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## TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE: THE CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF A SWEDISH TIME BANKING INITIATIVE

Stefan Molnar\*

*Chairman Of The Time Banking Initiative TidsNätverket I Bergsjön*

### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the only existing time banking initiative in Sweden – TidsNätverket i Bergsjön (TNB). It explores the organization's: 1) *challenges*, 2) *achievements* with regard to empowering its participants and creating social capital, as well as 3) if these can be attributed to TNB's use of time banking. The semi-structured interviews and studies of documentation that were carried out in 2008 have been supplemented with additional information derived from the author's personal experience of being a member of TNB.

TNB has faced problems concerning the way that the time credit system functions as well as regarding a lack of long term participants, time shortages and segregation among some of those who partake. TNB has empowered its participants and has fostered an increase in social capital, something that can probably partially be explained by its use of time banking. The paper is concluded with some recommendations as well as some general thoughts on the future role of time banking within the Swedish welfare state.

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\* Email: stefan@stefanmolnar.se

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

TidsNätverket i Bergsjön<sup>2</sup> (hereafter called TNB) is the first and thus far the only attempt at time banking that has been established in Sweden. Time banking can be described as a method which lets individuals, groups and institutions exchange resources, most often services and activities, with each other. The so-called "time credit" – a currency that gives value to a resource according to the time needed to produce it – is used as the medium of exchange. Time banking usually creates positive economic, political, social and environmental outcomes for its participants and for society in general. This article seeks to test this claim by inquiring whether the activities of TNB have indeed brought about such positive outcomes<sup>3</sup>. Focus is placed on three areas of research. The first area of research concerns the challenges facing TNB since it began in 2007. The second set of issues questions whether the project has in any way increased empowerment and social capital among its participants. The third line of inquiry seeks to determine whether the achievements of TNB in the areas of empowerment and social capital can be attributed to any specific mechanisms within the time banking apparatus. The final question is particularly important because time banking is often said to create an increase in empowerment and social capital; this claim merits further study because empowerment and social capital are crucial for a healthy society. With this article, I hope to build on previous research in these areas. If time banking indeed leads to increased empowerment and social capital in society, we cannot afford to ignore it.

## TIME BANKING

The human-rights lawyer Edgar Cahn (2004) invented time banking to promote four "core values" that he deemed are missing in today's society. These values are 1) the idea that all people are resources; 2) increased reciprocity; 3) increased social capital; and 4) a re-evaluation of the definition of "work" (Cahn, 2004: 85-86). Participants in the time banking-system commit themselves to helping other participants or to developing their local communities. For every hour of work, the participant receives one time credit. The credits received by any one participant are placed in his or her own account in a kind of "bank," exemplified by a ledger book or an IT-system. In some cases, printed coupons are used. Time credits are withdrawn from the account when the participant receives a service or gets to participate in an activity arranged by someone else. All transactions are monitored and arranged by a person employed as a "time-broker" (Cahn, 2004: 10). Although all time banking systems operate according to these basic principles, the transactions can be organized in many different ways. In the person-to-person model, individuals trade services with other individuals within the local com-

munity. In the person-to-agency model, which is based on the principle of co-production, the time-banking tool is set up within an organization such as a hospital, a school or an association as a means of motivating people to help reach the organization's goals. In the agency-to-agency model, time banking is used as a way to facilitate exchange and cooperation between organizations (Collom, E. 2005: 4-5; NEF, 2008: 14).

## About TNB

TNB was founded in August, 2007. There exist no official numbers regarding how many individuals that have participated in its activities since then. But, during the year 2009, approximately 160 individuals participated in arranging activities, and around 1600 individuals participated in activities arranged under the auspices of TNB. In total, seventy-two activities were arranged during the year 2009. The exchanges are coordinated by a time broker employed by TNB. TNB uses the person-to-agency model of time banking. Groups of individuals create activities in which other people can partake. In exchange for organizing these activities, the individuals who belong to this group can also participate in activities arranged by other groups within TNB, by the time broker or by other organizations affiliated with TNB. TNB does not use the person-to-person model of time banking in which individuals exchange services with each other because, in that case, Swedish law would require the individuals to pay taxes as well as risk losing their income-related benefits. Each hour of work that the participants completed would be calculated against the price that this service would cost on the ordinary labor market. However, if groups instead of individuals create activities for the local community, these problems can be avoided. Participation in TNB does not require any formal membership. Instead, people can come and go as they wish. Because of this, the ways in which people participate are quite varied. Some individuals participate for long periods of time, both arranging and participating in many different activities. Others might arrange or participate in only one short activity of a few hours duration.

To date, several different ways of registering the participants' hours' have been attempted. For some individuals, hours are registered in a personalized ledger book or in an IT system, whereas others receive printed coupons recording their engagements. Still other individuals do not have their hours registered at all; this point will be discussed later.

The activities that have been arranged have taken three different basic forms. First, the interest-group arises when a group of participants meets on a regular basis to pursue a common interest or goal. Examples of such activities that

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tidsnatverket.se>

<sup>2</sup> Literally translated as "The Time-Network in Bergsjön." Bergsjön is a suburb of Gothenburg, the second largest city in Sweden.

<sup>3</sup> This article is based on an evaluation of TNB that I conducted during the period of April-May, 2008. It was written and presented in Swedish as a bachelor's thesis in Sociology at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden in June, 2008.

have been arranged include a field-biology group for children, a welcome group to greet individuals who have recently moved to the neighborhood and a group of young adults who teach older people how to use mobile phones. Second, the project can be defined as a short-term activity in which anyone can participate. Projects are usually done in cooperation with other organizations based in the Gothenburg area. An ecological festival and a film project in collaboration with the police are two examples of this type of activity. Third, a social activity is a short-term activity meant to bring the regular participants closer together and to thank them for their participation in TNB. A few examples of such activities include museum visits, barbecues, rock-climbing excursions and canoeing.

## RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

One purpose of this paper is to give an account of the greatest challenges facing TNB since its foundation in 2007. Another purpose is to describe TNB's biggest achievements. Because the stated goal of TNB is to empower its participants and to foster an increase in social capital amongst them, I will focus specifically on these issues. The main research questions are as follows:

1. What challenges has TNB faced since it began its activities in 2007?
2. What has TNB achieved with regard to empowering its participants and creating social capital?
3. Can TNB's achievements in terms of empowerment and social capital be attributed to any specific mechanisms of time banking?

## THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### What is empowerment?

Empowerment as a theoretical concept has surged in popularity among different groups around the world; these include politicians, non-governmental organizations and academics (Alsop et al., 2006: 1). Some people also see time banking as a way of increasing empowerment (see, for example, Seyfang, 2004b: 9-11, Collom, 2005: 1-2, 11-13, Cahn, 2004: 4, Boyle, 2003: 256). But what exactly is empowerment? The term is most often used to describe concepts such as "power," "feelings of strength," "autonomy," "self-control," "confidence" and "self-worth" (Askheim & Starrin, 2007: 9; Narayan, 2006: 3). According to Alsop et al. (2006: 3), empowerment can be described as "[t]he process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes." Empowerment is dependent on an asset-based agency, a state in which an individual possesses the necessary assets – psychological, in-

formational, organizational, material, social, financial and human – to make the "purposive choices" referenced in the definition above (Alsop et al: 2006: 11-13). Empowerment also requires an institution-based opportunity structure. This concept refers to the degree to which an institution allows its members to convert their goals into the "desired actions and outcomes" also mentioned above (Alsop et al., 2006: 13). The degree of empowerment of an individual or group, therefore, is dependent on the availability of assets and on the existence of a social structure allowing the fulfillment of desired actions and outcomes.

Deepa Narayan (2006: 3-4) discusses the importance of empowerment. She emphasizes the positive correlations between empowerment and economic growth and between empowerment and efficient governmental, commercial and civil/societal organizations. Furthermore, she posits another positive correlation between empowerment and subjective well-being (Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2006: 126).

### What is Social Capital?

The concept of social capital is critical in the contemporary debate about time banking and other types of community currencies. Time banking is often said to be a way of fostering an increase in social capital (see, for example, Boyle, 2002; Cahn, 2004: 169; Collom, 2007: 58, Soder, 2008). However, researchers who explore the subject of social capital have not reached a consensus on the exact meaning of the concept. Woolcock and Narayan (2002) describe the four most common ways of defining the concept. I adhere to Robert Putnam's (1996, 2008) definition, which, according to Woolcock and Narayan (2002), belongs to the communitarian tradition. According to this definition, social capital consists of norms of reciprocity, trust, and social networks and enables cooperation among individuals. According to Woolcock and Narayan (2002), there are three additional ways in which social capital can be viewed. Although this space does not permit a full explanation of these perspectives, they can be characterized briefly as follows: the institutional and synergic traditions focus on the connection between social capital and the macro level of society. Because my study focuses on the micro levels, these traditions are not applicable. The network tradition views social capital as constituted by social networks. If social capital facilitates cooperation, however, the network traditions perspective is too narrow. Cooperation requires not only social networks, but trust and shared norms as well. This observation justifies my selection of Robert Putnam's definition over the others (1996, 2006).

Scholars have criticized Robert Putnam (1996, 2006) for painting an overly-positive picture of social capital, whereas in reality it can sometimes produce negative results, as in the cases of violent gangs and mobs, for example. Putnam replied to this critique by asserting the existence of two types of social capital – bonding and bridging

(Putnam, 2006). Bonding social capital is based on relationships between individuals of similar backgrounds, whereas bridging social capital is based on relationships between individuals of different backgrounds<sup>4</sup>. If bonding and bridging social capital are combined, Putnam (2006) argues, the negative effects described above can be reduced. Sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973) uses a similar method to solve this problem. He points out that ties between individuals can be of different strengths. Strong ties often exist between persons who belong to the same family and between close friends. Ties of this kind are necessary to make a person feel safe and to enable him or her to live a happy, healthy life. Weak ties, on the other hand, exist between individuals who are not close emotionally. Weak ties hinder the introversion and sectarianism that often result from strong ties. Therefore, a functioning society needs a combination of strong and weak ties.

There are at least two perspectives that support the importance of social capital. First, Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (Herrerros, 2004: 6) view social capital as a tool that an individual can use to satisfy his own wants and needs. Second, Robert Putnam (1996 & 2006), as well as many other intellectuals, regard social capital as an instrument facilitating cooperation between individuals. According to this view, social capital is a prerequisite for positive attributes such as health and happiness, economic growth, low crime and corruption, effective schools and communities, and other social needs (Halpern, 2005: Part 1; Layard, 2005: 68-69; Putnam, 2006, Part IV).

### Data Collection and Analysis

To investigate the concept of empowerment, I used an approach inspired by Alsop et al. (2006). According to these authors, a study of empowerment should deal with two key areas of research (2006: 33-37). The first concerns the indirect indicators of empowerment, namely assets and institutions. The second concerns the abilities of individuals and groups to make choices if they take advantage of the opportunities made available to them and considers whether these choices enable them to reach their desired outcomes. The latter factors will be termed the direct indicators of empowerment. With respect to data collection methods, a variety of methods ranging from survey studies to ethnographic work can be used (Alsop et al., 2006: 33-37).

The qualitative approaches of Robert Whitley (2006: 73-74) and Forsberg et al. (2002: 9-10) inspired me to attempt to map the social capital within TNB. In both Whitley's and Forsberg's research projects, data was gathered through a combination of qualitative research methods. These researchers claimed that this method of data collection provided information about the "quality" and "type" of social capital present in the fields they were studying. Sociologist Ed Collom (Publ., 2008), on the other hand, approached the

topic in a different way. By tracing transactions between the participants in a particular time bank, he could extrapolate information about the size, density and amount of social capital circulating within a particular institution.

My initial study was based on a mix of qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2006: 212) were conducted with six individuals that at that point in time were engaged in TNB. I also studied internal TNB documentation. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was used to analyze the data (Rosengren & Arvidsson, 1992: 214-216). Last year, I was involved in TNB as a member of the board of directors, an experience that has provided me with additional insight into the workings of TNB. In this article, my personal experience will be used as a complement to the data obtained in the initial set of interviews and observations to allow discussion of the contemporary relevance of my findings in the initial study.

An obvious disadvantage of using less-structured methods of data collection is that they do not allow for statistical generalizations (Rosengren & Arvidsson, 1992: 75). This may compromise the validity and reliability of my study. Robert Whitley (2006) argues that this problem is ameliorated by the fact that less-structured methods allow the researcher to address his research questions from multiple angles. I did this by asking direct questions about participants' opinions and feelings on the particular topics under study, but I also paid close attention to the indirect and implicit cues of my respondents. I focused on the experiences the respondents thought that other participants had had during their time with TNB, and I traced the spread of social networks within TNB. These methods allowed me to construct a broad view of the project and justified the accuracy and reliability of the conclusions I draw from my study. A final problem I faced in this study is the problem of memory. When asking people to describe how they had changed as a result of a particular event, I could not be sure that the participant had an accurate memory of the event. In this case, the only thing I could do was to hope that the interviewees' memories were accurate.

### DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this section, I will address the research questions posed at the outset of this paper. I begin by outlining the biggest challenges that TNB has faced since 2007. I then discuss TNB's achievements in the areas of empowering its participants and fostering an increase in social capital. Finally, I explain how the observed achievements might relate to TNB as a time banking initiative.

#### Challenges

Based on my interviews and observations, I will outline the biggest challenges facing TNB.

4 The book in which Putnam deals with this critique is called *Bowling Alone* (2000). Woolcock and Narayan (2000) published their article the very same year that Putnam's book was released. It is possible that they did not read Putnam's study before writing their article and, thereby, failed to consider his theoretical revision of the concept of social capital based on the critique that he had previously received.

### *Time credits*

First and foremost, the interviews that I conducted revealed a great deal of confusion among the participants about exactly how the time credit system actually functioned. At that point in time, the time credits had not been utilized within all of the activities, and therefore not by all the participants. And this is true even to this day. The same goes for the fact that, depending on what activity you take part in, different ways of registering the hours are used; coupons, personal notebooks or a computer database. In some of the activities that are arranged together with other organizations, exchanges are made without getting the time credits involved at all. And in some of these activities, the participants who are affiliated to TNB have to hand in their time credits, while the participants that are affiliated to other organizations use normal currency, or can participate for free. There are some more or less logical reasons for this being the case. But there is not really an easy and quick answer to give to the hundreds of participants why this is the case. Why do only some participants, and not all, receive time credits? And why do only some participants, and not all, require time credits in order to be able to partake in an activity? Why do only some types of activities involve time credits? Why do some individuals receive coupons, while other individuals use a personal notebook? The lack of an easy way to explain and understand how to use the time credits clearly spurred questions among the respondents that I interviewed; questions such as those above. And, at least for some of the respondents, this fact undermined their respect for the system, making them ask themselves what the use is of collecting time credits. One respondent said:

"Honestly. Sometimes I feel that there is no use in collecting these hours [...] I can't really see the value compared to normal money"

The fact that a consistent time credit system has not been established within TNB, is really a problem. And we might ask ourselves, why has this not been the case? One reason relates to public policy. Even though the Swedish National Tax Board has exempted TNB's activities from taxation, a few individuals within the local authorities have questioned whether TNB's activities are merely yet another form of illegal labor that should be taxed. This skepticism has hindered the thoroughgoing application of time credits in TNB's activities. A second reason for the incomplete application of time banking relates to the specific model used by TNB. Although cooperation with other associations is a crucial part of TNB's activities, most other associations do not use time banking as they would if the agency-to-agency method of time banking - in which organizations use time banking as a way to facilitate exchange between one another - was used (NEF, 2008; 14). That the collaboration among organizations is based on different systems of remuneration means that some of the individuals that participate in TNB's activities do not give or receive credits for their participation. This is because these individuals are in reality members of the other organizations and therefore do not use time banking. This leads to a third challenge, and

that is motivating the partnership-organizations to start using time banking. A fourth reason for the underutilization of the time banking system is also connected to the type of time banking that TNB uses. When using time banking for exchanging activities on a group level instead of exchanging services on an individual level, the boundary between what might be considered giving someone else a bit of your time and receiving time from someone else, is often blurred. For example, in a study group, it is not always clear whether the participants are giving something to one another or receiving something. In sum, the four problems mentioned above seem to create confusion about how the time banking system functions within TNB.

### *Time constraints*

Another problem identified in the interviews is the issue of time constraints. Active participation in TNB requires a lot of time. This is especially problematic because many people already operate under a time shortage in their daily lives, which makes playing an active part in TNB particularly difficult. From the start, it has been clear that some participants take much greater responsibility in arranging activities than do others, an imbalance that causes a lot of stress. Although time-banking initiatives based on exchange of services have the clear advantage of relieving individuals of some of the burdens of quotidian tasks, time-banking initiatives such as TNB seem to deprive participants of their time because arranging and partaking in the activities requires a substantial time commitment. This is another problem inherent in the type of time banking used by TNB.

### *Lack of participants*

Connected to the problem of time shortage is the TNB's difficulty in attracting new participants. Although TNB easily attracts short-term participants, the organization has experienced severe difficulties in extending the participation of individuals to longer-term projects and in convincing participants to accept the responsibility of creating new activities. As a result, interviewees expressed concern over the lack of activities in which they could participate and the dearth of opportunities available for spending their time credits.

### *Segregation*

Finally, the interviewees identified as a problem the lack of socialization between people of different backgrounds within TNB. Although TNB does attract people from diverse backgrounds, they tend to form groups with individuals of similar backgrounds. The problem of segregation can be attributed to the type of time banking used in TNB, which promotes the formation of groups based on the activities in which individuals participate, thus promoting cohesion among people of similar backgrounds and interests. For example, the "neighborhood-group" consists mainly of middle-aged women, whereas the "dance-group" has tended to attract younger girls. As a result, TNB has experienced a form of segregation since its foundation, even

though there are also several activities with a “bridging” function, as discussed below.

### Achievements

Given that the goal of TNB is to empower people and to foster an increase in social capital, its main achievements, dealt with in the following sections, revolve around these objectives.

#### Empowerment

In this study, the term assets is used as one of two indirect indicators of empowerment (Alsop et al., 2006). From my interviews, I conclude that gaining new assets plays an important part in involvement in TNB. In particular, the respondents felt that their participation had improved their confidence and socializing skills, as well as their feelings of self-worth, access to new knowledge, and other informational and psychological assets. The respondents had learnt new things, and gained new experiences through their participation in the program. As one respondent said:

"Previously, I was a pretty quiet person. But within TNB I feel that other people listen to me, and this has had a huge impact on the way that I behave and feel."

Before analyzing the second indirect indicator of empowerment, a short analysis of the direct indicators of empowerment is warranted (Alsop et al, 2006: 33-37). The direct indicators measure the availability of opportunities for making autonomous life choices, whether individuals take advantage of these opportunities and whether their choices help them reach their desired outcomes. At the time of the interviews, the participants felt that they had opportunities to participate in planning activities and that as a part of this planning they could express their opinions freely. But did their participation actually influence the activities of TNB? My interviews suggest mixed results. Clearly, some respondents have been able to affect the choice of activities within TNB. However, the agency of other respondents was less clear.

Regarding the third indicator of empowerment, the respondents stated that they were encouraged to plan and organize activities, a clear indicator that TNB as an institution fosters empowerment among its members.

Although much of the content discussed during interviews emphasized TNB's empowering effect on its participants, at least one observation, the fact that the project manager played a very large role in arranging many of the activities, points in the opposite direction. The participants seemed to be very dependent upon the project manager and some of them doubted their ability to manage new activities without her. As one of the participants replied to a question regarding the possibilities of arranging activities without the help of the project manager:

"Without XXXX [the name of the project manager]!? I doubt it. She supports us. I feel a lot better when she's around"

Because the goal of TNB is to encourage the participants to create activities, this dependency of the project manager has a particularly negative effect on empowerment.

#### Social capital

What effect has TNB had on social capital formation among individuals who have participated in its activities?

We shall begin with norms of reciprocity. The respondents clearly described reciprocity as an important part of TNB. They acknowledged that participants should commit themselves to the projects, help other participants, and repay favors others have done for them. The respondents also recognized that TNB is grounded in certain principles, such as those of giving and receiving. This is in itself another indicator of reciprocity. As one respondent said:

"I do someone a favour, and someone does me a favour back. That's the way that the time credit system functions"

By mapping the exchange of activities within TNB, I was able to understand how norms of reciprocity were transformed into mutual relationships between the participants. These mutual relationships most often involved “generalized reciprocity” (Putnam, 1996: 207), which implies long-term, indirect exchanges within a network of people rather than the short-term, direct exchanges between two or more individuals that are characteristic of “direct reciprocity.”

A lack of reciprocity within TNB does, however, manifest itself in a few cases. First, there are quite a few examples of individuals who created activities without participating in any activities arranged by others. Examples of the opposite, that is, persons who enjoyed taking part in activities without creating any in return, also exist. Second, much of the cooperation that occurred within TNB took place within groups of people of similar backgrounds, implying a lack of reciprocity between people of dissimilar backgrounds.

Can TNB be described as a trusting environment? The interviewees experienced difficulty conceptualizing trust and its role within TNB. This is probably due to the ambiguity of the concept of trust and was perhaps exacerbated by the limited Swedish language skills of certain participants, which inhibited clear discussion of a complex topic. A wealth of statements pointed to the perception of TNB as a trusting environment, buttressed by the near-absence of statements pointing in the opposite direction. An organization that, like TNB, is built around cooperation and mutual giving and receiving requires a high degree of trust to function properly.

Has the existence of TNB resulted in the creation of new social networks? Interaction with other people constitutes a significant part of the activities within TNB. Most of the issues identified by the interviewees concerned meeting

new acquaintances, strengthening bonds with old acquaintances and cooperating with other people. Comments such as: "I have gained new friends and I want even more people to participate in the activities of TNB" were plentiful in the interviews that I conducted. During the year 2009 160 individuals have arranged activities, and 1600 people have participated in TNB's activities, indicating a definite emergence of new social networks. These numbers also hint at the significant size and extent of these networks. Quite a few individuals, however, were not regularly engaged in TNB but took part in activities on a short-term basis or intermittently. The limited participation of these individuals probably hindered the development of social networks, especially those with strong ties (Granovetter, 1973). Many of the activities are arranged by individuals who share the same background, indicating the salience of bonding networks over bridging networks within TNB. Accordingly, an important theme in the interviews was a concern over the activities and events within an individual's own community. This was accompanied by a relative lack of awareness about what was taking place in the other groups. Despite the predominance of bonding social networks, TNB also contains examples of bridging social networks. These arise especially during the so-called "social activities," where people of different backgrounds come together to enjoy themselves and celebrate.

To sum up, there exists a wealth of indicators that the Swedish time banking system has fostered an increase in social capital among its participants. Furthermore, the fact that some of the respondents were not engaged in associational life before joining TNB probably means that some of the social capital possessed by these respondents would not have been generated without the intervention of TNB. The talk of fellowship was plentiful:

"I, for one, think that 'fellowship' is a word that pretty well describes what TNB is all about. Fellowship is something that all the participants have in common".

Do these conclusions still apply two years after the initial interviews were conducted? During the last two years, there have been no major changes in the way in which TNB functions, which indicates that the conclusions should largely hold true today. Having followed TNB closely in the aftermath of the interviews, my observations confirm the continued applicability of my conclusions, registering no signs to suggest otherwise. Since its conception, TNB has witnessed some major successes, but it has also stumbled upon some problems. The next section seeks to address the extent to which these problems can be attributed to the specific system utilized by TNB.

### **Explaining the rise of empowerment and social capital**

In the following section, I point out a few possible mechanisms of the time banking method that might explain the observed increase in empowerment and social capital within TNB.

First, time-banking initiatives are based on an exchange of resources between individuals rather than on the usual one-way giving or receiving practiced in traditional voluntary organizations. This has very likely shaped TNB's potential to empower people. The idea behind time banking is that all people have something to give to others. When an individual creates his own activities or services, he must learn new things and develop new skills and thereby increases his self-confidence. In a time-banking system, time credits play a special role by letting the individual know that his commitment is valued within the system. They also function as a way of motivating individuals to become involved because time credits function as rewards for this participation. However, because time credits have played a limited role in TNB so far, the tendency of individual members to create their own activities can more readily explain the observed increase in empowerment than can the system of time credits.

Second, time-banking initiatives such as TNB comprise a wide range of different activities. This makes it easier for a participant to find an activity to which he can contribute his own skills, thus developing greater feelings of self-worth among participants. The wide range of activities in which the participants partake is also a way for them to acquire a broader skill set, a prerequisite for empowerment.

The special manner in which time-banking initiatives function affects social capital formation. Time banking is a good way to create social capital because the wide range of services and activities available increases opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to meet and establish bonds with one another. Time-banking initiatives such as TNB attract participants of a wide variety of interests and backgrounds, which is not as often the case with traditional associations. This means that participants come from a broader section of society than do members of traditional associations. TNB, for example, attracts individuals interested in going to museums and those who enjoy dancing or traveling, instead of targeting only one of these groups. In this respect, however, TNB might have a disadvantage over individual to individual-based time banking initiatives because the interest groups and projects formed within TNB allow for cooperation among people of similar backgrounds rather than for people of dissimilar backgrounds. This leads to the predominance of bonding over bridging social capital.

TNB has to a greater extent influenced the rise of social networks with weak ties rather than those with strong ties. This can be explained by the fact that many of the TNB activities take place over short periods of time. This can be compared to the more common types of civic organizations such as sports clubs or interest groups that are built around single, long-term activities, thereby giving participants a better chance to get to know each other and build strong bonds.

Finally, the existence of the generalized and mutual exchange of services and activities between the participants



in time banking associations fosters the growth of norms of reciprocity and trust.

To summarize, the growth of empowerment and social capital within TNB can at least partially be attributed to the fact that TNB is a time-banking initiative. Nevertheless, the mutual exchange of activities rather than the use of a time-based currency most likely accounts for the largest part of this growth. Still, whether or not the exchange of activities is mediated by an actual currency, TNB functions in the same way as all time banking initiatives: the participants share their time with other people by creating activities for each other. Time is seen as a resource - a form of capital - to which all people have access. Within TNB and similar initiatives, a form of "time capital" is exchanged between individuals, and as a result of this, it is transformed into other forms of capital, in this case into a "capital of power" (empowerment) and into "social capital."

## CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated the major challenges facing TNB since its initiation in August, 2007. The paper has also focused on what TNB has achieved during this period, with special attention to empowerment and social capital.

Since its start, TNB has faced four major challenges, which continue to present themselves today. These challenges can be summarized as follows. First, the time credit-system has not yet been applied successfully. The interviews revealed a great confusion among the participants concerning how the time credits work; this confusion diminishes the respondents' respect for the time-credit system, thereby undermining many of its potential advantages. Second, being an active participant in TNB requires a significant time commitment, in contrast to time-banking initiatives based on an exchange of services, which reduce participants' time constraints. This leads us to the third challenge facing TNB, namely, the difficulties in attracting participants prepared to embrace the responsibility of creating activities. Last but not least, although TNB is made up of individuals from different backgrounds, there is a lack of socialization between these individuals.

What has TNB achieved in terms of empowerment and social capital? As a result of their engagement with the organization, participants have gained new resources, are considered as assets by the organization, and have, at least in some cases, shaped the activities of TNB. This allows us to conclude that TNB has empowered its participants. At the same time, there is at least one matter that hinders further empowerment, namely that TNB is overly dependent on the project manager. Finally, as this study has shown, TNB has indeed led to an increase in social capital among the participants engaged in its activities. This social capital is mostly based on weak ties, whereas strong ties seem to be less common. Both bridging and bonding social capital exist within TNB, but the latter is more prevalent. TNB is permeated by norms of reciprocity and trust.

The mutual giving and receiving that characterize time banking initiatives allow the participants to learn new skills, which increases their self-confidence and leads to the formation of new social networks, often between people of different backgrounds. It is therefore probable that TNB, as a time-banking initiative, has had a positive effect on the empowerment and social capital of its participants.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From my analysis, some recommendations for TNB's future and for other time banking initiatives include:

- TNB has not yet successfully implemented the use of time credits. If the potential benefits of the credits are to be reaped, the participants must be able to trust that they will obtain credits for the activities they organize and must pay credits for the activities in which they participate. Therefore, TNB should develop concise and thorough rules for how and when time credits are to be used, while ensuring that these rules are actually followed.
- Participants have difficulty understanding how the time credit system works. TNB must better communicate the role of the credits, not only to participants, but also to non-TNB members.
- Some TNB participants have previously belonged to other civic organizations. Therefore, to foster the creation of bridging social capital, TNB must attract individuals who are not members of such organizations. These individuals often have low levels of empowerment and social capital, increasing their value for meeting the objectives of TNB.
- TNB's emphasis on attracting people living in the nearby area is misguided. Attempts should also be directed at attracting people from wealthier neighborhoods because this would facilitate the creation of not only bonding and bridging, but also linking social capital, that is, a form of social capital based on relationships between individuals of different wealth and social status.
- TNB has been more successful at creating bonding social capital than it has been at creating bridging social capital, partly because people of similar backgrounds tend to engage in similar activities. By creating even more activities that engage people from different backgrounds, the amount of bridging social capital produced by TNB could be increased.
- The problem that TNB and its participants are highly dependent upon the project manager must be remedied. All participants should be allowed to take responsibility for arranging activities. One way of doing this would be to appoint participants to roles with specific responsibilities assigned to each.

## THE FUTURE OF SWEDISH TIME BANKING - SOME FINAL REMARKS

This paper has dealt with the achievements and challenges of a specific time banking initiative – namely TidsNätverket i Bergsjön (TNB). TNB is the first, and so far only, time banking initiative in Sweden. However, what are the future possibilities for getting a bigger time banking community in Sweden? Is there room for time banking within the Swedish welfare society? This is surely a topic for a paper on its own. However, I will here point towards some contemporary trends in Sweden that might be able to offer a few clues to the question.

On the one hand, certain people in Sweden might see time banking as a threat towards some of the major features of the welfare state, namely jobs and salaries in the public and private sectors. Similarly, some might view time banking as an intruder on a territory that by traditional standards should be occupied by the public sector, namely healthcare and social support. These factors could prevent the future growth of time banking in Sweden. One more such factor is the more or less total lack of awareness of the existence of time banking among the Swedish population. Without a public discussion about the pros and cons of time banking and other community currencies, we can never hope for getting a flourishing time banking community in Sweden. Similarly, time banking of the service-based kind simply won't be able to flourish in Sweden, if individuals are taxed for the services that they receive, which is something that has been noted previously in this paper.

On the other hand, as in other countries, Sweden has seen the rise of a new form of governance during recent years – something that has been called New Public Management (NPM) (Nilsson, 2003: 464). There is much to be said about this trend in itself. But one thing is true. With its advocacy of multi-centred governance and decentralisation, NPM might render possible new, innovative welfare solutions, such as time banking. One thing that hints towards such a development is the fact that SKL (the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) – an important actor within the Swedish political landscape – see co-production as one of their future commitments (Bergstrand, 2010). The same goes for the fact that the social economy has come to play a greater role in the country in recent years, employing more people and raising larger sums of money than before (Rothstein, 2003). The Swedish government also expects the social economy to become more heterogeneous and focused on innovation and entrepreneurship in the future, as well as to become a more accomplished participant in the delivery of welfare solutions to the citizens of the country (Prop 2009/10:55: 98). This new culture of civic engagement fits time banking very well. Last but not least, there exist politicians at the national level who work towards reforming the tax-system in a way that would benefit time banking (Mutt, 2010).

To sum up, as long as the jurisdictional and political climate looks the way it does, I don't see any bigger opportunities for time banking in Sweden other than when it comes to the

model that is used within TNB. But, with present trends and some future policy changes, time banking can come to play an important role in guiding the Swedish welfare society into the future.

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