

Basic income against an unequal approach to ownership

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Basic income lays the foundations for citizens also to take a more equal approach to ownership in order to reduce poverty, inequality and increase living standards. The presentation will deal with three reasons why basic income helps concerning this equal approach and its application in reality.

First, citizens with basic income will be less dependent on other people's ownership, because they will have a tangible basis to pursue their own livelihood, which means they will not have to accept disadvantageous employment contracts with business owners just to get by. Second, basic income gives citizens the basic resources and time they need to create start-ups and, therefore, the ability to create private and public ownership. Third, basic income frees up citizens' time to engage in the economic life of society and enables them to play a hand in democratic decision-making on public (municipal, national, and other) ownership that may be of benefit to them, especially public ownership of critical infrastructure in the form of a health network, transport, electricity, gas, water, postal services, etc. In conclusion, the presentation will interconnect the three reasons in a systemic explanation.

(1) Breaking Disadvantageous Employment Contracts and Empowering Economic Independence

In the context of economic uncertainty and increasing wealth inequality, the concept of basic income can be useful as a potential solution to address poverty and inequality related to disadvantageous employment contracts and promote bigger economic independence and autonomy. Under the current economic system of dominant private ownership, many individuals find themselves trapped in low-paying or unfulfilling jobs due to financial obligations. Citizens are vulnerable to economic and social hardships and are compelled to accept unfavorable job conditions out of desperation.

Basic income offers a financial basis to pursue individual livelihoods. Because basic income is a safety platform that provides individuals with a financial basis to cover essential needs, such as housing, food, and healthcare, it liberates citizens and grants them the freedom to seek meaningful employment that aligns with their skills and interests. By granting citizens financial security, it empowers them to break free from the shackles of dependency on other people's ownership, enabling them to make more informed choices about their employment. When people are not forced to accept any job to survive, they can make more informed decisions about their career paths, choosing roles that contribute positively to their personal development and the wider society.

In traditional employer-employee relationships, the power dynamics can often be skewed, leading to disadvantageous employment contracts for workers. However, when individuals have a basic income as a foundation, they can negotiate employment terms from a position of greater strength. With the assurance that they can sustain themselves even without a particular job, workers can demand fair wages, better working conditions, and more equitable treatment. This bargaining power helps to rebalance the relationship between employers and employees, fostering a more just and harmonious labour market.

The basic income acts as a financial bridge, allowing individuals to explore better employment opportunities, or further their education. Basic income encourages continuous learning and skills development by reducing financial barriers to education and training. Citizens can invest

in themselves and pursue learning opportunities that align with their interests and career aspirations. As a result, the workforce becomes more skilled and active.

(2) Fostering Start-Ups and Cooperative Ownership

The concept of basic income has garnered significant attention as a transformative solution also by empowering individuals to pursue start-ups. It ensures that citizens have access to the fundamental resources and time needed to create start-ups, including public ownership.

One of the most significant barriers to entrepreneurship is the lack of financial security. Starting a company, especially a cooperative, often requires upfront capital and sustained investments during the initial stages. Basic income serves as a launchpad for aspiring citizens by providing them with a reliable and consistent modest source of income, which reduces the financial risk associated with starting a business. This safety platform allows people to take calculated risks, pursue their innovative ideas, and embark on the path to start a company.

With basic income in place, individuals have the freedom and time to explore alternative models of ownership like cooperatives, which prioritize collective ownership, cooperation, and solidarity over traditional individualistic competitive profit-driven private structures. By reducing financial constraints, basic income encourages the formation of cooperatives, where individuals pool their skills, resources, and talents to create self-sustaining enterprises that benefit the community as a whole. Cooperatives are economic entities owned and operated by their members, who share the benefits and decision-making authority.

One of the most powerful aspects of cooperatives is their focus on inclusive ownership. By distributing decision-making power and profits among members, cooperatives provide a more equitable and democratic economic structure. Basic income enhances this ethos of inclusive ownership by ensuring that all individuals have the means to participate in cooperative ventures, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Basic income not only empowers individuals to pursue their personal economic ambitions but also enables them to engage in social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs address pressing societal issues by developing innovative solutions that bring about positive social change. With the assurance of basic income, aspiring social entrepreneurs can channel their efforts into ventures aimed at improving education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and other critical areas that traditional business models may overlook.

(3) Public Ownership of Critical Infrastructures

Basic income offers citizens more time and enables them to participate in democratic decision-making on various kinds of public ownership. This applies both to infrastructure that has already been built and to new infrastructure that citizens can initiate and build together with the city council or the state government, for example. This citizen's engagement in the economic life of society is significant especially in public ownership of critical infrastructure in the form of a health network, transport, postal services, electricity, gas, water, etc.

Certain critical infrastructures, such as electricity and water, possess natural monopolistic characteristics. Public ownership can help prevent monopolies or regulate them to protect citizen-consumer interests. By setting fair pricing and service standards, governments can ensure that essential services remain affordable and accessible to all, even in regions where private companies might not find sufficient profitability.

In modern societies, critical infrastructures are essential pillars supporting a society's functioning. The ownership and management of these infrastructures play a vital role in shaping the socio-economic landscape. While both private and public ownership models exist, I argue in favour of public ownership of critical infrastructures. By placing these crucial assets under democratic public control, we can achieve enhanced stability, equitable access, and shared responsibility for the common good.

One of the primary advantages of public ownership lies in the stability and resilience it provides to critical infrastructures. These assets are fundamental to a society's security and well-being, and their effective functioning is critical during times of crisis and emergencies (economic crisis, wars, environmental disasters, pandemics, etc.). Public ownership ensures that these infrastructures are driven by the broader goals of society rather than private and often short-term profits. This enables long-term planning, investment, and maintenance, reducing the risk of disruptions due to market fluctuations or privatization-related uncertainties.

A public-owned health network, for instance, can better handle public health crises like pandemics, providing coordinated and accessible care to all citizens. Similarly, public transport systems can be strategically expanded to address changing demographic needs and mitigate environmental challenges, while publicly-owned electricity and water networks can prioritize safety and sustainability over immediate profits.

Conclusion: Systemic institutional economic and social security by the means of a share of ownership

Systematically taken, a principle of social equality concerns the systemic institutional security of social and economic recognition not only by means of redistribution, which is what basic income does primarily, but also by ensuring a share of ownership – in the form of cooperative, municipal or state ownership, for instance – that paves the way for people to pursue democratic self-realisation economically as well, and basic income helps here.

To conclude, basic income is a promising tool against an unequal approach to ownership and in favour of participatory economic democracy. It makes it possible to pursue a way from disadvantageous employment contracts to better employment and to create and participate in cooperatives and public ownership of critical infrastructure.