How the Residential Environment Form Place Attachment: A Comparison of Different types of Aging Communities

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1. Purpose
This study aims to clarify how place attachment is formed through the residential environment in aging communities in Japan.

2. Background
In the past few decades, place attachment was considered as a significant concept to explain the affective bond between individual and their meaningful place. People who have strong attachment to their community, are more willing to engage in activities and resist changing. The similar propensity is also notified by research concerning depopulated district in Japan. In such a district, the aging of population and decline of birth rate are aggravating year by year. In order to decrease the outflow of population, improving place attachment would be helpful to restore activities in the communities, thereby such communities would be sustainable. However, research regarding to such issues in aging areas recent years have focused on the effect of place attachment rather the mechanism of formation of place attachment. Although some prior studies indicate that the place attachment composed of two demonstrations: physical environment and social environment. Concrete environmental factors, however, have not been clarified sufficiently. Hence clarifying components and formation process of place attachment would be helpful to improve such pessimistic perspectives on aging communities.

3. Methods
This study focuses areas whose aging rate is over 50% in Miyagi prefecture in Japan. First, we extracted such aged communities using Japan Census data, and clarified the communities using cluster analysis. Then the communities were classified into two groups: Urban suburbs and mountain areas. After that, a questionnaires survey was sent to all households in extracted communities by mailing. Respondents of the questionnaire were asked to assess physical and social environment of their residential area. After that an exploratory factor analysis was applied and 6 factors were extracted. In addition, regression analysis was applied to clarify significant factors which form place attachment.

4. Results
The results showed that, 1) there is no significant difference on the degree of place attachment between two community groups, even though perceived residential environment was different from each other. 2) On the other hand, there are differences on structure of the place attachment. Compared to the urban suburbs, traditional cultural norm and age were significant factors of the place attachment in the mountain areas. 3) Regardless of community types, place attachment was formed by both of physical and social environment. In addition, the residential convenience and the connection to the locals did not show direct impact on the
place attachment, which suggested that the qualitative aspect of environment could be more important than the actual environment. For an instance, individual could show high level of place attachment because of their reciprocity and reliability to neighbors, but not their activities in their communities.

5. Conclusion

These results highlight that, in order to improve place attachment in aging communities, enhancing qualitative aspect of environment is more effective than infrastructure development. Besides that, the policies on sustainable development for aging communities should be focus on something irreplaceable in the communities, and on improving the quality of connection among dwellers.