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# Sharing Economies & Time Banking: Implications for Participation in Planning

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**Abstract**

Bartering has moved from the physical transfer of goods to online mediums utilizing the Internet as a platform in the exchange of goods and services without the space-time constraints of traditional bartering. Town planning can leverage lessons learnt from sharing economies and bartering, and imagine a future if planning were to take on these.

**Author Keywords**

Sharing economy; collaborative economy; local community; town planning.

**Introduction**

This paper will explore the current trends towards barter in the sharing economy, and the implications and possibilities for barter economies in town planning in the UK context.

Bartering was a commonplace mechanism used for the exchange of physical goods before currencies existed [8]. The swapping of goods was agreed upon depending on their perceived values, without using a monetary medium. It was used recently in Zimbabwe during hyperinflation in 2008, when the Zimbabwean dollar became essentially worthless [4]. Bartering has

**CouchSurfing** is a website that enables people with spare space to host guests, now has nine-million members [3].

**FreeCycle** is a network of seven-million people with the aim of recycling 'stuff for free' and avoiding landfill.

**Planning Portal** is the UK Government's website that allows planning applications to be processed electronically, with the aim of simplifying and explaining the planning process.

**Planning Aid** is a free planning advice service offering planning advice for those that can't afford it.

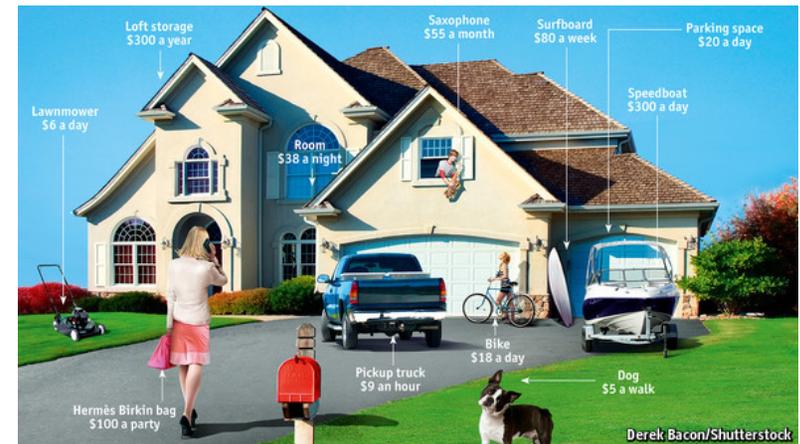
**Local Authorities** are separately elected local governments which are responsible for a number of local services education, housing, and planning.

difficulties, such as space-time constraints, and relies upon the other person wanting your goods. Recently, barter mediated through technology have become commonplace, overcoming the limitations inherent with traditional bartering. These platforms are modern equivalents to traditional bartering, although they usually rely on currency or time as a unit of exchange.

Modern sharing economies "share spare resource with people who want them" [7], such as "property, resources, time and skills" [5] with peer-to-peer exchange and multiple independent providers being their core principles. For example, *CouchSurfing* and *FreeCycle* embrace the principles of the sharing economy (see Figure 1 for examples).

Whilst the economy can't be directly applied to town planning, an ideology gaining traction in the UK is time banking. Time banking is an interpretation of the sharing economy, where hours of someone's time are exchanged for another's. These are typically used peer-to-peer, or as part of a larger network, allowing people to 'earn' hours and 'spend' them on someone else within the network.

The UK Government recently recognised the growth and role modern sharing economies have in "creating entirely new ways to do business", with its power to create new ones and transform existing industries [5]. Alongside this, an emphasis on buying locally has emerged. Weatherell *et al* [12] found that the majority of consumers now seek to buy local foods, and are increasingly conscious of where their food comes from. Time banking and sharing economies can take advantage of the desire of citizens to support local peers and independent suppliers.



**Figure 1:** "On the internet, everything is for hire" [9]

### **Context: Planning in the UK**

Town Planning is the discipline of providing a strategy upon which decisions about competing land-uses can be made. It uses planning policy to imagine an area's future, and planning applications to decide on individual developments. It can take lessons from the sharing economy and time banking, whether applied directly, or, used as inspiration for innovative methods of participation, knowledge sharing, and community involvement.

Communities involvement stems from the belief that "everyone should know they can influence the shape of their community" [2]. Although it is accepted citizens should have a role in shaping their neighbourhoods, there is a feeling that planning is inaccessible to many community members, particularly at a local level.

In 2004, emphasis was placed on "enhancing stakeholder involvement" [1], and "integrat[ing]

## Experience

The author worked in a local authority's planning department, and has studied and researched town planning in higher education. They're currently undertaking a PhD looking at the empowering possibilities of technology.

communities more fully into consultation and decision making". One ideology gaining traction across the UK is the dislike of 'big government' [3] and the wish to take "power, responsibility and decision making from the state and giving it to individuals" [6]; mirroring consumers' wishes to buy local and support peers, and the Government's adoption of the Localism Act 2011, which aims to give decision-making power to individuals and communities [11].

While town planning is trying engage people locally, it still relies on traditional methods of communication and participation [10]. Progress has been made, with *Planning Portal*, the UK Government's website that aims to increase planning's presence online. While this has improved participation, innovative methods largely remain within academia.

Following austerity measures in the UK, Local Authorities (LAs) are reducing services offered to citizens. Funding for *Planning Aid* was withdrawn, leading to a reduction in the services and advice it can offer. Without this support, and LAs scaling back on consultations, citizens are increasingly becoming left to fend for themselves, and increasingly required to work together as LAs can no longer be relied upon for support.

### Sharing of Knowledge: Time Banking

Currently, a lack of citizens' understanding of planning dominates complaints of the planning system. Both planners and citizens complain of not being able to communicate effectively: one complaining of limited understanding of the proposals being presented, and the other of a lack of meaningful comments.

Time banking could be a partial solution by engaging citizens in the planning process, with both planning professions and informed citizens sharing knowledge between them. This could bring benefits, allowing LAs more meaningful participation without increasing the burden of already strained planners. Previous research has indicated that informed citizens would like to help their communities, allowing citizens to share knowledge and cooperate to compete with professionals when campaigning against proposals. Allowing citizens and planners to work together effectively, through community planning experts, will help communities put their views forward, and help planners understand these.

Citizens complain of not having access to professionals during campaigns due to financial constraints. Time banking may provide a solution to this, although further exploration on the availability of professionals is needed, and their motivations for taking part.

### Lessons Learnt & The Future

As discussed, trends in the sharing economy and barter have gaining traction across the UK, and town planning should further its work, taking lessons and implications from existing platforms, and applying them to creating exciting possibilities for improvements in participation, particularly, how to engage local citizens. The sharing economy can be used for the exchange of goods and services globally, but more importantly, can be used for the exchange of knowledge locally.

Innovative platforms could be tested, taking lessons from sharing economies. Firstly, this could be done through time banking, furthering citizens' participation in what is normally considered a difficult process to



Give your garden to someone and received a quarter of all the fruit & vegetables they grow!



Give an hour of your time for an hour of someone else's!



Work with your community, using their expertise, to have your say in planning!

engage with. Secondly, platforms that enable the sharing and distributions of access resources, particularly land and its associated advantages could be developed.

Imagined online platforms could allow communities to be involved in deciding on and shaping land's short-term temporary use, while planners decide its long-term future. People's assets, such as gardens or allotments could also be shared with others, allowing someone to 'rent' a garden for growing vegetables.

Technology can empower and bring communities together allowing them to establish links and work together. By applying lessons from the sharing economy, based around time banking and the sharing of goods, communities can work together, instead of relying on paid professionals or LAs.

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