean-reversion adjustment process. This suggests that regional disparities are not simply fixed once they emerge, but that an endogenous adjustment mechanism may be at work in the short term. This*



*is one of the main findings of this study. These results suggest the need to redesign regional policies for arts and culture from a medium- to long-term perspective with ample attention given to structural conditions, such as the accumulation of human resources, institutional design, and the formation of regional cultural infrastructure, rather than simply responding to short-term fluctuations in the activity level.*

*Keywords: cultural policy, COVID-19, arts support, regional revitalization, public cultural facilities*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In our 2018 study (Edagawa, 2018), which used the FY2015 survey data, we conducted an empirical analysis on conditions for establishing high-quality cultural and artistic activities that are effective for local community vitalization and on the sustainability of such conditions (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2021a). This was based on the recognition that the policy framework in which cultural and artistic activities are utilized for regional promotion is fundamentally valid but entails the risk of including even low-quality activities as beneficiaries of public support under the guise of local development. The results revealed that the level of cultural and artistic activities in a given prefecture can be explained by the accumulation of cultural and artistic project funds by the prefecture, the amount of cultural and artistic activities produced by artists and performers residing within the prefecture, their number, and the number of prefectural residents who constitute audiences (viewers). This is consistent with the basic framework of cultural and artistic promotion in which the level of cultural and artistic activities is deemed to be determined by both artists as producers and viewers as consumers. Moreover, the results also confirmed that, while the number of artists and performers was a factor of influence, the accumulation of cultural and artistic project funds also influences the level more greatly. This is equally consistent with the basic framework of cultural and artistic promotion in which cultural and artistic activities are deemed possible only with the existence of both artists as producers and viewers as consumers.

In the study presented here, drawing on the findings of the 2018 study, we conducted a similar survey in FY2024 to verify whether or not the relationship between the level of cultural and artistic activities and the accumulation of project funds and the numbers of artists and viewers still holds.

Between the two surveys, cultural and artistic life in Japan was significantly impacted by the spread of COVID-19 from December 2019 through May 2021, resulting in the cancellations of events and performances and restrictions on event admission (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2021a). As support measures for artists and related organizations, subsidies were provided to

cultural projects that had encountered difficulty in securing revenue, and financial compensation was implemented to enable the continuation of activities following project suspension (Cabinet Office, 2020a, 2020b). However, it is pointed out that the significant reduction in audience size caused not only a quantitative drop in cultural and artistic activities, particularly in performing arts, but also qualitative decline (Japan Arts Council & Cultural Arts Promotion Forum, 2021). Furthermore, our study revealed that high-quality performing arts were maintained in regions with relatively ample budgets, whereas the composition of genres changed: the performances of opera, ballet, musicals, and plays, which tend to require large-scale production, decreased in number while traditional Japanese performing arts and regional festivals took priority (Edagawa, 2024).

The period between the FY2015 and FY2024 surveys was thus marked with a major exogenous negative factor, namely the pandemic, influencing cultural and artistic activities. Therefore, our study was also intended to verify whether or not the relationship between the level of cultural and artistic activities and the accumulation of project funds and the numbers of artists and viewers is still observed in the post-pandemic settings. If a similar relationship were to be confirmed, the findings, with this background taken into account, should inform future cultural policy making in such a way as to enhance its efficacy. In recent years in Western countries, there has been concern about, and actual cases of, cuts to public cultural spending due to economic constraints and political pressure. However, cultural investment still remains an important policy tool that supports the formation of local community identity and strengthens social cohesion and resilience (Council for Cultural Affairs, 2018; Edagawa, 2022; McGuigan, 2004; Throsby, 2010; UNESCO, 2021b). It is essential to reaffirm the value of sustainable cultural investment by the public sector, which should also contribute to expanding the potential of culture and arts itself.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Regional cultural activities**

The spread of COVID-19 was a major exogenous factor that caused the Japanese government to seriously interfere with regional cultural and artistic life. Due to the imposition of governmental measures for infection prevention, large-scale events were cancelled, postponed or scaled down across the country, drastically reducing opportunities for activities and income generation, especially in the performing arts sector. Performing arts such as plays and music concerts are goods that are essentially characterized by simultaneity and face-to-face immediacy in that they generate value through live interaction between performers and audiences occupying the same physical space. These characteristics are often viewed as

experiential or participatory goods in cultural economics. The implementation of infection control measures, such as admission restrictions, seat distancing, and mandatory facemask use during performances, coupled with physical restrictions on event organization, significantly impacted both supply and demand in the performing arts market. Furthermore, the reduced revenue resulting from restrictions on admission and performance frequency weakened the financial foundation of regional artistic organizations and cultural facilities, which in turn reduced positive effects that cultural and artistic activities can normally have on the local economy (demand for related services, flows of people, local consumption etc.) (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2021b; Naylor et al., 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, & International Council of Museums, 2019; UNESCO, 2021a). To sum up, COVID-19, through directly constraining the structure of performing arts production and consumption, which mainly depend on personal attendance at live performances, greatly affected both the level of local cultural and artistic activities and their ripple effects on the local economy (Salvador, Navarrete, & Srakar, 2022).

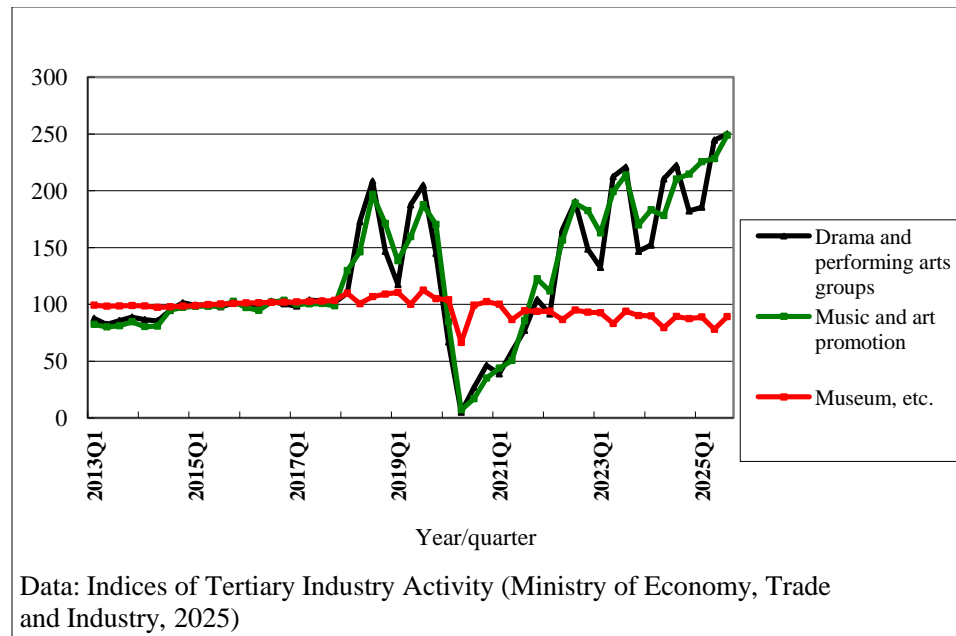


Fig. 1 Indices of activity of artistic and related projects

The impact of COVID-19 up until the end of that period is clearly reflected in the service industry indices (“Indices of Tertiary Industry Activity”) published by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in 2025. Fig. 1 shows the indices, with the FY2017 index set as 100, indicating that the level of activities by theaters and performing arts groups (plays, concerts, and other live performances) significantly declined, as compared to activities by museums and art

galleries, starting from FY2020, when policy measures were put in place requiring the population to refrain from going out and avoid crowds. This can be interpreted as being reflective of the difference between the two in that live performing arts saw simultaneous, in-person participation by audiences, on which they depended, dwindle and disappear, whereas museums and art galleries were able to sustain a certain level of activity through operational adjustments, such as limiting admission and designating time slots for visitors. The indices also show that, after the infection control measures were relaxed in April 2023, a noticeable recovery trend occurred in performing arts-related activities; although it should be noted that, many regional theaters being strongly non-profit in nature, their activities are not adequately reflected in the tertiary industry indices, which are mainly market transaction-based statistics.

Meanwhile, the national government provided financial assistance totaling some 114 trillion yen (approximately 3.8% of the cumulative GDP for the same period) from FY2020 to FY2024 around the three pillars of COVID-19 control policy measures: support for households and businesses, support for local governments and medical and vaccination system reinforcement (Cabinet Office, 2020a, 2020b; World Health Organization Regional Office for South-East Asia, 2021). As part of support for households and businesses, a subsidy system was established for artists, artistic organizations, museums, art galleries, and so on. However, direct support for consumers of arts and culture was limited, policy measures targeting them mainly comprising those intended for restricting their movements. Over the five years from FY2020 to FY2024, the total financial support for the cultural and artistic sector was approximately 174.5 billion yen (the annual budget for the Agency for Cultural Affairs is approximately 106 billion yen), accounting for no more than 0.15% of the government's overall expenditures for COVID-19 control measures. This spending constituted general support for maintaining the operations of artists, cultural organizations, and related facilities, whose income opportunities decreased due to activity suspension or reduction, rather than selective assistance commensurate with the content or results of their usual cultural and artistic activities. In other words, the subsidy system was similar in nature to compensation for restaurants and other businesses that were forced to suspend their operations, that is, the national government's mere reaction to, and attempt to contain, the drastic fall in the level of cultural and artistic activities as shown in Fig. 1.

### **Historical background to local governmental involvement in cultural and artistic activities**

During Japan's economic bubble in the 1980s, many large-scale cultural facilities were constructed. In the 21st century, they have become a burden on prefectural and municipal governments due to difficulty resulting from financial constraints and insufficient managerial

knowhow for their maintenance and operation (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1988; Edagawa, 2015, 2022; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2019). As a result, some facilities were closed down or repurposed while many others were shifted to a rental-based management mode. Many of them also adopted a system of designating specialized entities to operate the facilities so as to cut costs and ensure required operational knowhow (Japan Foundation for Regional Art Activities, 2004, 2025). This is to say that the 21st century has been the period for local governments to increase and improve their support for cultural and artistic organizations, thereby encouraging, diversifying, and perpetuating the use of local cultural facilities built in the 20th century. It is safe to assume that the enthusiasm of prefectural and municipal governments for culture and arts has a significant impact on the level of local cultural and artistic activities and that such enthusiasm is usually reflected in local governmental expenditures for cultural and artistic projects. Accordingly, in our study, trends in such expenditures were first analyzed based on the results of the Regional Cultural Administration Survey conducted each year by the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

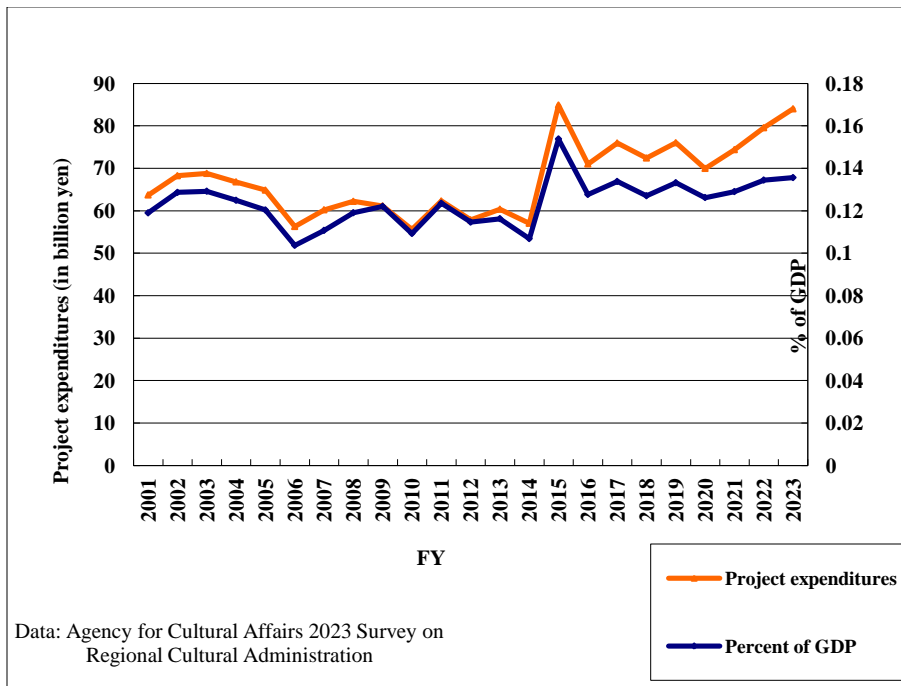


Fig. 2 Trends in cultural and artistic project expenditures

Fig. 2 shows trends in cultural and artistic project expenditures by prefectural and municipal governments and their percentages of GDP from the beginning of the 21st century to recent years (monetary amounts spent by local governments for cultural and artistic projects). In nominal terms, a general upward trend was confirmed in the expenditures starting from FY2015

from around 60 billion yen and surpassing 70 billion yen in FY2016. However, as a ratio of GDP, it was only roughly 0.12% before FY2015 and has remained at around 0.13% since FY2016, indicating no major structural change. The upward trend in the nominal expenditures continued in and after FY2020, when COVID-19 began spreading, with no marked change in the ratio to GDP. From FY2020 to 2024, subsidies were provided to artists, artistic organizations, museums, art galleries, etc., but this did not change the basic framework of cultural and artistic project expenditures by local governments since this type of subsidy geared toward livelihood protection against the negative effects of the pandemic fell under the responsibility of the national government. The prefectural and municipal expenditures for cultural and artistic projects have not increased remarkably since the beginning of the 21st century mainly due to overall stagnant financial growth on the part of local governments.

In general, public spending for cultural and artistic projects is discretionary and policy-based, not mandatory, and therefore more susceptible to the influence of economic cycles and not necessarily stable (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2019; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). Yet, the trends as mentioned above indicate that public spending for cultural and artistic projects has remained relatively stable in the face of economic fluctuations. The nominal spending has generally been in the range of 50 billion to just over 80 billion yen, meaning roughly 1.2 to 1.8 billion yen per prefecture. Although it cannot necessarily be considered a high-priority sector within the overall policy framework, the fact that at least the nominal amount has not significantly shrunk suggests that prefectures and municipalities have maintained their cultural policy implementation. It can even be said that this fact, against the generally strong pressure to prioritize expenditures in other policy areas, points to a measure of stability in policy prioritization. As well, no significant increase or decrease in public spending as percentage of GDP seems to indicate limited influence from financial fluctuations on the level of cultural and artistic activities. No particularly significant increase in spending even during the pandemic suggests that any COVID-19-related support basically remained within the existing institutional framework.

With regard to regional public spending, in 2014, Japan recognized anew the importance of addressing the country's low birthrate and depopulation as major policy issues, launching a battery of regional revitalization policy measures centering on the Act on Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy in Japan (promulgated in and enforced from November 2014) (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2018; National Governors' Association of Japan, 2015). Specifically, toward the goals of these policy measures, including the correction of overconcentration in Tokyo, the stabilization of local employment, local

community building, and the transformation of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries as the sixth industrial sector, the national government established a support system for projects proposed by prefectures and municipalities. Within this system, the promotion of cultural activities is integrated into policy measures for tourism that contributes to enhancing the competitiveness of local industries; for regional revitalization drawing on local assets such as history, townscape, culture, and arts; for town revitalization as the foundation for community life; and for strengthening people's sense of pride in their hometowns.

Our previous studies and surveys demonstrated the following in connection with this policy trend: First, for local cultural promotion, active participation by local residents and their ties with the local community are essential. Second, cultural activities positively contribute to the maintenance and revitalization of local communities. Third, public assistance for these activities are primarily "soft" expenditures that pose relatively less financial burden for their implementation than "hard" investment, such as the construction of facilities.

During the nine-year period after our 2015 survey, a major exogenous event negatively affected cultural and artistic life in the country, namely the spread of COVID-19. In view of this, we conducted this study to examine whether the relationship we confirmed in the previous study between the level of cultural and artistic activities and the accumulation of project funds and the numbers of artists and viewers is still valid after environmental changes resulting from the pandemic. If similar results were to be observed again, it would signify that the empirical finding that the level of cultural and artistic activities is determined by the accumulation of activities by both producers and consumers maintains a measure of generality even following exposure to external disturbance factors, such as the spread of an infectious disease.

## **SURVEY OUTLINE**

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a descriptive research design to analyze the factors influencing regional cultural and artistic activities and their convergence structure across prefectures in Japan. A descriptive design is appropriate because the objective of this study is not to manipulate variables experimentally, but to observe, measure, and explain existing patterns and relationships based on secondary data. Specifically, this study utilizes prefecture-level panel data from 2015 to 2024 to examine regional disparities and convergence trends. The descriptive approach enables the identification of structural characteristics and long-term tendencies in cultural and artistic activities without imposing causal assumptions beyond the observed data.

## Cultural and artistic activities covered by the survey

To enable comparison with the 2015 survey, our 2024 survey only covered cultural and artistic activities whose activity format was based on a conceptual framework identical to that of those covered in the 2015 survey, that is, activities that allow viewers to have cultural experience contributory to regional revitalization, or more specifically, activities that allow local residents to appreciate, while in the space of their daily life, arts, traditions, cultural assets, etc. unique to the locale. This includes both amateur and professional activities, the former being performances, exhibition of works, and the like performed or created and viewed by local residents and the latter being those performed or created by professionals and viewed by non-professional local residents. The survey period was FY2024, meaning that it concerned activities that were conducted for any duration of time between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025. Activities deemed purely religious, such as religious fetes and rituals and memorial services, were excluded from the survey because governmental policy measures do not target them and the involvement of artists in them is usually extremely limited, if any.

For the survey, information on cultural and artistic projects was collected by the same method as in the 2015 survey: a two-way method by which information was collected both from entities providing subsidies for projects and the local governments hosting them. Concretely, the subsidy-providing entities comprised the Agency for Cultural Affairs, (including the Japan Arts Council, which is under the supervision of the Agency), the Japan Foundation for Regional Art Activities, and the prefectural and municipal governments, from which we collected information in August 2015. Documents published by tourism promotion-related organizations reporting on subsidies were also consulted as reference. In September 2025, we requested the prefectural governments and the municipal governments of the ordinance-designated cities (designated cities with a population over 500,000) to submit a list of up to 30 cultural and artistic activities (20 in the 2015 survey) locally held in FY2024 and deemed to have contributed to regional development. The upper limit of the number of activities was increased by 50% from that of the previous survey to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the actual state of relevant activities, in view of the significant impact of the pandemic on local cultural and artistic life. The sets of information thus obtained were collated as data on cultural and artistic activities contributory to regional development.

This preliminary survey enabled us to extract high-quality cultural and artistic activities from among those that received public assistance. We also looked into activities that did not receive public funds but were locally judged to contribute to regional development. This way, we established as exhaustive a list as possible of activities meeting the criteria, thereby minimizing gaps in survey coverage.

## Survey method and questionnaire survey particulars

Regarding the cultural and artistic activities identified in the preliminary survey, we conducted a written questionnaire survey in October 2025 by the postal placement method as in the 2015 survey. The main question items concerned (1) the name (title) of the activity, (2) the name of the organizer, (3) the nature of the organizer (public, private or voluntary organization), (4) the physical location of the activity, (5) the objectives of the activity, (6) the estimated ripple effects of the activity on the local community, (7) the duration of the activity, (8) the content of the activity, and (9) the expenses incurred in conducting the activity.

In the process of collecting survey results, we contacted respondents whose questionnaire survey forms were incomplete for a telephone follow-up interview and, as a new addition to the survey method, inquiries via the internet and in-person visits for confirmation as deemed necessary. These steps allowed us to minimize errors resulting from different levels of knowledge on the part of respondents and to homogenize the level of information extractable from the responses. Furthermore, to compensate for the relatively limited number of participants, we had prefectural and municipal governments cooperate with us in information collection so as to minimize the number of unanswered question items.

The final list of survey subjects meeting the criteria comprised 1,156 cultural and artistic activities (as compared to 851 in the 2015 survey), all of which were covered by our separate questionnaire survey. Valid responses were obtained about 561 activities (272 in 2015), and the average response rate was 48.5% (32% in 2015). This improved response rate is probably attributable to the involvement of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, in securing cooperation from prefectures and municipalities.

## ESTIMATION RESULTS

### Classification of activities by genre and project type

Table 1 shows collected survey results of project expenditures of cultural and artistic activities classified by genre and project type. For comparison, the figures from the 2015 survey are also provided below each of their corresponding 2024 figures.

By project type, the ratio of professional to amateur projects was roughly 7:3 in the 2024 survey, an increase in the part of professional projects from 5:5 in the 2015 survey. A professional project here refers to a project whose principal members, such as artists, performers, and the like, engage in a live performance or artistic or creative activity in their professional capacity, and this does not depend on the monetary conditions of the project,

such as whether or not admission fees are collected or the project members are remunerated. On the other hand, an amateur project refers to a project whose principal members are non-professionals, who may or may not be remunerated for their participation in the project.

By genre, in the 2024 survey, just as in the 2015 survey, music was the most prevalent, accounting for 40 to 50% of the total. This was followed by plays and traditional Japanese performing arts accounting for similar percentage points, with fine arts registering much smaller points. Between the two surveys, a markedly large difference was found in the numbers of ballet, resulting from zero professional projects and a very small number of amateur projects in the 2015 survey, as compared to the 2024 survey numbers.

### Relationship between project scale (operating cost) and subsidy

The most arguably appropriate indicator for project scale is the cost incurred for project operation.

Table 1. Project expenditures by genre, project type and year (in 1000s of yen)

Genre	Type	Average	Number	(A) as % of	SD	CV
Music	Amateur	1015.2	136	24.2%	733.5	0.72
		3599.9	57	21.0%	2620.4	0.73
	Pro.	17005.0	91	16.2%	17594.3	1.03
		5907.1	93	34.2%	5699.9	0.96
	Total	7425.2	227	40.5%	13611.6	1.83
Plays	Amateur	5030.3	150	55.1%	4889.1	0.97
		1999.6	79	14.1%	1331.3	0.67
	Pro.	3613.0	33	12.1%	3366.7	0.93
		25836.5	17	3.0%	21525.9	0.83
	Total	5708.1	29	10.7%	4383.9	0.77
Ballet	Amateur	6220.7	96	17.1%	12773.7	2.05
		4593.0	62	22.8%	3984.7	0.87
	Pro.	1043.0	74	13.2%	799.8	0.77
		6365.3	8	2.9%	4476.0	0.70
	Total	19095.6	23	4.1%	15986.5	0.84
Trad. Jpn performing arts	Amateur	-	0	0.0%	-	-
		5323.5	97	17.3%	10891.3	2.05
	Pro.	-	8	2.9%	-	-
		1083.1	73	13.0%	971.6	0.90
	Total	3272.0	12	4.4%	2159.1	0.66
Trad. Jpn performing arts	Pro.	15095.9	27	4.8%	11804.8	0.78
		4481.5	19	7.0%	5138.4	1.15
	Total	4866.5	100	17.8%	8739.4	1.80
		4013.3	31	11.4%	4232.0	1.05

Fine arts	Amateur	792.7	19	3.4%	531.8	0.67
		3503.3	6	2.2%	2485.2	0.71
	Pro.	12713.0	2	0.4%	13709.4	1.08
		965.0	1	0.4%	.	-
	Total	1928.0	21	3.7%	4744.2	2.46
Others	Amateur	1232.1	18	3.2%	620.6	0.50
		2180.5	11	4.0%	1600.2	0.73
	Pro.	5627.8	2	0.4%	2057.5	0.37
		1738.0	3	1.1%	471.2	0.27
	Total	1671.6	20	3.6%	1548.5	0.93
Grand total	Amateur	1226.8	399	71.1%	1000.1	0.82
		3619.0	127	46.7%	2927.5	0.81
	Pro.	17717.0	162	28.9%	16985.7	0.96
		5560.1	145	53.3%	5337.0	0.96
	Total	5988.7	561	100.0%	11815.5	1.97
	4653.8	272	100.0%	4479.0	0.96	

NB: For each item, the upper figure is for the 2024 survey and the lower figure for the 2015

Table 1 shows that the average project operating cost in all genres of all types of projects combined was 4.65 million yen in the 2015 survey, which increased to 5.99 million yen in the 2024 survey by approximately 1.34 million yen. In terms of the coefficient of variation (CV), which is obtained by the average value divided by the standard deviation (SD), it was nearly 1 in the 2015 survey and approximately 2 in the 2024 survey, indicating that the variance in project cost widened over the years.

By project type, the coefficient of variance was generally below 1 for both professional and amateur projects in the 2024 survey, pointing to relatively limited inter-genre difference. This suggests that the overall increase in variance is largely due to larger differences in operating cost among the genres, and also possibly due to the impact of an operating cost increase for both professional and amateur activities. In fact, in the 2015 survey, the difference in average project cost between professional and amateur projects was approximately 1.94 million yen, about 40% of the average project cost of either project type. In the 2024 survey, however, the difference between the project types was significantly larger in all genres. A closer look reveals that, while the costs of amateur projects in different genres remained almost unchanged or slightly decreased over the years, the cost of professional projects, although slightly varying from one genre to another, increased at a markedly high rate of 10 times. Furthermore, the coefficient of variance was less than 1 in most genres of either project type, with little variance in project cost within the same genre and project type. In other words,

between the 2015 and 2024 surveys, the operating cost of professional projects largely increased in all genres, expanding the cost gap between the two types.

More specifically, in the 2015 survey, between the average operating costs of an amateur project of 3.62 million yen and of a professional project of 5.56 million yen, there is a difference of approximately 2 million yen. In contrast, the 2024 survey showed a much larger difference between the two, with the average cost of amateur projects showing a downward trend and a marked increase in the average cost of professional projects. One factor responsible for higher operating costs of professional projects is the different ways costs are covered and recorded: professional activities usually require meticulous recording of cost items, including performance fees, travel expenses, and honorariums for time spent, whereas amateur performers often pay out of their pocket, covering their own travel expenses and opportunity costs related to practices and rehearsals, which are not always clearly recorded or reimbursed. Moreover, some genres of activity, such as music concerts, only require relatively simple stage equipment while others, such as plays and dance concerts, necessitate sophisticated stage equipment and installations, which further expands the difference in project operating costs.

In view of the above, it can be stated in summary that the operating cost of amateur projects remained stable or even decreased while those of professional projects largely increased during the nearly 10-year period between the two surveys. It is possible to suggest that exogenous factors such as changes in institutional settings and the economic climate might have influenced the cost structure of regional cultural and artistic activities. Such changes include new developments in the professional sector adopting novel modes of production and presentation, such as pay-per-view streaming of plays and other live performances and virtual tours of museums and art galleries utilizing digital art innovations, and the emergence of public and private foundations offering financial support to new projects and crowdfunding enabling alternative large-scale financing.

### **Evaluation of cultural and artistic activities**

The activities on which we collected data were evaluated by a panel of experts by the same method as in the 2015 survey to enable comparison. However, all experts were renewed for the 2024 survey, given the lapse of nearly 10 years since the previous survey. Together with the experts (seven researchers and practitioners in their respective fields of performing arts, fine arts, and regional policy studies), we evaluated the activities from two perspectives: artistic content and cultural and operational connection with the local community.

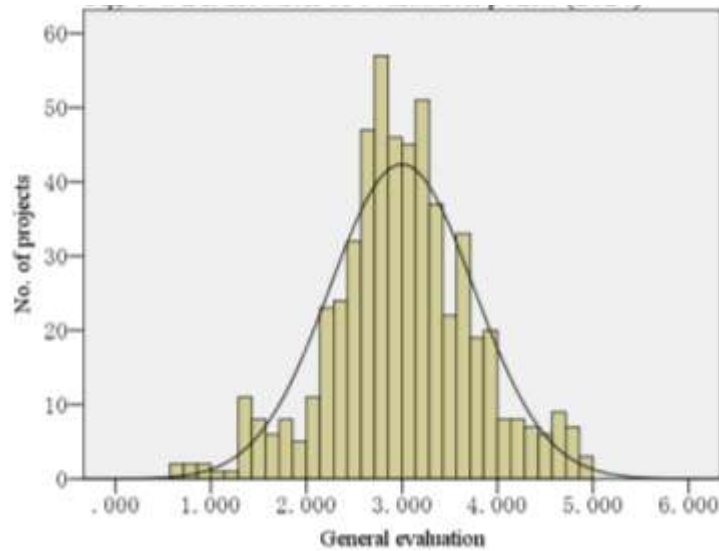


Fig. 3-a. Distribution of evaluation points (2024)

Detailed evaluation criteria were set for these perspectives concerning, for artistic content, objectives, target, artistic level, and future development potential, and for cultural and operational connection with the local community, budget and revenue, partnership with the local community and government, venue, RP and advertising, and operating entity (members). Each expert provided an absolute evaluation on a five-point scale, and the scores were averaged for each activity. Average values were used to eliminate disparities in evaluation levels among the experts as much as possible.

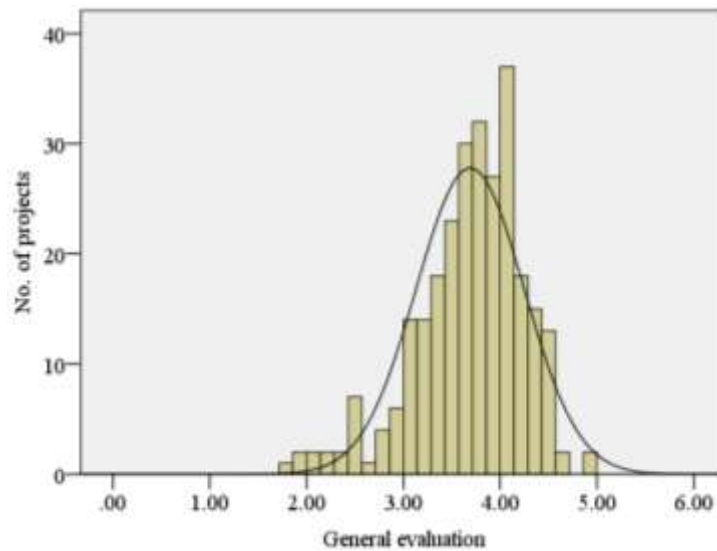


Fig. 3-b. Distribution of evaluation points (2015)

As shown in Fig. 3-a, the distribution of scores by all experts was roughly normal with a shape similar to the distribution of general test scores. For comparison, the distribution of evaluation scores from the 2015 survey is provided in Fig. 3-b. As in the previous survey, evaluation was conducted in a fair and minimally biased manner by averaging the experts' evaluation scores, securing an acceptable level of validity. In addition, descriptive statistics (Table 2) were calculated to understand the distribution characteristics of variables.

Comparing the 2015 and 2024 survey results based on the descriptive statistics of the data, we confirmed that the mean value had decreased and the standard deviation had increased in the 2024 survey. This indicates an increase in the variance in evaluation points. In other words, in the 2015 survey there was a tendency for evaluation points to converge in a certain direction, while they were more dispersed in the 2024 survey, suggesting that differences among the activities had widened. The mean value was 3.69 in 2015 and 3.00 in 2024, a drop in overall evaluation by 0.69 points. This is a relatively large decrease on a five-point scale.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of evaluation scores in the two surveys

Survey year	No. of items	Average	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
2024	561	3.00	0.75	-0.07	0.50
2015	272	3.69	0.56	-0.65	0.88

A look at the shapes of distribution reveals a relatively large negative skewness with a bias toward higher scores in the 2015 survey. In the 2024 survey, on the other hand, the skewness was close to zero, resulting in a more symmetrical distribution. Figs. 3-a and 3-b indicate that in terms of skewness and kurtosis, the 2024 survey is closer to a normal distribution, while the 2015 survey shows slightly weaker normality. Since the maximum score is 5 points, it is possible that a ceiling effect due to upper-limit restrictions affected the 2015 data.

With the validity of evaluation established as above, we compared the prefectural levels of cultural and artistic activities using the same method as in the 2015 survey to identify the factors that determine regional cultural policies. We also analyzed the effects of the spread of COVID-19, which severely affected cultural and artistic activities during the period between the surveys.

## Relationship between activity level and related indices

Table 3. Coefficients of correlation between activity level and indicators

	Y	K	L	T	S	I	P
Total pref. level of activities (Y)	1						
Pref. project expenses (K)	.754(**)	1					
No. of artists in pref. (L)	.895(**)	.820(**)	1				
Per-resident time spent on	-0.070	-0.051	0.022	1			
Total pref. area surface of	-0.098	-0.106	-0.098	1			
Per-resident income (I)	.395(**)	0.200	.346(*)	-0.106	1		
Population (P)	.775(**)	.372(*)	.442(**)	0.477	1		
	.292(*)	.412(**)	.399(**)	-0.123	0.108	1	
	.594(**)	.589(**)	.711(**)	-0.104	0.124	1	
	.863(**)	.851(**)	.918(**)	.055(**)	.494(**)	.850(**)	1
	.819(**)	.756(**)	.926(**)	-0.051	.746(**)	.964(**)	1

NB 1) The correlation coefficient is significant \*\* at the 1% level (two-tailed) and \* at the

2) In each column, the upper figure is for the 2024 survey, the lower figure for

Data: Prefectural project expenses: "Survey on the State of Regional Cultural Administration" annual edition by Agency for Cultural Affairs; Number of artists by prefecture: "Japan National Census report" by Statistics Bureau of Japan, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication; Per-resident time spent on cultural and artistic activities: "Basic Survey on Society and Daily Life" by Statistics Bureau of Japan, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication; Prefectural total surface area of cultural facilities: "Survey on Society and Education" by MEXT; Per-resident income: "Prefectural Economic Figures" by Cabinet Office

The level of cultural and artistic activities by professionals as producers of arts and culture is thought to be roughly proportional to the number of artists and performers in a given locale, provided that they operate in a competitive environment. As for cultural and artistic activities by amateurs, it is noteworthy that in the 1970s the anthropologist Tadao Umesao and the author Masakazu Yamazaki pointed out that they tended to be more active, the larger the number of local residents engaging in them and the higher their income level (Umesao, 1979, 2001; Yamazaki, 1993). A similar observation was made in the first White Paper on Culture published in 1988 by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1988). In addition, it is reasonable to assume that the level of cultural and artistic activities in a given locale is proportional to the number of local viewers who consume products of arts and culture.

Table 3 indicates the coefficients of correlation between the prefectural level of cultural and artistic activities (Y) and several indicators assumed to be factors determining

the activity level. The term “prefectural level of cultural and artistic activities” here refers to the prefectural total of points given in the expert evaluations in each of the two surveys discussed above; it is used as an objective variable indicating the overall prefectural level of cultural and artistic activities.

First, Table 3 shows the following: the level of cultural and artistic activities is strongly influenced by financial and human resources. The correlation coefficient with cultural and artistic project expenses (K) was 0.754 in FY2024 and 0.857 in FY2015, showing a consistently strong positive correlation. The correlation with the number of artists and performers (L) was also extremely high at 0.901 in FY2024 and 0.895 in FY2015. In other words, it is possible to surmise that financial investment and the concentration of specialized human resource are the main factors that determine the level of cultural and artistic activities. Cultural infrastructure, represented by the surface area of cultural centers and event halls (S), showed a strong correlation of 0.775 in FY2015, and, although it dropped to 0.395 in FY2024, a certain degree of positive contribution was still recognized. These results indicate that the level of cultural and artistic activities cannot be adequately explained solely by hard aspects such as facility construction. As for income (I), a certain degree of positive correlation was seen at 0.594 in FY2015 and 0.292 in FY2024, but as a direct determinant it had very limited impact on the level of cultural and artistic activities. Furthermore, the correlation with residents’ time spent on cultural and artistic activities (T) was -0.070 in FY2024 and -0.098 in FY2015, neither of which was statistically significant. This points to the greater importance of quality, systems, and expertise than quantitative participation in shaping the level of cultural and artistic activities.

Next, the data allows analysis of venues as a possible factor influencing the level of cultural and artistic activities. Since many cultural and artistic activities take place in such venues as cultural centers, event halls, museums and art galleries, the state of development and availability of such facilities in a given locale can affect the level of activities (Japan Foundation for Regional Art Activities, 2004, 2025). Ideally, a venue that is most suited to the content and nature of each individual project should be secured, considering that the greater the compatibility between the project and the venue the better the results. Yet, this can also raise the transactional cost associated with project organization, hence the project organizing cost. It can negatively impact the realization of the event itself. It can be a negative factor for professional projects, which need to be profitable, and possibly an equally negative, demotivating factor for amateur projects. Therefore, while the existence of venues is thought to have a major impact on individual activities (at the macro level), considering that different projects call for varied venue features and that other conditions such as location and accessibility are also important, it is not easy to measure the impact of quantitative availability of

cultural facilities on the level of cultural and artistic activities when they are examined as a whole (at the macro level).

From the above correlation analysis, it can be surmised that the level of cultural and artistic activities is determined more strongly by public spending and professional human resources than local residents' income and leisure time. Implications from this analysis are as follows: First, in a supply side-led structure, it is important to secure an ample budget and professional human resources to improve the level of activities. Second, issues surrounding facility availability and accessibility must be addressed, taking into consideration that facility development and increased activity volume do not necessarily translate directly into residents dedicating more time to cultural and artistic activities. Third, although the influence of income and other economic factors cannot be overlooked, their influence was actually weakened in relative terms by the time of the 2024 survey, and the absolute number of recipients of products of arts and culture, as reflected in the total population, remained influential. Based on these observations, in this study, economic investment, human resources, and population were considered as main factors that explain the level of cultural and artistic activities. In other words, we hypothesized that the level of cultural and artistic activities is determined by the number of artists and performers who locally provide activities, local governmental expenditures that support such activities, and the population (the number of potential viewers) as activity recipients. This framework was also adopted in the 2015 study and produced valid results. Therefore, we used the same functional form as in the previous study for comparison. That is to say, we assume that the total output of the prefectural level of cultural and artistic activities can be expressed as the product of viewer (consumer)-side factors multiplied by factors of cultural and artistic creation (producer).

$$Y = A \times \text{project cost (investment amount)}^\alpha \times \text{artist density}^\beta \times \text{population}^\gamma \quad \dots(1)$$

From the producer's perspective, this can be interpreted as follows: the number of artists (human resources) and cultural and artistic project expenditures (capital investment) are invested as production factors, resulting in cultural and artistic activities that are consumed by a certain percentage of the prefecture's residents (viewers), thereby forming the prefectural level of cultural and artistic activities. Of course, not all activities by artists correspond to, and not all local government funds are invested in, the activities covered in the survey. Yet, if we assume that all prefectures use roughly the same percentage, this is absorbed into the constant term, and so the shape of the production function itself does not change.

Table 4. Production function for the two survey years

Explanator variables	Total cultural and artistic activity level	
	2015	2024
$\alpha$	0.4394	0.4003
(Project cost)	2.0254	2.2447
$\beta$	0.9470	1.1044
(Artist density)	2.0267	2.2211
$\beta/\alpha$	2.1552	2.7589
$\gamma$	0.5105	0.6333
(Population)	3.0820	3.9770
A	-1.6360	-2.0415
(TFA)	2.6680	4.5300
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.6500	0.7194

NB: The figures below each of the variables are t values.

Table 4 shows the results of production function estimation, with the total prefectural level of activities (based on the evaluation scores) regarded as produced value. The results based on the 2015 and the 2024 surveys are shown side by side for comparison. The variance inflation factor (VIF), the index of multicollinearity, was 1.22 and 1.40 for  $\ln(\text{project cost})$ , 1.77 and 1.76 for  $\ln(\text{artist density})$ , and 1.90 and 1.98 for population for FY2015 and FY2024, respectively, all of which were below 2, and almost no multicollinearity was observed between explanatory variables.

With regard to the model's goodness of fit, the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> rose from 0.65 in FY2015 to 0.72 in FY2024, indicating that the level of cultural and artistic activities can be explained to a considerable extent by input factors such as project cost, artist density, and population. In other words, this production function framework is statistically and structurally valid in both years, and it can even be said that its explanatory power increased over time. Comparing the elasticities by input factor, the project cost ( $\alpha$ ) slightly declined from 0.439 in FY2015 to 0.400 in FY2024, suggesting a relative drop in the marginal contribution of the quantitative effect of simple investment. In contrast, artist density ( $\beta$ ) rose from 0.947 in FY2015 to 1.104 in FY2024. It is important to note that this is above 1, which means that the concentration of artists has more than simple proportional effect but super-linear effects through the externalities of agglomeration through networking, mutual learning, and collaboration. The population ( $\gamma$ ) also rose from 0.511 in FY2015 to 0.633 in FY2024, indicating that the density of audience base and the expansion

of market size strongly influenced the level of cultural and artistic activities. Furthermore, the  $\beta/\alpha$  ratio rose from 2.16 in FY2015 to 2.27 in FY2024, suggesting a shift in the results of cultural and artistic activities toward a structure relatively more dependent on the concentration of artists than the amount of investment. As for the total factor productivity, TFP (A),  $\ln A$  changed from -1.64 to -2.04, and the t value increased from 2.67 to 4.53, suggesting that the influence of institutional, operational and cultural factors that cannot be explained by the observed input factors was more stable in FY2024.

These results lead to the conclusion that between FY2015 and FY2024 the production structure of cultural and artistic activities shifted from one dependent on financial input to one that places greater emphasis on the concentration of human resources and the consumer base. The increase in the elasticity of artist density and its relative importance suggests that cultural and artistic activities have entered a stage where they rely heavily on network externalities and agglomeration effects.

### **Actual and calculated levels of cultural and artistic activities and investment effects**

In the previous section, we showed that producer-side factors such as project cost per artist (capital equipment) and artist density (the number of artists and performers per prefectural resident) and audience-side factors (potential audience size represented by the number of prefectural residents) explain 65% (FY2015) to 72% (FY2024) of output as the prefectural total level of cultural and artistic activities. On the other hand, we confirmed that variables such as income per prefectural resident, the surface area of cultural facilities, and per-capita time spent on cultural and artistic activities were either uncorrelated or only slightly correlated and that they could not be major determinants of the level of cultural and artistic activities.

In this section, the level of cultural and artistic activities calculated for each prefecture using the closely related factors, namely project cost and the numbers of artists and residents in the prefecture, is compared with the actual observed level to examine differences between the prefectures whose actual observed level is higher than the calculated level and those whose actual observed level is lower than the calculated level. It should be noted that these three factors can only explain about two-thirds (FY2015) to 70% (FY2024) of the total, with the remaining one-third to 30% being determined by other factors. From the perspective of production function, the prefectural level of cultural and artistic activities is believed to be composed of investment (prefectural expenditures for cultural and artistic projects), labor (the number of artists), and the number of prefectural residents constituting audiences.

Since the deviation between the calculated and actual observed levels of cultural and artistic activities is likely to be caused by factors that cannot be expressed by the explanatory

variables used in this study, the prefectures will be compared in terms of degrees of deviation to examine the influence of factors other than input factors on the formation of the level of cultural and artistic activities. With a special focus placed on prefectures whose deviation is consistently large, we attempt to extract latent factors that may provide explanation, such as accumulated cultural assets, institutional peculiarities, operational efficiency, and cultural networks that are unique to respective prefectures.

Table 5 shows the prefectures divided into groups according to their degrees of deviation between the calculated and actual levels (actual/calculated level). The deviation is an indicator of factors that reflect institutional, operational, cultural, historical and other specificities that cannot be explained by project cost and the numbers of artists and residents. It can be interpreted as an indicator of relative positioning of TFP by prefecture.

Table 5. Deviation between theoretical and actual levels

Group	Deviation	FY2015	FY2024
1	-0.5	Tochigi, Gunma, Okayama, Nagasaki, Kumamoto	Okinawa, Okayama, Miyagi, Kumamoto
2	0.5–0.9	Chiba, Aichi, Mie, Tottori, Tokushima, Kochi, Oita, Okinawa	Kochi, Wakayama, Gunma, Saga, Aomori, Chiba, Shizuoka, Oita, Ibaraki, Tochigi
3	0.9–1.1	Toyama, Ibaraki, Yamanashi, Shizuoka, Shimane, Shiga, Niigata, Nagano, Nara, Osaka, Gifu	Tokushima, Shiga, Fukuoka, Saitama, Tokyo, Mie, Osaka, Tottori, Nagano, Aichi, Nara
4	1.1–1.2	Ishikawa, Iwate, Akita, Saitama, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Ehime, Saga, Miyazaki, Hokkaido, Yamagata, Fukuoka, Kanagawa, Fukui, Kagoshima, Hyogo, Tokyo	Fukuoka, Aichi, Kagawa, Ishikawa, Fukui, Niigata, Ehime, Yamagata, Kanagawa, Yamanashi, Nagasaki, Hokkaido, Kyoto, Toyama
5	1.2–	Fukushima, Aomori, Miyagi, Wakayama, Yamaguchi, Kagawa	Iwate, Yamaguchi, Kagoshima, Hiroshima, Hyogo, Shimane, Miyazaki, Gifu

The FY2015 survey-based division shows that the prefectures in the high deviation group (1.2 and higher) have a high level of actual cultural and artistic activities compared to the amount of input. It is highly likely that factors difficult to quantify, such as institutional maturity, the depth of local culture, and the accumulation of resident-participatory activities, are responsible for these results. On the other hand, the prefectures in the low deviation group (0.5

and lower) have lower levels as compared to the amount of input, suggesting that efficiency in the utilization of cultural resources and the agglomeration effect might not have fully been realized. The changes that occurred by the time of the FY2024 survey point to a certain degree of “fluidity” in the deviation structure, meaning that the composition of prefectures in the high deviation group is largely different from that of FY2015. This suggests that the deviation is not a fixed regional attribute and can change depending on policy implementation and regional strategies. The prefectures that include large urban zones, such as Tokyo, Osaka, Aichi, and Kanagawa, are concentrated in the mid-range groups (0.9 to 1.2) in both FY2015 and FY2024, meaning that the relationship between input and output is relatively stable in large cities and that cultural and artistic activities are institutionalized and normalized. Comparison of the two years reveals that deviation is dynamic, not a firmly established regional trait, and that it does not remain consistently high or low except in limited cases. This indicates that TFP is not a simple region-specific attribute but is strongly influenced by variable factors such as policy measures, operational conditions, and networks. In FY2024, several prefectures in the provinces moved to higher-deviation groups. This suggests the possibility that the outcome is determined not only by the scale of urbanity and budget but also by differences in regional resource utilization and operational capabilities.

The prefectures with a deviation degree of around 1 (0.9 to 1.2) have calculated and actual levels that are almost identical, and they account for about 60% of the total. A deviation degree below 1 means that the output is relatively small compared to the input, and conversely, a deviation rate above 1 means relatively greater output than expected from the same amount of input. In this manner, deviation analysis makes it possible to visualize differences in the way input is used and institutions and networks are structured, rather than simple budgetary amounts and personnel size. It is effective in identifying cultural and institutional characteristics unique to respective prefectures that cannot be explained by the amount of input.

To verify whether high/low degrees of deviation are temporary or structural and sustained, we formulated a time-series model of deviation change. The deviation of Prefecture  $i$  in Year  $t$  being  $u_{i,t}$ , the equation below expresses the extent to which it persists relative to the deviation from the previous period:

$$u_{i,t} = \rho \times u_{i,t-1} + \eta_i + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad \dots(2)$$

Where,  $\rho$  is a coefficient that indicates the persistence of deviation. If  $\rho > 0$ , it persists, whereas if  $\rho \approx 0$ , it is reset each period, and if  $\rho < 0$ , it corrects or reverses itself.  $\eta_i$  is a time-invariant factor specific to the prefecture (such as a cultural custom and practice, historical institution, or collective nature and character of local residents not likely to change much over several decades), and  $\varepsilon_{i,t}$  is an error term. Using data on the 47 prefectures for FY2015 and FY2024, we

obtained statistically significant  $\rho = -0.277$  ( $p = 0.019$ ). This means that the prefectures whose deviation was one unit higher in FY2015 had a decrease of 0.277 on average in FY2024, while prefectures whose deviation was one unit lower in FY2015 had an average increase of 0.277 in FY2024, indicating that the deviation shrank over time. This means that extreme states do not persist in the long term, pointing to a tendency toward mean reversion, which can be interpreted as indicative of the existence of a self-correcting dynamic mechanism in the level of cultural and artistic activities.

With the above analysis, in the first stage of this study we clarified the structural factors that determine the level of cultural and artistic activities, using a production function; in the second stage, extracted deviation between the calculated and actual observed level that could not be explained by the structure; and in the third stage, verified using dynamic panel analysis whether the deviation is fixed or adjusted. The results showed that the differences among the prefectures in terms of deviation are not fixed but have a dynamic structure that is adjusted over time.

## **CULTURAL & ARTISTIC PROMOTION MEASURES FOR LOCAL REVITALIZATION**

In this study, we evaluated local cultural and artistic activities from the perspectives of artistic content and cultural and operational connection with the local community, as in the 2015 survey, and compared the results of the two surveys. During the nine-year period between them, a major negative exogenous event impacted cultural and artistic life: the spread of COVID-19. At present, however, activities have largely returned to the pre-COVID levels, making it possible to analyze changes in the level of regional cultural and artistic activities giving excessive consideration to COVID-19-related factors (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has added new forms of expression and organization to cultural and artistic events, such as digital-and-real hybrid events and outdoor/small-scale dispersed shows and performances. These changes have prompted redefinition of audience-performer relationships and diversified fund and revenue generating models, including foundations and crowdfunding. At the same time, many cultural and artistic activities have reverted to conventional physical shows and live performances, and the basic framework seems to have basically remained unchanged, although differences have emerged in the cost structure of professional activities. Throughout the nine-year period, among the factors that determine the level of cultural and artistic activities, the concentration of human resources and financial investment remained predominant, with no marked change in the structure determined by public spending and professional human resources, rather than by demand-side factors such as residents' leisure time and income. On the other hand, the influence of hard factors such as the

surface area of cultural facilities have diminished as can be seen in the ongoing diversification of modes of artistic expression.

Changes in elasticities by input factor suggest that the production structure of cultural and artistic activities shifted from FY2015 to FY2024 from one dependent on financial inputs to one that places greater emphasis on the agglomeration of human resources and the consumer base. Specifically, the operating cost elasticity ( $\alpha$ ) declined slightly from 0.439 to 0.400, while the elasticity of artist density ( $\beta$ ) increased from 0.947 to 1.104, along with its relative importance. This suggests that cultural and artistic activities have entered a stage wherein they depend more heavily on network externalities and agglomeration effects. The population elasticity also increased from 0.511 to 0.633, confirming the growing influence of demand-side factors such as the depth of the audience base, matching efficiency due to city size, and the expansion of the cultural consumer market. The  $\beta/\alpha$  ratio rose from 2.16 in FY2015 to 2.76 in FY2024, pointing to the greater dependence of the level of cultural and artistic activities on the concentration of human resources (“who are where and how”) than on financial investment. In other words, it is highly likely that a structural shift has occurred from focus on hard and operational spending to focus on soft factors such as human capital and networks. In the calculation of TFP(A), the t-value increased from 2.67 to 4.53, suggesting that factors such as institutional, operational, and cultural specificities, which cannot be explained by observable input factors, came into play more stably and systematically by FY2024. Comparison of the deviation between theoretical and actual levels values for each prefecture revealed the existence of region-specific factors that cannot be explained by input alone and that the distribution of these factors largely fluctuates from one year to next. This indicates that the results of cultural and artistic activities are determined not by fixed regional characteristics, but by variable factors such as institutional design, management capacity, and cultural networks.

To examine the persistence of the deviation over time, a dynamic fixed effects model was formulated using prefecture-specific panel data. The results confirmed that the deviation does not persist in the long term but shows a significant tendency to correct and reverse itself. In other words, this can be interpreted as a mean-reverting adjustment process occurring in the level of cultural and artistic activities. This suggests the possibility that, if policy efficacy is evaluated solely through static year-by-year comparison, improvement can be overestimated as success and deterioration underestimated as failure. Therefore, it is necessary to design regional cultural policies from a medium- to long-term perspective while taking into account deviation sustainability and structural factors, instead of as a simple reaction to short-term deviation.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

In this study, we compared the regional levels of cultural and artistic activities between regions using prefectural data for FY2015 and FY2024 and presented implications of the results for the efficient allocation of cultural resources and policy and institutional design implemented accordingly. Specifically, regional differences were surveyed in terms of the deviation between the theoretical and actual observed levels of cultural and artistic activities, and their changes over time were examined using dynamic panel analysis.

The empirical analysis in this study is a minimally configured dynamic model based on a short-term panel with a limited observation period. It does not fully identify the long-term convergence process or structural determinants of the level of cultural and artistic activities. Causal analysis that explicitly incorporates factors such as population structure, urban agglomeration, cultural facility development, financial expenditures, and cultural networks must be addressed in future research. Furthermore, considering the possibility of endogeneity bias inherent in dynamic panel estimation, it is desirable that longer-term panel data be established in the future and that more precise identification strategies be adopted, such as using GMM (Generalized Method of Moments) estimation.

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