

Re-organizing community as gift-based entity

Hiroshi Tsutomi

Director, Youth Employment Support Network of Shizuoka (Japan)

Professor, University of Shizuoka (Japan)

Polanyi (1944; 1957) writes in *Great Transformation* that “The true criticism of market society is not that it was based on economics---in a sense, every and any society is based on it---but that its economy is based on self-interest”. This paper is a presentation of an attempt to build our society upon mutual aid which has taken place in Shizuoka, Japan, for 15 years (Tsutomi, and Youth Job Development Support Network of Shizuoka, 2011). Before describing this attempt, I briefly overview how the Japanese society has affected youth transitions to adulthood.

Societal changes affecting youth transitions

Japan is said to be a country where a stable life course is prepared for most youth. However, that image is no more a reality. Figure 1 summarizes our national statistics on school students and new graduates. Out of 100 new students entering high school, 94 of them finished high school while 6 leave school before completion. Out of 94 who finish high school, 4 do not have any job or education to pursue; 51 go to college/university; 21 go to technical school, and 18 start working. Out of 51 who enter college, 6 drop out and 45 graduate. Out of 45 who finish college, 11 have no way to go, 6 go to graduate school, and 28 start working. Out of 28 who start working, 8 quit job within three years, and 20 continue to work for three years. If you sum up all those who continue to work for three years after the last education, the total is only 41. The life course of Japanese youth now follows a zig-zag pattern rather a straight path.

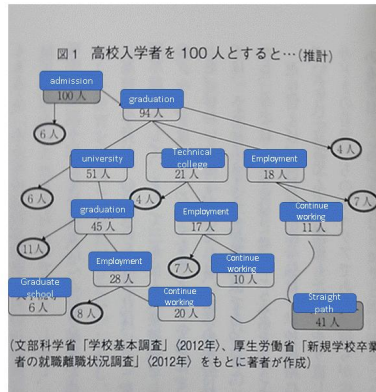


Figure 1. Zig-zag path of youth transition

Even after joining the workforce, the life is unstable. Figure 2 show the percentage of non-regular workers in Japan (left for male; right for female). It has been on a stable increase since around 1990 (not shown in the figure) and now reached about 40% of the total employees. The same applies to youngsters (aged 25-34) as well. Thus, it has become more difficult for young persons to be integrated into job market as regular workers.

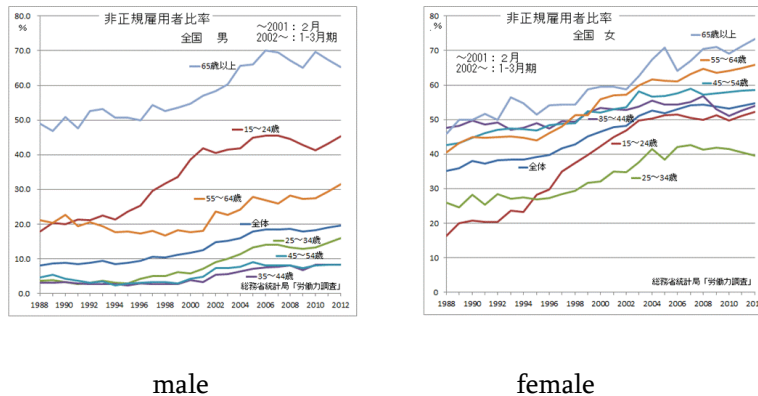
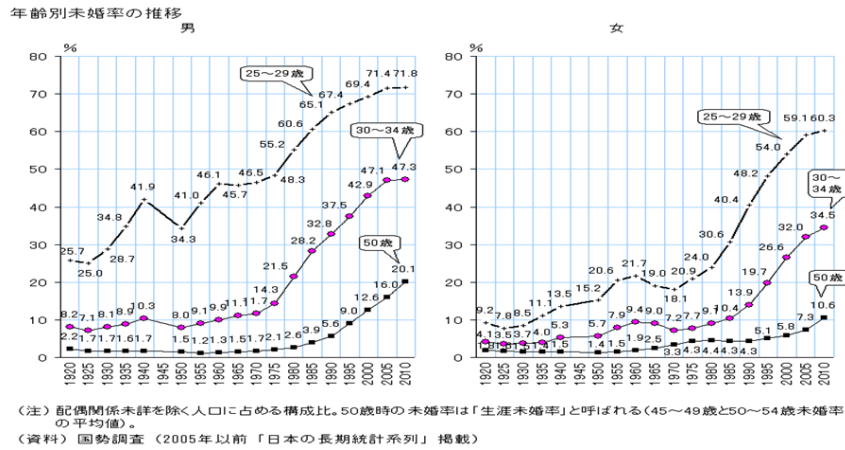


Figure 2. Percentage of non-regular workers in Japan

The increase of non-regular employment has contributed to the difficulty with finding a marriage partner. Figure 3 shows the rapid increase of unmarried rates for male (left) and female (right). The situation seems worse for the male if you compare the male and the female of the same generation.



male female
Figure 3. Trend of unmarried rate

Figure 4 shows the relationship between the unmarried rate and the types of employment for male (left) and female (right). It is so clear the male with nonregular employment have a huge difficulty in finding a partner. In their thirties, three quarter of them remain unmarried while only thirty percent of regular workers remain unmarried. To note, the situation is different for female because many of them turn from regular to nonregular work after marriage.

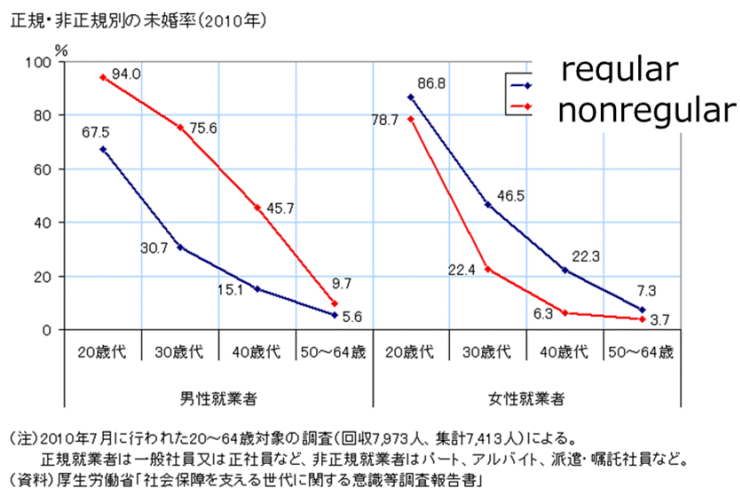


Figure 4. Relationship between the unmarried rate and the types of employment

Figures 5 and 6 give us a further bleak picture for the Japanese youth. Figure 5 shows

the percentage of deaths caused by suicide for each age grades. As you find, the percentage almost reaches 50% for youths in twenties. This is a very painful figure. In Figure 6, we can find a very high correlation ($r=0.87$) between the suicide rate (per 100,000) and the perceived bad prospect for the future.

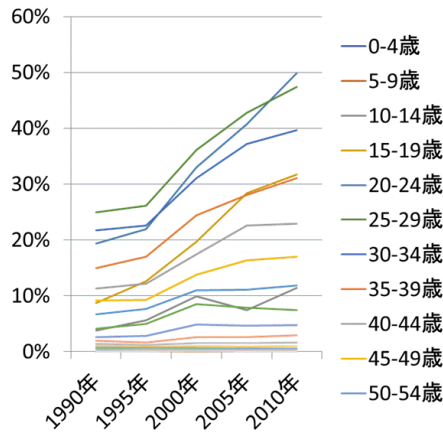


Figure 5. Percentage of deaths caused by suicide

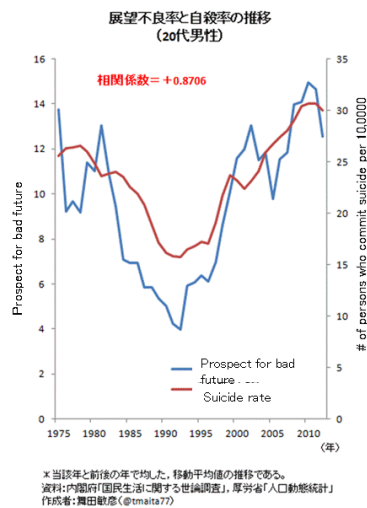
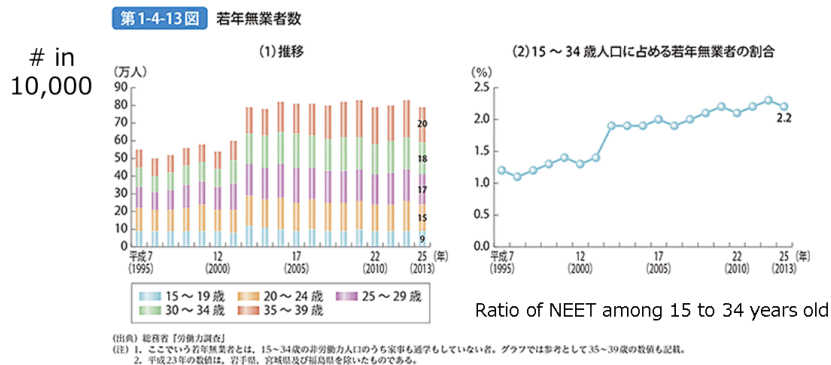


Figure 6. Trend of suicide rate and prospect for bad future

The Japanese government defined those youths who are not employed, not at school, and not in training as NEET. Figures 7 and 8 show governmental statistics on NEET. The number and percentage of NEET has been stable for more than ten years.



NEET: Those not in education, employment or training who do not seek job and not engage in housework.

Figure 7(left). Trend in the number of NEET

Figure 8 (Right). Trend in the percentage of NEET.

Figures 9 and 10 show the number of hikikomori (those youth who lack social relationship and isolate themselves at home from the rest of society) which mostly overlap NEET. The estimated number of hikikomori, 696,000, is almost the same as that of NEET. Many of them give mal-adaptation to a workplace, sickness, and failure to find job as reasons for becoming a hikikomori.

第1-4-16表 ひきこもり群の定義と推計数

	有効回収数に占める割合 (%)	全国の推計数 (万人)
ふだんは家にいるが、近所のコンビニなどにだけ出かける	0.40	15.3
自宅からは出るが、家からは出ない	0.09	3.5
自宅からほとんど出ない	0.12	4.7
ふだんは家にいるが、自分の趣味に関する用事の時だけ外出する	1.19	準ひきこもり 46.0 万人
計	1.79	広義のひきこもり 69.6 万人

注: 狭義のひきこもり 23.6 万人^(注4)

(出典) 内閣府 (2010) 「若者の意識に関する調査 (ひきこもりに関する実態調査)」
 (注) 1. 15～39歳の5,000人を対象として、3,287人 (65.7%) から回答を得た。
 2. 「上記ひきこもり群に該当する状態となって6か月以上の者のみを集計。『現在の状態のきっかけ』で統合失調症または身体的な病気と答えた者、自宅で仕事をしていると回答した者、『ふだん自宅にいるときによくしていること』で『家事・育児をする』と回答した者を除く。
 3. 全国の推計数は、有効回収数に占める割合に、総務省「人口推計」(2009年)における15～39歳人口3,880万人を乗じたもの。
 4. 狭義のひきこもり23.6万人は、厚生労働省「ひきこもりの評価・支援に関するガイドライン」における推計値25.5万世帯とはほぼ一致する。

Figure 9 (left) Estimated number of hikikomori by condition

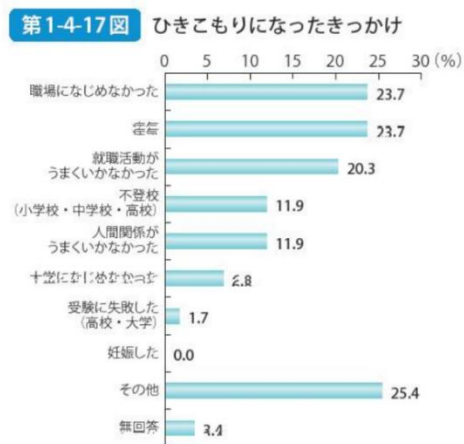


Figure 10 (right) Reasons for becoming a hikikomori

There has been only one local municipality in Japan that conducted the full count of Hikikomori in their jurisdiction. That is Fujisato-town in Akita Prefecture. Fujisato-town is a

town of less than 4,000 population in a very remote area of Japan. Their Council of Social Welfare made a list of all members of all households in town and figured out at least 113 hikikomori in the town. This is a surprisingly huge figure if you compare this finding to the national statistics. However, if you could properly consider the bias produced by the nonresponses which you cannot avoid in the social survey, the gap would be greatly reduced.

Formulating Muen-Ka

Mu means loss. En means connections, especially personal and community connections. Ka means phenomenon. So, Muen-ka means the phenomenon of the loss of connections. The situation surrounding youths in Japan described above is one of the phenomena related to Muen-ka including solitary deaths of aged people, child abuse in single-parent families, filling of houses with garbage by failing to throw it away, etc.

We can visualize Muen-ka, using the well-known Pestoff's triangle. The triangle has three corners: state (public agencies), market (private firms), and community (households, families, etc.) and a space in-between (as shown in Figure 11).

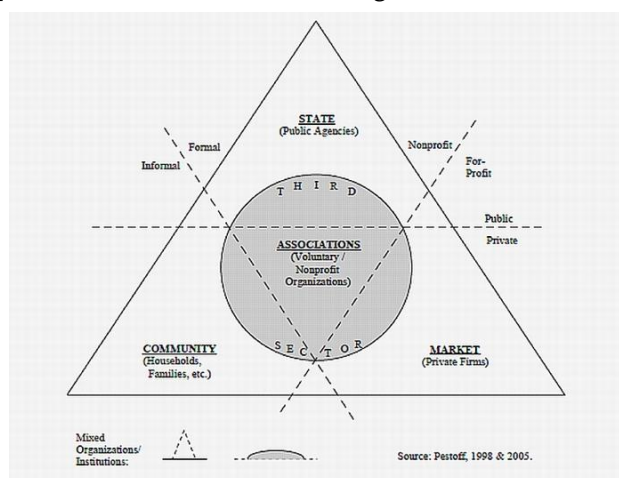


Figure 11. Pestoff's triangle

At present, this space is getting larger because of the stagnant economy and shrinking market, the decrease in tax revenue and declining social spending, and the loss of employment and drop in capacity of families to care for their members (see Figure 12).

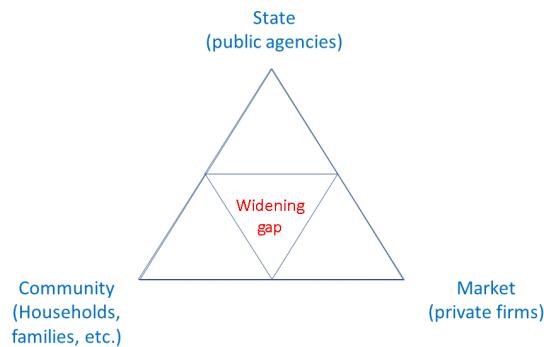


Figure 12. Widening gap in Pestoff's triangle

Pestoff himself argues that this space/gap could be covered by associations (voluntary/non-profit organizations) (see Figure 11). However, in reality, this gap has not been covered by existing social institutions (i.e., state, market and community) or newly appearing ones (i.e. associations). Individuals have been severed/released from the social institutions occupying three corners and thrown into this space like a grain of sand, each one not connecting to each other (Figure 13). This is the visualized situation of youth (and others socially excluded) in Japan.

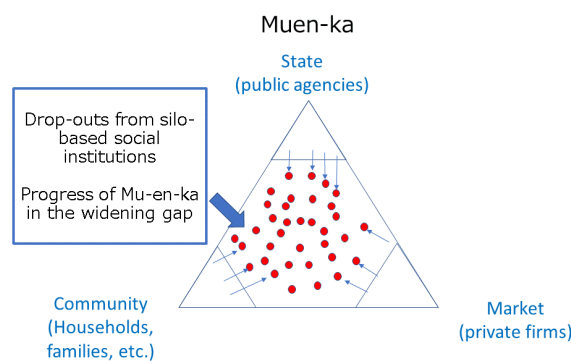


Figure 13. Progress of Muen-ka

How has this situation occurred? It seems that the suspicious suspect is neo-liberalism. Before neo-liberalism started to wield its power, the pursuit of economic freedom was mostly congruent with the pursuit of civic freedom. But as neo-liberalism has taken over the society, the pursuit of economic freedom has become divergent from the pursuit of civic freedom and the former indeed is suppressing the latter in the current society. As one of the results, right/freedom is denied to many of us including youth in the Japanese society.

We need economy in which we can be free from global and totalistic oppression (Figure 14).

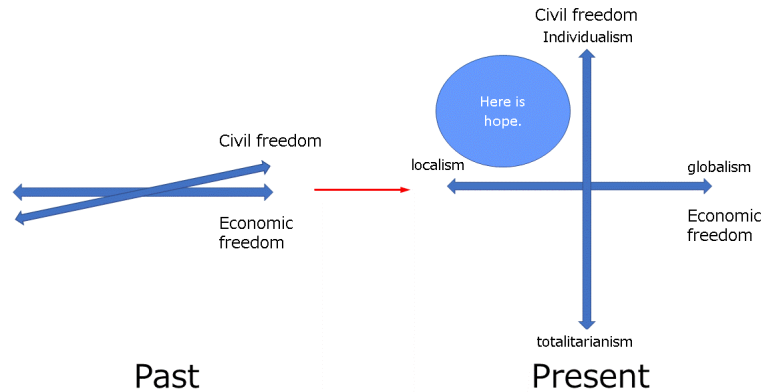


Figure 14. Divergence of civic and economic freedom

Regaining “en”: Achievements of Youth Job Development Support Network of Shizuoka

Youth Job Development Support Network of Shizuoka (YJDSNS) is an organized network of about 800 citizens in Shizuoka Prefecture who are interested in helping people who have difficulty in finding and keeping work. Now YJDSNS do not limit their targets to youth, but They not only organize voluntary work, but also provide a dozen of services under contract with national and local governments (Figure 15).

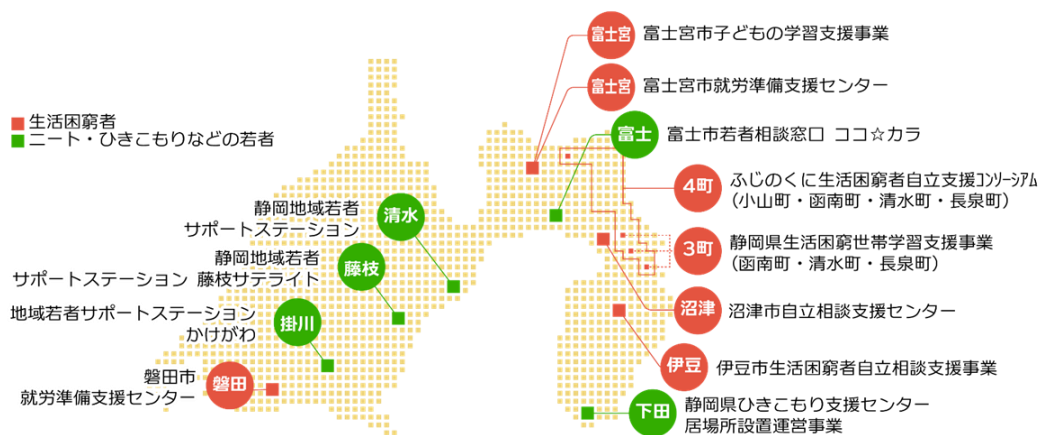


Figure15. Services in Shizuoka prefecture under contract with local/national governments

The mission of YJDSNS is as follows: we aim to build a society based on mutual aid by providing those who cannot but want to work in the prefecture of Shizuoka with an escort-type job support through a network of citizens. Thus, our ultimate aim is not to provide job support,

but to build a society or community based on mutual aid. Actually, those people who have been excluded from work are not necessarily efficient workers. So, we are here to provide additional support as fellow citizens to help them re-connected to local employers.

Table 1 lists basic principles of our support. Firstly, we believe that every person who seeks our support can work. We do not exclude anybody because of their mental and physical conditions. Secondly, we do not change individuals, but the community. Since we assume that everybody can work, what is necessary for us to do is to change their community so that it can empower those in need. Thirdly, we escort the person in need directly to resources in the community such as prospective employers and our volunteers who are willing to help him/her. Fourth, we open a meeting place where anybody in the community can come across and talk. We believe that new ideas emerge through encounters among participants who drop in this place. Fifth, we provide not only job support but also any kind of related support necessary including housing support, food support, transport support, etc. We call this network of support as an ecosystem of support comprised of various support services. Sixth, we help each other along our life course as members belonging to the same local community.

Table 1. Basic principles of support of YJDSNS

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Assume that the person who needs help can work.2. Change a community, not an individual.3. Escort the person to the community.4. Open a meeting place where people can mingle with each other.5. Create an ecosystem of support.6. Follow up the life course as a friend in community. |
|--|

YJDSNS helps a young person by linking him/her to our volunteer network, or sharing him/her with our “en” (=connections). We as members of a local community have a lot of “en” such as “en” as workmates, “en” as relatives, “en” as schoolmates, “en” as neighbors, etc. Such “en” helps a young person to gain an opportunity to work in the community (See Figure 16).

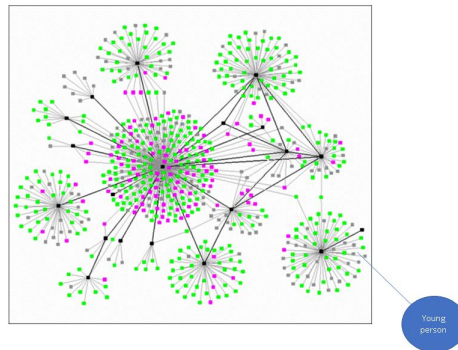


Figure 16. Regaining “en”: connecting a young person to people’s network

The young person can express what s/he is fond of. A small expression of preference suggests us an idea about which “en” should be activated. Thus, we form a circle of supporters around a person who needs help. This circle itself is a safety network which will not lose the person and creates interactions which allow new ideas to come up to provide unique opportunities to the person in need (see Figure 17).

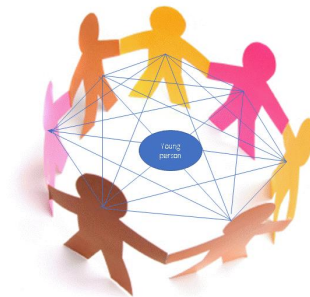


Figure 17. Forming a support network surrounding a person who needs help

What we create is not a pyramid, but a network because a pyramid will drop off the person in need between silos, but a network will hold him/her by keeping the person on trampoline (see Figure 18).

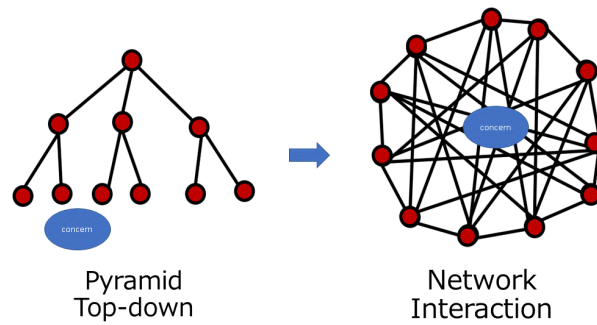


Figure 18. Fill the gap with a network, not with a pyramid

In addition to difficulty in finding and keeping work, there are so many concerns in the society. One may not afford housing. One may not be able to keep their houses clean. One may fail to pay public utility charges. One may not be able to send his/her child to a cram school. One may fail to find enough food to eat. These concerns are actually related to each other which constitute an ecosystem of concerns (see Figure 19).

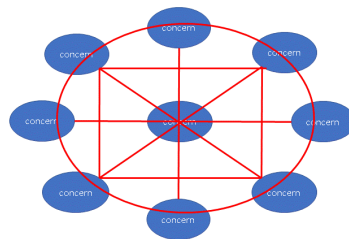


Figure 19. Ecosystem of concerns

So, if we can surround each concern by citizens interested in taking care of the concern, we can form an ecosystem of support (see Figure 20).

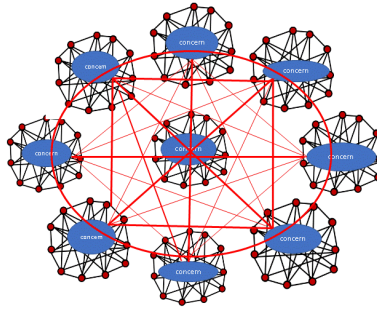


Figure 20. Ecosystem of support

With this ecosystem, we cover the space in the middle of the Pestoff's triangle. Each concern attracts people who are concerned and trying to solve the issue. In a sense, a concern becomes a meeting point, where movements of people in the community intersect. People concerned meet each other and start to work together. This ecosystem of support connects individuals who have been thrown into in the space and changes them from the isolated and powerless to the connected and powerful (see Figure 21).

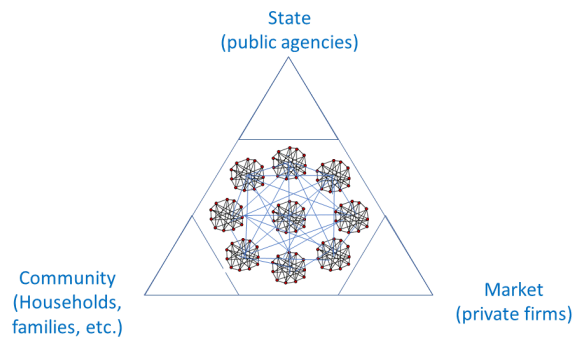


Figure 21. Fill the gap with an ecosystem of support

Figure 22 shows an example of an ecosystem of support we have established in the city of Numazu in Shizuoka Prefecture. There are several support services related to each other including escorting people with difficulty in finding work to a workplace, summer school for children of single parent families, free education to children who cannot afford cram schools, assistance for those who cannot afford moving, organizing a “children’s restaurant” for children in the community to eat together, and meetings of self-help groups with similar problems such

as parenting and LGBT. We have made a call to the community and have held town gatherings once a year since last year. Concerned citizens joined to discuss any issues which they concerned about and came up with actions. Our ecosystem of support has developed out of these meetings.



Figure 22. Ecosystem of support (at Numazu city)

Closing Remarks

The achievements of YJDSNS can be seen as an attempt to re-embed economy/work in society by re-organizing and mobilizing a local community on mutual aid. Polanyi (1944; 1957) writes that “After a century of blind “improvement” man is restoring his “habitation”. If industrialism is not to extinguish the race, it must be subordinated to the requirements of man’s nature. The true criticism of market society is not that it was based on economics---in a sense, every and any society is based on it---but that its economy is based on self-interest”. Our ecosystem of support can be this habitation because YJDSNS attempts to build a society based on mutual aid, not self-interest.

References

- Polanyi, Karl. 1944 (1957). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time*. Beacon Press Books.
- Tsutomi, Hiroshi, and Youth Job Development Support Network of Shizuoka. 2011. *Wakamono shurou shien: Shizuoka housiki de iko*. Kurieitsu Kamogawa.