

WAIS

An example of success

My name is Sanel. I'm from Guadalajara, Spain and I have been studying alternative currencies. Through the MOOC Money and Society at the institute IFLAS, University of Cumbria, I contacted Tim Jenkins, CES developer, who spoke to me about the voucher system operating in your community in the Wairarapa. As a consequence of my studies in London in the residential module on Sustainable Exchange, I was given support to begin doing research to help my CES community, La Bellota (CIGB in CES), develop a voucher system of its own.

I feel deeply grateful that Wairarapa Green Dollar has been working so successfully for the last 25 years; it is enormously inspiring for me and for my community. I'm also very grateful to Hayden McGrail for agreeing to be interviewed and helping me coordinate sending my questionnaire, and to everyone in WAIS who has contributed to my research by completing the questionnaire. I hope my results are useful for the future of your community and for community currencies in general.

The following is some of the information gathered in my research:

WAIS currently has 261 members, and in June of 2016 reached over 13,895 sales/purchases, which means a total of W\$357,929.51, demonstrating just how active this community is. WAIS has a remarkable monthly average of transactions – 109 per month, with last month (June 2016) being one of the best: 259 transactions that left a total of W\$7,503. These “green dollars” indicate the economic activity that took place within margins of credit and debit during last month in a deeper way than official currencies can.

Membership growth has been steady, averaging four new people monthly.

WAIS has been printing vouchers since 2008. There are around W\$4,320 worth of vouchers being exchanged within the community. Printing notes or vouchers can be considered a monetary innovation among community currencies, a mechanism that helps to develop the local economy in a different way than the CES mutual credit system usually does. Its particular design and setting up is unique to WAIS. With help from WAIS members who completed a questionnaire, I've been able to gather information about how the vouchers are perceived and used. The following are some of the conclusions from this data.

The first question asked was whether members considered using vouchers to be different from using national currency (NZ\$). 13 people responded. 60% said that vouchers are very similar and 20% felt them to be the same. Just 20% felt them to be a completely different way of understanding and using money.

Another question was whether members preferred using vouchers or CES. 39.13% felt that vouchers encourage CES activity and 8.69% were undecided. Of those who preferred to use CES rather than vouchers, 17.39% did not feel vouchers help, and 26% felt that vouchers help to encourage more exchanges but prefer to use CES themselves. The remaining 0.5% were undecided. Therefore, members with a positive attitude about vouchers totalled 65.63%, in contrast to 17.39% with a negative attitude. The remaining were undecided.

The main reasons why vouchers were considered positive for the community were:

- You can give them to any person as a gift and this encourages them to participate.
- You do not have to go online to complete sales.
- It is visible and tangible.
- Flexibility, depending on circumstances.

Some of the reasons against them were:

- There is no ledger record like in CES.
- Some traders don't want to accept them.
- You have to remember to take them with you.

In my interview with Hayden he expressed that one of the main reasons why vouchers were launched was to bring more businesses on board, but a lack of publicity had made this difficult to achieve.

Hayden described vouchers as an additional tool in the exchange system that compliments mutual credit, and says they have been an improvement in the community currency technology that WAIS was using until 2008. This change in the community currency system brings some important implications. Alternative currencies avoid inflation by taking the currency out of circulation in different ways. For the time being this is not a priority for WAIS to think about, not least because since 2008 the vouchers have been running without problems. Although vouchers are made in a different way than national currency, there are issues that should not be overlooked, such as **accumulation and inflation**. It could be predicted that the number of vouchers in circulation in some point in the future will be enormous, or there will be people who have collected large amounts of vouchers. The current economic system has shown its errors, and now is the time to take the advantage and correct them. This is what community currencies are exploring.

The information gathered will be extremely helpful in order to bring some knowledge about community currencies. Thank you very much once again and I wish you all the best in your future projects.

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