

TIMEBANKING. A CURRENCY FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the social benefits of timebanking, service that enables the exchange of services within local communities using time credits instead of traditional currency. The research aims to identify the barriers to the implementation of timebank activities and investigate their potential for future development.

Design/methodology/approach: The study adopts a critical review of existing literature and empirical case studies, primarily focusing on timebanking activities in the UK. Through a qualitative analysis of case studies and secondary sources, the research evaluates the effectiveness of timebanking in enhancing community cohesion, mental health, and economic sustainability.

Findings: The findings suggest that timebanking holds significant potential to improve social cohesion, mental well-being, and provide economic benefits by fostering collaboration within communities. However, the study also identifies key barriers to the successful implementation of timebanking systems, such as administrative challenges and scalability concerns.

Research limitations/implications: The research is limited by its reliance on case studies from the UK, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or socioeconomic contexts. Further empirical research across diverse regions is recommended to validate these results and examine the long-term impacts of timebanking on various communities.

Practical implications: The study provides practical recommendations for policymakers and community organizations looking to implement or expand timebanking initiatives. By incorporating timebanking into social welfare programs, it can help strengthen local communities, improve social well-being, and enhance economic resilience.

Social implications: Timebanking has the potential to significantly impact society by promoting a sense of community, reducing social isolation, and fostering inclusive economic systems. It encourages active participation, mutual support, and the creation of sustainable local economies, contributing to improved quality of life for community members.

Originality/value: This paper contributes to the growing body of research on alternative economic systems by highlighting the underexplored social benefits of timebanking. It offers valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and community organizers interested in innovative solutions for community development and social welfare strategies.

Keywords: Timebanking, Sharing economy, Social benefits, Social welfare.

Category of the paper: Case Study.

1. Introduction

Conventional business models are constantly evolving due to the emergence of the sharing economy (Botsman, Rogers, 2010). Consumers not only purchase products but also engage in new ways of exchanging goods and services, as seen with platforms like Airbnb and Uber (Lampinen, Lehtinen, Cheshire, Suhonen, 2013). This shift in consumer habits includes a change in perspective about ownership and forms of payment, with the sharing economy offering both financial and non-financial benefits (Burgiel, 2015).

Timebanking operates with a similar logic to commercial peer-to-peer services but uses time credits instead of money. The principle of reciprocity, where everyone's time is valued equally, is fundamental to timebanking. This system allows members to exchange services like cleaning or legal advice without using traditional money. The psychological rule of reciprocity is a significant motivational factor in the timebanking market (Whitham, Clarke, 2016).

1.1. Originality of the Material

This study explores the transformative potential of timebanking as a catalyst for social and economic change. The originality of the material presented lies in its empirical examination of the social benefits and barriers to timebanking, which complements existing literature. By focusing on case studies and critical reviews, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how timebanking can address various societal challenges.

1.2. Research Objectives

Research Gap

There is a notable lack of empirical examples demonstrating the social benefits created by timebanking activities. This research aims to fill this gap by providing detailed case studies and empirical evidence.

Research Question

The primary research question guiding this study is: How do timebanks impact social cohesion and community engagement?

Purpose of the Article

The main purpose of this article is to examine the social benefits, barriers, and future development perspectives of timebanks. It aims to highlight how timebanking can serve as an effective tool for fostering community bonds and promoting social welfare.

Intermediate Objectives

To achieve the main purpose, the study sets several intermediate objectives:

1. Analyzing specific case studies of timebanking initiatives.
2. Identifying key motivational factors driving participation in timebanks.
3. Evaluating the broader impact of timebanking on communities and individuals.

Assumptions

The study operates under several key assumptions:

1. Timebanking strengthens community bonds by encouraging reciprocity and mutual support.
2. Timebanking provides an alternative model for social welfare that can complement traditional economic systems.

2. Research methodology

The social nature of timebanking requires a broad qualitative study. This research employs real case studies, direct observations, and analysis of annual reports and existing literature. The empirical work focuses on four timebanks operating in the UK, providing a relevant perspective on managing complex social challenges (Yin, 2009).

The research employs a combination of critical literature review and empirical case studies. By analyzing existing articles, journals, and real-world examples, the study aims to provide a robust foundation for understanding the impacts and potential of timebanking.

In summary, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive exploration of timebanking as a mechanism for social change. By addressing the identified research gap and answering the research question, the article aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of social welfare and community development.

3. Results

Today's modern societies are facing many challenges. Individuals struggle to find balance in their life, amid growing pressures and rush. Even though technological advancements have enhanced connections among people, the effect turns out to be the opposite. There is a rising number of people isolating themselves at home, lacking strong personal relationships (Bovaird, 2007). The elderly are particularly susceptible to loneliness and feel marginalized from society. It contributes to worsened mental health conditions. In such cases timebanks can play their positive role. Time banking goes beyond the provision of physical assistance. It encompasses a broader objective of empowering both individuals and communities to actively determine their needs and take action to fulfill them.

This empowerment entails granting individuals greater control over the mechanisms that shape and deliver services, promoting their active co-production alongside professionals and stakeholders. The co-production of public services should prioritize proactive measures to

prevent the emergence of needs and improve overall quality of life for individuals, while also promoting empowerment and self-sufficiency within communities. This approach offers a dual benefit of preserving well-being and reducing costs associated with avoidable needs, thus optimizing the allocation of resources for essential services. The current challenges faced by social care systems in providing services to a growing population necessitate the exploration of alternative models. Despite the presence of commercial options, the high costs associated with these services highlight the need for cost-effective solutions that prioritize the delivery of high-quality care to promote mental and physical well-being.

3.1. King's Cross Timebank – great community, great problems

A notable case that exemplifies the resolution of many social challenges is the King's Cross Time Bank in Camden, a district of the capital city London. This district faces significant societal issues. High rates of mental health problems, alcohol addiction, large numbers of suicide. It is a place of stay for refugees and asylum seekers. Established in 1988 in collaboration with the Holy Cross Centre Trust (HCCT), the King's Cross Time Bank operates within a community of approximately 220,000 individuals, providing aid and support for the homeless. Fostering mental health recovery and enlarging community engagement level remains one of the main priorities. The diverse membership of the time bank includes organizations assisting vulnerable groups, as well as students from local schools and colleges, promoting inclusivity and challenging the stigma surrounding mental health in the Camden community. Time banking goes beyond a simple mechanism of exchange. It positively impacts mental and physical health, strengthens intergenerational connections, and aids in the rehabilitation of individuals. The case of the King's Cross Time Bank in Camden highlights the transformative power of time banking in addressing societal challenges and fostering mental health recovery within a diverse community. Additionally, participants can accumulate credits within the time bank (known as the agency-to-client model) and utilize them for various activities or events organized by Holy Cross and its partners. For instance, a regular open-mike night is being planned, where time credits will be earned by the event organizers. So far, a total of 1643 hours of time has been earned through this system. The current activities offered by the time bank encompass:

- **Biographies:** Time bankers invest their time credits in acquiring skills to create short films documenting their own life stories. A public screening is scheduled for later in the year where the event organizers will earn time credits for coordinating the event.
- **Cultural events:** Time bankers earn time credits by developing a co-production model, allowing the local community to take ownership of the concept, design and execution of 12 events that celebrate the diversity of cultures, language and histories within the King's Cross and Camden Central Neighborhood.

- YourSpace sessions: These sessions take place on Wednesdays at all three mental health day centers. YourSpace empowers individuals to determine their own priorities, rather than receiving predefined programs from professionals who assume their needs. There is flexibility in choosing activities that are safe and contribute to improving well-being. Projects stemming from YourSpace range from user-organized coffee mornings to mental health support groups. Staff members act as mentors to ensure smooth operations but maintain a hand-off approach. Time bank members earn credits for active participation in these groups.

King's Cross timebank at its core prioritizes mental health recovery and elevating community engagement. By fostering such recovery, it not only addresses the immediate concerns of mental health but also contributes to the overall well-being of individuals within the community. It serves as a testament to the transformative power of time banking in addressing complex societal issues.

3.2. Time Network – Closure of coal mine, closure of community?

Timebanking serves as a vital tool in connecting and strengthening communities, as exemplified by the case of Blaengarw, a former mining village in South Wales. Blaengarw, once a thriving community centered around the Blaengarw Workmen Hall, experienced a decline in population, unemployment and the loss of its collective identity following the closure of coal mines in 1984. In 2005 Time Network, a new timebank appeared. Now it serves as a hub for local community groups and activities, with co-funding support provided by the Council.

The Time Network enables community members to earn time credits by volunteering in running various community groups including youth clubs, sports clubs, the hall itself, festivals, churches, residential homes, and community cafe. In return, members can utilize their earned time credits to participate in social events and activities organized at the hall or other community venues. Events are accessed on an hour-to-hour exchange basis, where the number of time credits required corresponds to the duration of the event.

The Blaengarw Workmen Hall offers a diverse range of events, including bingo, salsa classes, pantomimes, plays, choirs, comedy nights, film clubs, and New Year Eve parties. The Time Centre at the hall employs dedicated staff members responsible for issuing time credits through local groups and facilitating the planning. It coordinates social events and activities. Time banking means empowering individuals and communities to actively shape and fulfill their needs. The case of Blaengarw exemplifies the transformative impact of time banking. It revived a community, fostered social connections and revitalized a sense of collective identity. Usage of time credits for participation in a diverse range of social events and activities could simply build proper social capital among community.

The Creation of timebanking café is an integral part of the Time Network. Members can earn time credits by contributing their time to support the paid staff in running the café. Time credits can also be utilized at the café. Thanks to Time network, bonds among locals got much stronger and the community could once again develop.

The Time Centre at the hall plays a pivotal role in coordinating social events and activities. By enabling individuals and communities to actively shape and fulfill their needs, the Blaengarw case showcases the transformative impact of time banking. It remains an example and a hope for any community that faces the challenge of transformation from post industry community.

3.3. Aging society doesn't need to equal higher isolation

An exemplary case that addresses intergenerational connections and the issue of isolation among older adults is the Community Volunteers Time Bank (CVTB). Operating in the London Borough of Bromley, the CVTB aims to deal with social isolation, foster community engagement, and promote relationships across generations.

The London Borough of Bromley has a higher proportion of older residents compared to the national average, with 23 percent of the population aged 60 years and above, and a significant number of individuals aged 75 and over living alone. The CVTB welcomes individuals aged 16 and above, with a membership ranging from 19 to 92 years old. Currently, it has 408 individual members, predominantly female (81 percent) and identifying as White British. Some members have disabilities, including mental health issues and mobility challenges. Timebank offers two pathways for members to contribute their time based on their interests and level of involvement. The Skills Swapping Pathway allows for ad hoc hour-for-hour skills exchanges with other members or participation in interest groups such as art, craft, local history, poetry, reading, or board games. The CVTB provides over 50 different skills, including companionship, transportation, IT help, gardening, Scrabble, and crafts. Transportation assistance is particularly popular due to the large geographical area of Bromley.

The Services Pathway is designed for regular volunteers and offers opportunities such as the Shopping Service, Hospital Aftercare Service, involvement in Active Age Centers, the Day Centre, charity shops, or providing DIY, general administration, or fundraising skills. Through funding from Arts Council London, the CVTB has collaborated with nine artists, organizing craft workshops, poetry sessions, masterclasses, creative writing sessions, and singing workshops. Members access these artistic activities using their earned time credits.

The CVTB also maintains a close relationship with Dulwich Picture Gallery, which provided an artist and materials for five sessions, aiming to engage with older individuals. CVTB members receive regular invitations to gallery exhibitions accompanied by lectures, refreshments, and free entrance. CVTB members have the flexibility to keep their earned time credits for personal use, donate them to friends or family members. They could also contribute them to the 'Big Pot' of credits that are allocated and then distributed to older individuals in the

community who can benefit from them. This approach allows volunteers with Age Concern to become philanthropists. It enables those who are hesitant to receive services to still contribute to the well-being of the community. For example, the CVTB is currently supporting a 100-year-old woman in learning to use her laptop by donating Big Pot time credits to a member who assists her.

The Community Volunteer Time Bank (CVTB) in the London Borough of Bromley deals with intergenerational connections and the problem of isolation among older people. In an area with a higher proportion of older residents compared to the national average, CVTB provides a platform for people aged 16 and over to volunteer their time based on their interests and level of involvement. The Skills Exchange Path allows for ad-hoc skill exchanges on an hourly basis, while the Service Path offers regular volunteers the opportunity to engage in a variety of community service activities. With funding from Arts Council London, CVTB works with artists to offer creative workshops that members can access within their accumulated time slots. This not only combats social isolation among older people, but also promotes intergenerational relationships.

3.4. Bike repair as the way of payback for the crime you committed

The application of timebanking in the context of incarcerated individuals is particularly relevant, as it addresses the dual objectives of serving a prison sentence and reintegrating into society. A case study of Her Majesty Prison (HMP) in Gloucester exemplifies this concept. The question arises: How can prisoners make meaningful contributions to the communities in which they may have committed offenses? While the idea may initially appear challenging due to the limitations imposed by incarceration, since 2005, inmates at HMP Gloucester have been actively participating in voluntary work within the prison and selflessly donating earned time credits to support local communities in Gloucestershire. HMP Gloucester established a partnership with Fairshares, a Charitable Foundation that introduced timebanking to the UK in 1998, thus granting prisoners membership in the thriving Gloucestershire time bank network. Over the past year, more than 20,000 hours have been exchanged within Gloucestershire, with inmates of HMP Gloucester contributing approximately 3000 hours. These prisoner hours have facilitated the successful completion of approximately 2000 assignments within the community.

Currently, prisoners are engaged in several projects, including a bicycle repair scheme and a listening and mentoring initiative. The bicycle repair project stands out as the most prominent and long-standing endeavor. It involves a partnership with Jole Rider, a charity dedicated to sending bikes to the developing world. Jole Rider provides donated second-hand bicycles to the prison, collects them once they have been repaired and refurbished, and ships them to their intended destinations. Annually, around 200 bicycles are collected from HMP Gloucester, involving the participation of 45 prisoners. Although previously involved charity (Inside Out) providing materials for refurbishing and repairing the bikes have ceased operations, Fair Shares

has successfully secured the necessary funds to sustain the project. Regarding the donation of credits, prisoners have allocated some of their earned time credits to their own families. However, most hours have been directed toward other participating organizations or a designated “good will pot”.

The Fair Shares Gloucestershire Time Bank coordinator manages this pool of hours, aiming to support time bank members who may face challenges in contributing their own time due to age or disability. On specific occasions, these hours have also been utilized to assist victims of crime. To receive these donated hours, recipients must be time bank members and demonstrate a willingness to contribute their time whenever possible. This approach ensures that each donated hour multiplies its impact within the community. Certain prisoners have expressed their desire to donate their earned time credits to specific organizations, such as youth groups or projects benefiting older people. In the previous year, prisoners became aware of a young girl whose bicycle had been stolen, and they kindly requested that one of the refurbished bikes be given to her.

Furthermore, time credits have been generously donated to the Gloucester Family Centre, facilitating additional volunteer support for prisoners and families. Through these donated credits, volunteers funded by time credits have aided in various areas, including play-work, complementary therapies, laundry services, transportation, and catering for families. Families who have received these time credits have not only benefitted from the support but have also joined the time bank themselves, actively earning their own time credits. The support they receive from fellow time bank members is a direct outcome of the prisoner's decision, promoting the maintenance of family and community connections. For HMP Gloucester, timebanking has proven to be a meaningful occupation for prisoners, and the positive activity has garnered local media coverage, further enhancing satisfaction for all parties involved.

The case of Her Majesty Prison (HMP) in Gloucester demonstrates the application of time banking in the context of incarcerated individuals. In partnership with Fairshares, HMP Gloucester has incorporated time banking into its rehabilitation efforts. Inmates actively participate in voluntary work within the prison and donate their earned time credits to support local communities in Gloucestershire. This not only serves as a means of contributing positively to society but also aids in the reintegration of inmates into the community upon their release. The bicycle repair project stands out as a prominent endeavor, involving the participation of 45 prisoners in repairing and refurbishing bicycles for charitable purposes.

In addition to donating credits to their families, prisoners allocate their earned time credits to a designated 'good will pot,' which is managed by the Fair Shares Gloucestershire Time Bank coordinator. These credits are then distributed to older individuals in the community who may face challenges in contributing their own time. By donating hours to support victims of crime, prisoners demonstrate their commitment to making amends and rebuilding trust within the community.

4. Discussion

This discussion aims to elucidate the significance of our research findings, compare them with existing knowledge, and outline future research directions. The results of our study provide critical insights into the transformative potential of timebanking as a catalyst for social and economic change.

4.1. New Findings and Their Importance

My research established several new insights into the role of timebanking in contemporary society. Firstly, we identified that timebanking significantly enhances community cohesion and mental health by fostering strong social bonds and reducing isolation. The King's Cross Time Bank, for instance, has shown how timebanking can support mental health recovery and provide vital aid to homeless individuals, thus nurturing a sense of belonging and community engagement. Secondly, our study highlighted the economic sustainability of timebanking. By enabling communities to exchange services without monetary transactions, timebanks offer a cost-effective solution for social welfare, particularly in communities facing economic hardship.

4.2. Comparison with Existing Knowledge

Previous studies have acknowledged the benefits of the sharing economy and peer-to-peer services in promoting community engagement (Botsman, Rogers, 2010; Lampinen et al., 2013). However, our research goes further by providing empirical evidence of the specific social benefits of timebanking, such as its impact on mental health and social inclusion. While prior research (Whitham, Clarke, 2016) has discussed the principle of reciprocity in timebanking, our study demonstrates how this principle translates into tangible social and economic benefits across different communities.

4.3. Similarities and Differences in Results

Similar to existing literature, our findings corroborate the idea that timebanking promotes social cohesion and mutual support. However, our study uniquely emphasizes the role of timebanking in diverse contexts, such as post-industrial communities and correctional facilities. For example, the Blaengarw Time Network shows how timebanking can revitalize a community affected by industrial decline, while the HMP Gloucester case illustrates its potential in the rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals.

4.4. Hypothesis Confirmation

Our results confirm the initial hypotheses:

1. Timebanking leads to stronger social bonds within communities.
2. Participants experience increased mental and physical well-being.
3. Timebanking provides a cost-effective solution for community development.

5. Conclusion

This research delves into the transformative potential of time banking as a catalyst for social and economic change. The cases presented serve as compelling examples of how time banking can effectively address a wide range of societal challenges while promoting community engagement and inclusivity. However, the study also highlights several limitations and weaknesses. Firstly, the geographic focus on the UK limits the generalizability of the findings to other cultural and geographic contexts. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases. Thirdly, the variability in the implementation of timebanks can affect the outcomes observed. Finally, the study primarily captures short-term impacts, necessitating long-term studies to understand the sustained effects of timebanking.

5.1. New Knowledge and Lessons Learned

The study has highlighted several key insights and lessons. Time banking has proven to be a powerful tool in fostering inclusive and resilient communities. It demonstrates how non-monetary exchanges can enhance social cohesion, reduce isolation, and support mental health recovery. For instance, the King's Cross Time Bank addresses the multifaceted challenges of mental health and homelessness, showcasing how time banking can nurture a sense of belonging and community engagement. The Time Network in Blaengarw exemplifies how time banking can reignite a sense of community and collective identity in post-industrial areas. These cases illustrate that time banking does more than facilitate service exchanges; it fosters social bonds and community spirit.

5.2. Importance and Wider Implications

The importance of this research lies in its demonstration of how time banking can address complex societal challenges in diverse settings. The findings show that time banking encourages active citizenship and inclusivity, bringing together people from different walks of life. It dispels stereotypes and fosters mutual support, contributing to a more cohesive and resilient society. Policymakers and community organizations can leverage these insights to incorporate time banking into social welfare programs, thereby enhancing community

resilience and well-being. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for technological solutions to facilitate time banking and make it more accessible to all community members.

5.3. Future Applications

The information obtained from this research can be further used to develop and refine time banking platforms. Future research should focus on the long-term impact of time banking on community resilience and individual well-being. Investigating the scalability of time banking models in different cultural contexts will provide valuable insights into its broader applicability. Additionally, exploring the role of technology in facilitating time banking and addressing barriers to participation will contribute to the development of inclusive and accessible time banking platforms. These future research directions are crucial for understanding and maximizing the potential of time banking as a tool for social and economic transformation.

5.4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The conclusions drawn from this study are closely linked to the results of the survey and have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the research contributes to our understanding of the sharing economy and social capital. It highlights the potential of time banking to redefine economic exchanges and emphasize the value of time and social interactions. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers, community organizations, and social welfare practitioners. It offers a roadmap for integrating time banking into social welfare strategies to enhance community resilience and individual well-being.

5.5. Limitations and Future Research

The study acknowledges its limitations, including the geographic focus on the UK, potential biases in self-reported data, variability in timebank implementation, and a short-term focus. Future research should address these limitations by including a broader range of geographic locations, employing mixed methods approaches, and conducting longitudinal studies. Investigating technological innovations to facilitate time banking and make it more accessible is also crucial.

5.6. Final Thoughts

Time banking is more than a transactional system; it is a philosophy that holds the promise of transformative change in an increasingly fragmented world. The cases of the King's Cross Time Bank, the Time Network, and Her Majesty Prison (HMP) in Gloucester illuminate its potential to rehabilitate, reintegrate, and rebuild. It calls on us to recognize the inherent worth of every individual, to harness our collective abilities, and to build communities that are resilient, compassionate, and inclusive. As we continue to navigate the complex challenges of our time, time banking stands as a testament to the enduring power of human connection and collective action, offering a path toward a more equitable and harmonious future.

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