

Living off-grid

Living off the grid (LOG) invokes an instant image of ‘switching off’, unplugging or moving away. It implies, cutting off from urban systems and utilities that rely on a grid infrastructure.

Early Origins

In the seventies, manuals for designing and planning self-sufficient, autonomous homes started to appear (Vale & Vale, 1975). These manuals popularised notions of ‘autonomous’ houses that could operate independently. Autonomous houses do not link into municipal utilities such as gas, [electricity](#), water, drainage and so on. In addition, the Vales’ ‘self-sufficient’ houses, powered themselves on the energy of the sun, wind and rain, to service their internal needs and process their [wastes](#).

Around the World

Since then, the idea has developed considerably over time, across the globe. Arguably, [recent innovations](#) introduce a degree of ease, as the concept. LOG has taken off on different tracks. However, similar patterns of daily living lead to larger and smaller environmental impacts world-wide (Chicca, Vale, & Vale, 2018). Across the globe, ecological and carbon footprints differ as does the idea of living within the limits of the planet (Chicca et al., 2018). Whilst planning to live off-grid, these differences all come into play. Indeed, to effectively plan, operate and manage LOG environmental impacts, time-sensitive, place-sensitive and socio-economically adaptable frameworks need to emerge.



Is it COVID Safe?

Despite these challenges, it is being reported, that LOG's promise of self-sufficiency and autonomy is gaining popularity in the wake of social distancing, economic instability, social unrest, fear and anxiety (Brown, 2020; Dorsey, 2020; Forum of the Future, 2020; The Gaurdian Labs, 2020). LOG patrons are reporting gratitude for the simple and stable LOG life. Also, praise is offered for its less-busy, less-stressful, nature-based parenting/learning opportunities, that add to a sense of [well-being](#) (Sarosy 2020).

For a well-rounded sense of well-being, however, humans need connection. Humans have a psychological orientation of being attracted to all that is alive and vital' (Fromm, 1964). It is through a connection to nature, to land, to place, to communities, to other people, that humans thrive as a species. Unsurprisingly, some LOG patrons, complain of mental unrest and fears, if they feel cut-off from larger systems, friends, social networks and so on (Sarosy 2020).

Future - potential to heal our planet

Keeping such varied arguments in mind, is LOG a viable option for the future? Does it have the potential to heal earth's systems? For a system-wide uptake to heal earth's systems, LOG needs support in urban planning, policy and design frameworks. Currently, existing conceptual, physical and institutional structures require adjustment as they are inherently biased against the preservation and expansion of social and natural life-support systems (Birkeland, 2020). To create net ecological and social gains, Birkeland's Positive Development theory holds that explicit reforms in planning, design and decision-making must occur. Once these reforms occur, they could foster the emergence of time-sensitive, place-sensitive, locally and socially adaptable frameworks. In conclusion, when the appropriate, system-wide frameworks emerge to complement LOG lifestyles, then, a hopeful trajectory of healing may be set upon.

Coming soon on *THRIVE*...

Meanwhile, it is useful to keep learning from the first-hand experiences of LOG patrons. In our forthcoming articles, we interview [THRIVE](#) members on their personal experiences. We explore the do's and don't's. We discuss the institutional challenges that exist and how to best manage them within existing support networks. Watch this space!

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