

Banking on Happiness (the Estonian Way)

Contributed by Bridget Algieri
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Editor's note: We introduce to Culture Change readers the Reality Sandwich blooger Bridget Algieri. First we present her short report on the Estonian answer to this historic recession.

Arcs of altruistic energy are empowering Estonians during a recession through the virtual Bank of Happiness. The "bank" is really an internet portal to allow the civic-minded across Estonia to network altruistically with each other.

To become a client, Estonians must register online, listing the useful things that they can do for others (ie: grocery shopping, walking a dog, fixing cars) and those that they would like done unto them (ie: having a suit darned or windows cleaned). After performing a good deed, the helpers receive tangible evidence of their kindness -- a "banknote," which can be printed from the bank's website with an inscription on the back marking the date and nature of the deed. The note can then be passed on to another Good Samaritan. There is no system of equations to codify how one work compares with another and the system will be self-regulatory.

Estonia needs it. The country placed dead last in a list of 30 nations rated by the 2007 European League Table of Happiness. They were judged by such diverse factors as carbon footprint, fear of crime and life expectancy. While that may constitute an emotional recession, Estonians are also experiencing an economic recession. Estonia's unemployment rate was less than 4 percent in early 2008; a year later it stands at more than 7 percent. In a country of 1.3 million people, the lay-offs of a few hundred have snowballed into a national economic disaster.

A small group of inspired optimists agreed that civic unrest would soon erupt if people did not find a virtuous way to meet their needs through meeting the needs of others. Further, there are many societal issues that remain unaddressed by the market economics of a capitalist system, including caring, loving, being a neighbor, and having a purposeful life. And so the idea of the Bank of Happiness was born. Co-founder Even Nolvak says, "[The Bank] is based on the assumption that doing good is good for you. It will touch everyone with a conscience."

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More on the "Bank": bankofhappiness.org, article from The London Times, 8 April 2009.

Original article at

realitysandwich.com

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