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# TIMEBANKS AND INNOVATION IN THE UK

Sam Hopley, Helen Goulden, Julia Slay

## Introduction

Sam Hopley, Helen Goulden, and Julia Slay—all from the UK—led the “TimeBanks and Innovation in the UK” workshop, in which a free form discussion took place about the various issues facing TimeBanks in the UK and the United States. Mr. Hopley is the CEO of TimeBanking UK; Ms. Goulden is a director at the National Endowment for Science, Technology, and the Arts (NESTA), which helps provide government funding for TimeBanking; and Ms. Slay is the senior researcher at the new economics foundation (nef), a think tank that provides valuable research on economics that care for both people and the planet. The workshop participants were from TimeBanks from across the United States, and their interests ranged from wanting to see how TimeBanks could engage more with local businesses, to using TimeBanking in public health, to discovering ways to obtain more members and funding.

## New Economics Foundation

Ms. Slay, from nef, began by providing an overview of what was happening politically in the UK. She said there had been a general election after seven years of liberal rule that brought in a coalition government. There is now a general consensus in the UK, she said, that there will be cuts to government services. The conservatives, she explained, have a political narrative called “The Big Society” where responsibility, ownership, and control in areas traditionally held by the government, are transferred to people and communities. This includes shifting resources for public services away from the national government. TimeBanking, actually fits neatly into this model, she said, because it is seen as a way for communities to take more ownership. Mr. Hopley, from TimeBanking UK, also agreed that the current, more right-wing government is interested in the TimeBanks model.

## NESTA

Ms. Goulden, from NESTA, outlined other factors that make TimeBanking appealing in the UK. She said the country was looking at an aging population, where there are not enough people making their own food, energy, etc., and where traditional public services have not been working. She mentioned that a study had been done that looked at one family and all the government interventions they had, as well as the costs of those interventions, over approximately a 20 year period. At the end of the study, she said, despite great efforts and costs trying to help them, the family was no better off than when they started. TimeBanking, she said, offers an alternative to these non-effective traditional approaches.

## Participants

Kim Hodge  
Lacey Sinn  
Lorrie Hurckes  
Shawn Kimmel  
Alison Underhill  
Christine Gray  
Kathleen Samways  
Megan E. Reynolds



## **TimeBanks in the US and the UK**

Ms. Slay said the government is looking for one simple solution and not for various solutions. Christine Gray, a participant and CEO of TimeBanks USA, explained how in the United States they had the debate as to whether all TimeBanks should look and feel the same or whether they should be allowed to develop organically based on the wants and needs of different communities. She said they chose the latter model. They chose to “let 1000 flowers bloom.” However, she acknowledged that there were benefits and downsides to both approaches. One of the downsides of the “1000 flowers” approach, she said, is that it is difficult to tell a collective story that embodies all of TimeBanks. Therefore, it becomes more important to collect the 1000 different stories. The UK group also acknowledged the value of collecting these stories, as they have been using the same examples of success over and over. There was a general consensus among the participants that both countries could learn from each other’s stories, and that the stories may even be helpful in funding requests because they show the possibilities of how TimeBanking can be successful.

Mr. Hopley liked the idea of the “1000 flowers blooming” because he believed that both large and small TimeBanks projects had merit and that one is not necessarily better than the other—they are just trying to serve different needs. In fact, he said, “it can be detrimental to perpetuate this myth of what TimeBanking will be,” because it could be very different for various individuals and groups. He indicated, however, that just because groups are using TimeBanking differently does not mean that they should be left to themselves—there are areas for improvement. For example, work can be done to help different TimeBanks find ways of helping each other. Participants from the U.S. agreed, and they said that new groups were often learning the same lessons that other groups had already figured out before them, and that sometimes different groups have complementary skills.

Mr. Hopley also agreed with Ms. Gray in that there is a downside to not having a collective story or goal. One downside in the UK is that groups that do not have the same grassroots foundation as TimeBanking come in and “use the right words” that help them obtain funding from the government. This can either divert funds from TimeBanking or it can create a top-down management approach that is not in line with what TimeBanking is about. Though he was not overly critical of receiving public sector funding, he acknowledged “if you receive public sector funding, then you end up providing public sector services.” “Unless you embrace co-production and people are actually in control of policies and budgets,” said Mr. Hopley, “then you won’t be as effective.” One U.S. participant said her TimeBanks had at least a partially independent budget by charging sliding scale dues of \$25-\$40, but that she would like to see fees of \$100. Mr. Hopley and others in the group thought it was interesting idea to think about as it could help provide independence from outside funding; though, he said, some groups find it blasphemous to charge traditional money in a system created to find an alternative to it.

## **Conclusions**

All and all, it was agreed that there are a lot of good ideas going around in TimeBanking and that there are energized people on the ground working on them. Ms. Gray said TimeBanking is inherently a system changer and that the people at the conference were an incubation unit. Now it is just up to everyone to continue creating and collecting stories.