

Current situation and challenges of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Japan

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Preface

In this report, we first briefly reviewed the history of the concept "social and solidarity economy (SSE)" in Japan, and checked the history of the practical SSE movement in Japan.

It became clear that: 1) For cooperative organizations representing the social economy, the economic impact is high compared to other countries. And it has a long history since the pre-war co-operative law (*sangyo-kumiai hou*). 2) Community-level economic actors such as the solidarity economy are still not well established. 3) The establishment of the NPO Law was expected to foster the development of "community and citizen economy", but as a result, they have become built-in as subcontractors of the governmental services at low prices.

While solidarity economy in many countries has become an alternative to neo-liberalism and economic globalization, in Japan it has remained in a complementary position supporting small government. On the other hand, one of the major characteristics of Japan is that the social economy is beginning to bring out small groups that can confront issues that cannot be addressed within the existing framework. As societies and regions become increasingly fragmented, inward-looking mutual aid is no longer able to function adequately as a prescription for society. I believe that collaboration among various entities across existing mutual aid organizations and sectors will be the prescription for a new era. It can be said that the Japanese version of SSE is beginning to develop as a movement to create new solidarity through "TSUNAGARU," in other words, "overcoming social issues through cooperation among multiple entities," which is also common to the SDGs initiatives in various regions.

The following two points are not sufficiently described in this report. I would like to mention this again as a reminder. The first is the response to environmental and energy issues. Environmental issues are an area in which Japan has lagged behind other countries, and there is also a relationship with medium-term political issues, such as the nuclear power policy after the Great East Japan Earthquake. On the other hand, as can be seen from the case studies, rather than treating the environment as a single theme, the perspective of the environment is coming to fruition as an integral part of regional revitalization, as in the case of FEC (Food, Ecology and Care). At present, the distance between the environmental movement and economic projects is large and not connected well. It is highly expected that non-profit environmental businesses will develop under the framework of SSE in the future.

The other is the response under the COVID-19 situations. It is indirectly touched upon in several cases, but does not include a case study that portrays it head-on. While Solidarity

Economy advocates the importance of face-to-face relationships, there are fewer opportunities for direct interaction and mutual help under COVID-19 situations. Although there already exist some examples of SSE in response to the COVID-19, we need to take more time to follow them rather than drawing them up in a hasty. For example, the diversification of work styles, such as "remote work", may be a major turning point in overcoming Japan's symbolic "long-

distance commuting” (i.e., the weakening of relationships with local communities). Japanese society has been torn between "work time" and "home time," and there has been little sense of “social time” or “third place”. As mentioned above, I would like to spend some more time collecting case studies on SSE in the environment and COVID-19.

Based on the discussions in this report, a webinar "TSUNAGARU(Connecting/Bridging/Linking) by the Social and Solidarity Economy" was held on December 16, 2021, co-hosted by the ILO and JCA (Japan Cooperative Alliance). Four of the twelve organizations discussed as case studies in this report participated in the panel and engaged in a lively exchange of opinions with the participants. At the end of this report, as appendices I packed the presentation slides of the day (by ITAMI, an introductory lecture and coordinate panel discussion), as well as questions and answers from the audience.

The Workers' Cooperative Law had been enacted in Japan in December 2020, and many businesses are preparing for its launch in the fall of 2022. Worker cooperatives will play a major role in addressing the issues facing local communities and in raising the issue of new ways of working in Japanese society under the banner of "decent work". The debate on SSE in Japan has been growing since the late 2010s, but it is not yet fully ripe. 2022 will undoubtedly be a breakthrough-year for SSE in Japan, and become a starting point for a new innovative movement to run and grow. Other social economy and solidarity economy actors are also expected to join this new trend and become a force for great change in Japanese society and the world at large. I would like to ask for the continued support and cooperation of the world in the development of the SSE movement in Japan so that it can become a movement in which all people can play an active role in the realization of a sustainable society.

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【Introduction】

1. How SSE has been accepted in Japan - Prehistory

The concept and the width of the movement of the Social and Solidarity Economy (hereafter “SSE”) so far has only been accepted in Japan in a limited way in comparison to EU countries while in Asia the adoption of the Seoul Declaration during the Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) in 2013 triggered an international network of local governments and NGOs in 17 countries / regions to take this social economy into consideration. While it came into existence recently, in comparison with the International Network for the Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economy (RIPESS¹), internationally the largest network in this sector, which was founded in 1997, it has acquired a similar level of influence. Also, the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC) was founded in 2011 as an Asian hub of RIPESS, holding conferences regularly as a regional SSE network.



In Japan, the Association of Seoul Declaration (founded mainly by those who attended the founding GSEF assembly) has been playing an important role in the transplantation and introduction of SSE into the country, while the Asian Solidarity Economy Forum took place in November 2009 where 100 guests from different Asian countries gathered in Tokyo. The Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC), which planned and hosted the event, has been introducing activities of RIPESS into Japan. Its fruits are summed up in the practices of PARC Freedom School, which hosts remote classes with practitioners from South America.

In the academic field, those who translated two comprehensive books “Économie Sociale (entre économie capitaliste et économie publique)” (Ed. By J. Defourny and J. L. Monzón, de Boeck, 1992) and “The Emergence of Social Enterprise” (C. Borzaga and J. Defourny, Routledge, 2004) have been continuously promoting research activities since the early 1990s. Researchers include Kenji Tomizawa, Tetsurō Uchiyama, Hideo Ishidzuka, Yūichirō Nakagawa and Toshikatsu Yanagisawa, as well as the late Masazumi Sugano, former president of Japan



Workers' Co-op Union (JWCU) who died in 2008. This research group has not only done research but has been closely involved with the elaboration of the movement's vision and planning. Together with practitioners and business units they have also worked on the promotion of and education on co-operatives and mutual societies, such as consumers' co-ops and medical co-ops.

¹ This acronym derives from its French name Réseau Intercontinental de Promotion de l'Économie Sociale et Solidaire.

Half the members of The Japanese Society for Co-operative Studies, the organisation in which the above researchers participated, are university professors and researchers while the remainder are practitioners at co-operative organisations. It has become a unique group in Japan as a "pragmatic academic community" with its closeness in research, education, business administration and social movement.

2. Social Economy and Solidarity Economy in Japan with their diverse levels of diffusion and the spread

The concept of Social Economy, which was actively restored in the 1980s by the Mitterrand administration, had already attracted attention in Japan by researchers of co-operatives and mutual societies, who were defined as its main players. (The 1980s are seen as a trigger for the restoration of Social Economy as a concept. Its practices had been well-known to a number of people as a movement to tackle other challenges which have arisen since the middle of the 19th century when capitalism arrived at its mature stage. Japan also has a history with the concept from the time when co-operatives were founded all over the country after the approval of the Industrial Co-operative Act in 1900. The 1920s saw a surge of urban consumers' co-ops by civil society as it tried to cope with social issues).

Solidarity Economy, in comparison with the history and accumulation of practices and research on Social Economy, is a relatively new concept which has been accepted since around 2000. In Japan it is quite often referred to as a non-market/uncommercialised informal economy. It is often introduced as a movement that looks for the creation of an economic sphere to oppose capitalism and encourages strong solidarity, by sociologists and anthropologists etc. who study the Latin world, including Middle and South America. In particular, it is characterized by the awareness of how civil society (people) copes with different issues churned out by the global economy, as well as its opposition to the global economy.

The Solidarity Economy movement accentuates its global identity rather than a local identity. "Altermondialism", which spread out by way of the World Social Forum's slogan "Another World is Possible," insists on the creation of an alternative globalism fit for social justice while abandoning inward-looking solutions which might lead to narrow-minded nationalism. The coexistence of contradictory vectors, which on one hand looks for diversity, restoring local and endogenous values, and on the other hand longs for worldwide solidarity, might have made it difficult for the Solidarity Economy to be understood in Japan. It could be true that the frequent use of the term "solidarity economy" in literature on ethnography, area studies and developmental economics in Latin America might have given the impression that these two aspects of this movement are irrelevant to Japanese society (vocabulary only to depict less developed countries). Rather, the responsibility should be attributed to those mainstream economists and others "who did not argue", instead of such researchers who did deal with the Solidarity Economy. It forced Japanese academia to reflect on the fact that they had lost the dialogue channel with the contemporary social movement (Such

circumstances are related to the reason it took 20 years, after the foundation of RIPESS, for debates in Japan on Social and Solidarity Economy to actively take place).

The common understanding in Japan has been that co-operatives, players of Social Economy, are characterised by gradualism aimed at the “ethical evolution of capitalism” as economic business units, while Solidarity Economy is a radical social transformation movement which actively promotes opposition and resistance to capitalism. At the same time, because cases of face-to-face local economic activities (community economy) stood out, Solidarity Economy was criticized that it only gets off from the capitalist economy rather than overcoming it. This was a stumbling block for its diffusion, but the most significant twist was the weird fate of the Non-profit Act which had the potential to make Solidarity Economy flourish in Japan.

The approval of the Specific Non-Profit Activity Promotion Act (Non-Profit Act) in 1998 gave rise to a number of non-profit activities at the local level, which are different than democratic business units such as co-operatives. As of September 2021, there were 50,846 acknowledged non-profits and 1,213 certified non-profits (leveraging the privileged tax system due to their high public utility), but most non-profits are characterised by their tiny size.²



At first non-profits were conceptualised as voluntary associations by citizens themselves, with the potential to play a similar role as the Solidarity Economy in the Latin world, which was actually hugely distorted by the administrative and financial reforms in the 2000s. The designated administrator system, promulgated and implemented in 2003, increases the entrustment of public services, traditionally provided by the national and/or local governments, are left to private business units. The rapidly aging population, together with the economic slump and little economic growth since the 1990s, made local governments expect non-profits to entrust their operations. This social background positioned non-profits as effective and cheap providers of social and public services that had deteriorated due to the lack of financial resources, instead of being “associations of independent social transformation” like the Solidarity Economy.

² Numbers are as of the end of each fiscal year (March of next year), except 2018 as of the end of June. Elaborated by nippon.com on the basis of the published data at the Cabinet Office (2007).

While the fact that non-profits that are built into Japan's socioeconomic structure turned out to be a positive factor in increasing the number of non-profits, the focus of their activities as entrusted business bodies of public services also means that most of them, unlike similar experiences abroad, failed to be players in the Solidarity Economy which has an opposing social vision. Especially when dealing with the welfare sector where the lack of resources is prominent, such entrustment of public services bears huge challenges, such as the relatively low remuneration for workers and high job turnover rate. While it is true that the services provided have been significantly improved over the last two decades thanks to the participation of non-profits and other business units, it is expected that non-profits will be important players in the Solidarity Economy in Japan if policies such as reform on tax deductions on donations help non-profits become independent and get stable income sources.

What is characteristic of Japanese society is that, while it would be far-fetched to say that a Social Economy exists without a Solidarity Economy, it is rather the traditional Social Economy with its own history and traditions which managed to have a huge economic impact after its enlargement and maturation in post-war Japan, while the Solidarity Economy here is behind that of other countries, with its foundation still fragile. However, a unique characteristic can be mentioned too: "Different movements leading to the Solidarity Economy are emerging from the Social Economy." As mentioned in different cases, leading co-operatives in Japan, such as agricultural and consumer ones, have given birth to several movements that tackle their communities' social issues. As the frequently cited phrase "co-operatives have two wheels: businesses and movement" puts it, co-operatives run the distribution businesses of sales/purchases as an economic business based on the common needs of both consumers and (especially primary industry) producers, while consumer members tackle their own communities' challenges such as "mutual help activities."



Co-operatives have their own history of having built an interregional economic solidarity between urban and rural areas since half a century ago. One example was the creation of "Teikei" (Community-Supported

Agriculture) whereby producers and consumers partner directly in search of safe food to avoid cut-throat pricing that is dominant at conventional markets. Teikei enables producers, who had suffered from unstable market prices controlled by the weather etc., to have more control over their products while consumers' demand for food with no or reduced amounts of agrochemicals, have a direct influence on the production process. Such control cannot be made to happen only by pricing mechanisms. The co-operative movement, after achieving safety standards such as ensured traceability, hold regular meetings where producers and consumers exchange their opinions. It developed the support system whereby urban residents go to rural areas to help farmers harvest, and they are also pioneers in starting fair trade projects abroad.

Recently, different innovative initiatives have been started, such as renewable energy projects by consumers' co-operatives and microfinance with financial counselling services. Japan is rich with examples of "Solidarity Economy born out of the Social Economy." The Japanese Society for Co-operative Studies Academic Conference in May 2014 had the topic "Think about Small Co-operations," which discussed the relationship between "huge co-operations (business)" boasting huge turn-over even at the international level, such as farmers' co-ops, consumers' co-ops and mutual benefit societies, and "small co-operations (members' activities)" to deal with small challenges. This "small co-operation" also looks at the moves of a new social transformation which is being born within the conventional Social Economy, and which has been highly systemised. It can be said that the relationship between Social Economy and Solidarity Economy differs from that in other countries as the latter's embryo can be found within the former, rather than being two independent movements.

As it took a long time for the proper vocabulary of Solidarity Economy to be shared beyond researchers of anthropology and developmental economics working in fields abroad, quite often this concept was studied together with Social and Solidarity Economy. One of the features in Japan would be the inversion in order that Social and Solidarity Economy were first mentioned before dealing with the Solidarity Economy's definition. Including the aforementioned discussions, the following three points can be referred to on presenting the characteristics of Social and Solidarity Economy in Japan, which are still in their embryonic stage. The first two delayed the prosperity of the Solidarity Economy while the third created new attention to this new movement from Social Economy's viewpoint, increasing people's expectations of the international trend "Social and Solidarity Economy":

- 1) Distance between academia and domestic/practical social movements
- 2) Overlap between the Non-profit Act and increase in the entrustment of public services to private sector
- 3) The beginning of small co-operations from the conventional Social Economy with a new movement

3. Late 2010s, the development of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)

While there was already literature featuring “Social and Solidarity Economy”, including pioneering works by Nobuji Kasuya, Naonori Tsuda, Shigeki Maruyama and Hiroyuki Kashii, among others, different reasons, such as the high-level specialty and the restricted geographical areas covered, were hurdles which kept this concept from being widely understood. The epoch-making event was the publication of “Shakaiteki Keizai Nyūmon – Minna ga Shiawasenai Seikatsu Dekiru Keizai System Towa” (Introduction to Social and Solidarity Economy – What is the Economic System Enabling Everybody to Live a Happy



Life?). It was published in 2016 by Yasuyuki Hirota, a Japanese researcher who resides in Spain. This work gives an overview of the development of the SSE movement in Europe, the Americas and Asia, enhancing the expectation for SSE as a movement. As already shown, no Solidarity Economy practice abroad was directly transplanted into Japan while rather it was within the Social Economy where new moves surged, and a number of activities have come up since the 2010s which go beyond the domestic definition of Social Economy and co-operatives. For instance, “public interest activities beyond their category as common benefit organisations” has been demanded more and more from the co-operatives as a movement. The JA Group (farmers’ co-operative), Japan’s largest co-operative, started its self-reform after the Japanese government’s report came out which questioned the raison-d’être of farmers’ co-operatives and of co-operatives in general (the modified Farmers’ Co- operative Act came into effect in 2016 and five-year-long debates have occurred up to 2021 as a Concentrated Promotion Period for the Reform of Farmers’ Co-operatives).

A trend in neighbouring Korea is also making an impact, as it pushes Social Economy organisations and entities in Japan to review their self-definition from a broader viewpoint. From the platform GSEF that took place in Montreal (Canada) in 2016, Bilbao (Spain) in 2018 and Mexico City in 2021 after it was held twice in 2013 and 2014 in its birthplace Seoul, it has strengthened its intercontinental network.

Another influencer of SSE practices is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in September 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly. The quick spread of SDGs’ Compass (corporations’ action guideline) in Japan helped huge corporations’ commit to the SDGs since its relatively early stages. But SSE is also highlighted as a concept to correct the tendency to wrongly understand SDGs in their narrow sense as the exploration of new markets (and ensuring the consequential profit there), pointing out that SDG initiatives should be taken by civil society, as more and more debates are unfolded in terms of how co-operatives, non-profits and other players in the third sector

should contribute to the achievement of SDGs.

It is also important to mention Japan's own circumstances in the early 2010s. While the International Co-operative Year (ICY) in 2012 helped different co-operatives strengthen their partnership at subnational levels, the huge earthquake which had hit the country the previous year forced ICY-related events to be rather



modest, giving priority to the construction of a collaborative system to deal with the actual challenge of supporting those stricken regions suffering the aftermaths than to discussions on the long-term project to reconsider the co-operative movement in relation to its principles and values. This experience created quite a few opportunities of partnerships among co-operatives, exchanges of people, which included non-co-operative entities, and also expressing of opinions based on the specific contexts rather than churning out theory-based thoughts, which lead to the epoch of co-operative innovation in late 2010s.

4. Changes in Japan and recent moves to promote SSE

As far as Japan is concerned, SSE started to be featured as an academic topic around 2017 and 2018. The quarterly magazine “Henkaku



no Asoshie” (Associé for transformation) no. 29 in June 2017 featured “theories and practices of Social and Solidarity Economies” with arguments by Naonori Tsuda and Shirō Wakamori. In October the book “Kyōsei to Kyōkan no Sekai o tsukuru – Global na shakaiteki rentai Keizai o mezashite” (Creating a World of Symbiosis and Shared Joy – towards a Global Social and Solidarity Economy) as well as related research, was published. The book was written by Shigeki Maruyama, an active member at the Association of Seoul Declaration who had been quite active for a long time in the movement of the Seikatsu Club³. In December “Ima Naze Shakaiteki Rentai Keizai Nanoka” (Why Social and Solidarity Economy Now?) was published in the magazine “Kyōsai to Hoken” (Mutualism and Insurance), reflecting the increasing need within the co-operative sector to explain why we should pay attention to SSE, as implied in the title.

2018 saw the foundation of the planning committee for GSEF Bilbao which hosted sessions in Japan to

³ Translator's note: One of the most innovative consumers' co-operatives in Japan.

learn the international context as well as practices and they dispatched delegations, headed by Toshikatsu Yanagisawa, to meetings in Bilbao. The think tank JC Sōken was restructured in April to turn it into the Japan Co-operative Alliance which is the first transversal permanent organisation in Japan to support partnerships among co-operatives beyond the sectionalism. Also, the Robert Owen Society, as well as other organisations, held research sessions to study the philosophical background of SSE.

The end of 2018 saw the foundation of “Tsunagaru Keizai Forum” (Forum on Bridging Economy) by the third sector, including co-operatives, social welfare juridical persons and non-profits, public sector and local businesses which are members of the National Conference of the Association of Small Business Entrepreneurs, as they responded to the call by Tōru Ikeda who aimed at building the platform at the Chiba Prefecture level to deal with challenges in the community integrated under the concept of SSE. The Chiba Social and Solidarity Economy Research Institute was also founded at that time, setting up Japan’s first practical organisation that features “Social and Solidarity Economy.”

The Spring 2019 Conference held by the Japanese Society for Co-operative Studies at Komazawa University focused on “Co-operatives and Social and Solidarity Economy”, with Toshikatsu Yanagisawa, Atsushi Fujii, Shigeru Tanaka and Iwao Takahashi discussing this topic. Another important event which took place this year was the transformation of the Association of Seoul Declaration, which had been active since 2013, into the Association of Promoting SSE in Japan (APSSEJ).

Since then, more and more academic papers on SSE have been published in Japan. According to the CiNii, database on academic papers in Japan by the National Institute of Informatics, 86% of papers including “Social and Solidarity Economy” in their title have come into existence since 2017 (as of November 2021), showing that it was after that year that this topic started to attract researchers’ attention.

5. “Tsunagaru” (bridging), a framework to accept the Social and Solidarity Economy in Japan

It is crucial to point out a characteristic in which the SSE has been accepted in Japan, after reviewing the historic development of SSE here. The word “tsunagari” (bridging), of autochthonous origin⁴, is used for the aforementioned “Tsunagaru Keizai Forum”, for the book “Rupo: tsunagari no Keizai o tsukuru – Spain hatsu ‘mou hitotsu no keizai’ eno michi” (“Reportage: Building the Economy of Bridging – Way to ‘another world’ in Spain”) and the website name “Tsunagari no Keizai – Shakaiteki Rentai



Keizai Pōtaru” (“Economy of Bridging – Social and Solidarity Economy Portal.”) The magazine “Gendai No Riron” (Modern Theory) also featured a special on SSE titled “Tsunagaru Keizai no Gen-jitsu to kanousei: Mou Hitotsuno Michi” (“Reality and Potential of the Economy of Bridging: Another way”) showing that the impression “SSE = Economy of Bridging” is at large and here to stay.

The expression “tsunagaru (bridging)”⁵ not only wipes away the rigid nuance brewed by the use of the literal translation of SSE in Chinese-origin vocabulary, but also implies Japan’s own plans through this movement. While SSE players, indicated by ICA’s position paper, has its own diversity which includes not only co-operatives but also fair trade and social enterprises, among others, the Japanese context indicates its intention to be a bit more comprehensive, implying the movement, which involves public administration and private companies as partners, is openly manifested by Tsunagaru Keizai Forum Chiba.

The consensus in Japan on understanding the SSE is to put together two philosophies with different historic backgrounds: “Social Economy,” whose democratic management tries to infuse moral



values into the market under capitalism, represented by co-operatives and mutual benefit societies and “Solidarity Economy” which underscores the non-commercial reciprocal human relationship based on the informal community economy.

There are some voices, such as Iwao Takahashi (Nihon University, Researcher on Farmers’ Co-operatives) who, based on the fact that different co-operatives share their juridical person, classify them into Solidarity Economy which deals with provision of social services for people, such as workers’ co-ops, and into Social Economy which works on the production, distribution, finance and

⁴ Translator’s note: The Japanese vocabulary can be classified into the following three categories: 1) autochthonous origin (whose etymology can be traced back to old Japanese in the 8th century, similar to English words of Germanic origin), 2) Chinese vocabulary (those words using Chinese characters, similar to English words of Latin or Greek origin) and 3) Western vocabulary (those words of Western origin, especially from English, no equivalent in English). While the literal translation “shakai teiki rentai keizai” only uses Chinese vocabulary, making people feel the concept is too academic and/or hard for ordinary people’s horizon, the word “tsunagari” (bridging) is autochthonous, giving the ordinary public the impression that such an economy can be practiced by themselves.

⁵ Translator’s note: The word “tsunagaru” is the verb both in its infinitive and gerundium while a similar word “tsunagari” is a derived noun.

insurance (to find two directions within the Social Economy). The magazine “Kyōdō no Hakken”, published by the Japan Institute of Co-operative Research, a think tank belonging to the JWCU, is more eager than others to publish articles on SSE, describing the value of associated work by way of SSE. Others, such as Terumitsu Honma, try to understand SSE by going back to the “co-operative spirit” to understand SSE on the basis of original values within human life, such as reciprocity and mutual help. This position, instead of drawing lines between the Administration / Market / Non-profit sectors, is also a huge story which draws, as SSE’s social concept, “new social solidarity” which will be born when such subjects, heretofore separated per sector, build a transversal partnership.

This report is based on the “Economy of bridging”, setting itself free from the exclusivity of the “Social and Solidarity Economy Sector” and its players and accepting SSE as a method to solve social issues with a partnership with the public sector and private profit-making businesses. We could say that the establishment of partnerships is the direction the Japanese SSE is taking nowadays, mainly consisting of co-operatives and other solidarity economy players, instead of excluding other sectors. It would also be a declaration to wish for a society where everybody can live their own life in an egalitarian manner while being mutually respected, including minorities, rather than imposing the simple majoritarian democracy as an effective tool of governance.

The concept of “Buen Vivir”⁶ has been highly regarded in Ecuador, a country where SSE is active, with values to symbolise it (See Tomizawa [1999] for details). Similarly, the Japanese SSE continues its expansion with the understanding that the fundamental value of the economy is restoring the linkage (bridging) of “*inter homines esse*” (what is among people) by returning it to our life, which is the essence of the economy. Japan has seen the dismantling of the middle-class as the result of the languishing economic slump since the 1990s and entering the era of “divided society.” It’s in this context that the “bridging economy” is appealing 1) as something we should restore and 2) the methodology to enable us to restore it, in order to prevent creating more divisions and from fragmenting people, and we should expect its expansion as Japan’s own SSE, although it might divert a bit from its original intention.

It seems to be most important to grasp the SSE’s emergence on the basis of real cases if we are to analyse how it has been accepted while being a foreign-born concept. The way in which SSE can flourish in the Japanese context should be read from what is taking place on the spot, instead of simply

⁶ Translator’s note: Spanish translation of the concept “Sumak Kawsay” in Quechua, referring to the people’s trial to achieve a decent quality of life in harmony with Pachamama (Mother Nature). This concept was incorporated into the current constitution of Ecuador.

importing the notion from abroad or adding useless interpretations over the theory.

We will visit twelve cases in the remainder of this report, trying to find out how SSE has been developed in the Japanese context. These cases are classified into the following four subtopics “co-operatives”, “partnership”, “inclusion” and “innovation”, with each of them containing three cases respectively. Readers are invited to wrap up each subtopic’s features before getting around to each report.

6. Case studies and their interpretation – summary of points

[6-1] Co-operatives – Return to the origin of mutual help

As already discussed, SSE in Japan started to raise its self-awareness as it faced phenomena that Social Economy, mainly featuring co-operatives, gives rise to businesses and movements from its inside which are different than other conventional ones as it develops. The transformation of the co-operative movement as a “return to mutual help” is discussed through three experiences in this sense.

The first experience “Otagaisama” was born in Shimane, far from big cities, and is spreading throughout the country. While it was conceived by way of debates among a consumers’ co-operative’s members who, at the same time, clung to the idea that the project would start as a spontaneous movement and a business unit which is autonomously run by the mutual help project and would spin out from the conventional structure. As people’s relationships and exchanges in communities were declining, they looked for simplicity both in organisation and in the operation, counting on the direct participation of users and supporters, in order to build up human relationships proactively by distributing “specific and small needs.” “Otagaisama”, on being diffused to other prefectures, started to evolve in different ways such as circulating the right to receive “the same amount of time of support” without being reimbursed in cash (such as Aichi Prefecture Otagaisama Center Chatto, similar to the internationally known Japanese system “Fureai Kippu”).

“Minna no Ouchi” (Everybody’s Home) project, a new policy for Japan Workers’ Co-operative Union (JWCU), tries to set up centres (counselling function) where everybody can ask for counselling services, reversing its traditional policy which put the membership = solidarity only for members. Local communities in Japan, where people used to be able to ask neighbours for advice, are now hollow, churning out societies of indifference where everybody must solve their issues by themselves. The creation of such places where counselling on what is at stake with them helps people understand the importance of the attitude to “solve issues co-operatively”. While traditionally workers’ co-operatives have been developing their businesses under the model of being service providers who come from outside so community’s issues are solved by member workers as experts, but “Minna no Ouchi” triggered this reversal towards the movement based on the support to set up community-based workers’ co-ops where communities themselves can solve their own needs.

The workers’ co-operative movement in Japan has grown for a long time using other juridical principles, due to the lack of legal framework for it, but it is now moving towards a new phase thanks

to the approval of the Workers' Co-operative Act in December 2020, to be implemented in October 2022. The legal base to allow workers' co-operatives to be set up freely is also enabling a movement to form co-operative work from each region. It is expected that both the networking of people by way of counselling and the exchange points in communities ("*ibasho*"⁷) should lead to the creation of even more unique co-operative projects.

The case of Yana Marché can be interpreted as one example of squatting in Japan. While some squatting cases in Europe etc. were presented as SSE experiences, no case of this sort was found in Japan in the realm of community-building because of the tight control on land and building property. On the other hand, while population is more and more concentrated in urban areas, more and more land and houses are empty in rural areas, being abandoned and becoming a blight on the landscape. On top of housing, the abandoned farming fields are left alone as farmers die without successors, totalling nearly 450,000 ha as of 2021⁸. Yana Marché is an example whereby an empty building, after the closure of the regional supermarket (A-Coop run by JA) due to the shrinking local population, is leveraged anew as a community space after persistent negotiations by the co-op's members (female members). The community building, started with Yana Marché by locals themselves, turned into "Yanamarutto", and in partnership with the "Yana District Council", set up as the smallest administrative district, they now start other businesses such as community farms. This is one of the cases whereby locals try to solve local issues, such as empty stores and abandoned farms.

[6-2] Partnership – Platform as an answer

The word "tsunagaru (bridging)" has already been used as a keyword to promote SSE in Japan, and both the partnership and the platform are to be understood as its variations. The example of the Japan Cooperative Alliance (JCA) explains why it was necessary. Traditionally co-operative organisations in Japan have been ruled by sectionalism per business field, due to their specific legislation and their own supervisory authority. Therefore, while Farmers' Co-operatives (JA) and Consumers' Co-operatives had a lot of economic impact in their respective field, it was complicated for the whole

⁷ Translator's note: See Chapter 2 for details.

⁸ Translator's note: Japan's total surface is approximately 378,000 km², so this amounts to more than 1% of the whole national territory.

co-operative sector to unfold a transversal movement. The foundation of JCA, an intermediary support organization founded to support the setup and promotion of co-operative partnership organisations at the prefectural level, paved the way for the promotion of transversal SSE, mainly consisting of co-operatives and mutual benefit societies who are Social Economy's main players. As JCA 2030 Vision explains, its partnership guideline is not restricted to being between co-operatives. It is rather by way of partnerships with non-co-operative entities, such as public administration, local businesses, non-profits, NGOs and other organisations, that JCA states that it will solve challenges in communities and of the Japanese society, while co-operatives as civil society's actor and SSE player are located at its core, trying to promote the partnership among different players, not only from the third sector but also from the public administration and the market sectors. The word "bridging" is a symbol that the Japanese SSE, including JCA, aims at for building transversal and inter-sectorial partnerships.

The Council of Workers' Welfare (CWW), created as labour unions all over the country were, based on solidarity beyond sectionalism under the slogan "Welfare is One," has 450 local centres in Japan's 47 prefectures built up over its 70 years of history. Internationally rare organisations, such as labour credit unions and Kokumin Kyōsai co-op (National Federation of Workers and Consumers Kyōsai Cooperatives), were mainly organised by CWW. The case of CWW Tokushima shows that it turned into a main player of community-building, on top of their own mutual help organization with the workers' organisations in the prefecture being its own members. While in Tokushima the community activities are led mainly by labour unions, but even if they do not take the lead, it is indispensable to count workers' commitment to promote SSE in regions. The partnership between consumers' and workers' movements will make corporations think seriously about how to contribute to their communities. While top-down initiatives by corporate leaders (ranging from *mecenat* to CSR) have been tradition-ally common in Japan, it is important in the SSE to unfold the movement from the bottom-up by workers and consumers who are linked as grassroot activists. SSE is likely to grow quickly in Japan as CWW supports community activities by its research and proposal, with seven decades of experience, on top of having a national network with 450 centres, as well as human and financial resources, leading to form horizontal networks in other regions.

Bridging Economy Forum is a practice promoted mainly by Social Economy's players. The fact that the very Forum was created intentionally as a pioneer case of SSE in Japan shows why the concept of SSE is needed in Japan. It is by way of SSE that social transformations, impossible only by co-operatives, are possible. Therefore, it is necessary to set up a forum whereby diverse players in the region, regardless of their size, industrial sector and field, can see each other and start discussions while previously each of them had their own direction.

[6-3] Inclusion-Construction of symbiotic zones

Here, different initiatives are shown with inclusion as its central topic, incorporating the viewpoint

of decent work, which is indispensable for SSE. Traditionally the working environment for the handicapped has been very far from ordinary employment. It is because most conventional welfare workshops considered them as users of work (experiences) and “*ibasho*”, paying only a little “working wage,” without thinking of making profits with such businesses. The Pig in Love Institute, though, defines the creation of “*businesses paying legal minimum wage or more to the handicapped*” as its departing point. The example of Silver Olive begins with correcting the conventional fault that the elderly’s diversity, as well as their eagerness for an independent life, has been ignored at elderly homes where they are users. The question that the fixed roles of users or supports have been impeding them from having decent human relationships led them to intentionally create opportunities whereby the elderly try to support themselves as much as possible. Also, the inclusion of spaces within the facility which are open to the community is another trial to improve the relationship between dwellers, users and local residents.

The cases of Tokyo Schule, Tekisen University and Creative Group 440Hz shows how the self-help groups and movements by the parties themselves in Japan have been developed. Different reasons explain why children stop going to school. While the most commonplace initial understanding was to force them to go to school, Tokyo Schule, founded by the children by themselves, looked for alternatives which would help them get rid of inconveniences if they continued to refuse to go to school, as forcing them to go there would run the risk of worsening the problem even more. A movement began to create a place fit for each one of the children by increasing options, such as creating “*ibasho*” where they can have friends out of school and an environment where they can go on studying without going to school. While there were lots of hardships to create such places by the children themselves, this led to the Tekisen University as well as the Creative Group 440Hz becoming their workplace.

The example of Elder Consumers’ Co-operative Aichi Care Centre Homi is a story of people trying to solve different issues by themselves as more foreigners settle there, as well as of those who support such initiatives. The insufficient provision of public services due to a language barrier is commonplace, regardless of the age of the group, with some troubles remaining unsolved. Such issues are overcome by creating places where counselling services are easily available within Homi Complex. Each request is connected to specialised support services within the Prefecture while different classes, ranging from ordinary life to profession, deepens people’s understanding of other cultures. The partnership with universities and public administration helps the region look for a new way of coexistence in a multinational context.

[6-4] Innovation – Movements by new subjects

Ohsato General Management, while being a community estate agency with some 30 employees, attracts people’s attention all over Japan by its unique way of management. The company itself considers contribution to the community instead of profit-making as its priority (it is OK as far as there is enough profit to keep the business going), which is remarkably expressed by way of the

employees' way of work. These employees are allowed to, during their working time, do whatever may seem important for the community. As a result, they spend some 40% of their working time on activities which are not linked to the profit-making for Ohsato. Employees are allowed to join the board of members where they can express their own thoughts. Obviously, they are also aware of the need to make some profit, as without it the company would be unable to survive, but the policy of "each one does whatever is possible" allows people with different hardships to work, turning Ohsato into a crossroads where people meet and get connected, either for paid or voluntary work.

Ama Town Multisector Co-operative is a new sort of co-operative with the goal of returning human resources to depopulated settlements. Members of this business co-operative are farmers and other business owners, such as shops, factories and inns. While the primary goal of founding this co-operative is to deal with the lack of workforce at each business, there is also the shared awareness of the fear that the shrinkage and departure of youth, who would be otherwise running their community in the future, will result in the community vanishing. It is much more important for Ama to enable youth from elsewhere to settle in their community as inhabitants, than to bring direct economic benefit to the co-op members. The multisector co-operative is one of the new co-operative models which thinks of the whole community's interest, instead of only focusing only on members' concerns.

Borderless Japan, on the basis of reciprocity, an operational principle of traditional rural communities in Japan, is a social business unit faced with new social challenges. The company is based on the acknowledgment that "*the indifference to those fields called 'inefficient', a by-product of the 'search for efficiency' by businesses, has triggered a number of social issues*", believes social businesses should be created in "*inefficient and unprofitable fields.*" It is clear that their approach is completely different than the common view that social businesses leverage business-like efficient methods into the non-profit sector. Not every business has to grow bigger. The example of Borderless to realise a sustainable economy in those fields regarded as "inefficient" demonstrates a solid sharing of ideals with SSE.

【Case Studies】

Co-operatives

— Back to the Origin of Mutuality/Mutual Aid —

Otagaisama¹ (Shimane)

The effect of “tiny co-operative work” to nurture spontaneity / awareness of being a participant and the philosophy of Yui (mutual help)²

In Shimane, the paid mutual help system “Otagaisama Izumo³” since 2002 has extended throughout the prefecture, with other prefectures trying to follow this initiative. One of the models for the Solidarity Economy consists of the non-commercialisation and local reciprocity against the commercialization and market exchange, characteristics of the capitalist economy, and Otagaisama can be regarded as something between Social Economy on which the co-operative structure is based, and the Solidarity Economy.

The mutual help and reciprocal system among members had already been found within the consumers’ co-operative movement. The “Tasukeai No Kai” (Mutual Help Association), originated in 1983 in Co-op Kobe, helps in domestic tasks such as cleaning of households and shopping with the elderly. At first a similar system was also introduced in Shimane, but the steady role-modelling of supporter / beneficiary (despite the original intention of reciprocity, those who ask for help are unlikely to provide it) and the concern for the lack of inhabitants’ autonomy, as this project is done within the consumers’ co-operative, led to the idea to found Otagaisama as a separate and independent small-scale project unit.



Otagaisama has a very simple design, based on users who only need a little help, on helpers who want to spend their spare time supporting neighbours and on the coordinator who bridges both of them. They

¹ Translator’s note: meaning “We’re to help and to be helped by each other” in Japanese.

² Translator’s note: in the context of SSE some autochthonous words which mean “mutual help” are used to highlight its reciprocal character, such as Minga in Andean countries, Mutirão in Brazil, Tequio in Mexico, Ubuntu in Bantu (Southern Africa) and Pumasi (품앗이) in Korea, and Yui is one of the Japanese equivalents (another one is Moyai).

³ Izumo is the historic name for the Eastern part of Shimane Prefecture, famous for one of Japan’s most important Shinto shrines, Izumo Sanctuary.

also try to keep this simple relationship, without creating a group of helpers and that of users, in order to prevent the aforementioned “role-modelling”, with mostly ad-hoc needs. While public systems, such as Care Insurance⁴, consist of providing the identical service for a long term, this system includes very personal needs, although quite requested ones, such as occasional troubleshooting, a tiny favour anybody can do, as well as hobbies such as piano and English lessons.

While co-operatives are defined in the Statement of ICA as “autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise,” Otagaisama only satisfies users’ needs and not those of the helpers. As a user and a helper are opposite, we see no co-operative action to satisfy the needs shared by both of them, while achieving the “exchange of labour” (similar to the Time Bank model, popular among SSE practices in Europe and the Americas) at the local level, as the same person who was once a helper requests the service as a user. The notion of Yui, origin of the Japanese tradition of mutual help (it works as reciprocity by means of time, as each one takes time for their colleagues), can be found in this practice.

Otagaisama is based on the following three ideas:

- 1) Users themselves choose what sort of help they want
- 2) Helpers provide the service during the time and within their possibilities
- 3) The coordinator bridges the user and the helper, showing sympathy for both

Users usually pay 800 yen per hour (US\$ 7.05 in November 2021: the price is subject to change if they ask for the service on a holiday etc.), of which 200 yen (US\$ 1.76) is spent as the running cost for the unincorporated organisation Otagaisama while the helper receives the remainder of 600 yen (US\$ 5.29). This system is not designed to allow somebody to make ends meet, and what matters here is to allow helpers to support others within their own capabilities when somebody requests “what is necessary for themselves”, thus achieving the mutual “freewill-based matching”.

The Otagaisama system in which “people tell what they wish in an unfettered manner, achieving their desires together with others who feel sympathy for them” is also the antithesis to public service as well as the private one which rather go towards the standardised help which does not satisfy the specific requests of those in need.

⁵ Translator’s note: In Japan the academic year as well as the fiscal year quite often (but not for tributary purposes) begins in April and finishes the next March, so Fiscal Year 2018 means April 2018 to March 2019.

⁴ Translator’s note: Japan introduced the public care insurance in 2000, modelled after the similar system in Germany, allowing people needing help in their daily life (such as provision of food and bath taking) to get it.

The common needs, previously only available by way of co-operatives, can nowadays be easily acquired in the market or quite often covered by the public administration as a social service. At the same time, a number of unsatisfied, diverse and tiny needs have been emerging as the social atmosphere changes. For example, those requests which used to be easily asked when neighbours knew each other very well, such as “could you change the light bulb?”, “Would you accompany me during the meal, as I don’t want this loneliness?” or “Could you pick up my kids at the nursery as I won’t be able to for a few days?” Otagaisama could be seen as a system to increase the “capacity to solve issues by neighbours”, and the fact that the same person alternates between user and helper increases the chance for everybody to contribute as a member of the community. Human talents are rediscovered and leveraged within the community. Otagaisama, active as a new community-building system in six places in Shimane Prefecture with Regional Bridging Centres as hubs, exchanged 33,306 hours per year (in the fiscal year 2018⁵) and counts 1,451 registered helpers (as of the end of March 2019), continuing its expansion. It is quite likely that the power of the community to alternately satisfy “each other’s need” instead of “the common needs” will turn into one of the driving forces of the SSE.



⁵ Translator’s note: In Japan the academic year as well as the fiscal year quite often (but not for tributary purposes) begins in April and finishes the next March, so Fiscal Year 2018 means April 2018 to March 2019.

Workers' Co-ops and “Minna no Ouchi” (Everybody’s house)

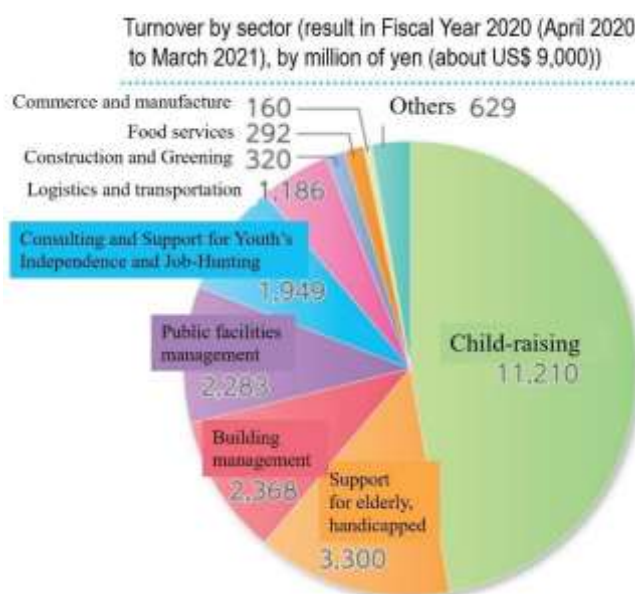
Changing the starting point from the bond among members
to the community counselling centres

More and more attention is paid to workers’ co-ops as an innovative co-operative movement in Japan, thanks also to the approval of the Workers’ Co-operative Act in December 2020. The Japan Workers’ Co-operative Union, with 35 billion yen (about US\$316 million) of annual turnover and 15,567 workers, mainly members (46,381 members of Elder Consumers’ Co-operatives), is one of the leading players in this movement and has been promoting the construction of new integrated community welfare hubs called “Minna No Ouchi”.

While workers’ co-operatives are attracting attention from different sorts of people as an SSE player, this time we would like to focus on confirming their relevance by delving into their social vision, shown as the “Minna no Ouchi” vision.

Workers’ Co-operatives had already been focusing their co-operative work on “job creation” and “community building.” Their practice to reform the workplace to be inclusive of different forms of work has evolved widely from the goal of their predecessor Elderly’s Project Team to create job opportunities for the elderly, churning out jobs for everybody, on the basis of the experience to have been entrusted with the Youth Support Station Project at the national level, not only for the youth who find it hard to work in a traditional workplace, but also for people with a physical and/or mental handicap, single mothers who need to give priority to child-raising, and others who feel uncomfortable with ordinary work environments due to different reasons.

Workers’ co-ops have the strong identity to be a co-operative project and movement, trying to solve issues by way of their “co-operative-ness” and “co-operation” despite being devoid of the juridical person as such. Prior to the “Minna no Ouchi” vision, workers’ co-operatives had the structural strategy of “triple co-operation.” It refers to “co-operation among members”, “co-operation between worker members and users” and “co-operation together with the



community”, putting members’ own co-operation at the core and trying to spread out concentrically their movement into the society at large as their ultimate goal. At their first stage, workers’ co-operatives typically used to run their own projects, mostly sorting out deliveries from regional consumers’ co-operatives and cleaning at hospitals but also deli service and eateries. However, both the “designated manager system¹” and the privatisation of public services by local governments triggered the workers’ co-operatives’ shift towards the care sector, including children’s centres, child care after school and other child-raising projects, welfare and care service for the elderly and the handicapped, consulting services for unemployed people and the indigent and public facility management, reaching three-fourths of their projects within these fields as of the fiscal year 2020. It is in this context that more awareness has been raised for the aforementioned triple co-operation.

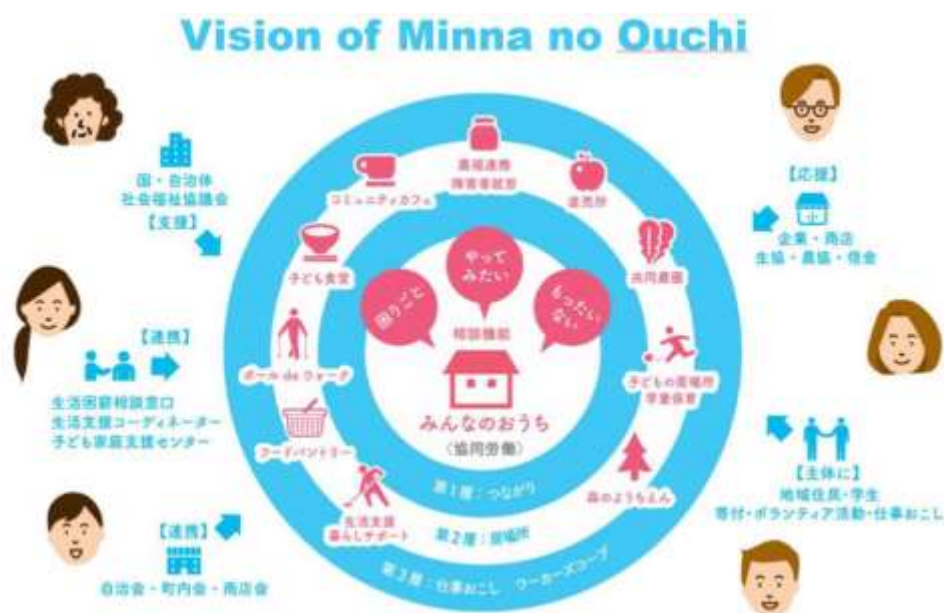
The Mondragon model, internationally recognised as workers’ co-operatives, reminds us of workers in manufacturing. What is at the core of this model is the democratic management of factories and projects by members, such as workers’ self-management in the former Yugoslavia or Poland, whereby what is important is not limited to the direct capital subscription by members but also includes financial partnerships, such as the labour credit union or people’s credit union, to satisfy investment needs. In the case of labour-intensive and public-sector-entrusted projects, on the other hand, no huge amount of investment is necessary while what is quintessential in this context is the relationship with service users with whom each project faces every day. While the co-operation among members as caregivers as well as the mutual help spirit remains important, ideal workplaces cannot be achieved without the service users’ understanding. This also led to the “co-operation with users” movement and makes it fundamental to get the understanding from the surrounding communities as well as local governments in order to create the “good job” that workers’ co-operatives aim to create.

The “Minna no Uchi” vision seems to be continuously linked with this historical context, but it rather inverts the model of “co-operation which evolves concentrically from the one among members,” placing the community troubleshooting at its core, with the “bridging” formed by this service as the first layer, the creation of “*ibasho*”² as the second layer and “job creation”, i.e. what has been regarded as

¹ Translator’s note: a system for local governments to entrust private companies, non-profits etc. to manage public facilities.

² Translator’s note: a typical concept used in this context which is hard to translate into English. Contemporary Japan is usually devoid of physical places where people of different walks of life and social classes can meet and have a social life, such as pubs in the United Kingdom or bars in Italy / Spain. Those who suffer from social exclusion cannot easily find such a place. It is in this context that an “*ibasho*” (literally “place to stay”) is artificially created by Workers’ Co-operatives so those afflicted with isolation can stay there, starting to nurture their social life with others who drop by.

workers' co-operative movement in the narrow sense, as the third layer. With new job creation in mind, we can say that it is not that novel to grasp the needs within the community and to start a project which neighbours join in when the time is ripe, which is when all neighbours are aware of the needs within the community. However, given the concept and history of the co-operative moment, this should be appreciated as a pioneer project as they get over the traditional feature to put more value on inward-looking solidarity, achieving a qualitative transformation into the open-minded co-operative movement.



It could be said that the basic stance of the current “Minna no Ouchi” vision to create jobs together with the community, building what might provide extraordinarily important suggestions not only for the workers’ co-operatives but also for the whole co-operative movement in Japan, on taking into account the fact that workers’ co-operatives used to focus rather on job creation than community building. We should expect this movement to spread out further, from the “viewpoint of SSE to stimulate the co-operative movement.”

Yana Marché and Yana Regional Chamber

Community building mainly by neighbours, starting with leveraging
vacant shops in a depopulated region

Yana district in Shinshiro (Aichi Prefecture) is going through the ageing process, with decrease of 100 children in a decade. Agriculture, the main industry, has no successors, and more and more arable land is abandoned. The public transportation that is bound for urban areas is inconvenient. It was in 2017, when the depopulation was already gradually changing the lifestyle here, that neighbours learned that the A-Coop, located on its main street, had decided to close its Yana Store. Its disappearance meant there would be no place at all to buy groceries such as rice and miso. Would the neighbourhood vanish?

On hearing this news, five women gathered to start planning a morning market. They were also community board members of Co-op Aichi and also female members of JA¹ Aichi Higashi. It had already been two decades since they became members of the consumers' co-op. The collective purchase, which used to



be practiced at that time on the basis of the conversation among housewives, turned into a personal delivery service, but they were still holding monthly community board members meetings at the delivery centre.

They were both community members of the consumers' co-op and female members of the JA. The reason is that, in the early 2010s, JA Higashi Aichi elaborated on a master plan for life support, creating the framework for both consumers' co-ops and JA to partner to promote complete medical checkups and health-building. Also, in 2015 both of them were the main drivers of a discussion to create an “*ibasho*”² for the elderly. These activities had already resulted in a collaborative relationship beyond the sectionalism that existed between JA and consumer's co-operative members. We could say that such a transversal platform already existed at the level of Shinshiro and/or Yana.

While squatting would be quite relevant in SSE experiences in other countries, Japan has been devoid of such a movement, also due to its legal system with the strict control on land use. But this case is about the five women who continued persistent negotiations with JA Aichi Higashi, owner of the already closed and therefore vacant supermarket on main street, leading to the opening

¹ Translator's note: JA is the common brand name for agricultural co-operatives in Japan.

² See Chapter 2 for more information about “*ibasho*” (literally “place to stay”).

of a morning market called “Yana Marché” where local vegetables, fruits, deli and other food are sold just outside the building. They were deeply afraid that their community would “die” unless there was a place for people to gather, while the supermarket’s closure would deprive them of such a place, they came up with the idea of a morning market. The community could be revived as long as there is a place for neighbours to meet. After a year, Yana Marché is a bustling regular event that every neighbour looks forward to. Rather than being just hosted by the five women, there are handcrafts, handmade bread and fresh flowers such as roses. JA Aichi Higashi provided the space to contribute to the community because it was requested by their own female members. Acknowledging that the morning market has cheered up the whole community, it now offers, proactively, not only the outside but the whole building. With this offer, a project was planned to set up an integral and multifunctional community hub. As a result, the vacant space at the former A-coop shop turned into the hub for Yana with multifunctional facilities such as a salon, meeting rooms and halls. It has renamed itself “JA Plaza.”



They invited JA’s mobile selling car to the morning market and held town meetings on the co-ops’ promise not to let the closure of A-coop create “kaimono nanmin” (shopping refugees)³. They won the trust of JA and consumers’ co-op, borrowed the kitchen facility at the former A-Coop Yana and have started to prepare a deli.

The initiative of Yana Marché, which began in the aftermath of the disheartening news of the A-coop’s closure, began as a weekly morning market outside the building and in 2019, two years later, turned itself into a permanent multi-functional facility. The neighbours themselves tried their best to come up with the best ideas, negotiated patiently to win collaborators and succeeded in reviving the whole community. Yana Marché has already started to promote the Yanamarutto (named to mean to stimulate the whole Yana district) project, trying to set up a business unit to provide new services

³ Translator’s note: A popular concept in Japan referring to people who are out of reach of supermarkets and other grocery stores to buy food and other essentials. Motorisation changed people’s lifestyle, especially in rural areas, having an automobile became indispensable for doing daily errands while the elderly finds it more and more difficult to live such a life because of their waning driving skills, and those without a drivers’ license in such areas find it hard to satisfy their basic needs.

under the partnership with the public administration after leveraging the structure of the social economy sector of organisations such as JA and the consumers' co-op, together with Yana District Council.

With the Shinshiro Basic Self-Rule Decree going into effect in 2013, Yana District Council was set up as one of ten district councils based on traditional submunicipal divisions. As municipalities in Japan recently went through annexations, enlarging each one's area⁴, but with a lowered level of public service as well as weakened communities emerging as problems in such districts. These district councils, a system which was introduced nation-wide, do little work in most cases, while the self-rule by neighbours in Yana District Council proved viable as they were actively involved with this decree, which turned into a strong tool for self-rule. Shinshiro City strengthened this district council system by setting up a congress for junior high school students⁵ and another one for youth, among others, giving huge influence in consensus-building to residents and raising their awareness as active parties.



There is a movement called municipalism, that originated in Barcelona (Spain) and Naples (Italy) which is also home to bustling SSE activities. It is, in a nutshell, about “restoring again under public control” different public services with ‘community-based autonomous democracy and consensus-building by residents’ as its slogan. Municipalism, born in the context to reconsider the rising price of utilities such as housing and water, triggered by their privatisation which was driven by the neoliberal trend, find the strengthening of local governments as a key for troubleshooting.

People's disappointment with big government can be found behind the intention to practice this sort of functional public administration in a small self-rule unit which can be managed by residents as a countermeasure to the quickly grown market sector. A number of similarities can be found between local governments and the non-profit sector such as co-operatives in the sense of self-rule by the residents themselves and of the creation of “civil economy.” It might be far-fetched to find

⁴Translator's note: The Japanese government promoted annexations of smaller municipalities into a larger one in the 2000s. This process, called "Heisei no Gappei" (annexations in the Heisei Era (1989 to 2019)), reduced the number of municipalities from 3232 in 1999 to 1727 in 2010.

⁵Translator's note: In Japan the youth's affiliation to the school matters more than in other countries, working also as a social category. This section mentions those who are enrolled in a junior high school (12 to 15 years), meaning that this congress is made specifically to raise the voices from adolescents of this age group.

commonalities between municipalism, a growing force in Europe, and the “Yanamarutto” Project, the next step for Yana Marché, but on considering SSE, projects at the municipal or district (sub-municipal) level whereby residents themselves can join in from the planning stage up to execution are important elements on restoring the community’s energy. Also, the “Yanamarutto” project, trying to bridge seamlessly the local government with the non-profit sector, could give us a new viewpoint to reposition the relationship between them.



Marutto Nouen
(Citizen Farm)



Alignment/Partnership

– “Platform” as Solutions –

Japan Co-operative Alliance

From Cooperative among Cooperatives to Cross-sectoral Partnerships

Japan Co-operative Alliance (JCA), founded in April 2018, is the only permanent organisation in Japan which bridges different sorts of co-operatives such as farmers' co-operatives (JA), fishermen's co-operatives (JF), consumers' co-operatives and mutual aid societies, among others, which have been working in their respective sectors. Although JC Sōken and the Research Institute on Co-operative Management, its predecessor, also tried to be a transversal think tank beyond each organisation and field, they tended to consist of personnel derived from JA. JCA features the incorporation and exchange of personnel from different organisations, not only from JA but also from Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union, Kokumin Kyōsai co-op (National Federation of Workers and Consumers Kyosai Cooperatives), labour banks and Japan Workers' Co-operative Union, among others.



The co-operative sector, unified under the Industrial Co-operative Act up to World War II, was legislatively fragmented into different subsectors from 1945 by the post-war reforms, such as Farmers' Co-operative Act and Consumers' Co-operative Act, with different laws and supervisory authorities. So, while each movement has its own development, such as farmers' co-operatives and consumers' co-operatives, it was rather hard to see the development of the “co-operative movement” at large. It can be said that the birth of JCA, a transversal permanent institution, founded the base for different sorts of co-operatives (internationally considered as main components of the SSE) to unfold their movement as a whole.

JCA's projects are based on the following three pillars: a) policy proposals and advertisement, b) education and research and c) partnership among co-operatives. As is implied in its Japanese name “Nihon Kyōdō Kumiai Renkei Kikō” (literally “Japanese Institution for the Partnership of Co-operatives”), it plans to promote other activities (policy proposals, advertisement, education and research) by way of the partnership among co-operatives. Especially in the last few years they have been making a lot of effort to support the construction and strengthening of partnership structures at the prefectural level, starting to get regional footholds which are the base for the movement to be in line with the international trend of “intercooperation among co-operatives” (6th co-operative principle)

to realise “concern for community” (7th co-operative principle), both adopted by the ICA (International Co-operative Alliance). Nowadays the prefectural partnership organisations exist in 42 of the 47 prefectures throughout Japan (excluding Akita, Ishikawa, Tokushima, Yamaguchi and Yamanashi), and it is requested of them to work as a platform to promote the exchange of information and partnership of activities in a permanent manner, transforming each prefecture’s status quo whereby joint events only used to take place sporadically.



JCA’s mission is shown in a short sentence that says: “JCA’s goal is to pursue the healthy development of co-operatives, as well as to contribute to the better life and job creation in communities.” Rather than expanding business opportunities as economic business units, they are more deeply aware of the “healthy development” on running businesses, as well as their co-operative identity as a civil society association for “better life and job creation in communities.” And, despite the fact that quite a few people understand JCA as a national centre (similar to what the former Japanese Co-operative Alliance used to proposit), actually it is not positioned as a confederation of federations, but an intermediate support association with the aim of supporting the transversal partnership beyond regions and business fields. As is stated in the ICA 4th principle of “Autonomy and independence,” co-operatives’ original relevance is to belong to the democratic governance of civil members, and we can say that the partnership among decentralised and autonomous subjects is the “healthy development” for co-operatives, rather than asking other associations or the central one for strong leadership. This would also contribute to the decent communities within the capitalist society where “competition” and “cooperation” are compatible and “private life” and “job” are harmonised, when transversal partnership comes up at the regional level as each co-operative grows quantitatively and tends to strengthen their hierarchy.

“We endeavor to ‘expand the cooperation’ as a ‘co-operative platform’ to aim at achieving the solution of different problems in communities on the basis of partnerships among co-operatives which is typical of us, together with various stakeholders such as local businesses, non-profits and the public administration” (JCA 2030 vision)

JCA regards the year 2030 as the bifurcation point for the future, aiming at solving communities’ challenges by way of partnerships with diverse stakeholders, not only with other co-operatives but with local businesses, non-profits and the public administration. This viewpoint confirms the concept of multi-stakeholder partnerships which is “a group of citizens to solve challenges by way of co- operation” in a broader sense, together with the co-operative entities and organisations *stricto*

sensu.

The position paper on SSE, published by ICA board of members, mentions the diversity of SSE players, and it is necessary to strengthen the partnerships with the public sector and the private for-profit sector in order to create “*the environment and win support so more activities can be done to promote SSE*”, and it will be requested to raise the awareness of the general public at large on the relevance and positions of co-operatives and other SSE players.

It seems necessary not only to 1) “*reinforce internally*”, increasing the number of each entity which is the subject of SSE, such as by increasing co-operatives’ members but also 2) to have a “*bridging*” strategy with other subjects by way of the “*troubleshooting by cooperation*”, reinforcing the partnership with such organisations and business units which cannot be main SSE players, in order to achieve the goal “*to expand the co-operation.*” The co-creative character is needed, not only among co-operatives, but also for partnerships at the community level with SSE players in a broader sense, proposed by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSE) and seconded by ICA, or even with the socioeconomic players generally sorted out of the SSE paradigm, for the “co-operative platform.”

It is highly expected for JCA to take the leadership in the SSE movement in Japan, still in its early stage, by playing the role not only for the inward-looking partnerships among co-operatives, but by being an open platform.

Tokushima Prefectural Council of Workers' Welfare

Based on a labour union, its spirit “One Welfare” supports the life in the community

A number of co-operatives were born on the basis of the labour union movement, such as regional co-operatives for workers, labour credit unions and Kokumin Kyōsai co-op (National Federation of Workers and Consumers Kyōsai Cooperatives). Toyohiko Kagawa, “father of co-operatives”, is known for having set up different co-operatives in the 1910s and 1920s when the labour movement had not yet split away from the consumers' movement. It is necessary to pay attention to the Workers' Autonomous Welfare Activity Movement (hereafter “Council of Workers' Welfare (CWW) Movement”) created and nurtured by forerunners of the labour and co-operative movements on unfolding the SSE, i.e. “a movement to bridge movements” in our current times. The CWW Movement, declaring loudly that workers are also “seikatsusha”¹ in the community, has been an historic icon which has been developing their own projects proactively to improve the welfare in the workplace and community life without being outdated, while still challenging a series of social issues in communities in Japan's 47 prefectures. We will see the overview of the projects done by the public-interest corporate juridical person of the Tokushima Prefectural Council of Workers' Welfare (CWW Tokushima) as one such cases.

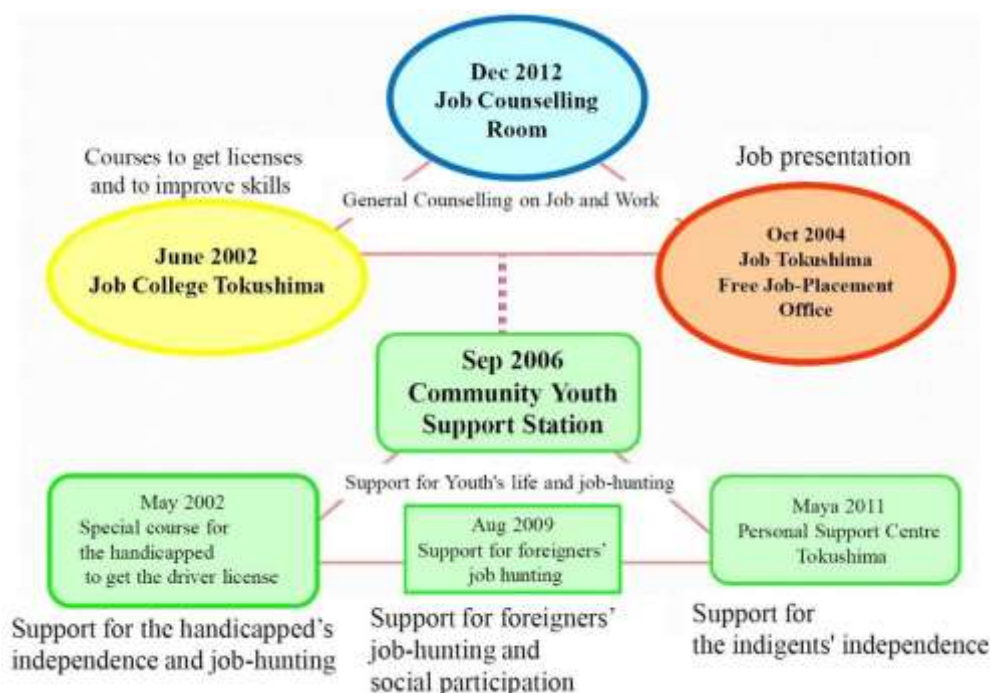
“CWW Tokushima is working for different workers' welfare projects, aiming at ‘a society free from isolation’ where nobody will be excluded.” (From CWW Tokushima's website)

“A society... where nobody will be excluded,” also a slogan of SDGs, is featured at CWW Tokushima (which had been adopted in 2013 when its juridical personality as a public interest corporate juridical person was recognised, even before SDGs) as well. Tokushima, located on Shikoku Island, a prefecture ahead of others in terms of depopulation, aging and industrial decline, is faced with typical problems in the rural area, including a number of “Genkai Shūraku (marginal villages).”² Both the challenges for SSE to face within rural Japan and creativities which sparked thanks to the small population will be reviewed when studying CWW Tokushima's initiatives.

¹ Translator's note: Seikatsusha is a key word for understanding the co-operative movement in Japan. This word, etymologically consisting of “seikatsu” (daily life) and “sha” (person), is devoid of a corresponding concept in English, illustrating each person's different aspects in life, not only limited to that of a consumer but also including those who live a social life, such as being an amateur soccer player, volunteers for the handicapped or an Instagram influencer, but usually excluding that of a producer / worker.

² Translator's note: A concept coined by the sociologist Akira Ono in 1991, referring to districts where at least half of the population is over 65 years old. Such neighbourhoods with too many elderlies and with relatively fewer youths to support them are considered to have difficulty in keeping their minimum function.

CWW Tokushima's main member organisations are: Rengō Tokushima (Labour union), Labour Credit Union, Kokumin Kyōsai co-op (National Federation of Workers and Consumers Kyōsai Co-operatives) and Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union Tokushima, all of which are usually bases for other prefectural CWW branches, as well as other different entities in relation to “work”, such as Retired Workers' Union and Tokushima Job-Hunting Support Institution. This network has played an important role in the excellent development of CWW Tokushima since the 2000s.



CWW Tokushima was founded in 1975 and used to be a small organisation with only three part-time workers as of 2000, with Rengō providing labour counselling and CWW providing its own counselling service in the daily life and welfare field on a small scale. This changed significantly with the establishment in 2002 of the “Pre-retirement Seminar” to provide lifelong support. As people now live for 80 years and more, the post-retirement life plan is an important concern, and CWW’s involvement with this model project made it aware of not only of “*current workers*” but also of its peripheral challenges. In the same year Tokushima Job-Hunting Support Centre and Job Counselling Room opened, raising CWW Tokushima’s awareness of how to work, including its diversified form and the importance of work-life balance.

An initiative by CWW, which has attracted attention all over Japan, is the “Special course for the handicapped to get a driver licence.” Especially in rural areas, it is obvious that having a driver’s licence gives access to a more diversified range of professions. Motorisation is even more advanced in the countryside which suffers from the lack of public transportation. The course began as a response to compelling requests from families of handicapped people, with 421 people having taken this course, 139 getting a car licence and 27 a motorcycle licence during the 18 years up to 2000.

This practice, very unique even at the national level, received inquiries not only from within the Prefecture but from all over the country, including a family which moved from Tokyo. Later on it came to be known that the driver's licence not only enhances the range of professions open to people, but also enriches their lifestyle as it gives them the freedom and pleasure of movement. It also has different secondary effects to encourage the handicapped who had never thought of trying to get a driver's licence and it increased their self-esteem by taking the challenging exam. So, the driver's licence has different impacts on people's social life.

The “small noticing” which arose from responding to needs at hand led to the Youth Support Station project (2006-), Support for foreigners' job hunting (2009-) and Support for the Indigents' Independence (2011-).

The Youth Support Station Project, which provides a supportive atmosphere for the youth in “hikikomori³” due to the hardship in their own life or others who stay away from work as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), is by no means as easy as pie. Each youth requesting counselling has their specific reasons, and it is necessary to meticulously understand their circumstances to figure out if job-matching is enough, or job training including “intermediate work”, is necessary

too. It can be said that CWW project's strength resides precisely in its partnership with labour unions which have been trying to plan its ideal purpose on the basis of the workplaces' reality.

CWW Tokushima started the Support for the Indigents' Independence project in 2011, four years before local governments throughout Japan began it on the passing of the supporting legislation. Tokushima has a small population⁴, allowing for a tightknit community that can provide meticulous support.

CWW Tokushima's Social Surveys

- 2001: Field survey on labour conditions
- 2002: Field survey on job-hunting support
- 2003: Survey on the work sharing
- 2004: Field survey on job-hunting and job referral
- 2005: Questionnaire on diverse way of working and “ikigami” for the elderly
- 2006: Awareness survey on workers' volunteering
- 2007: Awareness survey on post-retirement life
- 2008: Life condition and awareness survey on mothers
: Field survey on the jobless youth's job-hunting awareness
- 2009: Awareness survey on careworkers
- 2010: Questionnaire on the work-childraising balance
- 2011: Awareness survey on food bank
- 2012: Awareness survey on adult guardianship
- 2014: Awareness survey on working men/women and corporations
- 2015: Field and awareness survey on telework
- 2016: Questionnaire on the youth's establishment in the workplace
- 2017: Survey on the amount of resource for the network
to support the children's future

³ Translator's note; the word refers to recluse adults, mostly young males, who refuse to go out of their room, not only to work but also to any social activity. While some can go back to work and social life after a relatively short period (months to a few years), some maintain their social withdrawal for decades, not only turning into an economic burden for their parents, but also running the risk of having no income at all after both of them die.

⁴ Translator's note: the estimated population in Tokushima as of October 2021 is 711,988, making it Japan's fourth least populated prefecture.

What made CWW Tokushima, which was rather a backward organisation up to the 1990s, create such diverse projects? Fumiko Kanematsu, its secretary general, tells that its vigorous commitment to the research projects mattered a lot. Every year Rengō regional branch offices present certain policies to local governments, and the fact that they were vigorously committed to the elaboration of basic references for the resource to visualise “residents’ needs”. These presentations influenced public administration policies, leading to the establishment of different projects. Rather than CWW per se, it is its participation in the task force or advisory bodies of cities or of Tokushima Prefecture, set up for each social issue, which also reinforces the advocacy projects. It is in repeating the “Research > Proposal > Model Project > Research > Proposal > Entrustment of Projects” cycle that residents’ potential needs are visualized, turning CWW into a better provider of services.

Another key is the different foundations in terms of funding and human resources. While in Tokushima 338 non-profits have been recognised since the approval of the Act on Promotion of Specified Non-profit Activities in 1998⁵, but only a few non-profits throughout Japan have enough budget to run civil projects, also due to the lack of the culture of donation and of fiscal measures to stimulate donations. Although not affluent, CWW has a stable financial base and counts on their human resource supply from labour unions and other member organisations, allowing it to realise additional trial projects that enable it to go forward. The member activities at co-operatives have similar advantages in this regard. The reason there is so much expectation on the co-operatives and CWW movement as a driving force of the civil society sector in Japan might have to do with its characteristic to be projects / movements with autonomy.

The CWW movement goes back to the foundation of “Rōmushayō Busshi Taisaku Chūō Renraku Kyōgikai” (National Liaison Council of Logistics for Workers) in 1949, as a transversal network of national centres of labour unions such as Sōdōmei, Sanbetsu Kaigi and Zenrōren, when the country was still suffering from the lack of everyday commodities in the aftermath of World War II. Then it changed to the current name CWW, with prefectural and sub-prefectural councils in Japan’s 47 prefectures. As the SSE aims at expanding a humane economy by way of setting up multilayer networks, ranging from subnational to international ones, the CWW movement with seven decades of history under the slogan of “One Welfare” is a pioneer model of SSE with more development expected, hoping that the movement itself will play an important role to bridge the communities in the future.

⁵ Translator’s note: In Japan it was only after the Hanshin and Awaji Great Earthquake (17th January 1995), which killed 6,434 people and destroyed or burned 257,216 houses completely or partially, that the population became aware of the importance of non-profits, and it was only with the approval of this aforementioned act that the very concept of non-profit came into general knowledge.

Bridging Economy Forum Chiba

Bridging local practices under the slogan of “Social and Solidarity Economy”

“Bridging Economy Forum Chiba” (Tsunagaru Keizai Forum Chiba, hereafter BEFC) was born in 2018 on the basis of a proposal by Tōru Ikeda, president of Seikatsu Club Kaze No Mura (Wind Village). Chiba Prefecture, located next to Tokyo, has a number of social economy entities such as co-operatives, social welfare juridical persons and non-profits, and BEFC builds up the platform to bridge them at the prefectural level, with the aim of trying to give solutions to social issues by their partnership.

The interesting characteristics of this forum are that it not only bridges social economy organisations, but also has been conceived as the hub for different players to play together, such as local governments (Chiba Prefecture, Chia City) and local businesses which have been reviving communities such as the National Conference of the Association of Small Business Entrepreneurs (Dōyūkai). The first forum took place in July 2019, and currently annual forums and other conferences / learning sessions several times per year, as well as study tours to BEFC’s supporting entities on a sporadic basis, are held.

The following text, released for the 1st forum, helps us understand what they believe and how they try to promote the movement:

“The Bridging Economy refers to economic activities to make everybody happy by ‘bridging’ between corporations, between a corporation and a community, and those who work there, beyond the sort of corporation or activity field. Isn’t it necessary to go back to the starting point that ‘corporate activities exist to make people happy’ in order to stop the widening gap and poverty, brought about by market fundamentalism? Now we need more than ever to expand the bridging economy (Social and Solidarity Economy) which is spreading all over the world.”

(Call for the 1st forum)

The forum itself, similar to the SSE in Japan, is still at the initial stage whereby member organisations learn from each other, without trying to set up projects to solve specific issues, so it is still unsure what sort of developments will be taken on. However, it is without doubt that, while traditionally in Japan the independence of the social economy sector has been underscored, BEFC tries proactively to strengthen the partnership with the for-profit sector and the public administration, trying to work together with them, changing significantly the social economy sector’s strategy.

This chapter will deal with Seikatsu Club Chiba Group’s movement at four different stages, which

inspired Ikeda to understand the concept of the Bridging Economy Forum, discussing which topics have changed the co-operative movement in Japan and widened its activities, and trying to position the reach of the SSE, i.e., BEFC, as Stage 5.

[Stage 1]: Seikatsu Club Chiba Group started in 1976 as a purchasing co-operative. Tōru Ikeda took part in its foundation with the aim of spreading this movement into Chiba, which in Tokyo already had a decade of experience, with only three full-time employees including himself.

[Stage 2]: The 1970s and early 1980s saw the golden age of the co-operative movement, with the movement in Chiba expanding, and some unique experiences emerging there. They built a soap factory without chemical additives as a commitment to environmental issues, strengthening the workers' collective movement to allow members themselves to create jobs in their own community. What mattered to the members when they finished their child-raising project at a purchasing co-operative Niji No Machi, which began with the aim of providing kids with safe food, was the care for their parents as well as for themselves. Some members, after joining the “Tasukeai Network Jigyō” (Mutual Help Network Project) to provide domestic chores and care support services, started a movement to question the quality of elderly care service in Japan, holding study sessions on which sort of elderly life they want to live in the quickly ageing society to come, as well as which sort of facilities are ideal.

[Stage 3]: The members' learning process led to the setting up of the Kōreisha Fukushi Shisetsu Kensetu Junbi-kai (Preparative Committee for the Construction of Elderly Welfare Facility) in 1995, opening Japan's first senior residence with individual rooms and units in February 2000, just before the Care Insurance System¹ was implemented. The creation of such a senior residence was very relevant, as the elderly themselves could be assured that this was their ultimate home, and this model spread to the rest of the country. The Social Welfare Juridical Person, Kaze No Mura, (Wind Village), founded to run the facility, enhanced the range of support to include services for child-raising and for the handicapped, counting some 90 facilities, 1,800 workers and an annual turnover of some 7 billion yen (US\$ 61.4 million).

[Stage 4]: The Kaze No Mura Welfare Village, which emerged from the members' learning process in the 1990s, was not limited to facilities for the elderly. It also referred to the building of a community where exchanges take place among people of different ages, such as children, people of working age and the elderly, trying to achieve the symbiosis with the environment and with the agriculture. This concept came true with the participation in the revival project of an old huge housing complex owned

¹ Translator's note: the system which started in April 2000, was based on a similar system in Germany.

by UR Toshi Kikō (Urban Renaissance Agency)². On rebuilding the Sonoo Complex at Inage Ward (Chiba City), Inage Village was inaugurated in 2010 as a complex for daily life, including a clinic, houses for the elderly, a day care centre, caretakers' visit and nursing station, a depot where Seikatsu Club's foodstuff is provided, a restaurant run as a workers' collective, and a space for community activities and counselling services. This is how they started to run their original plan of a community revival project.

[Stage 5]: On top of that, initiatives in Chiba are extending to other fields, such as the universal job-hunting system to allow the handicapped and others to get a job. What is now projected as its next stage is the BEFC with SSE as its axis. While only a single business unit has been playing the important role on solving social issues up to the Stage 4, now the topic is the partnership among different units. The forum's basic concept is the platform where different players, beyond their own business field or sector, work together to solve issues. A partnership to solve the proposed goals is required also within the context of the SDGs.

Issues were solved and the movement was reinforced in the previous four stages by setting up a huge subject called "us" by conscious members. The most common way of expansion was to have the colleagues within the same co-operative group, although their business field is different. But from now on, a new sort of movement is requested whereby a diversity of subjects with different mission and vision collaborate and establish partnerships, aware of their differences, instead of trying to seek one huge subject.

Remember the aforementioned call for the 1st Forum. Both the *"economic activities to make everybody happy by 'bridging' between corporations, between a corporation and a community, and those who work there, beyond the sort of corporation or activity field"* and *"to go back to the starting point that 'corporate activities exist to make people happy'"* clearly shows BEFC's deep desire to promote this movement together with ordinary local businesses, instead of limiting itself to only the non-profit and civil society sector such as co-operatives, mutual benefit societies, social welfare juridical persons and non-profits. Reviewing the historic development of Seikatsu Club Chiba Group its prehistory (Stages 1 to 4) should help to understand what sort of positioning and values are held by the policies of the new movement with SSE and its axis. "In a way different than up to now" means it has achieved a huge step in comparison with previous stages. Specifically, whereas the movement so far has been evolving under the solid identity of co-operatives, from now on it will aim at a new identity where a symbiosis is found among different values, not only of co-operatives but of other juridical persons.

² Translator's note: A semipublic Independent Administrative Institution in charge of providing housing.

The “Co-operative Sector Theory”, suggested in the 1930s by Georges Fauquet, discussed the separation among public / capitalist / private / co-operative sectors, as well as their “mutually-restrictive” relationship, arguing co-operatives’ limited social functions. The co-operative sector has been playing its role as an autonomous existence for a century, but what is requested from now on will be to realise a horizon which goes over the co-operative sector theory by building up a new partnership among different sectors. This will be the path for the Forum by way of the concept of SSE.



“Kazenomura”

Japan’s first senior residence with individual rooms and units in February 2000



“Inage Village” a complex for daily life, including a clinic, houses for the elderly, a day care centre, caretakers’ visit and nursing station, a depot where Seikatsu Club’s food-stuff is provided, a restaurant run as a workers’ collective, and a space for community activities and counselling services.

Inclusion and Diversity

— Constructing the Spaces where We Live Together —

Welfare Orchestra (Pig in love Research Research Institute) + Silver Wood (Sweet Olive)

Creating added value by multiplication, restoring the original way of life by subtraction

This chapter deals with two juridical persons, specifically the Social Welfare Juridical Person Fukushima Gakudan (Welfare Orchestra) and the Silver Wood, Co., Ltd. Both are also counselling members of the Bridging Economy Forum Chiba (BEFC, see Chapter 6 for details), providing an indispensable viewpoint on thinking about SSE in the future.

Fukushi Gakudan (Welfare Orchestra, run by Pig in Love Research Institute)

Fukushi Gakudan is a social welfare juridical person which runs welfare projects at nine centres in Chiba and Saitama Prefectures, but mainly in Katori, Chiba. It works on a wide range of business fields such as senior residences, short stays, care services at home, child day services



and job-hunting support projects for the handicapped, but what makes this organisation famous is the “Pig in Love Research Institute, Co., Ltd.”, working on food processing and commercialisation. Why is a social welfare juridical person working in this field?

Japan has a number of workshops, but in most cases the handicapped are accepted there to do simple chores under the help of supporters, receiving only a small labour payment, with the average monthly fee being 17,000 yen (US\$ 150). Should we not provide a workplace where their “eagerness to work” and “eagerness to be socially active” is truly achieved? We would like to provide a job paying them 100,000 yen (US\$ 878) per month¹. It is with this desire that Fukushima Gakudan has been faced with the challenge of job creation for the handicapped. While more and more attention is paid recently to the partnership between farming and welfare, with the increasing number of practices to employ people with psychological and mental handicap in the farming sector, Fukushima Gakudan partners with Arita Farm which raises pigs (a brand product), creating jobs for the handicapped as a Job Hunting Continuous Support A-type Project. They promote the marketing channel of their value-added processed pork by way of “welfare x livestock.” A restaurant has opened in Katori as an opportunity to rebrand “Pig in love Research Institute.” This restaurant will create a number of jobs for the handicapped.

¹ Translator’s note: while the minimum wage differs from prefecture to prefecture (between 820 yen (US\$ 7.20) and 1,041 yen (US\$ 9.41) per hour, as of October 2021), 100,000 yen per month is still below the minimum wage for full-time workers (40 hours per week, at least 160 hours per month = 131,200 yen (US\$ 1,152)).

The representative Daisuke Iida said that neither agriculture nor welfare were regarded as an attractive workplace by young people, who had a rather shabby image of it. Iida's challenge is to mix both of them, as well as the brainchild of creating completely new values. Isn't it in those fields that are considered as old-fashioned where creativity can be unfolded the best? It is this sort of reverse ideation which allows Fukushi Gakudan to get deeply involved with the primary industries, working in farming fields in its stronghold Katori or at sea in Chiba Prefectures, combining welfare with farming, forestry, fishing and others...

"A small brainchild" cannot be something which can be easily copied. It is the creative leveraging of the community and the surrounding you are in to the maximum which will lead to form sustainable regional economies, which should be regarded as the basic form of SSE.

Silver Wood (Sweet Olive)²

Silver Wood, Co., Ltd runs ten Homes for Elderly with Care (HEC) and two group homes. Originally started as a company dealing with construction materials for steel panels, the company started the HEC project "Ginmokusei" (Sweet Olive) in 2011.

Sweet Olive has some characteristics which are different from traditional houses for the elderly. *The first* is the self-help principle. When help is needed, the elderly residents help each other to solve the issue, instead of asking the caretaker for help. Some even still do their paid work while residing there. Tadamichi Shimogawara, its representative, says that "*control gives birth to dependency, lowering people's willingness to live,*" instructing the personnel that their task is just to watch, trying to meddle as little as possible. There lies the philosophy that a good house for the elderly is a place where people can live a life which requires as little help as possible.

The second is not to see anybody as special. As people get older, their bodies will have troubles and their mental capacities will wane more or less. While the same service is demanded for everybody at most facilities, Sweet Olive takes into account the fact that every resident differs, with no two people with identical conditions. People can support themselves precisely as they recognise their differences.

² Translator's note: In Japan the word "silver" means "of the elderly", due to the fact that the elderly tends to have "silver" hair. Also, the Japanese word "Ginmokusei", written in Kanji (Chinese characters) as "銀木犀", contains "銀" = silver, reinforcing its commitment to the elderly.

The third feature is to cherish exchanges with neighbouring residents. Such facilities are also located within a community. Sweet Olive allows neighbours to use the common space within the building. The lunch at the eatery is provided for neighbours too, and children come to Sweet Olive to buy small snacks sold by residents. They have a summer festival where



food stalls are set up. These places are not only open to the community, but residents are also free to go out to them. Not a few of the residents have dementia and quite often get lost, but the fact that Sweet Olive is known to the community helps neighbours talk to lost residents and they contact the staff.

If Fukushi Gakutan has the “philosophy of multiplication,” Silver Wood has that of “subtraction.” People are different. Would it not be true that the ideal last house is a housing home where you can still live a similar life to your previous one, instead of counting on meticulous services? By practicing this idea completely, residents make self-help efforts and believe that it is the way people should live life.

Last, but not least, an important fact needs to be mentioned. Sweet Olive has an overwhelming rate of 76% of residents dying at home while the national average at HECs is a mere 17%. Most facilities try to avoid seeing off people and most people usually end their lives in a hospital bed. Sweet Olive includes death as part of a normal life. It is not at all something special.

SSE tries to restore economy into our society and life, as well as “restoring the humane economy.” If so, what kind of “richness” do we really desire? How about starting to learn this rich experience where people are surrounded by trusted friends, get older and finish their life?

Tokyo Schule, Tekisen University and Creative Group 440Hz

A pedagogical movement precisely by those who suffered the pain by themselves
to redesign society

It can be said that both education and learning are the central hubs for any social movement. As SSE is also one of them, it should have something to be embodied from the aspect of specific personality formation or education. Here two experiences of Tekisen University and Creative Group 440Hz are studied. Both were born on the basis of Japan's leading free school Tokyo Schule, to see the challenge of SSE and education.

Different free school movements exist in different places, such as Montessori in Italy, Waldorf Schools in Germany, Freinet education in France and Sudbury Education in the United States, each one with its own educational principle and philosophy and international expansion, including in Japan. While such can be called, in general, alternative schools, the Japanese free school movement has a different flavour, as their characteristics are to “create the *ibasho*¹ for children and youth”, responding to the problem of the 1980s of those kids who refused to go to school. The representative case is TokyoSchule, which is also the matrix for Tekisen University and Creative Group 440Hz.

Tokyo Schule started in 1985 at a small flat owned by Keiko Okuchi, who had a kid refusing to go to school. The traditional school education had virtually no solution at all to this emerging issue. Although the direct cause was bullying, it was rather the whole school education system in Japan, featuring the control of children and their evaluation only by academic results, which was regarded as the fundamental, although indirect, cause of such a refusal. “Don’t derail,” i.e. you are turned down when you want to do something different than others, or you are different from others. Both the schools and society demanded kids get used to such a choking atmosphere. Okuchi came to understand the need for an *ibasho* where children and youth can have regular exchanges among themselves to live a decent life without being isolated



Tokyo Schule SHINJYUKU

¹ See Chapter 2 for details.

from society. Modelled after Tokyo Schule, similar schools = *ibashos*, have been set up throughout Japan by parents of such children and youth since the 1990s. Tokyo Schule has three venues in Tokyo and Chiba, with 120 youth and more than 1,200 graduates.

While we can see a long history in the international sphere in problem-solving activities by self-help groups, by patients and those who suffer from problems, such as alcoholics and people with other addictions, cancer patients at the terminal phase, those who suffer from gambling and domestic violence, and/or LGBTQ (already recognised widely in the 1930s), self-help groups by parties themselves are still little known in Japan as a problem-solving method. On the other hand, Tokyo Schule and other Japanese free schools (=creation of *ibasho*) is one of the few cases which were started by the parties themselves, although nowadays the public administration, boards of education² and corporations have started to participate in this sector.

The viewpoints of “being the interested party” and “multiculturalism” are extremely important in promoting SSE. It is necessary for residents in the community to “be aware” of something in order to develop a movement, and those people near those parties are requested to respect their own voices. Their refusal to go to school should be regarded not as a problem of themselves and/or their parents, but as one of society at large. It is false to see that they “*do not want to go to school.*” They have their own reason “*to be unable to go to school.*” It seems there is still too much prejudice to see the “*phenomenon not to go to school*” itself as a vice without having a dialogue with them about the cause. It would be the expected recipe to build a society where the choice “*not to go to school*” does not lead each youth to suffer huge disadvantages.

Tokyo Schule has the following five principles: 1) where the youth can relax, 2) where the youth are supported in doing whatever they want, 3) where the youth’s decisions = freedom is cherished, 4) where the youth create by themselves and 5) where differences are respected. Tokyo Schule has changed by the youth’s own force under these five principles. Although each one has different practices, Schule has been enriched by the fact that they share the common experience of being afflicted with the pain and suffering of being excluded.

It is in this context that Schule University was opened in 1999. It is not a university officially recognised by law but is a small learning space with a limited number of people, and has turned into a place where each student looks for their own “individual project” as they wish, thanks to a number of external collaborators and supporters.

² Translator’s note: Boards of Education (“Kyoiku Iinkai” in Japanese) are administrative committees at municipal and prefectural levels, influenced by the respective local government.

Schule University restarted in October 2010 as the non-profit Tekisen University. Tekisen is a newly coined word by students, which means: “*We want to get over the feeling of stagnation just like water drops over time can make holes in a rock.*” There were 180,000 children and youth throughout Japan in 2020 who refused to go to school, and the number of social *hikikomori*³ is estimated to be more than 1.15 million. While the free school is an *ibasho* for a limited age group of children and teenagers, Tekisen University accepts anybody regardless of age. It features a course to form free school staff, and more and more expectation is given to the formation of such human resources capable of running such *ibashos*, which are needed more and more.

Creative Group 440Hz is a company founded in 2010 by four graduates of Tokyo Schule and Schule University to work on video, design and website creation. Leveraging skills they learned at Schule University, they founded it in order to create a workplace where they can live their own life, together with trusted friends who had similar experiences. They learn

a lot of business administration methods from workers’ co-operatives and conduct their business, cherishing every member’s opinion. A social issue cannot be solved if some voices are split away. This movement, based on their own viewpoint, might be a test for SSE to turn into a truly alternative movement.



Tekisen University Unveiling Ceremony



Creative Group 440Hz (Workspace)

³ See Chapter 5 for details.

Elder Consumers' Co-operative Aichi and Care Centre Homi

Possibility of New Coexistence at an aging multinational residential complex

Elder Consumers' Co-operatives (ECC) started as co-operatives set up by the elderly themselves after retirement and are unique to Japan. There are 19 ECCs and some 50,000 members throughout Japan (as of 2020, based on affiliation to the Federation), willing to build a society where the elderly can live an assured life on the basis of mutual help as colleagues, creating new jobs by leveraging their experiences and knowledge to allow themselves to live with pride and dignity.

ECCs were founded in the early 1990s with the high ideal of having the elderly neither tied to a bed nor allowed to be lonely. They try to be active as much as possible to serve people and community, which restores their energy. The case Care Centre Homi is a local welfare office pertaining to ECC Aichi founded in 1995 and is based in Homigaoka, Toyota (ECC Aichi has some 2,600 members as of 2021). Consumers' co-operatives in Japan are mostly classified into regional co-operatives, based on prefectures, and co-operatives for worker consumers, set up at the workplace, but ECCs are unique in the sense that they were founded on the basis of their attribute of their members as being elderly. Also, just as the ECC Federation belongs to Japan Workers' Co-operative Union, their actual projects show their aspect as workers' co-operatives, mainly focusing on the elderly's welfare and care (currently there is no age requirement to be a member).

Homi Residential Complex (Homi Complex), is well-known all over Japan as almost half of the residents are Brazilians and other foreigners, with a history of having experienced serious conflicts between Japanese and non-Japanese residents due to linguistic and cultural differences. The aging society is affecting Homi Complex as well, with increasing demand for elder care and welfare since the 2000s.

Care Centre Homi opened in 2011 as Homigaoka Care Centre. Its main businesses are homecare by elderly care insurance or for the handicapped, support for transfer and other life support, but the atmosphere where half of the population are foreigners generates its own hardships. The language barrier makes it harder for people to understand the public elderly care system or the language for the health and elderly care, preventing the elderly insurance system from working enough. So, the Care Centre opened the "Homigaoka Care Lesson." To put it simply, it is a training course for helpers, but the coexistence of Japanese and non-Japanese enriched the learning content which is not limited to the helper course.

Members who planned this course wanted it to be the entrance for the multicultural coexistence whereby care service is done in Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish and other languages. This course, under the ideal of "Care is communication," provides food from different cultures and cooking lessons,



and is a learning place with fresh surprises. As a result, 103 helpers have finished the course, comprising of 60 Japanese, 23 Brazilians, 9 Peruvians, 6 Filipinos, 2 Chinese and 1 Ecuadorean, 1 Bangladeshi and 1 Lithuanian. They leveraged the Japanese government's subsidy system which allows receivers of allowances to take training courses, so some people who were unemployed can find a job at care and



welfare projects after the course, getting out of their jobless situation. The increase of human resources fluent in Portuguese and Spanish has improved the care in Homi Complex, stimulating people to learn about foreign cultures.

Homi Complex is home not only to the elderly but also to working-aged people, with quite a few families who have recently immigrated to Japan. This is, where again, language is a huge barrier. The learning of Japanese is a huge hurdle and quite often children are left alone without being able to follow classes at schools. The public support for such tasks is not yet enough. Members, after getting counselling by Care Centre Homi's users and their families, opened "Jidou Day Hohoemi" (Children Day Smile) in 2015 to satisfy their requests by partnering with different organisations.

Students from nearby Aichi Prefectural University and Chukyo University, who were involved with projects, created the volunteers' group JUNTOS ("Together" in Portuguese/Spanish), they arranged communitarian activities, such as learning hiragana and Chinese characters for children, playing outside and cleaning parks with them. Based on such experiences, the Aichi Prefectural University will start post-graduate studies on community interpretation in April 2022, gathering interpreters who can help bridge health, judicial, public services and foreigners.

Care Centre Homi is playing this indispensable role for the community as it goes beyond its usual range of elder care. While only a small number of people use home helpers, i.e. 12 elders, 20 handicapped adults, 15 handicapped children (28 Japanese and 19 foreigners) out of 3,500 households and 11,000 people in the whole Homi Complex, this centre creates *ibasho*¹ and jobs by being a counselling centre for the troubled within the community. The activities at Homi Complex, starting to play an active role in building this multicultural community as a specific case of "Everybody's

Home" depicted in Chapter 2, will be an important reference on thinking about Japan which will see a quick increase in the foreigner population.

¹ See Chapter 2 for details.

Innovation

— Movement of New Leaders —

Ohsato General Management, Co., Ltd.

Spend 40% of your working time for community activities:

The ultimate secret of the company which eliminates any “barrier”

Ohsato General Management, Co., Ltd. (OGM) runs real estate management at Ōamishirasato, Chiba where Kujūkuri Beach extends along the Pacific Ocean. A small company with 32 employees is attracting attention, not only locally but nationally as well because they are committed to different community activities which are not directly related either to turnover or profit. As many as 350 sorts of community activities, ranging from cleaning beaches, traffic control near the station, holding concerts and conferences, among others, are mainly done by employees.

What makes this company famous is its unique way of working: “40% of community activities and 60% of core business.” At OGM neither bosses nor colleagues meddle with the way each employee works. Each one plans and conducts the business as they like. Although the company’s core business is real estate management, employees spend some 60% of their working hours directly involved with sectors related to the profit-making businesses while the remaining 40% is dedicated to community activities. The separation of “for-profit/non-profit” is quite commonplace and a number of corporations return their profit to society, but usually employees wonder if it is possible to ~~run~~the company with nearly half their time spent on activities not related to profit-making. But OGM has maintained its projects for 30 years under this policy without having a deficit and is actually expanding the projects. Their way of working, as well as their relationship with the surrounding community, might suggest some tips which would help us promote SSE in the Japanese context.

The “Reform on the working style,” promoted all over Japan, aims at increasing the efficiency and speed of work to avoid tying workers to the workplace, trying to achieve the work/life balance by cherishing employees’ private life. However, the borderline between “paid work” and community work is vague for those who work at OGM. Obviously, it wouldn’t work if all employees wanted to spend 100% of their time for community activities, but each of them is committed to think about what is necessary to go on working in this company. As a result, the “40% community activity” working style turns out to be the best way of work to keep the “*stable business*,” “*community’s satisfaction*” and “*employees’ willingness to work*.”

OGM allows each employee to get involved with a “nano-business” with capital of 5,000 yen (US\$ 45) on top of doing OGM’s own activities. Each employee has their own and exclusive bank account for this nano business, doing whatever they want under the following four rules: “What you can,” “What you want to do,” “What helps the community” and “What will not be a burden for OGM’s core business.” While it is much smaller than splitting some business units into other independent

corporations or “venture within the company,”¹ the president hopes that employees should understand what they can do and how it is related to the community, on top of experiencing the joy of running a business, which lead to this “nano-business” practice.

What is most cherished in this company is “noticing.” Mariko Tokoro, former president of OGM, said in an interview that she *“did not think about the future, as having a huge goal or vision as an organisation will prevent us from seeing what is in front of us.”* So OGM’s motto is for each employee to “notice” anything tiny and to practice something immediately. OGM’s management style would be enough to surprise most people who think that the existence of long-term goals are the ABCs of any business management, as it gives priority to what each of them can do today to how the company will be in the future.



Mariko Tokoro

The attitude to appreciate “noticing” is based on Tokoro’s sad experience. Two years after she became the president, an accident took place in which a motorcycle was involved in tree-cutting work, and the student who rode it lost his life. It was an accident which could have been avoided only by paying attention. The noticing and practicing never to make such tragedies happen again turned into the behaviour principle both for Tokoro and OGM. The beach cleaning activity by all employees for one hour, started as training for noticing and has now been kept for 25 years. Noticing what they face without overlooking anything tiny. It was under this principle that OGM has been training those human resources who can think what they should do as an independent individual, rather than being tied into “*Organisation’s logic*.” Is it not true that we are currently living a lifestyle whereby the company’s logic (of what you belong to) is given priority over society’s viewpoint? OGM eliminates this border, reminding us of our original way of living and working, i.e. “*companies for the society*,” “*me who lives in society*.”

The company’s headquarters, with entrances on all four sides, admits neighbours who come in the morning and in the afternoon, doing their own hobby activities such as singing, while housewives in this community run a “one-day chef restaurant” taking turns at a space given on the second floor². Both

¹ Translator’s note: an initiative practiced among large corporations to stimulate their employees to run start-up projects without leaving, with the aim of promoting their entrepreneurship.

² Translator’s note: In Japan floors are count in the American way, i.e. what is the “ground floor” in the UK is called as “first floor” there.

employees and neighbours can enter freely. The entrance displays locally-grown vegetables (as a practice of the nano-business) to be sold there³. The fact that different people drop by that company, including elderly and fathers who pick up their children after school, makes OGM an indispensable place and not only the president but also its employees are proud of this.



OGM is also active in supporting job-hunting, as well as in building the community. It set up the “Ōamishirasato Universal Job-Hunting Support Association,” helping the handicapped, single mothers, former drug addicts, homeless, the indigent and others afflicted with “hardship to live a life” find their role in society and work. It would not be too erroneous to state that a community inclusive of different people’s lifestyles, rather than looking for human resources which can be immediately leveraged, is run under the juridical person of a Company Limited.

The cultural school “Chikyū Juku” (Earth School) is also interesting. Ōamishirasato has seen the arrival of elderly who, after retirement, returned to the town where they had spent their childhood. The Earth School’s concept is to share their knowledge and skills, and it is quite popular as it widens locals’ perspective. The fee is 500 yen (US\$ 4.50)⁴ and the instructor receives most of the money after subtracting costs. Though different than the “40%” policy at OGM, pensioner instructors make an effort to live up to expectations as this is paid work which gives them a sense of satisfaction. The exchange at the school also helps them restore their relationship with the community they had left decades earlier. Most local governments with decreasing population make an effort to attract young people while Ōamishirasato welcomes the influx of the retired elderly. It is locals’ active participation in reviving the community by sharing their knowledge that gives roles to newcomers, allowing them to find a purpose for their life after retirement. Outsiders may see it as going against the current, but for those involved with OGM it is a viewpoint which is tied directly to “*noticing*.”

OGM, as shown above, is a strange company without any borders between “*work and community activity*”

³ Translator’s note: In rural Japan such public spaces are found where farmers leave their own produce, asking consumers to voluntarily pay. Such places are usually kept unmanned, so the farmers’ income is up to the consumers’ goodwill.

⁴ Translator’s notice: it is customary in Japan to charge 500 yen as “reference document fee” even nowadays, as people prefer to have power points, news articles etc. in the printed form.

or between “*employees and locals.*” Cherishing small “*noticing*” more than anything leads everybody to think by themselves, strengthens people’s bridging and builds up an attractive community. SSE proposes to run a “*humane economy*” and it seems OGM is showing us a lot about how to “*work in a humane manner.*”

Last but not least, some challenges will be mentioned from the viewpoint of the promotion of SSE itself. On one hand, we should give up the conventional and inflexible mindset which depicts non-profitability from the viewpoint of the juridical person such as the co-operative or social welfare juridical person. We tend to distinguish ourselves from ‘company limited’ as they are for-profit companies, but they should be evaluated not by the juridical person but by what they think and practice, and SSE should be willing to partner with them for the community.

Also, it should be noted that it is not necessarily the best option to copy and paste OGM’s case. It happened to turn into a platform to create the community’s bond and to nurture human resources. Companies in other business fields should do it in their own way as the president’s personality in this small business played an important role. What is of extreme importance in this example is the simple idea that “*everybody can think, make correct decisions and practice as the involved party.*” What is necessary to nurture and increase such human resources? For example, some parents leave school to be completely in charge of their children’s education, saying that they are too busy with it. Locals and passengers who look out at garbage on the beach or around the train station think cleaning is the local government’s task. Is it not our indifference to such incidents, saying to ourselves that it is somebody else’s fault, which has contributed to a deteriorating our society? Cherishing yourself as you are somebody who lives in this town, which can observe such small “*noticing*” instead of huge visions. The attitude not to draw any borders in advance would be a quite important viewpoint in promoting SSE.

Ama Town Multisector Co-operative

A new type of co-operative, an initiative tackled by a challenging island

Ama Town is located in Nakano Shima, one of the islands of the Oki Archipelago, Shimane Prefecture. Its population is 2,293 and it is rich in fresh water where thriving agriculture, fishing and livestock businesses are found. Oki is famous for creating one of the innovative experiences to stimulate communities in insular regions in the 21st century, winning the Good Design Award 2010 with the

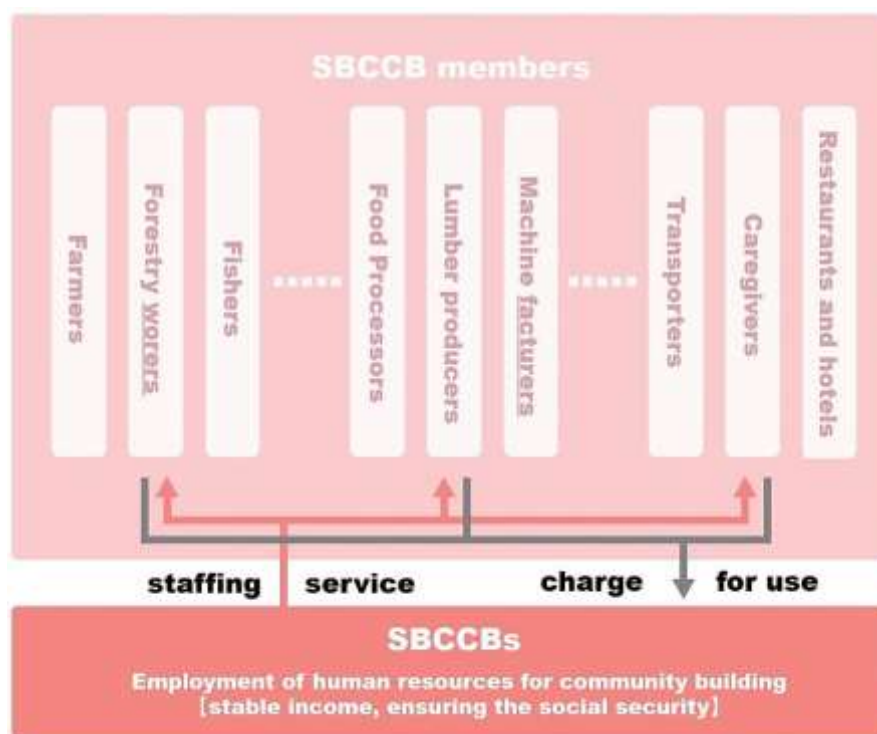


project to attract students from mainland Shimane to Tōzen High School or by the integral project “The Happiness in the Island” at Ama. It is in this municipality that the Ama Town Multisector Co-operative (ATMC) was founded in 2020. The expression “multisector co-operative” still sounds unfamiliar to most people. It refers to the Specific Business Co-operatives for Community Building (SBCCB), on the basis of a law titled “The Law on the Promotion of Specific Businesses for Community Building to Deal with the Quick Diminution of the Local Population” which came into effect in June 2020 and the expression “multisector co-operative” is a colloquial term coined in Ama to better explain its structure.

SBCCBs is a system which was formulated with the aim of creating jobs on the basis of a business co-operative set out in quickly depopulating regions, by trying to attract youth from urban or neighbouring areas. Many rural areas have tasks which require temporary workforces. A common practice is that farmers went to urban areas as temporary workers in the winter when they had less work in agriculture, and this system was created with the aim of doing the opposite to attract youth to the countryside. So, a co-operative was set up by different business units which have temporary seasonal labour demands, (three months), and the creation of the year-round job guarantees a stable income for the young newcomers.

This is a new trial inspired by the recently common phenomenon of young immigrants from urban areas who combine farming tasks with something else, called “Hannō Han X” (Half agriculture, half something else) in Japan. While this “X” has been what “*they bring from the city*” by closing a contract of rewarded remote work by the immigrants themselves, such as designing and programming, SBCCBs provide different jobs which are completed within the area. Local business owners are

afflicted with the workforce shortage, so this system is beneficial both for employers and for employees. On top of that, the co-operative's projects run by the members' businesses receive financial aid from the public administration (approximately half of the running cost and the special tax allocation for setup support).



New workers who come from outside the community are employed as regular workers (with an unlimited contract). Then they are dispatched from their direct employers (co-operative) to different business owners in the community (members). They get committed to different tasks under a range of different combinations, such as “morning / afternoon,” “Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays / Tues- days and Thursdays” and “Spring / Summer / Autumn / Winter”, achieving full-time employment. As said above, the human resources employed under this regime are called “*multi workers*” (multitask workers)¹ as they are in charge of different tasks. An issue in Japan is the deteriorated rights of workers as the way they are employed is more flexible and diversified, symbolised by the “dispatched workers.” As such work is not foreign to a negative impression, this system’s other challenge is how to provide them with attractive jobs, leading to the youth’s immigration and settlement although they are basically dispatched.

It is important to guarantee that workers’ rights are well assured on receiving the subsidy from the

¹ Translator’s note: In Japanese the word “maruchi” (deriving from “multi”) is used as an abbreviation of “multi- something.”

public administration. While one of the goals is to stimulate the local economy, the largest one is to stabilise the *multi workers*’ employment, establishing a workforce that will work long-term in the local economy.

ATMC shows the mission to “aim at creating the island’s value in our own way by designing our own way of working, on the basis of the island’s urgent challenge of the workforce shortage.” Business owners in Ama, who are also members of this multisector co-operative, have the first need to solve the work-



force shortage. It is necessary to create the island’s new value to achieve this goal in a sustainable way, and the empowerment of the youth themselves, who go there as *multi workers*, will be the core purpose. It is under this principle that ATMC’s business fields are not limited to dispatching workers, but it also realizes joint advertisement projects (advertising the island’s attractiveness by way of web-sites and SNS) and joint training projects whereby the *multi workers* and member businesses have discussions at the same table. Outsiders’ views are incorporated by giving feedback on the effects of such ads, and the whole island studies the current challenges, as well as explores the potential for new businesses, by way of such a training business. While *multi workers* have their stable job assured with their unlimited contact, they are also welcome to go into local industry which cannot find successors, or to be independent entrepreneurs to help create the island’s new value.

Traditionally co-operatives have put a high value on education, taking care of their members’ learning through their movement. On the other hand, currently different activities are done separately, such as education for members, education for personnel and advertisement for non- members. The fact that “Education, Training, and Information” are mentioned at the current 5th Co- operative Principle, set out by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), implies that education is segmented per stakeholder within the co-operative sector.

At the ATMC, however, members (business owners) themselves are both learners and have their mission to train the successors / future generation of the island. The “Member-centrism” *stricto sensu* might be understood as giving priority to members’ learning, for which the personnel should provide the learning space and be trained to build their own skills, and it seems that actually many co-operatives are run this way. But is it not true that the essence of learning is to place both members and employees together at the same table where everybody learns and teaches each other,

instead of only listening to lectures?

The *multi workers* who currently work in Ama are three men and three women who were employed in the first term. Most of them are from the greater Tokyo region without

Gender rate	3 males, 3 females
Average age	25.8
Average annual income	2.7 million yen (US\$ 23,400)
Term	unlimited

As of June, 2021

any connection to Oki, Shimane or San'in region². Different talents gather there, such as a youth with a Ph.D. in engineering, a former high-school professor who decided to move there after five years of teaching experience, a bilingual³, a clinical psychotherapist and a graduate from a cinema school. Such profiles should be new to local business owners, their different values might complicate communication and there might be some cases whereby their expectations are not met. But that should be why there are a plenty of chances to co-create and churn our new values as they work together and spend their life as colleagues who think about the island's future. The Workers' Co-operative Act in Japan was approved in December 2020 and it is expected a number of workers' co-operatives will be established after the law comes into effect in 2022. It would be desirable for more people to know that more and more "multisector co-operatives" are emerging as another form of co-operative, different than this trend.

While a number of local governments were late in preparing for the 1st application to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication in June 2020, in the midst of the Pandemic, 23 business co-operatives have started under this regime, ranging from "Shimokawa Business Co-operative" in Shimokawa (Hokkaido) and "Erabu Shimadukuri Business Co-operative" in Wadamari and China, both on Okinoerabu Island, Kagoshima.

ATMC recommends the newcomers visit as many businesses as possible in their first year to achieve the following three goals: "*To get used to handling multitasks*", "*To understand industries, seasons and lifestyle*" and "*To work in a way related to the season for three months, building human relationships*." It is their ability to handle different tasks that turns their training into the "*training of the island, of the town*" beyond each workplace. The initiative in Ama illustrates the basic principle that active regions are made possible by active human resources.

² Translator's note: The North-Western coast of Honshū island. While its range differs in contexts, in the largest sense it includes the whole Shimane and Tottori Prefectures, as well as Northern parts of Kyōto, Hyōgo and Yamaguchi Prefectures.

³ Translator's note: Japan is still dominantly a monolingual country where being fluent in English is regarded as a special skill.

Borderless Japan, Co., Ltd.

A new-age social business based on the mutual help spirit

Borderless Japan, Co., Ltd. (Borderless) was founded in 2007 and has deployed 40 social businesses in 15 countries as of April 2021. With the annual turnover of 5.5 billion yen and 1,500 employees, its quick growth attracts the attention of students and other youths in Japan who are interested in social businesses.

This company's Statute defines itself in its foreword, as “*‘social entrepreneurs’ community’ co-creating larger social impact by gathering, sharing their know-how, funds and social capital mutually and expanding different social solutions all over the world.*”

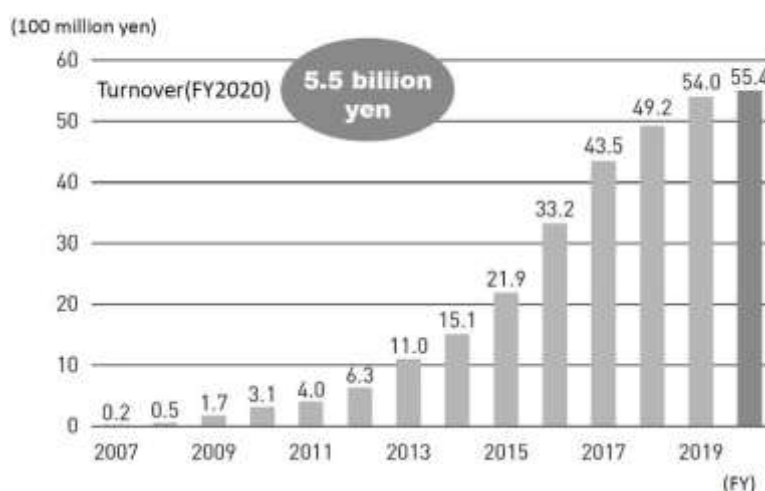
Those 40 companies run their own business in an independ-

ent manner but act as one community in supporting the creation of new businesses. Kazunari Taguchi, the representative, declares that his business goal is “*to set up 100 companies per year,*” and what’s intriguing about Borderless is not its fresh character, but that its business is done by way of the traditional “mutual help.”

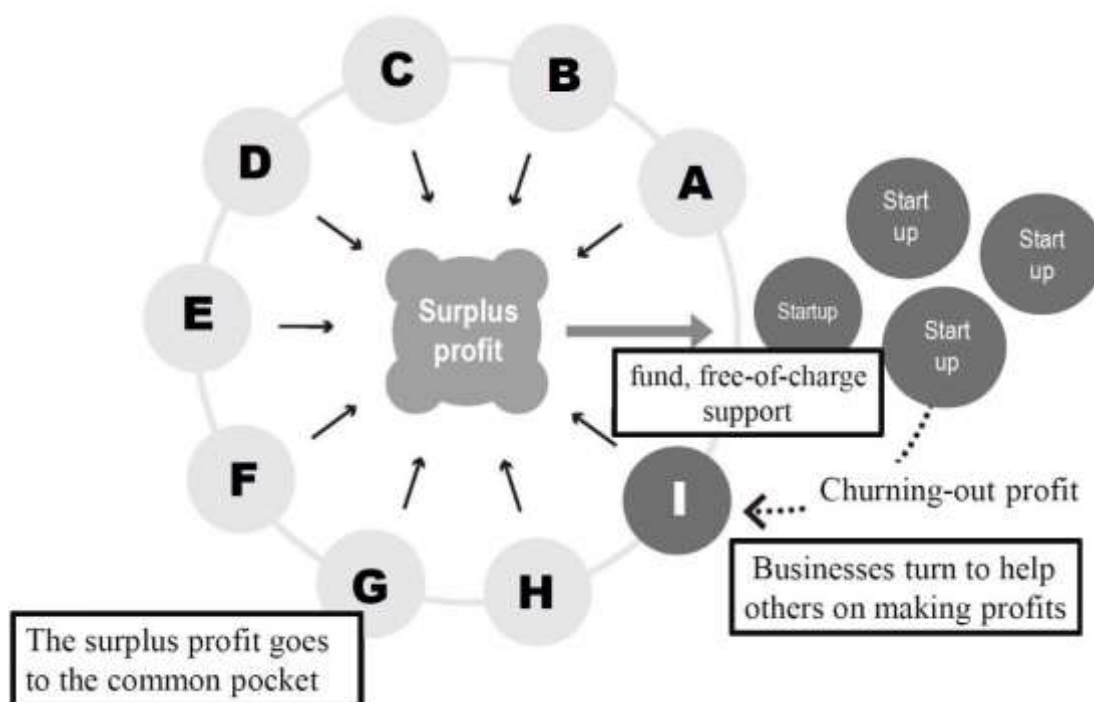
Borderless has a system whereby the 40 independent business units work together to support the creation of new businesses. Those employees who want to start up present their business plan at the “Group Presidents’ Committee” where heads of the 40 group companies gather and get both a 15 million yen business fund and the marketing support of the Startup Studio if they are approved. On the other hand, each business is run basically with funds which come completely from the Group from fundraising after the startup, and at the same time all the surplus profit from each company is poured into the Group’s common pocket. Borderless is proud to be the “*platform for social entrepreneurs*” as an intermediate support structure which helps non-professionals in business administration set up their own firm only by bringing the “*business plan which can solve new social issues.*”

Therefore, each company within the Group grows, receiving the initial startup support, and as they grow and make profits, their business profit returns for future startup support funds. Borderless calls

Performance trends of Borderless Group



this system “On Okuri Keiei” (Return-your-gratitude-to-somebody-else Management), which is modelled after Japan’s traditional mutual help systems, such as *Moyai* and *Kō*¹. The presidential meeting to approve new businesses is basically based on the unanimous vote instead of majority, following traditional decision making such as *Sō* and *Yoriai*.



Also, management meetings called MM Meetings are held in a group of four companies, copying the function of *kumi* (which used to be the smallest group within the village) of asking for business counselling on a daily basis as all of them are in the same boat. While Borderless itself tries not to intervene at all in each company’s business, the Group’s Statute stipulates that the wage gap within the company is restricted to 1 to 7. This system is similar to Mondragon where the maximum rate is 1 to 6. Borderless is trying to reduce this gap furthermore to 1 to 5, proving that this business practice is realistically feasible.

While Borderless deals with businesses in various fields, each one tackles huge social issues. Member companies have their own mission to run their own business, not only limited to those ones within Japan such as “Relight” to help the homeless by providing them with housing and work, “Hachi- dori Denryoku” (Hummingbird Electric Power), “Borderless House” which offers shared housings²

¹ Translator’s note: While two nouns are used there, both of them refers to the Rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA).

² Translator’s note: In Japan it’s not common even among youth to share housing, as a huge amount of flats for singles to live alone are available, while such a habit is recently attracting people’s attention as they find advantages of living together with others.

for foreigners who cannot easily rent a flat, “People Boat”, a project to reuse PCs for refugees, but also those abroad such as “Business Leather Factory”, “AMOMA” which cultivates herbs, and “Sunday Morning Factory” which produces clothes for babies etc., supporting agriculture, building factory and creating employment in integrated primary, secondary and tertiary industries.

Each one of the businesses run by Borderless is not huge. Actually, it would be precise to say that they are doing such challenges because such projects cannot become huge. Conventional businesses have increased their competitiveness and earned profit by looking for efficiency. Borderless considers those many social issues that we have as byproducts produced by the “inefficiency”, overlooked by conventional businesses which only seek efficiency. Then social businesses, bearing the mission to “solve social issues,” work best in “*achieving sustainable economies in the fields considered as inefficient.*” While conventional businesses give priority in putting resources to “fruitful” fields which are relatively more likely to yield profits, the main fields for social businesses are the opposite, “little fruitful” ones. Such issues are not taken care of because of the lack of profitability, further aggravating themselves.

There are still a lot of untouched fields, both within Japan and abroad, on thinking of businesses which are needed to avoid inconveniences / to stop aggravation of social issues. The construction of a platform to solve small issues one by one by way of inspirations and creation by social entrepreneurs might suggest a tip to expand the SSE.

Three Principles of Borderless Group

