

COMMUNITY FINANCE BRIEFING

Dialogue on ways to provide the basics without succumbing to debt

*These extracts are based on the handbook "Community Finance Canvas" - due to be published late 2012
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The object method of community finance design

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Key Objects

In order to function as a whole the initiative will need component parts that work together to provide the services the community requires.

Don't sketch out their physical placement yet, just start identify objects and see if you can give them multiple functions and where the waste of one process might be the raw material for another.

Identifying the most practical scale at which to talk about objects needs a bit of thought. If the level is too detailed you get too many objects (like nuts and bolts). If the level is too general you miss out on getting a grasp on what is needed to create the services (like "a farm").

A typical object list for an eco-village might include "Forest", "orchard", "kitchen and dining room block", "water purification plant", "workshops", "greenhouse", etc. A community centre might include "meeting room", "stage", "toilets", "store room", etc.

At the initial stage, just brainstorm the objects you think your community will need to function.

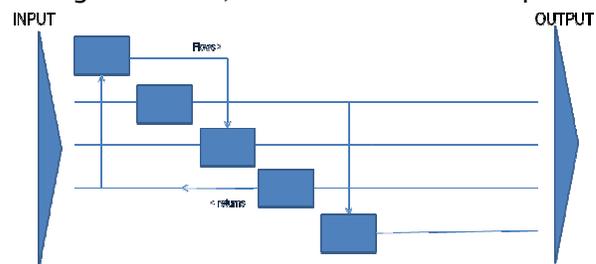
ABOUT COMMUNITY FINANCE

We are living at the peak of human achievement, but also at the peak of our resources. Sustainable development means handing over to future generations the possibility to create for themselves a standard of living at least equivalent to that we enjoy. This requires fundamentally re-thinking how we use resources, indeed all of the social arrangements we take for granted, including our relationship to money. And we need to start now. The basic values in the handbook come from Permaculture: People care, Earth care, Fair share. However, you do not need to know Permaculture to use the book. We explore ways to, within the current financial system, create communities that align to these values.

Include the obvious "showers and toilets" and the less obvious "community meeting room".

FLOWS BETWEEN OBJECTS

Having identified the main objects, work to identify the flows between them. You can use a flow process diagram like the one below. Outputs go to the right and left, as well as down and up.



Several attempts by budding eco-villages to do this exercise have turned up the same result: the first object is the forest, and the last the toilet, with the next to last being the dining room preceded by the kitchen!

PERMACULTURE PRINCIPLE #5. Use and value renewable resources and services – Make the best use of nature's abundance to reduce our

consumptive behaviour and dependence on non-renewable resources.

PERMACULTURE PRINCIPLE #6. Produce no waste – By valuing and making use of all the resources that are available to us, nothing goes to waste.

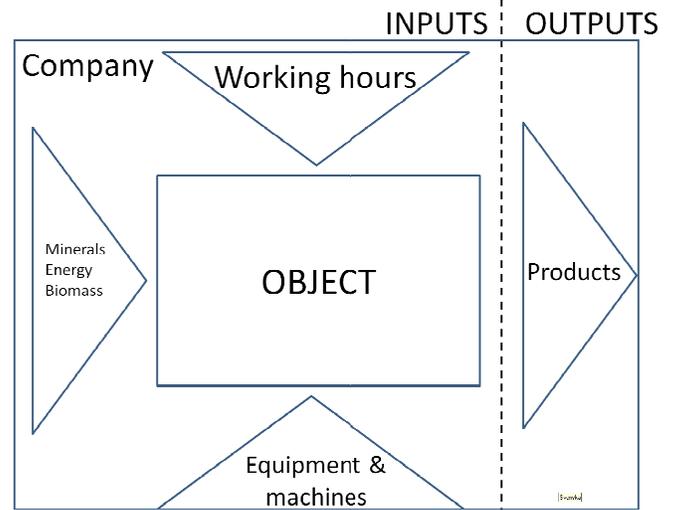
Whilst looking at businesses often means looking at the value added at each step of the operation, looking at communities means finding ways to provide essential services with the minimum impact on natural capital and ensuring all resources are used.

PERMACULTURE PRINCIPLE # . 8. Integrate rather than segregate – By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop between those things and they work together to support each other.

Objects can have many uses: for example a hen-house can produce manure, chickens and eggs, but also function as a weed and pest removal tool when uses as a chicken tractor, and some designs have channelled the heat from chickens into a greenhouse.

Objects can be analysed in their four components: the output services they provide,

the inputs needed, the human activities required and the infrastructure they contain.



For each object, complete the table below. Do not analyse the purchase/acquisition/renting costs of the object yet, we take that in a separate section.

Start with the object name in the middle, and to the right of that, the service output that will come from it. Don't get too worried about getting it accurate at this stage, guesstimate your way through it – there will be plenty of time later to revisit your ideas. Just estimate the volume of output that might come out. From that you will be able to complete the columns to the right, in terms of revenue that can come from the object. If it is not

INPUTS		OPERATION MAINTENANCE		PEOPLE	OBJECT	UNITS		REVENUE/YEAR	
INPUT	COST	ITEM	COST	HRS	NAME	NAME	VOLUME	PRICE/UNIT	REVENUE
TOTAL		TOTAL						TOTAL	

obvious where the revenue will come from at this state, write in the market value as an input to the later stage of tying it all together in a business plan.

The columns to the left will be the inputs in terms of materials and working hours and operation and maintenance costs. In operation costs, the item column is for things like “service charge” or “spare parts”. Inputs will include things like “chicken feed”.

REALITY CHECK ON THE OBJECTS NEEDED

Take a moment to look back at the objects you have identified. Are there alternate, simpler ways to get the services your initiative wants?

PERMACULTURE PRINCIPLE # 9. Use small and slow solutions – Small and slow systems are easier to maintain than big ones, making better use of local resources and producing more sustainable outcomes.

Could you at least start with, for example, simpler houses, simpler toilets, simpler ways of heating, and lighting?

Or could you find ways to share services or buy them one-off?

Financial permaculture likes to get down to basics. It recognises that people want money to be able to buy things. But they buy the things in order that they will provide them with the services they need. Why do you want to buy a house? For shelter and security? Why do you want a car? To get around. Why do you want to buy a television? To be able to watch favourite programs.

Why should it be so that that which is essential to you, you buy as a consumer? This is surely not resilient if you expect the financial system to be compromised or indeed your own economy.

Would it not be more prudent to identify that which is most important to you and invest in a community that will provide you with it, even if the current money system fails?

One way to identify what services you need is to ask yourselves if you had unlimited money, how would you live? Make a list. The answers provide clues as to what you would like to have from your initiative and the objects your really need,

It is an interesting exercise to go back over the list and remove all of the items that require massive amounts of fossil oil. Most people are surprised by how possible it is to live a good life without fossil-based energy.