In Baltimore: Fixing the Future

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Monday, November 12, 2012 - 00:00

On Thursday, November 8 at 7:00 pm, Creative Alliance at the Patterson theatre came alive, fed by the life blood of intelligent optimism. The space seemed to breathe as it swelled to encompass the 200 to 250 participants gathered to share a vision. That vision was presented in the form of a recently released documentary called “Fixing the Future” by David Brancaccio (PBS, NPR). The film explores communities from all across the United States that are using innovative and creative ways to build local wealth and take charge of their local economies. Some of the initiatives featured include local paper currency, time banking, and worker cooperative programs.

Some of the stars of the program were Baltimore’s own local money, the BNote, as well as a number of local, independent Baltimore businesses. Both served as excellent examples of the very real potential for engaging the public at the local level to the benefit of the communities they serve. The BNote alone has almost 30,000 dollar’s worth of exchange currently in circulation with over 170 independent companies participating.

The event itself was a demonstration of collaboration, as representatives from Baltimore Green Currency Association, Baltimore Green Works, Red Emma’s, Baltimore Timebank, and The Zeitgeist Movement were all on hand to chat with interested patrons, who also had the opportunity
to enjoy free food and drinks provided by Clementine and Zeke’s Coffee. Leading up to the start of the screening, the room resounded with one progressive conversation after another.

By the time the film started rolling, there was standing room only in the theatre. “Fixing the Future” was well received, drawing frequent rounds of applause from the crowd mixed with the occasional cheer of affirmation. Seeing shots of our city on the big screen was truly inspirational and gave an immense sense of satisfaction to have our community identified as being one actively working on positive change.

Following the movie, a panel was made available for a Q&A session. The highlight of the evening was the chance to hear about the work of professor/author/activist Edgar Cahn, also known as “the father of the time bank” (a system of trade based on the provision of services and tracked in hours that are then used as units of exchange). Since the early sixties, Cahn has dedicated his intellect and enthusiasm to creating a more level playing field and working to counter the stratifying effects of the existing social system. Since 1995, Cahn’s time-banking [2] has been working “to achieve wide-ranging goals such as social justice, bridges between diverse communities, and local ecological sustainability.”

And his message is starting to take root. Over 500 time banks [3] are now operational in 26 countries all across the globe. As we continue to receive new information on how deep the rabbit hole that is our current monetary policy goes, there is an ever pressing need to find alternatives to slow the bleeding and lead us in a more sustainable economic model.

If you missed the event, you missed a great time and a well-executed event organized by the capable Julie Gouldener of Baltimore Green Currencies. You can find more information on the film here [4], and check out the attached one page “What Can I Do” list collated by recommendations of the participating groups.

By reclaiming and taking accountability for the structural systems in the world around us, we can start to diminish our community’s susceptibility to coercion at the hands of those who value profit over people. It starts here. It starts now. It starts with you.

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