

CLARIFYING THE 'EDGES' OF PARTICIPATORY ECONOMICS

by Michael Albert

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Clarifying the ‘Edges’ of Participatory Economics

An Anti-Blueprint ‘Blueprint’,
and an Anti-Sectarian ‘Instruction’

Michael Albert

SERIES

Towards (a Better) Postcapitalism: A Handy How-To Guide

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Production | Allocation | Decision Making

i.e., how could/would postcapitalist *production* be like (and who would own the means of production), what shape would the *allocation* of goods take (and which alternatives to the market economy may be explored), and what would be the main tenets of postcapitalist *decision making* and *democracy*.

In this paper, **Michael Albert** revisits certain aspects of PARECON (‘participatory economics’) as a viable postcapitalist model.

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Participatory economy promises classless post capitalist production, consumption, and allocation. Participatory economy promises solidarity, diversity, equity, self-management, sustainability, participation, and internationalism. Participatory economy’s defining institutions deliver on those intents. Participatory economy’s defining institutions dictate nothing beyond those intents. Participatory economy’s defining institutions are a commons of productive assets, collectively self-managed workers and consumers councils, a new division of labour that features balanced job complexes, remuneration for duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued work, and participatory planning that determines inputs, outputs, and prices.

Participatory economy presents its defining institutions as a kind of post capitalist “scaffold” on which future citizens can, in light of future experiences, add additional economic features, or “edges”—where “edges” are not a thin periphery, but instead a rich and deep blanket of contingent, contextual features that round out the economic vision’s practical implementation.

Indeed, the type of any real-world economy is set by that economy’s defining scaffold. Some “edges” add to the core scaffold of any economic type numerous practical details that help the scaffold fit

different contexts. Other “edges” operate in addition to but not within any economy’s core scaffold.

For example, on top of its defining private ownership of productive assets, owner and coordinator domination of workplace decision making, corporate division of labour, remuneration for property and power, and markets for allocation, capitalism’s “edge” features differ in their details from country to country and within countries from industry to industry, and even within industries from workplace to workplace, as well as from family to family and neighbourhood to neighbourhood. The point is, economic “edges,” though they often having profound impact on social possibilities, are nonetheless contextually contingent. One country may accomplish an “edge” function one way. Another country may accomplish the same “edge” function another way. One workplace may accomplish an “edge” function one way. Another workplace may accomplish the same “edge” function another way.

What different ways of implementing participatory economy’s edge functions might we anticipate seeing? Well, no one knows the details of future circumstances. No one has practical real world experiences even with participatory economy’s defining scaffold, much less with its possible “edges.” No one knows future peoples’ preferences for any one “edge” choice over any other. Nor should anyone now want to make such choices for others who will later live with them. For these reasons, a worthy vision is not a detailed blueprint. Possible “edges” may be tentatively described but not definitively prescribed. This holds for economic vision and also for kinship, community, political, ecological, and international visions.

So, is it a weakness or a strength for advocates of participatory economics (or of any other vision) to say little about its “edges”? Is it a weakness or a strength for advocates of participatory economics (or of any other vision) to have disagreements about its possible “edges,” or even about how to best advocate participatory economics (or any other vision)? Having myself proposed economic vision, I will continue this discussion of clarifying “edges” by considering the economic case.

In sum, what about a participatory economy makes it a participatory economy? It is that it has the five earlier noted institutional features as its defining organizational spine or scaffold. The flexible part that will impact what any particular instance of participatory economy will include in different contexts is then everything that fills out or adds to its participatory economic core. This will depend on how different instances of the economic vision add to their defining institutions to make them fit actual worldly situations. It will depend on what different implementations of the vision add beyond their defining features.

People interested in participatory economics often quite justifiably say, “you claim the vision isn’t a blueprint because a blueprint would overstep current knowledge. A blueprint would usurp future citizen’s choices. A blueprint would imply there is only one right way to do each economic thing, when there will be many right ways to do most economic things.” People then ask, “okay, but then what is and what is not contingent about participatory economic vision? More, in the contingent part, what do participatory economy’s advocates not yet agree on? What do they disagree about? And is the fact that advocates have different views about ‘edge’ features a good or bad thing?”

Edges of the Participatory Economic Scaffold

What might any developed participatory economy add to its defining institutional scaffold to make that scaffold’s operations viable and worthy in specific national, regional, local, industry, workplace, neighbourhood, and household contexts?

Consider participatory economy’s productive commons.

Here, things appear pretty cut and dried. Something is in or is not in the productive commons. Resources, buildings, tools, skills, and knowledge useful in production are in. Final goods and services for consumers as well as pollution that we all endure are not in. There can be some vagueness about this or that item, but I don’t think there is much “edge” to add to the productive commons of participatory economics and thus I also think there is not much here for advocates to disagree about. On the other hand, to have a productive commons means we no longer have private owners of productive assets. This poses problems. Who decides what? Who does what? Who receives what? To have a productive commons in place of private ownership of productive assets requires that we have mechanisms to facilitate worker requests to use productive assets. It requires that we have mechanisms to facilitate society determining whether such requests are deserving. Participatory economy’s first defining feature, its productive commons, calls forth not so much “edges” as additional defining features.

Next, consider participatory economy’s self-managing councils.

If workers and consumers are to make decisions, by way of what venue will they do this? Participatory economy’s answer is worker and

consumer self-managing councils. Each worker and consumer council’s operating norm is that decisions should be made by those affected, each with decision-making say in proportion as they will be affected by the decision made. So, a first “edge” addition is structures that will settle on procedures to make different types of decision. Do particular work teams or groups of neighbours decide unto themselves, or do whole councils decide? For whoever does decide, how do they hold meetings? When? With what procedures? How do they generate and keep records? How do they undertake deliberations? Most especially, what voting and tallying procedures do they use?

Suppose you work in a unit with a thousand workers. You can’t sensibly have a thousand members vote on every little thing. So, what do you do? Well, there is no single right procedure you can always use to deal with the myriad details of every situation that requires deliberation and votes. Different situations and issues call forth different procedures. There is therefore plenty of “edge” to settle on. We will learn from future experiences. We will evaluate future methods. We will develop new preferences in new contexts that we grow into. Experimentation and evaluation will therefore play a decisive role in deciding among “edge” options. More, the “edge” features that workers and consumers adopt to facilitate self-management will likely turn out differently in different industries, or sometimes even in different workplaces in the same industry, due to different conditions and workforces.

For example, some advocates of participatory economy may prefer to approach perfect self-management for every choice as closely as possible even if such precision would require considerably more time than would getting agreeably but not excessively near to perfection. I

doubt, however, that such differences will seriously agitate folks. If I favour sufficient mutually agreed self-management but you prefer nearly perfect self-management, I can look for a workplace that implements what I prefer, and you can look for a workplace that implements what you prefer. Participatory economy requires that all councils self-manage. But participatory economy does not prescribe detailed means and methods that each and every council must utilize to self-manage. I don't think advocates have consequential disagreements about this flexibility. This is not to say there won't be disagreements over specific decisions, only that there will be agreed procedures.

Next, consider participatory economy's balanced job complexes.

The guideline here is that the mix of tasks composing jobs should be such that every worker is comparably empowered by what they do for their jobs as every other worker is empowered by what they do for their jobs. The goal is to eliminate the division of employees into a subordinate class which does overwhelmingly disempowering activity and a dominant class which does overwhelmingly empowering activity.

Participatory economics therefore establishes balanced jobs within each firm to remove local class division. Participatory economics also establishes balanced jobs across firms to prevent the emergence of a relative few workplaces in which jobs are balanced but all largely empowering, plus many more workplaces in which jobs are balanced but all largely disempowering. Cross workplace balancing is proposed, that is, so that even without class division inside workplaces, we don't have it throughout society. But beyond requiring empowerment

balancing, participatory economy doesn't specify procedures by which any particular workplace must determine its own particular allocation of tasks into balanced jobs. Methods and structures for balancing inside and across workplaces constitute an "edge" adopted to adapt the participatory economic scaffold to different contexts.

In a workplace, will settling on balanced jobs only involve general meetings of its council, or will it also use meetings of committees that make proposals and continually update assessments? How often? Using what information and techniques? Will balancing across workplaces involve agencies outside of workplaces that facilitate cross workplace balancing, themselves perhaps composing a kind of "job balancing industry"? For that matter will the greater complexity of cross workplace balancing lead over time to investing to diversify each workplace to include sufficient tasks to avoid its locally balanced jobs being unduly empowering or disempowering, to in turn reduce or eliminate the need to balance across workplaces? Likewise, what procedures will exist for on the job training, not just during an initial transition, but always?

The general point is hopefully already evident. To achieve self-management, solidarity, diversity, equity, and sustainability, we can't have class division and class rule. To not have class rule, we must jettison the corporate division of labour that elevates empowered (coordinator class) employees to dominate disempowered (working class) employees. To replace the corporate division of labour, we must implement what participatory economy calls balanced job complexes that comparably empower all workers. However, participatory economy doesn't propose an actual specific balance for every specific workplace, nor even for each whole industry. It doesn't propose specific

procedures that all workplaces must use to allocate tasks into jobs. Participatory economy specifies only that workplace and cross workplace allocation of tasks into balanced jobs should occur, and that the process should be self-managed.

I think advocates of participatory economics agree on all that, but I suspect we sometimes disagree on how much we should emphasize the importance of job balancing, as well as about what specific procedures are desirable and how perfect a balance we ought to seek. Such views, however, will remain advisories based on guesses and intuitions until actual participatory workplaces experiment with practical options and gravitate to what turn out to be the approaches they most like. Different future choices in these regards will reflect different future situations, experiences, and preferences. Differences among current advocates about what “edge” features to enact later, however, necessarily reflect only tentative guesses about the future.

Next, we come to participatory economy’s equitable remuneration.

Participatory economy’s proposed remunerative norm is that all people who work should get a claim on the social product in proportion to the duration, intensity, and onerousness of the socially valued work they do. This is equitable. This provides appropriate incentives. This reveals information needed to determine how much of what to produce. Equitable remuneration is for these reasons part of the participatory economic scaffold.

But here too, the vision doesn’t specify that one approach fits all. Rather, due to their different situations and different workforces, some workplaces may want to apportion their total income allotment to their workers in very close accord with a tight assessment of each

worker's duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued work. Other workplaces, however, may prefer a more relaxed attitude based on a looser accounting. Also, the exact procedures any particular council will use to determine duration, intensity, and onerousness of each worker's socially valued work could certainly differ for different industries, and even for different workplaces within a single industry.

Suppose you and your workmates prefer precise accounting. Suppose I and my workmates value the time saved by looser accounting more than we value greater precision. I and my workmates prefer a workplace that favours looser accounting. You and your workmates prefer a workplace that favours more exact accounting. As a result, the tools and perhaps the committees our respective workplaces implement to arrive at their accountings differ. Over time, some methods might prove generally superior to others, just as other methods might prove not so durable or desirable and fall into disuse. Even so, different conditions such as the size of different workplaces, the composition of their workforces, or the nature of tasks they accomplish would likely cause considerable diversity in their choices of methods.

Or consider time off from work, but with continued income. Not for illness, for which a participatory economy proposes to provide a full income, but time off to fulfil some personal desire. Imagine an established participatory society with a participatory economy. Suppose the social average ("edge" feature) is, say, thirty-hour work weeks with four weeks off with pay each year. What if someone wants to take time off beyond the agreed paid vacation time? Suppose you want to not work for six straight weeks, or for six months, or forever. Should you receive a full or a living or no income for your time off? Different "edge" policies and procedures might emerge to address this

situation, whether for a whole participatory economy, or for specific workplaces.

For example, some people might feel that all who work should get some time off with pay. Nothing particularly unusual about that much. So, suppose it is policy that all who work get four weeks paid vacation. Now, some people may additionally feel, hold on, if I want time off for longer, say for six months, or a year, or whatever, I should still get some sort of living income, presumably below the average income for people who do work, but not nothing. Others might feel, well, if you do get income for less work, extra leisure, then the social product the rest of us get our income from is reduced, and the average income for those of us who work declines, and we feel this is unwarranted—sometimes called freeloading. Society has a full average income for all who can't work. Society has some level of paid time off for those who do work. Beyond that, should those who want to take more time off still receive for those extra non-work hours some level of income?

For example, perhaps society agrees there to provide some living income even for those in a workers' council who choose to opt out of work, and decrees that that that income will persist for however long the person chooses to not work. Or perhaps instead society decrees that a person wanting time off with some continued income has to request continued payment from workmates who are affected by the choice. Those favouring the latter option may agree that while providing full income for people who can't work avoids poverty and respects humanity—providing even just lesser income for not working though one can work, is only about avoiding poverty in today's society where there are too few jobs, jobs are too alienating, and so on. If I don't want

to work, though I can, and I want income for not working, I should have to petition to others for my extra benefits which will come at the cost of those others. In any event, aren't such policies contingent and for future people to decide in light of future conditions and preferences? Participatory vision's task is to bequeath future people equitable, self-managing institutions that let them decide as they choose. For that matter, suppose someone has a special but non-medical need and they want additional income. If that is an option, whether provided nationally, or by an industry, or by a workplace, or by a community, what “edge” features might councils implement to register and assess such requests?

The point is, such views about “edge” elaboration of how to remunerate can yield different choices. One economy might handle time off differently than another or perhaps it is left to individual workplaces who differ, one from another. Some think a living income should be guaranteed to those who opt out of work regardless of their reason. Others feel that unless a person has good reason, for a person able to work to opt to not work and still expect to be supported by those who do work, is anti-social. There certainly could emerge different views about such future choices among current advocates of participatory economy. However, such differences now about what policies to have later will reflect different perceptions, preferences, and experiences of current conditions. In contrast, decisions about such issues later, by those affected, will be informed by future perceptions and tastes, and by experience of future conditions. For that reason, I think current differences about these future “edge” options should augment rather than undercut the priority that as long as society and each workforce is satisfied that participatory economy's overall norms are

respected, a participatory economy should welcome diversity and not seek homogeneity.

More, just as having a productive commons yields implications for additional defining economic elements bearing on who decides what and who earns what, so too having equitable remuneration carried out in each workplace by its workplace council leaves open what exactly determines what constitutes socially valued labour? More, it leaves open how each workplace council gets allotted an overall total income to disperse to its workers that is sufficient for but does not exceed what is needed for each worker’s income to be equitable? These are defining features, however, and so in this broad overview, we have finally come to participatory planning, the most complex and multifaceted component of the participatory economic vision. Here there are more moving parts and also more “edges” to settle on—and to perhaps disagree about.

The essence of participatory planning is that workers and consumers councils each engage in rounds of proposing and reacting to others’ proposals for production and consumption. The defining scaffold, in this case, has to reach a bit further to describe what it advocates than is necessary in other cases, because to do less wouldn’t be sufficient to demonstrate how participatory planning will be viable and worthy. Without rehearsing the whole allocation vision, perhaps it is sufficient to note that participatory planning says workers and consumers councils submit proposals for their own production and consumption. An “iteration facilitation board” receives the proposals, tallies them, and conveys back to all councils the gap between proposed production and consumption for each category of item as well as new estimates of what will likely become the final valuations of all the

individual, social, and ecological inputs and outputs of the production/consumption process. Then, in each new iteration of the process, workers and consumers use the updated information they receive to generate new proposals which move toward a final implementable plan.

Workers councils propose their own production based on their members' personal and collective production choices for work and leisure, and on the need for their proposal to be socially responsible. Consumers councils propose their own personal and collective consumption choices in light of expected prices and their incomes and the need to abide their budgets. Iteration by iteration, all councils refine their proposals in light of proposals made by other councils. The process provides continually improved estimates of likely final prices. Various presentations of participatory planning go further into specifics than this brief summary, but the summary does describe the defining essence. Workers and consumers councils use true valuations of personal, social, and environmental benefits and burdens to arrive at mutually agreed upon socially responsible agendas. They conduct collectively self-managed allocation with no top or bottom. They elevate neither dictation nor competition. They advance solidarity, diversity, equity, self-management, and sustainability. They arrive at what people want without wasting what people value.

The "edge" to append to the essentials of participatory planning to ensure that participatory planning fits diverse contexts is considerable. For example, what additional features permit each council to arrive at its proposals for each new round of planning? The scaffold establishes that workers councils consult their preferences to propose a socially responsible and thus acceptable use of productive assets. It

likewise establishes that consumers consult their preferences to propose socially responsible and thus acceptable consumption requests. But consider different workplaces in different industries. Consider different living units in different neighbourhoods or larger locales. Precisely how will the various involved councils actually decide what proposals to make?

Likewise, while the participatory economic scaffold emphasizes that units should account for the ecological consequences of their choices, and while it indicates that they will do so by way of those consequences being properly represented in prices due to methods that uncover ecological costs and benefits, again, how precisely will all that happen? Similarly, while the scaffold says councils should self-manage investments, how will proposals for investments emerge? How will research into options and implications occur in each case? How will longer term choices among options be decided? To permit assessment of the viability and worthiness of participatory economics, some tentative answer to these “edge” questions must be provided. At the same time, it is important to remember that these are ultimately issues whose detailed determination will arise from future experience and preferences.

Yet another “edge” issue is what level of qualitative information to convey in the course of participatory planning? Do producers and consumers make decisions based only on numeric indicators of costs and benefits called prices, or does an economy add to that core that producers and consumers can also access qualitative information about the circumstances of other producers and consumers?

Participatory planning pursues collective self-management of worthy production and consumption. As with arriving at specific means of decision making in councils, or arriving at specific balanced jobs in workplaces, or arriving at local modes of remuneration for duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued work in different workplaces—in the case of allocation, too, there is a trade-off between seeking more perfect fulfilment of sought goals versus the time and hassle of seeking overly great precision.

Participatory economics facilitates diverse choices for the particular methods that particular workplaces implement to arrive at production proposals. It facilitates diverse choices for the particular means that particular individuals and neighbourhoods implement to arrive at collective consumption proposals. For example, one workplace favours a particular method to poll its workers. Perhaps it also favours special committees to provide information and offer proposals, and so on. Another workplace, in a different place and with different workers, might opt for different procedures. Both workplaces would operate within the rubric of the overall planning process. Both would for that reason choose options true to self-management. But they would each also have differences that would reflect different conditions or preferences and would evidence healthy diversity. However, for allocation sometimes we can't have different strokes for different folks. An economy can't have some industries not relating to planning, or have some relating substantively differently than others relate. It can't have, or it likely can't have, one set of procedures for determining the costs of say, pollution, in one place, and a quite different approach to the same task, or at least a different approach that would not sensibly mesh into a consistent whole, in another place.

Certain “edge” features added to the essence of participatory planning may be able to differ from one context to another. Other “edge” features added to participatory planning may have to be the same everywhere. The point is: choices have to mesh together sensibly. So, in some cases, choices between allocation “edge” features will, like differences over how to set up balanced jobs in different firms, be a non-disruptive matter of local choice. Different strokes for different folks. Other times, however, “edge” choices to facilitate allocation will have to be more universal to achieve a workable mesh across a whole economy. For example, there may be more than one worthy way to arrive at investments or more than one worthy way to determine ecological costs and benefits, but it may not be possible for some councils or regions to use one worthy procedure while others opt for some other worthy procedure, due to their not meshing.

It follows that there could arise consequential disagreements among advocates of participatory economics about what “edge” features to choose to fill out the allocation part of the defining scaffold. Complicating further, to make a case for the virtues of participatory planning, one may have to—and indeed advocates have had to—describe at least some “edge” features which a future participatory economy might not utilize.

So, what kind of allocation disagreements might advocates have? The earlier listed types of allocation “edge” that might need to be added to participatory planning are each possible sources of difference. You like that. I like this. Rather than go on too long with complex hypotheticals, let’s consider one relatively simple example. Should the participatory planning process incorporate a mechanism that lets workers access qualitative information about those who consume

what they produce, or that lets consumers access qualitative information about those who produce what they consume, or that even facilitates inter-council deliberations in order to in some cases uncover additional insights? If so, how much information, how much deliberation? Here are two possible polar positions.

Position one says that one of the damning attributes of market allocation is that it compels participants to consult only their own personal preferences and prices and therefore allows them to know virtually nothing about the circumstances, motives, or capacities of other actors. This is further aggravated by the fact that market exchange creates a competitive dynamic where you are not only oblivious to the situation of others, but you also do better at their expense. Participatory planning gets rid of the latter especially vile attribute, but if participatory planning conveys no qualitative information it does nothing to put an end to actors considering only their own circumstances while being ignorant of others. Because participatory planning's prices reflect true social and ecological costs and benefits and because there is no means for actors to accumulate excess power or inequitable income, this separation of actors would not be near as damning as the extreme "individualist" isolation a market system imposes, but still, position one argues that there is value and virtue in producing explicit solidarity in the form of mutual understanding. For that reason, position one wants to include qualitative information in participatory planning.

A second issue for those who favour position one might be awareness that no social procedure is perfect. Access to qualitative information, position one's advocates might argue, could correct inadvertent pricing errors by leading to proposals somewhat different from

what such imperfect prices would alone elicit. Short of that, the availability of qualitative information might often shortcut what might otherwise be unduly long detours on the road to final plans by giving people not just the fact that others say they aren't eager to produce what you seek or that others say they want more than you are happy to produce, but also the actual qualitative reasons why, and perhaps even beyond that, time for deliberation to arrive at new insights. For those with these views, the "edge" addition they favour could be a mechanism for conveying qualitative information that others can choose to consult or not, as the need arises. For example, a worker's council's first proposal might include information as to why in light of their circumstances and capacities the council believes that their proposal is a responsible or perhaps even an exemplary request for use of the part of the productive commons they seek to employ. Likewise, a consumer council's first proposal might have to include information why they feel the final goods they seek constitute a socially responsible request. Or, in the process of planning investments or of accounting for environmental costs, perhaps means of deliberation and consultation could enhance arriving at accurate valuations. Qualitative communication between workers councils and consumers councils might also provide useful guidance for innovating products to better address needs of both workers and consumers. For these reasons, too, position one wants to include qualitative information and in some situations mutual deliberation in participatory planning.

In contrast to the above, position two says a very important factor in trying to assess the merits of participatory planning is the duration of the planning process and the complexity of assessments and actions it imposes on workers and consumers. Keeping these to a minimum,

says position two, is highly desirable and is more likely if we use the participatory process without allotting time for councils to provide or to consult qualitative information, much less to deliberate beyond their own councils, which consultation or deliberation would in any event be, says position two, redundant as far as the merit of the actual final plan is concerned. For that reason, position two urges that qualitative information and deliberation beyond one's own council be excluded from participatory planning and deems their absence a virtue.

Worse, says position two, to append qualitative information might even distort outcomes by providing councils an incentive to make what could turn out to be exaggerated subjective claims that could distort choices, even if not maliciously. The unembellished planning process arrives at accurate prices, which prices in turn inform warranted proposals, which proposals culminate in socially responsible production and consumption, says position two. Why burden this with time consuming and perhaps misleading qualitative information, much less cross council deliberation? For these reasons, position two urges that qualitative information be excluded from participatory planning.

Whatever one thinks of the two positions, it should be clear that one might uncover similar "disputes" among participatory economy advocates regarding other allocation "edge" features. The overarching point of presenting the indicated example is to consider whether we need at this time to even try to resolve such differences. As more examples, similar in these regards, I also suspect that how to precisely measure ecological effects on different constituencies with what means or agencies, as well as how to arrive at proposals for middle and long term investment that utilize what research conducted by what agencies will also involve "edge" methods and structures which will,

however, be societally contingent additions to the participatory economic scaffold that are definitively arrived at only after considerable future experience. Are current different opinions about these future allocation matters a bad or a good thing?

First, unlike differences over precisely how workplaces should arrive at balanced jobs or precisely how they should internally apportion income, we can't always say about allocation differences that because we can let different places implement different allocation choices there is no need to resolve the difference. Suppose it turns out that for its allocation to work well, a society with participatory planning could opt to have no qualitative information exchanged, or some, or a lot throughout its planning processes. In that case, perhaps another participatory economy might operate differently, though within any one economy, there would have to be one universally adopted approach. Indeed, there may be many allocation "edge" features for which there will need to be a single determination that can't differ from place to place. In that case, what approach an advocate favours matters in a way that an advocate's preference for different methods of balancing jobs doesn't. But is even this more serious type of difference bad for advocates to have?

I think the contrary is true. One of the defining values of the participatory approach is diversity. The argument for diversity includes the idea that when there are competing options for some policy, approach, or structure, even if only one option must ultimately become operative, first, the selection should depend on evidence and experience and should therefore await having relevant evidence and experience. Second, even when evidence is agreed to point to one choice, it is generally wise to keep alive other choices. We should not eliminate

all but one option which we elevate without hesitation. That is, even as we institute a “winning” choice, it is desirable to realize that it may ultimately prove flawed. It may even prove less desirable than an earlier rejected choice. Keeping earlier rejected positions afloat as “insurance” has benefits, even after experience opts for a different position.

To currently have various positions regarding “edges” that we might choose to append to the participatory economic scaffold (or, writ larger, for that matter, to the defining features of a kinship, community, political, ecological, or international scaffold), will only be detrimental if advocates of those contrary positions become sectarian or even mutually hostile and thereby create unnecessary divisions, or if resolution among options doesn’t await practical evidence and especially the preferences of those who will live with the results. Diversity is a virtue especially when it means respecting views that one currently rejects.

Edges Beyond the Scaffold

Beyond the scaffold, even after the scaffold is filled out with “edges” as discussed above, there will no doubt be many more “edge” features which, taken all together, will compose each actual, functioning participatory economy. Here are at least a few observations that suggest plausible or even likely areas of further “edge” addition.

For example, we might anticipate that at the basic level of workplaces and local neighbourhoods, but also at industry- and, say, state- and country-wide levels there will arise research mechanisms regarding new methods of production and likely also innovations for

consumption. If so, their existence and character would be “edge” material.

We might also anticipate agencies to help people change jobs when they so desire and other agencies to help facilitate job balancing in and across workplaces, including addressing job training. Their existence and character too, would be “edge” material.

We might well imagine needs arising for regulatory bodies associated with different facets of producer and consumer activity, as well as issues of when and how to close under-performing workplaces, or under what conditions to keep them operating. Additionally, what will facilitate hiring new workers or letting others go, or, for that matter, adjudicating disputes among workers? All that too would be “edge” material.

All such “edge” elements seem to me contextual, flexible, and thus capable of diverse implementation, though each would have to be designed and utilized to work effectively and consistently with the underlying values and structures of the system.

We might also anticipate that emanations of transformed polity, kinship, and community will intersect the economy to add additional edge material to participatory economy’s scaffold. These features emerging from other dimensions of life would likely not only include guards against political, gender, race, or other hierarchical violations within economics, but also ways of economic arrangements positively accounting for diverse cultural heritages, new sexual and gender attainments, considerable ecological requirements, and so on.

The point is, an actual implementation of any particular economic type, and in our case an actual implementation of participatory

economics, always arrives at an incredibly encompassing system that includes many contextual, contingent elements that facilitate and augment the operation of the system’s defining universally present features, and that also accommodate and reproduce social relations born beyond but intersecting and manifesting in the economy as well as throughout society.

Communicating Participatory Economics

Finally, while it isn’t a part of the scaffold of participatory economy itself, nor is it even a part of the “edge” that will emerge to refine and extend participatory economy’s defining scaffold, there is another aspect of advocacy of the vision that can yield contending views. How should advocates most effectively write and talk about participatory economic vision?

Each advocate devotes time to writing or speaking about the vision. Each advocate’s aim could be to improve the vision or could be to convey the vision’s agreed logic and features in an effort to provoke more support for it. In the latter case, they presumably write or talk so as to address, counter, and hopefully overcome whatever obstacles obstruct their audience from deciding to advocate participatory economics. Advocates’ efforts to overcome doubt can, however, differ because of different perceptions of what deters any particular audience from relating positively to the vision (or to any vision)

For example, a speaker/writer might feel an audience’s lack of support for participatory economics rests primarily on doubt about the merit of its values, or doubt that people would want to behave in the ways it requires, or doubt that people would be able to participate in

the ways it requires. Another speaker/writer might instead think an audience's lack of support rests on doubt about the implications of participatory economy's incentives, or doubt about whether participatory planning is technically consistent or economically efficient.

Similarly, one writer/speaker might think some particular aspects of the vision tend to invite ridicule or prod resistance, for example, discussions of class and the division of labour, and might think that other aspects tend to overcome ridicule and resistance, for example precision accounts of planning. Such a speaker/writer might think that advocates should avoid the former aspects and emphasize the latter aspects. Another writer/speaker might think more or less the opposite. Their talks and texts will presumably differ accordingly.

Or perhaps a writer/speaker thinks one potential audience is more important, or is more reachable, or, if convinced, will be more likely to have more influence in subsequently reaching still larger numbers of potential supporters. Another writer/speaker might think the same, but about a different potential audience. Further, the first writer/speaker might even think prioritization of the second audience tends to generate broad, imprecise formulations and images that the first audience could be repelled by, whereas the second writer/speaker might think that prioritization of the first audience tends to generate too detailed or too technical formulations and images or even that it uses too much familiar mainstream terminology that the second audience could be repelled by.

Will these many possible differences over how to best advocate participatory economics be divisive? Perhaps it seems they would be, since the communicative differences are not only about contingent

assessments, but also about current actions. That is, they propose how to more effectively advocate for the vision now. If you opt for one way, you are not utilizing the other way, and vice versa. Will that produce sharp division

It could, but I don't think it should. Differences about the details of how to most effectively advocate for participatory economics (or any vision for any new social relations) depend on different impressions, intuitions, and agendas. If advocates of different approaches practice mutual respect to foster a diversity of thought, then debate, dissent, and creativity will be beneficial rather than destructive. Advocates will solicit and hear advice and will welcome guidance from one another. They will want to adapt their preferred views to not detract from and even to augment one another.

The point is, when advocates who agree on a visionary scaffold don't have consensus about an "edge" feature or about a mode of advocacy, they will relish the opportunity to preserve a diversity of options. They will remain flexible while experience and evidence continually illuminate specifics. They will avoid the tendency to blueprint. They will avoid the tendency to split.

Many hands will further share, develop, and contextualize participatory economics. As inoculation against sectarian divisiveness, advocates' diversity can and should fuel mutual efforts to remain true to the vision's shared core features while flexibly exploring its diverse "edges" to reach out as best we can.

Note one to readers: Ironically, on reading the above essay, I found it to be an anti-blueprint “blueprint” and an anti-sectarian “instruction.” In that regard, I found it to be relevant not only to the sources, consequences, and ways of dealing with differences about participatory economy, which is what I had in mind as I wrote it, but also to the sources, consequences, and ways of dealing with differences about any vision. For that reason, after a final reading, I inserted some words here and there to highlight that point, which though it was not initially intended, does seem to me a desirable aspect of the finished article.

Note two to readers: On reading the article, it also occurred to me that one might respond, “wait a minute. What about polity, kinship, culture, and the world beyond each individual society?” Imagine we have a shared vision for each of these additional sides of life. Implemented, these visions would have to entwine compatibly with economy, just as economic vision would have to entwine compatibly with them. The economy, kinship, community/culture, polity, and international relations each have implications for the consciousness, habits, expectations, desires, and capacities of all people. Can we flexibly extend the discussion of “edges” beyond what this article centrally addresses? Can we see some “edges” of each vision imposed by the defining relations of other visions? I think we can.

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