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Time Bank and Sustainability: The Permaculture Approach

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Abstract

The paper aims to find a new approach to include interesting phenomena of time banking (a system of time complementary currency) into the current economy. The time banks have been in existence for almost three decades for now, but their existence is often powered only by good will of enthusiasts and they suffer from the lack of real institutional support. During their existence the time banks proven to be not only very valuable support to local economies, but as well to social development of a society where they are implemented. Basic problem appears to be created by reluctance of national economies to accept time banking concept as viable support to social system or include it directly. It probably looks to be too utopistic and suspiciously not profit-based to be understood by rigid monetary-based economies. The paper uses the approach of permaculture to show how socially beneficial systems, which merge trade exchange system with other dimensions of human development of life, are necessary to the sustainability of the economic system in general. It is becoming clearer and clearer during past decades that mechanistic economies are most probably not sustainable and more holistic point of view is more than necessary. Inclusion of elements like time banking opens gates to autopoietic ways of economy and it should be considered as one of the ways for the further development of economic systems.

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1. Introduction

The topic which has been discussed a lot during past decades is sustainability. Sustainability of economy is tied to the elemental question, how long economy can grow in the environment with limited resources and space, especially when economic growth is the main target of contemporary economies (Seyfang and Longhurst 2012). It

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can be also related to the workforce usage, as it would be very silly and short sighted to reduce all natural human needs only to financial profit. Elemental question to ask is, which ways to use to keep the economy sustainable?

In this paper we are going to see what is sustainable and unsustainable including some basic information about permaculture, later we are going to deal with time banks followed by the part with the analysis of time bank contributions to sustainability and finished by results of the research.

2. Sustainable and unsustainable system

Human culture is considered to be sustainable if it has the ability to reproduce for generations along with preservation of the material needs without disastrous collapse or long term deterioration. From the point of view of energetic management, high energy society could be nothing else than fluctuation in long run of human development. According to this description seems the base of functioning of “developed countries” unsustainable even with considerable help of technological progress. Therefore the knowledge gained from observing autopoietic systems should be put to use in preparation to the future situations of limited energy accessibility. (Holmgren, 2006, pp. 13 – 24). To reach as fluent transition to the low energy society, as possible, we should consider more, the systematic relationships working within cultures which are thriving by life in balance and harmony with surrounding environment and survived longer than any other humanity’s relatively young civilization attempts.

The principles to achieve sustainability are according to the permaculture approach are:

- Care about Earth
- Care about people
- Set the boundaries for consumption and reproduction and reallocate surpluses (Holmgren, 2006, p. 1)

Global monetocracy and corporativism are different names for politically-social system, which aims constant grow of monetary, services and goods resource. The system is based on creation of new money by consequential creation of a debt. The debt is made by banks in form of different loans for which the interest is paid. To pay the interest there is need to generate new money, which means to produce more goods and services for sale. The system uses various tools to sustain itself like influencing governmental political programmes, financial and law institutions, mind manipulation through media, education system etc. The “grow imperative” is financially profitable for ruling international elite, which does not care, if their interest are enforced by corporations or governments (Johanisová, 2008, pp. 81 – 87)

The difference between industrial culture and sustainable culture is illustrated in following table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of industrial and sustainable culture

Characteristic	Industrial culture	Sustainable culture
Energetic base	Not renewable	Renewable
Mass flow	Linear	Cyclic
Natural resources	Consumption	Preservation
Organization	Centralized	Decentralized network
Scale	Large	Small
Movement	Fast	Slow
Feedback	Positive	Negative
Focus	Center	Edges
Activity	Episodically changing	Rhythmical stability
Thinking	Reductionist	Holistic

Source: (Holmgren, 2006, p. 28)

In the contemporary business world there are many companies who try to act responsible respecting their role in society, but still there is still considerable number of companies for which the main imperative is profit regardless on the context of surrounding world and social system. Of course businesses are set up to gain profit, that is their mission and by that they support economy and its growth, but such unsystematic approach could be very dangerous in the long run. There are other values in human life than only profit and in relation with that a term “social responsibility of the business” appeared. This term is already turning the situation in favor of the humanization of businesses as sometimes it is not just a term, but it slowly changes the reality. Some could object, that there are businesses exploiting popularity of the “social responsibility” expression by only engaging projects tagged as socially responsible to support their own marketing. Or that even really socially developed businesses could look weak in competitive environment and could be easily crushed by pressure of dynamic, aggressive, profit oriented brute force of simple non-socially thinking companies. That should not scare potential open-minded and future-thinking businesses from implementing real corporate responsibility campaign whether it is aimed to improve social situation outside of the company or inside. Anyway let us let us focus more on the human development in this paper, than on direct exploitation of markets. Let’s focus on enrichment of the current system by sustainable elements that really have social dimension and bring considerable elevation of the work and living environment, even though they are not so expressively visible and therefore not profitable as marketing tools.

3. Analysis of time bank benefits

As we know, there are people who are not satisfied with their work as it doesn’t give them personal growth, new skills or simply just don’t interest them. The problem with hobbies on the other side is that they bring to the person a lot from the work satisfaction point of view, but not money. What if these could be merged? What if such unsatisfied person could work and get something else than money in return? In most of our lives it works or not, on informal basis, but there are systems which allow that formally and their inclusion to the work life brings only positives.

One of the projects like that is called „Time banking“. Time banks (TB) are the systems of complementary currency originally based on the “time dollar” idea of American economist Edgar S. Cahn. As he says the time dollars are not an attempt to create an alternative to market. They are designed to rebuild a fundamentally different economy, the economy of home, family, neighborhood and community. They are the Core Economy. The Core Economy exists side-by-side with the world of commerce – regardless of the medium of exchanges used to consummate transactions in that world. The Core Economy of home, neighborhood and community is complementary, not alternative (Cahn, 2001). In the essence the time banking is a system of untaxed exchanges in neighborhood and which was and is all the time present naturally in sustainable local economies.

Main principles of time banking are (Ozanne, 2010):

- We are all assets – every human being has something to contribute
- Redefining work – rewarding the real work in our society by creating a currency which pays people for helping each other and creating better places to live
- Reciprocity – giving and receiving are basic human needs which help to build relationships and trust with others
- Social Networks – building people’s social capital is very important, belonging to a social network gives our lives more meaning

- Respect- encouraging people to respect others in their community

Although the activities and exchanges within the TB are absolutely non-profitable in the financial matter, they have great social input and help to build social capital as in addition to the exchange brings implementation of a time bank system another social (Valek, 2013). Also meeting users of a time bank system allows passive interpersonal contacts to be created from which part is transformed to active ones. Bonds between these contacts create a network which main features are stability, intensity and reciprocity. In the frame of mutually beneficial exchange (both material and immaterial) the trust is created. People we can rely on are our social capital. Social capital and it's level is both individual and group characteristic. One of aforementioned characteristics of time banks is their fixation to local environments and support of local economies, because of that time bank implementation in broader geographical scale could be very tricky. Bonds within time bank system are mostly created by close geographical proximity. Anyway it is not only physical proximity which creates the bonds, it is also cognitive proximity. The cognitive proximity is basic for building of the infrastructure of time banks which might lead to delocalization of the system for example by use of information technologies. From other point of view creation of social capital is tightly connected to networking and as time bank is human network, company clusters are networks of legal bodies so implementation of time banking in such commercial network should be also theoretically possible. Nevertheless sustainability of company clusters is not going to be part of this document and it is more elaborated in other sources (Bures, V., Jasikova, V., Otcenaskova, T., Kolerova, K., Zubr V., Maresova, P., et al., 2012)

4. Benefits of inclusion of time banks to an economy

In conclusion the results and outcomes of time bank use are interesting not only for the members of time banks themselves, but they could be as well interesting for the governmental bodies and bodies in commercial sphere.

Most of the results which could interest commercial sphere are:

- Skill and knowledge development of potential employees
- Building social capital
- Deepening the communication skills
- Professional development
- If included into TB – exchange of services
- More efficient use of capacities (lowering transactional costs, time economy)
- Making the offer of resources more broad
- Lowering of the entrepreneurship risks
- Lowering the consumption by sharing
- As system is interest less, its use generates no more costs for its users
- Innovative approaches in the labor organization

and governmental sphere:

- Employment of structurally unemployed
- Solving problems with solitude
- Lowering investment costs to some social issues which requires support as they tend to solve themselves
- Youth participation on citizen life

- Inclusion of seniors
- Lowering the social pressure
- Creation of the new bonds in a community and strengthening of the existing ones
- Possibility for better life and dignity for “overdebted” people
- Regional dimension of services
- Preserving of skills and knowledge
- Limitation of individual demand
- Building of new social structures

5. Results

The time bank concept is clearly the way to sustainability of economic development. The concept has been up and running for several decades now, but very often run with limited resources powered by good will of its users. That results often in burning out of human resource driving the time bank initiatives. To keep working the time banks need the support and inclusion of mainstream economy. Instead of rejecting the system as not viable should authorities start to include it into local economies as it is proven both its usefulness and ability to survive on its own. Of course the time bank is not a system which could offer replacement for traditional monetary economy, but it could improve it and give it more dimensions which affect human life positively. The fear from the adopting or implementing time banking system should not be based on the fear from the change itself and reasons for rejecting it or not supporting it should be clearly stated and supported by the evidence proving that in particular conditions there is no sense to do so. In other situations the possibility of further development of the local economy to more sustainable and open minded way should not be missed.

The time banks thrive on the equal and fair approach, the same approach which is often considered to be utopist and unreal in contemporary economy. Elemental difference is in the focus on human values and satisfaction from life and exchange itself rather than on pure financial profit only. In this case inclusion of fair policies as time bank into economy could divert negative elements of social imbalance based on spreading the social distance between various classes of the society which could lead to the serious turmoil.

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