UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME FOR CREATIVE FUTURES

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For the right of a basic income for all

Universal basic income (UBI) is a periodic cash payment, unconditionally delivered to all, on an individual basis, without means-test or work requirement. In this sense, the UBI guarantees a *Ius Existentiae* (right to existence) and provides dignity for all; for this reason, the UBI is considered as a new fundamental social right (De Wispelaere & Morales, 2016; see also Ferrajoli, 2007, pp. 404–405). The UBI is also seen as an alternative to the submission of the market, and an alternative to the acquiescence of our lives to the control of the state which frees individuals (e.g., from having to accept low-paid gigs). Moreover, the UBI can also be considered as a device that promotes an idea of freedom “as ‘real freedom,’ not just ‘formal freedom’- that is, as involving not only the sheer right but also the genuine capacity to do whatever one might wish to do” (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017, p. 104).

The UBI as a fundamental human right was already described first during the humanism of the Renaissance era and then especially during the Enlightenment, with Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (1794–1795) by Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794) and with *Agrarian Justice* (1797) by Thomas Paine (1737–1809); in recent years it has gained considerable space in the international political debate. In particular, the UBI is seen by its promoters as a solution to the prediction that job automation, the job market changing, will produce an increasing impoverishment of workers and a fall in the demand for consumer goods in capitalist countries. For this reason, both libertarians and democratic socialists consider the UBI as a possible tool to solve the new future challenges of the digital society. In any case, different ideological standpoints promote different notions of the UBI. In a libertarian conception, there is a tendency to consider basic income as a tax reimbursement from government to individuals; for the new left, the UBI is seen as an additional and free income allocated directly to the people by emancipating them in everyday life, within the framework of a new universal Welfare State (Allegri et al., 2021; Allegri & Foschi, 2021).

After WWII, some scholars and researchers began to make explicit the link between UBI and living as free and happy as possible. From 1975, Jan Pieter Kuiper (1922–1986), professor of social medicine in Amsterdam, published articles and research in which he stressed the need for a guaranteed income to counter the dehumanizing nature of paid employment (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017, p. 96). In the same decades after the European period of struggle in the
years 1968–1969, the new student, metropolitan, youth, feminist, Italian, and European social movements began to put the theme of innovation into welfare systems during the crisis of the Fordist approach to labor (i.e., collaboration between capital and labor), and supporting the feminist struggle for wages for housework (Dalla Costa & De Bortoli, 2019; Elgarte, 2008; Fraser, 1994; Koslowski & Duvander, 2018; Pateman, 2004). In the analysis of the post-Fordist crisis, the need was felt to promote the guarantee of a basic income required by the new temporary employment contracts, the acceleration of technological innovations, and the crisis of Welfare State (Bologna & Fumagalli, 1997).

In this great social and cultural transformation, the Charles Fourier Collective, a group of researchers and trade unionists close to the University of Louvain, proposed in September 1986 to organize in the same city of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, the first founding meeting of the Basic Income European Network, which later took the name Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN). It became the reference association for studies, campaigns, and actions involving UBI (See https://basicincome.org/). The following year in France, the economist Yoland Bresson (1942–2014) founded the association AIRE (Association pour l’Instauration d’un Revenu d’Existence), the first French association structure dedicated exclusively to the support, promotion, and dissemination of the idea of a real income for living. From 2006, Basic Income Studies was the first academic journal dedicated to the UBI debates.

Building a new society based on a new right

For rebuilding solidarity (Van Parijs, 1996), it would thus be necessary to start from the guarantee of a basic income, sufficient for living worthily, with greater social security, freedom, and happiness, to overcome the paternalistic and conservative bottlenecks of family, tribal, and ethnic solidarity anchored to pre-modernity, as well as the bureaucratic, abstract, and selective solidarity of a State that from welfare declines into workfare. The intention expressed by the supporters and authors of the project is to take the first concrete step in thinking about the foundations of a new social contract in the 21st century that includes basic income and questioning the existential effects, both individual and social, that the experimentation would produce on life, work, relationships, and so forth, of the different subjects involved.

In the midst of this real propagation of experimentation with the UBI is the Finnish case. In Finland, for the years 2017–2018, the Kela (Social Insurance Institution of Finland) provided an unconditional basic income of 560€ per month to 2,000 citizens between 25 and 58 years old who were previously recipients of unemployment benefits. The purpose was to monitor the effects of this measure on the choices, behaviors, and conditions of the recipients (management of free time, choices of participation or not in public life, cultural life, and so on, as well as reduction of public costs due to the significant reduction of the bureaucratic apparatus involved in a basic income without means-tests, etc.). In addition, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) studied this Finnish project and presented a first short publication titled Basic Income: An Answer to Social Security Problems? (Turunen, 2017). In this sense, the results of the Finnish experiment in 2018 recently showed that among the 2,000 people who received income (treatment group TG) and those who did not receive it in the rest of the unemployed Finnish population (control group CG), “days in employment increased, on average, about six days more in the group that received basic income than in the control group” (Kangas et al., 2020, p. 188). UBI would therefore slightly influence the labor market of the unemployed who are the specific target of the Finnish experiment. Contrary to the economic data, the data on psychological well-being are
instead all in favor of UBI. In a telephone survey among 586 people who had received UBI and a control group of 1,047 without additional income, the TG presents significantly higher average scores on a life satisfaction scale; the TG members are also more confident about the future and perceive less economic and mental stress (Kangas et al., 2019). Final data on UBI’s ability to be a lever that facilitates the employment of the unemployed are therefore relatively encouraging—in particular, if work incentive strategies are activated together with UBI, as was done in Finland during the UBI experiment period—while psychological data are perfectly in line with previous research showing significant correlations between income and mental well-being (Kangas et al., 2020).

The results of the first systematic experiments on UBI have also favored the publication of articles in mainstream medical journals that underline how the greatest results of the unconditional allocation of income occur precisely in the improvement of the physical and mental health of the recipients:

Poverty and stagnant income growth are inextricably entwined with poorer health outcomes. […] A review of studies, focusing on the effects of UBI on health, was published in 2020 (Gibson et al., 2020). Twenty-seven studies reported health benefits, including reduced mortality, improved adult health, and increased provision of nutrients for low birthweight infants (Patel & Kariel, 2021, p. 1).

On the basis of these findings, many are now asking for a continuous experimentation of UBI in order to collect solid data to promote the unconditional allocation of income as a tool for fixing the economic and human crises that cyclically affect a capitalist context.

**UBI a bridge between creativity and the future**

The notion of the UBI is thus related to a revolutionary idea of a future society attentive to the psychophysical well-being of citizens and based on the free will of the individual in addition to the value of equality and social justice (Balibar, 2014; Carter, 1999). A different kind of freedom from that of libertarians which associates freedom to individual free action, especially with the loosening of the constraints of the state. In a new and positive conception of freedom, therefore, the UBI not only provides the individual to live without constraints but also promotes the use of free time without the worries of job insecurity. These forms of income support have already been shown in the past to free individuals by promoting activities that meet psychological as well as material needs, and finally by promoting creativity.

After World War II, in fact, a series of income support schemes were actually created within the so-called “Beveridge Plan” in the United Kingdom, which mainly benefited baby boomers. Moreover, Jobseeker’s Allowance in England in the 1960s and 1970s helped a generation of creative young people who were able to make sense of their lives by living off these forms of support. In 2016, this is how Keith Richards remembered his transition in the 1960s from Jobseeker’s Allowance (in slang, “the Dole”) to earning money by doing creative and satisfying work:

“It was a very exciting period, but then what isn’t when one week you are on the dole and then suddenly you are making 50 quid a week! There was excitement in many different ways, and then, “You mean I can actually make a living out of what I want to do?” That to me was the most amazing thing to me. Shit, I’d be doing this even if I was in my shed, if it had never happened, I’d still be doing it.

There was an amazing feeling in the early 60s—and I guess it was all to do with being war babies or something—and we were just reaching out and growing up with the Beatles and ourselves. And it wasn’t just us, it was happening all over the place, like nasty rash breaking
out. At the same time, you didn’t think it was going to be historic. You were too busy making history to think about it (Reid, 2007, p. 7).

These forms of subsidy continued until the end of the Cold War, and in England, they favored the creative freedom of a number of key figures in the youth culture during the second half of the 20th century. Joe Strummer (1952–2002), for example, met the other members of the Clash in a Job Center where he went to pick up “the dole” (Mioni & Benetello, 2010).

Despite this evidence, many people have always expressed the idea that UBI was not a really useful tool for a society founded on the free market and that UBI could indeed promote laziness and antisocial behavior among citizens. On the contrary, the data that we have available on the first controlled applications of the UBI show that the receivers by spending basic income do not implement self-destructive behaviors, such as excessive consumption of alcohol and smoking (Evans & Popova, 2017); indeed, they perceive psychophysical improvement (Kangas et al., 2019) and especially a different horizontal relationship with the employer that helps them to defend themselves from having to accept underpaid jobs, offers them more choices and favors changes in job offers that are more in line with the wishes and attitudes of the workers (Calnitsky et al., 2019). From the analysis of the interviews of receivers of the UBI emerges another important psychological aspect: the receivers living in the city invest more in social relations, interacting and shaping themselves with their neighbors who are also receivers, thus creating social networks whose effects are to deepen with new community studies (Calnitsky, 2019; see also Allegri & Foschi, 2021). This data therefore indicate a possible influence of UBI on sociability, which is a proxy for the so-called social capital considered as the “value” of social networks that are established between individuals of the same group, family, and community (bond social capital) or that are open to the outside world, to members of other cultures, other groups, and other communities (bridging social capital) (Putnam, 2000). Sociability, in turn, has proven to increase political participation and civic engagement in a virtuous circle that again influences social capital (Foschi & Lauriola, 2014). UBI could therefore promote sociability and trust in institutions with positive effects on the social capital of a given community (Foschi & Lauriola, 2016).

Thus, most analysts note that it is precisely from the first reports of the results of UBI trials, in particular the Finnish trial, that it appears as a useful tool to think more fairly and inclusively about societies in the (post)pandemic era, starting from three fundamental points that clearly emerged from users of basic income: reduction of stress caused by previous economic and financial insecurity; greater confidence in their future expectations; conditions of self-determination and individual autonomy (Allegri, 2020; Allegri & Gobetti, 2021; Carras & Van Parijs, 2021; Nettle et al., 2021).

As for the “Dole,” psychophysical well-being and the possibility of building social networks promoted by the fact that UBI’s stakeholders are freed from certain dynamics of exploitation of leisure time and their potential by the labor market have a further probable effect on the enhancement of creativity, which needs a context characterized by freedom in order to be cultivated. Thus, various types of consequences of UBI can also be hypothesized for creativity (see also Marturano & Vizmuller-Zocco, 2019).

Current welfare programs have not proved capable of having any effect on creativity, whereas UBI could. On one level, having opportunities to do jobs the UBI receivers like can foster workers’ creativity in carrying out their work (Sözbilir, 2018). On another level, workers can choose to use UBI to satisfy their creative aspirations, as in the cases of Keith Richards and Joe Strummer who built professions that produced wealth and well-being for themselves and for those who benefit indirectly (family, friends, community). In the history of mankind, creativity has often been a prerogative of the wealthier classes or creative people,
supported by patrons or specific philanthropic programs. Having a guaranteed and unconditional income every week or month could lead in the future to a society where cultivating one’s creativity could be a prerogative of everyone, promoting a sort of future democratization of creativity (Painter & Thoung, 2015).

For this reason, for example, groups of radical activists (Institute of Radical Imagination) have launched a manifesto that summarizes in 14 points all the issues relating to UBI and creativity which is explicitly considered a useful tool to overcome problems relating to the freedom of the artist who in a post-capitalist society is strictly dependent on the dynamics of commercialization and globalization:

**Art for UBI**

- Universal and Unconditional Basic Income is the best measure for the arts and cultural sector. Art workers claim a basic income, not for themselves, but for everyone.
- By demanding UBI, art workers do not defend a guild or a category and depreciate the role that class and privilege play in current perceptions of art. UBI is universal because it is for everyone and makes creative agency available to everyone.
- Art’s health is directly connected to a healthy social fabric. To claim for UBI, being grounded in the ethics of mutual care, is art workers’ most powerful gesture of care toward society.
- Because UBI disrupts the logic of overproduction, it frees us from the current modes of capital production that are exploiting the planet. UBI is a cosmogenetic technique and a means to achieve climate justice.
- Where to find the money for the UBI? In and of itself, UBI questions the actual tax systems in Europe and elsewhere. UBI empowers us to reimagine financial transactions, the extractivism of digital platforms, liquidity, and debt. No public service should be cut in order to finance UBI.
- UBI inspires many art collectives and communities to test various tools for more equal redistribution of resources and wealth. From self-managed mutual aid systems based on collectivizing incomes, to solutions temporarily freeing cognitive workers from public and private constraints. We aim to join them.
- Do not call UBI any measures that do not equal a living wage: UBI has to be above the poverty threshold. To eliminate poverty, UBI must correspond to a region’s minimum wage.
- UBI frees up time, liberating us from the blackmail of precarious labor and from exploitative working conditions.
- UBI is given unconditionally and without caveats, regardless of social status, job performance, or ability. It goes against the meritocratic falsehoods that cover for class privilege.
- UBI is not a social safety net, nor is it welfare unemployment reform. It is the minimal recognition of the invisible labor that is essential to the reproduction of life, largely unacknowledged but essential, as society’s growing need for care proves.
- UBI states that waged labor is no longer the sole means for wealth redistribution. Time and time again, this model proves unsustainable. Wage is just another name for exploitation of workers, who always earn less than they give.
- Trans-feminist and decolonizing perspectives teach us to say NO to all the invisible and extractive modes of exploitation, especially within the precarious working conditions created by the art market.
Universal basic income for creative futures

• UBI affirms the right to intermittence, privacy, and autonomy, the right to stay offline and not to be available 24/7.
• UBI rejects the pyramid scheme of grants and of the nonprofit industrial complex, redistributing wealth equally and without unnecessary bureaucratic burdens. Bureaucracy is the vampire of art workers’ energies and time turning them into managers of themselves (Institute of Radical Imagination, 2021).

References


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