

all the resources today going into advertising, banking etc. will probably result in less bureaucracy. Similarly, the total time spent in meetings might be similar to today, but everyone will be meeting as opposed to a privileged few.

Will there be money in a parecon?

Not really. People will get "credits" on computer readable cards for working, and will use these to purchase goods, but credits will not be transferable to anyone else. *Once a credit is spent, it disappears*, it does not go to a store or bank. To get more, one must work more. This makes it very hard to bribe someone or reinstate capitalism. Also, workplaces and industries will receive the inputs they need earmarked by what was agreed to by the participatory planning process. No money will be needed to get these inputs to workplaces.

What about Governments?

The participatory planning process will replace much of what is done today by governments. For example, goods that hospitals need will be decided upon by the planning process, which will coordinate the building of bridges and roads as well. Major societal initiatives such as reducing the number of cars, exploring space, etc. will all be a part of the planning process. The primary role of governments will be to make and enforce laws, and deal with global relations. Parecon is only one piece of vision for how we might want to organize our future society, we also need vision on how we will organize a participatory democracy, and how different cultures and genders will interact.

Participatory Economics in Action:

Parecon is a new idea, a little over ten years old. Hence there are only a few worker collectives around the world that try to maintain a balanced job complex. Unfortunately there has not yet been an opportunity to experiment with parecon's allocation scheme.

Some self conscious experiments in parecon are:

- *South End Press* - A publishing cooperative in Boston.
- *Mondragon Bookstore and Coffehouse* - A cafe and bookstore in Winnipeg.
- *Z magazine* - A Boston based political monthly.
- *G7 Welcoming Committee Records* - A record label producing and distributing music in Winnipeg.
- *Arbeiter Ring Publishing* - A book publishing house in Winnipeg.

The Vancouver Participatory Economics Collective is interested in assisting and creating similar efforts in the lower mainland.

More on Parecon:

Websites:

Check out <http://www.parecon.org>

Books:

Parecon: Life after Capitalism (2003) by Michael Albert.
Available in most bookstores.

Looking Forward (1991) by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel.
Available free at <http://www.parecon.org/lookingforward/toc.htm>
can also be ordered at most bookstores.

Contact Us:

Please visit our *website* at:

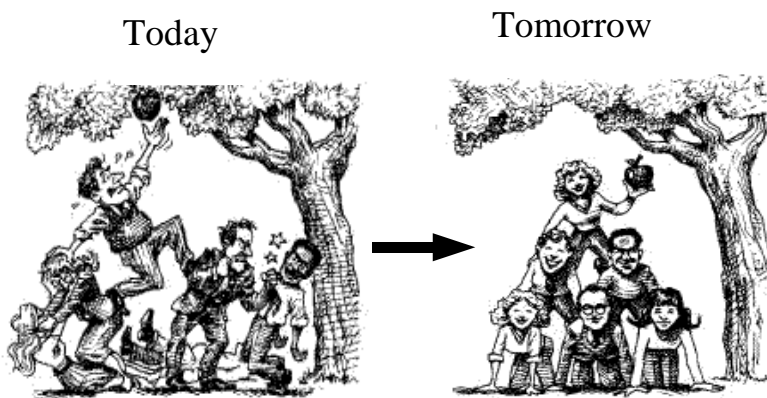
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Vancouver Participatory Economics Collective

Promoting a fair and just alternative economic system



• What is Participatory Economics?

PARticipatory ECONomics (or parecon) is an alternative economic system that brings direct democracy into the workplace, and allocates goods and services through an environmentally sustainable, democratic participatory planning process. It is more just and very different than market capitalism or centrally-planned communism. Parecon is designed to promote self-management, solidarity, diversity and equity. Please read on to find out more.

• What is the Vancouver Participatory Economics Collective?

The Vancouver Parecon Collective is a group of individuals interested in promoting and researching parecon through workshops, events, and information sharing. We are committed to supporting struggles against classism, racism, sexism, war, corporate greed and all other systemic horrors that we face today.

What is the Philosophy behind Parecon?

Parecon is the culmination of historical efforts to create a truly democratic economic system. Parecon was designed by Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel to promote :

- *self-management* - People have decision making power proportional to the extent they are affected by a decision.
- *equity* - Fair pay for fair work.
- *diversity* - There is a diverse and desirable range of not only products, but opinions and cultures.
- *solidarity* - Economic institutions should encourage people to work together and care for one another.
- *efficiency* -The economy should produce what we need in a timely fashion with minimal social sacrifice.

What is Work like in a Parecon?

Parecon promotes the Balanced Job Complex as the most fair and just way to organize the workplace. In a Balanced Job Complex, all workers spend part of their time doing empowering, enjoyable work, and a lesser amount of time doing less empowering and rote tasks. In this way the necessary drudgery is collectively shared, as is only fair, and there is a powerful incentive to automate all onerous work. Since everyone has a main job that is empowering, such as conceptual work and management duties, everyone is equally qualified to make collective decisions in the workplace.

For instance, a worker in a parecon publishing workplace would spend some of her/his week doing editorial or writing work, and some time sorting mail, or sweeping, etc.

How are people paid in a Parecon?

Parecon pays for work according to effort and sacrifice. The harder one works and the more effort and sacrifice a job entails, the more money one receives. Today people are rewarded for how much they can strong-arm out of the owners of the means of production, who are in turn rewarded for how much productive property they own. Since all jobs will be more or less balanced not only for empowerment, but also effort and sacrifice, people will be paid more or less according to hours worked. If one wants or needs to consume more than the average, one must work harder. Parecon is also opposed to rewarding for output, as this rewards people for winning the genetic lottery. Naturally, there is full employment in a parecon.

Who owns the Parecon workplace?

In a parecon, private ownership of the means of production would not be allowed. People would own things like houses and toothbrushes, but not workplaces.

Are there hierarchies in a Parecon?

Parecon eliminates oppressive hierarchies in the workplace by *rejecting a fixed hierarchy.* Since it is impossible to do some tasks without someone being in charge, all such jobs are rotated through with different workers. For instance, if on Tuesday you are coordinating baggage handlers in an airport, on Wednesday you are one of the baggage handlers. This ensures that continuing, oppressive hierarchies do not occur.

Is the workplace democratic?

Yes. The parecon workplace is also designed to promote self-management. Workplace decisions on what the workplace or entire industry will do are made by those affected by the decision. If all involved are going to be profoundly affected by the decision (say to perform a dangerous building operation) consensus might be used,

otherwise, decisions might require an all but one dissenter vote, a 90% or 60% vote, whatever is appropriate. Since we do not want to put all our eggs in one basket, attention will be paid to minority opinions and effort will be made to reconcile differences. Workers not affected by the decisions of another group have no say in what another group decides.

How can you allocate goods & services democratically?

Every year, citizens of a parecon will enter (by computer) their planned consumption for the upcoming year on an individual, neighbourhood, community, provincial and country-wide level. Individuals will enter how much food, clothing, entertainment, and other goods and services they will want to purchase in the coming year. This will be as detailed as needed, and will not be designed to be a time consuming process. Further, *everyone will have the right to submit proposals for collective consumption* (such as swimming pools, power plants, more street cleaning, new parks, etc.) to facilitation boards. The facilitation boards collect these proposals and work them into integrated packages to be voted on at the appropriate level.

Workplaces and industries will also submit proposals regarding how much they wish to work and which things workers want to produce in the coming year.

Then what?

All these proposals will be summed up, giving a “supply and demand” for the year. Environmental and social costs will be added, and prices for goods and services that truly reflect the *social opportunity cost* (a price that goes up if the good impacts the environment or society negatively) will be generated.

Consumers and workers will review the new prices. Any group that proposes to consume much more than the average will have to justify this proposal to peer groups, or else redo their proposal.

Then a second round of proposals are entered, based on reactions to the new prices. The new prices are reviewed, and a third round then begins, except groups will not be allowed to deviate from their previous proposals by very much. In the fourth and fifth round the deviation allowed is less and less. This ensures that the prices and plans converge to a creative compromise beneficial to all. Facilitation boards help this process, and produce a set of plans that incorporate the data from the previous rounds into packages for everyone to vote on. Whichever one is voted for becomes the participatory plan for the following year, and sets the prices of all goods and services.

How does this protect the environment?

The price of any good will rise in proportion to its environmental cost, creating a disincentive to produce such goods. Further, any activity that leads to unrecoverable and disastrous environmental effects will not be allowed. A region that suffers environmentally due to producing a good will be compensated (resulting in a higher price for the good), and the inhabitants of that region can stop production once the effects are too much (or at any time). Over time, this will lead to sustainability, even in a technologically advanced society. Environmentally benign technologies will be encouraged. Environmentalists will have a very loud voice in a parecon.

Isn't this process too bureaucratic?

Not really. People will get time off work to participate, and entering consumer proposals or discussing a community project in a meeting will be done in proportion to how much interest there is. Redirecting

