

14th Australian National LETS Conference 2007

Newcastle New South Wales
Hosted by Hunter Valley LETS
November 2007

Report on the Topics Discussed at the Conference

Introduction of Members and Groups

1. Maleny LETS - QLD **Presenter: Anne Jupp**

Maleny LETS turns 20 – celebration party.

Maleny innovated the first National LETS conference

- Michael Linton (Canada)
- W.A. computer boffins
- People people talk

2001 National Conference, Ceres Environment Park, Brunswick, VIC – 160 attendees.

2002 National Conference, Maleny, QLD – 18 attendees.

2006 National Conference, Bairnsdale, VIC, East Gippsland LETS – 40 attendees.

Anne feels her LETS philosophy is generally supported, i.e., that LETS is about generating trust, not fear through neighbours doing things for one another.

K.I.S.S. principle – pure origins.

Anne has the original start-up document from Maleny which needs updating and putting on email. This requires a committee to collate and update the documents.

Maleny LETS - 20 years old

- Most members at any time – 400 active members June 2007; 120 members renewed and traded 80 transactions.
- Occasional markets
- Information on trading is provided through a booth in town sometimes.
- Office space – evolving.

2. South Australia LETS – SA - **Member: Sue**

- 10 years old group
- 2 Adelaide groups
- Have adopted C.E.S. accounting

3. Sydney LETS - NSW

Member: Jacqui Kennedy

- Resuscitating LETS

4. BrisLETS - QLD

Member: Adrian

- 15 year membership
- Sees LETS as about services, community, national and global future

- Sees a need to revitalise through new ideas, example – travel.

Member: Hugh – promotions person in BrisLETS

- Sees blockage to people joining LETS
- NB looking for LETS promotion resources
- Sees a need for better communication.

Member: Fred 70 members

- Tight-arse tours as a spin off

5. Central Coast LETS – NSW-

Member: Korina

- New group – April 2007
- 118 members

6. Tambourne LETS - QLD

Member: Graham Brown

- 1998 started
- Ex-Queanbeyan LETS
- No trading days
- 20 active members and others

7. Hunter LETS - NSW

Member: Nick

- New Hunter LETS member
- Former Byron/Moreland LETS member
- Saw the demise of BMT LETS – attributes this to the rise of ‘prosperity’ versus ‘principle’
- Sees needs of the new generation

Member: Gaynor

- Member for about 15 years
- Ups and downs in membership
- 165 paid up members, 90 active members
- 3 monthly picnic with good food – tries to be 100% molly tokens.
- If people know each other, it stimulates trading.
- Need for brokering of trade

Member: Richard/Ruth

- Sees the picnic as an essence of Hunter LETS
- And also Gaynor

Member: Andrew

- Networking – opens new doors, e.g., *a capella* group

Member: Kate

- Services are great; member for 10 years; Uscha – 7 year member – some quibbles.

8. Warranwood LETS - VIC

Member: Rosemary

- In the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne
 - Second conference 12 year membership
 - Mostly uses services and community support
 - Builds trust and community
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9. Bega Valley LETS - NSW

Member: Kym Magridge

- 18 years old – started 1989
- 600+ members – 170 active
- Uses C.E.S. system
- Has a vision of moving LETS into the mainstream community

10. Coloundra LETS - QLD

Member: Annabelle

- Sunshine Coast LETS
- 42 years
- With Permaculture
- Passionate about community
- 250 members, 2/3rds trade
- Monthly markets, newsletter, Weblets
- Three big functions annually

11. Moreland LETS - VIC

Member: Judy

- Based at Ceres Environmental Park
- 80 members
- Contact: 03 9388 1999; moreland_lets@yahoo.com.au

12. Diamond Valley LETS - VIC

Member: Glenda

- North-east Melbourne
- Jenny Miller – driver, active
- Website has a PowerPoint presentation

Member: Anne

- 3 years, very active
- Networking, social generosity, community , involvement.

With acknowledgements to the following note taker:

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10.30 Saturday : Presenter - Mark Jackson

Introduction: Mark has a past involvement with LETS as a 'global expert'

- Attended the 1st National Conference at Yarrahapinni 1992
- LETS in New Zealand was strong

Founded NEWCASTLE LETS 1989

- Based on philosophy of building sense of community
- With the assistance of a HAAS (Hunter Area Assistance) grant of \$43,000 to start groups all over Hunter. Di Orton took over in 1993.
- Noticed disjunction between economic rationalism and the 'value' of LETS units.
- Received scholarship through Bendigo Bank 1993 to study 'green dollars' of NZ – seen as a mentor.
- 2005 (grant?) went to Diamond Valley LETS, where Jenny Millar was writing a thesis on small is beautiful/social. (Global currency disconnects people from others and an understanding of their sources of food, services, etc.)

Characteristics of LETS systems

- Nick noted the absence of non-Caucasians in LETS - mainly women, Caucasian – often single women looking for a handyman.
- Some LETS systems collapse because of an imbalance between offers and wants – cannot meet expectations of giving/receiving. Numbers/currency mean something. Members have an expectation that they should be able to use their *Mollies* but the majority of members are do'ers (in credit).
- Mark strongly supports the use of 'numbers' and accounting systems in LETS. Expectations to balance – the balance of the account is a representation of the capacity of a LETS system to meet expectations. If we don't honour balances the system collapses, expectations are not met.

The Problem Clarified

- Builders of the LETS system with high positive balances – the higher the balance, the greater the expectations – but finding that the system does not have the capacity to meet their needs.
 - The units of members who leave are wiped: is this an accounting problem or a system problem?
 - Most members who leave in Hunter are in debit, although nationally more members leave with positive balances.
 - In society there are givers and takers – there is a need to facilitate/broker trade to bring balances back to zero.
 - If members are trading something people want – their balances will be positive. But when they want things they cannot then always get them. Bigger system, more to draw on.
 - Suggestions:
 - Keep listings current
 - Publish all account balances
 - Backbone people of groups – e.g., Admin, don't get acknowledged in units
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- Richer people should raise the price, and give more for what they want – people pay more if they really want it.

Barter card (business world) has the same problems. Nick, Korina highlighted the importance of community philosophy—doing favours, neighbourliness, trust and support, versus economic rationalism in which entrepreneurs rip off others.

Maintaining a sense of community requires member care:

- need ---? and controls – credit and debit limits – how much are you assisting them
- What assistance do you provide to those who don't trade well – so much wealth around, often cheaper to replace than repair – relaxed/comfy society – materialistic, account balances reflect this - communities fail.
- Keep system flow with new members = growth, to counteract those who leave with negative balances; expectations are larger than capacity. Those who leave in debit fail the system and expectations in the system cannot be met.
- Need to lower the expectations of members.
- Add one-off levy per year to balance the system – on top of administration costs.
- Keep it closer to local communities.

Jackson, Mark, 1997, 'The problem of over-accumulation: examining and theorising the structural form of LETS', *International Journal of Community Currency Research*, 1: 1-9. ISSN 1325-9547

Abstract

The broad-scale adoption of local currencies by communities around the world has brought with it an equally broad interpretation of the economic principles which govern its operation. Many activists perceive LETS as a form of exchange which promotes abundance within a community. In the face of such a perception though many users experience difficulty in spending their local currency. This paper analyses this disjunction by focusing upon Marx's conception of use value and exchange value to examine the form of exchange which LETS represents. This interpretation of the structure of LETS is compared with the perceptions which many LETS activists hold about LETS' exchange form. A case study of a demised LETS system supports the conclusion that, as a type of money, LETS must conform to well established economic 'laws' which identify monetary super-abundance with economic demise.

Article online: [http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/ijccr/abstracts/vol1\(2\)jackson.html](http://www.uea.ac.uk/env/ijccr/abstracts/vol1(2)jackson.html)

The Future of LETS online

The Community Exchange System (CES)

Presenter: Kym Magridge

Bega LETS has a monthly stall at community markets.

This led to a workshop on Bega Eco Neighbourhood Development – with all workers paid in ‘Sapphires’.

BEND is an ecovillage with 5 acres, 17 lots, which has integrated commercial and community currency; development work is paid entirely in LETS points.

For more details of this development see <http://thebegavalley.org.au/bend.html>

Framework

Technology – use it tools

Future generations – all online, expectation

Membership fees – have to be members and fees as go online

Branding ‘LETS’

What is local – internet, space (used to be more local)

The name LETS originally was not an acronym but meant ‘Enabling’ – lets do it

CES Community exchange system - Tim Jenkins – South Africa.

- Admin : members
 - Transactions
 - Publications
 - Offerings
 - Wants
 - Control panel
 - Stats/reports
 - Management
 - Announcements
 - And growing in functionality through feedback
 - Server-based software
 - Monthly data backup
 - Developing software to load onto local servers
 - Open source
 - Firefox browser
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- Members login to their exchange account – ID, BVCE Bega Valley or CCE Central Coast, brings up home page to edit.
 - Top tool bar – members/my records/offering/wants/announcements/group
 - For those registered with CES – can buy accommodation – trade and exchange rate
 - Can close off groups for members only and groups within these groups; offers can be limited to a geographical range.
 - Skype ID for VOIP chat
 - Password access – new member changes it from the password given initially
 - Need update offers or it will expire within 365 days
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- Admin can do transaction for another person (search name) under 1st name (alpha order) or surname
- Multiple entries – up to 10 at a time
- Problems with public terminal access – screen goes blank after 10 minutes of non-activity and then logs out automatically
- Past transactions – preserve in text site (acc no/trade/description/in order – leave line between – paste
- New account – send welcome email (with user name and password) online payment on PayPal.
- Or can list bank details or send cheque
- Offerings – also has rate – admin has to approve.
- Several local area coordinators – members allocated to an area.
- Systems administrator – top 1
- Announcements – send update (personalised by names)
- Can attach newsletter (update notice)

SELLER does the entries for the transaction – most motivated to do the trade/get paid
Try to get done within 10 days

If mistake – buyer can reject/cancel – you can delete their account or go to administrator

Trading days – print out your name already on online trading slip – authorisation/reminder to go to seller to remind them to charge you.

Offerings – search for – specific job type – oz – go

Category – add photos ; show rates;

Edit description – key words

Recommendations: can add feedback – anyone can see your balance

Members can hide their home address but not to the administrator

Administrator can download offers list to pdf and Word; fine to print out.

Uses Open Office, Firefox.

If using Microsoft, use Internet Explorer.

REVITALIZATION – KORINA

- Publishes balances in newsletters – encourage people to use services
 - Socializing/Buddy system
 - Publish recent unfinancial members
 - Pamper days
 - Gift voucher/cheque to unregistered members – to encourage joining
 - Gift membership to all new members to spend in one month
 - Theme day
 - New members start with positive balance
 - Working Bees/Backyard blitz
 - Advertise looking for these services
 - Link to freecycle
 - Business broker – use LETS services in quieter times – face to face
 - Members pick up other members – travel together
 - Radio interviews – ABC Talktime
 - Newspaper stories – What's On
 - Word of mouth – personal recommendations
 - Local newsletters of other groups – e.g., permaculture
 - Online free advertising – council
 - Library – brochures
 - Neighbourhood centres
 - Flyers at TAFE/UNI
 - Council – 100 dollars *per annum* for photocopying
 - Trade days – different sub areas
 - Meetings – in between trade days
 - Local talks – community leadership development programs, Rotary/Lions
 - Use emails – weekly
 - If members have high balance – give to a worthwhile project to lower balance
 - Trade as a group/not individual
 - Organize takeaway/catering
 - Community development – publicize projects supported
 - Help families in need – community fund – publicize in local paper
 - Form partnerships with suitable groups, e.g., Grey Nomads – assist small business
 - Non-members pay to use tokens at trade/pamper days
 - James Taris – travelled around world on LETS – see website.
 - Group work – working bee followed by lunch/chat
 - Choose someone's garden, you bring a plant and can take plants/produce home
 - Pin down regular time/place, e.g., last Sunday in each month, complete four working bees before ones' garden is done.
 - Council noteboard – tear off slip – library
 - LETS auction – with auctioneer; provides units to pay admin staff; all donated; advertised as a special day.
 - Also guest speaker.
 - Catering with LETS members
 - Campfire cooking – movie
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Statement: LETS is a community organization and cashless debit-credit system where people can trade goods and services without the use of money. Members use a cheque book to pay for items in local currency and trade with each other via a newsletter, skills list and regular markets.

COMMUNICATION – Annabelle

- Need eight positives of constructive criticism to overcome 1 negative – people have to accept the feedback.
- Administrator also accepts complaints – dissipates the negativity (sounding board) - committee needs time to build relationships; conflict lowers trust.
- Try to stop people feeling ‘poor me’ – diffuse it before it gets a hold.
- Newsletter raves to reward people.
- Assistance with admin – raise their confidence, small jobs – if not much there – to help people start trading.
- Regular small functions – can sit and talk face to face – powerful personal contact rather than email - can monitor feelings, eye contact, body language.
- Buddy ring-arounds, meeting monthly
- New members, some one to contact them; membership profile in the newsletter, trade asap

Intergroups

InterLETS coordinator in each group? Encourage use.

CB discussion group for administrators

Yahoo group for OZ

Invite other groups LETS to attend functions

Wrenwood - Urban Permaculture Village

Graham and Debra

Townhouse living within created native habitat

Visualized during Ecohouse stay.

2 acres residential zone 2 near the university and wetlands.

21 residences, community cultural centre, permaculture, primary school (Montessori) off Mader St, Shortland/near Tuxford Park

Storm water management – with dam water if level gets too low

Greywater recycling – to use for plants, to lower volume

Composting toilets (excel marine) – contractor to empty

Landscaping – 20% natural bush

Dalton Real Estate – Thomas Quinn – Mayfield

Developer – Newcastle ecovillage

Architect – Stanley Once, Leichhart

Car share, cooperative; Community management statement

Conflict resolution process

Timber – plant trees to offset footprint (each Oz requires 1.7 hectares)

Petrol – plant grain to raise ethanol

DA about to be approved, November, build May 2008

InterLETS**Anne Jupp, Annabelle**

InterLETS account – complete 2 slips – 1 for each system

Seller puts one slip into their personal account (attributing sale to InterLETS); buyer places other slip into the InterLETS account of their home group.

There is no cross-reference, it is a matter of trust.

The inter-nations system works the same way.

Between group transfers work better if both parties are on CES

Important to write down amounts to place on system later.

www.community-exchange.org. LETS admin online

LETS TRAVEL AUSTRALIA
Promises, Problems and Possibilities
Elaine Hartley Dandenong Ranges LETS

The Current System

- Updated by Janice Trenair, new editions produced
- Electronic version of the booklet emailed to LETS offices
- For distribution freely to members
- Hard copies made available at cost on request
- Template passed on to prospective hosts
- Emailed or posted back to Janice or me.

Issues

- Long delays between editions
- Poor distribution of new editions
- Confusion about system by office staff
- Out of date entries and contact details
- Inflexible process for temporary holds
- Very sketchy coverage of many regions
- Format too print-based for online
- Yet prints out wastefully in hardcopy
- No backup service for hosts or guests

Alternatives

- Accept newer ways of delivering information
- Advertise this service on national LETS site
- Give hosts control over updating of info on the CES website
- Use travel brokers and buddy system
- Expand the range of services
- Evaluate degree of non-participation

Discussion

- Place this as another service on CES directory, not as an accommodation guide
 - Can add range of services to simple accommodation, e.g., house swap, travel
 - Create an accommodation broker in each LETS group – receives requests or what members ‘want’ in area they are visiting – tries to match with local members
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- Advertising on a bulletin board – people often approach LETS members for their known skills rather than what is offered in the directory.
- % driven by response to need – helps with contacts
- Photos/map added to website – CES uses Google maps to give general location
- Can also learn about ones' host from the website information
- Many members may be more willing to offer accommodation if this is flexible and not fixed.
- CES – deletes entries after a time – hosts are sent an autorereminder by email to update when the entry is due to expire.

The LETSaholic Twist - Everything you always wanted to know about LETS, but didn't know who to ask. Pdf file – booklet written by James Taris
1st chapter is free online – inspirational – from www.lets-linkup.com

LETS+MONEY Evelyn Burt

What is a LETS point?

- Unit of energy/exchange – measuring a transaction
- Something in common
- A favour
- Idea, not physical thing, virtual
- Same as current currency
- Currency without emotional attachment—no sense of loss, sense of gain
- Meeting a need
- Social stuff involved
- Not good to accumulate
- If don't use them, then the system collapses
- Need to make it go around
- Want zero balances
- Wants and offers are both important
- Turnover should be acknowledged in newsletter – best trader of the month
- Buying and selling interchange
- Give and take

Integrity of LETS – if respected it will work – aim is to inspire; plus intention

LETS unit is created at the point of sale, not by govt/banks and has no value unless spent

LETS unit has value from social contact, even if not spent

Transaction is important, not just the balance

Hoarding it for your future security

LETS – builds security into relationships, closer to home

Don't need hoard units to get trust

When traded – no onus on 'I owe you anything'

Don't have to make money before spending

Signalling wants is important so others can see needs to fulfil in order to start trading.

LETS Unit is an exchange between you and me for an agreed value – the value can increase if you want the service more.

LETS unit is an opportunity to see how you feel about the transaction – recognition to record.

No spending limit!

Spender asks that the recipient of the service give whatever they want to give – this is a shift in consciousness.

We all are at times in need of something; another time there will be an opportunity to give back.

We should not speak of ‘taking or giving’; instead speak of enabling a cycle, an opportunity or favour.

People can get what they need when they need it and will have an opportunity to give back when they are able.

Can get support during receiving times – being helped builds trust in people.

If someone disappears without paying, nobody loses.

Quoted an article by the World Bank on currency at the Sydney Futures Forum:

‘Why alternative currencies are working well’

http://www.futuresummit.org/documents/Future_Summit_2004_Report.pdf

Spreading the Load

**Rosemary Johnston, Sue Lloyd
Warrenwood LETS Melbourne**

Warrenwood is a time-based LETS: 1 token = 1 minute; fuel etc can be claimed in dollars. When LETS is used in local business, up to half dollars, half tokens is advertised if listed in the Directory. Tokens are multiplied by four to get points, i.e., 15 minutes or 15 dollars = 60 tokens.

Warrenwood has a buddy system K.I.S.S. – buddies ring up every few months and before an event: they check email addresses, see if there are any concerns, if trading volume is okay. Members can always call their buddy for help. Buddies are assigned on a geographical basis.

The buddy does not follow up members who have not paid their fees – their role is as a friend, not a debt collector.

CES uses an area co-ordinator system to foster local trade.

Buddying is not hard; volunteers also get points and are paid dollars for their phone expenses (time based).

Popular programs:

- Gardening group: held 3-4 times a year on the last Sunday of the month.
Communicate where, what time, tools and bring lunch – social occasion
 - Healing days: Pamper time with a speaker, advertised.
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CES administration

- Members are empowered to put in transactions correctly and can download their account whenever they wish to. Can then print their own statement.
- Members pay \$20 annually, or \$10 concession

Social occasions

- Members are busy so these are kept simple – BYO meat with salads supplied for which participants pay mollies (tokens)
- People are asked if they would take a turn running a group – stops burn out of busy organizers.

New members are invited to assist with administration

- Bring in new suggestions – great ideas – encouraged .
- if the idea has failed before, it is important not to be negative as with a new group it may succeed. Be positive, give encouragement and praise.

Care for Members Anne Wensley

What we give out, we get back.

Anne showed a diagram of the LETS tree in which Community is the ground out of which the trunk rises so that care for Planet and People then returns to nourish the earth.

Anne drew a change-process wedge in which:

- one-third of people are **laggards** - they wonder what happened and try to undermine it
- one-third are **followers** - target these because they will adopt what is emerging
- one-third are **change agents** - they make new things happen.

Be non-judgmental of people about unemployment, low education, etc.

Model values – teach by example, example and example.

Self-esteem: most people rate their self-esteem between 4-6 out of 10, i.e., how they feel inside.

Pass on appreciation – tell someone they are the only person that can change the way they feel about themselves, but give them positives which might change their thoughts about themselves.

This takes time and care. Eight positives are needed to overcome the effect of one negative.

- Put a 'rave' section in the newsletter
 - Politeness, consideration and remember to thank people
 - Handwritten thanks or flowers are appreciated
 - The group can give appreciation in the form of certificates, cheques
 - Positive sayings on business cards
 - Match like members to each other (also match needs)
 - Send cards for big life events (like weddings)
 - List buddies in the Directory for the new or inexperienced
 - Appoint a complaints enquiry person who is suitable for the role (good listener)
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- Get new members to begin trading as soon as possible
- Put a monthly profile in the newsletter (their skills plus their wish list)
- If people are in debit – help them line up jobs they can do
- Encourage members to bring non-members to functions
- Give a 20 unit reward to members who introduce new members
- List skills with a note about level of expertise and appropriate price
- Make a phone call to every member every two months – to update skills or email
- Community chest – make donations of skills
- Have local cells within the group and an area coordinator
- Remember to take care of members who are disabled, who may have a mental illness or a personality disorder.

Question: What should the group do about members who use services without giving back?

- Phone call first to find out circumstances – life issues? Received no requests?
- Encourage to do something like join a working bee.
- Address low/high balances before they get too extreme – offers to be in the directory.
- Keep the directory strictly updated in regard to offers, wants; brainstorm what people would like to be offered at functions, such as a picnic, but do not make it personal
- Give a little job to do – raises self-esteem and members get to meet others.

Question: Inactive members? Should they be targeted for renewal requests?

- CES administrator can hide inactive accounts, but he cannot delete them.

For CES support – email [Kym magridge@bega.org.au](mailto:Kym_magridge@bega.org.au)

Next conference:

Tasks and suggestions in preparation for next time:

- Collate suggestion sheets from the pre-conference questionnaire.
- Use short, shared rules, a timer and a ‘talking stick’
- Appoint a transport co-ordinator or accommodation person and organizer to give out information before the conference participants arrive.
- Could have two sessions running at the same time with five minutes free time between each workshop.

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