

## **The Role of Peer Groups in Japanese Youth Support Service**

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Youth unemployment rate and the ratio of irregular employment has increased, and stability of youth employment has been undermined. Patterns of youth transition to adulthood has been individualized and delinealized. In Japan, since 1990s' economic depression, more young people do not participate neither in education, employment, nor training or remained in unstable participation with scattered or long-lasting non-participation period- called 'Young People with Crisis in Transition'.

The object of this paper is Youth Support Station (hereafter abbreviated YSS), which was launched in 2006. Its main object is to decrease youth non-participation (generally called NEET). This presentation focuses on the entitlement to the service—how foreign and domestic precedent services have been examined in defining the object of Japanese public youth support.

YSS is selected as object for research, because it has two different traditions: foreign public institutions, especially Connexions Service in the UK, and domestic private youth-support organizations in Japan. EU countries have been tackled youth unemployment problems since relatively early years. Common points in recent youth policies across the EU countries is 'individualized service and measures'. Member countries have to revise former considerably uniform service to more tailored one. Those revised youth policies have arguably clear intention to form social capital, which may likely to contribute to transition to adulthood.

In Japan, the period from the late 1990s to 2000s has been characterized by concern about youth employment problem (such as unemployment, irregular employment, non-participation called NEET). Since the number of precedent of youth support was very limited,, Japanese government (especially Cabinet Office) has overviewed EU contemporary youth policy and established a committee to discuss those precedents to rethink youth support.

Among those precedents, Connexions Service in UK has been pointed to be an important model for the planning of YSS. Besides, private youth support organizations in Japan have arguably played an important role prior to the beginning of public youth support. There young people with similar problems (such as school non-attendance, withdrawal, and others) share the same place, and through interactions they recover their confidence. Previous research pointed the importance of those interaction to regain positive self-image.

On the other hand, linkage between those places and society has been pointed to be uncertain and need further research. A manager of those private organization took part in committees for planning YSS as a representative, and in practice YSS in each localities has been delegated to such organizations with experience of youth support. In this sense, YSS has dual origins: namely foreign public institution and domestic private organization. As the node of both traditions, YSS is an important object to rethink the public youth support in Japan.

One striking differences between the two traditions is about entitlement to the service. The former is provided for all young people aged 16 to 18 to prevent disengagement and support re-engagement. The latter is often young people with certain difficulties. In this sense the former has allowed more universal entitlement. The theme of the presentation is to reveal how the concept of 'universal' entitlement to the youth support service has been invented in United Kingdom, and how this concept has been interpreted in Japan.

In the UK, youth unemployment rate has been relatively high since 1980s. Unemployment benefits and job trainings for youth has been developed to deal with those problems, and a number of revisions and modifications have been made for the services. The process has revealed the fact that non-participation in education, employment or training for those aged 16 to 19 (after leaving compulsory education) can lead to unemployment or many other social risks in the later life.

The purpose of the Connexions service was as follows, 'young people stay in education, training, or work with a strong education/training component until they are at least 18.' (SEU 1999: 9). One of the difficulties for the service was to trace the individual transition process after 16, and 'maintaining a comprehensive register of the 13-19 population, their educational history and current status' was regarded as task for Connexions (SEU 1999: 81). The important point of Connexions was personal adviser (abbreviated for PA), a profession responsible for individual treatment. PA consult and give some information through making contact with young people in schools, one-stop shops, and outreach centers or sometimes outside those premises if necessary. Single contact with PA arguably meet the needs of youth with a range of problems.

In Japan, YSS has initially been presented in investigative Committee for Comprehensive Youth Policy to Support Independence. Two handout, 'How to understand the NEET problems '(Kosugi 2004b) and 'Overview for Connexions Service in the UK' (Cabinet Office 2005a) was presented to the members of the committee, and there the background, object, organizational structures and main characteristics of Connexions were explained. Through discussions based on those materials, several question for them were presented. First, tracing transitions (especially from school to work) was not

feasible, because of the duty for preserving students' privacy. And inter-agency sharing information about youth was also seen as unrealistic (Cabinet Office 2005b). Eventually, YSS project has been launched in 2006 as a part of 'Model Project for Establishing Networks for Supporting Youth in Each Locality' by Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. Its target has been young people aged 15 to 39, those who not in employment or education and those who show some willingness for vocational independence or some other planning for their future except for those who doing housework (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare 2013: 1). The idea of individual and continuous support has been in common with Connexions Service. But several differences can also be found between the two. YSS is located a few in every prefecture, and is delegated to private organization with careers for youth support are delegated to work within the area. The duty of collecting information within the area has been mentioned, but little reference has been made concerning the framework to enable each YSS to do the duty.

Even though universal access to the service has been introduced in quite limited way in YSS, some newly invented activities can be found. One of those is re-defining the role of peers among young people. Although it had not been examined clearly in the planning phase, it has been given importance in the youth support practices.