



Attendees at the international 'Innovating Complementary Currencies' workshop held at UEA London.

Innovating Complementary Currencies Workshop Report and Key Findings

The international 'Innovating Complementary Currencies' workshop was held in September 2010 in London. It brought together a wide range of complementary currency (CC) practitioners from across Europe and beyond. CCs are parallel means of 'exchange like local money systems, time banks, and barter networks. We aim to learn how to grow and harness the benefits of community-based CCs to deliver sustainable development. GICC applies 'niche innovation' theory to explore the diffusion of

complementary currency systems and the factors which support or undermine their growth.

The workshop explored the different ways in which complementary currency systems can diffuse into wider society, through processes of *replication*, *translation* and *scaling up* (see Table 1 below). Our discussions covered the different factors which might enable or hinder currency systems' growth.

The experience and expertise of workshop participants was key in drawing out some initial findings which will guide future research and are discussed in more detail below.

diffusion processes. Eight overall 'themes' emerged from the discussions about which factors supported or hindered currency diffusion. Each of these main themes includes several sub-themes, and it's worth remembering that sometimes diverse topics are grouped together for convenience in this summary.

For each diffusion process, two themes have been highlighted as the 'most significant', with other factors ranked 'significant' and 'less significant' according to the strength of impact on diffusion. Whilst we should be cautious about over analysing the findings of a single workshop, some interesting patterns did emerge from the discussions.

Key diffusion factors

Three factors were seen as most significant for all three diffusion processes: **networking**, **marketing** and **effectiveness**.

Table 1:
Processes of diffusion

Process	Description
Translation	Diffusion through 'mainstreaming' whereby some aspects of the innovation are adapted and re-interpreted for mainstream contexts, eg by government, business, other NGOs etc.
Scaling up	Diffusion through the growth of a specific initiative (eg recruiting more users).
Replication	Diffusion through the replication of initiatives in different contexts or sites.

Growing currencies What works?

A summary analysis of the workshop findings is presented in Table 2. This is based on the participant group discussions held around the different diffu-

First, building **networks** was widely seen as critical to diffusion success, although the nature of the networking varied: translation implies forging relationships with key sponsors in different fields, while scaling up might involve engaging with existing partnerships and organisations to recruit more participants.

Second, good **marketing** and communications were also seen as important to all types of currency diffusion. Language is important (talking about ‘currencies’ might alienate potential participants), and presenting currencies professionally was key to being taken seriously by potential partners and the public. Using personal and imaginative stories to promote currency take-up was also suggested.

Third, currency systems must also **effectively** address a problem, and deliver the impacts that proponents claim. From an innovation perspective this relates to the importance of the ‘functionality’ of the currency and its ‘relative advantage’ over alternative solutions to the perceived problem, and to the importance of promoting realistic expectations about its impacts.

Other diffusion factors

For processes of *translation*, **networking** and **marketing** were the most important factors. This often entailed building good relationships with appropriate ‘mainstream’ actors to whom the currency developer is trying to ‘sell’ a system. This requires sensitivity to language and the politics of the situation, as well making a clear case that the currency is able to meet the needs of the sponsoring organisation - **effectiveness**.

In contrast, processes of *scaling up* were perceived to be more dependent on good **leadership and management** as well as the securing of adequate re-

Success Factor	Translation	Scaling Up	Replication
Networking	★	★	★
Marketing	★	★	★
Leadership & Management	★	★	★
Effectiveness	★	★	★
Resources	★	★	★
Learning	★		★
Socio-cultural context			★
Political / regulatory context	★	★	★

Table 2: Significant themes of success factors relating to currency diffusion (size of star indicates significance of factor)

sources. To some extent, *scaling up* was therefore largely a function of organisational structure and capacity.

For *replication*, there was an emphasis on **learning**: the processes and systems that enable replication to take place. This encompassed not only standardisation of procedures and models, but also sharing learning and experience with fellow currency developers. The **socio-cultural context** was a particularly significant factor, affecting how easily a currency can be transferred from one location or setting to another.

Emerging tensions

The data also revealed some interesting tensions between factors which were perceived to be both enabling and potentially undermining to the successful diffusion of currency systems:

Use of Information Technologies - IT can support the functionality of currencies (indicated by the attendance of two electronic currency developers at the workshop). However, inappropriate use of IT could limit the development of a

currency system and diminish the ‘human’ interaction of currencies.

Standardisation and context specificity - Standardisation is a necessary step for currency replication to take place, enabling the easy transfer of knowledge and codification of current learning. However, some participants questioned the easy transferability of systems, claiming that ‘context matters’. The wider cultural context of the currency ‘movement’ is also relevant. Understanding these contextual factors is critical to avoid ‘shallow’ and failing replication.

Leadership - Charismatic leadership can be important in motivating people and driving projects forward; but strong, influential leaders can also hold projects back, through their control over the project and potentially through dogmatic beliefs about how the currency system should develop.

The workshop was part of the ‘Grassroots Innovation: Complementary Currencies’ (GICC) research, University of East Anglia.



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