

Louvain School of Management

Local currencies and their use by businesses and organisations: the Talent in
Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve

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Estelle Collard

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Supervisor
Marie-Paule Kestemont

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Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. The chosen subject

The economic and financial crises that have been occurring since 2007 have triggered feelings of rejection and mistrust in the monetary and economic systems currently in place. In Europe, many citizens as well as politicians have blamed the Euro for their economic and financial suffering. Whether the Euro is the cause of their misfortunes will not be pondered in this paper. Nevertheless, a phenomenon has retained the attention of many and will be the focus of the research conducted for this master thesis: local, complementary, and community currencies. In short: alternative currencies created and managed by citizens.

Nowadays, many people in developed countries are looking at our society's current way of life and discovering its unsustainable nature. Some blame the system and decide not to change their lifestyle. Others take matters into their own hands by trying to find new ways to live. They attempt to find new and better ways to consume their surrounding environment. Everyone needs to consume in order to live: food, shelter, basic human necessities, etc. However, there are ways to live that are deemed more sustainable and others that are considered less sustainable. The nature of what is sustainable will not be debated, nor will the ways to measure sustainability. Alternative currency schemes are studied in this paper, not because they are indeed proven to be sustainable or good for the planet, but because some people have chosen this method to try to lead a more sustainable and respectful life.

1.2. Motivations for selecting the subject

The motivation for choosing the subject of local currencies arose when the French documentary *Demain* came out in early 2016. The film talked about the future of the planet and the human race. Humanity is essentially destroying their home: planet Earth. In rich and developed country such as Belgium, most of its inhabitants lead comfortable lives based on the consumption of fossil fuels. As someone who has

studied marketing in University, I am very well aware of how aggressively we are all pushed towards endless and mindless consumption. However, most of us are only vaguely conscious of the true price of our lifestyles. The documentary showed the different paths some people in the world have taken to go against our destructive way of life. *Demain* dedicated an entire section to local currencies: a completely new concept for many of the viewers. The alternative currencies shown in the section appeared to positively impact their surrounding communities through the revival of local businesses and the strengthening of community ties. Delving deeper into this subject through the production of a master thesis seemed like a good way to combine personal interests with educational imperatives.

Alternative movements are interesting to know and understand because they show a distinct way of approaching the necessary “problems” of life, such as the need for food, clothing, a place to live, etc. Different approaches and different solutions are not often taught to the general population: most of us do not know how to live differently. This research is not a plea for the use of local currencies, but a plea for being better aware of the options that are not considered conventional.

Moreover, over the last few years local currencies have been created everywhere in Wallonia. They are starting to come into the light and the general population is beginning to notice them. However, using more than one currency may seem counter-intuitive to many people, and especially for those who live in the euro zone. Indeed, for decades people fought to build a single currency for Europe: the euro. Additionally, these days, people increasingly tend to use electronic means of payment rather than cash. In light of these tendencies, the existence of currencies that can only be used in the form of cash and only within a small geographical area generates many questions.

1.3. Objectives of the research

The aim of the present research will be to understand how a local currency’s implementation and unique features affect its use by businesses and organisations. Businesses that accept to be paid in a local currency have to find ways to factor an additional currency into their daily management practices. Also, they have to find ways to spend the amounts they receive as a business entity. The objective is to find out and

understand the benefits and drawbacks of being part of local currency network as a business or as an organisation.

The Talent, a new local currency located in Wallonia¹, was chosen as a concrete study case. People who have been part of the creation of the Talent and of other local currencies have been interviewed in addition to some of the businesses and organisations that are part of the Talent network. Although, none of them have been part of a local currency network for more than a few months, it is still interesting to collect, analyse, and compare their early perspectives and experiences as members of the Talent currency network.

1.4. Methodology of the research

To begin, many books and articles on the subject of currencies and alternative currencies were read. At first, no specific knowledge was sought, but rather a general understanding of the topic.

To get a better understanding of local currencies in Belgium, an interview was obtained with a member of organisation that manages the oldest local currency currently circulating in Wallonia: The Epi Lorrain. The interview created a better understanding of the difficulties of keeping a local currency alive and of the importance of the people and organisations that make up the currency network. Following that interview, one of the creators of the Talent was contacted to obtain an interview. At that point, the choice to focus on the professional users (businesses, stores, liberal professions, etc.) that make up the network was made.

Details of the data collection process such as the type of interviews conducted, the number of interviews, the choosing of respondents, or the limitations encountered are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. To continue, the data was examined qualitatively: the differences and similarities found in each interview were analysed and comparisons were made; all the while taking into account their different circumstances—mainly the type of organisation and the geographical location. To conclude, a few recommendations were made.

¹ Wallonia is one of the three main regions of Belgium: Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia.

Part 1

Chapter 2: Local, Complementary, and Community Currencies

2.1. What is a currency?

McLeay, Radia, and Thomas (2014) define the word “currency” as paper notes² and coins. However, this definition only makes sense when describing currencies such as the pound sterling, the American dollar, or the euro. For the sake of this paper, the term “currency” must be considered more broadly.

People use a plethora of different currencies in their daily lives. Some currencies (i.e. digital currencies) even lack a physical form (coins and paper notes). Beyond using currencies such as euros, dollars, or pounds many people also use loyalty cards, shopping vouchers, airline miles, etc. These are all currencies, even if they are seldom thought of as such. Many different forms of currencies are used in a complementary way; meaning they are used alongside each other in everyday life. (Community Currencies In Action [CCIA], 2015)

A key role of currencies is to act as a medium of exchange (CCIA, 2015). The things used as a medium of exchange vary a lot depending on the when and where: the point in time during which they were used, and where on the planet they circulated. For example, U.S. prisoners traditionally used cigarettes, stamps, and envelopes as currency, trading them for other goods such as food or clothing. However, recently ramen noodles³ have become the new medium of exchange in North American detention facilities, showing that currencies evolve with time, depending on circumstances. (BBC, 2016) Indeed, what is used as money can evolve together with social change. In the case of prison currencies, the study suggests ramen noodles have gradually become more valuable because funding for U.S. prisons diminish year after year, impacting negatively the quality and quantity of the food served to inmates (BBC, 2016). More generally, many different valuable commodities such as shells, pearls, and

² Paper notes = banknotes

³ Ramen noodles: quick-cooking egg noodles usually served in a broth with bits of meat and vegetables (Ramen, n.d.)

precious metals⁴ have acted as a medium of exchange throughout history (Lietaer, 2000).

Jérôme Blanc (1998) has stated that money is a quintessentially human phenomenon. He goes on to equating money with a tool because it generates social ties between people and encompasses all aspects of social life: cultural, social, economic, and political. Knowing the link between money and social life, it is no surprise that some alternative currencies have very often been used as a way to strengthen social ties within a community. Nevertheless, these currencies can have a variety of names and ambitions—topics that will be discussed in the next few sections.

2.2. The different types of alternative currency schemes

In this paper, we are going to focus on currencies that originate from citizen initiatives for non-profit purposes. These currencies go by many different names, depending on their design, goals, and country of origin. These types of currency schemes are difficult to categorise and the names they are given—“complementary currency”, “local currency”, “community currency”, “social currency”, etc.—are sometimes used interchangeably.

Classification has proved difficult since such currency schemes constantly evolve due to rapid innovation in the field. Scholars have not agreed to use a common typology (Blanc, 2011). However, Jérôme Blanc (2011) has given several ways to classify them. Some terms such as “social currency” are widely used in Latin language-speaking countries whereas the names “complementary currency” and “community currency” are frequently used in the English language. As both complementary currencies and community currencies have the same initials, the acronym “CC” has served as a meta-name. “CC” has no equivalent in other languages⁵. (Blanc, 2011)

With the goal of being as clear as possible, Blanc’s method of classification will be applied in this master thesis. Since the Talent, the concrete study case selected, is categorised as a local currency, the term “local currency” will naturally be used in

⁴ The first coins were made from precious metals (Lietaer, 2000)

⁵ Languages other than English

subsequent chapters and sections. The meta-term “CC” will also be employed frequently in chapters that deal with theoretical notions that can be applied to more than just one specific type of alternative currency.

Table 1: The classification of currencies by Jérôme Blanc

Nature of projects	Space considered	Purpose	Guiding principle	Denomination (English / Spanish / French)
“CCs”				
Territorial	Geopolitical space (territory politically defined)	Defining, protecting and strengthening a territory	Redistribution or political control	Local currencies / Monedas locales / Monnaies locales
Community	Social space (pre-existing or ad hoc community)	Defining, protecting and strengthening a community	Reciprocity	Community currencies / Monedas sociales / Monnaies sociales
Economic	Economic space (production and exchange)	Protecting, stimulating or orientating the economy	Market	Complementary currencies / Monedas complementarias / Monnaies complémentaires
Outside “CCs”				
Territorial	Sovereign space	Sovereignty	Redistribution or political control	National currencies / monedas nacionales / monnaies nationales
Economic	Clients of a for-profit organization	Profit	Purchasing power capture	For-profit currencies / Monedas para lucro / Monnaies à but lucratif

(Blanc, 2011, p.7)

As shown in Table 1, Blanc (2011) begins the classification by pointing out two categories of currencies that should not be considered CCs. To start, sovereign currencies⁶—defined and controlled by a national or sovereign power—cannot be classified as CC. US dollars, euros and yens are all examples of sovereign currencies. Then, for-profit currencies—created by firms to turn a profit—are not included in the analysis of CCs. For example, loyalty schemes are a for-profit currency because they aim “to capture the purchasing power of their customers”. (Blanc, 2011, p. 6)

Blanc (2011) has identified three ideal types of currency schemes. The first one is called “local currencies”. Their objective is to protect and strengthen a defined

⁶ Sovereign currencies will sometimes be called domestic currencies or national currencies.

territory by keeping monetary relations and exchanges within a defined perimeter. An example can be Argentinean provincial currencies that were in use mainly during the 1980s and the 1990s. (Blanc, 2011) During those decades, Argentina saw high unemployment rates, high inflation, and monetary instability. Some provinces could not pay their employees and gave them printed bonds that could be used within the province's territory. These bonds were unenthusiastically accepted and were spent as quickly as possible because these bond's beneficiaries did not really trust this form of currency. (Gomez, 2009)

The second type, named "community currencies", aims to strengthen and protect a specific community by encouraging reciprocal exchanges. The community itself often generates the currency it uses. This type of community initiative doesn't have to be guided by economic principles and are not bound by territorial constraints. An example of this type of currency is time banking schemes. (Blanc, 2011) Time-based currencies are frequently used to acknowledge the value of activities that are neglected by the mainstream economy. This type of CC puts value on time spent working. (CCIA, 2015)

The third ideal type is "complementary currencies". "They are built with regards to economic spaces, defined by sets of actors and economic activities from production to exchange, mostly considered as ruled by market principles" (Blanc, 2011, p. 7). They specifically aim to stimulate and guide the economy but hold no lucrative purpose. German regio schemes are a close example of this third ideal category. (Blanc, 2011) Regiogeld (shortened form of "region money" in German) started in 2001 and spread quickly everywhere in Germany. They are non-profit and aim to strengthen regional economies and purchasing power. To encourage money to circulate more quickly they designed it to lose value as time passes (negative interest). (Thiel, 2011)

However, one has to keep in mind that actual currency systems often do not perfectly fit into one of the above described categories (Blanc, 2011); hence the continuing difficulty to clearly categorise a CC.

Another way to classify CCs is to distinguish four generations of currency schemes (see Table 2). Each generation combines the above described three ideal types in different way. Each one is:

...characterized by a specific monetary organization and specific relationships with the socio-economic world and with governments (local or central) as well. They emerge through innovation processes. They overlap, since the emergence of a new generation does not put an end to the former; and they are progressively transformed, since a generation may be regenerated by innovation. (Blanc, 2011, pp. 7-8)

Table 2: The four generations of CCs by Jérôme Blanc

Generation	Significant cases	Currency scheme types	Guiding principle	Content overview
G1	LETS, trueque, CES	Mostly community	Reciprocity first; various distance to market	Inconvertible schemes; quite small openness to external economic activities
G2	Time banks, Accorderie	Community	Reciprocity first; various distance to local governments	Inconvertible schemes with time currencies; frequent partnerships, especially with local governments
G3	Ithaca Hour, Regio, Palmas, BerkShares	Local and complementary	Market first; generally distant from local governments	Convertible schemes; local businesses are included; interest of partnerships with local governments
G4	NU, SOL	Mostly complementary	Market first, with links to governments and reciprocity	Complex schemes oriented toward consumer responsibility or / and economic activities re-orientation and other purposes; partnerships are necessary

(Blanc, 2011, p.9)

The first generation began in the 1980s with the LETS⁷ model—mutual credit systems that prioritize reciprocity and exchanges between people. They are mostly community currencies. First generation schemes tend to be inconvertible and are not backed by national currency reserves. (Blanc, 2011)

⁷ LETS=Local Exchange Trading System

The second generation encompasses pure time exchange schemes. This generation started with the rise of time dollar schemes at the end of the 1980s in the US. Reciprocity is also a central principle. These time currencies are also inconvertible and lack national currency reserves to back them. (Blanc, 2011) Time dollar, term coined by Time Banking creator Edgar S. Cahn, were created in response to the United States' growing inequality, poverty, social problems, and disillusion with public programmes who were supposed to undertake these problems (Cahn, 1999).

The third generation began with the Ithaca Hour experience in 1991 and is a derivation of the LETS models. Third generation schemes have an economic purpose as well as a territorial ambition; making them complementary currencies as well as local currencies. Generally implemented by non-profit organizations, they are linked by a fixed rate to the national currency. They are convertible and backed by national currency reserves. Inflows (converting from a national currency to a CC) are possible and sometimes encouraged through a bonus rate. However, outflows (converting from a CC to a national currency) are sometimes impossible or dissuaded by conversion costs. They are meant to be used alongside the national currency to stimulate local economic activity. For these initiatives to succeed, shops and businesses must be included in the scheme. Also, partnering with local government may be essential for this generation. (Blanc, 2011)

The fourth generation is gradually coming to life, with forerunning schemes such as Rotterdam's NU scheme in 2002-2003. They are complex projects that combine several objectives that were traditionally kept apart. They are characterized by the high involvement of local governing authorities and by their focus on environmental issues. These projects require complex governance. The NU project was designed to encourage sustainable behaviour just like the French SOL programme launched in 2007. (Blanc, 2011) Rotterdam's NU savings programme was a pilot project that promoted sustainable behaviours by encouraging spending that is local, eco-friendly, and good for humans and animals. This currency worked with a card. Every purchase made at a participating store earned points that were credited to an electronic card. Points were redeemable as part of a reward system. (Van Sambeek & Kampers, 2004) The also experimental SOL project possessed similar characteristics: a chip card was

used and it had multidimensional purposes (social, economic, and environmental). Just like its Dutch counterpart, the French pilot project sought to develop the concept of 'consom'acteur'—a contraction of the words 'consumer' and 'actor' in French—, meaning they were aiming to make people more aware of the impact of their everyday purchases. (Orzi, 2015)

2.3. The functions and objectives of local, complementary, and community currencies

In order to understand the functions and objectives of CCs, it is important to first understand the functions of the type of money we handle everyday—the thing that first comes to mind when thinking of “money” or “currency” in the traditional sense: sovereign currencies.

Sovereign money is issued by a state authority, in Europe a national bank, or the European Central Bank (ECB). Today, sovereign money exists in the form of cash (coins and banknotes) and non-cash central-bank money, called reserves. Such reserves, however, circulate on bank accounts with the central bank only, not on customer current accounts with banks. (Huber, 2017, p.1)

Sovereign currencies such as the euro, the dollar, or the yen have three main functions. Money acts as: a store of value, a medium of exchange, and a unit of account (CCIA, 2015).

Money is a store of value if it can be kept in one's pocket for a long time without any loss in value or purchasing power⁸. For example, saving money is how people are able to have resources readily available for use in the future. If money could not store value

⁸ In reality most monetary currencies do not keep the same value over time due to inflation and market demands.

people would have to find something else that would serve the same function: hold value that keeps with the passing of time⁹.

By being a medium of exchange, money also allows people to escape the barter system, which requires an individual to have exactly what the other needs and to be willing to part with it. Overall, money increases the number of possible exchanges by foregoing the need for ‘double coincidence of want’¹⁰.

Money as a unit of account represents a standard numerical unit of measurement and, as such, enables a uniform interpretation of value and cost. Without a widely agreed upon unit of measurement money cannot be used to settle debts between different parties and effective price systems cannot be established—both of which are key elements of market economies. (CCIA, 2015, p.99)

In short, “one euro”, “one litre” or “one hour” has to mean the same thing to everyone in order for people to live in the same reality and have meaningful, practical exchanges.

However, it should be noted that CCs do not have to fulfil all the above functions. Part of designing a CC is deciding whether or not, and to what degree, they wish to partake in these functions. CCs have specific agendas determined by the people and organisations creating them, hence the role and function of CCs and national currencies often differ greatly. (CCIA, 2015) For example, many CCs chose to keep the domestic currency as a unit of account, with a one-to-one valuation, and to have a different name (e.g. Bristol pounds have a one-to-one valuation with British pounds). Being able to easily understand the value of a CC with regard to the domestic currency makes it easier for people to use them in everyday life. Additionally, just like sovereign currencies, CCs aim to be a medium of exchange between people. However, in order to encourage exchanges, some of them use a method called demurrage; meaning they

⁹ Most food items would not replace money well as a store of value as they would tend to spoil with time.

¹⁰ A situation in which two individuals possess and are willing to trade exactly what the other person wants or needs.

design the currency to lose value as time passes in the hopes of boosting the speed of circulation of money. (Tadjudje, 2016) Using demurrage is one of the ways that CCs use to dissuade being used as a store of value—another divergence between national or sovereign currencies and CCs.

Many different and varied objectives can be associated with CC schemes, as each model is unique. However, there are a few who tend to be found more commonly; they can be roughly separated into four categories: “1) Democratising services and organisations; 2) Supporting the SME economy; 3) Countering inequality and social exclusion; 4) Addressing environmental impacts” (CCIA, 2015, p.44)

The first one is called “Democratising services and organisations” by the New Economics Foundation (CCIA, 2015, p.44). That phrase basically means that many CCs aim to meet the needs of their community. For example, the 2008 financial crisis resulted in reduced government budgets for many vital public services, which drove citizen to take matters into their own hands and use tools to tackle community needs. Such citizen-originated projects usually don’t replace the previously provided public services but the attempt to solve problems and meet needs in ways that match their core values as CCs. (CCIA, 2015)

If well designed and implemented, a community currency can bring new ideas and inputs into public service delivery in a cost-effective way, strengthen independent community-based initiatives, recognise talents and activities not valued by the mainstream market economy and create their own dynamics of interaction and exchange. (CCIA, 2015, p.47)

The second broad objective category is “supporting the SME¹¹ economy”. (CCIA, 2015, p.44) Commercial diversity is desired and crucial when it comes to the health of national economies as there is a need for systems that accommodate the specific needs of local economies. Big international companies tend to have more of a negative impact on the economic health of a community. For example, such companies will

¹¹ Small and medium-sized enterprises

leave quickly if they sense economic troubles, taking jobs with them. Local businesses are more rooted to a community and will be more likely to stay and weather storm than leave at the first sign of turmoil. In addition, CC money has to circulate locally or within a delimited community whereas profits made by a euro spent locally often don't stay in the same area (Blanc, 2006a). CCs favour smaller businesses and help them stay alive by supporting diversity and educating consumers about the impact their everyday choices have on their local economy and community. Also, businesses become part of a network through such currency schemes which has the potential to be very helpful in terms of solidarity, mutual help, and good press stemming from knowing the values such businesses stand for. (CCIA, 2015; Blanc, 2006a) Finally, being a member of a CC network can also allow businesses to grant each other credit, lessening their reliance on traditional banks (Attout et al., 2013)

The third broad objective of CCs is “addressing environmental impacts” (CCIA, 2015, p.44), as CCs have a role in the way the planet's resources are value. They can support projects and business that behave in an environmentally-friendly manner. They can also encourage sustainable behaviour by implementing a system that rewards people for shopping at eco-friendly businesses. Similarly, alternative currency schemes can encourage actors in the supply chain to join the movement. (CCIA, 2015)

The last general goal is to “counter inequality and social exclusion” (CCIA, 2015, p.44). CCs can support projects that value skills that would not normally be valued, thus valuing people that are not always valued by the mainstream job market and economy. According to Financité¹², CCs that greatly emphasize reciprocity have a positive effect on exchanges and solidarity within a community. They are an appropriate tool to prevent social exclusion. Nevertheless, they are not a good way to reintegrate individuals into a group or society. Excluded individuals require one-on-one attention, which CC systems cannot provide. (Didier, 2010)

¹² Previously known as Réseau de Financement alternatif

2.4. The difference between historical local currencies and modern local currencies

Since explaining the difference between historical and modern local currencies all over the world is not the main subject of this paper, we will briefly explain how these two differ only on a European level.

The idea of a local currency is far from new in Europe. In the past travelling long distances wasn't as easy as today, making long-distance exchanges less common. Therefore, many towns and regions had their own local currency. Many of them have existed in Europe since the Middle Ages. Copper coins were issued by local town authorities, bishops, and monasteries. These local coins were used alongside silver and gold coins issued by kings and lords. These local currencies eventually disappeared with the progressive centralization of powers in Europe. (Buron & Franck, 2013)

In this section the term "local" is used broadly; it can designate a currency created by a governing authority (e.g. a regional government) as well as a currency generated by regular citizens (Blanc, 2006a). According to Blanc's (2011) way of classifying CCs, historical local currencies would not fit his description of a local currency since they were generated by governing authorities and not by citizen-driven projects (see Table 1). However, there is no other accurate way to designate such historical and locally-circulating currencies¹³.

There are many differences between historical local currencies and the local currencies that have been appearing since the 1970s. As said in the previous paragraph, historical local currencies were issued by local authorities and banks to be used as a regular everyday currency¹⁴, whereas modern local currencies stem from citizen organisations that are not often partnered with banks. (Blanc, 2006b) And, even though they both circulate in more restricted geographical areas than local currencies, their core objectives differ.

In the past, the rationale for issuing a local currency was mainly economic:

¹³ Monetary localism can be defined as the organization of a localisation of exchanges within a delimited geographical area by adapting an existing monetary system or by creating a suitable monetary system (Blanc, 2002).

¹⁴ The term "regular" here means that the currency functioned and was intended to be used in the same way as a national or sovereign currency, except in a smaller geographical area.

...while local public administration's goals are mainly to protect or stimulate local economies or to finance themselves (when it is not a case of claiming sovereignty), groups of citizens either aim at stopping a currency shortage or at transforming the nature of exchanges according to an ideological basis (Blanc, 2006b, p.4)

2.5. Local, complementary and community currencies in the present context

Money is used every day by billions of people on Earth. However, many people question this tool in the light of some of its apparent negative impacts on our lives. In their book called *Rethinking Money*, Lietaer and Dunne (2013) describe the unsustainability of the current global monetary system:

At present, our unexamined money system perpetuates scarcity and breeds competition. Are you aware that money is created out of nothing, as bank debt? And how that particular process of creation breeds systematic competition among its users? Did you know that the prevailing money system generates several other harmful consequences, including short-termism, compulsory growth pressure, cyclical recessions, unrelenting concentration of wealth, and erosion of social and physical or natural capital? All these factors together create a wholly unsustainable financial structure that is, indeed, disintegrating. (Lietaer & Dunne, 2013, p. 2)

In response to the discontentment created by the current system in place, complementary, community, and local currency schemes are being created by communities all over the world. There are currently about 5000 CCs in the world. (Van Overmeire, 2012) Many regions in France, Austria, Germany, and many other European countries have successfully introduced local currencies (Buron & Franck, 2013). The popularity of such currency schemes has only risen higher since the financial, economic, and social crises of recent years as people strive to reclaim this

financial tool to transform it into a social tool; anchored in human and economic exchanges (Attout et al., 2013).

2.6. Local, complementary and community currencies in Belgium

During the last few years, many different CCs have seen the light of day in Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels. As in numerous other countries, these initiatives were prompted by the growing discontentment with the way the economy works, by the financial crisis of 2008, by various other factors such as rising environmental awareness, and the desire to take back control of money and consumer purchasing power (Buron & Franck, 2013).

Some projects were supposed to be permanent while others were designed to be temporary. For example, Ghent has a local currency called the Toreke¹⁵ that was supposed to be temporary but that is still in use today (Buron & Franck, 2013). As a whole, Belgium also has a large number of LETS¹⁶ currently in use (Attout et al., 2013)). In Brussels, the Eco-Iris was a pilot project that ran for two years and stopped in 2015. The information gathered during this trial period could be used to launch a CC in Brussels sometime in the future (Eco iris, n.d.). According to Eric Dewaele from Financité, some projects for Brussels are currently under study (Appendix D).

In Wallonia, the first CC, the Ropi¹⁷, was created in Mons and launched in 2010. The Epi Lorrain followed in the southern rural tip of Wallonia in 2012 (Attout et al., 2013). The Epi Lorrain has been in circulation for five years—the longest running local currency in the Walloon Region— which makes it a source of inspiration for other currency projects such as the Talent (Appendix A). Since then, many other projects have been launched with the support of Financité¹⁸. Most recently, the Talent was launched on October 25th, 2016 in Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve. (Appendix A) Overall, in October of

¹⁵ The Toreke is one of four CCs circulating in Flanders (Theunis, 2014)

¹⁶ LETS is short for Local Exchange Trading System or SEL (Système d’Echange Local) in French

¹⁷ Unfortunately the Ropi didn’t succeed as intended but a relaunch is currently underway (www.ropi.be)

¹⁸ The Financité network brings together organisations and citizens with the goal of making finance a positively impacting force on everyday life (Réseau Financité, n.d.-a)

2016 there were 6 circulating currencies in Wallonia and 5 others projects were presently being worked on.

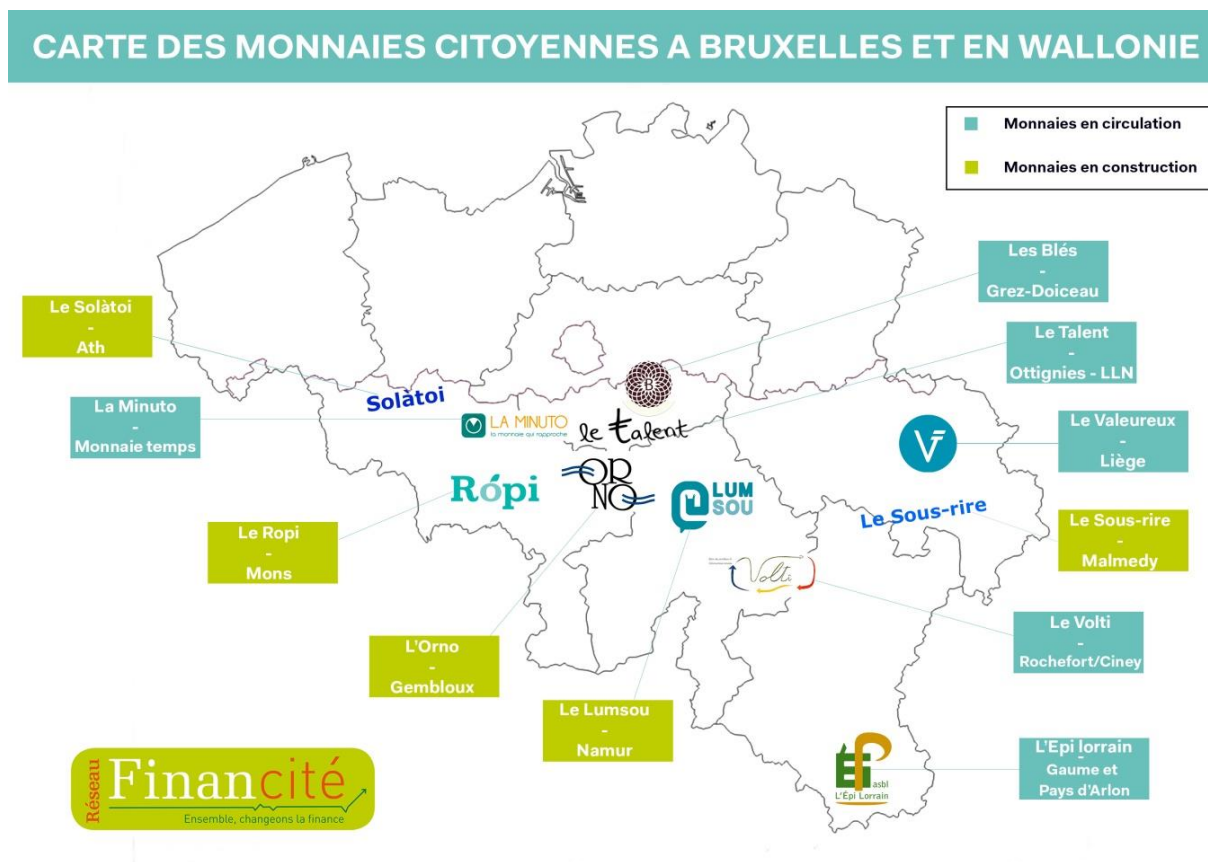
According to Emmanuel Winance from the Epi Lorrain (Appendix B) and Fabienne Neuwels (Appendix A) from the Talent, the renewed enthusiasm for local currencies comes partly from the success of the French documentary *Demain*, which dedicates an entire section to local currencies. More people are now aware of the existence of local, complementary, and community currencies. Moreover, it seems the documentary has shown the public why such alternative currencies can be useful and beneficial.

The alternative currencies in Wallonia (see Table 1) can all be considered local currencies. Indeed, they circulate freely in a defined territory and anyone can have access to it. Additionally, they all share similar objectives: the strengthening of their territory on a social and economic level. (Attout et al., 2013)

Financité is an organisation that brings these different currencies together; it acts as a communication bridge, allowing them to exchange information and to learn from each other. Recently, it has also been working on a common project for these currencies: the addition of an electronic mean of payment for the businesses and the individual users. As it will be discussed in chapter six, there is an apparent diminishing of the use of coins and paper notes in everyday life. Electronic payments are becoming increasingly common all over the world, including in Belgium. Although Eric Dewaele did not reveal if any of the currently circulating local currencies had officially agreed to be part of the project, it seems logical that Financité would only work on such an important and time-consuming project if several of the currencies were genuinely interested and ready to add an electronic dimension to their currency. (Appendix D)

As shown in Figure 1, by 2016 there are many local currency projects flourishing everywhere in Wallonia. (Réseau Financité, n.d.-b) The Walloon Region is a relatively small territory, which begs the question of the possibility of exchanges between the different local currencies. Mr. Dewaele also mentioned that they are looking for a way to allow for such exchanges with the electronic system they are developing. Time will tell if they are rendered possible. (Appendix D)

Figure 1: Six currencies and five projects in Brussels and Wallonia by 2016



(Réseau Financité, n.d.-b)

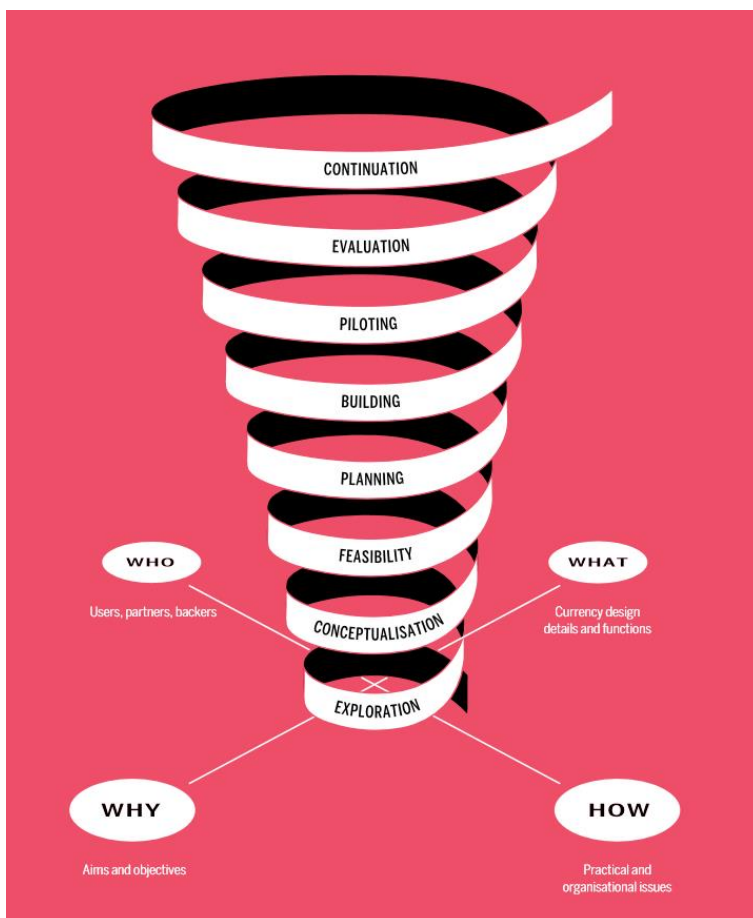
Chapter 3: The Design and Features of a Local Currency

3.1. Building a local currency

Since community currencies are created by the people and organisations that will ultimately use them, their design focuses on the benefits they bring to the users. Such benefits can be monetary or financial, but also solidarity or community spirit; a benefit can be anything as long as it brings something that is valued by the person who receives it. (CCIA, 2015)

To be sure, "...each currency is designed to meet specific needs in a specific context. This is true even if at first glance two currencies seems to be carbon copies in terms of technical design elements." (CCIA, 2015, p.89)

Figure 2: Currency designing process



(CCIA, 2015, p.91)

The process of designing a currency cannot be described as linear (see Figure 2), a straight path from start to finish. The book *People Powered Money* (CCIA, 2015)

describes it as a spiral; meaning it is a process that requires frequent adaptations and modifications throughout. Indeed, a decision may affect choices made earlier; hence the importance of revisiting past choices to see if they still have the intended impact on the project. The decisions made during the creation process of a currency regard four core elements: (1) the participants (who); (2) the objectives (why); (3) the functional design of the currency (what); and, (4) the organisational and practical necessities to making the currency a reality. (CCIA, 2015) Some of these core elements will be discussed more at length later in this chapter. The objectives (why) of CCs have already been discussed in chapter 2. In this chapter, the participants and the functional design of the CC will be discussed. The fourth element deals with the organisational structure, the governance of the CC, and legal aspects; these aspects will not be discussed in this thesis. Indeed, the research focuses on the experiences of the businesses that are part of the CC network and how some aspects of the currency directly affect their use of it, as they perceive it. This is why the participants and the functional design were chosen.

Here are the general steps that lead to the building of a currency. These steps are given here so a general idea of the building process is understood. Focusing on each step is not the aim of this research.

Table 3: The process of building a currency¹⁹

CURRENCY BUILDING PROCESS	
Phase A: Planning	
Stage 1: Exploration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analysing the environment for goodness of fit with a CC ○ Identifying potentials partners & stakeholders ○ Testing ideas in various forums ○ Sketching the general ideal ○ Setting up an implementation team
Stage 2: Conceptualisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Development of the concept and design of the currency
Stage 3: Feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In-depth analysis of all possible scenarios: good and bad
Stage 4: Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Combination of stages 1 through 3 ○ Planning of implementation
Phase B: Building-Piloting	
Stage 5: Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Setting up all operational elements to be functional for the launch of the currency (publicly or as a beta-test)
Stage 6: Piloting	<p>Pilot-stage monitoring of the circulating currency through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Data-collection; ○ Measurement of key performance indicators; ○ Feedback from users; <p>in order to identify weaknesses and strengths</p>
Phase C: Continuity options	
Stage 7: Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analysis of results of pilot stage with feedback from all stakeholders
Stage 8: Continuation	<p>4 common options of continuity:</p> <p>(1) <i>Improve and innovate</i>: if the currency shows potential, some modification may be required</p> <p>(2) <i>Stop</i>: the currency project is not reaching its objectives and/or has insufficient support</p> <p>(3) <i>Scale up</i>: make the currency available to a larger territory or group of people if the project is successful</p> <p>(4) <i>Replicate</i>: replicating a currency somewhere else is an option usually considered at a later stage—when the successful currency is mature—,and will naturally require some adaptations</p>

(CCIA, 2015, pp.90-95)

¹⁹ Table 3 was created to summarize the process of building a currency.

3.2. The participants

3.2.1. Three kinds of stakeholders

There are different groups that make the currency into what it is and determine its success. Their contribution sometimes matters more in the long-run success than the initiator of the project or the organisation responsible for it.

There are three types of stakeholders involved in a currency's creation and planning process. The first type of stakeholder is called partners. This category groups all the individuals and entities that are involved in the design, launch, and operate a currency. The partnerships will vary according to the objectives of the currency, and can come from non-profit organisations, university departments, city councils, business networks, etc. (CCIA, 2015) For example, The Talent had various partners supporting and helping in creating the Talent like the Cryptogroupe, responsible for the security of the banknotes, and Alternatis, who helped design the banknotes²⁰ (Appendix A).

The second type of stakeholder is called backers. Backers provide financial support or other resources (i.e. their knowledge, expertise, access to a resource, etc.) to a currency project but are not directly involved in its creation and building process. However, the success of a project can depend heavily the support that is received. (CCIA, 2015) For example, the Fondation Roi Baudoin supported the Talent by granting money that was used for printing the paper notes and that covered communication fees. On the other hand, the AGL²¹ provided free access to meeting spaces at the university instead of making a financial contribution (see Chapter 4 for more details).

The third type of stakeholder is users. A currency is a tool created to achieve a certain goal. That goal can only be reached if the currency circulates in the way its designers intended. Therefore individuals, businesses, and public entities have a major role to play the fulfilment of a currency's objective. (CCIA, 2015)

²⁰ See Chapter 4 for more details

²¹ General Assembly of Student of Louvain-la-Neuve

The process of using an additional currency is not simple as it requires significant efforts and may require the changing of habits. Individuals have to know about the CC, understand how it works, be willing to use it, go exchange domestic currency, carry it with them, and maybe change their spending habits by spending money in stores that accept the CC as payment. Similarly, businesses have to know about the currency, understand how it works, be willing to accept and use it, factor its existence into daily management, have a way to spend the banknotes they receives, and perhaps change some of their habits. Public bodies may have a role in lending credibility and being an important player in the community either by supporting the project publicly or by becoming a user of the currency²². Acceptance of the new currency by its potential users makes the difference between success and failure since such currencies have to circulate and be used to accomplish its goals. Users can never be neutral or passive because using or not using a CC both have an impact on the project, be they negative or positive. The approval of the community is crucial because it indicated how well the organisation that created the CC understands the needs for the community for which the CC project is intended. (CCIA, 2015)

The first two types of stakeholders build and give support to the CC project, and thus tend to be more important during the creation and launch phases of the project. The importance of users comes into play more predominantly once the currency is circulating because even a well-designed and financially-supported currency will eventually collapse if it is not used by the people for whom it is intended—individuals, businesses, and sometimes local public bodies. There is no reason for a CC to exist if it is not used. We will therefore focus on the users of a CC and how their involvement shapes the success or failure of a CC project.

3.2.2. Focus on the users

For the project to be successful, it is necessary for respected and trusted members of the community to be part of it. A CC project cannot thrive without the community's trust. Also, involving different types of people and organisations, depending on the

²² Some alternative currencies are started by local governing authorities but this master thesis does not included such CC projects, instead considering only projects born from citizen movements.

objectives of the project, is important because the more people are involved the better the chances of success. Indeed, the CC's success depends being part of a network that is deeply rooted in the community and the territory. Moreover, networks allow for a plurality of points of views and opinions that will foster synergies and shape the CC into something the users will accept more readily. (Attout et al., 2013)

Being part of the community from the beginning makes it more likely for the currency to be used by a strong network of people and businesses. User networks should be sufficiently large and diversified to ensure the proper circularity of money. A great number of individual users and businesses is not enough for a currency to be able to exchange hands without getting stuck in the hands of a user or a business that cannot find a place to spend it next. Indeed, a diverse pool of users is necessary to have numerous spending options. (Attout et al., 2013) The circulation of the currency embodies the links between the different members of the network, cementing their affiliation by claiming a common strategic and commercial identity, with ethical goals and objectives that go beyond individual interests (Blanc & Fare, 2016)

The formation of a network of businesses that accept and use a local, complementary, or community currency is a delicate and important step. The entire network's size depends on the number of places where people can spend their money. On the network's size depends the number of total exchanges, the currency's circulation, and its long-term capacity to thrive. Naturally, individual users are also quite important as they, along with the businesses, use the currency in the different businesses and contribute to its circulation. (Attout et al., 2013)

A network of businesses and individual users that is too small or not sufficiently diversified does not encourage new members to join it. Money that cannot be spent in a large enough number of different businesses holds no interest as its proper circulation will be impeded, rendering the currency stagnant. People and businesses need to find alternative local spending options, places where they can obtain the goods and services they need and want. Otherwise, the network will slowly disintegrate and the long-term viability of the project will be threatened. (Blanc, 2009)

Knowing the importance of the size of the network of users, there could be a lot of pressure to rapidly increase its size once the currency is launched. However, the business selection process is important for the guarantee of the currency's system of values. Compatibility between the CC project's values and the business's values is important to ensure that the currency's objectives will not be forgotten or put aside. (Blanc & Fare, 2016)

Overall, the network's solidity is important because using an additional currency is not easy. Becoming part of the network, either as an individual user or as a business may require changes in habits. The first members of the network, the early adopters of the currency, are often people and organisations whose values and habits match well with the use of a local currency; for them, changes may not be very substantial. However, a vibrant, dynamic, local network cannot only have members who already embodied the values the currency is trying to promote. For example, a local currency is a tool designed to promote local exchanges; if it is only used by people and organisation that already favoured the local economy before they entered the network then the existence of the local currency does little to nothing to promote the local economy. The goal is to change the way people and organisations choose to spend their money. Instilling change in the way people behave can be quite difficult since "... in many cases, behaviour is habitual and guided by automated cognitive processes, rather than being preceded by elaborate reasoning." (Steg & Vlek, 2009)

Until now, people and businesses were the two kinds of users discussed. However, public bodies may also be part of the CC network either as a user or as supporting entity. Overall, local governments haven't shown much interest in CCs because they are a relatively new tool as they first appeared in the 1980s. Their degree of involvement is different with each generation of CC, being almost completely inexistent for the older generations of CCs. With the more recent generations, the collaboration and partnerships between CCs and public bodies can make the difference between failure and success as the objectives of the CCs have gotten more diversified (with environmental protection becoming very common objective), and thus may require more support to succeed. Local public authorities may find it important to help promote the use of a CC if they share common objectives. Usually,

these objectives are of a social or environmental nature. Social objectives often have to do with the tightening the community ties and fighting against poverty and social exclusion. Environmental objectives often aim to promote behaviours and consumption habits that have a positive impact on the environment. Additionally, local public bodies can just be users of the currency, accepting payments in CCs for some of the services they offer. The involvement of public bodies can send a strong message of trust to non-users. (Blanc & Fare, 2010)

3.3. The functional design and organisation of a local currency

The different CC network can adapt their currency's functional design and features depending on the objectives they wish to accomplish with it (Attout et al., 2013). There is not perfect setup that allows CC to thrive long-term, but every choice and every feature that is selected brings its own set of advantages and disadvantages.

Four important currency features were selected and their advantages and disadvantages are discussed in this section. Naturally, a CC's design is made up of many different features but the following four were chosen because they affect the user's experience in a concrete manner, either because they make it more or less difficult to manage the use of a second currency or because they directly encourage or discourage joining the CC network in the first place.

3.3.1. Currency convertibility

The question of convertibility is very important and should be brought up at the beginning of the currency building process as it will have an impact on the entire project. The CC can be tied to a national or domestic currency and have the capacity to be converted to and from it (1 CC = X units of the national/official/domestic currency). In some cases, a tied CC allows only one-way conversions: from national/official currency to CC. A tied CC's value is determined by the value of the national or domestic currency and evolves alongside it. A CC can also have its own unit of account, having no ties with the official currency, and existing in a close loop (i.e. Time currencies). Each type of CC, convertible or inconvertible, has its own advantages and disadvantages. (Attout et al., 2013)

Most first and second generation CCs were inconvertible and required no backing. From the third generation, a fixed rate of exchange linked CCs and official currencies, thus making reserves a necessity to guarantee the CC and make it a system in which people can trust. (Blanc & Fare, 2016)

Advantages of convertible currencies (Attout et al., 2013):

- The possibility to convert a CC back to the national/official currency may reassure potential users and encourage them to become part of the network as they will perceive the operation as less risky, not irreversible.
- Because it is tied to a national/official currency, accounting for it in bookkeeping is easier and reassuring for businesses
- Being able to convert back to a currency may be the only way for some businesses, who cannot pay their suppliers in local money, to be part of the network
- Conversion back the national currency can be a paying service, thus generating revenue for the organisation

Disadvantages of convertible currencies (Attout et al., 2013):

- Being able to convert the CC doesn't encourage businesses to change their habits or find creative way to spend the local currency
- The CC organisation has to maintain proper funds to always have the capacity to convert money back
- There needs to be a place where users can exchange their CC money against an official currency
- There needs to be safe place for both CC and domestic currency deposits

The advantages of inconvertible currencies (Attout et al., 2013):

- The CC network is less dependent on the national economy and operates outside financial regulation
- Legal currency reserves are not necessary
- Independence from other currencies and the values they promote is emphasized

The disadvantages of inconvertible currencies (Attout et al., 2013):

- Users (people and businesses) feel less comfortable joining inconvertible systems, particularly if their spending options within the network are not very numerous

3.3.2. Bonus or Malus

If a currency is convertible, a bonus and/or malus can be introduced in the conversion process. A “bonus” is given to someone who chooses to convert from a national currency to a CC. Bonuses can be thought of as gifts meant to encourage conversions to CCs by new and existing users. For example, a few percentages can be added to the total amount exchanged. A “malus” is the opposite of a “bonus”. A malus is charged when someone tries to convert a CC back into an official/national currency; it is an extra amount of money that has to be paid. Charging a malus is supposed to discourage conversions to national currencies. The bonus system can be financed by the malus system. Whether bonus and malus systems have the intended effect depends partly on the magnitude of the bonus and whether converting back to the national currency is a necessity (if the person or organisation has no way to use the local currency). (CCIA, 2015)

For example, if a conversion bonus is applicable 100 euros can be exchanged for 110 units of CC, making it a bonus of 10%. In the case of a conversion back to euros, 100 units of CC can be exchanged for an amount of euros inferior to 100 euros such as 97 euros, making it a malus of 3%. (Attout et al., 2013)

Advantages of using a bonus/malus system (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

- A bonus system can encourage new users to join or to purchase larger amounts of CC
- A bonus system gives users more purchasing power in CC
- A bonus system can be especially helpful at the beginning to encourage people to join the network and use the currency
- A malus can encourage users to find ways to spend the CC amounts in their possession instead of converting back to national currency
- A malus system generates income that can be used to finance the currency organisation or other side projects

Disadvantages of using a bonus/malus system (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

- A bonus system needs to be financed, thus making the generating of additional funds the CC organisation's responsibility
- Using a bonus/malus system is more complicated than not using one because one needs to calculate the amounts taken or given
- Using a malus system can discourage people and businesses from joining the network in the first place if they are worried about not being able to spend their CC.

3.3.3. Demurrage

Demurrage is a mechanism by which the nominal value of a CC banknote diminishes over time, meaning it depreciates with time. Demurrage is mainly operated to avoid hoarding and to promote currency circulation. (CCIA, 2015)

Advantages of demurrage (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

- It clearly discourages people from hoarding
- It puts a clear emphasis on the chief function of the currency as a medium of exchange
- It encourages consumers to spend their money faster
- Overall it boost the velocity of circulation and possibly the number of exchanges that take place

Disadvantages of demurrage (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

- The concept of demurrage can be difficult to understand and discourage people and businesses from joining the network and using the CC
- It puts collective interests in front of individual interests
- Demurrage is complicated and can be difficult for the CC organisation to manage properly
- Some people see demurrage as a ploy to make people spend more money and will not approve of the CC
- The limited validity of paper notes means they have to be replaced by new ones periodically, which piles on additional costs for the CC organisation

3.3.4. Paper money versus digital/electronic money

A CC can either use paper banknotes or be digital. However, digital does not mean virtual (allowing purchases made through the internet such as Bitcoins). Paper currencies and digital currencies both make it impossible to buy goods and services on the Internet. Paper currencies use banknotes and digital currencies are stored electronically or magnetically in much the same way as electronic vouchers. For example, digital CCs may use a card or a smartphone application instead of paper notes. It is possible for a CC to use both paper and digital money (Attout et al., 2013)

Advantages of paper money (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

- Paper notes are a physical reminder of membership to a network, their symbolic meaning is significant because they can be touched, and they are concrete.
- Paper notes can be easily used by everyone because official currencies use paper notes as well
- Printing money is not very costly

Disadvantages of paper money (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

- Paper notes are more easily forged than a digital currency
- Paper notes take up space in people's wallets and businesses' cash register
- Paper notes need to be replaced after some time due to wear and tear
- Large money transactions using only paper notes is inconvenient
- More and more, there is a tendency to avoid carrying cash and prefer using electronic cards
- Allowing for demurrage of the CC is more difficult to manage in the case of paper money

Advantages of digital money (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

- It takes up no space in wallets and cash registers
- Digital transactions leave a trace that makes managing a business easier
- Forgery is difficult in the case of a digital currency
- Demurrage of a digital currency is more easily manageable

Disadvantages of digital money (Attout et al., 2013; CCIA, 2015):

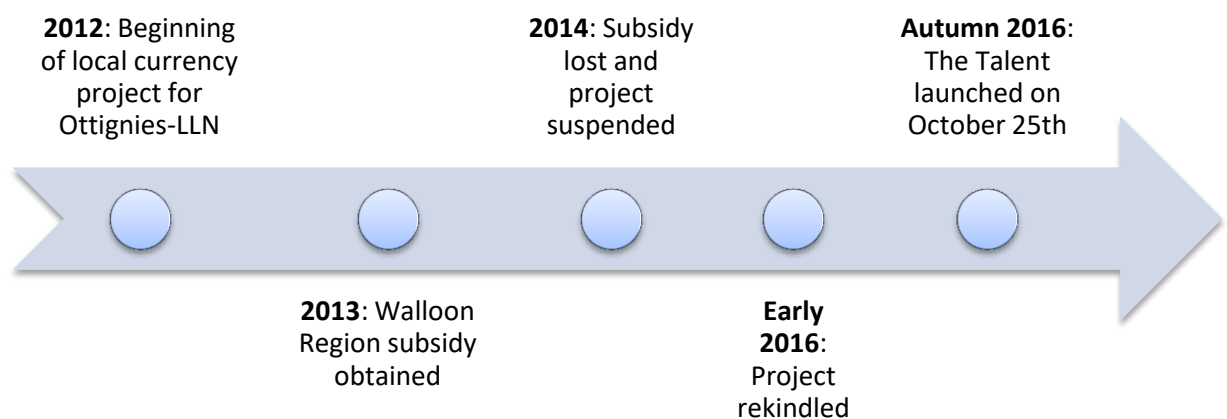
- Setting up a digital currency can be costly
- As it cannot be touched, a digital currency feel less close to people and communities
- Not everyone has access to the Internet or has the skills needed to manage properly a digital currency

Part 2

Chapter 4: The Local Currency of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve: le Talent

4.1. History

Figure 3: Timeline for “Le Talent” project from thought to launch²³



(Appendix A)

The idea to create a local currency in Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve came to a few of its inhabitants a few years ago. As a group that meets every week to group their purchases made to local food producers²⁴, they were already interested in alternative movements that promote economic localism, ethics in business and production, and the environment. They believe that it is time to stop exploiting our planet, and, to do so, change must start at home, in our own communities. (Appendix A)

A few years ago, they heard the city of Mons had launched its own currency: the Ropi. The Louvain-la-Neuve-based purchasing group invited a member of the association responsible for the Ropi to come explain to them the purpose and workings of local currencies. From that exchange came the idea to start a similar currency project in Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve. (Appendix A)

²³ This timeline was built with information given by Mrs. Neuwels, whose interview is available in Appendix A

²⁴ Groupe d'achat = buying group

Starting in 2012, they worked on the project for about a year and a half (see Figure 3). They borrowed ideas from other currencies such as the Epi Lorrain and the Ropi, both local currencies in Wallonia. Most of the project was ready by 2013. Creating a local currency is a lot of work; which is why they sought to obtain a subsidy from the Walloon Region. That subsidy would provide the organisation with two full-time employees during two years. (Appendix A) That same subsidy had previously been granted to the Epi Lorrain, whose members claimed having employees available to work on the project full time had been a tremendous help (Appendix B). Unfortunately, the government that came to power in 2014 cancelled all subsidies in favour of local currencies. The workload proved to be too heavy for the organisation, leading to the suspension of the project. (Appendix A)

In early 2016, the documentary called *Demain* was released in Belgian cinemas. The success of the documentary rekindled the project, and public interest in the currency rose. More people understood the purpose of local complementary currencies. The Talent²⁵ was officially launched on October 25th, 2016. (Appendix A)

The currency was able to see the light of day thanks to the contributions in time and in resources of many different people and associations. The *Fondation Roi Beaudoin* granted several thousand euros that were used to print the paper notes and to pay for communication and advertising fees. The *Cryptogroupe* from UCL volunteered to provide security to the banknotes in order to prevent forgery. The *AGL*²⁶ also allowed the Talent organisation to access UCL meeting rooms free of charge. Student organisations (*kots-à-projets*²⁷) also help organise events from time to time. *Financité*²⁸ is also an important partner as they often act as communication bridges between different local currencies. The *Maison Du Développement Durable* in Louvain-la-Neuve also helped during the early days of the currency. It is also important to point out that

²⁵ The name was chosen as a group after two brainstorming sessions. The organisation wanted a name that sounded positive and was easy to remember. (Appendix A).

²⁶ Assemblée Générale des Etudiant·e·s de Louvain (AGL) is an organisation that represents students from UCL (AGL, n.d.)

²⁷ Student organisations that revolve around a specific theme or project

²⁸ The Financité network brings together organisations and citizens with the goal of making finance a positively impacting force on everyday life (Réseau Financité, n.d.-a)

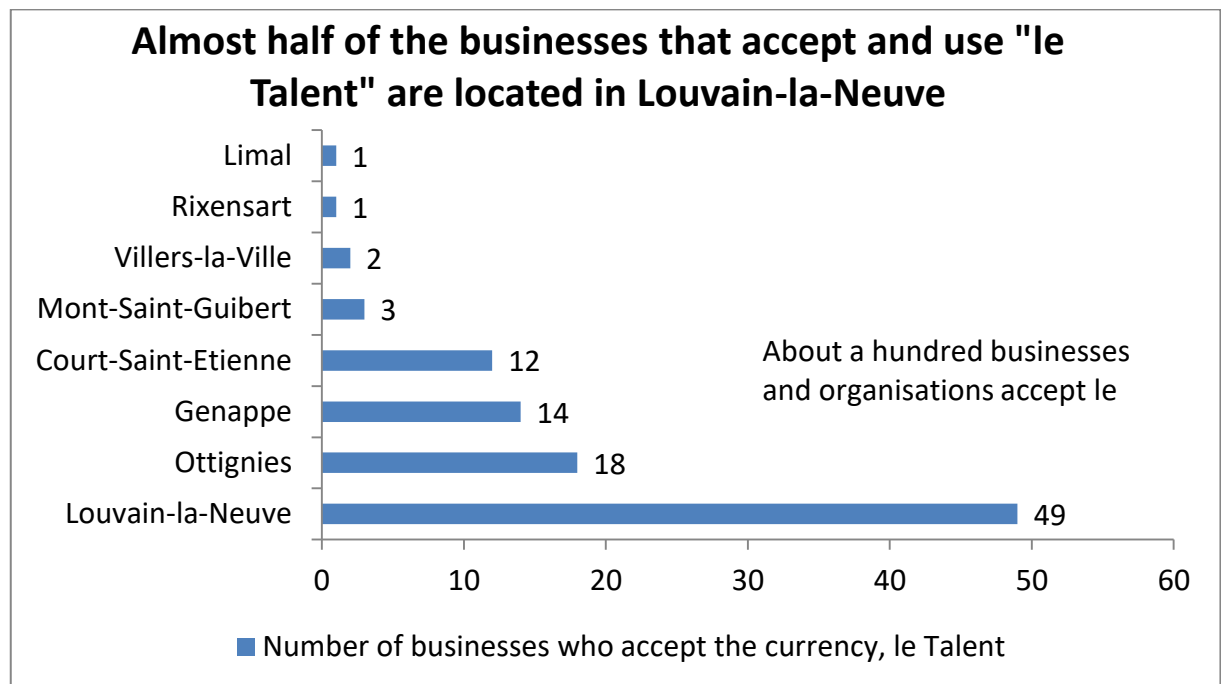
the Talent doesn't pay anyone for their contribution; the entire project was rendered possible by volunteer work. (Appendix A)

4.2. Territory

In the very beginning, the Talent only circulated on the restricted territory of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve. During the spring of 2017, Genappe and Court-Saint-Etienne became part of the currency's territory. Other neighbouring towns have also shown interest. Fabienne Neuwels, secretary of the Talent association for Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, explained they didn't launch the currency with any territorial ambitions. They wished for the Talent's geographical boundaries to extend naturally, at its own pace. In that spirit, they don't want to pressure other towns into joining the network; instead waiting for said towns to show interest and take the first step. Due to their inability to take on more work, Fabienne Neuwels and her associates demanded that the new towns joining the Talent set up an additional branch of the organisation in order to manage their respective territories. The different branches meet regularly. (Appendix A)

Overall, the members of the organisation believe the Talent will naturally spread in the province of Walloon Brabant. However, they do not wish to compete with other nearby local currencies, and will therefore respect their territory. Fabienne Neuwels argued to would be nonsense to compete with an organisation that stands for similar values and wishes to accomplish the same thing they do. By June 21st 2017, the Talent had welcomed almost a hundred businesses into its network. (Appendix A)

Figure 4: The geographical distribution of businesses that are members of the Talent's network²⁹



4.3. Objectives

A local complementary currency is a medium of exchange used in a restricted geographical zone. In addition to its role as medium of exchange, the Talent has a social role to play in the community. (www.letalent.be)

The Talent has three main objectives (Appendix E):

1. Support local producers and businesses to reinforce the local economy
2. To promote solidarity, environmentally-friendly behaviour, and the strengthening of social ties within the community
3. To finance a local funding system³⁰ that would support other local projects with similar values

²⁹ This graph was built using information from www.letalent.be (the official website of the currency) retrieved on April 18th 2017. This graph is not updated because that repartition was used to determine the number of interviews needed in each location (see Chapter 5 for the Methodology)

³⁰ The funding system is not yet operational but they are going to work with Crédal. (Appendix A)

More broadly, the Talent wants to be a currency that serves the citizens and not the banks. Their philosophy is that money should not sit in a bank account but should instead be used to produce goods and services that benefit people. This local currency is also a way to educate people and make them aware of the role money plays in everyday life and the values it entails for our society. (www.letalent.be)

4.4. How does the Talent work?

First of all, 1 Talent is equal to 1 euro. Each Talent is backed by a euro reserve in a bank called Triodos³¹. Although the Talent is called a currency, its legal status is that of a voucher. There are three poles of users: citizens, businesses, and currency exchanges. All three are crucial for the entire system to function properly. Neglecting one of the user poles would impact negatively the entire network. Citizens can use the currency in businesses that accept it, who in turn will give change back in Talents and pay their suppliers. (Appendix A; www.letalent.be)

There are five different banknotes: 1T, 2.5T, 5T, 10T, and 20T. (Appendix A)

The non-profit organisation the Talent holds board meeting every month and general assembly meetings every three months. Legally, they have to hold one general assembly meeting every year but they have been doing so more often since the currency was only launched recently. Every town has its own board meeting but, regularly, board meetings that group all towns are organised. The president of the organisation is Stéphane Vanden Eede, the treasurer is Yves Dewelle, and the secretary is Fabienne Neuwels. (Appendix A)

³¹ Triodos is a bank that invests money into ethical projects that respect the values the Talent stands for (Appendix A)

Chapter 5: Methodology

The research conducted for this master thesis aims to identify possible advantages and drawbacks in using a CC in the context of a professional activity (businesses, stores, liberal professions, etc.). In addition, potential problem-solvers are identified and briefly discussed. Such potential problem-solvers are simplifiers that make the use of a CC by businesses easier but also contribute to the overall health of the local complementary currency chosen as a concrete study subject. A complete assessment of their feasibility and their ability to counter the identified drawbacks are not provided because such research goes beyond the scope of a master thesis.

This type of research, called 'Problem identification research'³², is used as an introduction to more comprehensive analyses. Studies that aim to unearth previously unseen potential threats and opportunities generally use more unstructured data collection methods such as focus groups and depth interviews. The approach used is qualitative and the collected materials cannot be analysed statistically. Instead, they will be examined more subjectively for patterns such as convergence and divergence. (Zaborek, 2015)

Several depth interviews were completed. One interview was done with the treasurer of the Epi Lorrain, Emmanuel Winance. Another interview was done with the secretary of the Talent, Fabienne Neuwels. Then, about 20 interviews were conducted with various businesses that are members of the Talent network. This chapter's goal is to explain and justify the choices that were made with regards to the gathering of primary data.

5.1. Data collection

In this master thesis, two types of data are collected: primary and secondary data. The secondary data comes mainly from published monographs. The primary data was collected for the express purpose of this thesis. The data came from respondents who actively provided verbal responses to questions asked by the interviewer. This type of person-to-person communication will inherently be subject to bias and possible error

³² Aka Exploratory research

coming from the background, psychological attributes, and behaviour of the interviewer and interviewee. Such factors have a direct impact of the interaction happening during the exchange. (Smith & Albaum, 2010)

Naturally, factors other than those tied specifically to who the interviewer and interviewee are influence the interaction. Smith and Albaum (2010) label them as context, content, and structure. The context refers to the situation in which the interview takes place: the location, the presence of other people or lack thereof, the temperature, the privacy, the time, etc. The content refers to the subject of the interview—the discussed topic, the choice of language, vocabulary, the questions, the answers, etc. The structure includes “the interviewer’s or interviewee’s basic organizational patterns, sequences of topics and questions, and the means used to open and close interviews.” (Smith & Albaum, 2010, p.59)

In research, information collection through interviews has two important characteristics: structured/unstructured and direct/indirect. An interview is structured if a formal questionnaire is used and if the questions are asked in a precise order. A direct interview does not hide the purpose of the questions; they are not disguised in any way. From these two characteristics, we can classify interviews into four different categories. Each type will be used for different types of studies. (Smith & Albaum, 2010)

Let us focus on the type of interview that was conducted in this study: Unstructured and direct. Indeed, they are most often used in qualitative research. (Smith & Albaum, 2010) The conducted interviews allowed a lot of freedom with the order of questions in order to fit the flow of the conversation and let the interviewed person speak freely and uninterrupted. Also, the purpose of the interview was clearly stated at the beginning of the exchange.

In the unstructured-direct method of interviewing, the interviewer is given only general instructions to obtain the type of information desired. He or she is left free to ask the necessary direct questions to obtain this information, using the wording

and order that seems most appropriate in the context of each interview. (Smith & Albaum, 2010, p.62)

During unstructured-direct interviews, the interviewer's mission is to understand the motives of the interviewees. They do so by asking follow-up questions that search for more penetration in the motivations such as: "What do you mean?" "How does it make you feel?" "What do you think about that?" "Are there other reasons?" (Smith & Albaum, 2010)

The wording and the order of the questions asked were adapted to suit the situation and the people interviewed. Unstructured interview should be seemingly casual and informal; the flow of the conversation determines the order of the questions (Smith & Albaum, 2010).

Depth interviews were the sole research method used. Doing focus groups was not feasible as it entailed the gathering of busy and working business owners and employees. Interviewees did not want to take time outside of their working hours to undergo interviews. Depth interviews tend to be less common than focus interview but they are a popular qualitative technique (Smith & Albaum, 2010). Naresh Malhotra (2010) defines a depth interview as "an unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single respondent is probed by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic" (Malhotra, 2010, p. 153).

For one-on-one depth interviews the interviewer's role is to contact the interviewees, set up the interviews, ask the questions, and record the answers given. Recording the answers can be done during or after the interview takes place. It is important for the information that was obtained to be clearly understandable and accurate. (Smith & Albaum, 2010)

5.2. Sampling methods

For this study, several interviews were conducted. The first interview had Emmanuel Winance, the treasurer of the Epi Lorrain, as an interviewee. That first interview gave us an insight into the experience of the Epi Lorrain, one the oldest local currencies in

Wallonia. The discussion started the reflection regarding the advantages and inconveniences of using a local currency—both as an individual and as a business. The second depth interview was naturally with one of the founders of the Talent: Fabienne Neuwels.

To continue, about 20 depth interviews were completed with businesses that are part of the Talent network. There are about one hundred businesses—including liberal professions—that accept the Talent as a form of payment. We were advised by both our promotor and by the courses taken in marketing statistics to conduct around 20 interviews (Kervyn & Van Pachterbeke, 2015). The businesses are located in several towns and cities and sell various goods and services. It was important to get a variety of different opinions and experiences: businesses located in different areas and that do diverse things.

A nonprobability sampling procedure was used. Nonprobability sampling is different from probability sampling because, in nonprobability sampling, the sample components do not have a known, non-zero probability of being chosen to become part of the sample. Error made during sampling therefore cannot be measured. Nonprobability sampling procedures are commonly used in exploratory research³³. The Quota sampling method was chosen out of the nonprobability sampling procedures; this method is very widely employed in marketing research. Such samples are collected to reflect the different subgroups present in the population of interest (the different towns, the various occupations of the businesses). There is no random selection. The interviewer is relied upon to make the appropriate sampling choices. Consequently, selection bias is likely to be present. (Smith & Albaum, 2010)

In the case of the present study, about half of the respondents were selected from Louvain-la-Neuve because about half of all businesses in the network are located in Louvain-la-Neuve. Such geographical proportions were respected as closely as possible. Moreover, the study tried to include a variety of different businesses. However, the 'limitations' section shows why respecting these imperatives is difficult in real-life situations.

³³ Aka 'problem identifying research'

5.3. Limitations and potential errors

As in every study, there are likely errors and limitations. First, depth interviews are very reliant on the skills of the interviewer (Smith & Albaum, 2010). Interviews were not led by an experienced or trained interviewer but efforts were made to let the interviewee express themselves without trying to steer them into a particular direction, and questions were formulated to clarify some points and to go deeper into motivations and opinions.

The efforts that went into the interviewing process do not exempt the study from bias. For example, people have a natural tendency to want to be agreeable. They also tend to try to please the interviewer. This kind of response bias is commonly present in such interviews. (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006) Some interviewees spontaneously apologised when giving answers they thought was not what I would want to hear, even when they had been told at the beginning of the interview that their personal opinion and experience were valuable, not matter what they were.

As explained in the previous sections, interviews were sought from different geographical locations and from various types of businesses. The quota sampling method used met a few limitations that are listed in this paragraph. Indeed, requesting for an interview does not equal to obtaining it. There were several conditions to be met. First, the businesses had to respond to contact attempts. That was not always the case in this study. Secondly, some businesses had not been part of the network for long enough to have any experiences using the local currency. Thirdly, they had to agree to meet for an interview. Some refused citing a busy schedule or no time; some did not provide an explanation. Many liberal professions and service providers cited not having any time to spare to do an interview.

Furthermore, the fact that the Talent is a new currency constitutes a limitation. Experiences are more limited and opinions may not be as nuanced as they would be in the case of a more established local currency.

Chapter 6: Discussion and recommendations

This chapter's objective is to analyse the collected data (the qualitative interviews conducted with businesses who are members of the Talent's currency network) and discuss it in light of the theory and comparing and contrasting opinions and experiences on different levels. First, each interview will be analysed. Then, interesting trends will be pointed out. To continue, the qualitative data will be examined in light of the business's location and their business model. To finish, we will discuss how the currency's features factor into the currency's ease of use and how they compare to the elements of the review of literature.

The twenty interviews' reports are available in Appendix C. As these particular interviews are mentioned and discussed extensively they will not be incessantly referenced in the text.

6.1. Individual analyses

6.1.1. Le Monty, located in Genappe

Le Monty is an old cinema currently undergoing renovations in order to become a theatre and a place where people can meet to exchange and promote all types of cultural activities and alternative movements (economic, environmental, consumption, etc.). They feel the economy should serve noble causes. They did not have to change many of their habits because they already put great care in their consumption habits by favouring stores and companies that are ethical, sustainable, and local. For them, using a local currency is rather easy because their habits concurred well with their consumption habits. They were convinced by the values conveyed by the Talent from the very beginning; they did not need to be convinced to join the network.

They are the type of organisation that has taken on a very proactive promoting role in the network: they try to pay their suppliers in Talents, they try to convince other businesses to join them, they have made the Talent the official currency for their bar (and would like to extend that practise to more of their paying activities), and they take the time to talk about it and explain it to people. They also don't seem to find that managing another currency on a daily basis is a problem.

Some of the people and organisations they have tried to convince do not wish to accept the Talent but Le Monty hopes they will come back on this matter once the network has further developed and the idea of a local currency is no longer new and strange. For now they can find ways to spend the Talents received by paying their suppliers but they hope to be able to pay as many suppliers as possible in Talents in the future. They hope the network will develop more, but they also think exchanges between different local currencies should be made possible. Indeed, some of their suppliers are located on the territory of another local currency and they think they should still be considered local because they are not far away. All the things they need might not be available in a twenty kilometre radius. Additionally, a digital version of the currency sounds like a great idea to them; they feel it would facilitate exchanges.

In short, Le Monty is the kind of business that will typically join local currency networks voluntarily and with enthusiasm; they seem more than willing to put in the necessary efforts to make the system function properly, grow, and further develop. They looking beyond the Talent's restrained territory would also be interesting.

6.1.2. La boulangerie Gossiaux, located in Genappe

The owner and manager of this bakery said they have always felt concerned by citizen-driven movements and by the subject of local businesses. They hope this currency will push people to shop in small and local stores rather than in big supermarkets. Few people pay with Talents for now, but it makes sense because Genappe is newer to the currency network. Managing the additional currency on a daily basis is easy, especially since one euro is worth one Talent. The bakery did not have to change habits because they already favoured local suppliers, which made the transition easy.

They try to encourage the use of Talents but they find it difficult to do so because it takes time to explain everything and they need to work fast while serving customers.

They would like for the Talent organisation to organise more events to promote the Talent. Many customers pay with electronic cards but they don't know if being able to pay electronically will inspire more people to join the network.

In short, the bakery is also the type of business to join a local currency network without any convincing necessary: they already share the same values and do not see it as a burden. Nevertheless, they are not placing much emphasis on communicating about the Talent and do not really think it is their role to do so.

6.1.3. La ferme du Passavant, located in Genappe

This farm produces potatoes, fruits, and vegetables. They have an adjoining store that sells it. They found the idea of a local currency interesting from the beginning as they are a local food producer and operate entirely from one store. Few of their customers pay in Talents, and those who do are very enthusiastic about the local currency. They try to talk to their customers about it but they can only do it if they have the time, which is not always the case.

Overall, they find that managing the currency isn't difficult since both currencies have the same conversion value. However, they find it more difficult to find ways to spend the Talents they receive. They feel it's because they are far away from the rest of the business network, making it difficult to find places to spend them. They can only spend them on a personal level as they have not found a way to make purchases for the store or the farm.

The real difficulty for this business is the network: they feel they are located too far from its centre in Louvain-la-Neuve and Ottignies, and that the network is too small and does not cover enough territory to make it very interesting for users and businesses alike.

They are afraid a digital version of the currency would entail too many difficulties and too much work to be interesting.

In short, the farm/store likes the values promoted by a local currency but they feel being a member of the network is difficult for them. They hope the network will further develop but don't really know how they will spend the Talents coming to them.

6.1.4. Michel Olmanst, psychotherapist located in Limal

Michel Olmanst is not located within the currency's official territory but he was accepted as a business member anyways. He understood the concept of local currencies as he had an interest in it prior to the creation of the Talent. He likes those types of projects. He became part of the network because one of his patients wanted to pay him using Talents, and he wanted to give that option to his patients (only one patient pays him in Talents).

He does not promote it and tries to remain very discrete because of his liberal profession; he feels it is not his place to talk about it and limits himself to displaying the Talent symbol on his door and on his website.

His habits have not changed much since only one patient pays him in Talents but when he reaches a certain amount he goes out of his way to spend them in Louvain-la-Neuve or Ottignies. Most of his patients either pay in cash or he sends them the bill. He has done a few mobile payments but very rarely as they are not very popular here.

He really hopes that the network will grow in territory, diversity, and number. He feels that using Talents is a big effort because the network is small and there are things one cannot buy with Talents (i.e. medication at a pharmacy). Only people who are committed stay.

In short, although he is convinced by the Talent's values, he cannot discuss it with his patients due to his profession. He is hopeful about the future of the network but does not seem to want to go out of his way to help it grow in his more isolated area.

6.1.5. Le Quatre Quarts, located in Court-Saint-Etienne

Le Quatre Quarts is a cooperative whose goal is to bring citizens and local actors together and make Court-Saint-Etienne's former train station (their place of business) a place where people can share and exchange on many different subjects. They are in agreement with the values conveyed by the Talent and wanted to be part of the project to support it.

They find that daily management of the currency is easy, as one euro is worth one Talent. They try to promote it and ask their customers to pay in Talents, but they don't do it every time. They are able to spend the received Talents but they have found it difficult sometimes because many transactions are done electronically.

They are hoping the network will grow, which will give them more spending options since they try to shop as locally as possible. Having a way to pay in Talents digitally would also make things much easier, allowing them to spend bigger amounts as the network grows.

In short, Le Quatre Quarts is the type of organisation that will join the network and be the kind of member that can assist in promoting it. They are looking forward to the growth of the network and its potential new features.

6.1.6. Greenpeas, located in Court-Saint-Etienne

Greenpeas is a sustainable store that sells food and house products. They try to be as local and as organic as possible while cutting down on non-recyclable packaging. They opened Greenpeas to provide the public with a small local store; they believe big corporations and supermarkets have ruined the market. The Talent organisation shares those values because they promote and favour small and local businesses. The creators of Greenpeas want money to circulate locally.

In their opinion, managing the currency has been made easy thanks to the one to one conversion rate. They try to promote its use to their customers but tend to forget so they created a display they taped to their cash register on the customer's side.

They do not seem to find many spending options for their suppliers. Their suppliers are local but not located in the Talent territory, or they want electronic payments. Greenpeas wants to try and change that habit in order to be able to pay their suppliers in cash. They are adamant about wanting to keep the Talent a cash-only currency. They believe banks are a big problem and that rendering the Talent digital will be costly and difficult to manage. Greenpeas is against the currency going digital, it is against their

values. What they want is a bigger network and to change the minds of suppliers about electronic payments.

In short, Greenpeas shares the same values as the Talent but does not feel favourably towards a digital evolution.

6.1.7. Le Petit Bouquineur, located in Ottignies

Le Petit Bouquineur is a book and magazine store. The person interviewed had seen the film *Demain* and felt concerned by the subject of currency and the way they operate. They want a more dynamic local economy.

Managing the extra currency is not always easy for them; making the fact that one euro is equal to one Talent even more important as it would add difficulties otherwise. They also try to talk to their customers about using the Talent but they find most people are very hesitant. As of today, using the Talent requires extra efforts because few stores accept payments in the currency. The store has almost no spending options except giving back change in Talents and operating as a point of exchange for the public and some of the employees.

They find that the list of businesses that are part of the network is not easy enough to understand. Also, always needing to go on the Internet to read it is a hassle. They would rather have pamphlets that would get updated regularly.

In addition, they think the city of Ottignies has a role to play in promoting and supporting the local currency. If the City of Ottignies uses the currency and gives their support, the network will develop further.

In short, le Petit Bouquineur is looking forward to a bigger and better developed network even though spending the Talents they receive is not an easy thing. They do feel using Talents requires extra efforts.

6.1.8. Pro Velo, located in Ottignies

The organisation called Pro Velo has multiple locations in the province, including the one located near the train station in Ottignies. They offer personalised solutions with

the aim to reinforce and facilitate the use of bikes (bike rentals and repairs, sale of accessory, and general advice). They share the same environmental and economic values as the Talent, which made them want to support it.

They don't differentiate the two currencies in day-to-day management; they don't seem to find it a challenge but admit it requires organisation. In the beginning they tried to promote its use to customers but they do is less now. Their habits do not seem to have changed. The employees are able to spend the received Talents by exchanging them for euros in the cash register and spending them as individual: their suppliers are not local.

They think the fact that they can't put the Talents in the bank is a disadvantage since it's more difficult to include them in their accounting. In addition, they find the quality of the banknotes mediocre; they look like they would not last very long. Overall, they would find it a challenge to spend Talents if the amounts they usually receive were to increase (they receive relatively small amounts).

In short, Pro Velo mainly shares the values related to the environment. They are also the kind of business that would have difficulties spending Talents. They do not particularly seem for or against electronic payments.

6.1.9. Biostory, located in Ottignies

The creator of Biostory has been in the business of organic food for a long time and has opened a few organic supermarkets. Biostory sells organic products and they try to buy products locally when possible. From the beginning, they have not understood how local currencies are useful but they did want to try to support local initiatives. They entered the network and waited to see how things would progress.

According to the creator of Biostory, there are two vision of what is "local". He thinks anything coming from Belgium or close to Belgium should be considered local, while the Talent has a narrow vision of what is local. Having such a small network makes no sense. While he understands solidarity and aspiring to be part of the community is important, local currencies do not make sense to him.

Biostory cannot do anything with the Talents they receive because their suppliers are not located in the Talent network territory and the store's accounting rule forbids cash exchanges. They only accepted payments in Talents with the guarantee they can reconvert them to euros. Having a digital version of the currency would not make things any better because he does not find Talents interesting in the first place. There is nothing they can pay with Talents, and employees do not want to use them personally as they don't live near stores where they could spend them.

In short, the reasons for this store to be part of the network are a bit puzzling as they do not agree with the way the Talent organisation sees the world. They do not care for any development since they see no use for a local currency.

6.1.10. Grashopper, located in Ottignies

Grashopper is an organic food store that strives to produce as little trash as possible. They have always been convinced that local economies are important and should be nurtured. They wanted to support the Talent by becoming part of its business network. They believe it is their job to find ways to spend the Talents they receive. Creativity and a strong will to make the currency circulate are important if the currency is to become successful.

They find that managing the two currencies is easy and they make no difference between the two. They spend what they receive by paying local suppliers, even ones who are not officially part of the network. Generally, their desire is to find ways to prevent the need for reconversion. They promoted its use to customers a lot at the beginning but they do not do it as much anymore. They agree they need to talk about it more.

Having a way to pay with Talents electronically would be great for them as they prefer payments that can be traced. A stronger network would also make it much easier to spend Talents and make the currency's circulation more fluid. They think anything in Belgium should be considered local.

The Talent has too many small banknotes (i.e. 1 Talent), which make bigger purchases tedious. Also, the idea to make a 2.5 Talent banknote is original but confusing for some people, especially the elderly.

In short, Graspopper shares the same values and is the type of business that plays a positive role in the promotion and development of the network. They would like to see it take advantage of new technologies and work towards more exchanges between local currencies in Belgium or Wallonia.

6.1.11. Oxfam, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

Oxfam is a store chain that sells Fairtrade items. Oxfam in Louvain-la-Neuve (entirely managed by volunteers) wanted to support the Talent and give users a place to spend their Talents because they share the same values. The reason for entering the network, like many other interviews, is because of shared values.

For them, having a second currency does complicate day-to-day management. Their habits didn't change uniformly: some volunteers promote the Talent and some do not. Some of them were somewhat adverse to the idea of a local currency and had to be convinced.

Unfortunately, Oxfam cannot really use Talents to buy anything because their merchandise comes from abroad. They are able to avoid reconversions mainly thanks to volunteers personally exchanging euros for Talents in the cash register and using them as an individual user.

They think several factors could make the Talent much easier to use both as a business and as an individual user. They believe involvement and support from the university and the city of Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve would improve the circularity. For example, if they could pay some taxes or maybe their rent they could stay part of the network, especially if it gets bigger (which would probably mean more customers paying in Talents). Another great improvement would be being able to pay electronically in Talents. They believe it would make things easier for everyone and make people other than hard-core enthusiasts join the network.

In short, as a store located in Louvain-la-Neuve, Oxfam looks towards the Catholic University of Louvain and local authorities for support in developing the Talent network. Their business model does not make it easy to spend Talents at the moment but they are hopeful involvement from the above mentioned institutions and the use of electronic payments will be enough to make the Talent successful.

6.1.12. La Maison Du Développement Durable, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

La Maison Du Développement Durable³⁴ (MDD) is a place where people can exchange and learn about sustainable development and the various issues surrounding it. The person interviewed is also a member of Financité and animates photography workshops for children during the summer at MDD. The values of MDD and the Talent are very much alike, which explains why they are part of the movement and support the project. However, they sell very few things there so they see very few Talents coming in.

The interviewee likes the idea of the Talent and local currencies in general but finds that there are many barriers to hurdle from theory to practice. A big problem is that you cannot buy a car or a house with Talents; there are things you simply cannot buy with them. Circularity is clearly an issue, which is why a strong and diverse network is a prerequisite to survival. Additionally, managing a currency is time consuming and costly; making success a hard thing to reach if the organisation managing it does not generate any revenues. He has his doubts about a digital currency for the same reasons: time and costs.

Using two currencies and carrying them in cash is also a barrier for most people because during the last few decades the tendency has been the exact opposite with the euro become the sole currency of many European countries and people carrying less cash than before.

The university as well as the city should get involved to give the project more chances. There are a lot of disadvantages that could make it difficult for the network to grow beyond its “enthusiasts only” phase.

³⁴ House of sustainable development in French

In short, MDD's limited use of money transactions makes their experience with Talents limited. Nevertheless, the interviewee's points of view on the hurdles local currencies are facing were interesting to hear as they mirror concerns commonly expressed by people.

6.1.13. Bernard De Backer, Physiotherapist located in Louvain-la-Neuve

Bernard De Backer's reason for joining the network is to promote the local economy and local businesses. He wants many aspects of consumption to be experienced on a more local level and thinks the Talent is a project work supporting. However, he does not promote the currency to his patients; liberal professions have to be more careful and neutral.

Few people pay him with Talents but he finds that perfectly normal as the currency is still very young. The fact that he does not talk about it to his patients, regardless of his understandable reason, may be limiting the number of patients who pay using the local currency.

He spends the received banknotes personally as whatever materials he might need for his practice could not be obtained with Talents. His main concern is with the state of the network. Since he can only spend them on a personal level he hopes the number of spending options will increase. He would not mind doing all of his shopping locally since he does so already.

In short, he was convinced from the beginning and shares the same central values as the Talent: the necessity for a strong local economy. However, he does not concern himself with the development of the network or its promotion.

6.1.14. La maison des Coccinelles, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

La maison des Coccinelles is a day-care centre for young children. They have been orienting themselves toward ecologically-friendly and sustainable solutions for some time now. They want to participate in movements and projects that share their values.

Also, they believe a local currency can act as an important educational tool for people, especially the children's parents.

They have not changed their habits as they already used local suppliers. They are aimed to be very sustainable place: the building is eco-friendly, their food suppliers are local and organic, etc. However, all those efforts are not visible to other people whereas the currency is visible and tangible. It can make people more aware of the way they act as consumers.

Allowing the currency to add a digital component would act as a booster because paper money is decreasingly used by people. Also, parents cannot pay fees using a local currency unless it is done electronically; accounting rules don't permit cash payments.

In short, this day-care centre has already been favouring local businesses and options that are eco-friendly. They are truly hoping for an inclusive and modern development of the Talent where educating others is a mission taken seriously.

6.1.15. La maison du Cormoran, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

La maison du Cormoran is a toy and game store. They wanted to join the network because they thought it was a nice citizen project and they wanted to show their support by allowing users to spend their Talents in their store (that is strategically located in the centre of town).

They do not have any difficulties with the day-to-day management of the additional currency, mentioning the fact that one euro is equal to one Talent is a facilitating factor. As in most places, few people pay using Talents so they are not overwhelmed. They do try to promote its use customers but lack of time and forgetfulness often get in the way.

For the store, it is quite difficult to spend the received Talents because their suppliers are foreign. Employees exchange the currency and put euros back in the cash register.

When first asked, the interviewee, claimed not to think a digital currency would improve the currency's ease of use. However, as he discussed it (with no additional questions or comments from the interviewer) he actually found that paying electronically would be quite interesting if the network were more developed since many people do not carry much cash. Paying rent with Talents would be a great way for the store to spend their Talents, but only if the network is better developed as they could not pay their rent with the amounts they currently receive from customers.

In short, as a store located in the centre of Louvain-la-Neuve they are also aware of the role that could be played by the university and the local authorities in the development of the Talent. As is the case with many businesses, it is a bit of a struggle to find the time to talk to customers about the Talents: speed and efficiency are highly valued during busy periods.

6.1.16. Chez Zelle, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

Chez Zelle is a non-profit organisation that organises activities aimed mainly at young adults. They wanted to be part of the network because they find it interesting to go back to a more localised economy, and thus favour small businesses. They do not have many paying activities so the number of Talents they received is limited. They do not find managing an extra currency difficult at all, especially since they do not received much. They want people to think deeper about the things they buy and their consumption habits.

They plan their spending of the Talents they receive and do so with ease in various small shops in Louvain-la-Neuve. They believe using Talents will be easier for Talents if there are more spending options.

In short, although their money transactions are limited they believe in using the Talent as an educational tool. They are finding it quite easy to spend them as the amounts received are small.

6.1.17. Le Respect-table, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

Le Respect-table is a small restaurant. The owner was asked to be part of the network and she accepted because she knows the public sees her restaurant as being part of alternative movements (local and organic products). She also accepted because it didn't entail much extra work or involvement on her part.

She said she quickly found out the currency is of no interest to her and presents more disadvantages than advantages. She does not promote the currency at all with the hope people will pay her in euros rather than in Talents. Indeed, she cannot pay for anything with Talents as the vast majority of her costs come from ingredients, rent, and salaries.

She cannot pay rent or salaries with Talents and her suppliers, while still being local, are not close enough to be part of the network. She thinks Wallonia should absolutely be considered local and the Talent should cover all of it. She does not wish to switch suppliers as she personally knows them and likes their products; she attributes a lot of importance to relationships and the human factor. Having a digital currency would not help her as she could not find places to spend the money. While she understands why promoting local businesses and exchanges is important, her situation does not allow her to do so through the use of the Talent.

In short, this restaurant is the type of business that would find it difficult to spend the Talents they receive. The Talent is not promoted at all; the manager does not want to be paid in Talents. The main problem for this restaurant is the presence of different local currencies in Wallonia, a region they think is too small to justify more than one local currency.

6.1.18. Les Editions Academia, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

Les Editions Academia edits and sells academic books as well as literature. They want to invest in the city and its citizen and a local currency seemed like a good way to do so. They have never had a single in Talents. They are also an exchange point for the

currency, the number of exchanges being quite limited as well. They do not tend to promote its use because they lack time to do so.

Their customer base is not very local and they predominantly pay electronically. They could find a few ways to spend Talents but most of their costs could not be paid with Talents. They think communicating more with customers would help.

In short, they have very little experience with the Talent. However, communication with people has been pointed out as a key necessary investment.

6.1.19. Le Trusquin, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

Le Trusquin is a store that sells tools and house necessities. They decided to be part of the network because they share similar values and wished to be part of a network of users and businesses forged by solidarity. They find that managing it is easy since they banknotes have the same value. As in all other interviewed businesses, few people pay using a local currency.

They cannot pay their suppliers with Talents so they spend them by giving back change in Talents and operating as a non-official exchange point. Their suppliers are not local. If the city authorities or the university were to get involved they could potentially pay some things with Talents and the network would be better developed, helping to make the circulation more fluid. The employees can also spend the Talents personally if need be.

The fact that many people pay by electronic means does not constitute a barrier in their opinion because many other customers pay in cash.

In short, le Trusquin also looks towards the university and local authorities for support, as many businesses located in Louvain-la-Neuve.

6.1.20. Livre et Art, located in Louvain-la-Neuve

Livre et Art is an art gallery and a book store that serves as the university museum's shop and cafeteria. They like the idea of supporting small businesses and increasing customer loyalty through the use of a local currency. The daily management

requirements are very light and do not involve much extra work as one Talent is equal to one euro. They try to promote its use to local customers if time permits it.

She finds that using Talents now is something only enthusiasts do because it involves many different steps: getting euros in cash, finding a place to exchange them, keep Talents on your purse or wallet, and go to the few stores that accept payments in Talents. Having a digital version of the currency would allow less enthusiastic people to use the Talent, thus boosting the network.

They have a few ways to spend the received Talents as they can buy office supplies and products for the cafeteria. The manager also takes part of her salary in Talents. However, she cannot pay her employees in cash as it must be done through a bank transfer. She believes “big players” such as the university should get involved because they have many contacts, customers, and more influence than small businesses.

In her opinion, the only way to become well-known is to communicate and talk about the Talent repeatedly.

In short, as a member of the Talent organisation and the manager of a store in Louvain-la-Neuve, Mrs. Rynik has a unique perspective on the current state of things (regarding the Talent). Big supporters and communication are, in her opinion, crucial for success.

6.1.21. Broad summary of the interviews

Table 4: Summarizing table of the interviews

	Name	Location	Type of organisation	Reason(s) for joining the network of the Talent	Positive aspects of using the Talent	Negatives aspects of using the Talent	Hopes for the future of the Talent
1	Le Monty	Genappe	Theatre & place of art	Promote sustainability	- Easy to manage -Creates discussions	- Small network	-Bigger network -Exchange w/ other local currencies
2	La boulangerie Gossiaux	Genappe	Bakery	Promote local economy	-Easy to manage	-No time to explain the Talent to customers	-More communication to the public done by the Talent -Bigger network
3	La ferme du Passavant	Genappe	Farm and adjoining store	Promote local economy	-Easy to manage	- Too few spending options	-Bigger network
4	Michel Olmanst	Limal	Psychotherapist, liberal profession	Interest in local currencies	Nothing specific	-Too few spending options	-Bigger network
5	Le Quatre Quarts	Court-St-Etienne	Cooperative	Share the same values	-Easy to manage	-Difficult to pay suppliers in cash	-Bigger network -Electronic payments
6	Greenpeas	Court-St-Etienne	Local & organic store	Promote local economy	-Easy to manage	-Too few spending options	-Bigger network -Stay a cash-only currency
7	Le Petit Bouquineur	Ottignies	Magazine & Book store	Promote local economy	Nothing specific	-Requires more organisation to manage and to spend	-Bigger network -Support from town authorities
8	Pro Velo	Ottignies	Services related to bicycles	Share the same values	-Easy to manage	-No local suppliers whom they could pay -Cannot make bank deposits	Nothing specific
9	Biostory	Ottignies	Organic supermarket	Felt obligated to try	Nothing	-Cannot pay suppliers -Cannot spend them -Currency is too local	Nothing because they don't understand the use of the Talent
10	Grasphopper	Ottignies	Local, organic &	Promote	-Easy to	-Payments	-Electronic

			zero trash store	local economy	manage	cannot be traced -2.5T note is too confusing	payments -Bigger network -Exchange with other local currencies
11	Oxfam	Louvain-la-Neuve	Fairtrade store (chain)	Share the same values	Nothing specific	-Daily management is more complicated -Suppliers are not local	-Electronic payments -Support from University and town authorities
12	La Maison Du Développement Durable	Louvain-la-Neuve	Organisation promoting sustainable development	Share the same values	Nothing specific	-Issues of circularity for the currency	-Support from University and town authorities
13	Bernard De Backer	Louvain-la-Neuve	Physiotherapist, liberal profession	Promote local economy	Nothing specific	-Few spending options	-Bigger network
14	La maison des Coccinelles	Louvain-la-Neuve	Day-care centre	Share the same values	-Didactic tool	-Only cash payments	-Electronic payments
15	La maison du Cormoran	Louvain-la-Neuve	Toys & games store	Support local projects	-Easy to manage	-No local suppliers	-Electronic payments -Bigger network
16	Chez Zelle	Louvain-la-Neuve	Youth organisation	Promote local economy	-Easy to manage -Didactic tool	Nothing specific	-Bigger network
17	Le Respectable	Louvain-la-Neuve	Restaurant	Public image & perceived ease	Nothing	-Cannot pay her suppliers -Cannot pay salaries -Cannot pay rent	-Exchange with other currencies (maybe)
18	Les Editions Academia	Louvain-la-Neuve	Book editor & books store	Invest in the city and the citizens	Nothing specific	-Few local customers -Only cash payments	-More communication, more public awareness
19	Le Trusquin	Louvain-la-Neuve	Tools & house repair store	Share the same values	-Easy to manage	-No local suppliers	-Support from University and local authorities -Bigger network
20	Livre et Art	Louvain-la-Neuve	Art gallery & bookstore	Promote local economy	-Easy to manage	-Difficult for customers to use -Requires constant communication	-Bigger network -Electronic payments -Support from big "players"

6.2. General trends

Although all accounts are different from each other, some general trends are worth mentioning and commenting before going into more detailed comparisons.

To start, ease of use and management were important to nearly everyone interviewed. The conversion system is simple and there is no demurrage or bonus/malus involved. Simplicity is a very important factor. Most people do not find it difficult, but a few lightly complained about the extra work and organisation needed. It is likely a lot more people would complain if the system were to be more complicated. A complicated system might make potential businesses and people hesitant about joining the network. It is also important to keep in mind they probably find managing the additional currency easy because very few people use it to this day. Opinions might go in the opposite direction if more people paid using Talents.

Then, ease of spending seems to be a concern shared by the vast majority. Many businesses cannot find proper ways to spend the Talents they receive, instead becoming a non-official exchange point or having employees exchange them for personal spending and use. Let us be reminded that salaries cannot officially be paid in cash, which makes it impossible at the moment for employers to pay their employees using Talents. The importance of this factor, as reflected in the interviews, shows how much the different users that make up the network are important (as discussed in chapter 3, section 3.2.2). The network's size in number and in territory (geographical area covered) matter, but the diversity of businesses is also paramount. Additionally, local authorities and institutions are somewhat expected to provide support as important and influential entities. All these factors impact the circularity of the currency and how the entire system is perceived by non-members.

To continue, it seems that in the beginning users and businesses are joining mainly because they like the idea on a theoretical level or because they want to show their support. Such people are needed to create a network and allow it to grow to a point where it becomes "reasonable" for less enthusiastic people to join it. People who do not feel strongly will not join the system and remain a part of it if there are too many disadvantages or too many efforts to provide.

The meaning of “local” is also discussed a few times. Many businesses find that the Talent is too local; which limits their spending options and prevents their suppliers from potentially joining the currency network. For many people anywhere in Belgium is still considered local. While the Talent’s ambition is not to cover Belgium, they know the network will naturally grow and cover more territory; the Talent is indeed a very recent currency.

Talking to customers about the currency seems important to the majority but few take the time to do it consistently. Let us point out that persistent communication may make a difference, as the Epi found increasing communication from business owners to customers as well as the use of “ambassadors³⁵” boosted the use of the money on some level (Appendix B). Many people are not aware of local currencies or do not understand their purpose. Communicating to the public can be done both by the Talent organisation and the businesses, but businesses have the advantage of being able to communicate directly with potential users and answer their questions in a personalised manner.

Most people would be interested in being able to pay electronically, as long as it makes using the currency easier. There is a project led by Financité to make several Walloon local currencies digital next year. This project is discussed in section 6.5.

Overall, perceived advantages and disadvantages are small because use of the Talent is not extensive. As its network grows, more effects could be perceived.

6.3. Comparison by location of the business

In this section we discuss whether the location of the business impacts their opinions and experiences.

The businesses interviewed come from four distinct areas. Louvain-la-Neuve and Ottignies have been part of the network from the very beginning and hold the majority of the businesses in the network, while Genappe and Court-Saint-Etienne are both newcomers and have fewer businesses for the moment. It is worth to mention that

³⁵ People trained to promote the Epi Lorrain through communication

Genappe is a bit further away from Louvain-la-Neuve and Ottignies than Court-Saint-Etienne, which is quite close to both Ottignies and Louvain-la-Neuve.

Louvain-la-Neuve can be considered the centre of the network as it holds about half its businesses. Spending options are important for users and businesses alike. The interviewed businesses in Louvain-la-Neuve hope, just like the businesses in other towns, that the network will further develop by growing in number, spreading, and diversifying. Louvain-la-Neuve's land is owned by the Catholic University of Louvain, making its involvement important for the businesses that pay rent to the University. The University is influential; its support and use of the currency could positively impact its progress.

Ottignies, as said above, is very close to Louvain-la-Neuve and similar to it in that they hope for involvement from the local authorities, more specifically the town authorities.

Court-Saint-Etienne mentioned wanting a better developed network but did not really think about the involvement of local authorities or "big players". Genappe's main concern also seems to be the network's strength and size. The focus on the network may come from the fact that both entities are new to it and haven't had as much time as the rest of the territory to add businesses and users to it. Genappe, as mentioned above, is also a bit further away from the centre of the network and might feel a bit more "weakened"—in terms of spending options—by the young yet growing network. The professional located completely outside the official territory felt the lack of spending options most acutely and insisted only on the importance of having a strong and diverse network of businesses.

Many of the interviewees wanted a digital currency. However, a few did not seem favourable to it or did not see going digital as a way to make the currency's use more simple or to boost the network. There was no pattern in terms of location or type of business, but the difference in opinion can probably be attributed to differences in personality and philosophy.

The matter of what “local” means was mentioned by several people interviewed, regardless of location.

6.4. Comparison by type of business

In this section, we discuss how the business model affects the business’s use of the Talent.

Let us first mention the particular case of liberal professions. The physiologist and psychotherapist interviewed had no supplies to buy and could only spend the Talents on a personal level. For them, the system works well if they are willing to personally change their consumption habits and frequent shops that are also part of the network. Cash payments are a bit more common in their line of work, likely diminishing the perceived need for a digital payment system.

Whether the business was able to pay their suppliers depended on the availability of the needed supplies within the territory and willingness to find ways to spend Talents by changing some of their habits. Businesses that already rely on local suppliers felt they could eventually spend the Talents they receive as the network grows.

Businesses that do not rely on local suppliers feel their options are limited and use other ways to spend their currency, such as employees exchanging euros for Talents and spending them personally. If the amounts received were to increase this way of evacuating the local currency would likely no longer function in an optimal way. Such businesses, like those in Louvain-la-Neuve, would benefit from being able to pay some of their fixed costs in Talents (e.g. rent, communal taxes, etc.).

Businesses that do not have local suppliers but whose suppliers are located in Belgium have argued that what “local” means can differ from person to person. Many of them think one local currency’s territory is too small. Anywhere in Belgium or Wallonia is local in their opinion. Some have argued that there should only be one local currency for Belgium (or Wallonia), or that exchanges between the different local currencies should be made possible. Eric Dewaele mentioned during his interview that Financité’s project for making local currencies digital included the matter of exchanges between

different currencies. They are currently studying the issue and did not yet have a solution to share. (Appendix D)

Seemingly, not every type of business would be able to remain a member of the network without the possibility for reconversion. Also, not every type of business would be able to join the network. Indeed, new applicants need to be approved by the organisation and be able to contribute to the circularity of the currency while respecting similar values: favouring local businesses, increasing the local economy's autonomy, inform citizens of the reality of the world's current monetary system, encourage behaviours that are eco-friendly and solidary, and support people who live in a state of insecurity (Appendix E). The applied restrictions may affect the network's ability to be diverse, thus potentially impacting the Talent's circularity.

6.5. Analysis of the Talent's features as a currency and network

In chapter 3, the importance of users (people, businesses, and local authorities) and of the currency system's features were discussed.

Just as in the theory, the different users who make up the network seem to be of great importance. Their participation as members of the network is what makes it stronger by adding more potential points of connection and exchanges. Their diversity allows the money to circulate and not get stuck in the hands of a person or an organisation that cannot evacuate it. Also, a bigger network that sports influential users, such as the university or local authorities, looks more trustworthy to outsiders. Moreover, people who feel less concerned by alternative projects may find that joining a network and making the necessary efforts to be part of the movement is especially not worth it if they cannot spend the money in places that sell what they want to buy. In short, the currency needs to circulate and users need to be able to spend it in a variety of places in order for people to see adopting and using the currency as worth it, not a waste of time and efforts.

In the beginning, the users are mainly people and organisations that are convinced on a philosophical level and are willing to go the extra mile to use the currency. The difficulty and challenge of local currencies reside in the fact that participating requires

extra work (even if it's relatively easy) and, at the beginning, it does not show much in terms of benefits. Getting more people to adopt and use the currency is the difficulty here because they are not convinced or not willing to make an effort to be part of the network. Making things as easy as possible is vital. Accordingly, the Talent's system is quite easy compared the currency designs discussed in chapter 3. One Talent is equal to one euro, making it easy to calculate the amounts converted. Also, the Talent has chosen against using demurrage and bonus/malus because they were too complicated (Appendix A). Professionals can convert Talents back to euros, which reassures them.

Most businesses felt favourably towards the implementation of an electronic payment system. Indeed, accounting rules prevented some of them from making payments to suppliers, while others felt a digital currency would attract more users and makes using the Talent simpler. Generally, making larger payments would be done more comfortably with an electronic payment system than with a wad of notes. Nowadays, more and more people forego carrying cash altogether, and feel increasingly comfortable using technological means of purchase and payment. It seems logical, assuming that ease of use remains the key concern of users, that such a system would have to be easy to use and bring little to no difficulties to be considered in a positive light.

Financité is currently working on proposing a digital version of their currency to several Belgian local currencies. The Talent organisation has expressed interest but Mr. Dewaele made it very clear that no official "green light" has been given. At this stage, going digital is a possibility for the Talent. (Appendix D)

Eric Dewaele (from Financité) did not provide details regarding the precise implementation of the payment systems or the costs associated during the interview. Whether the system proves easy and cheap enough to please users remains to be seen. There would be an online debit/credit system for professionals and a system that would use text messages or QR codes for regular users. Individual users would also have their own debit/credit account. Using text messages is an option that is accessible to a high percentage of the Belgian population as it can be done with any mobile phone. (Appendix D)

Financité is working with Cyclos, a Dutch company that specialises in mobile and online payment software. Cyclos is the company that implemented the text message payment system used by the Bristol Pound network in the United Kingdom. The Bristol Pound was featured in the famous French documentary *Demain* as a thriving network, partly thanks to their ability to make payments simple and hassle-free. Cyclos has worked all around the world on multiple projects ranging from digitalizing CCs to providing banking services to unbanked people in dozens of countries. (<https://www.cyclos.org/>)

It was mentioned by several interviewees that the money can be used as tool of educate people and make them aware of their own spending habits. Paper notes are tangible while a digital currency cannot be felt or touched. Whether the Talent would lose some of its educational or “eye-opening” properties by adding a digital component to their currency is unknown.

6.6. General recommendations following the discussion

The following recommendations are made in light of the elements discussed above.

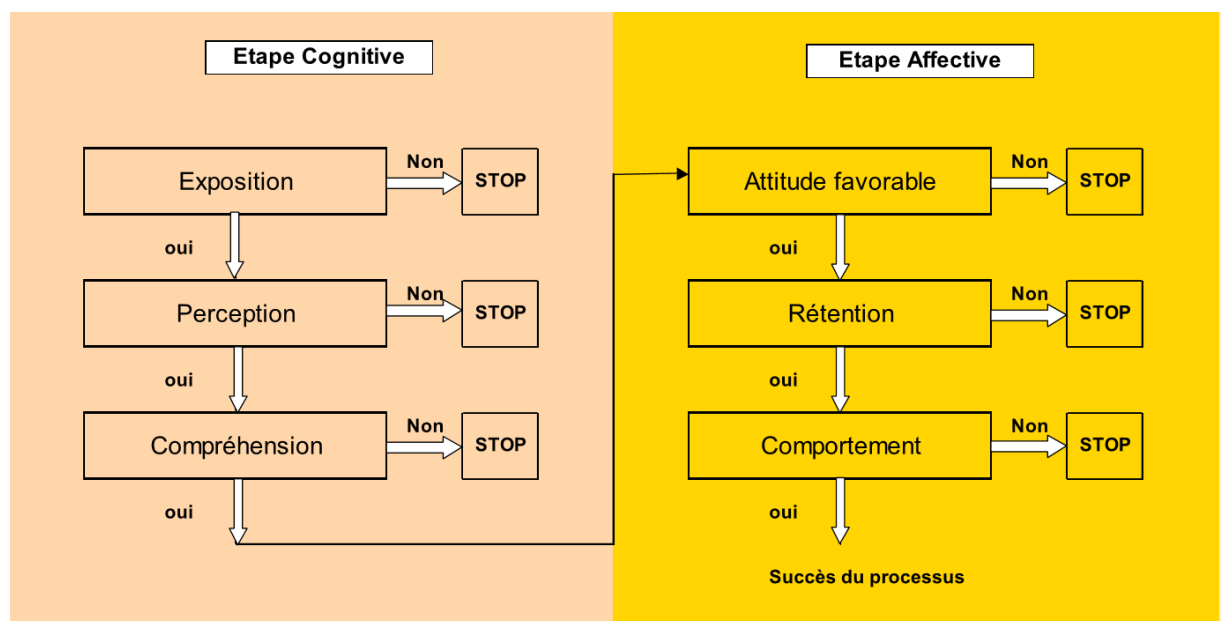
Simplicity of use is very important. Using a local currency should be as easy as possible for both businesses and individual users, especially if the benefits of changing their behaviour (e.g. using an additional currency) are not very strong or very obvious to an untrained eye. Many people may not understand or perceive how their efforts would impact their surroundings (the local economy, the environment, etc.), and a complicated system would be a sizeable hurdle on the network’s path to growth and circularity. Whether being able to pay electronically would contribute to the currency’s simplicity of use is unknown at the moment: we can imagine the effects will differ depending on the person or business, but the overall trend cannot be inferred without additional information or research. First and foremost, it is important to remember that people are concerned by how using another currency in addition to the official or national one affects their lives and their time.

Wallonia is not very densely populated. In 2016, Wallonia’s population density was 214 inhabitants per squared kilometre. By comparison, Flanders has a population density

of 479 inhabitants per squared kilometre and Brussels 7 361 inhabitants per squared kilometre. (IWEPS, 2017) Collaborating and figuring out a way to exchange between the different local currencies may be one way to become a stronger and more diversified network. Wallonia is indeed a small territory since it is possible to drive from its most southern tip to its northern linguistic border in a couple of hours.

The importance of communicating about the Talent and local currencies in general is also worth mentioning. Some people are either not aware of there alternative currencies, or do not understand how they work or why there are used. People will not join an alternative currency network if they do not know it exists or if they don't understand it. Communication efforts need to be continuous and persistent. As the Lavidge and Steiner model shows us below, a message needs to go through a certain process to reach an intended public's attentive ear.

Figure 5: Lavidge and Steiner model



(Jacques, 2016)

The above model (Figure 5) represents the communication process as it is seen in a marketing context. There is information a company or organisation wants people to acquire in order to change their behaviour (e.g. buy a new product). In order for the intended public to change their behaviour there are several steps that need to be taken. First, the intended public must be exposed to the message: seeing an

advertisement, hearing an advertisement, etc. Second, they must perceive the message: they must be paying attention to the advertisement. If the television is showing advertisements while someone is in the room there is exposition, but there is only perception if the person is listening or looking at it. If the person in the room is sleeping or not paying attention, then the message is only being exposed, not perceived. Third, the message must be understood: the language, the vocabulary, and the general message must be understood. Fourth, the message must be thought of in a positive way: people tend to discard information they do not approve of. Fifth, they must remember the message. Sixth, the message's content has to lead to a change in behaviour. If any of the steps ordered in that sequence are not validated then the message's aim has not been fulfilled. (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh, 2007; Jacques, 2016)

The Lavidge and Steiner model explains how difficult reaching people with a message can really be. Local currencies are not very widely known by the general public³⁶, so continuous and purposeful communication is necessary to raise the level of awareness. Gluing posters to a wall is unlikely to be enough.

³⁶ Although the documentary *Demain* seems to have increased awareness in the general public (Appendix A; Appendix D)

Conclusion

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. General summary of the research

To begin, general research on currencies was undertaken with a review of some of the existing literature. In order to write on the subject of currencies it is important to understand them better first. Indeed, we use them every day but we seldom stop to ponder the role they play in our lives. Then, the focus was shifted onto a more specific category of currencies: alternatives currencies. Local currencies are a type of alternative currency. Again, understanding their functions and objectives was imperative for the research that was conducted.

To continue, a recent local Belgian currency called the Talent was chosen as a concrete study case. We chose to focus on the businesses and organisations' experience with using the Talent: how they perceive it in addition to the advantages and disadvantages its use might bring (if any). About twenty managers/owners/employees were interviewed to collect their thoughts and opinions. The businesses were chosen according to their business model and location: the aim was to compare and contrast their experiences according to their location and to the kind of organisation they are. The interviews were qualitative and in depth. The analysis of the data eventually led to a discussion about the best ways for a local currency to be "user-friendly".

Several main trends appeared. The first one is that the majority of the businesses and organisations that are part of the network at the moment are already convinced that local currencies are important and have a positive impact on the world and society. The second one is the importance of being able to use Talents effortlessly: a) managing an additional currency should be relatively easy and hassle-free; b) finding ways to evacuate the Talents they receive should be easy. The currency's features should make its use as simple as possible so that more people will be more tempted to use it. The third one pointed out that people need to be somewhat persuaded to become part of the network—especially since it's a new and still small network—, meaning communicating with potential users is very important.

Overall, the analyses convey a need for ease and communication for the current members but also for potential members. Local currencies are either unknown or a brand new idea for most people and organisations. Many may not be willing to become part of the movement if they do not understand its purpose. Furthermore, convincing more people to join (either as businesses or individual users) will strengthen the network and make using the currency easier for everyone. Therefore, it appears “ease of use” and “active communication with users and potential users” may be two important conditions for a local currency to be successful.

7.2. Personal appreciation

Alternative currencies and alternatives movements in general are important because they represent a different school of thought, another way of looking at the world. Although local currencies exist by the thousands all over the world they still tend to remain hidden from the general public. Furthermore, their impact can be difficult to perceive clearly.

The people who create local currencies often dream of a different world, and of a different lifestyle for society. To reach their objectives, they use a tool (the currency) that can be difficult and time-consuming to manage efficiently. From thought, to launch, to daily management, the hurdles are great and imposing. Using an additional currency, either as a business or as an individual, requires extra efforts that many people may not be willing to provide. In many cases, the efforts will be perceived as utterly useless if the person does not believe in the changes a local currency could bring. Indeed, measuring the impact of local currencies is difficult because they can have an impact on many aspects of our lives. Persuading people to add another difficulty to their life—in a society where convenience is highly valued—is a challenge, especially if the fruits of their labour cannot be guaranteed or effortlessly detected by someone who is not an expert on monetary systems.

Even if the impact of local currencies is not easily measured, their importance as an educational tool should not be forgotten. Such tools also exist to raise awareness and to let people know that there are other ways to live and consume. Giving people a broader perspective is essential in a world that tries to sell a single economic model.

Approaching a problem or an issue from a different angle or solving it in a different way is impossible if one does not know other ways exist.

7.3. Future research

There is plenty of interesting research that could be conducted on the general subject of alternative currencies in Belgium. Let us briefly discuss the research that could be conducted on local currencies, as it is the broad subject of this master thesis.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the Talent was launched during the autumn of 2016—making this local currency a very recent one. Consequently, there is an opportunity to follow the evolution of the currency and its network from the beginning. The research done at a later date could be similar to the one done in this paper: a qualitative research on the use of a local currency by a business or organisation. The businesses' opinion is bound to evolve with the growth of the network and with other changing factors (e.g. If an electronic payment system is adopted).

The present research only included data collected from one local currency network: the Talent. Studying how different networks in Wallonia or Belgium compare to each other and what factors and circumstances create differences would certainly improve our understanding of local currencies in Belgium.

Financité is aiming to launch a digital version of local currencies in Wallonia in early 2018. Research assessing how an electronic payment system affects the different local currencies and how they are used would be interesting. As mentioned in Chapter 6, little is known about Financité's project and its potential as a facilitator could not be evaluated at the present time.

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