Time Bank Governance:

Cooperative Lessons for Complementary Currencies

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Abstract

Currency is something that is used as a medium of exchange, recognized as valuable by all who use it. Modern economies often run on some form of *fiat* currency, which is understood to have value simply because someone with power – usually the government – has declared it valuable.

In reality, fiat is not so simple. Once established, a successful fiat currency must be governed, whether that is by decree of the emperor or by cooperative action among participants. Currency must also be managed to ensure day-to-day functioning and the cooperative models of subjecting management to democratic member governance and organizing networks into formal federations provide useful lessons for those who seek to create and maintain currencies.

hOurworld is a worker cooperative that has developed software for *time banks*, which are a particular type of *complementary currency* (e.g. it complements the national currency) that uses online exchanges to track transactions between members. This group of self-described "social architects" has also been exploring the issue of governance for those time banks.

Governance is the part of decision-making that addresses longer-term policy. It is often conducted by aboard of directors, and is the counterpart to the shorter-term execution of policy that is the responsibility of management.

This paper will thus focus generally upon the need for clearer time bank governance, and specifically upon how hOurworld can contribute to the development and spread of best practices at both the local and network levels.

Governance is examined at two levels: First, each local time bank, or "exchange," must necessarily have its own systems of governance, whether that is a formal and elected board of directors or deferral to an unelected founder. Second, the decisions made by numerous local exchanges produce diverse forms that need coordinated governance to grow as a movement. Network governance is already being discussed, but I propose that it will be productive to model these networks after cooperative federations.

I use the experience of the Great Depression's "self-help cooperatives" to offer guidance for contemporary time banks. This earlier movement provided important service to its members by helping them trade when money was scarce, but it was ultimately unable to create clear, consistent and durable forms of governance.

I hypothesize that clear and accountable governance will improve each time bank's chances for survival and growth, while stronger inter-exchange governance system will assist overall development of time banks through providing better coordination of services and an effective venue for building the movement's identity. And finding that unclear and unstable governance contributed to the downfall of the self-help co-ops, I make recommendations for how time banks can avoid a similar fate.

1: Introduction

The current wave of time bank development

While most people use some dominant national currency, many regions – from neighborhood to national levels – also employ *complementary currencies* (also called *community* or *alternative currencies).* These currencies are used to fill perceived gaps in the functioning of the national fiat currency or simply to build a sense of local identity in the face of economic challenges.

A key distinction within complementary currencies is between *scrip* and *time banks*. Scrip currencies employ paper certificates resembling dollars and generally tied to a dollar value. Scrip allows some services to cost more than others and facilitates sale of goods. In contrast, time banks track hours of services exchanged among members and generally do not employ physical paper. Time banks generally treat all hours of labor equally and are less appropriate media of exchange for goods.

More pertinent to governance, time banks bear closer resemblance to cooperatives than scrip exchanges do because the time banks generally have defined memberships. In contrast, scrip may be used freely by anyone who happens to possess it.

Recent macroeconomic troubles have motivated some time bankers (as participants are often called, although the name is not universally accepted) to join the booming complementary currency movement. The current wave of time bank development is also driven by a desire to reorganize local economies in response to the perceived domination by large and dollar-driven corporations.

Like other forms of complementary currency, time banks theoretically can serve as a way of keeping one's buying power local, since non-local businesses are less likely to take currency that can only circulate locally. hOurworld touts this community-building aspect inherent in time banks as an additional and distinct benefit.[1]

The modern time bank concept is generally attributed to Edgar Cahn. However, Cahn's significant achievements knitting together a movement that formed into a network called Time Banks USA Network (TBUSA) in 1995 are, of course, built on the foundation of many others. Time banks evolved most recently from more grassroots exchanges known as local exchange trading systems (LETS). LETS were more likely than newer time banks to allow members to charge differing rates of exchange and less likely to work with or organize under established community

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[1] "Welcome to hOurworld," hOurworld, Online at www.hourworld.org/_Answers.htm?p=3, accessed March 16, 2012.

agencies such as hospitals and churches. Time banks also often use a broker to match services, while LETS simply facilitate direct transactions between members.[2]

Depression Era self-help co-ops

Earlier currencies included hundreds of groups that operated in the Great Depression. Beginning in Seattle and Dayton, Ohio, the Depression's "self-help co-ops" spread nationwide and blossomed especially in California, where at one point there were nearly 200 exchanges organized into a complex and shifting set of federations that rose and fell over the course of the 1930s, meeting people's needs while the federal government's New Deal was set in motion.[3]

The Depression's relatively dense network of groups learned from and supported each other during a specific period of rapid growth inspired by financial turmoil. The brief history of the "self-help co-ops" provides some painful governance lessons that are relevant for the modern time banks. In recognition of this commonality, I use "exchange" as a generic term that includes both historic time banks and modern self-help co-ops.

Although there are important differences between the Depression-era exchanges and the modern time banks (e.g. technology and degree of economic turbulence), the self-help co-ops serve an especially relevant example for three reasons:

First, in the present as well as during the early Depression, we see very rapid growth in both the number of exchanges and the number of individuals participating, sometimes leading to tensions between faster or slower growth and more or less-democratic models of governance. Second, participants in both eras show a significant interest in networks or federations. And finally, in both eras there are significant interactions with established outside groups including governments, hospitals and churches, raising issues of autonomy for the exchanges.

While the contemporary time bank movement is nationwide instead of limited mostly to concentrations around a few metropolitan areas, the dramatic improvement of communications technology renders this difference less important. Today we have a degree of nationwide communication that surpasses what was possible even locally 80 years ago. So there is a comparable level of interaction among exchanges, in that ideas and practices can be shared nationally now in ways that would only barely have been possible on the local level then.

This paper will look both at the internal governance cultures of local exchanges as well as inter-exchange governance from both periods. I hypothesize that these two

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[2] L.K. Ozanne and J.L. Ozanne (2009) "Relational Exchange within a Community Time Bank," Online at www.duplication.net.au/ANZMAC09/papers/ANZMAC2009-059.pdf, accessed March 22, 2012.

[3] California State Emergency Relief Administration, *Research Project on Self-Help Cooperatives in California"* (Sacramento, California, 1935), 135-7.

levels of governance are intimately involved with each other, as the local governance practices of exchanges will play a role in determining whether and how they might federate into regional and national bodies. In particular, I will examine governance challenges for exchanges affiliated with two different networks: the emerging hOurworld network and the older TimeBanks USA Network (TBUSA):

hOurworld is a three-person worker cooperative based in Maine and affiliated with an 800-member time bank called Hour Exchange Portland. hOurworld is the creator of the time bank database software called "Time and Talents," (TnT), which was developed for Portland but has since been shared with numerous other communities. As of April 4, 2012, the hOurworld website indicated 32 exchanges using (or planning to use) TnT; this included 12 that were described as start-ups and 10 full exchanges.[4]

TBUSA is an older and much larger group of exchanges whose website listed 339 exchanges as of April 4, 2012. It should be noted, however, that a significant number of these listings have only a handful of members and some have only a single individual. TBUSA has developed software called "Community Weaver 2.0."[5]

Both during the Depression and in the present we find two large centers of organizing, with some overlap and periodic attempts at unification. Now, as then, there is an impetus to merge these two efforts. During the Depression, economies of scale and political power were in tension with issues of governance and autonomy. And the more independent and democratic co-ops of the 1930s were also longer-lasting, suggesting that this issues of governance should not be glossed over.

It should be noted that the hOurworld network does not yet have any governance structure. Their affiliation is not defined at present, and mainly consists of a local exchange's decision to use the software created by hOurworld. There is no formal organization of hOurworld exchanges, let alone a cooperative. Nevertheless, hOurworld does identify as a cooperative and is encouraging discussion that may result in both local exchanges organized as consumer co-ops and networks organized similarly to federated cooperatives.

Research Methods

This paper draws primarily from four sources: archival research, a survey of literature related to time banks and self-help co-ops, interviews with hOurworld and TBUSA leaders and a survey of governance values distributed to coordinators of hOurworld and TBUSA exchanges.

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[4] "Exchange Map," hOurworld, Online at www.hourworld.org/_ExchangeMap.php, accessed April 4, 2012.

[5] "Time Banks Community Directory," Time Banks USA, Online at www.community.timebanks.org/, accessed April 4, 2012.

The archival sources are a combination of academic studies and government reports. There is considerable authorship overlap in the work and supervision of Clark Kerr, who prior to his doctoral work served as director of the California State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA), a government agency tasked with supporting and overseeing the state's self-help co-ops.

I conducted a series of interviews with hOurworld cofounder and business specialist Terry Daniels, who also made available a variety of internal documents that served as valuable background knowledge. Daniels was a founder of a cooperative time bank focused on home construction that evolved into hOurworld.

I also gathered qualitative information from TBUSA's discussion of network governance through observation of their listserv and governance working group conference calls as well as an email exchange with former board member and current CEO Lisa Conlan-Lewis.

The survey was sent to the coordinators of groups currently involved with both networks. hOurworld responses were solicited by email from staff to network members, while TBUSA responses were solicited through the listserv. Responses were kept in confidence and included only in aggregate in this report.

The survey had three sections. First, it sought to gather background information about the history of each exchange and its affiliations with other exchanges. Second, it explored the internal governance structure of the exchanges. Finally, it sought to identify coordinators' perspectives regarding inter-exchange governance.

A total of 16 exchanges responded, of which 5 reported affiliation with hOurworld, 8 reported affiliation with TBUSA and 3 reported (current or past) affiliation with both. The exchanges ranged in age from a quarter-year to a quarter-century, with 13 under 5 years old but 3 having lasted 14 or more years. Notably, no responses were received from exchanges between 5 and 14 years old.

There are currently hundreds of time banks and new exchanges are forming on a weekly basis. This makes it difficult to draw lasting conclusions, and my small sample size prevents any firm conclusions. However, the variety of respondents provides an indication of the movement's tendencies and suggests areas for further research, And as we shall see the data seems to match much larger earlier surveys, which suggests that the sample is representative.

<u>2: Literature Review</u>

Current state of time bank movement

Recent research has documented a large number of recent time bank start-ups and a high rate of failure. The research of Lasker, Collom and Kyriacou (2011) especially corroborates the age-related data reported by time banks responding to my survey. These researchers' exhaustive 2010 survey of 128 time banks indicates a tendency toward unclear governance as well as a high rate of failure – particularly among start-ups. They found that of 88 exchanges, 69 had been formed in the previous 5 years; in contrast, 9 were 6-10 years old and only 8 had lasted a decade. They also found that only 41 time banks noted a board or advisory committee, while 14 referred to the involvement of another agency in running operations.[6]

These researchers also attempted to contact 100 other time banks "for which the contact information was not valid and/or no evidence of their existence could be documented. Many of these may have never been started…Of the initial list of non-responders, only 32 could be confirmed as existing."[7]

Also of note, their survey discovered that nearly half of the time banks are embedded in "a variety of community development organizations (such as neighborhood advocacy and service organizations, PTA, and eco-villages), and secondly with health and mental health organizations. A few are sponsored by cities and religious institutions." However, their survey indicated that 9 respondents had made a change in their embeddedness, while 15 had considered it.[8]

Embeddedness has profound implications for governance – especially at the network level – as each type of institution in which a time bank may be embedded will have its own needs and desires for governance as well as existing affiliations, which in many cases may not be negotiable. This primary relationship with another organization is likely to complicate the process of developing a formalized relationship with other time banks.

Research on governance

Internal governance has been a rather neglected topic in the literature on modern complementary currencies. What little specific research exists often blurs governance in two ways: First, there is poor distinction between internal policy and external regulatory environments. Second, even when the literature's focus remains internal there is minimal distinction between governance and management.

As an example of the poor distinction between internal policy and external regulatory environments, Seyfang (2002) found that time banks could improve community participation in neighborhoods that are otherwise underserved and poorly engaged. He observed that, "'Active citizenship' is founded upon the principle that citizens have both rights and responsibilities…taking part in decision-making processes to shape not only national policy but local action and service delivery."

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[6] Judith Lasker, Ed Collom and Corinne Kyriacou. 2011. *Time Banks in the United States: Organizational and Membership Diversity* (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, August 20, 2011, Las Vegas, Nevada), 7-9.

[7] Lasker, Collom and Kyriacou, *Time Banks*, 5.

[8] Lasker, Collom and Kyriacou, *Time Banks*, 7-8.

However, his few examples were linked to a local council or resident association. Governance within the time banks was not explored, even though participation in a democratically governed time bank would provide citizens with opportunities to exercise their rights and responsibilities as they collectively meet their needs.[9]

The lack of distinction between governance and management within exchanges also appears in the work of Lasker, Collom and Kyriacou (2011), whose survey obliquely addressed governance but inadvertently illustrated the general lack of research specifically addressing governance. Note how both the question and narrative summary clearly combined management with policy (emphasis added):

> When asked, "What type of leadership structure do you have? For example, who takes care of day to day *operations*, and who has ultimate responsibility for the organization's *policies*?" there were many different responses, most of which mentioned staffing by coordinators or volunteers, a board or leadership group, and, to a lesser extent, support from other organizations.[10]

Schroeder, Miyazaki and Fare (2011) underlined this lack of governance literature in their survey of the literature, while also contributing to the poor distinction between governance and management. They noted that,

> community currencies need to have a well-anchored *governance* structure…Again, this crucial issue has not been dealt with adequately…funding for some of the established Time Banks in the UK, i.e. professionally *managed* systems, has not been extended. (emphasis added)[11]

The most significant contribution to governance research is Jones' (2010) Shared Monetary Governance (SMG) framework, in which she noted that governance must incorporate external regulators, internal decision-makers, and users of the currency. She also provided a helpful distinction of the boundary between internal and external, as she identified four influences that impact governance:

> Two of these four influences, transparency and accountability, are controlled more by internal institutional processes. The other two issues, legal frameworks and participation, are largely determined by the external [regulatory frameworks] surrounding the currency institution.[12]

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[9] G. Seyfang, "Time on our side: Time banks and active citizenship." *New Economy* 9, no. 4, Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, accessed March 22, 2012, 243-6.

[10] Lasker, Collom and Kyriacou, *Time Banks*, 9.

[11] Rolf F.H. Schroeder, Yoshihisa Miyazaki and Marie Fare. 2011. *Community Currency Research: An Analysis of the Literature.* International Journal of Community Currency Research, Volume 15 (A) 38.

[12] S.D. Jones, "A Theoretical Framework for Shared Monetary Governance, " (2010), online at http://bath.academia.edu/ShirDestinieJones/Papers/381905/A_THEORETICAL_FRAMEWORK_FOR_SHARED_MONETARY_GOVERNANCE_Shira_Destinie_A._Jones, accessed March 23, 2012, 5.

Apart from Jones' contribution, the academic conflation of management and governance appears to indicate a broader dynamic in the time bank movement, which is supported by my survey's finding that most time banks are loosely organized (to be discussed later). The apparent lack of attention to governance in this movement is worth exploring, as it is possible that good governance might be the missing link to avoiding burnout, mismanagement and eventual irrelevance.

Great Depression models

The self-help cooperative movement has been generally ignored by academics since the 1930s. The main exception is Gatch (2005), who explored the "failure of decentralism," which he attributed to a lack of robust federated structures. Gatch importantly noted that as governments took a growing interest in the co-ops as a means of delivering services with minimal taxpayer cost, governments also played a growing role in coordination among exchanges and determination of policy.[13]

To date there has been minimal government interest in contemporary time banks as an instrument of policy. However, exchanges embedded in other organizations already face limitations from partner organizations, whose influence range from informal up to governance power being formally vested in the organization in which the time bank is embedded.

This outside influence recalls the lack of autonomy faced by self-help co-ops in later days of the Depression, when those exchanges increasingly came under the influence and outright control of governments. Even well-intentioned interference – ironically including model by-laws that were apparently helpful at face value – ultimately undermined the earlier co-ops' autonomous nature and especially their ability to freely federate. This, Gatch argued, contributed to their downfall:

> FERA opposed the creation of centralized federations, and through its grant-making powers to specific enterprises left production decisions up to individual units. For its part, the California State Relief Agency (SRA) supervised the allocation of federal subsidies, which flowed first to state accounts, and then for disbursement only upon requisition by individual units, which themselves had no direct access to the funds granted to them by the federal government…SRA even attempted to reconcile the values of workplace efficiency and democracy by promoting 'town manager' style governance and, by 1935, had promulgated a 'model constitution' that most California self-help units adopted.[14]

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[13] Loren Gatch, "Self-Help Cooperatives and the Failure of Decentralism During the Great Depression." *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association 1-27* (2005), online at http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/4/0/1/9/pages40198/p40198-1.php, accessed March 25, 2012, 19.

[14] Gatch, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 20.

What can we now learn from this earlier attempt at rapidly scaled-up cooperation? Is the lack of clear governance structures a major contributing factor in the high failure rate of time banks now, as it was for self-help cooperatives? Do unclear distinctions between governance and management in practice and research point to a real weakness in time banks? And most importantly, what are the ways that cooperative forms of governance may help the time bank movement live up to its potential and match a rapid rate of reproduction with structures to sustain it?

These questions will occupy the rest of this report.

3: Current governance efforts underway

Governance became a significant topic of conversation among time bankers in early 2012, with both hOurworld and TBUSA engaging in conversations about how to create more responsive network structures. There is some potential for these conversations to merge and lead to a single federated structure for time banks from both networks, and it will be important for hOurworld to act strategically in ways that maximize participation from exchanges in both networks. A review of developments since hOurworld's inception will help to frame the discussion.

In a March 14, 2012 phone interview, hOurworld co-founder Terry Daniels recalled that hOurworld originated as a time bank modeled after a previous home construction time banking effort. hOurworld was formed as a way of complementing the work of Hour Exchange Portland (HEP), the local time bank. The new co-op most immediately provided weatherization for HEP members during a spike in home heating costs. But hOurworld then developed the *Time and Talents (TnT)* time banking software and provided technical support to other time banks, which often approached HEP for advice.

hOurworld realized that the software they'd developed had the potential to support many time banks, not just Portland's. Daniels recalled, "When we formed [hOurworld] we relieved HEP of the trainings, consulting and software work that they used to perform. They now act as a referral source for national inquiries which are still many."

hOurworld itself has a very simple governance structure. As a three-member worker cooperative, its members each have an area of expertise.[15] According to Daniels, "most of our decisions are consensus and made as they come up and outside the formal meetings we have at least every 6 months."

Daniels reported that hOurworld has had numerous and regular conversations with TBUSA's Conlan-Lewis. He added that hOurworld is exploring the prospect of a

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[15] "Meet the hOurworld founders," hOurworld, online at http://hourworld.org/_Staff.htm?p=3, accessed April 5, 2012.

founding “convention” for a more formalized structure and hopes to include TBUSA and its exchanges to the greatest extent possible.

hOurworld does not see creation of its own formal time bank network outside of TBUSA as a goal in itself. Daniels reported that, “If a healthy TBUSA is created and a healthy ‘network’ of exchanges is created we may stay a co-op of social architects that create support tools for time banks and are a part of the whole network of the time bank/exchange movement.”[16]

It is important to note that the governance of hOurworld as a worker co-op is not at issue in terms of this paper, and is only provided as background. Rather, the question is: How can this small service provider to time banks export its cooperative sensibilities? That is, in addition to providing the software that makes launching new time banks so easy, how can hOurworld also spread more robust governance practices to help keep time banks healthy once they launch? Is this even possible given that hOurworld lacks a formalized governance practice of its own and is a very different kind of organization than the time banks themselves?

hOurworld’s competitive environment is highly important. As incongruous as it may seem, ultimately a discussion on governance is a product that hOurworld could provide to time banks. This product would be most valuable if it is an inclusive discussion, with as many time banks as possible at the table. And TBUSA’s participation will be essential to any effort to gather large numbers of time bankers.

TimeBanks USA governance discussion

TimeBanks USA was founded in 1995 and now counts over 300 member time banks worldwide, with membership concentrated in the United States.[17]

To help give form to this growing network, in February of this year TBUSA launched its governance “transformation team,” convened by CEO Lisa Conlan-Lewis.

In an April 6, 2012 email, Conlan-Lewis said that the governance team “came out of a request by the TBUSA Board of Directors to have strong local TimeBank leadership and participation in the future direction of TBUSA.” She also noted that the board “was looking for input in a strategic planning process that would help to define Network infrastructure and sustainability, fund development and communications.”

February also saw the launch of a new forum at the TBUSA Action Hub, which is “dedicated to building a stronger governance and a strong viable Network.” [18]

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[16] Terry Daniels, e-mail messages to author, March 19-23, 2012.

[17] “TimeBanks Community Directory,” TBUSA, online at http://community.timebanks.org, accessed Feb. 21, 2012.

The TBUSA governance conversation recently included the idea of a "time bank of time banks" to facilitate exchanges among multiple time banks. Such a secondary exchange highlights the importance of network governance.

However, TBUSA already launched such a second-level exchange in 2007. This "super time bank" was "intended to support the work of Time Banks as a whole. Time Dollars earned are for the Time Bank, and not for an individual coordinator." [19]

TBUSA records indicate that this exchange has 40 members, but it was last used in 2010.[20] The lack of use for the super time bank points to a possible lack of buy-in among time bank coordinators, and is reminiscent of the self help co-ops' many short-lived attempts at federation.

4: The Depression's models and lessons

As I explore some critical lessons from the past, it is important to remember that the Great Depression's self-help cooperatives were a response to a unique set of circumstances. In considering the implications of these earlier co-ops, we should note, most obviously, that the 2012 economy is in better shape than that of 1931: A less-desperate populace gives modern organizers much more room to maneuver but also diminishes the need for (and therefore appeal of) complementary currencies. Likewise, technological advances discussed above have both helped and hindered, allowing organizers to quickly set-up exchanges with only minimal organizational structure or community support.

However, the economic and technological differences do not substantially diminish the underlying similarity pertaining to governance. Then, as now, many thousands of members rapidly joined hundreds of exchanges to track hours as a means of facilitating barter. And then, as now, development of governance lagged behind explosive growth in both the size and number of exchanges. And despite their name, the "self-help co-ops" were often not much more cooperatively organized than are the modern time banks.

The self-help co-ops faced two main sorts of governance challenges. First, they needed to find ways for members of any given exchange to determine leadership and then hold that leadership accountable to the group's common goals. Second, they had to work together as a nascent movement, particularly in developing federated structures to create economies of scale and engage with outside groups.

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[18] "TimeBanks Governance 'Transformation Team,'" TBUSA, online at http://actionhub.timebanks.org/groups/timebanks-governance-transformation-team accessed Feb. 22, 2012.

[19] "The TimeBank of TimeBanks provides a forum for the exchanges of services among Timebanks," TBUSA, online at http://super.timebanks.org/, accessed March 28, 2012.

[20] Steve Bosserman, email to timebanks-network@googlegroups.com listserve, March 28, 2012.

The Depression's self-help cooperatives were not successful in the long run. The movement was born and died within the space of a decade, with most exchanges lasting only a year or two. It is too early to tell whether the modern time-bankers will follow a similar course, but their high rate of failure (including frequent failure to launch – noted by Lasker, Collom and Kyriacou) suggests that this threat is real.

Internal governance

The self-help co-ops had to respond to dramatic changes in conditions: Government grants came and went, jobs returned and cash began to flow back into the economy, politicians identified potential voting blocs and lost interest after the votes were not delivered. Without strong governance, the exchanges apparently were unable to adjust.

Kerr and Harris (1939) identified 262 exchanges that had been started in California over the course of the decade. Of these, 182 were in Los Angeles and adjacent Orange counties, in southern California. Alameda County in northern California, where Oakland is located, had 27. Most of the rest were located near these two centers. I will refer to these two main groupings as southern and northern for the rest of this paper.[21]

Although they share the "self-help" label, the south and north had significant differences in their origins and operations. Although each grouping had significant diversity among its members, there were important aggregate differences. The north and south were ultimately unable to find sufficient common ground to serve as a foundation for statewide organizing, so we should examine why a lasting bridge could not be built.

To some extent the south's faster growth was tied to many hungry people living in close proximity to farmland where crops were rotting in the field. The northern co-ops were more likely to begin as salvage operations, although some did expand into farming and included rural "sections" operating up to 150 miles from Oakland. Both used the same model of work for credits, through which individuals could meet their needs through a commonwealth they helped to build.

While the southern co-ops were unquestionably more prolific, the northern co-ops were apparently more robust despite their slower growth. This robustness was connected to the generally more democratic practices found in the north, which helped them to avoid a common southern problem of poor management despite better talent sometimes hiding in plain sight.

Panunzio, Church and Wasserman (1939) conducted a survey of Los Angeles co-ops and observed that, "usually the managers were the originators of the units and

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[21] Clark Kerr and A. Harris, *Self-Help Cooperatives in California,* Berkeley: Bureau of Public Administration, University of California, 1939, 8.

therefore were self-elected. This, of course, indicates that they were persons of initiative and foresight, but that did not necessarily guarantee their efficiency as managers." Meanwhile, "there were persons among the cooperators who had had managerial or near-managerial experience, but the units seem to have been unable to discover and to use them in that capacity."[22]

The Division of Self-Help Cooperatives of the California State Emergency Relief Agency (SERA) assembled a 1936 prospectus and annual report, which included two sample organizational charts featuring complex systems of management accountability through elected leadership. Both were from the north, which suggests that despite the much larger number of co-ops in the south, there was a lack of good models there.

One of the models provided was the Berkeley Self-Help Cooperatives, Inc. (BSHC), located just north of Oakland. BSHC's structure was based on model by-laws produced by SERA and adopted voluntarily: Members elected a board, which appointed coordinators of various departments, called sections.

An elected board empowered to appoint coordinators, is described by SERA as a common structure and it closely resembles typical modern cooperative governance – although BSHC had team leadership rather than the general manager common in modern co-ops.

In contrast to BSHC's standard cooperative governance, Oakland's Unemployed Exchange Association (UXA) had a more complex structure. Among the northern self-help co-ops, the UXA lasted longest and grew to the highest level of complexity. It was described as a model in reports from that time[23] – so its structure is worth examining in some detail.

The UXA's members elected a coordinating chairperson, who appointed coordinators to manage the various sections. The chair also appointed members of the Operating Committee, which provided day-to-day management. All of these appointees collectively formed the Coordinating Assembly, which played a quasi-governance role and had the power to recall the chair.[24]

In a November 11, 1983 *East Bay Express* article titled "Living in the U.X.A.," John Curl interviewed one of the last surviving co-op members, whose description shed more light on the UXA's bottom-up power structure:

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[22] Constantine Panunzio, Wade Church and Louis Wasserman, *Self-Help Cooperatives in Los Angeles,* Publication of UCLA in Social Sciences, Vol 8, No. 1 (1939), 82.

[23] California State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA), *Prospectus of Program for California Self-Help Cooperatives* (1936), A9.

[24] SERA, *Prospectus,* 12-16 (of Annual Report inserted following p. 48).

> A General Assembly made up of all members held final power. The assembly selected an Operating Committee in semi-annual elections, to coordinate the functions of the group…Coordinators from each section met with the Operating Committee to form a Coordinating Assembly, the basic ongoing decision-making body.

But this assembly was not the only UXA body providing something like governance, with another elected group providing longer-term guidance: A 1936 SERA annual report also noted that the UXA's officers "have projected a sort of trusteeship called 'General Schools', for the purpose of holding longterm contracts, acquiring franchises, administering large grants, etc."[25]

The General Schools was directly elected by the membership, which indicates that it most closely corresponded to the board of directors in a typical modern cooperative.

There is some confusion regarding how the Coordinating Assembly was chosen. The 1936 SERA report clearly stated that only the chair was directly elected by the membership. But Curl described the entire body as being elected, which agrees with an organizational chart found in earlier SERA research.[26]

It is quite possible that the practice changed over time. But whether the whole Coordinating Assembly was elected or just appointed by an elected chair, the salient point is that there was a governing group that guided management and was accountable to the membership as a whole.

Regardless, the Coordinating Assembly met weekly while the Operating Committee met four nights a week. Review of the day's work was the primary agenda item for the latter group. Meetings were remarkably open, as Curl noted that "Anybody with an idea – member or not – was welcome to sit in and was heard after the day's job commitments had been dealt with. The only rule was to speak one at a time." [27]

Taylor and Kerr (1934) praised this assembly's open roundtable structure, saying it "has proved an educational method of great effectiveness, and distinguishes UXA from all cooperatives of the state. There is actually being built up a body of economic leadership showing ability to stand on its own feet even when the original leader is not present."[28]

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[25] SERA, *Prospectus,* 14 (of Annual Report).

[26] California State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA), *Research Project on Self-Help Cooperatives in California* (1935), 73.

[27] Online at http://www.countercurrents.org/curl030510.htm, accessed April 6, 2012.

[28] Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr, "Whither Self-Help?" *Survey Graphic*, Vol. 23, No. 7 (July, 1934), 328, online at http://newdeal.feri.org/survey/34328.htm, accessed April 6, 2012.

The presence of three deliberative bodies did not provide a precise boundary between governance and management. But we can still discern separation of governance and management and conclude from the general academic consensus and the UXA's relative longevity (from 1932 to at least 1936) that this model was more effective and stable than the self-elected governing manager common in southern California.

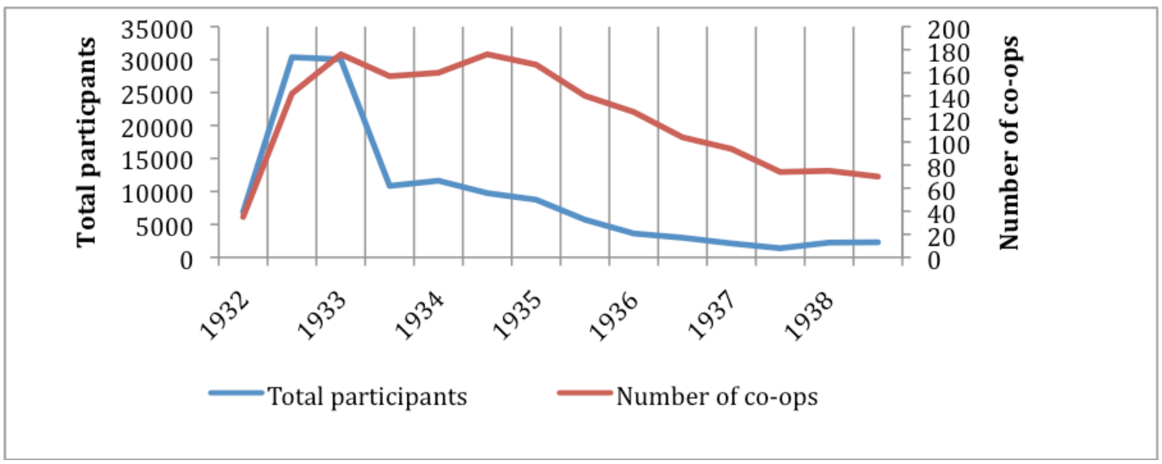
Federations and governance

I now turn to the question of governance among multiple exchanges, through the creation of federated structures that sought to coordinate the work of the self-help cooperatives.

Many co-ops – particularly in agriculture, electricity and finance – have found great benefit in federation, which is the creation of second-level bodies that are themselves governed cooperatively.

There were many self-help co-ops in California and their numbers were always changing. Rapid changes in the number of individuals involved provided the first challenge to creating structures.

Kerr and Harris (1939) documented the movement's dramatic rise from 6,900 members during June 1932 to 30,025 members a year later. Membership then plummeted to 10,840 in just half a year before gradually dropping toward the final count of 2,290 members in December of 1938.[29]

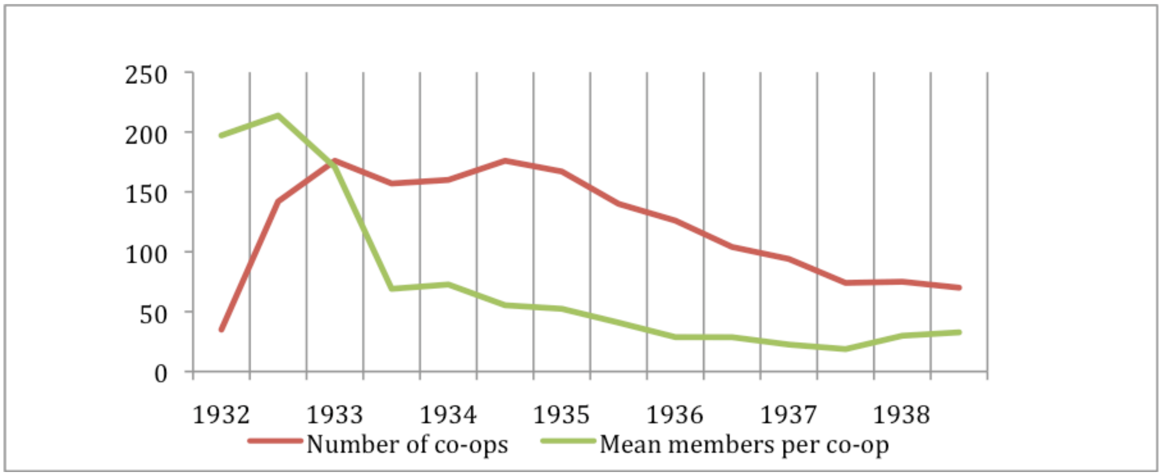


The above chart from Kerr and Harris' research also shows that the initial explosion in membership was followed by rapid growth in the number of units, which peaked at 176 groups (June 1933). The dramatic drop in membership strongly suggests that the second peak in number of units (December 1934) was more related to

[29] Kerr and Harris, *Self-Help Cooperatives*, 7.

unhealthy division of existing groups than healthy growth of the movement as a whole. This will be discussed in more detail below.

1934 also saw a sharp drop in average (mean) members per co-op. The average size bottomed out at 19 members per co-op in late 1937, only one-tenth that of five years earlier while the movement was making its rapid ascent.



The drop in membership rates was mitigated by a change in what the co-ops offered to members: While the co-ops initially served simply as vehicles for barter and salvage, late 1933 saw the arrival of co-ops that were oriented toward production of goods like mattresses, bread and vegetables; so in a sense the early counts were of consumers while the later counts were increasingly of workers, and any business needs fewer employees than customers to succeed. The production co-ops were often supported by government grants from state and federal relief agencies that saw the co-ops as an indirect alternative to the dole.

Kerr and Harris described two periods of the self-help movement – corresponding to non-grant "barter units" and grant-based "production units" – placing the transition between the two in early 1935. But the transition was not a matter of one form being replaced by another, as the grant-oriented production co-ops themselves peaked at 86 (just over half of the total of 176) in late 1934, even before the so-called production period began. Rather, the shift to production was part of an overall decline from the peak of 1932-4.[30]

The movement's rapid rise and fall presented a challenge for the creation and maintenance of any federation. Throughout their history, these co-ops struggled to work together – for example, pooling buying power to purchase a rail car full of goods, or for warehousing and maintenance of vehicles. The co-ops did form federations, but were ultimately unable to create stable structures.

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[30] Kerr and Harris, *Self-Help Cooperatives,* 7.

Attempts at federation were often based on each exchange's different set of resources; members could benefit from inter-exchange trade. For example, dozens of exchanges in the Los Angeles area began to specialize: Redondo Beach traded fish, while Hollywood traded entertainment and marketing materials. Mutual interest led these co-ops to federate beginning in early 1933 with the Unemployed Cooperative Relief Association (UCRA), which initially represented all of the co-ops in Los Angeles County.

Unfortunately, economic pressures and organizational shortcomings prevented the UCRA and its successors from taking root. Constantly shifting alliances ultimately failed to provide a lasting structure around which the nascent movement could grow.

The UCRA made some inroads to the north – most notably in San Francisco – but these were more political than economic operations and were plagued by infighting and conflict originating in the south. These southern-styled exports did not last long.[31]

The UCRA soon faced competition from the Area Conference of Cooperatives, which was organized by the Los Angeles County Bureau of Welfare. By September of 1933, the two bodies merged and absorbed two smaller federations and some independent units, becoming the Unemployed Cooperative Distribution Council (UCDC); soon thereafter it was renamed the Unemployed Cooperative Distribution Association (UCDA).

These frequent changes were attended by a 64% drop in overall member participation during the second half of 1933, a period marked by great turbulence. By May of 1934, the UCDC was in rapid decline as grants ran out and relief policies changed with the new SERA administrator; nearly 40 co-ops left within three months to form a new group, the California Cooperative Units (CCU).[32]

Once the UCDC became the UCDA it effectively compelled local co-ops to join and surrender control over their resources. Taylor and Kerr (1934) noted that:

> The present leadership of the UCDA established complete and open control in March 1934, when it elected its entire slate to the executive board of five. This board, according to a new constitution, virtually owns all the property and controls the destiny of the cooperative movement in Los Angeles County. This marks the culmination of a steady trend away from the extreme democracy of the early UCRA, toward extreme centralization.[33]

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[31] SERA, *Prospectus*, A8.

[32] SERA, *Prospectus,* A7-9.

[33] Taylor and Kerr, *Self-Help Cooperatives*

SERA confirmed that "almost complete power was vested in an executive council of five men, partly as a result of reaction to the democracy of the earlier period and partly because the political relief activities demanded a 'boss.'"[34]

In contrast, the constitution and by-laws of CCU show an attempt to restore some semblance of federated democracy: Los Angeles County was divided into seven districts. Each unit would select a delegate, which would in turn vote for a district representative to the CCU executive board. These representatives served indefinitely but were subject to recall.[35]

By 1936, SERA identified five major federations in the south: In addition to the UDCA, CCU had 48 member co-ops for which it maintained rolling stock and provided a small amount of warehousing. Just to the southeast, an ironically named pair, United Cooperative Exchange of Orange County and United Cooperatives of Orange County, divided 20 cooperatives after less than a year as a single countywide federation; SERA noted that the split "served rather poorly to coordinate interunit exchange." Meanwhile, the Inter-Counties Cooperative Exchange provided trucking for 58 co-ops; it is not clear if this group's membership overlapped with the others' but the overall number of co-ops at the time strongly suggests that it did.[36]

Despite the lack of regional stability, the co-ops attempted to organize statewide. The California Cooperative Council was organized by southern cooperators in early 1935, and was recognized by the Cooperative League of the U.S.A. But this council never really caught on statewide. SERA reported that a northern division was established "by the same people and for the same purposes" but did not progress beyond "issuing advice and distributing literature."[37]

The northern co-ops were wary of the top-down methods of the southern co-ops, some of which were viewed as little more than rackets. One illustration of the northern view of the south can be found in Upton Sinclair's 1936 novel *Co-op,* which took place in a fictionalized city whose co-op experience was based on that of the north and depicted another city's cooperatives - presumably in the south – as being run by a trio of crooks.[38]

Surprisingly, this period of struggle among the federations was accompanied by a rise in the total number of co-ops. These increases occurred even as overall membership declined. The co-ops themselves were dividing for some reason other

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[34] SERA, *Prospectus,* A7.

[35] SERA, *Prospectus,* A58-64.

[36] SERA, *Prospectus*, A-8 and annual report 21-25.

[37] SERA, *Research Project*, 50.

[38] Upton Sinclair, *Co-op: A Novel of Living Together,* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936).

than outgrowing their systems and facilities – perhaps in direct response to turbulence at the federation level.

The tumultuous history of the self-help federations should serve as a warning to modern time bankers: The self-help co-ops failed to develop a clear and legitimate governance structure, so that they could clearly define themselves and set standards for how major decisions were made.

We cannot now tell whether stable decision-making structures would have led to stable federation, as there ultimately may have been irreconcilable differences. Further research is needed to determine whether a clear and legitimate governance structure could have prevented the exodus of members. But the correspondence between 1934's organizational turmoil and the collapse in participation suggests that the lack of stable structures contributed to the downfall of the self-help co-ops.

However, it does not appear that the co-ops simply became so dysfunctional that people turned away. Kerr and Harris (1939) reported that a survey taken in early 1935 reported that 80 percent of people who were familiar with the co-ops had a positive opinion of them. And SERA surveys of cooperators from that same period indicate that perceived problems had more to do with availability of work.[39]

But while dysfunctional governance may not have been a direct and conscious cause of departure for most outgoing members, an effective system of governance could have provided better value for members and thereby kept them engaged for longer.

SERA saw a clear need for better governance. In addition to drafting model by-laws, the agency itself attempted to create federated structures. Its 1936 prospectus proposed a hybridized system of 100 producer co-ops and 130 consumer co-ops. These two classes of co-ops would have overlapping membership and would be linked together by warehouses. SERA apparently sought to assemble these co-ops – sometimes from scratch and sometimes by reconfiguring existing co-ops.

The SERA model used different standards for two classes of co-ops: Producer co-ops were organized regionally based on skills and job experience, while consumer co-ops were organized on the neighborhood level. An organizational chart in the prospectus depicts six producer co-ops (shoes, clothing, gardening, bakery, canning, etc.) linked with a similar number of neighborhood consumer co-ops. Each class was expected to provide twelve representatives to a coordinating assembly.[40]

There is no sign that SERA's warehouse plan ever launched, as the statistics discussed above indicate that the total number of co-ops at time of the plan's publication was just over 100 and trending downward.

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[39] SERA, 1935, 86-91.

[40] SERA, 1936, 25-28.

Ultimately, the movement was unable to establish a lasting system of federation at any level, and soon the self-help co-ops passed into history, with organizing energy shifting more toward a wave of consumer cooperatives. By the early 1940s there was no sign of self-help or of statewide unity, evidenced by the lack of any mention of self-help in *Co-oportunity,* a monthly publication of the Associated Co-operatives of Northern California.[41]

Ultimately, the challenges introduced at the beginning of the section prevented cooperatives in the north and south from unifying into a statewide movement. The north and south had generally different governance styles, which presented an important cultural difference in decision-making. And the southern exchanges' collective inability to get along with each other deterred northerners from wanting to get involved.

5: Conclusions and Recommendations

We now return to the present day and the questions of governance that hOurworld seeks to discuss with contemporary time bankers. Using data from my survey and elements of the self-help history, I provide two sets of recommendations and topics for further discussion:

Internal governance: Democratic or cooperative governance by no means guarantees success in dealing with challenges, but the self-help history shows that organizations lacking clear and robust decision-making processes are less likely to survive the process of discussing such challenges.

F*ederation*: the self-help movement's experience with unstable federations suggests that clear governance structures are needed not only within exchanges but among them. Time bankers have already begun discussion of creating larger systems, and I argue that a clear and democratic federation will provide better service than the nebulous networks that currently exist.

Internal governance

The most resilient self-help cooperative – the UXA – featured several bodies that were accountable to the members, and which had differing roles that were relatively well-defined. This structure appears to have avoided or addressed problems that came with an informal structure in which a founder may serve as manager as well as board chair, or even take on the board's entire governance role.

In contrast, a significant portion of modern time banks have loosely-defined structures. These have great diversity of form so generalizations are difficult, but few could be considered cooperative in the sense of having an elected board that appoints management.

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[41] Associated Co-operatives of Northern California, *Co-oportunity,* Vol. 1, No. 8 (November, 1940).

Of 16 survey respondents, none reported the existence of a democratically-elected board. Only 7 reported any clear board structure, usually either appointed by or self-selected from among the group's founders. Direct democracy is also used, with 2 newer time banks reporting that decisions were made at open meetings and 1 reported that founders make the decisions as a group as there are still no non-founding members.

Because organizational form alone does not provide information on governance practices like inclusive decision-making, I asked questions designed to indirectly gauge cooperative nature through a choice between efficiency and inclusion. These two terms were chosen in order to avoid the likely biases in interpreting "how democratic" as well as the probably unclear meaning surrounding "how cooperative" the group was. The intent was to identify whether the group achieved something like the inclusive participation of the UXA, or took the more efficient top-down approach common in southern California.

Survey answers were rather balanced along the spectrum of inclusion versus efficiency, with responses slightly inclined toward inclusion. It is worth noting that the oldest three groups included two that gave neutral answers and one strongly inclusive, indicating a negative correlation between efficiency and longevity.

Another question asked how controversial is this balance between efficiency and inclusion; the aggregate answers suggest that this is not a serious source of controversy.

The final question asked how well this balance was achieved, in order to monitor contentment with the current level of governance. Contentment appears generally adequate, although it should be noted that there is likely to be some bias due to the survey's being completed by coordinators, who are more likely than most participants to feel empowered.

Score:	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	*Average*
Balance efficiency (1) and inclusion (5):	2	2	7	1	4	*3.1875*
Degree of eff/incl Controversy:	6	4	4	2	0	*2.125*
How well eff/incl balance achieved:	0	3	6	5	2	*3.375*

These responses indicate that participants are reasonably pleased with the status quo. Of course, the sample size is small; more importantly it only includes time banks that have not (yet) faced a governance challenge that overwhelmed their systems. A survey of what went wrong with the many recently failed time banks initially identified by Lasker, Collom and Kyriacou (2011) would provide a different and useful perspective, and further research is needed in this area.

While cooperative governance in the form of an elected board that appoints and oversees management may ultimately be useful to the time banks, they generally are cooperative neither in practice nor identity. The most common answer to a survey question on overall structure was “not formally organized,” chosen by 7 respondents. Also, 6 are projects of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (including 1 church) and 3 are independent nonprofits.

Interestingly, the only group that identified as a co-op does not seem to be moving in the direction of an elected board, but might instead choose to legally organize as a limited liability company (LLC) when they reach the point of feeling that a legal structure is needed. LLCs do not require a board but can be structured to use direct democracy.

Therefore, it should not be assumed that time banks would embrace cooperative governance elements simply for the sake of being cooperative. Rather, hOurworld will need to provide a reasoned and factual case for cooperative structures and practices, of which this report is only the start.

Federated governance

If the time bank movement is to form lasting structures, it will need some form of higher-level governance, which both hOurworld and TBUSA are exploring. Collaboration between the groups is certainly helpful toward creation of the structure through which federated governance may be developed, but the conversation needs more structure than has existed to date.

First and foremost, it will be necessary to identify the primary reasons for forming an organization to link local exhanges. There is already interest in supporting software development, but other tasks could include public education, lobbying and creation of systems for trade among multiple local exchanges.

Whatever the purpose of federating, I suggest two separate but related elements that can serve as general structural goals to focus the discussion:

First, it will be important to institute some form of representative democracy in which delegates are empowered to speak (and sometimes act) on behalf of local exchanges. The number of exchanges suggests that the federation may need to involve subgroups oriented along some lines of affinity among exchanges – perhaps based on geography. This will be discussed more below.

Based on my observations in the TBUSA governance team conference calls there is wariness of increased “democracy.” Further research is needed to determine the various connotations of the term among time bankers, but it will be important to avoid equating democracy in general with direct democracy in which any participant in any exchange can individually participate in making all decisions.

Such a false dichotomy between direct democracy and no democracy will impede discussion of various intermediate options of representative or federated democracy.

There is reason for concern about direct democracy due to the large and growing size of the movement. Even without growth, a hypothetical time bank federation's representative assembly, in which each exchange has at least one delegate (and larger exchanges have several delegates), could potentially exceed a thousand persons.

For this reason, it makes sense to explore a federated structure with at least three levels: Local time banks would be members of one of several intermediate bodies, which in turn would constitute the national federation. A loose analogy may be seen in how the United States was structured: Rather than a huge federation of counties, the government was made up of states, which were in turn divided into counties.

The need for an intermediate level of federation calls for a decision about how that intermediate level would be defined. This brings us to the issue of affinity: That is, in what ways does a time bank identify its kin within the much larger group?

This affinity could be based on geographic proximity, but also on which software is used or the exchanges' style of internal governance (e.g. based on efficiency vs. inclusiveness). Affinity may also be determined along more ideological lines such as whether to allow for some types of work to be valued at different hourly rates.

Which basis of affinity is most appropriate for time banks? Survey respondents were most interested in either shared principles and values (chosen by 13 as important criteria) or potential for concrete collaboration (chosen by 11). Eight chose geography and 5 chose software as important bases of affinity.

Although geography was not the most common basis of affinity among respondents, it still provides an easy-to-visualize illustration of how a multi-level federation might work. And because "concrete collaboration" could be needed most along geographic lines (e.g. state regulations, planning regional conferences), it is worth exploring how a three-level federation might be structured geographically.

A survey of the network maps provided by TBUSA and hOurworld indicates that time bank organizing is currently concentrated in the Northeast and in California. However, some late-blooming regions might ultimately eclipse these current centers of activity. The possibility for further rapid growth adds to the urgency for creating a larger governance framework, including plans for periodically addressing the likely change in distribution of groups with something like legislative redistricting. This redistricting cannot be anticipated in detail, but it should be recognized as inevitable and included in planning efforts.

Plans should also be made for identifying the shared principles and values, as circumstances will inevitably arise to challenge participants' assumptions about the movement. For example, if a major religious denomination like the Southern Baptists suddenly discovered time banking, it could spark an explosion in the Deep South. Such a hypothetical scenario also points to the need for a clear method of decision-making, so that the resultant shift in the organization's values – as well as its geographic distribution – could be negotiated.

First Steps

I have so far recommended qualities of governance and structures likely to bring about such qualities, which have much in common with mainstream cooperatives. But how should two loosely-defined networks already in existence proceed in that direction? The answer to that question depends to a large degree on the purpose of federation. So an initial step is to learn more about what the local time banks hope to achieve, and what they would hope to get from a federated structure.

The hOurworld idea of a convention to launch some form of federation would be a useful opportunity to discuss goals and identify how time banks might adopt cooperative structures and practices. To make the most of such a gathering, the agenda should include education about the history of complementary currencies, with focus on governance and structural issues.

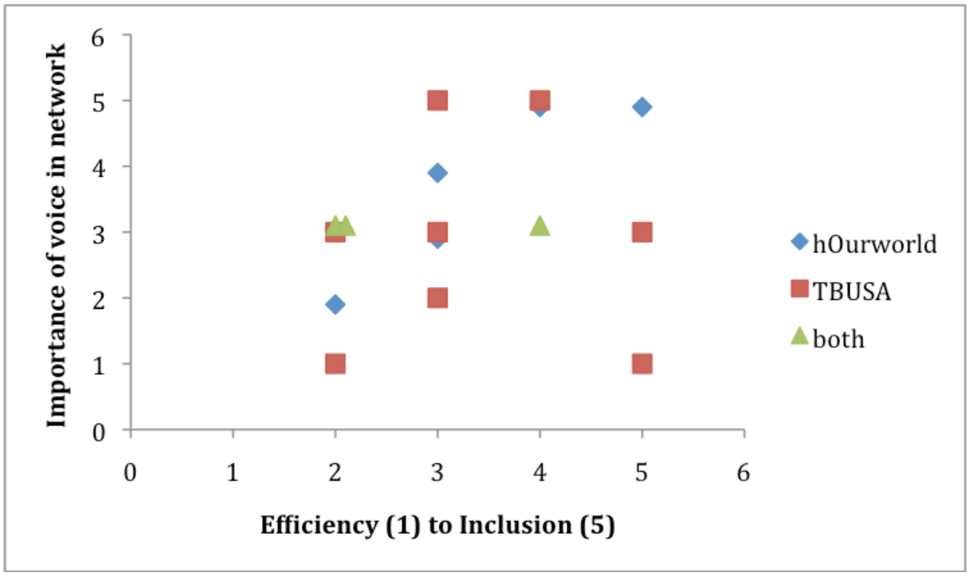
The self-help cooperatives are a useful and inspiring model, but they had significant shortcomings and should not be romanticized; ultimately they are an example of how *not* to create lasting structures. It will also be important to consider historical and modern examples of healthy democratic federations, in order to achieve some common understandings of what should be done.

Shared language will be essential. The very term "federation" is unfamiliar to many, and productive discussion of whether to create one will be dependent on agreement of what is being discussed. Likewise, "cooperative" must be defined clearly.

Even "democratic" carries different connotations, both positive and negative, which must be brought out into the open to ensure that all participants are having the same discussion. If one person is arguing for a clearly-defined representative democracy, while another is expressing fears of a chaotic democratic free-for-all, it is hard to imagine that they will ever reach agreement.

It is up to time bankers to decide how to structure a federation, assuming that they decide to create one. However, I hope that this paper's framing of democratic governance and cooperative federation will be of use, helping to identify various points along a spectrum between efficiency and inclusion, as well as different approaches to organizing. Once those points are identified, a more coherent debate about their relative merits will be possible.

One positive indication from my survey is that – unlike the stark north/south divisions of the 1930s self-help movement – there are not serious differences of approach and opinion between the time banks affiliated with hOurworld and those affiliated with TBUSA. The following chart shows that each network features a range of values surrounding both internal and external governance, and these ranges overlap significantly.



This is not to minimize the significant diversity of practices and ideals among these groups as a whole. TBUSA affiliates are more likely to value internal inclusion more than voice in a network. And the exchanges that have switched networks between TBUSA and hOurworld are more likely to identify with internal efficiency. But there is a good deal of similarity between the networks' aggregate overall interest in network participation, as well as the balance between efficiency and inclusion.

Ultimately, prospects for building a federation of time banks are good. And such a federation can operate along generally cooperative principles on the macro level while also providing a venue for dissemination of best practices on the micro level.

It is far from certain that the time banks can succeed where self-help failed. But the opening lines of communication between hOurworld and TBUSA, coupled with improved communication technologies that allow quick transfer of learning around governance (as well as management!) suggests that the current window of opportunity may yield robust governance structures to sustain the movement into the future.

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