

Alternative exchange systems operating outside of the traditional waged economy

April 30 2015



Gradon Diprose with Hannah Mackintosh, coordinator of the Wellington Timebank.

Gradon Diprose, who will graduate from Victoria in May with a PhD in Geography, studied two alternative exchange networks in Wellington—the Wellington Timebank and an arts collective called Letting Space.

"My research started after the [global financial crisis](#) hit—there were a lot of people being made redundant here and around the world, and many people were very uncertain about the future," says Gradon. "I was interested to find out about any alternatives to the classic capitalist ways of meeting people's needs."

Gradon discovered two organisations doing that work on his own doorstep. "The Wellington Timebank is a network of about 500 people from all walks of life who swap skills and services—all time is valued equally, no matter what a member's special skill is," he explains.

"Participants keep track of the hours they provide, and that is turned into time credits that they can exchange for services offered by other members. It could range from walking dogs or cleaning to dietary advice or help with budgeting. Time is the currency, and the idea behind it is to equalise the inherent inequality that occurs in waged work."

Letting Space, an arts collective that at times has worked with the Wellington City Council to stage projects in vacant office space, works slightly differently.

"Letting Space stages temporary art installations that offer a form of critique or exchange in unused urban spaces—one high profile example of these projects was the Free Store [a non-profit organisation that redistributes surplus food from cafes, bakeries and restaurants to people who decide that they need it]. Members of the public become involved—and it's all taking place outside of the traditional gallery setting."

He observed how both organisations function and assessed the impact on the lives of people who took part in them. "I wanted to find out why people got involved and the effect it was having on their day to day lives. Some people took part because it met their political goals whereas others

were interested in the Timebank, for example, because they had no money but wanted a specific service."

Gradon's research, which was supervised by Associate Professor Sarah Kindon and Sophie Bond (now a senior lecturer at Otago University) came from a personal desire to explore ideas about economic development outside of dominant business-focused approaches.

"Both of these organisations are about changing how people interact and connecting bigger political ideas with everyday actions that meet peoples' needs," he says. "Both projects have made a real difference in the Wellington community, meeting material needs and helping to build a stronger sense of community and connection amongst people."

Provided by Victoria University

Citation: Alternative exchange systems operating outside of the traditional waged economy (2015, April 30) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-04-alternative-exchange-traditional-waged-economy.html>

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