

Basic Income and Degrowth?

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Context: Degrowth and Social equity

- Social equity → i.e. Income Redistribution



- Effects on resource /material consumption
- Effects on labour market participation / growth
- Considerations in terms of autonomy
(Castoriadis)



- Which degrowth variants could be compatible with a BI policy? (unconditional money transfer)

Definition - characteristics

Many different forms

- Raventos (2005) → Universality
- Standing (2008) → Liberal Notion of Social Justice – Rawlsian principles / no control / no charity / compatible with pursuing dignified work / no jeopardising effect on environment
- Friedman (1962) → (negative income tax) individual liberty
- van Parijs (2004, 2009) → Unconditionality (saves administrative and bureaucratic control), Autonomy

Relationship with degrowth proposals

- Barcelona declaration
- <http://en.demagazine.eu/>
- Kallis, 2011; Kallis et al. 2012

Relationship with consumption

- Andersson, 2012 → “work out a combination of instruments – including a BI – that would liberate us from the imperative to grow” → would foment more frugal lifestyles
- Boulanger, 2009 → impact of BI on the consumption of more eco-efficient goods and services is likely to be weak
- The economist, 2013; Haushofer and Shapiro, 2013 → UCT work; “unconditional cash transfers have significant impacts on consumption and psychological well-being”

Relationship with labour market

- Hum and Simpson, 2000 → Manitoba experiment: small effect in work reduction (1% male, 3/5% women) and increase in divorce rate
- Gilroy et al., 2013 → study on income and substitution effect on German Social Security System characterized by unemployment trap
given that individuals have different leisure/consumption preferences (3 categories are modelled), the final effect would likely increase labour participation
- Increases workers' bargaining power against employers capitalist → desirable social policy
- not necessarily contributes to a reduction in the domination of “economicism”

Criticisms 1:

BI is not likely to contribute to degrowth and if it was, it cannot be sustained

	Net payer for BI	
Net beneficiary of BI	<i>Maintain employment level, less income</i>	<i>Maintain income, work more</i>
<i>Maintain employment level, more income</i>	Same hours worked, tax-base is maintained and BI can be sustained	More hours worked in total, likely GDP growth, BI can be sustained.
<i>Maintain income, work less</i>	Less hours worked in total, tax base decreases, how to maintain BI policy?	Less hours worked in total, but tax base is maintained. BI can be sustained

Criticisms 2:

BI is based on a system which reinforces the prevalence of the monetary domain.

If an aim for the degrowth movement is to get rid of economic imperialism (MAUSS; Latouche, 2005; Fourier, 2008), then BI has very little, if anything, to do.

Based on liberal values that manage civil rights in monetary terms, and contribute to reinforce the monetary domination of our capitalist societies.

Criticisms 3:

BI might enhance individualism and consumerism.

- in a society whose members have the security of a BI very little can be predicted with respect to how mutual aid relationships will evolve
- BI strengthens individual autonomy, but not directly addressing degrowth values such as conviviality and disinterested reciprocity
- in a context of permanent crisis where unemployment level might often be at double-digit, BI could help in maintaining aggregate demand and mass consumption
- ensuring that all citizen have an adequate income to spend has a tremendous marketing potential for capitalist corporations
- Not clear which cultural values might emerge

Criticisms 4:

BI needs to beware of population growth.

- UBI for all or only for adult population?
- families seeking extra income might simply chose to have more children pushing population up.
- even if applied only to the adult population, the freed time will likely be devoted to child raising, making the choice to have a baby relatively more easy.

Criticisms 5:

All human societies have to perform some work to live-by.

- Beneficiaries of BI depend on those who pay for it as well as the employment of often harmful technological means to over-exploit natural resources
- In contrast, in traditional societies all members -already from the young age- contribute to sustain themselves and their community
- nature overexploitation, workers alienation and absolute laziness are not laws of nature → BI can be seen only as a marginal degrowth proposal, contextual within capitalism only.

Should we dismiss BI as a degrowth policy proposal?

- why degrowth policy proposals pose so much attention on BI?
- social sustainability is now more urgent than ever and environmental concerns are of a lower priority
- Degrowth movement related to the crisis (2008)
- BI can therefore be justified as an easy and temporary solution to the present injustice localized in post-industrial societies. Far easier to implement than guaranteeing universal access to the commons or convincing governments that we can prosper without growth. And far more pragmatic

In the light of post peak-oil era (risk of unwanted degrowth) BI would be a second-best short-lived solution in order to prepare for the strategic exodus towards nowtopia.

Degrowth politics should have other priorities for implementing a sustainable societal transition

Criticisms 6:

BI is only partially for an autonomous society.

- Does BI foment the autonomous sphere -standing as a third pole between the market and the government- or rather makes citizenship primarily depend upon the institutions that allow for its existence?
- A more relevant third pole, is that of the commons → how to secure basic access to common funds and their flows
- Access to commons as a source of income (independent from State and markets); with respect to commons, BI is only an end-of-pipe policy
- to what extent proposals for BI stand in opposition to policies for accessing the commons?