

A Framework for the Provision of "Community Symbiosis-Type Services" in Depopulated Areas of Japan

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Abstract

The welfare needed in the community includes a diverse range of subjects and combinations of services, such as care for the elderly, childcare and protection for children, and various services for the disabled. In modernised Japan, these welfare services have been developed as a each single project within the national insurance programme and system, and services have been expanded as needs have grown. However, in the last five years or so, there has been an awareness of the problem of the "gaps" in services that have been fragmented as a result of the expansion of services, as well as social conditions associated with demographic changes, such as a declining population and an ageing population with fewer children. There is a growing trend towards the development of "community symbiosis-type services", which combine a variety of welfare services necessary for the community.

In rural areas of Japan, where the population is declining, these community symbiosis-type services are on the increase, with particular attention being paid to methods of utilising local human and building resources when providing these services.

This paper examines methods of developing community welfare in rural areas with a declining population by clarifying the actual situation of community symbiosis-type services.

Keywords

Community Symbiosis-Type Services, In rural areas of Japan, Gaps

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The welfare needed in the community includes a diverse range of subjects and combinations of services, such as care for the elderly, childcare and protection for children, and various services for disabled children and people. In modernised Japan, these welfare services have been developed as a single project in the context of insurance projects and system design, and have been expanded as needs have grown. In recent years, however, there has been a growing awareness of the problem of 'gaps' in services that have been fragmented as a result of the expansion of services, as well as social conditions associated with demographic changes such as a declining population and an ageing population with fewer children, and there is a growing trend towards combining community-based welfare services that are necessary for the local area to create composite projects. This is reflected in the 2018 amendments to the Long-Term Care



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Insurance Act and the Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act, and the creation of 'symbiotic services', in which long-term care insurance services for the elderly and welfare services for persons with disabilities can be provided in one place of business, is positioned as part of this. Specifically, the revision of relevant laws and regulations in 2018 refers to the revision of laws, mainly the Comprehensive Support for Persons with Disabilities Act and the revised Long-Term Care Insurance Act, which will change the current situation where users of services for persons with disabilities had to shift to long-term care services at the age of 65 or over, and where long-term care insurance service establishments had to use services that correspond to the criteria of the disability welfare system. The revision refers to the establishment of "symbiosis-type services" that straddle the disability welfare and long-term care insurance systems.

At the same time, there are also a number of pilot projects that provide integrated welfare services to people with diverse attributes who were previously regarded as 'separate entities' as subjects of different projects, even though they have not yet been made into a fixed system. As for the development of community symbiosis-type services, a number of developments have been confirmed, such as the collection of case studies on the construction of community comprehensive care systems provided by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare(2014) and the portal site for community symbiosis(2021), in which various welfare services have been combined. In this paper, these are collectively referred to as 'community symbiosis-type services'.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) has set as a goal to be achieved by 2040 "the realisation of a community symbiosis society as a society that is connected across generations and fields and builds communities together, in which all residents have a role" (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2019). The movement towards a regionally convivial society differs from region to region. In urban areas where a certain degree of population concentration is expected, conventional single projects are still being developed and operated. This is mainly due to the profitability of the project, i.e. the fact that a single project is feasible from the viewpoint that the density of needs is sufficient in the area. At the same time, it is also considered that when the population density in the area is high, the use area is too small and it is difficult to control the scale of the complex type of community symbiosis-type service. In addition, there are also cases of complex projects as a phenomenon mainly caused by increased efficiency in land acquisition.

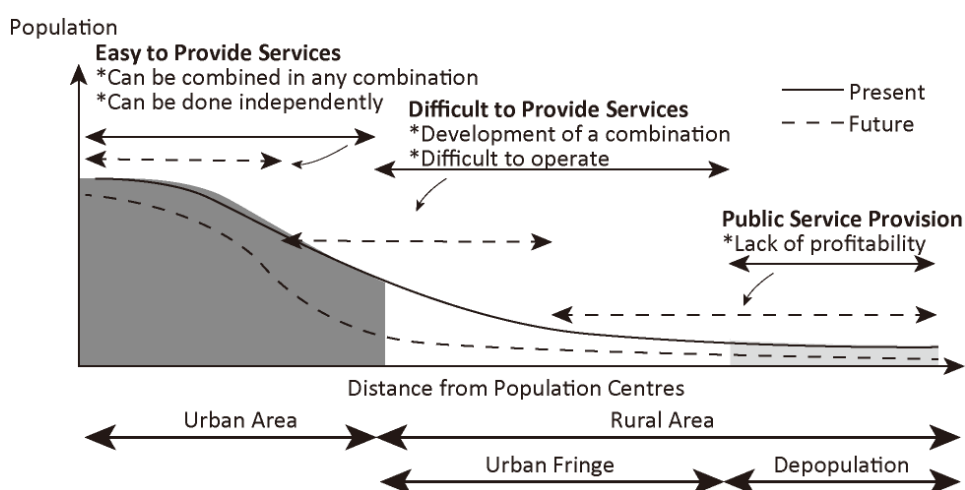


Figure 1. Concept of Service Provision in Relation to Population and Distance from Population Centres

On the other hand, in non-urban areas where the population is declining (hereinafter collectively referred to as 'rural areas'), the low density of user needs makes business unprofitable, and it is difficult to establish a single business. In areas where the population is declining rapidly, there have been cases

where even elderly service offices directly operated by social welfare councils, which are semi-public institutions responsible for community welfare, have been integrated and reorganised in the areas with high population densities. Furthermore, it is well known that in depopulated areas, public welfare services are provided without taking profitability into account. These situations are summarised in Figure 1 in terms of population, distance from population centres and the ease of providing welfare services. As it is difficult to give a clear definition of the population size, this can only be organised conceptually.

1.2. Objective

In such rural areas, the aforementioned community symbiosis-type services are on the increase, with particular attention being paid to cases that make use of local human and material resources. This paper examines the recent trend in Japan of complex, community symbiosis-type services, and examines methods of developing community welfare in rural areas with declining populations, by clarifying the actual operational conditions. It also examines what constitutes HEALTHY CITIES.

2. Research methods

2.1. Target Region and Target Services

Four case studies from Tochigi Prefecture are discussed, where complex, community-based symbiotic services have been developed in rural areas with declining populations, particularly in urban fringe and depopulated areas, and where research was feasible. Tochigi Prefecture is 100 km north of Tokyo.

The services investigated were: 'ENGAO', which operates a GH for people with disabilities, a place for the elderly, a learning space, and a kitchen/workspace for rent in a vacant house in an urban fringe area; 'SANNOHACHI', which renovated an old private house and operates a fresh food sales, a health centre and a community base. Also located in depopulated areas are 'MANMATOCHIGI', which sells fresh produce and operates a place for the elderly and children, and 'TSUNAGOUNOUSON', which operates a mobile sales and watch-over business (Figure. 2).

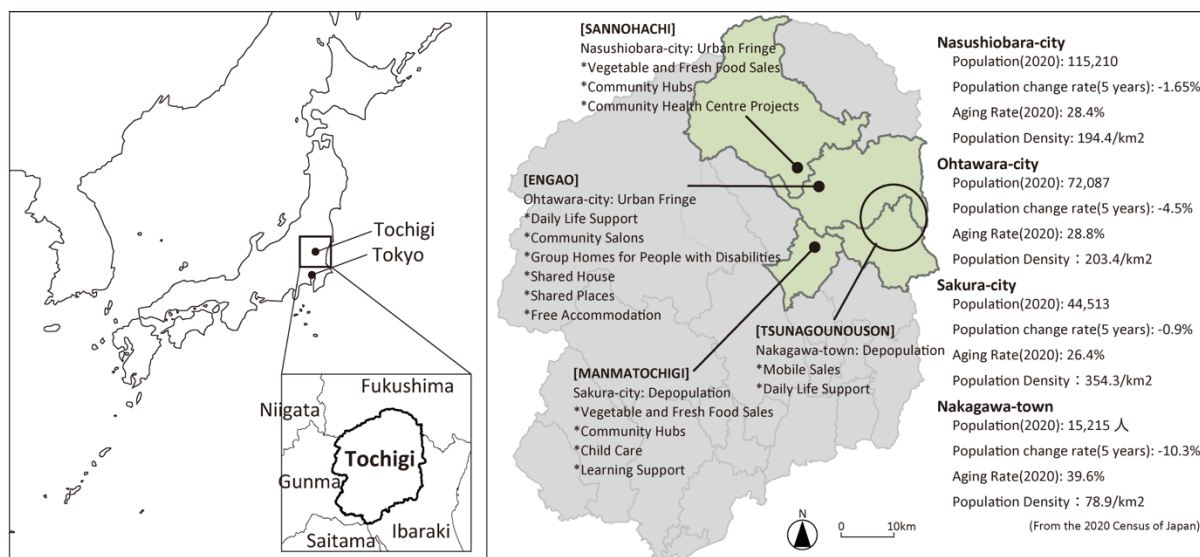


Figure 2. Target Region and Target Services

2.2. Research Methods

The survey first focused on the background to the start of the project and the development of the project in the region, and interviews were conducted on the background to the establishment of the project, the content and target audience of the project, and issues related to the continuation of the project, in common with the four project sites. For two of the projects, 'ENGAO' and 'TSUNAGOUNOUSON', an observational survey was conducted, focusing on the management method of business continuity in depopulated areas.

3. Results: Background and Overview of the Creation of the Service

3.1. ENGAO

The corporation was founded by an occupational therapist who graduated from a local university and recruited local comrades, with the aim of changing the reality that people end up alone, with no one to talk to and no one to rely on during the last few years of their lives.

The philosophy of the corporation is "a society where everyone can feel connected to others", and it is operated with the help of local high school and university students to prevent the elderly from becoming isolated and to eliminate their isolation. It is also developing community welfare that is not limited to the elderly in terms of creating opportunities for young people to play an active role. The service is a composite of activities such as livelihood support, intergenerational exchange, promotion of activities and utilisation of vacant houses. The distribution of facilities and the period of project development are shown in Figure. 3.

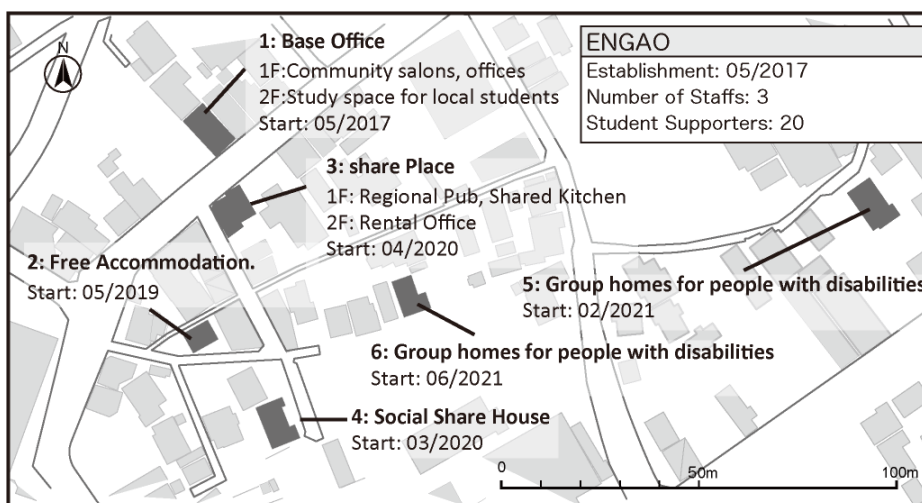


Figure 3. Outline of the ENGAO

3.2. SANNOHACHI

The closure of a local supermarket prompted the building owner to consider the possibility of selling fresh food on a small scale, and this started with the conversion of part of the warehouse, which is tangential to the road, into a shop. The rear part of the premises via a garden is also being renovated to open it up to the local community.

The second floor is a rental space for discussing local issues, where a voluntary nurse living in the area provides health consultations and other services. On the second floor, there is a space for discussion of local issues, a health clinic and health consultations by voluntary nurses who live in the area. At the back

of the building, a barn has been renovated into an accommodation space and a sauna is under construction using a stone warehouse. Doctors and nurses are also studying the possibility of adding further medical and health functions to the local area. The building owner has come up with the idea, and a regional centre is being formed together with local residents(Figure 4).



Figure 4. Appearance and Project of SANNOHACHI

3.3. MANMATOCHIGI

MANMATOCHIGI is a small organic greengrocer and community centre newly established at the entrance to a residential area with a hot spring developed in 1992. More than half of the population in the surrounding area is over 65 years old, and young people in their 30s living in the area established the NPO to provide shopping support, with local residents and university student volunteers managing the business.

The project consists of a local market where local people's works are sold, with vegetable sales at its core; a 'MANMA-KAI' where local people are invited to cook and eat; a field and a small playground for children in the adjacent green space and vacant lot; and a neighbourly childcare service. The shop also has a space for rent and provides learning support such as English classes. A space with simple tables and benches in a corner of the shop provides a place for local residents(Figure 5).



Figure 5. Appearance and Activities of MANMATOCHIGI

3.4. TSUNAGOU-NOUSON

It is a joint venture founded by a former regional development cooperative worker and joined by three local residents who agree with the business objectives; one of the four is a qualified nurse.

Amid calls for rural decline due to population decline and ageing and a crisis in the survival of rural areas, the company aims to create a rural society where people can live in beautiful rural landscapes with peace of mind for the rest of their lives. Farming is a job that can be continued long into old age, but the reality is that in a car-centred society, if a person lives alone and has difficulty driving a car, they cannot continue to live in a rural area even if they are able to farm. As a 'community management company', TSUNAGOU-NOUSON is developing a daily life and health support project through shopping support and monitoring activities to enable people to live healthy, happy lives in which each individual plays a leading role, and to live while farming long after they are old.



Figure 6. Mobile Sales of TSUNAGOU-NOUSON

4. Results: Methods of Services Management

The problem of understaffing often arises when developing complex community symbiosis services in depopulated areas; through an observational study of two projects, a method of staffing operation is examined.

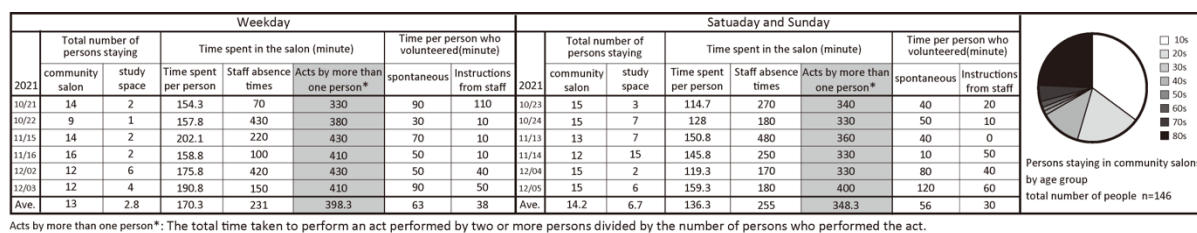
4.1. Behaviour of Service Users and Staff at ENGAO

1) Overview

A total of 146 people visited the community salons over the 12 survey days. The average number of visitors was 13 on weekdays and 14 on Saturdays and Sundays. The time spent per person was 170 minutes on weekdays and 136 minutes on Saturdays and Sundays, with more people staying on Saturdays and Sundays, but the time spent per person was shorter. During their stay at the local salon, the number of people who engaged in activities such as talking and playing catch with others was 398.3 minutes on weekdays and 348.3 minutes on Saturdays and Sundays, indicating that interaction with others was more active during the weekdays. The age of those who stayed at the community salons was the highest, with a total of 29 people in their teens on both weekdays and weekends, followed by 20

people in their 80s, confirming the multi-generational nature of this intergenerational exchange project (Figure. 7).

In addition, four users of the GH for the disabled, which is one of the projects, visited for a total of 10 days during the survey period (e.g., IDs 29 and 35 in Figure. 8), and we captured people with mental and intellectual disabilities integrating into the community. The caretakers of the GH for people with disabilities are taken care of by ENGAO staff and students who use the community salon, and many users who are familiar with the users of the GH for people with disabilities stay at the community salon. Therefore, it was possible to confirm that users of the GH with disabilities actively talk to each other. In ENGAO, it can be said that the use of the community salons is characteristic regardless of generation or disability.



Acts by more than one person*: The total time taken to perform an act performed by two or more persons divided by the number of persons who performed the act.

Figure 7. Number of People Staying and Overview of Activities in ENGAO

(2) People who stay at the study space

The number of people staying at the study space differed greatly between weekdays and weekends, with a maximum of six people staying per day on weekdays and a maximum of 15 people per day on weekends. On days when there is high demand, such as during school tests, the study space is expanded by opening up the first floor of the front shared place (3 in Figure. 3) as a study space. As a feature of the study space, a variety of places to stay are provided, including study desks, dining tables and tea tables, which users can freely use for 100-200 yen per day.

(3) Staff absence time

During the survey period, staff were absent for more than 60 minutes a day. When staff were not available, the residents of the community salons took on the role of staff, such as dealing with visitors and mail. Voluntary volunteering took place every day, mostly by residents in their 80s (Figures 8 and 9). Volunteer work under the direction of staff was often carried out by residents in their teens.

(4) Night-time use

Two university students stayed in the study space until 23:30 and three other university students until 25:00. The next morning, a user of the community salon who lived nearby (Figures. 8 and 9, resident ID (3)) visited the salon to turn off the outside light of the salon a little after 6am. The users were free to use the facilities during the night time as well as during the daytime, while the staff were not present.

(5) Summary

The community salon became a place where people could feel at home, as the residents of the community salon volunteered to make use of their individual strengths, from administrative work to cooking, etc. The corporation was founded by an occupational therapist who graduated from a local university and recruited local comrades, with the aim of changing the reality that people end up alone, with no one to talk to and no one to rely on during the last few years of their lives.

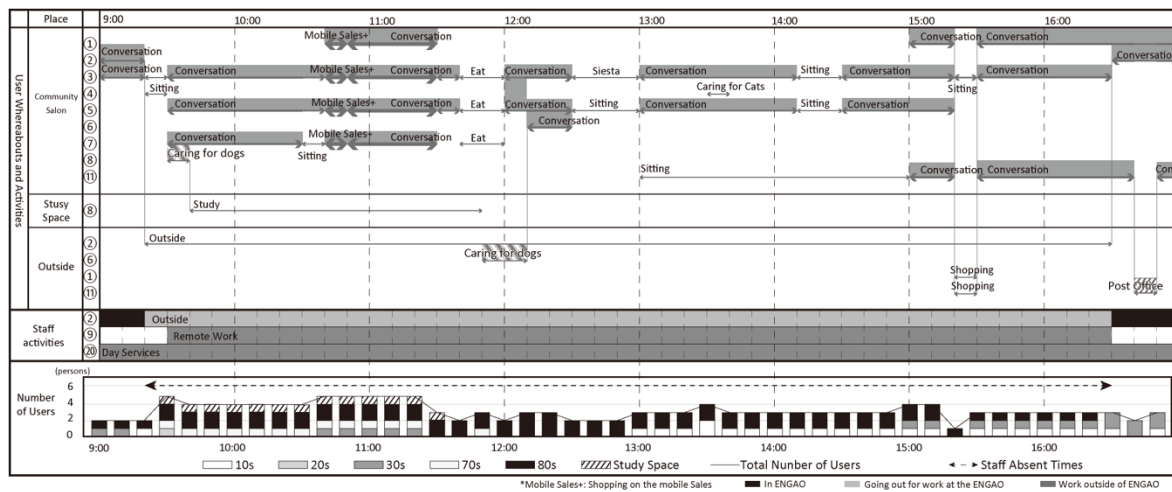


Figure 8. Whereabouts and Activities of Users and Staff on 22 October (Friday)

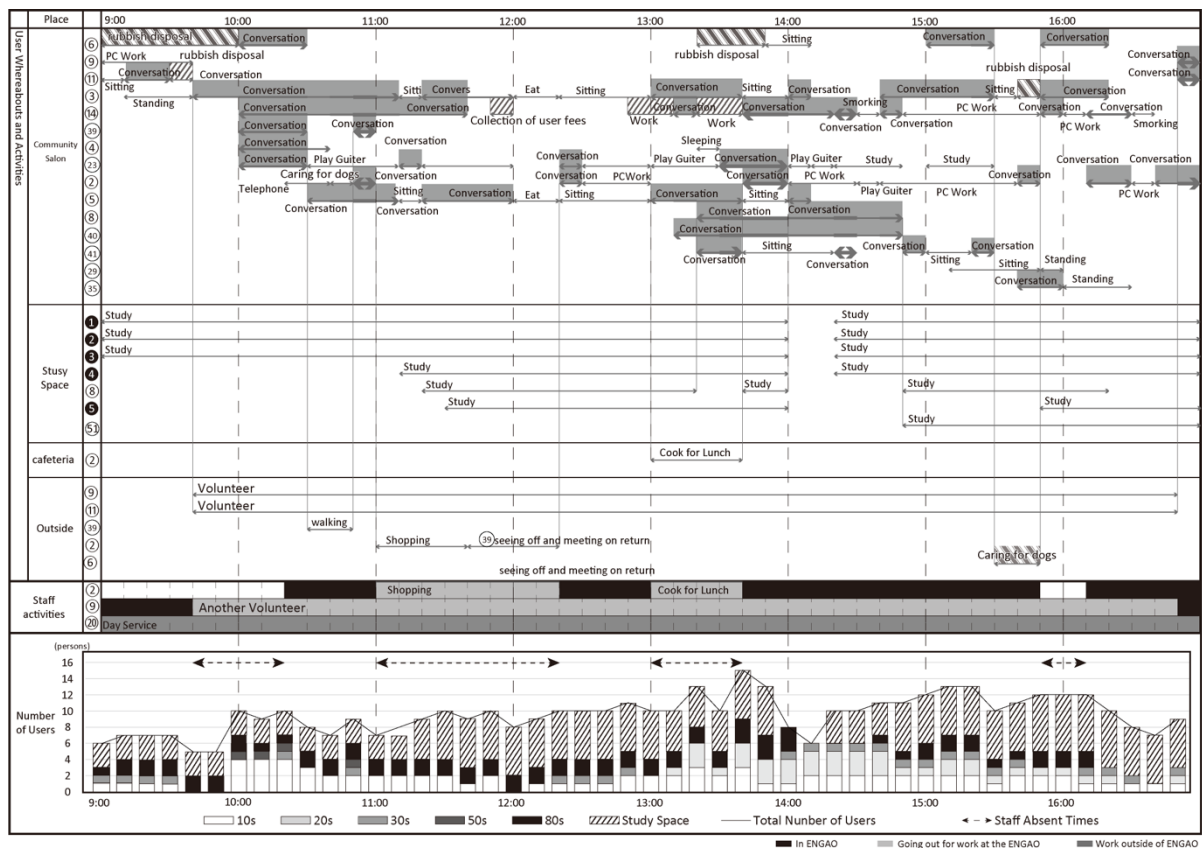


Figure 9. Whereabouts and Activities of Users and Staff on 5 December (Sunday)

4.2. Shopping and Livelihood Support at TSUNAGOU-NOUSON

The results of the accompanying mobile sales are shown in Figure 10. Four employees, two each, operate two vending vehicles and conduct shopping mobile sales four days a week. They provide products tailored to the needs of the users by purchasing and selling the products.

(1) Route and area

On the survey day, one vehicle covered a distance of approximately 70 km in one day and visited 13 locations. Users were found even in relatively densely populated areas, confirming the need for mobile vending throughout the town. While one employee was conducting mobile vending in front of users' homes, another employee cleaned users' houses as a livelihood support service. The daily life support business receives 20-30 requests a month, and the fee starts at ¥100 per 5 minutes.

(2) About the users

The mobile sales is characterised by the fact that the car is parked in front of the entrance of the house, so that even elderly people with disabilities can see and choose products with their own eyes while sitting in a chair (Figure. 6, photo). The average age of the users was 85 years, and the average time spent at each of the 13 points was 14 minutes. Users not only purchased products, but also engaged in conversation with the sellers while selecting products. In addition, employees carried the goods directly to the house to check the foodstuffs stock and prevent over-purchasing.

Nakagawa-Town operates six demand taxis a day on weekdays from all parts of the town to the city centre to provide mobility support. However, there are time constraints and some elderly people with walking difficulties find it difficult to use the service. TSUNAGOU-NOUSON service is responsible for providing services from the user's point of view.

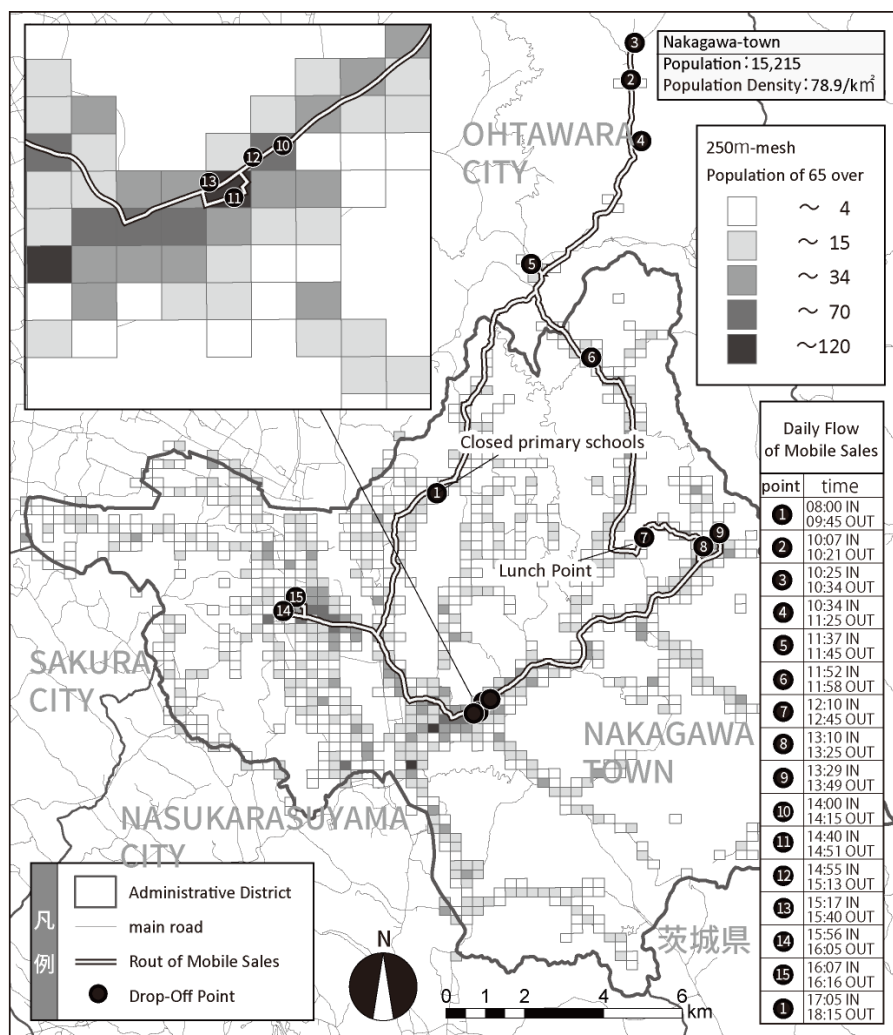


Figure 10. Daily Flow of Mobile Sales

5. Conclusion

From the case studies, it is possible to read how they started their own businesses, increased the number of bearers, adjusted the balance between the bearers and the people receiving care, and "involved" the people who were thought to be the people receiving care to be employed by the community and mutually support each other's livelihood. It is also possible to confirm a change whereby people who were local residents and who worked to support people as their own employers became business owners themselves.

On the other hand, there are also initiatives by people who are already operating businesses in the community to 'open' their establishments and businesses to the community. In the past, "community exchange spaces" were established, and in recent years, initiatives known as "open offices" and "livelihood openings" have been identified in Japan.

In both of these cases, the creation of business owners and the opening of business owners to the local community, there is the problem that they lack a macroscopic perspective from which they can be positioned within the framework of the local community as a whole, and a method of developing community welfare for the community as a whole. It can also be pointed out that there are issues regarding the bias and qualitative differences in the fields and regions of the employers. Intervention and coordination, such as what kind of employers are needed in the region, what kind of skill improvement is necessary/effective for the existing employers, and where in the region the employers should be active, can also be said to be a perspective of the development method of community welfare. In this regard, problems such as inconsistency with higher level plans such as urban planning and medical care, such as how to set up projects in the region, have also been pointed out.

Based on the above examples and academic interpretations, the issues of development methods in community welfare are listed below.

(1) It is often pointed out that the quality of community medical care and community welfare depends on the providers, such as corporations and local human resources. Under the precondition of providing impartial medical care and welfare, leaving the development of community welfare up to the employer is a challenge in the overall regional planning.

(2) Although business development can be expected by combining various services according to the needs of regional welfare, it is necessary to consider what kind of interpretation of the development of regional welfare is possible with regard to the combination of medical care and welfare that is ultimately necessary.

In an overview, the business owners who are the bearers of the community expand to include the "business owners", the local people who gather with the "business owners" and the workers who are the actual practitioners of these businesses. Furthermore, it is necessary to play a role as a supporter of the place where business owners are active and participate, supporting the people in the town to become business owners. In addition, the entities that carry out local management, such as local authorities and consultative bodies of business owners, are assumed to be the participants.

(3) The challenge for community welfare in depopulated areas in Japan at present is to structure the existence of entities that are multi-layered, including the people of the town itself, who are the participants, and their supporters, as the business owners.

Up to the above, we have interpreted regional welfare in depopulated areas as a manifestation of the phenomenon in Japan. However, this phenomenon can be seen as almost synonymous with the Actor-Network Theory (abbreviated to "ANT") proposed by Latour, B. (2005). ANT can be seen as a theory for interpreting design as a social enterprise. As Yaneva, A. (2009) stresses: "...design has a social goal and

mobilizes social means to achieve it". In recent years ANT has also been addressed in the fields of gaming and computing, simulation (Jessen, J. D. and Jessen, C. 2014). Furthermore, as discussed from the theoretical construction of ANT until recently (Callon, M. and Latour, B. 1981, John L. and Vicky S. 2013, Latour, B. 1996, John L. 1987, 1992), the adaptation of ANT to Japan's super-ageing population, population decline and the possible disappearance of local cities may be effective for the future design of Japanese local communities.

From Reality to Theory, and from that theory to social design. Society-oriented regional design is key to the transformation of depopulated areas in Japan into healthy cities.

6. Acknowledgment

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Numbers 21K18760 and ,21H03157.

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