

# CREATIVE TEMPORAL COSTINGS

A PROTO-PUBLICS RESEARCH PROJECT WITH LEEDS CREATIVE TIMEBANK

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*I suggest that money will eventually take as many forms as the plurality of associations we enter. I take this to be a likely consequence of the reduced power of states to control the economic activity of their citizens. ... To an increasing degree we will be able to make money for our personal and shared purposes. In the context of more democratic access to money, it will become clearer that its main function is to help us keep track of those exchanges with others that we choose to calculate. We will make money in many different ways as a means of remembering.*

Keith Hart, *Money in an Unequal World*, Texere, 2000, pp. 16-1.

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# PREFACE

2

Creative Temporal Costings (CTC) was an experimental social design intervention that explored the practices of collaborative exchange as experienced by, and through a co-commissioned study undertaken with the AHRC ProtoPublics project<sup>1</sup> and the Leeds Creative Timebank (LCT).<sup>2</sup> Two key objectives were: to investigate the value of creative collaborative exchange in an emerging ‘parallel’ economy; and to test and develop experimental research methods for social design with the aim of prototyping new forms of collaborative research oriented towards social change, as part of the larger ProtoPublics investigation.<sup>3</sup> Written with these diverse audiences in mind, this ‘proto’ report describes and reflects on methods used and outcomes achieved and contributes initial findings to current thinking on the alternative exchange mechanisms in the creative economy. The research team is developing more extensive texts through academic peer-reviewed presentations and publications, and in creative and experimental social design-oriented projects.

1. ProtoPublics, short for ‘Developing participation in social design: Prototyping projects, programmes and policies’ (<http://protopublics.org> [accessed 16.10.15]), asked arts and humanities academics and community organisation representatives to experiment with using ‘agile’ approaches to prototyping new products and services derived from software development, to tackle real social questions in the UK.
2. <http://leedscreativetimebank.org.uk> [accessed 16.10.15].
3. ProtoPublics built on Mapping Social Design (<http://mappingsocialdesign.org> [accessed 16.10.15]) the final report of which suggested that UK research councils set up collaborative arts and humanities oriented projects in which researchers actively participate “in crafting new services, experiences, projects and policies that address contemporary issues.” The AHRC then experimented with new forms of research, supporting five cross-sectoral research collaborations through ProtoPublics.

# INTRODUCTION

Leeds Creative Timebank (LCT) was chosen for the study because it employs a non-monetary form of exchange to foster creative activity, thus offering a potentially rich model for community-building. However, the project was not designed to investigate LCT as an alternative economy to money but rather, as a parallel economy: one that co-exists alongside other economies (organised by sovereign currencies, digital currencies, gift and family economies etc.), in relation to and partly within but not subordinated to them.

The project methodology was inspired by social design thinking, itself a critical development from co-design/participatory design.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, this meant that collaborative exchange was not simply the object of study but also the means of study. Thus the project involved the creation of a method assemblage<sup>5</sup> that brought the LCT economy into relation to that of UK research funding councils and

universities to conduct a co-commissioned study of the timebank. The project title speaks to the nature of this assemblage: it is a play on the parallel economies of the non-monetary LCT and the institutional processes of organising and costing time and money expenditures for a research grant proposal through the techniques of what is usually called 'Full Economic Costs'.<sup>6</sup>

A refusal to convert the currencies in these parallel economies was fundamental to the project: as investigators we aimed to work both within and outside both the parallel economies of LCT and the research councils. One concern was to see whether and how the experimental method assemblage would function: would it allow us to explore how collaboration supports the creation of multiple values from within and from without the economies?

As employed in the project, collaboration became a mode of research that does not involve taking sides or attempting to synthesise points of view, but rather operates as a process of working *across* situations. These relations of 'across-ness' were, as will become evident, not simply two-way or reciprocal, but produced a more tangled mode of analysis in which universities and a research council joined the LCT for the study. The approach provided us with a twisted position or moving perspective from which to view the value of time and creativity itself.

4. Kimbell, L. (2011) Rethinking Design Thinking: Part 1, *Design and Culture*, 3(3); Kimbell, L. (2012) Rethinking Design Thinking: Part 2, *Design and Culture*, 4(2).
5. Law, J. (2004) *After Method*, London: Routledge.
6. <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/documents/fecFAQ.pdf> [accessed 16.10.15].



Creative Temporal Costings

# RESEARCH CONTEXT & AIMS

Timebanking is the oldest and most used of the so-called service-based community currencies in the UK. As such it is part of what has recently come to be called a 'peer-to-peer' – or P2P – economy; this is an economy that is principally concerned with creating value as community- and social 'capital' by maximising resources locally and/or by valuing the work of those who are marginalised from mainstream economic production.<sup>7</sup>

The P2P economy is receiving growing attention from academic researchers, think-tanks, politicians, commercial and third sector organisations, both for the potential alternatives it poses to money-based forms of economic and labour exchange and as a potential mechanism for locally-driven community building. Our project was informed by this burgeoning field of literature, which includes discussions of local community-driven economic organisation, alternative currencies, alternative, sharing and parallel economies, the social/sharing economy, co-design/participatory design methods and other experimental social science and design research methods. The research was also informed by literature and current discussions on the creative industries and historical change in industrial communities.

The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of the research team and of our situation within academia and across community practice meant that we were interested in many of the concerns raised by this existing research. However the most immediate of our shared aims was to explore how the LCT conceptualised and employed time in terms of a currency of hours, and to see whether and how the specific practices of 'banking' designed and operated within LCT add value to the exchange of creative skills. Thus our research questions were:

- What values are created through collaborative exchange in a creative timebank?
- How is the exchange of the unit of time – the hour – supported by the bank, and how does the banking of time facilitate the creation of values?
- How do these values contribute to creative processes and cultural outcomes?
- How do members understand the value of time, as articulated through timebank participation, in relation to the value of money? And;
- How can creative practice represent and articulate the value of time experienced by members of a creative timebank?

Given that the research was intended to both be a collaboration and be about collaboration, another aim was to experiment with the values afforded by our time as researchers, as part of the research methodology. The project emerged from an AHRC-organised research grant 'sprint', in which invited academic and practitioner participants and those selected from an open submission formed small groups to compete against each other, in a carefully staged and time-limited series of workshop activities, to develop project ideas for funding.<sup>8</sup> This kind of event is one of a number of novel grant application and commissioning frameworks currently being trialed by research councils in the UK and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Following this event, and then a more typical if truncated application and review process, the project was approved. The funding available was always minimal (up to £15,000) and required the participation of a community investigator. Project duration was limited to three months, with a start date, at the beginning of the summer, days after confirmation of funding.

The proposition, derived from the 'agile' culture of software development e.g. the hackathon, was that 'fast' or 'speedy' approaches to research grant application and conduct have a number of academic, economic and political benefits including a higher likelihood of 'innovation', relative low cost, more immediate 'results' than 'slow' research, and greater relevance for policy-making. The project's origins thus already focused our minds on the role that time plays in generating value for (and the values of) academic research and research councils. These two aims fed into a third aim: to better understand the possible value(s) of collaborative exchange for participants and beneficiaries of the 'creative economy'.

Existing studies of collaboration often employ the phrase 'sharing economy', a term said to have emerged from the digital file-sharing collaborative culture enabled by the Internet but currently epitomised in journalism and academic literature alike by services such as Uber and Airbnb.<sup>10</sup> As commercial services strategically appropriate the terminology of sharing for market positioning or to promote particular brands, industry members, researchers and users have debated what is and what is not sharing.<sup>11</sup> Advocates invoke related terms such as the 'collaborative economy', with the principles of enabling 'smarter' application of available resources, a concern expressed by multinationals as well as local- or social enterprises and markets.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, some timebanks are linked to existing social services: "the traditional roles of recipient and provider in health care services" are said to combine in a process of co-production that benefits both the helpers and the recipients in a mutually valuable exchange while also benefiting the wider community.<sup>13</sup> This heterogeneity in practice poses challenges for policy-makers and regulation and complicates the understanding of free, communal sharing outside the market economy that underpinned early Internet-enabled collaborative models.<sup>14</sup> Our study thus sought to understand the value of collaboration mediated by a parallel economy.

7. Shih, S., Bellotti, V., Han, K. and Carroll, J. (2015) 'Unequal Time for Unequal Value: Implications of Differing Motivations for Participating in Timebanking'. In *Proceedings of CHI 15*, New York: ACM Press, 1075-1084.
8. See the workshop call on the AHRC website: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/funding/opportunities/current/protopublicssprintworkshop/> [accessed 16.10.15].
9. Including Japan and New Zealand.
10. e.g Whiteboard 'Startups, stop saying you're the "Airbnb of X, Y, Z" right NOW'. 01.02.13; <http://www.whiteboardmag.com/startups-stop-saying-youre-the-airbnb-of-x-y-z-right-now/> 2015; Light, A. and Miskelly, C. (2014) *Design for Sharing*, report and working paper available at <https://designforsharingdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/design-for-sharing-webversion.pdf> [both sites accessed 16.10.15].
11. Ibid.
12. Stokes, K., Clarence, E., Anderson, L. and Rinne, A. (2014), *Making Sense of the UK Collaborative Economy*, London: Nesta, p. 44 available at [https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/making\\_sense\\_of\\_the\\_uk\\_collaborative\\_economy\\_14.pdf](https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/making_sense_of_the_uk_collaborative_economy_14.pdf) [accessed 16.10.15].
13. Carroll, J. and Bellotti, V. (2015), 'Creating Value Together: the Emerging Design Space of Peer-to-Peer Currency and Exchange'. In *Procs. of CSCW 2015*, New York: ACM Press, p.1504.
14. See [12]; also Pasquale, F. and Vaidhyanathan, S. in *The Guardian*, July 2015 'Uber and the lawlessness of "sharing economy" corporates: Companies including Airbnb and Google compare themselves to civil rights heroes, while using their popularity among consumers to nullify federal law' available at [http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/28/uber-lawlessness-sharing-economy-corporates-airbnb-google?CMP=twt\\_technology-gdntech](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/28/uber-lawlessness-sharing-economy-corporates-airbnb-google?CMP=twt_technology-gdntech); for an effective overview including critics' voices as well as proponents see "The human cloud": A whole new world of work'. *The Financial Times* 12 October 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/a4b6e13e-675e-11e5-97d0-1456a776a4f5.html> [sites accessed 16.10.15]. For a sustained academic critique see Standing, G.(2014) *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*, London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic; and *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (2011) London and New York, Bloomsbury Academic.

# RESEARCH PROCESS

The first step in our methodology – even before the project was approved – was to prepare a budget that met the requirements of not only the AHRC and our respective institutions but also the LCT. To do this required specifically not establishing a set exchange rate for hours=money, since to do so would have imposed an equivalence between the two economies that the LCT explicitly rejects. Instead the participation of the collaborative team of investigators, comprising members very differently situated in relation to both LCT and universities, was ‘funded’ equally between the AHRC – in pounds – and the LCT – in hours. The different values of the academic investigators’ time based on salary and institutional requirements resulted in the formal allocation of an uneven number of hours to be contributed by these individual investigators. At the same time, each investigator received an equal number of hours deposited for them in the timebank. As a freelance creative practitioner who was also an AHRC recognised investigator, the community investigator was paid in money for her participation out of grant money awarded to LCT to the same value as received by each of the institutions in which the academic investigators were employed. The hours required for use within the LCT system by both academic and LCT contributing members were ‘coined’ by the bank to enable collaborative participation in the bank on the same basis. The assembled (non-)equivalent ‘hours’ were to be invested in investigators and LCT members’ participation in two activities and the co-production of two outputs: this research report and a creative publication.

At the first meeting following the project’s approval by the Research Council and LCT, the community investigator inducted the academic members of the research team as associate

members of the LCT. We could not be normal members as we did not satisfy the criterion of living or working in Leeds, even if some of us did meet the criterion of being a creative practitioner. This process of induction, in which we signed a document expressing our willingness to abide by the terms of the bank, immediately raised issues for the academic members of the team: what would it mean to be bound by LCT conventions and rules as researchers? Could we express criticism and if so in what form? In what sense was our membership of the bank ‘balanced’ by the agreement of LCT members’ participating in the workshops to abide by/within academic conventions, including for example, the research ethics framework? There was little chance to reflect on these questions of equivalence or symmetry as, given the speed required by the project, we immediately followed this meeting with a workshop, the first of two planned activities.

In the first half of this workshop, the participants – academics and other members of LCT – split into two groups to discuss experiences of the timebank. The researchers also invited the timebank members to reflect upon and visualise their perceptions of the timebanking process to elicit insights from a different angle and to prompt wider discussion amongst the group. In the second half of the workshop, the community investigator introduced the opportunity for timebank members to produce artistic responses to a brief on the theme of ‘time as a currency of artistic exchange’. These responses were to be ‘time-tight’ and were to be presented at the second event, scheduled for a fortnight after the first. The call was also emailed to LCT members, to elicit further participation (see over for call as reproduced in the creative publication).



Between the two activities, the academic members of the team and four LCT members used the four timebank hours allotted to them (although see below), to develop five-minute responses to the brief. These were then presented orally and in some cases visually at the second event. Presentation modes encompassed filmed choreographic exploration, poetry, monologues, interactive performance and mini-lectures.

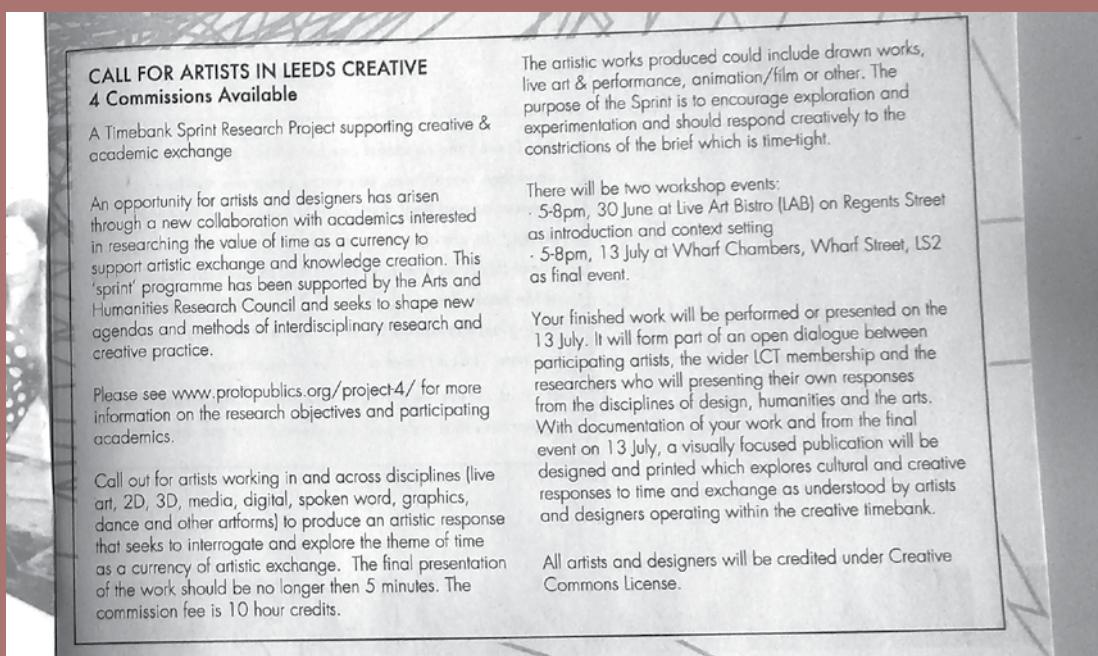
The second event was audio, photo and 'stop-frame' video documented, to comprise the source material for the creative publication.

Data for analysis was generated largely from these two events: post-event work focused on data analysis and the preparation of the two publications. Paul Miller, a timebank member, designed and produced the creative publication in exchange for both timebank hours and money (from an additional university support grant). Miller and one of the researchers spent a day examining the material that had been captured at the second event, researching ideas for the creative publication and discussing design and layout. Captured source material primarily comprised photographs, the individual presentations, typed transcriptions of the audio recording and a stop-frame video of the whole event. Miller then produced the design in collaboration with a member of the research team, and worked with LCT member Footprint Workers Cooperative to produce the Risograph-printed creative publication,<sup>15</sup> and a scanned version to distribute online. Footprint was paid, in money, from the project budget.

In addition, the researchers had access to an anonymised data archive recording all specific exchanges within the timebank over several months. Researchers employed methods including textual analysis, coding, basic quantitative analysis, and interpretation to identify key qualitative and quantitative characteristics of transactions, and placed findings in relation to literatures in their respective disciplines. Significantly, researchers' analysis of LCT time-work transactions generated related findings around their own time-work 'transactions' within the project structure. Some researchers found that standard practice in their disciplines would have taken more time than was allotted in the grant structure to make statements about primary material. The Principal Investigator also spent considerable time on project practicalities: gaining ethics approval, arranging transcriptions (the labour costs for which were paid for in money from the project grant), buying food for the events and so on. In sum, producing this report required a considerable number of 'uncosted' hours, a number which will likely significantly increase if it leads to an academic paper – the output which will be valued by researchers' institutions. These hours, while in some sense supported by the grant (through direct funding of a number of hours)<sup>16</sup> and the institution (through that part of their salary which is intended to support 'unfunded research') were not counted by the individuals but were merely added to their working time.<sup>17</sup> Different institutions cost and audit the time of academics differently, and each individual accommodated this in their own way, but typically by working more time than is costed by the institution, with considerable implications

for their lives 'outside' work. The additional 'weight' created by the project due to the academic team members' location within academic institutional cultures and structures stands in somewhat uncomfortable opposition to the proposition of 'agility' fundamental to the ProtoPublics framework and, more generally, the prototyping process for

research grant applications. We wonder whether the more straightforwardly transactional nature of the LCT's use of time might mitigate this tension. More concretely, the dual time/money method assemblage created for the project produced these findings very effectively.



The image shows a poster titled 'CALL FOR ARTISTS IN LEEDS CREATIVE 4 Commissions Available'. It is a Timebank Sprint Research Project supporting creative & academic exchange. The poster features a photograph of a person's hands working on a screen-printing press. Text on the poster includes:

- An opportunity for artists and designers has arisen through a new collaboration with academics interested in researching the value of time as a currency to support artistic exchange and knowledge creation. This 'sprint' programme has been supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and seeks to shape new agendas and methods of interdisciplinary research and creative practice.
- Please see [www.protopublics.org/project-4/](http://www.protopublics.org/project-4/) for more information on the research objectives and participating academics.
- Call out for artists working in and across disciplines [live art, 2D, 3D, media, digital, spoken word, graphics, dance and other artforms] to produce an artistic response that seeks to interrogate and explore the theme of time as a currency of artistic exchange. The final presentation of the work should be no longer than 5 minutes. The commission fee is 10 hour credits.
- The artistic works produced could include drawn works, live art & performance, animation/film or other. The purpose of the Sprint is to encourage exploration and experimentation and should respond creatively to the constraints of the brief which is time-tight.
- There will be two workshop events:
  - 5-8pm, 30 June at Live Art Bistro (LAB) on Regents Street as introduction and context setting
  - 5-8pm, 13 July at Wharf Chambers, Wharf Street, LS2 as final event.
- Your finished work will be performed or presented on the 13 July. It will form part of an open dialogue between participating artists, the wider LCT membership and the researchers who will present their own responses from the disciplines of design, humanities and the arts. With documentation of your work and from the final event on 13 July, a visually focused publication will be designed and printed which explores cultural and creative responses to time and exchange as understood by artists and designers operating within the creative timebank.
- All artists and designers will be credited under Creative Commons License.

15. Risograph is a specific printing technique.  
See <http://www.creativebloq.com/print-design/risograph-printing-51411803> [accessed 16.10.15].
16. According to the research council application, the combined total hours for the four academics was 136 hours.
17. Like some but not all professionals, academics are typically not given fixed working hours in their contracts; their job description usually requires them to agree to do whatever is 'reasonably' asked of them by their line manager. There are different mechanisms in institutions to value this unspecified time: for example, the Time Assessment Survey (TAS), required of universities by the government, asks academics to record their time in terms of relative proportion for different activities without giving any total, while costing the time of researchers for external funding bodies according to a supposed 37 hour week. It is the individual academics who are supposed to reconcile these very different accounting systems.

# DISCUSSION

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Current research on timebanks<sup>18</sup> suggests that the timebank organisers generally emphasise idealistic, community or sustainability related motivations for their participation in a timebank.<sup>19</sup> This certainly seemed true of LCT, which was founded in 2010 by four Leeds-based artists and activists motivated to counter what they saw as the increasing commodification of creative practice and growth in market forms of exchange. The founders were motivated by a strong sense of the radical history of Leeds as a place, including the practice of 'DIY Culture', as well by the historical decline in funding for regional and community art practice. Initiated with an Arts Council England grant to explore informal exchange cultures among groups of creative practitioners in Leeds, the LCT has since become self-sustaining and currently has 100+ members. For some, membership of the LTC still brings with it strong political and moral overtones: it's about "doing it right"; "[LCT is] a political model, where people buy into the politics"; and individuals are ascribed moral personae: "he's a good person".

18. See [7]; Bellotti, V., Cambridge, S., Hoy, K., Shih, P., Handalian, L, Han, K. and Carroll, J (2015) Towards Community-Centred Support for Peer-to-Peer Service Exchange: Rethinking the Timebanking Metaphor. In *Proceedings of CHI 2014*, New York: ACM Press, 2975-2984.

19. Some see timebanking as a method for reviving community engagement, promoting civil engagement and tackling social exclusion [7]. Specific to the UK, timebank-based co-production has also been discussed as a policy tool for increasing resources within local communities through time credits; see Gregory, L. 'Spending time locally: the benefit of time banks for local economies', *Local Economy*, 24, 4 (2009), 323-333. Timebank members meanwhile often have a more utilitarian motivation to participation; see J. Collom, J. Lasker, and C. Kyriacou (eds.) (2012) *Equal Time, Equal Value: Community Currencies and Time Banking in the US*, Burlington VT: Ashgate.



# COLLABORATION

Discussions at the project events suggest that many LCT members agree that the collaborative exchange enabled by the bank creates alternative values to those of the monetary economy.<sup>20</sup> So, for example, nearly all timebankers expressed the view that the bank fostered a sense of belonging to a community: "you become part of their world."

*I entered into it because I think in principle it's a brilliant idea. So it seems like a flat community, like a constellation...it just seemed all opportunity to do with being part of a network of creative people.*

Some saw the bank as a way to mitigate social isolation: "visual artists are terrible actually [and] don't go out there that much." It provides a specific kind of space for generating a sense of community in which membership is sufficient for acceptance by others as a creative practitioner. One key effect of timebank membership was thus a kind of accreditation, a vouchsafing that the individual was indeed a creative practitioner, acknowledged as such by others. One of the bank's more enabling features in this respect, at least for some, is the initial anonymity of individuals it brings together: "you'll just try something out with someone even though you don't know them". In addition, the bank's role in providing an alternative to or within the standard funding model was clear:

*You apply to the Arts Council, you apply to the Research Council and somehow creative practice is quantified... It gets distorted by that. You can actually decide what is it I want to do with this creative resource in the city, amongst these people. What would I like to do, what I think is the right thing to do? And if there's enough people around, I can do it. I don't need to go looking for funding. That's wonderful.*

However, the bank was also valued because it displaced a culture of favours and personalised obligation or debt ("Oh, it's the whole thing of 'I'll buy you a drink' ... you want something out of somebody"). The result, as expressed by many of those who participated, was what was described as a 'clean' exchange, a pact, in which an otherwise indeterminate – and thus overwhelming – sense of obligation was removed from collective creative practice:

*Of course, there's a massive pool of people. Someone there is going to want to do this and is going to feel, because without the timebank if people are doing things for free it's always on this kind of favour basis.*

*It's a cleaner exchange with the timebank because without it you feel indebted to someone ... maybe [in the culture of favours] they're not valuing what they gave because you didn't pay them in any way, maybe they feel taken advantage of.*

*It creates a cleaner exchange as well than if it were voluntary or mates.*

The timebank as intermediary allows for a separation of favours and friendship from creative and professional relationships, while the formal system of recording hours given and received sustains a sense of community. But while there was common sense that separating friendship from creative and professional relationships was positive, the timebank's role in adding value to those relationships was more difficult to articulate. A drawing made at the first workshop, and the discussion it provoked, are helpful here:

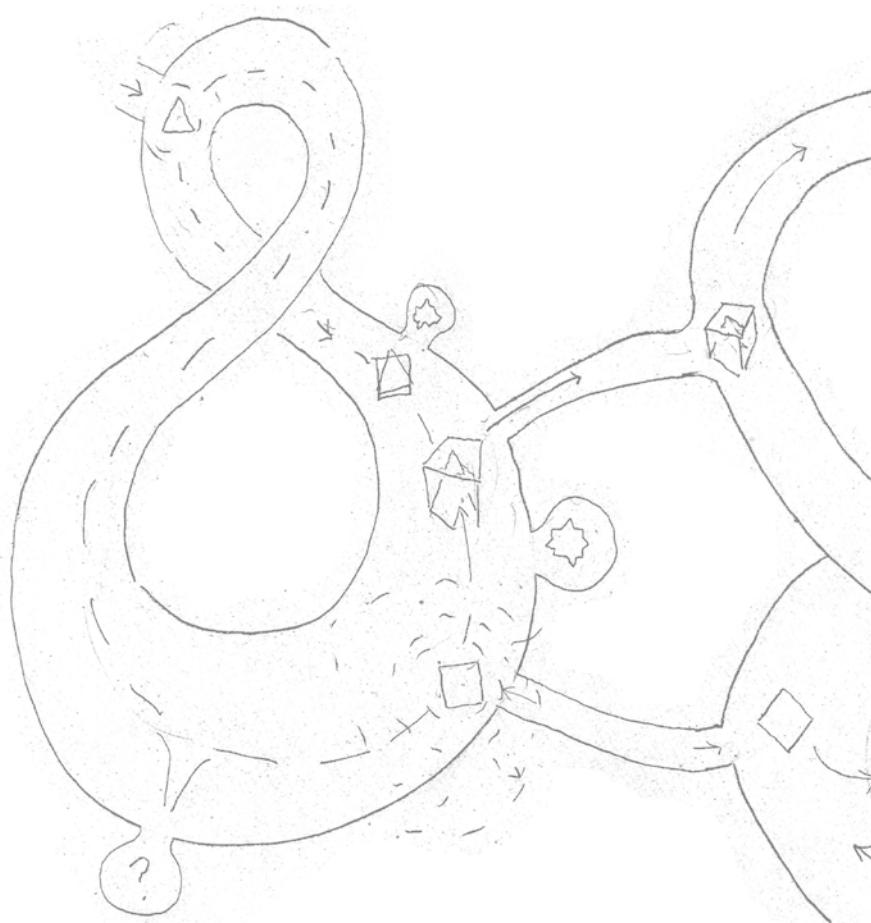


*There is a hidden exchange and a visible exchange. ...The visible exchange is the simple exchange of the skill. The invisible one is the conversation that happens at the same time and because we're all creatives it opens out and sparks ideas as well as enabling you to do that particular thing that you want to do.*

*So what you've actually normally got in any transaction is two entry points into the transaction. There's a lot of talking that goes both ways. You've got the very so specialist thing that would happen, and you've got a generalist thing, so as it goes through you'll have little loop conversations that appear that are not actually part of the plan and in that you get these combinations. So here's Mr Triangle, who wants services from Mr Square but actually besides the service there is also a conversation. And as the conversation develops Mr Triangle and Mr Square may well develop something that's about cubes and pyramids.*

*See what I mean. So then ... but out of that often...generates another transaction. So Mr Square in the transaction is now thinking more about cubes. And therefore is asking for another transaction as a cube rather than the original square, because he's got additional value. [Because his ideas developed.]*

*He's got a new idea and he's asking for a service that Mr Circle is offering. ... But as this conversation develops, of course they will have their conversations where circles and squares are coming up and that's feeding back into the loop. ... Which then generates another transaction [...] each one is going in different directions and each time they link and as they link each time they're adding value. It's like a dance.... They become more three-dimensional because of the accrued information.*



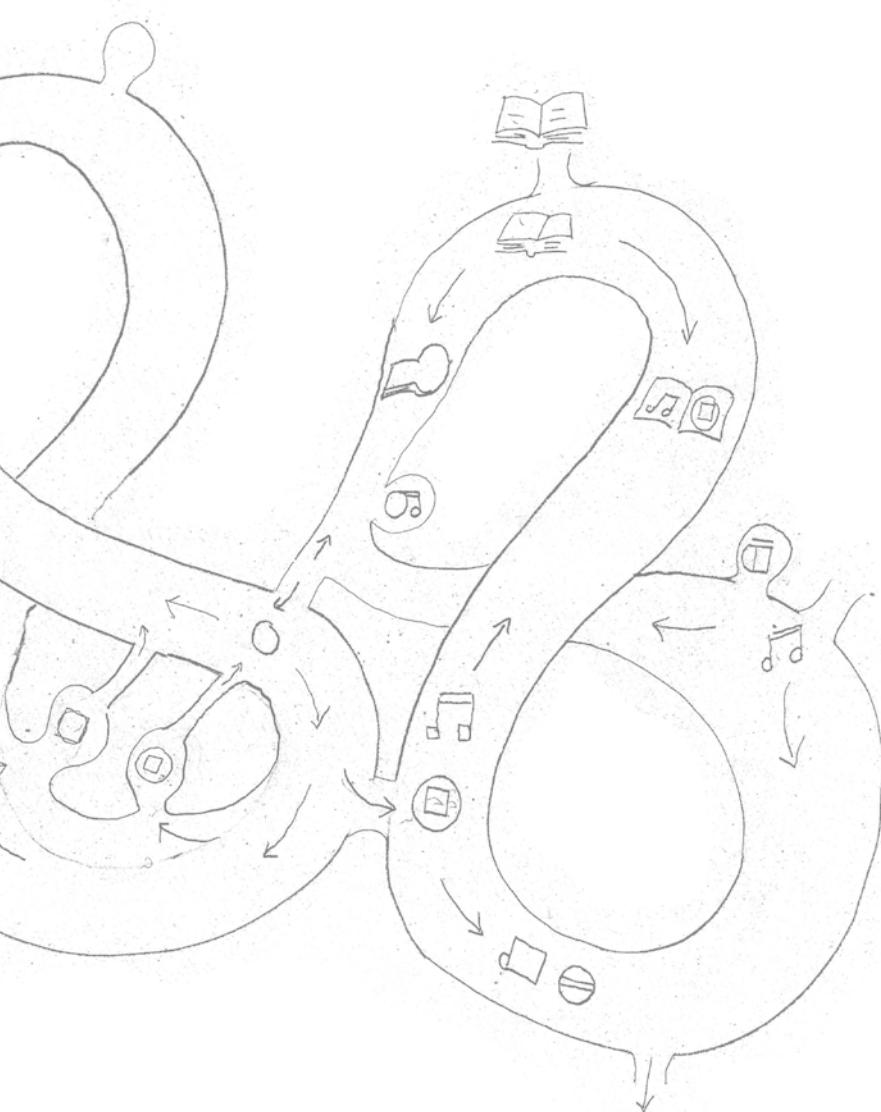
For some timebankers, the bank gave them freedom to chose as to whether they accepted an invitation or not and on what terms. This might mean putting in more time than was actually banked according to the 'weight' of the project.

*You're right about the generosity because I don't clock watch....You might say, 'All right, six hours for a day's work', but I'll probably put in 8 or 9 including travelling there and stuff like that but you just do it. You don't say, 'Oh, I'll do this job for £500! You weigh up the value of the project.*

For others, whether to participate or not involved a complex process of negotiation. As previous literature also reports, this often focused on the issue of whether to offer what were considered to be a member's core skill (that is, the skill for which they sought and gained financial compensation):

*I think one thing to realise about the timebank is, a lot of the time, when you're involved in an exchange, you're not actually doing your key skill. And I think that's how it works. I have taught trapeze once and I kind of like, 'Should I, because they could come to a lesson as part of my currency.' And then I thought, 'Well, it's more to do with I'm not busy this week, so I can.' Had I been busy, I'd have probably gone, 'No.' Or, 'Yes, but in a few weeks' time.' So it's the flexibility of time that makes it possible. Like if somebody wanted me to be an aerialist in a major public building, that I would normally charge a lot of money for, that I'd have to get a professional rig in for, I'd probably have to say no. So you do it on a case-by-case basis and you can say no. And a lot of the time I spend invigilating or meeting people or things like that, so you're not doing your main...*

20. The two events were open to all LCT timebankers, however only some participated. Data collected during the two events, including the comments discussed here, thus provides a partial image of attitudes towards time, money, work and the timebank, rather than comprehensively reflecting the attitudes of all members. However, strong parallels between data collected for this project and findings in other research on timebanks suggests some degree of representativeness.



# MATERIALITY OF TIME & TIMEBANK MECHANISMS

As is evident here, time, as employed in the timebank system affords multiply-natured and complex negotiations between individuals, and offers the potential to be asynchronously used (out of step with the time schedule of other economies). The hour as a unit of currency can neutralise or flatten the hierarchies of the cash economy. In addition, time's capacity to be aggregated and disaggregated in specific ways enables it to act as a medium with affordances that are different to the cash economy. This capacity derives from the fact that the money economy typically affords less flexibility; money is 'tight':<sup>21</sup>

*But it is a small amount of time. It's never a large amount of time ... I suppose what I've thought about it is that, probably quite effortlessly I can accrue time [in the bank], but what it gives me is the possibility of a creative project without having to go for funding. Because we're making it from the creative energies of the people here, which is a very liberating thing because of how tight money is, actually. And you didn't have to think about having loads of money. We did this event without any expenditure.*

This is a use of 'meantime' time analogous perhaps to what has been described as 'meanwhile spaces'. In contrast to some examples of 'meanwhile use', however, the bankers do not divert or accumulate this mean-time outside the bank.

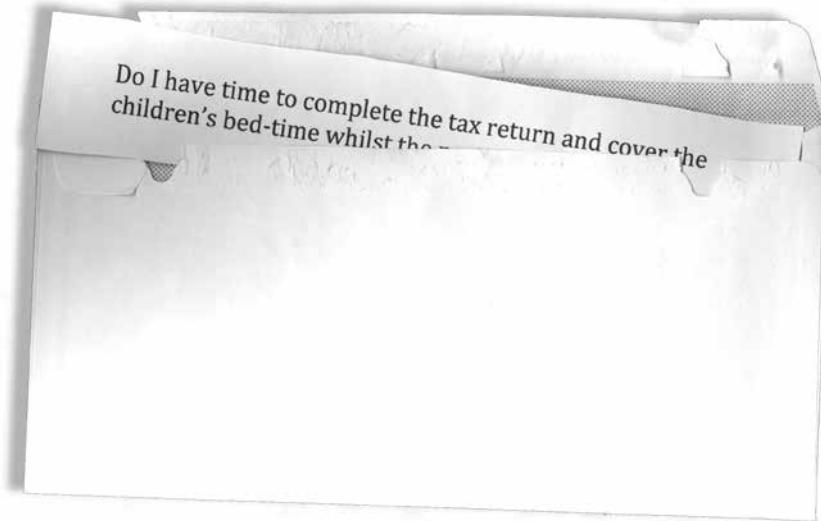
The mediation afforded by the timebank means that a member can limit the level of his or her involvement, and disentangle him- or herself from both the sticky exchanges of the culture of favours and the competitive world of the cash-based creative economy:

*Even there I've made a conscious decision of reining in expectations....I've never done a video project where I've gone beyond 8 hours. So when I look at that as a day, or two days' work, you're going to get a day or two days' work, so if you've got an expectation I'm going to give you all the bells and whistles and I'm going to put colour grading on it and throw it into AfterEffects, sorry, that's not what's going to happen. So I've found a template that works quite well with most of the needs of the timebankers, which is really they just want mediation and documentation of their event. So far I haven't really met anyone who wants a film making and I think that will be a different conversation.*

On the other hand, timebankers recognised that the 'flatness' as a unit of currency means that its exchange can realise other values:

*I know X partly through she teaches me Pilates. And so I wanted a one-to-one, so she said, 'Oh, I'll do it with timebank'... and so I paid her with timebank hours. Which is weird, isn't it, because it is right on the edge of... Because I would have paid her, I was saying, 'I'll pay you.' [X] said, 'That's all right' because of the good will. And I don't know if that's why I think it's not just time, it's also good will.*

Timebankers described negotiation of the number of hours required by a request as situationally specific, involving not only the timebank, but also the inter-relationship between the timebank and the (time-)money economies of individuals' lives, including commitments of care for others, study and participation in paid, professional activities. At the second event one of the commissioned artists handed out five envelopes containing 'notes on time' which he asked selected audience members to open and read out as part of his performance.



For timebankers, part of the bank's value appeared to be that it provided an additional currency as well as an alternative. This validated our initial interest in parallel economies: but while the term parallel implies one or more economies working alongside each other, without meeting or crossing over, what our study suggests was that having another measure of value was allowing members to work across the economies. Parallel economies were constantly being brought into relation with each other, allowing for complex entanglements or knots of value.<sup>22</sup> These went beyond entanglements around the value of time, as noted above, to include other cultural values such as formal and informal ways of working.

- 21. Some timebankers did note that time could be equally 'tight', in the sense that five minutes spent on one project meant spending five fewer minutes on another.
- 22. Day, S., Lury, C. and Wakeford, N. 'Number ecologies: numbers and numbering practices', *European Journal of Social Theory* 06/2014; 15(2):123.

# ON CREATIVITY

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In terms of value creation, timebankers suggested that the affordances provided by the timebank specifically contributed to or shaped *creativity*. Several members remarked that timebank exchanges produced a sense of possibility. Collaborations were described as experientially generative: "*it doesn't feel like it drains you.*" One person remarked that the bank enabled creative 'growth' while another observed that it facilitated what she called "*inter-practices*", since it made it possible to gain insight into other's practices: "*It's an odd learning thing as well, in terms of doing what you wouldn't normally do*" [on embedding performance in graphic art practice]; "*innovation lies in between the gaps between the disciplines.*" For others, the added value was formulated in terms of 'non-risky risk':

*I tend to take more risks on a timebank project, whereas if it was a funded Arts Council project, I'd go back to my safety net of kit I really know. So I know that works but it gives me a chance to actually take it through a project and it's a meaningful project, rather than for the sake of doing something just to learn some equipment. So I certainly use it in that respect.*

*So you don't feel like you have the same risk factor of oh I'm going to pay my x amount of money for this so I'm not saying. ... So in a way it's much more a creative and risky, I guess, but risky in a non-risky way.*

The open-endedness of where an exchange might lead is however not the result of a lack of determination, but is brought into existence in specific ways. Tentatively, and recognising that our evidence base is very limited, we suggest two factors that may contribute to this open-endedness: the timebank's flattening or neutralising of the differences registered by a cash economy, and the invisibility of any alternative

hierarchy in the bank. In other words, it results from a mix of transparency and opacity in the bank's operation. It is perhaps therefore worth exploring this a little more.

When LCT was established, it used an 'off-the-shelf' platform produced by Timebanking UK, a national charity and limited company dedicated to supporting and providing resources for community timebanks. This was beta-tested by LCT leading to limited customisation with a focus on speed and "*efficiency*". However, the bank is not – and nor are there any plans for it to be – entirely automated.<sup>23</sup> Instead, a team of time-brokers match individuals according to the terms of the request (as determined by the pre-determined categories of skill identified by members as those they have) and the brokers' knowledge of individuals. This knowledge appears to be based on the personal interviews that typically lead to and are part of induction into the bank as well as by records of previous participation, including feedback provided by members on each other's participation. So while the bank might appear to offer automated anonymity, it does not in fact do so. Some of the members of the timebank participating in the workshop seemed not to want to recognise this. It was not hidden by the time-brokers, but in conversation ordinary members indicated either a lack of knowledge or a lack of interest in how members were initially connected to each other. The community investigator, who is one of the founders described the induction process in the following way:

*By the time people have actually stepped in through the door to be inducted they've already signed up, actually. They've already got caught wind of it. They've already got the concept. They don't know exactly now how it works but actually by the time you've got them around the table or in that space next door it's a matter of okay, this is what it is, this is the background, these are the ethics, this is how you use it and these are some of the people you're going to meet and actually...*

The precise role of the bank, as determined by the community partner and brokers, was thus largely submerged. Some members acknowledged the significance of its intermediary role – “*It supports. It's a supportive structure like the putting a value on it, that time,*” and it was observed that it was a way of ensuring that exchanges did not cancel each other out:

*... if it becomes a collaboration you don't need the timebank anymore. ... Because if you're just going to collaborate why would you do that through the timebank, because you'll get equal value ... Yeah, they cancel each other out, yeah.*

Initial findings suggest that members employ the timebank to further their own specific creative practice rather than engaging with the timebank as a creative platform or medium in its own right.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly though, the timebank's mechanisms and the experiences they afford might be better employed to enhance members' creativity and maximise creative ‘profit’ through transactions. A parallel here would be mainstream banking's use of algorithmic experimentation in designing and using financial instruments. But when raised at the second event timebankers indicated little interest in exploring how the bank might use accounting as a creative practice. Indeed, in line with existing research, the prospect of accruing ‘debt’ through timebanking is off-putting for some.<sup>25</sup> Our initial findings show that practices of accruing ‘deposited’ hours are in line with the literature<sup>26</sup> in that some timebankers preferred to offer rather than receive help. When one member mentioned that (s)he had only ever given time one of the time-brokers responded: “*We need a conversation to look at how you might spend your hours.*” However, our findings also showed a tension in that ‘hoarding’

was seen as necessary in enabling larger creative productions: “*Even to make a minute film my head thinks fifty hours spread across people.*” To keep the timebank operational and overcome accumulation or ‘hoarding’ of hours by some members, the community investigator expressed interest in experiments in accounting. She explained:

*If you don't spend it in the next few months we take it away from you and put it into a central pot and if anyone's got a big project, they can apply for it so that's part of a further innovation, it's like yourself saying, I'm going to give people twenty hours and the gift becomes something people bid for, if they want any hours that are useful for them.<sup>27</sup>*

While the mechanism was only a sketch, the bank had already developed methods to commission ('big') projects such as the participation in ProtoPublics, and the community investigator considered the study as a way to experiment with (co-)commissioning within the bank more generally:

*I still think we haven't really exploited and explored what this can do, and I would love to see somebody say right, it's a bloody great epic and we're going to use like seventy-five percent of the people in the timebank over this next period.*

One direction the timebank might explore, then, is whether and how not simply counting but accounting can be used creatively. Possible mechanisms might include: recognising added value by measuring the direction of exchange (with requesting hours being valued more highly than donating, for example) and numbers of participants involved in any one exchange or over time; exchange of core rather than generic skills; and the creative value of the exchange for participants, as indicated perhaps by routine feedback on exchanges already completed. This would develop the already existing mechanism of peer evaluation, which operates in retrospect since “*you don't know the advantage of [a specific exchange with another timebanker] until you've done it.*” Such measures of ‘added value’ could interfere with the bank's largely non-evaluative culture, one clear from the anxieties around selecting timebankers for the commissions:

*I was worried that we were going to get more than four or five and somebody said well how are you going to select, so I think this whole thing of first come first served sits okay within the timebank, so in fact we're in a really good position now because we've got four people who know what they're doing, they've got the contexts and they've got that time to actually prepare themselves ... all of that's really important.*

But creative accounting might also open new kinds of time for creativity; that is, to realise LCT's potential "to be a bit jazz".

- 23. This is interesting given the current interest in the role of trust or trustlessness in digital currencies, including recent discussion on regulation, e.g. 'European Central Bank, Virtual currency schemes: a further analysis' (February 2015); 'HM Treasury evidence on Digital Currencies' (March 2015) [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/414040/digital\\_currencies\\_response\\_to\\_call\\_for\\_information\\_final\\_changes.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414040/digital_currencies_response_to_call_for_information_final_changes.pdf) [accessed 16.10.15].
- 24. The parallel here would be between retail bank customers and investment bankers, with current timebankers using the timebank as retail bank customers do a bank: banking savings, taking out loans and so on. If timebanking continues to develop as an exchange mechanism, it will be interesting to see whether 'investment timebankers' who employ the system itself to generate value emerge.
- 25. See Bellotti et al 2014 [18].
- 26. See Collom et al 2012 [19].
- 27. When this was noted in one academic's presentations at the second event, one of the ordinary members indicated they did not know of the existence of this initiative and expressed some consternation. The community partner immediately responded to say that accrued hours would never simply be taken away, but that their use in this way was merely a possibility to be considered. The ensuing discussion led timebankers to consider the potential of other kinds of sources (beyond research councils or arts funding bodies) for a collaborative commissioning process.

# CONCLUSION

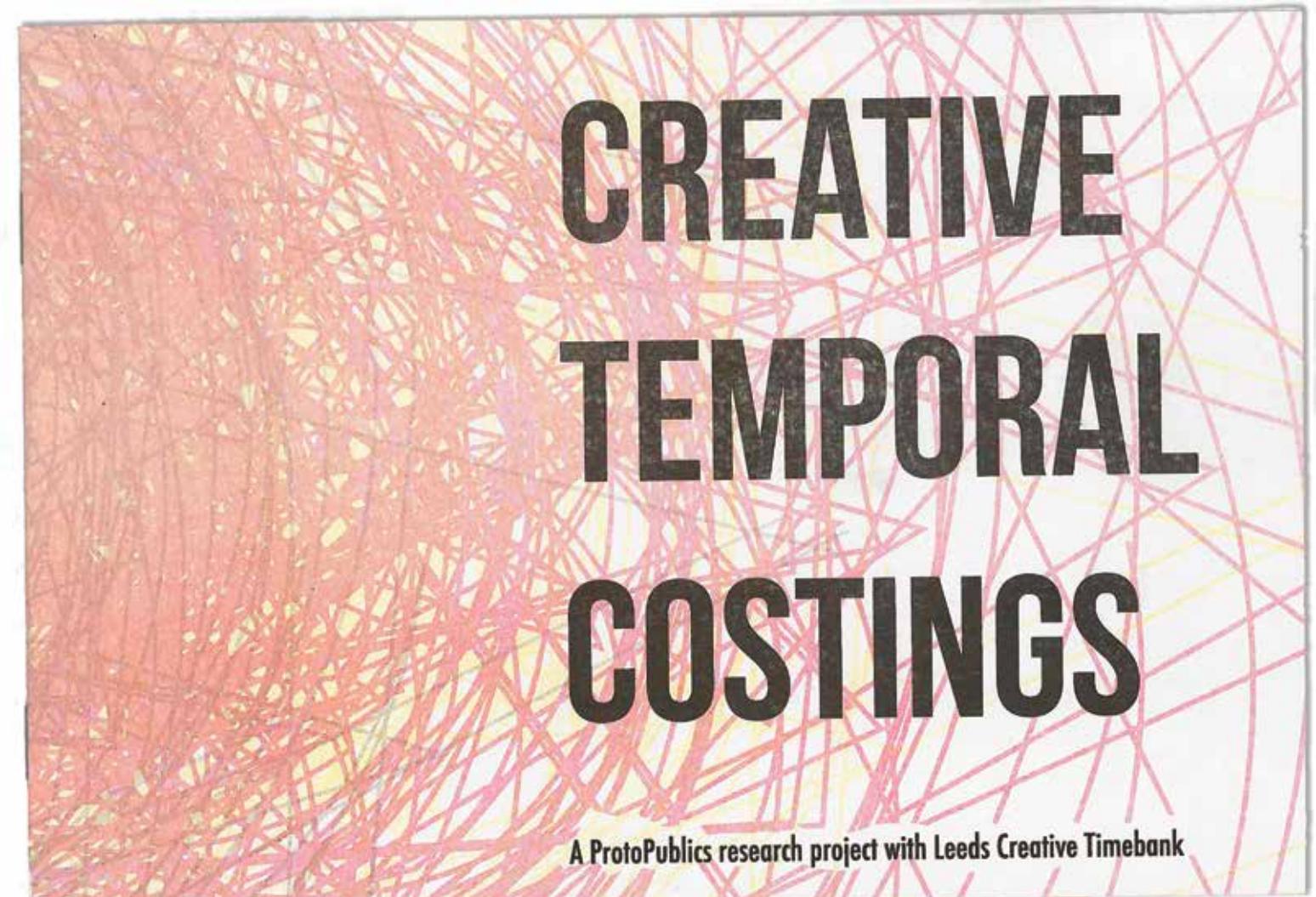
While an 'agile' project lasting only three months in duration, Creative Temporal Costings generated findings that both corroborate and challenge existing literature on and practices within timebanking as a form of alternate or parallel creative exchange. More broadly, findings on timebanking, collaboration, the value of time and money, human-digital exchange mechanisms and experimental method-assemblages within the arts, humanities and social sciences have clear links to existing debates in academic research areas and areas of practical concern including (but certainly not limited to): Human Computer Interaction and interaction design; the sociology of money; the creative economies, particularly in UK communities excluded from global investment and banking-driven growth in London; participatory design and co-creation; design, industrial and technology policy; community activism and organising; arts funding; research funding; and the specific research questions of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's foci on Connected Communities and Social Design.

Furthermore, findings were generated not only through the formal research events but also by the very structure of the project. This comprised a co-commission operated by a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team of researchers including HEI-affiliated academic researchers and a community investigator. It was funded equally in time and money by a research funding council and a community organisation, and subject to the cultures, ethics, mechanisms and regulations of both. In response to the ProtoPublics project, then, with its aim to "prototype new kinds of research collaboration oriented towards achieving societal change and collective outcomes", and to the AHRC's commitment to "supporting the prototyping of new collaborations between

researchers and practitioners", the project's method-assemblage clearly not only prototyped but tested, further developed and documented (in multiple formats) one easily reproducible form of research collaboration.<sup>28</sup> Significantly, this form of collaboration not only involves both 'researchers and practitioners' (as we have seen, an artificial distinction) and community organisations and Higher Education Institutions, but creates a temporary community that both highlights 'knots' and tensions and allows reflexive, productive work with them. In response to the Mapping Social Design report's recommendation for "arts and humanities and other researchers [to] become active participants in crafting new services, experiences, projects and policies that address contemporary issues"<sup>29</sup> then, Creative Temporal Costings far surpasses conventional methods of engaged research in co-design. As agile, experimental social design that mobilises equally the expertise and cultures of arts, humanities and social science disciplines and community organisations, Creative Temporal Costings indicates mechanisms, questions and challenges for engaging with fundamental social, economic and political issues. And – perhaps most importantly, given its concern with the value of creative collaborative exchange in an emerging 'parallel' economy – Creative Temporal Costings suggests that both academic research and parallel economic mechanisms such as timebanks could generate added-value through further experimentation and collaboration.

28. <http://protopublics.org/> [accessed 16.10.15].

29. Julier, G., Kimbell, L., Armstrong, L. and Bailey, J., *Mapping Social Design*, AHRC, 2014, see <http://mappingsocialdesign.org> [accessed 16.10.15].



# CREATIVE TEMPORAL COSTINGS

A ProtoPublics research project with Leeds Creative Timebank

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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