

# The LEGO® ecosystem project

By HispaBrick Magazine®  
Images by Yun Mi Antorini

*The HBM Ambassador had the opportunity to participate in a CEE Team project that aroused great curiosity. To study how our great AFOL community is organized, how the different parts are related, what we give and what we seek; it may seem trivial, until you stop to think about it. There are other communities of fans of toys, games, sports, ... but I don't know any other with such strong ties between all its constituent parts. You just have to look at the number of websites, forums, communities, events, applications, programs, photographs, etc., related to LEGO® around us. All this display of relationships has also drawn the attention of LEGO and mainly of the CEE Team. There is no doubt that other studies, conclusions and even business decisions will arise from the study that they have conducted, but for now they are beyond our reach. What seems clear is that we form an ecosystem, with all that entails, both good and bad. We spoke with Yun Mi Antorini, the head of the study by the CEE Team.*

**HBM:** Can you explain in the simplest way possible what an ecosystem is in the businessworld

**YMA:** First of all, thank you so much, Carlos, for initiating this discussion. The term ecosystem has made its appearance in "management speak" during the recent years. Just as in biology, "ecosystem" conveys the idea of a self-reinforcing whole whose components create value for each other through the various relationships that hold them together. When we speak of the LEGO ecosystem, we use the term "ecosystem" to emphasize that the LEGO brand, the LEGO employees, customers, suppliers, users and many other groups, have become much more interdependent and that their roles have become increasingly interconnected. Take the LEGO Exo Suit product, for example. Peter Reid initially proposed it on LEGO Ideas. But the project became a reality through the support and engagement of the many who voted for the project and who featured the project on blogs and other forms of social media. The Exo Suit project is an example of a "co-created" product

that was made possible through the support and commitment of the LEGO ecosystem. We initiated the LEGO Ecosystem Project to document and better understand the ecosystem actors, the dynamics and relationships.

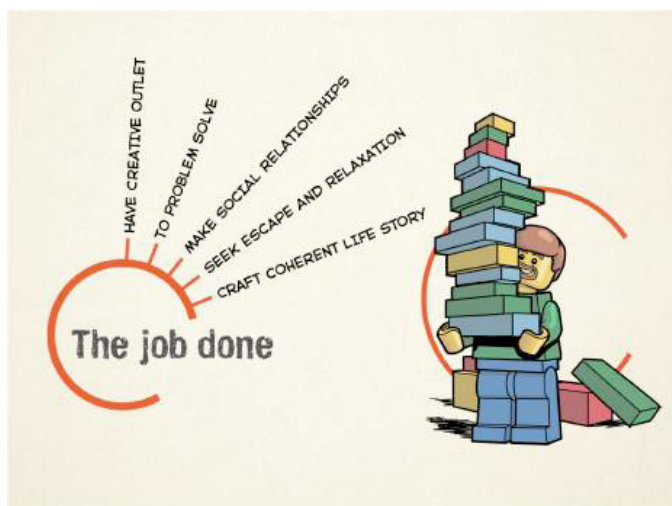
**HBM:** How did the idea that the set of relations that exist around the LEGO brick make up an ecosystem come about?

**YMA:** The idea came partly from the business ecosystem academic literature, partly from the biological conceptualization of an ecosystem, partly from many years of observing and interacting with the AFOL community. Through observing and interacting AFOLs, we learned that the sites and tools they have created to be more creative with LEGO products and to manage their LEGO hobby ties AFOLs together in what can be described as an ecosystem. Unlike a real biological ecosystem the AFOL ecosystem transcends time and space. Since many of the sites and tools AFOLs have created exist in a digital space, the ecosystem is always "on". One may have an individualistic or solitary approach to the LEGO hobby, but the fact that one uses sites like for example Brickset or The Brothers Brick, forums like Eurobricks, and magazines like the BrickJournal or HispaBrick inherently connects one with other AFOLs. You feel part of a community of other adult LEGO builders. We use the ecosystem metaphor to emphasize that the social relations and the sites and tools AFOLs have created compares to a living entity within which different LEGO related interests co-exist and specialize.

**HBM:** Why is it important to study this ecosystem? What kind of information can it provide?

**YMA:** When you think of people who consume a specific product as merely consumers, you easily lose sight of the fact that consumers are also value creators. When one reduces people to merely "consumers", then one tends to elevate the company who produce the products to the one solely responsible for the value creation. This might have been true in the past. But with the global social networks, the new and improved information technologies, the fact that people have become better educated etc., reducing users to "consumers" no longer offer a meaningful framework. Instead, what we see is massive value creation going on among users. As the ecosystem study revealed, users create value for one another by sharing user created content. The content inspires other builders. They support one another with businesses and services that allows users to get even more out of their LEGO hobby. Etc. Studying the way users interact and create value for one another is important since it provides a much richer and elaborate understanding of the way LEGO products and experiences come alive among users.

**HBM:** How long has the study taken? What have been the most important stages?



Overview of the jobs AFOLs "Hire" LEGO products to do.

**YMA:** The study took app. 4 months. The most important stages involved engaging the LEGO® community Ambassadors in the research, analyzing the data they shared with us and trying to map all the various ways in which value creation happens.

**HBM:** What are the main conclusions you have reached based on this study?

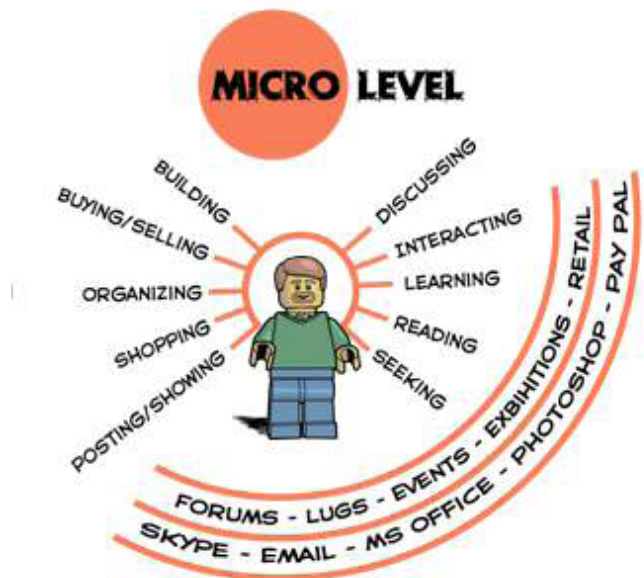
**YMA:** That adult LEGO users have created a network of activities that are centered on their shared joy of the LEGO hobby and that enables users around the world to access and share authentic and very exciting new experiences and functionalities of importance to the hobby. Another main finding is that this network is fairly stable which means that you, as a user can rely on it. This offer a tremendous value since you don't have to constantly search for sites where you can meet with other AFOLs, where you can view the latest MOCs and such.

**HBM:** What are the strong points and the weak point of the LEGO ecosystem?

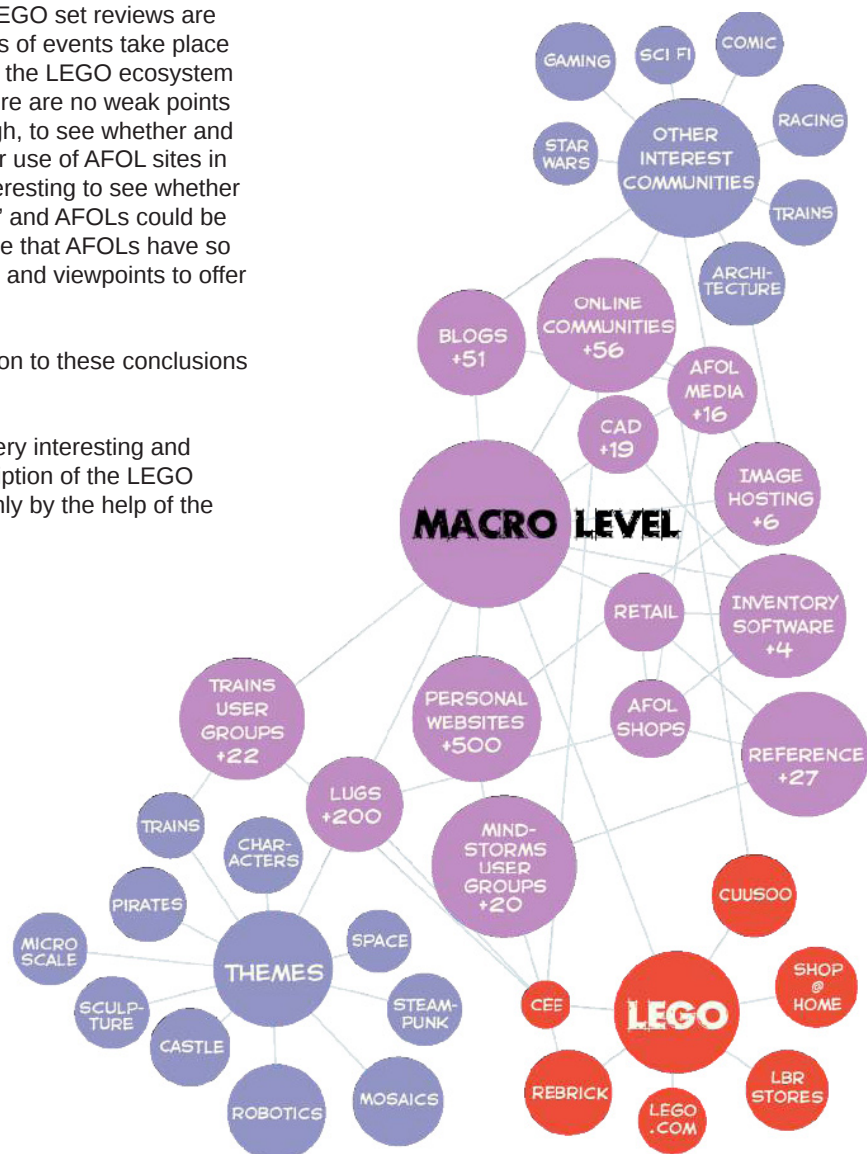
**YMA:** The strong points are the many great sites, functionalities and such that AFOLs have created. The strong points are also that the AFOL community is so active. For example, photos of new MOCs and LEGO set reviews are shared around the clock and hundreds of events take place each year. All of these activities make the LEGO ecosystem extremely vibrant and interesting. There are no weak points as such! It would be interesting, though, to see whether and how "non-AFOLs" would make greater use of AFOL sites in the time to come. It would be very interesting to see whether stronger bonds between "non-AFOLs" and AFOLs could be formed. I am saying this since I believe that AFOLs have so many interesting LEGO related things and viewpoints to offer "non-AFOLs"

**HBM:** What has the company's reaction to these conclusions been?

**YMA:** The company finds the study very interesting and are impressed by the elaborate description of the LEGO ecosystem that was made possible only by the help of the LEGO Community Ambassadors.  
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Typical AFOL activities and a few of the channels, Software Programs and Services that AFOLs make use of



Overview of the LEGO ecosystem