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The Social *and* Cultural Capital of Community Currency An Ithaca HOURS Case Study Survey

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Abstract

In this article the authors report and analyze the data from an interview survey of 42 Ithaca HOURS community currency users. The theoretical context for the study is social capital, and the survey seeks to answer questions centering around the extent the interviewees participate in networks of reciprocity, trust and support. The survey results indicate that the respondents highly value their experiences buying and selling with HOURS, and that it does in fact function as a social capital resource for them. Nevertheless, on average, the respondents' use of HOURS was modest at best, with \$300 to \$350, exchanged in the 12 months prior to the survey. Since the exchange in HOURS is dwarfed by the mainstream economy's circulation of federal dollars, and since the respondents use of HOURS, on average, is only a very small part of their disposable income, the authors sought the significance of the HOURS economy in cultural and symbolic rather than material terms.

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INTRODUCTION

“Just knowing it’s there makes me feel good about living in Ithaca.” This was the way one of the 42 respondents in a University of Calgary survey of Ithaca HOURS users described her emotional attachment to the upstate New York city’s local currency. Although this respondent, at the time of the survey, was a marginal participant in the HOURS economy, her obvious affection for Ithaca HOURS suggests that, at least for her, HOURS function not only as social capital (Putnam 2000, Baron et. al. 2000, McLean, et. al. 2002), but also as a kind of “cultural capital,”¹ capital that carries with it the potential to elevate one’s perception of the quality of his or her community life.

In this report of a 2002 survey of Ithaca HOURS participants, the authors will focus on HOURS as sources of social capital — “the additional productive benefits to the society or economy as a whole that result from the synergy of a set of mutually trusting social relationships” (Sreter 2000). But beyond social capital, we will, within the limitations of the survey data, explore the possibility that local currency, particularly one like Ithaca HOURS that has deep roots within its community, can serve a role for endowing a community with a sense of cultural capital, parallel to civic institutions such as art galleries, museums, theater companies, and universities and colleges. In short, it will be our contention that for some members of the Ithaca community, specifically progressive, environmentally inclined activists as well as advocates of and participants in the local business community, Ithaca HOURS have become part of the local ambience, just as much a part of the community consciousness as the lakes, woods and waterfalls that define what it means to live in this upstate New York university town.

ITHACA AND THE RISE OF THE HOURS ECONOMY

Ithaca is a small city of 30,000 located in the picturesque Finger Lakes region of south-central upstate New York. It is the county seat and commercial center for Tompkins County, which counts on a total population of 100,000, with a mostly suburban populace residing primarily within a ten or fifteen minutes drive to downtown Ithaca. Ithaca is the home of Cornell University, a world-class research and teaching institution with 20,000 students. In addition, there is the private, liberal arts Ithaca College with a student body of 6500. A substantial proportion of the Cornell and Ithaca College students would not be year-around residents of Ithaca, likely leaving the Ithaca region with a population of approximately 110,000 to 115,000.

With twenty to twenty-five per cent of its population students, the Ithaca region fits comfortably into the category designation of service economy. The broad descriptor of service economy covers a wide range of occupations, from relatively high paid researchers and teachers to minimum wage retail and food industry workers. Historically, Ithaca, as part of the northeast U.S. industrial heartland, had middle-income, union-scale manufacturing employment as part of its occupational profile. But most of those jobs have dis-

appeared, migrating as low-wage labor to the U.S. south and southwest, and onto Mexico and China. Consequently, what one sees today in Ithaca is a polarization or bifurcation of the labor market, with minimum-wage service workers on one end of the income divide and affluent professional and technical workers on the other. (For a recent overview of Ithaca's regional economy, though from an optimistic business perspective, see Pendall et. al. 2004.)

The Ithaca region's income disparity, coupled with the intellectual culture that defines a university and college town, creates a mix of political and academic variables calculated to foment the kind of thinking, and subsequent action, that takes radical exception to the status quo. In the person of Paul Glover, long-time Ithaca grassroots activist, who himself lives on the under side of the region's economic divide, the elements of intellectual imagination and unqualified need came to together to produce the Ithaca HOURS community currency, arguably the most successful the local currency experiments of the past two decades.

At the height of its popularity in the mid-1990s close to 2,000 Ithaca area residents were buying and selling goods and services with HOURS. In addition, more than 300 local businesses accepted HOURS for at least partial payment for their offerings. But now, 13 years after startup, what is the status of the HOURS revolution? To what extent do HOURS constitute a form of social capital for Ithaca area residents in terms of connecting them to each other in networks of mutual support? And to what degree do they provide their users with increased purchasing power that they would not otherwise have? In order to address these questions, the authors conducted a survey of Ithaca HOUR users in the spring of 2002.

STUDY METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE PROFILE

The remainder of this report summarizes the experiences of 42 listers in the Ithaca HOUR Town Annual Directory. A research arrived in Ithaca on April 23rd 2002 and interviewed HOURS participants through May 1st. The research team asked Board of Directors President Steve Burke and administrative assistant Laurie Konwinski to go through the HOUR Town Annual Directory and highlight to the best of their knowledge "active users." Through this process, approximately 120 potential interview subjects from 800 listers were identified. On the morning of April 24th the research team began phoning the identified listers to request interviews. The interviews covered 172 items and required a minimum commitment of 45 minutes, though a substantial number of the interviews took considerably longer as respondents elaborated on their experiences with HOURS. Though the data from the research are extensive, this report will focus on those variables that relate to the characteristics of the sample and their experiences with HOURS, particularly as they reflect aspects of social capital.

Overall, the research team found the potential interviewees cooperative—there was only one flat refusal for an interview. Naturally, there were difficulties harmonizing schedules, and there were the inevitable wrong numbers. A surprising number of listers returned calls, after hearing voice messages left by the researchers. After all the phoning and contacting, 42 HOURS listers completed interviews.

Though the process of selection does not meet the criteria of a scientific, random sample, the research team is unaware of any bias resulting from the contacting process itself. The members of the team called as many potential respondents as possible and

conducted as many interviews as time allowed during the window of opportunity available to them.

One check on the representativeness of the sample is the wide distribution of behaviors and sentiments across the sample. As will become evident in the presentation and discussion of the data that follow, there are few variables that did not reflect considerable variation. Overall, there is a fairly broad distribution of indicators and behaviors across the potential ranges of responses. That is, there are respondents who report transactions in the thousands of dollars over the past year, with a corresponding number with little or no dealings in HOURS. The same goes for personal characteristics: some respondents regularly participate in social and political protests, while others evidence little interest in making a political statement. In summary then, while the researchers do not claim the sample is in any way a strictly, scientifically representative one, the selection and interview processes, along with the distribution of responses, suggest that data collected mirror in a rough, imperfect way the overall experience of both active participants and those committed to the ideals of Ithaca HOURS as a local currency.

There is, however, a caveat that needs to be offered to temper the suggestion that the sample as drawn might be roughly representative of HOURS participants. Approximately one in five of the respondents has a business that does more than 30 transactions in HOURS in a month. Some of these are storefront operations that do hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of business in a year. Consequently, there are a small number of respondents (in the neighborhood of 15 per cent — see Figure II below) who turnover more than \$2000 worth of HOURS in a year. This kind of concentration in volume participation in HOURS almost certainly would not show up in a truly random sample. Nevertheless, since the character of HOURS in Ithaca depends on businesses who willingly accept local currency (though most often as a percentage of the purchase price), the over representation of these businesses in the study has the advantage of reflecting the larger dynamics of local currency in Ithaca, as opposed to what one would likely see in a strictly scientific sample.

What does a typical HOURS user look like? Following from the April/May 2002 survey of 42 HOURS participants, the “average” user is early middle-aged, well-educated with a modest income, who is also married with two children. Our “average HOURS person” has a preference for green politics and is no stranger to political and environmental activism. Selected details follow.

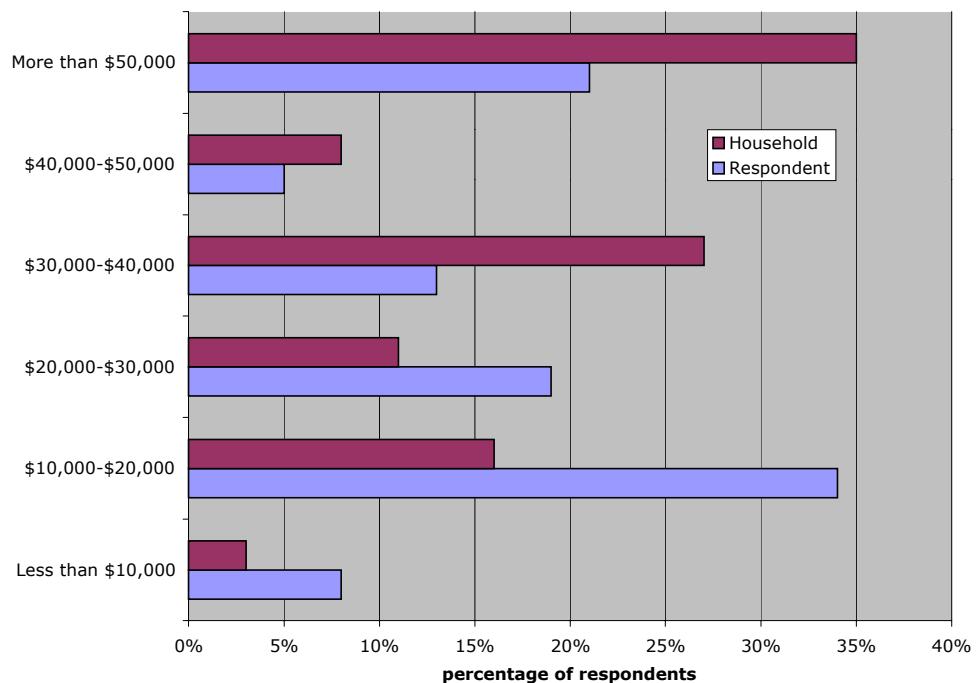
The median age for survey respondents was 40, with range in age of respondents from 22 to 72. Twenty-six of the interviewees were males (61.9 per cent). Most (61.9 per cent) of respondents were either married or living with a partner. One respondent was widowed, and the rest (35.7 per cent) were single. Just over half (52.4 per cent) do or have had school-aged children.

Occupations included an eclectic range that definitely tended toward the self-employed rather than the salaried. While the occupational categories we collected did not specifically ask respondents whether they were self-employed, the job descriptions they supplied indicated that two-thirds of them were non-salaried businesses owners, consultants and professional and non-professional service providers. (Since the sample was small and drawn with an understanding of anonymity, the research team is reluctant to specifically identify occupations, since individuals could be easily identified.)

As one might suspect for a sample drawn from a university and college town like Ithaca, the respondents have relatively high levels of education. The great majority of respondents (85.4 per cent) and their spouses/partners (85.7 per cent) have had some college and university experience, with approximately half (46.3 per cent for respondents and 50 per cent for spouses/partners) having a college/university degree. Then another 31.7 per cent of the respondents, with 28.5 per cent of their spouses/partners, have some graduate school or a graduate degree.

A natural question to ask at this point is whether these high educational levels, with a significant number of graduate degrees, translate into relatively high incomes. Figure I below summarizes the reported incomes of respondents and their households.

Figure I: Respondent & Household Income



Focusing on the blue (respondent income) bars of Figure I, there is evidence of modest income levels: 42.1 per cent of respondents report earning \$20,000 or less during the past year, and 60.5 per cent earn \$30,000 or less a year. Still, there is some definite affluence in the sample: just over one in five (21.1 per cent) reports income of more than \$50,000 a year. Then affluence becomes more prominent when we turn our attention to household income. More than one of three (35 per cent) of respondents live in households with incomes over \$50,000 — \$53,041 being the median household income in Tompkins county (DuPuis 2004). Only 5 per cent of the respondents, however, report household incomes over \$100,000.

There appears, then, a kind of bi- or even trifurcation in the sample's reported income levels. Approximately one-third (29.7 per cent) have household income levels under \$30,000, with another third (35.1 per cent) at household income between \$30,000 and \$50,000, and the remaining 35 per cent over \$50,000. Perhaps this kind of distribution can be expected in a sample that includes the owners/operators of successful business

alongside one-person businesses who are struggling to attract HOURS to their inventive but not always compelling services and products.

Given the more than one third (35.1 per cent) of respondents with household incomes above \$50,000, one might well wonder to what extent HOURS serve as social capital for them, at least in terms of networks that raise income. Perhaps HOURS for them serve just as much or more a cultural or symbolic function than a strictly monetary one. For the more affluent lister, HOURS may be more an ideology than a way of significantly improving one's material standard of living. For example, in a recent column in the Cornell daily newspaper, a spokesperson for a local business presented a brief to the effect that Ithaca owned and operated enterprises, compared to the "Wal-Mart's" of this world, both keep dollars circulating in the community and support local initiatives and charitable projects. As part of the evidence the writer simply drew attention to: "Our use of Ithaca HOURS [is]a program through which capital remains entirely within the community" (List 2004). It is hard to imagine that this rather substantial business actually needs HOURS in order to prosper financially; rather, it would appear that HOURS play a very important symbolic role in terms of legitimizing the ideology of community economics, on which the business does depend for its financial life and well-being.

In terms of the sample characteristics, one final note is in order. In the choice of a political party to support, or not to support, the sample does seem to mirror iconoclastic politics. One in three of the respondents does not identify with a political party — perhaps a sign of disillusionment as much as an independent state of mind. Yet the politicized nature of the rest of the sample becomes evident with its breakdown of party preference: just over seventy per cent are Green Party supporters, with only one Republican, and 25 per cent Democrats. For the city as a whole, sixty per cent voted democratic in the recent mayoral election (Bishop 2003b), thus giving credence to the assertion that HOURS supporters, even in progressive Ithaca, constitute a counter-stream disposition bumping up against the flow of the mainstream way of doing things.

INVOLVEMENT PATTERNS: EARNING, SPENDING AND PARTICIPATION INDICATORS

The survey respondents reported, on average,² eight years of involvement with Ithaca HOURS, a good share of Ithaca HOURS' 11 year-old institutional history at the time of the survey. The respondents, then, were veteran HOURS users, with just over one-fourth (26.2 per cent) having three or less years of reported experience with HOURS.

What, though, is the nature of the respondents' buying and selling with HOURS? Over half (54.8 per cent) say that their use of HOURS is part of their primary source of income. This figure would indicate, then, that the sample is representative of the business side of HOURS use, rather than the more casual private selling of goods and services, which is the way approximately one in three (35.7 per cent) respondents characterize their participation.

Probing more directly the business profile of the respondents, two thirds (68.3 per cent) say that their participation with Ithaca HOURS is as a business, whether that involvement comes as a full-time or part-time business. More specifically, the respondents characterized their business relationship to Ithaca HOURS in the following way: full-time store-owner operator (26.2 per cent), full-time service provider (11.9 per cent), part-time service provider (21.4 per cent), full-time home-based business (19 per cent), part-time

home-based business (21.4 per cent), and then the private selling of goods and services, as mentioned above (35.7 per cent). (The percentages here do not necessary add up to 100 per cent, since a respondent could choose more than one category of involvement, e.g., a service provider, as a masseuse, working in a home-based business.)

The study's respondents, then, tend to have their involvement with Ithaca HOURS structured around their business, which tends as well to be their primary sources of income. A natural, next question becomes just how much income they realize from their HOURS' participation. The respondents were asked to estimate the value of HOURS in dollars they both earned and spent over the past year, and their responses are summarized below in Figure II.

Figure II: Estimate of Hours Earned and Spent, in Dollars

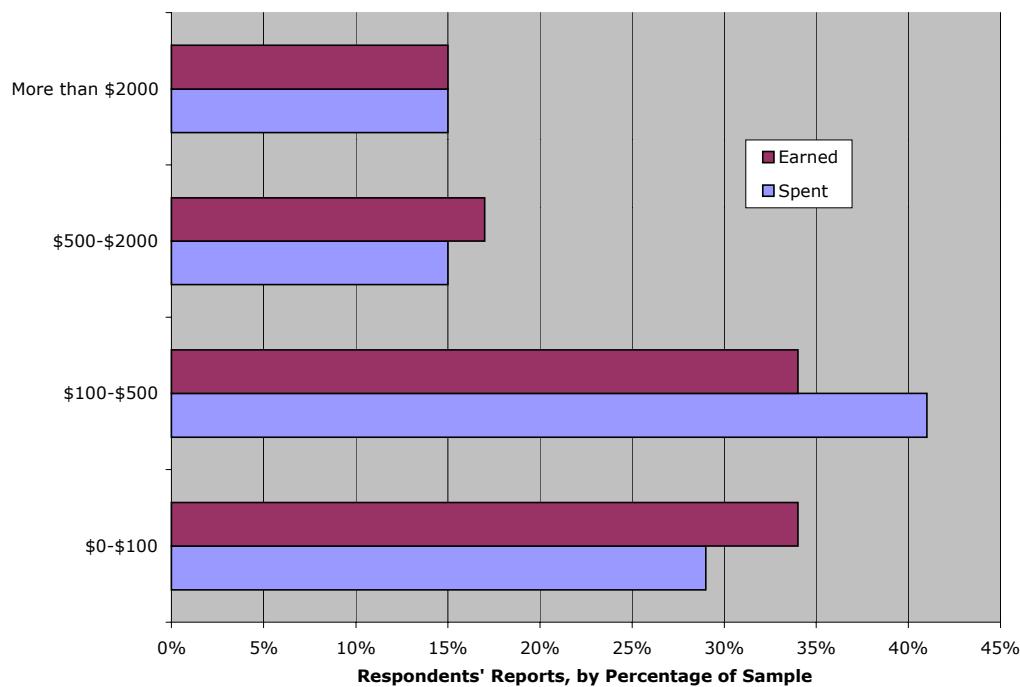


Figure II's data translate into an average of \$350 spent and \$300 earned on the part of the survey respondents. These relatively modest figures are quickly confirmed by the graphical presentation of the data: Seven (70.7 per cent) out of 10 of the respondents spent \$500 or less in HOURS in the past year, and almost the same number (68.3 per cent) earned \$500 or less. There are respondents, however, who do earn and spend substantial HOURS over the course of a year. Fifteen (14.6) per cent of respondents earned and spent more than \$2000 worth of HOURS in the past year. These respondents are prominent businesses in the community, which are consistent HOUR supporters. The remarkable aspect of their participation is not so much in the dollar amount of HOURS earned (one would expect this kind of volume from a recognized business), but their ability to spend the HOURS and keep them in circulation — whether it is in partial staff compensation, contracting for work completed, or buying goods and services from other individuals and businesses. On the one hand, it is interesting to note that in the lowest spending and income category (zero to \$100), there is a greater percentage of the sample reporting earnings than spending (34.1 to 29.3 per cent). While the data do not unambiguously lend

themselves to an interpretation, this gap might well be the result of respondents acquiring HOURS through sign-up or renewal, but then not being sufficiently persistent or inventive in finding ways to spend their HOURS. All of which leads to the conclusion that the dynamics of local currency revolve around the spending of HOURS as much or more than earning them. And it stands to reason that the spending of HOURS is not an easy task for a business, given that HOURS are not universally liquid as are federal dollars. Consequently, businesses' ability to find outlets for spending HOURS is a sign of their dedication to the principles of local currency.

It is one thing to earn and spend HOURS, but there is also the question of just how many HOURS one might have in her possession at any particular time. Consequently, the interview schedule called for asking the respondent how many HOURS she had in her possession at the time of the interview. Respondents answered that they had an average of three HOURS or \$30. The great majority (75.6 per cent) had \$100 or less, and slightly less than ten percent (9.8 per cent) had \$350 dollars or more, indicating that by and large HOURS are in circulation rather than being hoarded. Nevertheless, two respondents had \$1500 and \$7000 worth of HOURS in dollars on hand, indicating that liquidity of HOURS in the sense of finding outlets for their use remains a persistent concern.

With HOURS circulating through Ithaca on this scale, one is led to wonder how many transactions an HOUR user might be involved in, for example, over a month. Half (50 per cent) of the sample estimated 4 or less transactions in a typical month, with an even 15 per cent reporting zero transactions. Just over one in four (27.5 per cent) reported doing more than 15 in a month, with 22.5 per cent saying they complete 30 or more transactions a month. This latter figure likely represents the storefront business who accept HOURS.

There is one additional indicator of local currency activity that is not strictly transactional or economic, and that is the participation in HOURS social events. And on this measure, the respondents are much less active than they are the economic front. One out of four (24.4 per cent) says she attends an HOURS event once year (one wonders whether this typically might be the annual meeting). But then more than half (53.7 per cent) report that they come to events less than once a year. These low participation rates, though, may more reflective of the absence of regularly scheduled social events than they are of disinterest on the part of survey respondents. Ithaca HOURS does not hold monthly potluck events, as is the practice with many other, and generally less well-established, local currency communities.

Given this low-level of social-event participation, whether due to choice or absence of opportunity, one wonders what kind of emotional and social meaning Ithaca HOURS holds for its users. Does our opening quotation ("Just knowing it's [HOURS] there makes me feel good about living in Ithaca.") in any way resonate for the survey respondents without the kind of sociability that comes from association at events like community currency potlucks? This is an avenue of investigation that we will explore in the following section.

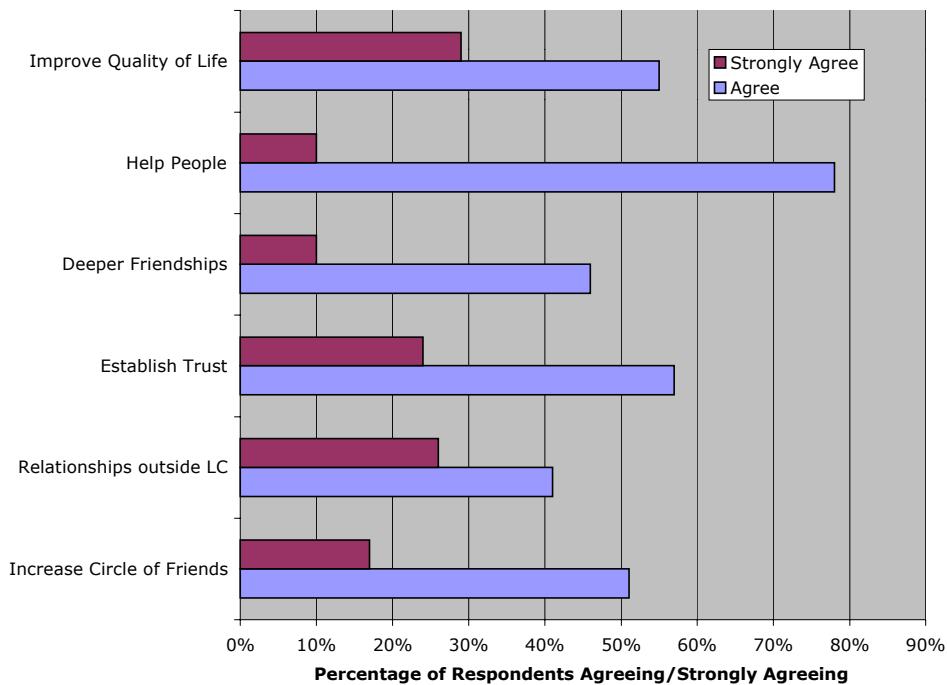
ITHACA HOURS: PERSONAL EVALUATIONS OF A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

The research team asked the respondents a series of 12 questions (seven of which are drawn from Williams et. al.'s [2001] survey of British LETS participants) intended to

elicit their personal evaluations of their local currency experiences. The questions broke down into two general categories: (1) the nature of relationships experienced through HOURS and (2) the instrumental or strategic advantages to participation in HOURS. The summary of the responses to these questions are found below in Figures III and IV.

Overall, Figure III indicates that the survey respondents have strong, positive feelings about the influence of local currency participation on the quality of their relationships. Fifty-five percent of the respondents agree that HOURS improves the quality of their lives and another 29 per cent strongly agree. These high percentages would appear to confirm that our opening quotation, to the effect that Ithaca HOURS can contribute significantly to the subjective evaluation of the community experience, is far from unrepresentative of the survey's sample.

Figure III: Relationship Evaluations



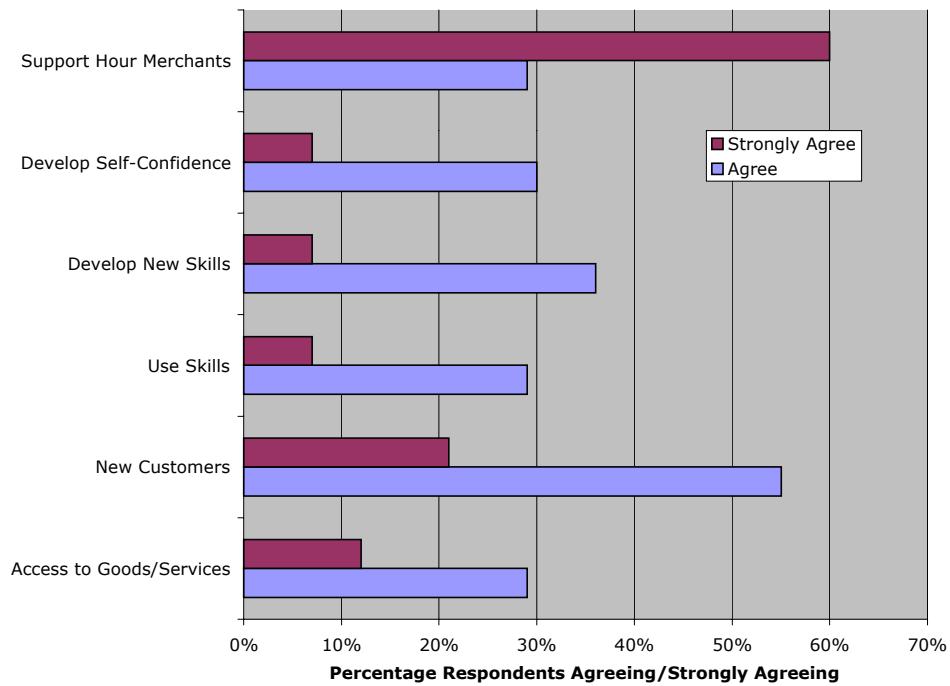
Interestingly, in Figure III, the highest overall agreement is to the statement that HOURS allows one "to help people." Seventy-eight per cent of the respondents agreed, with the relatively smaller number of 10 per cent strongly agreeing with the statement. Perhaps it is this perceived ability to help others that is one of the major contributors to the feeling that Ithaca HOURS increases one's quality of life.

Deeper friendships and increasing the circle of one's friends are two additional relationship dimensions on which the respondents also have strong feelings, though not quite to the same degree as their agreement with the first two statements. Just 10 per cent strongly agreed that HOURS exchanges and participation brought them deeper friendships, but just under half (46.3 per cent) of the respondents did agree with the statement on deeper friendships. The respondents, however, are even more confident that local currency can and does increase their circles of friends, with over two-thirds of them either agreeing (51.2 per cent) or strongly agreeing (17.1 per cent) with the statement.

While many, if not most, of the relationships reflected in the above statements likely have evolved into non-instrumental dimensions, it is nevertheless assumed that the initial, if not primary, purpose of HOURS transactions is to provide an exchange advantage for the participants. The question then arises as to whether these transactional relationships set the stage for future exchanges, in which the parties might well have a deepened confidence in their efficacy, whether inside or outside the HOURS boundaries. In terms of establishing productive relationships outside of HOURS transactions, 40.5 per cent agreed that their local currency experience put these relationships in place, and another 26.2 per cent strongly agreed. Then, on the issue of developing trust for future exchanges, just over four out of five (80.9) respondents agree (57.1 per cent) or strongly agree (23.8 per cent) that HOUR transactions lend themselves to establishing this trust.

The above six dimensions of relationships underline the community building aspect of local currency in general, and Ithaca HOURS in particular. While there are undoubtedly many long-lasting and strong friendships that began as straightforward HOURS exchanges, many if not most of the initial relationships likely originated on an instrumental premise, and most HOURS relationships, however rooted in friendship, are still presumably based on an underlying instrumental dimension: how the transactions add to one's economic quality of life. A number of these instrumental dimensions of HOURS are summarized below in Figure IV, based on the respondents' degree of agreement with six statements that tap the transactional advantages of local currency participation.

Figure IV: Evaluations: Instrumental Dimensions



The respondents were asked whether HOURS gave them access to goods and services that they would not otherwise have. The response was positive, but not overwhelmingly so. Just 12 per cent strongly agreed with the statement, while 29 per cent were in agreement. Less than half (41 per cent) the sample, then, see HOURS as allowing them to make purchases that they otherwise would not be able to afford. Still, 41 per cent

is a significant minority. It shows the underlying economic energy that is central to HOURS, while at the same time reemphasizing the social, as well as the symbolic and ideological attractions to HOURS that may well motivate a good share of the 59 per cent who do not see HOURS providing goods and services that they would not otherwise have.

While acquiring purchasing power that one would not otherwise have may not be a pervasive attraction of HOURS, the survey respondents nevertheless see tangible benefits in their local currency participation. One of these potential benefits is bringing new customers or clients for the goods and services they offer. Over half (55.3 per cent) of the study respondents agreed the HOURS did bring new customers through their doors, and another one in five (21.1 per cent) strongly agreed with the statement.

When one considers the benefits of local currency involvement, it is only reflexive to focus on the relational and economic aspects of participation. There is, however, a personal dimension that is not always considered. The first aspect of this personal dimension is the skill development that local currency encourages. A significant minority of respondents (35.7 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that participation allowed them to use skills they would not otherwise have employed, and another 42.8 per cent either agreed or strongly agreed that working with HOURS encouraged them to develop new skills.

While skill development and access to goods, services and customers, as graphically illustrated above in Figure IV, have a definite transactional value, one wonders about the effect of all this at the individual or personal level. Consequently, the interview schedule included a statement on whether HOURS participation had led to an increase in the respondents' self-confidence. While the majority of respondents were not in agreement with the statement (they presumably developed their self-confidence prior to or independently from local currency involvement), a definite minority (37.8 per cent) of interviewees agreed with the self-confidence statement, with 8.1 per cent expressing strong agreement and 29.7 per cent agreeing.

Moving back towards the instrumental or transactional from the personal, the survey's description of its respondents' local currency participation ends with the degree of agreement with the following statement: "I consciously try to shop or purchase services at stores or practitioners who accept local currency." Close to nine out of ten (89.1 per cent) of the respondents agreed with this statement, with 59.5 per cent strongly agreeing and 28.6 per cent agreeing. These figures certainly indicate the loyalty of the respondents to both the principles of local currency and to the particular merchants and service providers who honor those principles by accepting HOURS. If the interviewees in practice only partially follow through on the commitment expressed here, there would still be a significant economic benefit for the Ithaca goods and service providers who participate in the HOURS economy.

Overall, then, in concluding this section on how the survey respondents evaluate their experience with their local currency, we are able to see a multidimensional reaction to HOURS. Unlike federal dollars, HOURS carry multiple meanings. They are certainly legal tender. And while 41 per cent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that HOURS gave them access to goods and services that they would not otherwise be able to purchase, substantially larger percentages of respondents saw HOURS in more relational than in directly instrumental terms. More than 50 per cent of the respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) with statements connecting HOURS to

deeper friendships and increasing the circle of one's friendships, as well as the ability to help others. Then, while less than 50 per cent, there were still significant percentages of respondents who saw HOURS as raising their self-confidence and allowing them to use skills and develop new ones. In addition, there were as well definite majorities who saw HOURS increasing their social capital in terms of establishing relationships of trust and extending these relationships outside of local currency transactions. Finally, in response to the statement as to whether HOURS has led to an improvement in their quality of life, the respondents were quite clear: just over eight in ten (84 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed. HOURS, consequently, appear to serve not only as financial capital, but as social, symbolic, personal and cultural capital. The statement from one of our respondents, with which we introduced this report, to the effect that "Just knowing it's there makes me feel good about living in Ithaca," appears, consequently, to be far from an idiosyncratic sentiment among those who use local currency, and subscribe to its principles.³

CONCLUSION

The data from the survey of HOUR respondents seem to support rather definitely the conclusion that Ithaca's local currency has attracted a loyal following of users who highly value their experience of exchanging the "In Ithaca We Trust" notes for a wide range of goods and services. The data, however, leave unanswered a series of critical questions on the role of HOURS in the larger Ithaca community. For example, how representative are HOURS users of the residents of Ithaca and its suburbs? Are HOURS accepted as legal tender throughout Ithaca? Are HOURS expanding in terms of their acceptance and influence in the Ithaca region?

Answers to these questions begin by recognizing that the HOUR Town Annual Directory contains approximately 800 listers, who collectively account for close to 1000 listings. At 800, the HOURS listers or members constitute just 8 of each 1000 of the 100,000 people who live in Tompkins County, essentially the extended Ithaca region. Perhaps, though, trying to locate HOURS within a county-wide context unfairly dilutes their influence. On a day-to-day basis, the scale of HOURS activity is restricted to a much more confined geography.

Three contiguous mixed business and residential areas, running in a reverse "L" direction from the edge of the Cornell campus in the north then south to downtown Ithaca before turning west to the GreenStar Cooperative Market (a primary retail supporter of HOURS) and the city boundary, comprise a virtually "chain-store free zone" where most of the daily exchange of HOURS takes place. Since walking from Cornell to the GreenStar Coop takes about 45 minutes, these adjacent neighborhoods/business districts may not strictly qualify as a "pedestrian pocket," but they are easily accessible by bicycle. And along the broad contours of these linked districts are dozens of one-of-a-kind storefront businesses and roughly 10,000 people.

To gauge the purchasing power of HOURS through this corridor, one of the research team purchased \$200 worth of HOURS. The following is a brief report of his experience with HOURS over the course of a week.

While interviewing Ithaca HOURS users, I spent local currency for many of my daily expenses. I purchased \$200 of HOURS from local businesses upon arrival and spent it on food, clothing, gifts and entertainment. My local

currency expenses started early each day with coffee from Gimme Coffee, a local of coffee shop that accepts 100 per cent HOURS. Through the day I would eat meals at ABC Café, Viva Taqueria, Ithaca Bakery, or the deli at the Greenstar coop, all of whom accepted a percentage of payment in HOURS. At Maxie's Supper Club, where regionalism was celebrated, the owner explained that HOURS fit with his philosophy for the entire business: local vegetables, meat, wine, beer, and dairy. I bought music CDs at Smallworld Music, clothes at Trader K, and gifts at Conkies. At the Farmer's Market, a focal point for many of the interviews, I bought fresh, organic pesto with HOURS, as well as lunch, and even tipped the bluegrass band in local currency. My memento from the trip was also purchased with HOURS, a handmade teapot, from Frog Hill Pottery, one of the two pottery vendors at the Farmers Market.

Although the percentage of purchases I could pay for with HOURS was sometimes small, pride in the currency was high in Ithaca, and I didn't meet a single person in town who was unaware of their local currency.

Not all the purchases recounts were made in the "Ithaca HOUR Zone." Ithaca's popular Farmer's Market on the city's western perimeter, held from March to December, is an additional location where HOURS are actively traded and accepted by most vendors. Then there are restaurant owners, small farmers and individual service providers scattered across Tompkins County who trade in HOURS. But along the highway that rings Ithaca to the west and north, where the transnational economy in the form of strip malls, big-box stores and enclosed malls rules, Ithaca HOURS are nowhere to be found.

Most certainly, the greatest volume of Ithaca commerce takes place in these chain stores on the city's edge. In contrast, transactions in HOURS, in the context of Ithaca as one of many satellites of the global economy, would hardly constitute a measurable category, even though yearly transactions total in the tens of thousands of dollars, with a compounding impact in the millions of dollars over course of several years (Glover 1996). But in comparison, one has to appreciate the scale of commercial activity that 100,000 people in Tompkins County generate in one year. The per capita retail expenditure in Tompkins county was \$6,335 in 1997, with total retail expenditure at \$616,319,000 for the same year, the latest year for which data are available (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

HOURS users in our sample had modest household incomes (a median of \$30,000 to \$40,000) and estimated that they spent on average \$300 in HOURS in the year prior to the survey. Supporters of HOURS, then, dedicated a small portion of their disposable income to commerce in local currency. Naturally, the impact of these individually modest amounts had a multiplier effect much greater than federal dollars since they circulate, and re-circulate, exclusively in Ithaca. Still, the volume commercial activity in the Ithaca region in federal dollars dwarfs the HOURS economy.

But while the big-box, chain-store economy is on an expansive trajectory in Ithaca, the HOURS economy struggles to remain a viable alternative in a local business world overwhelmingly dominated by federal dollars. In the face of this dominance, HOURS are held together by a relatively small number of store owners dedicated to the principles of a self-reliant business community and a group of activists like Paul Glover who are committed to reminding the city of its progressive instincts as they try to push it in the direc-

tion of ecological sustainability. Together, in spite of the relatively diminutive nature of their enterprise, they demonstrate that a local economy can and does function successfully, even if under the radar of the Census Bureau.

If, in the final analysis, the influence of HOURS does not register on a government statistician's spreadsheet tracking the economic indicators for Ithaca and region, then perhaps in determining their impact one needs to turn to an examination of the part they play in the cultural life of Ithaca. While HOURS have not yet, nor will they likely in the foreseeable future, become even a second-choice currency for most Ithaca residents, they nevertheless carry a symbolic value far beyond even their economic potential. They represent both a celebration of the virtues of a self-reliant local economy and a resistance to the dehumanizing effects of the global economy. An inquiring survey researcher would be hard pressed to discover Ithaca residents unaware of their local currency and who did not at least implicitly acknowledge that HOURS stand for the protection and enhancement of the quality of their community life. It is arguably here, in the symbolic realm rather than in the material world of goods and services, that Ithaca HOURS make their lasting contribution.

Endnotes

1. Our use of “cultural capital” draws on a commonsense distinction between physical, material or financial capital and cultural capital in terms of the sentiments and dispositions that constitute one’s attachment to particular places. Our usage, therefore, should not be confused with the theoretical enterprise of French sociologist, academic Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital revolved around notions of cultivated tastes and educational credentials which function to legitimate one’s social class position. Interestingly, Bourdieu theory of class hegemony also included the resource of social capital, whose networks of reciprocity and trust are of interest to the students of community currency. For an evolution of the concept of social capital which includes the work of Bourdieu, see Baron, et. al. (2000), and for a summary of Bourdieu’s work, see Fowler (1997).
2. Unless otherwise noted, the median or mid-point in the distributions of responses will be used to report “averages” rather than the mean, since the respondents’ answers often tend to skew to one end or another of the distribution of answers.
3. One approach to measuring the ideological impact of HOURS would be to cross-tabulate for the sample the evaluation of HOURS with reported spending levels in HOURS. If those with low spending levels nevertheless maintain relatively high evaluation levels, then this result would add to the case that there is likely a cultural capital phenomenon attached to HOURS. And this definitely seems to be the case for our sample. Three out of four of the respondents below the fiftieth percentile in spending HOURS in the year previous to the survey still either agreed or strongly agreed that their participation with HOURS “improved their quality of life.” This relatively positive evaluation was evident for the other 11 indicators as well.

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