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Hureai kippu - lessons from Japan for the ‘Big Society’

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***Hureai kippu* – lessons from Japan for the ‘Big Society’**

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The UK government has recently picked up on the Japanese system of time credits for social care known as *hureai kippu*, which translates as the *Caring Relationship Ticket Scheme*. This is now being promoted in Britain as an initiative which, following its ‘success’ in Japan, is likely to encourage a much greater level of volunteering.¹ The BBC reported Care Services Minister, Paul Burstow, as saying that such a scheme could help vulnerable people maintain their independence. It clearly fits into the context of the UK government’s ‘Big Society’ initiative, in which it is hoped that communities will play a greater role than in the past in undertaking a range of public services where the skills and resources which volunteers can contribute may complement (or even in some cases substitute for) the skills offered by paid professionals in public services.

In principle, this seems like a great idea but hardly evidence-based. In Japan, *hureai kippu* was introduced by the Foundation for New Welfare in 1992, since when it has often been managed ineffectively, resulting in limited expansion across the country. Indeed, the communication director of the *Coalition for Legislation to Support Citizens’ Organizations (C’s)*, Suzuki Ayumi, told us recently: “*Hureai Kippu* was one of the most unsuccessful schemes introduced in Japan in the field of elderly care - many people don’t have an idea what this term refers to”.

Why is this? Research which one of the authors has undertaken (Nakagawa, 2007) suggests that *hureai kippu* has not been managed well. To be successful it would require genuine partnerships between local authorities and the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) ‘infrastructure’ organisations. This generally hasn’t happened yet. Perhaps because it would require investment.

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11657006>

Nevertheless, the need for new approaches in this area is clear. In Japan, *muen shakai* (literally translated as “the absence of relationships among people in society”, which leads to social isolation) is seen as one of the most serious social issues and is the focus of the government’s attention. *Hureai kippu* has the potential to reduce isolation and help more people to participate in society. However, for this to happen, it is necessary to explore what the scheme is, how it evolved, why it has not worked to date and what might be done to make it more successful.

Time Stock

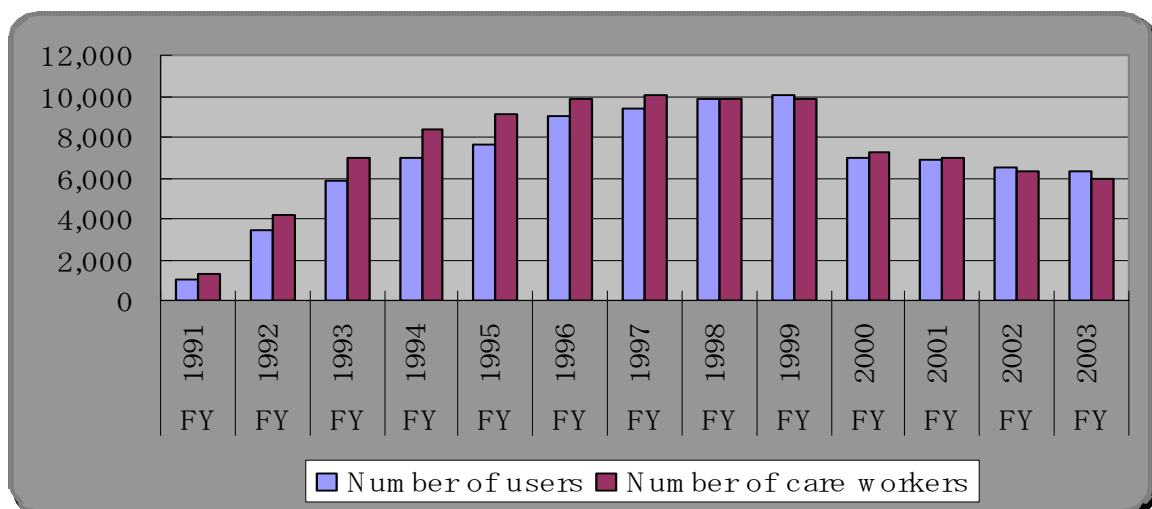
To understand the evolution of *hureai kippu* in Japan, we need to go back over two decades. The Association for Research on Care for the Elderly, located in Takamatsu, Kagawa prefecture, introduced a scheme called *Time Stock* in 1985. A form of time banking, it was designed to encourage people to become volunteers in Tokyo, while their time credits could be available to them and their relatives anywhere in the country. As this scheme attracted significant attention, the *Association for Japanese Care Systems* (AJCS) was established in 1991 to act as an umbrella organisation for the VCS across the country which wished to support the *Time Stock* scheme.

To join the AJCS, VCS organisations must comply with certain requirements, which include being either a voluntary association or a specified not-for-profit corporation, and adopting the *Time Stock* system. The single target group for *Time Stock* is care workers. For each hour of care work, the carer accumulates one point and can deposit the fee for the work with the supporting organisation. The carer can save points for the hours worked and then use them personally, or for their relatives at any time. The care workers can use their points with all the organisations operating within the AJCS. They can choose at any time to keep any money earned, rather than accumulating points in the *Time Stock* scheme.

As the graph below shows, the system attracted large numbers of not-for-profit organisations up to 1997, but began to lose ground from 1998/99 onwards

when both the number of care workers who deposited points and the number of users who received services through *Time Stock* began to decrease (AJCS, 2004). A likely reason for the decline of the scheme is the enactment of the new Nonprofit Law in 1998, followed two years later by the introduction of the Long Term Care Insurance (LTCI) system. The 1998 Law allowed many previously unincorporated associations, such as voluntary associations (who had been operating with no legal status), to be incorporated as specified not-for-profit corporations. In 2000, all these new forms of corporations became eligible for financial support under the LTCI system as providers in the 'quasi-market' it had created. Thus, from 2000 onwards, the AJCS found it harder to attract new voluntary associations, as many of these were eager to join the LTCI scheme instead. A lot of not-for-profit organisations in Japan are inadequately funded. When given the opportunity of choosing between engaging in a scheme run by an umbrella organisation such as the AJCS and an LTCI scheme introduced by the government, they are much more likely to choose the latter. This tendency has sometimes been misinterpreted - the Japanese not-for-profit sector has often been wrongly perceived as having been co-opted by the government. In fact, there has never been any coercion for the sector to work in partnership with the government - it has simply tended to do so because of the government's reliability as a source of income (Laratta, 2009).

**Association of Japanese Care System
(Number of users and care workers from 1991 to 2003)**



Source: Association of Japanese Care System (2004).

The emergence of *hureai kippu*

Hureai kippu was introduced in 1992 by the Foundation for New Welfare, as a development of the *Time Stock* scheme. Someone in need of care services buys a 'ticket' from a not-for-profit organisation, usually at a price of \$10 (\$1=80JY). This is then handed to a carer (i.e. someone providing them with a care service) who, in turn, can then use it whenever they, or anyone in their family, needing care themselves. *Hureai kippu*, although apparently similar to the *Time Stock* scheme, has in fact some substantial differences. For example, *Time Stock* can only be exchanged among the care workers of AJCS affiliates; conversely, *hureai kippu* tickets are intended to be exchangeable by anyone who is involved in the scheme either as a user or carer.

Many not-for-profit organisations supported by the Foundation for New Welfare signed up for the *hureai kippu* scheme, but scheme management, choice of services and the way in which users are targeted, differs greatly from one organisation to another. There are two generic types of *hureai kippu*: one which requires all users or carers in the scheme to become members of the organisation under which the scheme was implemented; the other type has no such requirement. However, organisations using both these types of *hureai kippu* tend to have different names for their own approach, which can lead to some confusion. There are two distinct types, *tasukeai hureai services kippu* and *chiiki kasseika hureai kippu*.

Tasukeai hureai services kippu was introduced by several organisations operating predominantly in the field of care services not covered by the LTCI scheme (generally known as *tasukeai services* and/or *hureai services*) to encourage people to engage in volunteering activities with the elderly, people with literacy or mobility problems etc. This involves the exchange of a ticket between the volunteer and the user, both of whom have to be members of the organisation running the scheme, and consequently the tickets are normally used within well-defined geographic areas. One of the few organisations which has successfully implemented this scheme is the You-I-Net in Nagareyama city, in Chiba prefecture. Here, users of *tasukeai hureai services* for one hour hand a *hureai kippu* with a value of 8 points (\$10 in money) to the carer who

provides the service. The transaction also gives automatic membership of the You-I-Net to both parties. In turn, the volunteer carer has to give two points (equal to \$2.50) from the 8 points received to the You-I-Net and retains the remaining 6 points (equal to \$7.50). Members can decide whether to take the money or use the points, which can be either saved or re-invested in You-I-Net. Following a census, carried out by Dr. Nakagawa in April 2006 as part of her research, it was discovered that about 1,500 local residents were You-I-Net members, 50% of whom were involved as carers and the others participating as users in the scheme.² Despite the You-I-Net scheme being one of the most successful in Japan, there has been only limited take-up of this approach countrywide.

Chiiki kasseika hureai kippu translates as ‘a ticket for the revitalisation and development of the local community’ this approach has a wider scope than the first type. It can be used for a comprehensive range of services, extending traditional volunteer work to areas such as taking children to and from school, running cookery classes, and so on. One substantial difference from the *tasukeai hureai services kippu* is that users of the *chiiki kasseika hureai kippu* can exchange tickets for services provided with carers who are not necessarily members of the organisation which runs the scheme. Indeed, the *chiiki kasseika hureai kippu* can even be used to pay bills in some local restaurants, cafes and even, sometimes, hospitals. However, according to a few of organisations which have implemented it, the scheme has not worked well. The reasons for this are still not entirely clear. However, we asked Mr. Toyota, the assistant director of Tree of Dreams, an organisation located in Abashiri city in Hokkaido prefecture, for his views. Tree of Dreams had previously attempted, without much success, to implement the scheme, which they called *okuen-ken* – ‘a ticket which produces a hundred million relationships’. Mr Toyota said:

*“We have not pursued it because we could not implement the necessary follow-up survey on how help was exchanged between individuals. As far as I have been able to see until now, okuen-ken has been used to only a limited extent. Only some of our members use it and its use has not spread beyond our organisation.”*³

² Interview with the Managing Director of You-I-Net, Mr. Yoneyama, 10/04/2006

³ Interview with Mr. Toyota, 12/11/2010

In fact, Mr. Toyota told us that he believed the scheme could work, but only if given adequate resources to employ a coordinator who could ensure that potential users and carers understood it better.

“The laws on Nursing Care Insurance and on services and support for the disabled are too complex. Elderly and disabled users cannot understand what service they require to meet their needs well. Therefore, they are not able to clearly distinguish between the services covered by the government schemes, and services which are not covered by them but rather satisfied by okuen-ken. Although we asked care workers to explain clearly how to use okuen-ken, we could not deal with it satisfactorily... some care workers just do not understand the significance, meaning and operation of okuen-ken and the approach of voluntary work, so they refuse to accept okuen-ken for the work which they do. You can understand that such a thing damages the reputation of okuen-ken, can't you? Users “buy” an okuen-ken by paying money, so they cannot understand why care workers refuse it. So, they said “We pay money, so please provide service for us”... I really think that managing and promoting the use of okuen-ken is very difficult... However, I also think that a coordinator could have increased the use of okuen-ken.”

As a result of these problems, Mr. Toyota believed that *okuen-ken* had been used mainly as a kind of standard currency to obtain services from hospitals or to reward local residents for doing manual jobs, such as car repair, pipe-laying or decorating. This in turn had caused some conflict between the not-for-profit organisations and businesses who objected to *okuen-ken* taking their customers away.

“Some local residents can repair cars, decorate a room and lay a pipe. But, when they do these things as volunteers by using okuen-ken, we often receive objections from local companies due to the damage done to their businesses.”

Conclusion

The systems of *hureai kippu* which we have described here were initiated with high expectations but have not really fulfilled the hopes of their designers. The reasons are; a lack of investment, the way the schemes were managed and the problems inherent in a scheme which relies on 'credits' that are issued in one place and honoured in another, possibly some considerable time later.

More generally, the systems of *hureai kippu* have two fundamental disadvantages as incentives to promote greater levels of care for those in need. Firstly, they rely on motivations which are essentially selfish, whereas much of the motivation for caring has strong elements of altruism. The history of time banking since the 1980s indicates that this is likely to continue to be an obstacle to such schemes.

Secondly, the other disadvantage of this approach is that *hureai kippu* are actually exchangeable for cash, which is more attractive than a 'time credit'. User and community co-production involves understanding and appreciating the resources and contributions brought to the production process by all those involved and using a cash valuation does reinforce this understanding. However, once 'volunteers' are being paid, the arrangement becomes a market transaction, not social co-production.

Experiments in social policy are to be welcomed, where they have been well thought out and have a good chance of success. However, *hureai kippu* does not seem likely to provide the mechanism for promoting much higher levels of volunteering in social care as the UK coalition government has suggested. If it is to be tried, our advice is "proceed with care" and learn from the Japanese experience.

The more general lesson for the UK is that we are still very inexpert at policy transfer. The media fuss created by the government's 'discovery' of this new policy instrument was premature. The Minister spoke enthusiastically about the scheme without sufficient briefing on its characteristics. Neither the Japanese experts who had carried out the most extensive evaluation of the scheme in Japan, nor indeed the Japanese Local Government Centre in London, which is a valuable source of expertise on the two-way transfer of knowledge between Japan and the UK, were consulted in advance of the Minister's pronouncement. While international knowledge transfer is potentially

enormously valuable, it must be seen to be carefully tailored and adapted, so that the appropriate lessons are learnt. This didn't happen in this case, which threatens to discredit the very idea of international policy learning – and this in turn weakens the overall learning capability of the public policy system.

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