

Re-organizing community as gift-based entity

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Japan has suffered from a long economic downturn which has severed many of Japanese from conventional social institutions such as households, the government or employment. We call this phenomenon of cutting off from the conventional safety-net as “Mu-en-ka” in Japanese. “Mu” means loss. “En” means conventional ties. “ka” means change of conditions. How we can help those who has lost contact with the rest of society?

In this presentation, I will briefly report the work of the Youth Employment Support Network of Shizuoka (hereafter, YESNS), which has been active for 15 years in Shizuoka prefecture, especially focusing upon its recent development in the city of Numazu.

YESNS was established in 2002 to help youth who had difficulty in finding and keeping work due to economic shrinkage and harsh working conditions prevalent in Japanese workplace. YESNS recently changed its policy. Now, they focus not only on assisting individuals (= those who are in trouble), but also re-organizing the local community so that community members can help each other.

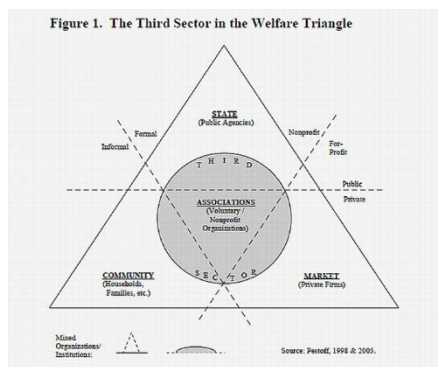


Figure 1. Pestoff's triangle

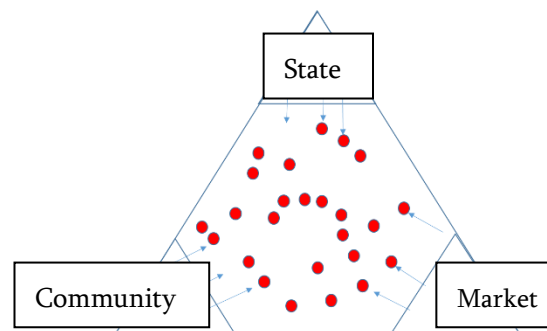


Figure 2. Floating individuals

The left triangle is the well-known Pestoff's triangle (Pestoff, 1998; 2005). The state corresponds to redistribution: the community (which is actually households) to gift; and market to market economy. In this triangle, the central gap is filled with “associations” which would provide welfare services. However, as the right triangle, in reality, “Mu-en-ka” individuals float in this gap losing connection to State, Community, and market in Japan.

What YESNS has attempted to do and has somehow succeeded in Numazu is the re-organizing of “Mu-en-ka” individuals into gift-based relationships. I will present basic ideas behind this development and its congruence with Polanyi's thoughts.