

THE PARTICULARITIES OF THE CULTURAL CENTERS SPECIALIZED IN TEACHING JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the particularities of the cultural centers specialized in teaching the Japanese language and culture. Thus, the study begins with a brief presentation of the cultural centers and the legal conditions for their establishment and operation. It highlights the role of these centers, generating non-formal education, in completing the formal education specific to the compulsory education system and in carrying out the permanent education programs. The applicative part, respectively the concrete contribution through this work, consists in presenting the particularities of the Japanese Cultural Center in the city of Brasov-Romania including collected and analyzed data reflecting the past and current situation of this center.*

Key words: *Japanese language, cultural centers, Japanese culture.*

1. Introductory Aspects regarding the Establishment and Functioning of Cultural Centers

Cultural centers are legal entities, usually established in Romania under O.G.26/ 2000 on the establishment and functioning of associations and foundations or in accordance with Law 31/1990 on the rules for the organization and functioning of companies.

These cultural centers will have stipulated in the constitutive acts as well as in the statute, as the case may be, a purpose, an object of activity as well as a duration of operation, all of which have been declared upon registration. (Government Ordinance no. 26/2000 on Associations and Foundations, 2000).

Obviously the cultural centers will have an object of activity with cultural specificity, a social headquarter and also a patrimony and an activity plan (Idem)

From the point of view of the forms of education, respectively systematized, organized or spontaneous, we can place the cultural centers in the category of organized education of non-formal type.

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Thus, the cultural centers are part of the educational entities through which all the instructional-educational actions are carried out in an institutionalized extracurricular setting.

They promote activities outside the classes organized in school institutions and include cultural programs for lifelong learning.

Therefore, considering the concept of lifelong learning that aims *to create a society in which people can continue to learn throughout their lives, at all times and in all places, in order to perfect themselves and to have fulfilled lives*, cultural centers through their structure and offer, have a significant contribution to fulfil this wish. (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, 2006).

Participation in non-formal educational activities is free of choice.

The participants attend according to the desire to spend their free time in various activities organized by the cultural centers, activities that have a cultural-educational character.

2. Particularities of the Japanese cultural centers on the Romanian territory

This article aims to highlight the particularities of Japanese cultural centers, precisely to understand how to acquire certain aspects of Japanese culture through their support.

Concomitantly with the transition of Romania to the market economy and to a multicultural educational system, after the 90s, the interest of Romanians to know and to acquire specific elements of different cultures, also generated the activity of promoting the Japanese culture through many organizational forms established in this regard, such as: universities, high schools or even general schools, which have classes in Japanese language. Alongside these, the cultural centers were also set up to promote the Japanese culture and language, specialized in these activities and which have many particularities compared to the other organizational structures listed above.

Japanese Government proactively supports, as stated, the various initiatives of cultural exchange and cooperation throughout the world, both by governmental and private organizations. (Minister of Foreign Affairs in Japan, 2014)

The latest available report based on the survey conducted by the Japan Foundation - a Japanese semi-governmental organization, which through its programs cultivates friendship and strengthens relations between Japan and other nations, indicates the worldwide increase of the number of organizations specialized in teaching Japanese language and culture. (Japan Foundation in FY2015). (Figure 1)

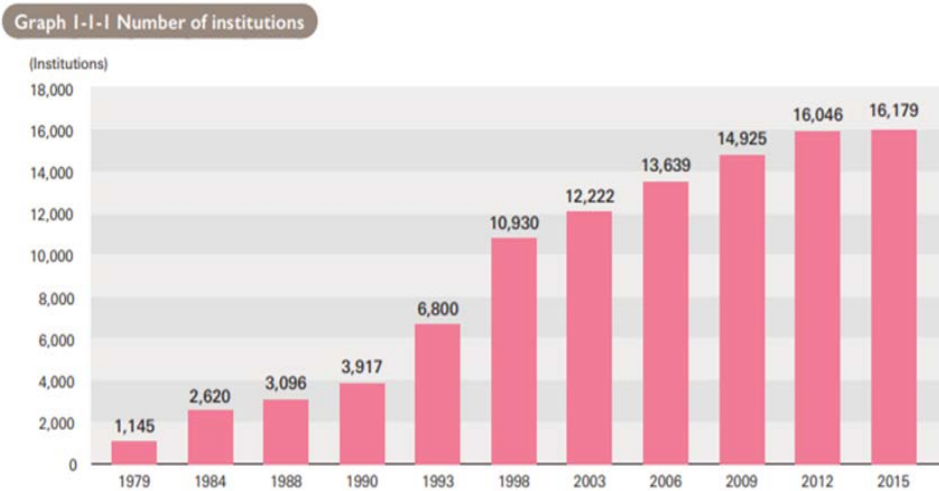


Fig. 1. *The Number of Worldwide Japanese language and culture institution.*
Survey Report on Japanese-Language Education Abroad 2015

https://www.jpfd.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/result/dl/survey_2015/Report_all_e.pdf

According to the same report, we find that the number of attendants (students/learners) registered a maximum in 2012 and a slight decrease in 2015. (Figure 2)

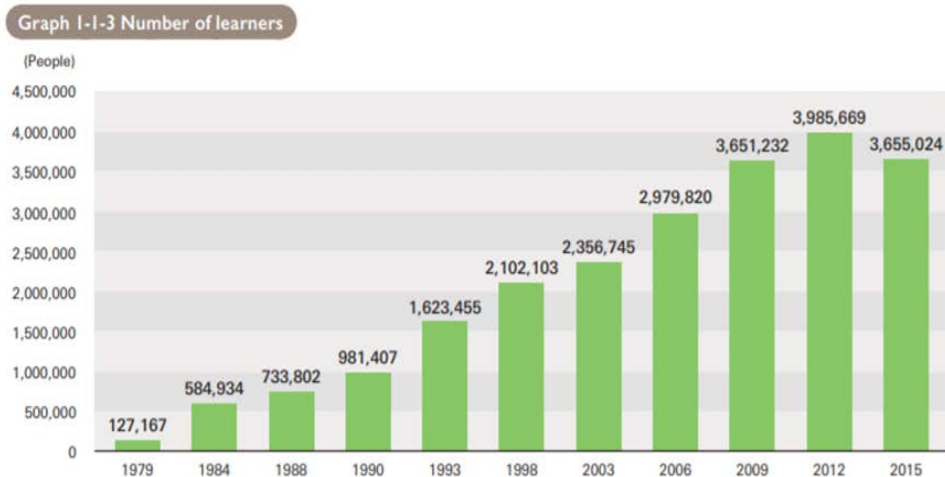


Fig. 2. *The Number of Worldwide Japanese language and culture learners.*

Survey Report on Japanese-Language Education Abroad 2015
https://www.jpfd.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/result/dl/survey_2015/Report_all_e.pdf

The data regarding the number of institutions and learners in Eastern Europe and more concretely in Romania are also found in this report. (Figure 3)

Table 2-9-1 Number of institutions, number of teachers, and number of learners in Eastern Europe

Country and region	2012			2015				Composition by educational stage (learners) (People)				Population* (People)
	Institutions (Institutions)	Teachers (People)	Learners (People)	Institutions (Institutions)	Teachers (People)	Learners (People)	Learners per 100,000 population (People)	Primary	Secondary	Higher	Other	
Russia	137	529	11,401	126	480	8,650	6	778	2,355	2,971	2,546	143,456,918
Poland	56	207	3,985	57	222	4,416	11	0	104	2,295	2,017	38,611,794
Hungary	28	65	1,554	32	93	1,992	20	201	267	1,007	517	9,855,023
Kyrgyz	18	46	777	23	48	924	16	180	169	394	181	5,939,962
Romania	22	54	1,905	18	41	2,052	11	53	460	986	553	19,511,324
Ukraine	15	71	1,319	18	97	1,523	3	60	163	974	326	44,823,765
Czech Republic	12	44	825	17	53	1,175	11	47	54	720	354	10,543,186
Uzbekistan	15	58	1,528	14	61	1,505	5	0	126	813	566	29,893,488
Serbia	5	14	292	11	31	533	6	99	120	246	68	8,850,975
Estonia	11	16	357	11	17	317	24	5	39	150	123	1,312,558
Slovakia	7	16	252	9	22	275	5	0	0	74	201	5,426,258
Armenia	4	7	107	9	23	235	8	8	20	135	72	3,017,712
Belarus	6	13	218	8	16	305	3	0	0	95	210	9,495,826
Bulgaria	9	36	1,570	7	33	1,245	17	467	504	207	67	7,149,787
Lithuania	9	15	288	6	10	301	10	0	35	236	30	2,878,405
Kazakhstan	4	41	405	5	30	297	2	0	0	126	171	17,625,226
Georgia	5	9	235	5	12	237	6	0	128	109	0	3,999,812
Croatia	5	8	125	5	11	175	4	12	0	126	37	4,240,317
Azerbaijan	7	17	465	4	9	239	2	0	150	89	0	9,753,968
Latvia	3	8	209	3	8	156	8	0	50	74	32	1,970,503
Tajikistan	3	9	73	3	9	77	1	0	15	62	0	8,481,855
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-	-	-	2	2	88	2	0	13	75	0	3,810,416
Slovenia	2	9	208	1	8	275	13	0	0	275	0	2,067,526
Moldova	1	2	82	1	2	75	2	0	0	0	75	4,068,897
Turkmenistan	1	5	48	1	5	49	1	0	0	49	0	5,373,502
Macedonia	-	-	-	1	1	23	1	0	0	23	0	2,078,453
Albania	1	1	15	1	2	15	1	0	0	0	15	2,896,679
Eastern Europe overall	386	1,300	28,243	398	1,346	27,154	7	1,910	4,772	12,311	8,161	407,134,135

Source: World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

Fig. 3. The number of institutions and of learners in Eastern Europe including Romania https://www.ipf.go.jp/j/project/japanese/survey/result/dl/survey_2015/Report_all_e.pdf

Based on Figure 3 we observe the great interest for learning Japanese in Romania with a number of 2052 learners in 2015, being ranked immediately after Russia (8650) and Poland (4416) compared to other countries in the Eastern European region (Hungary-1992 learners, Bulgaria 1245 learners etc.).

The research of A. Dragan makes reference to some of the organizations dedicated to Japanese language and culture education in Romania (Dragan, 2018, pp.95-96). Other relevant information of the number and location of these organizations within the country are provided by the Embassy of Japan (2020) in Romania and by the latest available survey, FY 2015, of the Japan Foundation (2019). Since there is a considerable dynamic in appearance or disappearance of these organizations within short periods of time, updated information is to be found in the following table.

Table 1

Relevant stat and private organizations concerning the Japanese language and culture in Romania

Type of education	No.	Institution/organization	Place	*Year	Website/others
University education	1	Bucharest University The Center of Japanese Studies	Bucharest	1975 2010	https://unibuc.ro/studii/facultati/facultatea-de-limbi-si-literaturi-straine/ https://japoneza.ils.unibuc.ro/
	2	Babes-Bolyai University a. Faculty of letters b. Department of Asian Languages and Literatures c. The Japanese Cultural Center of "Babes-Bolyai" University	Cluj	1999 2008 2017	http://lett.ubbcluj.ro/departamente/departamentul-de-limbi-si-literaturi-asiatice/limba-si-literatura-japoneza/ https://lett.ubbcluj.ro/departamente/departamentul-de-limbi-si-literaturi-asiatice/ https://japanese.centre.ubbcluj.ro/?fbclid=IwAR3vGYfhIPS-V9pbFxxYUD3ejsuLUjKCZSIF4rabe7ihZyx3GpYxaZWGUj0
		Polytechnic University	Timisoara	2017	http://www.upt.ro/Informatii_UP_T_1261_ro.html
	3	Hyperion University	Bucharest	2010	https://hyperion.ro/component/content/article/21-facultati/departamente/39-litere-si-limbi-straine
	4	"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University	Bucharest	2000	http://limbi-straine.ucdc.ro/japoneza.php
	5	Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies	Bucharest	-	<i>Optional organized upon request of the University's registered students</i>
	6	Technical University of Civil Engineering	Bucharest	-	<i>Optional organized upon request of the Univ. registered students</i>
	7	"Angela Hondru" Romanian-Japanese Study Centre of the Romanian-American University	Bucharest	2005	http://csrj.ro/en/home/
Pre-university education	8	"Ion Creanga" National College	Bucharest	1996	https://cnion-creanga.ro/comisii-metodice/46-sectia-de-japoneza
	9	"Emil Racovita" School No. 93	Bucharest	2000	<i>Optional course</i>
Others	10	Musashino Association, Japan	Brasov	2003	www.musashino.ro/
	11	"Petre Dulfu" County Library	Baia Mare	2012	www.bibliotecamm.ro/

Table 1

Relevant stat and private organizations concerning the Japanese language and culture in Romania

Type of education	No.	Institution/organization	Place	*Year	Website/others
Others	12	Nihongo Mirai Center	Bucharest	2008	www.limbajaponeza.ro/?fbclid=IwAR3UKp2KN2Ts8zRxj8GbbqNDPeMcb_whyj4SmTjfiYaXBBY0FWaymbVMmFg
	13	Sakura Japanese School	Bucharest	2011	https://japoneza.com/ro/prima-pagina
	14	International House	Bucharest	2012	https://ih.ro/cursuri-de-limbi-straine-pentru-companii/
	15	“Ioan. I. Dalles” Popular University	Bucharest	1966	https://www.dalles.ro/cursuri/limbi-straine/curs-de-limba-japoneza/
	16	B. Smart Language SRL (B. Smart Foreign Languages Center)	Bucharest	2017	www.cursuri-bsmart.ro/limbi-straine/limba-japoneza/ www.cursuri-bsmart.ro/
	17	Nobori Aikido Aikikai Sportive Association (Nobori Japanese Cultural Center)	Bucharest	2017	www.nobori-dojo.ro/category/limba-si-cultura-japoneza/
	18	Sakuranbo Association	Constanta	2010	www.sakuranbo.ro/despre.htm
	19	Simone Educational Center	Craiova	2017	www.simone-educational.ro/en/japanese-courses/
	20	Himawari Romanian-Japanese Association	Iasi	2007	https://asociatihimawari.wordpress.com/despre-noi/
	21	Yamato Cultural Association	Timisoara	2017	https://asociatiayamato.ro/despre-noi/

* The year represents the year of the beginning of the Japanese language and culture courses; it may or may not coincide with the year of the establishment of the organization

Considering what was said above, we state that these cultural centers, respectively those promoting the Japanese culture and language, came into being mainly due to the relations developed between Japan and Romania.

These friendly relationships were materialized by the desire of the Japanese side to promote its culture in Romania.

As significant features, the cultural centers promoting the Japanese language and culture are organized with the support of local authorities or of public educational institutions, which can put at their disposal headquarters for their activity.

These centers have a specific program of activity that consists of both Japanese and Japanese language teaching courses. These are mainly promoted by organizing presentations and workshops of Tea Ceremony, Japanese Calligraphy, Ikebana-The Art of Flower Arrangement, E-Tegami-Painted Views, Origami-the Art of Folding Paper,

Parade of Kimono as well as some Japanese-specific traditional festivals such as Hinamatsuri-Girls` Festival and Tanabata-Stars Festival and contemporary ones like Cosplay genre, Comics, exhibitions with different themes, lectures, discussions and movie projections.

The participants in these services offered by the Japanese cultural centers are called learners.

The significant difference from the other organizational structures for promoting Japanese culture is the fact that these students have different ages and different social statuses, their connection (the cohesion element) being the desire to acquire elements of Japanese language and culture.

The differences in age, occupation and level of knowledge of the participants lead to the idea of mimicking a society.

Thus, we can consider that the learning process within these centers is carried out in mixed classes of multi-age type (the learners present not only different ages but also different level of knowledge regarding the Japanese language and culture) and non-graded (assessment without notes of students)

This type of classes, according to the numerous studies, have a positive effect for the students, being centered on the individual learning needs, B.A. Miller considering them of a major importance for the successful assimilation of the knowledge (Miller, 1994, p.23).

Another element regarding the organization of the classes is the size of the group of students. The group is usually of small size (2-12 persons), except for the beginning period of the course when there is a considerable participation of the enrolled ones (some learners withdraw during the trimester for various reasons). Smaller groups, according to some studies, encourage the learner-instructor and the learner-learner interaction, this being associated with a higher level of quality and efficiency of the learning process. This is visible in the ability to listen, to better understand and to more accurately enunciate of those who learn (Yi, 2008).

The Japanese cultural centers are organized in a similar way to the formal education units, in addition, having a suitable library, halls intended for cultural activities of initiation in various Japanese arts including Japanese gastronomy, calligraphy, Ikebana-Art of flower arrangement etc. as well as outdoor spaces for conducting and organizing Japanese events and festivals.

Another feature of Japanese cultural centers is that they offer scholarships or even organize cultural exchange trips /visits for meritorious learners who have managed to accumulate sufficient knowledge and prove this in competitions or exams. In this way the learners have the opportunity to deepen their study through direct contact with the Japanese culture and civilization.

An important feature of these centers is the carrying out of the teaching act with native Japanese instructors who most often perform this activity as volunteers.

Knowing that the learning process of any foreign language is inextricably linked to the specific cultural aspects, the native instructor represents the only direct contact between the learner and that language (Elmes, 2013; Samaneh, 2017), in this case Japanese language. The native instructor becomes an exponent of Japanese culture and at the same time an essential source of cultural elements (Oxford, 1997).

The teaching/learning act is a relaxed one, not conditioned by grading systems or strict and authoritarian rules found in formal education.

The teaching program in the cultural centers is flexible, this coming in support of the learners who have a main activity, the study of the Japanese language and culture being a secondary one. This flexible program gives them the opportunity to achieve their goal. Thus, the teaching hours are established according to the availability of the learners and the participation in the course allows intermittent learning, the learners can withdraw for a period of time, returning and resuming the course at the appropriate level.

Another feature of the Japanese cultural centers is that both the exterior design and especially the interior one have specific Japanese elements. In this way the students are surrounded by numerous objects of Japanese origin, allowing them to have contact with a Japanese space with a genuine ambiance.

3. Organization and operation of the Japanese Cultural Center in the city of Brasov-Romania

The Japanese cultural center in Brasov was established on the basis of an agreement between the cities of Brasov-Romania and Musashino-Japan, an agreement signed in 1998 by the mayors in office at that time, of the two cities.

The agreement provided for the setting up of a Japanese-specific Cultural Exchange Center and the strengthening of friendly relations between the citizens of the two cities.

The center operated for a short time in a building of the “George Bariţiu” County Library in Brasov, but lacking legal personality, being administered by the Brasov-Musashino Friendship Association.

Some contextual changes have led to the reconsideration of the activity of the Friendship Association Brasov - Musashino and of the Center of cultural exchanges Brasov-Musashino that is in its administration.

As a result, a new legally established non-governmental organization called the Musashino-Japan Association has continued the tradition of promoting Japanese culture and has taken the initiative to build a Japanese center in Brasov, among the first made in the country.

The funds needed for the operation come mostly from sponsorships, this being an essential feature of the cultural centers set up as non-profit organizations.

In the following figure we can observe the evolution of the turnover compared to different periods of time.

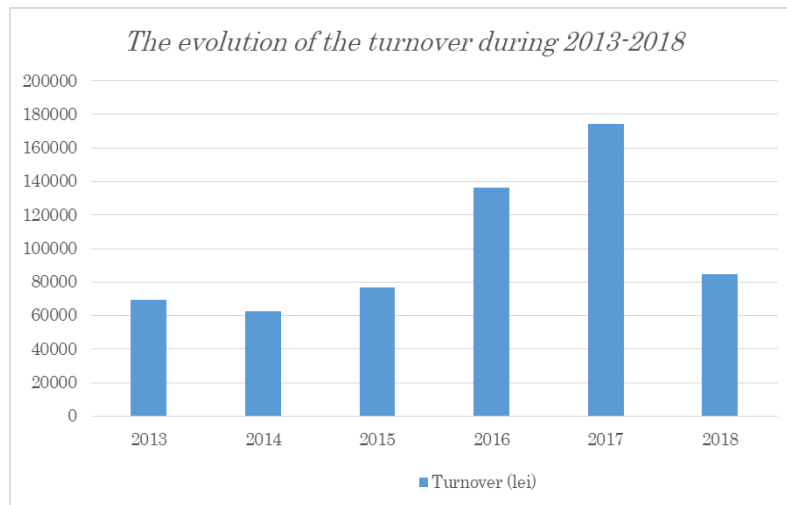


Fig. 4. *Evolution of turnover during 2013-2018 of the Musashino Association, Japan*

The advertisement of the courses is done mainly by the means of the new media and also by placing posters in educational and cultural institutions intensely frequented especially by young people.

The registration of the students is done only based on the identity card, no file with diplomas, certificates or portfolio of activities being requested. The only condition is the learners' age of minimum 8 years as a guarantee of the reading and writing ability. At the same time the ability of understanding English is desirable.

The following figures reflect the number of learners in relation to the time period.

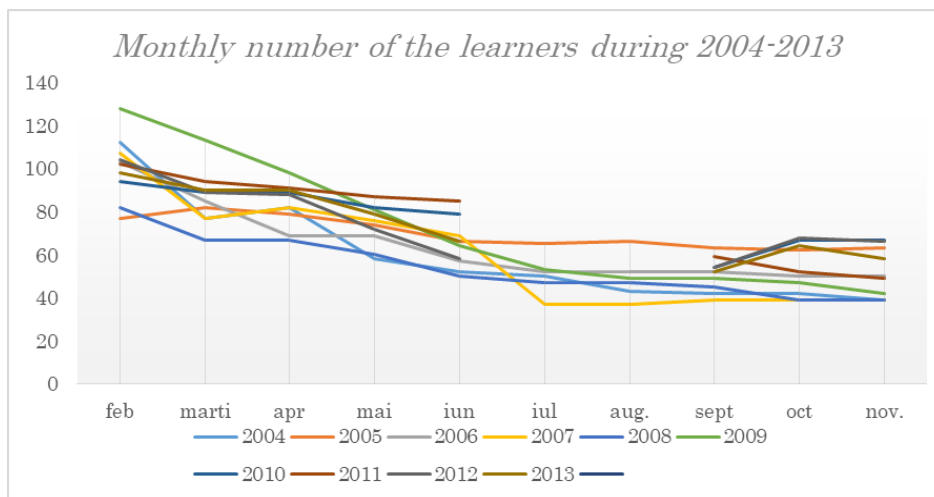


Fig. 5. *Monthly frequency of the learners at the Musashino Association, Japan; 2004-2013.*

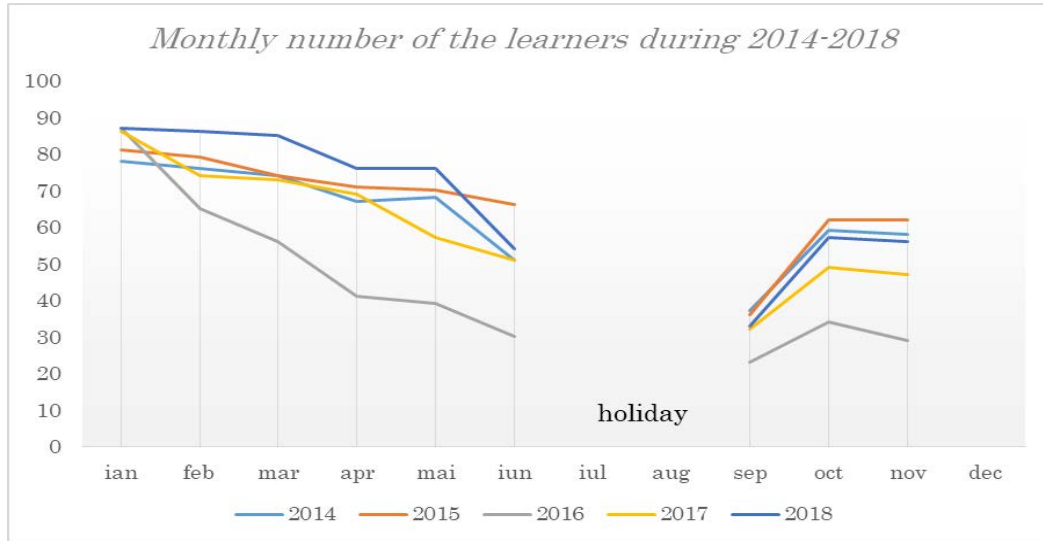


Fig. 6. Monthly frequency of the learners at the Musashino Association, Japan; 2014-2018

From the point of view of age, among learners predominate adolescents and young people between 15-30 years.

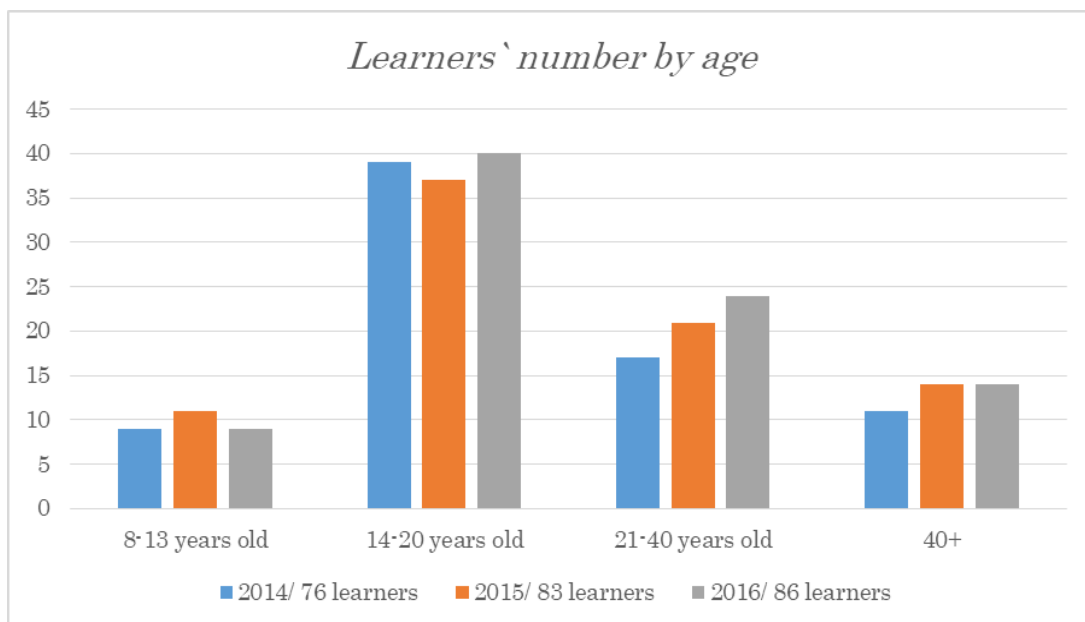


Fig. 7. Learners` number by age

The professions of the participating adults are mainly from the following fields of activity: IT, education, health, economics and art.

The following figure highlights the proportion of the students in relation to their level of education.

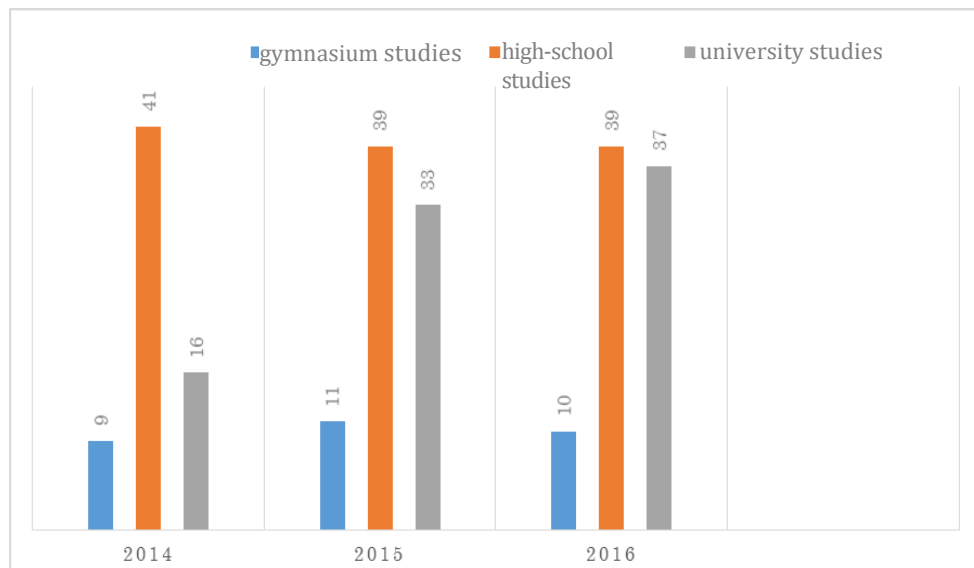


Fig. 8. *The level of study of the learners*

4. The particularities of the Japanese Cultural Center of the Musashino Association, Japan in Brasov

The existence of the friendship relation between the cities of Brasov-Romania and Musashino-Japan created the premises of the emergence of the Japanese Cultural Center in the Municipality of Brasov, this fact being a particularity of this center.

The context favored the center by getting support from both city halls. Therefore, it could benefit of an adequate location for its educational-cultural activities made available by the Municipality of Brasov. On the other hand a Japanese volunteer instructor was detached by the Japanese side.

Another feature of the Japanese Center in Braşov is the realization of a cultural calendar that aims to carry out certain Japanese holidays in the territory of Romania, respectively in the city of Brasov, their organization being ensured with the learners` active participation.

The way of organizing the classes takes into account the level of knowledge of the Japanese language and not of age or occupation, a particularity that highlights, from a social perspective, a significant role of stimulating the relationship between generations and the cohesion of the participants.

As part of the recreational activities and the different origami-type workshops, paper folding, manga-comics, Japanese Shodou-calligraphy, etc. participants can develop their creativity and acquire new skills.

5. Data Collection Methodology

In terms of data collection for this article, some of the relevant data were accessed via Internet being published on the official website of governmental and public institutions (the Japan Foundation, public universities) as well as on the website of the legally established organizations named in this article.

In case of ambiguity, where possible, the data were verified by telephone survey with few questions and short answers (e.g. the year of establishment of Japanese language classes, the nationality of the teachers who teach Japanese, etc.). For the case study research the data were collected through combined methods. Thus, an in-depth documented interview was suited for gathering quantitative archived data (statistic data regarding the number and the profile of the participants of the Japanese classes as well as of the financial ones, found in the Annual Activity Reports for the period 2004-2018). In addition, a qualitative description of the different aspects of the activities has been offered during the interview by the representative of the organization. Furthermore, the data were verified by observation through direct attendance at some of the Japanese classes and events.

6. Conclusions

Japanese cultural centers provide an organized framework for learning Japanese language, culture and civilization with multiple benefits for learners and communities.

Cultural centers are an important source of development of the society, supporting and completing the offer of formal and informal education. They facilitate access to the specific education of the Japanese culture by assimilating theoretical and practical knowledge in an organized framework and by direct transfer from specialists, more over they ease the stimulation of creativity. All these broaden the cultural horizon of the participants by interacting with aspects of a different culture, complete the learning process, develop skills and educate them in the spirit of tolerance and appreciation of the values of both their own culture and others.

The locals have the opportunity to get in touch with the natives; this makes, on one hand, the learning process direct and efficient and, on the other hand, it strengthens the relationships.

We consider that the mission of the cultural centers, in the case of the Japanese ones, is to come with the richness of the Japanese culture for those who aspire to its knowledge.

Compared to the other institutional forms of education and learning that exist, whose purpose is to promote the Japanese language and culture on the territory of Romania, the cultural centers with Japanese specificity, through the highlighted features, realize the conveying of knowledge in an easy, accessible, flexible, authentic and efficient way.

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