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## Intercultural learning and communication in Time Bank environment

Lukas Valek<sup>a\*</sup>, Olga Tarasova<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Hradec Kralove, Faculty of Informatics and Management, Rokitanskeho 62, Hradec Kralove, 50003, Czech Republic<sup>b</sup>KURO Hradec Kralove (non-profit, non-governmental organization), Gagarinova 587, Hradec Kralove, 50003, Czech Republic

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### Abstract

This study aims to conduct preliminary research in the field of Time Banking and its use in solving of intercultural issues. Time Banking is a system of complementary time currency where sharing is the main element. The Time Banking is used often to solve various social problems and using it to tackle intercultural learning issues is at hand. The information about precise scope and activities of Time Banks over the world are hard to access, nevertheless main focus of this study is going to be to research the possible connections between intercultural learning and communication and Time Bank environment. Main methodology used is literature review combined with previous Time Bank researches in order to determine the connection between aforementioned fields, including search of other resources to determine whether the issue was, or is, already tackled. The latter proven to be very challenging, anyhow the results show that the Time Bank offers great opportunity for solving various intercultural issues, especially by enabling the, skill and offer-demand based exchange without taking the cultural background much in consideration, therefore opening a way for the communication among different parts of population.

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### 1. Introduction

There have been already conducted researches related to the time banks (TB) from various points of views, but as long as authors know, never in relation to the intercultural learning. Time banks are interesting phenomena which

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +420737977911.  
E-mail address: [lukas.valek@uhk.cz](mailto:lukas.valek@uhk.cz)

started in the United States about thirty years ago by idea of American economist Edgar S. Cahn and his Time Dollar. It belongs to the Core Economy of home, neighbourhood and community, and as said, it is complementary, not alternative (Cahn, 2001) in relation to current economic system; in other words it is not designed to replace it. There is difference between alternatives and complements. In the past many of the alternative economic systems failed, because they were trying to replace the economy as a whole; on the other hand complementary economy systems are just trying to aid where the economy fails (Lietaer, 2001). There are initiatives focused on researching complementary economy systems and time bank among them, as the time bank is considered to be one of these complementary economy systems. Among these initiatives belongs for example Time 4 Research or Complementary Currency Resource Center. Particular features of time banks are elaborated more in separate section of this paper.

The intercultural learning (ICL) is process aimed to develop the ability to decode effectively signs that come from members of other cultures and to encode messages using signs that carry the encoder's intended meaning to members of other cultures (Beamer, 1992). Culture is a one of the important aspects in the concept of ICL. Culture is the phenomenon which is definitely not "closed" but very influenced by people. The efficiency or even existence of Time bank system depends on cultural environment. And Time bank with involvement of cultural aspect could stimulate the intercultural learning process through natural intercultural communication among members. There is a good reason to combine these two approaches. One of main aim of time bank is to bring people together and (Valek, 2012) teach them to cooperate. Intercultural learning fights the stereotypes and lack of understanding in various culturally differentiated environments. It is at hand to use the time bank concept in this case.

Structure of this paper is as follows. After introduction methodology is briefly introduced, than specifics of Time Bank and intercultural learning are outlined, leading to the description of possible uses and outcomes and ultimately to the conclusion of this paper.

## 2. Methodology

As this is the first step in researching possibility of the merging two topics of Time Banking and Intercultural learning the main method used is a literature review. One of authors is conducting research about time banking and the results of the research which happened through past three years are richly used through this paper to support the theories expressed. To the date 10 papers were published to the topic and most relevant are cited in this work.

To shed light on the relation between intercultural learning and communication a literature review was done and two ideas were merged with the main focus on the impact of intercultural learning and communication on the time banking environment.

### 2.1. Time bank

They originated by idea of American economist Edgar S. Cahn. Instead of a currency a time unit is used. By that one person invests own time into service for other person and gains value exactly in the amount of the time invested. Later it is possible to select a service or knowledge sharing from another person within the system. Time banks are worldwide spread phenomena, nevertheless not as wide spread as they would deserve to be. Wider spread is obstructed by many issues. Among others there are cultural conditions, lack of understanding by governmental institutions, financial problems and others (Valek, 2013d). There are main features which define time banks (Ozzane 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

The information for the comparison comes out of the previous research in the field of time banking. The results contain various points of view on the topic such as situation of time banking in the Czech Republic and Russia (Valek, 2013b, 2013c), the view of sustainability (Valek&Jasikova, 2013), possible use of the TB framework in company clusters (Valek, Kolerova&Otcenaskova, 2013), the law and taxes point of view (Valek, 2013a) etc. Also there were side results tied to the education of economists (Valek, 2014) where necessity of inclusion of complementary economic approaches are discussed. Consequently it would be valuable to the research to explore also the connection with intercultural learning and multiculturalism, especially when some of resources (Bank vremena, 2011) suggest, that there are some time bank systems which include immigrants.

## 2.2. Intercultural learning

Due to raising process of globalization and still interreligious conflicts in the world, there is great interest to intercultural competence such as understanding and empathy. Many works on intercultural communication from the field of linguistics share the assumption that influences of culture on social interaction will manifest in communicative exchanges and conversely, that an academic's look at these exchanges will be a sufficient basis for an adequate description of what intercultural communication is supposed to be about.

The intercultural learning's strategies core idea is that groups and individuals (both dominant and non-dominant) living in plural societies engage each other in a number of different ways (Berry, 1974 and 1980). Whether it is the colonizer or the colonized, immigrants or those already settled, individuals and groups hold preferences with respect to the particular ways in which they wish to engage their own and other groups (Berry, 2001).

Bennett organizes Basic Concepts following a developmental sequence outlined in his introductory chapter. He begins with an overview of intercultural communication that is based not on assumed similarities, but on differences in cultures. He contrasts the "melting pot" idea of assimilation with adaptation and outlines the "Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity". A progression from ethnocentric stages (denial, defense, minimization) through ethno relative stages (acceptance, adaptation, integration). Bennett believes that an intercultural perspective allows for the existence of diversity as well as unity (Bennett, 1998).

Dean Barnlund's essay, "Communication in a Global Village," poses the question, "Will a global village be a mere collection of people or a true community?" "Barnlund maintains that to understand someone from another culture, it is important first to understand our own frames of reference, creating a basis from which we then can begin to explore other worlds and reach mutual respect and understanding" (Bennett, 1998).

Berry (2001) reminds about some "Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU, adopted by European Union in 2005." The basic requirement is for mutual accommodation, in which all groups and individuals in contact need to change culturally and psychologically in order to achieve harmony in these plural societies. "Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a nondiscriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration" (Berry, 2001). From this point of view Time bank system perfectly achieves the "mutual accommodation" and provides the "harmony" through tolerance and non-discrimination.

## 3. Discussion of the results

Time bank concept is built on communication, sharing and exchange (Valek, 2013d) this would lead ultimately to informal learning of all participants of the exchange. By informal learning we mean the learning unconsciously by life experience. This is related to both, learning related to the exchanged service, knowledge or other element, and intercultural learning. In Europe there are many difficulties in social integration of immigrants, refugees, and Roma people. And the truth is that the most social service systems are set up as one-way exchanges, with professionals keeping their distance. Time banking and reciprocity makes this relationship one of mutual respect (Cahn, 2005). Government provides support social centers, and centers for integration, create different actions, concerts, workshops aimed to integrate the minorities to local community. However all these efforts still mark the "minorities" as something which is unique and different, not originally belongs to community. But Time bank provide equality and natural trade for everyone independently from nationality, religion or social background. That system is much

easier to get involved for “minorities”, because there is no need of money, good uniform, even to be advanced at local language etc.

According to research of Smala (2002) there were several waves of antipathy towards different ethnic groups in Australia at past few years. In Australia, for many people refugees are members of an ethnic ‘threat’. In a learning situation at school or in adult communities, first exploring one’s own beliefs is a rallying point, and in further sessions it can move towards an understanding of how identities are constructed socially.

When analyzing the descriptions of time banks from various sources, we could notice that they adhere to the abovementioned principles of time banking. It means that anyone can earn kind of, time credits by contributing to others. Individuals, groups, organizations, government agencies, churches, businesses; they all can become members, and contribute time, energy, skills and resources. Time banking builds social networks of people who give and receive support from each other, enabling people from different backgrounds, who may not otherwise meet, to come together and form connections and friendships. Generating social capital in this way can be an important determinant of health, wellbeing and resilience, all of which can prevent problems arising, including the relationships among various cultures.

At this point we can isolate here few points related to the interconnection of intercultural environment and learning, and time banks. There are:

- Readiness of cultural environment to accept the idea of time banking – This is mainly issue to keep in mind when one is running a time bank.
- Inclusion of various groups of populace with different cultural background to the time bank system—as stated above meeting and sharing within time bank brings together groups of people from various backgrounds without prejudices, because main aim of first contact is need of sharing in TB system.
- Enabling the communication between various groups of populace with different cultural background – this is result of the point above
- Aiding in mutual understanding between cultures by allowing sharing of language knowledge – meeting of people from different cultural backgrounds has to lead inevitably to contact with foreign languages and therefore it at least raises awareness and possibly interest about them.

#### 4. Conclusion

With involvement of representatives with different cultural background (immigrants, refugees, ethnical minorities etc.) has time bank power to be a valuable contribution to local community, such as: reduce the level of xenophobia, built an intercultural dialog, raise the process of social integration of immigrants and ideally – decrease the unemployment. And nowadays with the outburst of modern information and communication technologies the access to time banking environment, if present, is much simplified. At the present time, kind of IT system is part of the most of time banks, and through it, the communication of various parts of populace across the cultural background might be allowed and simplified, especially if it has form of a social network; the social network time bank undoubtedly is.

In conclusion we might say that this study fulfilled its purpose. After literature review and time bank research there are key points where time bank can aid intercultural issues or vice versa. The next course of this research should be more practical, researching whether and how real existing time banks are tackling this issue.

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