

Basic Income Earth Network Congress 2023

Opening Reflections

by


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Comparison of the BI conference in 1986 and the BIEN Congress in 2023


	▶ 1986	2023
▶ No of sessions	8 sessions	36 sessions
▶ No of papers	25 papers	140 papers (including plenaries)
▶ presented by women:	4	28, at least
▶ Countries of presenters		
▶ Europe	10 (mainly northern)	12
▶ Africa		2
▶ Asia		7
▶ Australia		1
▶ S America		2
▶ N America		2
▶ Presenters:	mainly academic	still manly academic



We are definitely a worldwide, mainstream,
Basic Income Movement,
comprising three layers:




Theoretical research – broad base



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- Empirical research } academic
- Theoretical research – broad base } foundation




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➤ Activists


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Avoid Pitfall No. 1: frustration and confusion caused by different definitions

- Do not create a new definition of BI;
- Use the BIEN definition.
- ‘A basic income is a periodic, cash payment unconditionally delivered to all on an individual basis, without means test or behavioural requirement.’
- Not UBI, but PCI-UUBI




Avoid Pitfall No. 2: false expectations, accusations of misrepresentation

- The range of level of a BI payment is quite wide.
- State clearly to what sort of level of BI you are referring, when predicting its potential outcomes.
- ‘Is a penny a month a BI?’ Yes, but it will not contribute much towards reducing poverty!




Avoid Pitfall No. 3: political opportunism by opponents of BI

- ▶ Do not claim that a BI programme could replace the existing cash benefit system.
- ▶ There is a place for other cash benefits to be retained.
- ▶ “BI payments can be introduced alongside the existing cash benefit system, and may be wholly or partially taken into account when entitlement is being calculated.”



Avoid Pitfall No. 4: Confusion and false expectations

- Always make it clear whether you are referring to a BI programme (cash payments only) or a BI scheme (including its recommended sources of finance), when extolling potential outcomes.
- Reduction in income or wealth, and work incentive effects, may be even more dependent on the sources of funding than on the BI payments.



Avoid Pitfall No. 5: confusion of means and ends creates avoidable confusion and leads to false expectations.

- A BI programme is not a policy objective.
- A BI programme is an instrument which will normally lead to identifiable outcomes.
- It is a key foundational instrument, which, together with other instruments, could form part of a strategy to achieve a set of carefully specified priorities.
- Avoid using the term Basic Income to describe a policy objective.



Basic Income is not a panacea for all of society's ills.

- A BI programme cannot transform society on its own.
- It needs other cash benefits.
- Its sources of funding play a significant role.
- Public welfare services are not substitutes for a BI. They are complementary.
- A range of other supporting policies is also needed, together with investment in physical, technological and social infrastructure.



The outcomes of proposed changes to cash benefits and taxation take place in two stages, analysed by two different **empirical research** methods.

- Stage 1 would lead to a change in the recipient's immediate financial situation.
- This can be analysed by the use of computer-based, tax and benefit microsimulation thought experiments.
- Stage 2 would lead to the attitudinal and behavioural changes enabled by stage 1.
- These can be analysed using pilot projects.




Why are BI pilot projects carried out?

- To educate the public;
- To create publicity;
- To test hypotheses about the effects of different BI levels;
- To test hypotheses about the effects of BI on different groups of recipients;
- To test hypotheses about the effects of different sources of finance;
- To demonstrate financial and administrative viability;
- To dispel myths;
- To check for unintended consequences.



Note that confusion can easily occur:

- “Would a BI programme lead to a reduction in employment?”
- is a different question from:
- “Would the same BI programme lead to a reduction in UNemployment?”



Concern 1 about raising false hopes and damaging the reputation of the BI Movement:

- Some BI projects have used levels for a BI payment that is too high to be implemented nationally.
- There are natural constraints on the maximum level of BI payment that an economy can finance – eg. a proportion of income per head or of GDP per head – eg. maximum of 25 – 30% of GDP per head.
- Risk of raising false expectations?



Concern 2 about misleading information damaging the reputation of the BI Movement

- Some BI pilot projects omit any source of funding that could be implemented nationally.
- Surely this will give only a partial and essentially misleading picture of the effects of any future Basic Income scheme?
- Might we gain a more accurate picture by introducing a low level BI scheme nationally, than from any pilot projects?



And what of our critics?

- Critics who have done their homework and know what they are talking about deserve our respect, even if not our agreement.
- Shouldn't we do our homework too and try to understand the ideologies of our critics?
- What are their values, assumptions and fears?
- The potential simultaneous outcomes of BI schemes include community, equity, choice and efficiency, appealing to those on both the left and the right of the political spectrum.



Beware of critics who claim that the population prefers an income-tested benefit.

- Critics have been known to claim that the population is in favour of a 'Minimum Income Guarantee', the name they give to their income-tested benefit.
- We should all challenge such claims, because the population might have thought that they were voting for a BI, which can also be thought of as a 'minimum income guarantee'.



Beware vague words

- ‘The problem with BI is that it will be too small to be meaningful and too large to be affordable.’
- ‘meaningful’?
- ‘affordable’? (Never defined.)
- What was meant was:
- ‘The problem with BI is that it will be too small to be meaningful for rich people, and too large for them to be willing to pay their share.’
- BI only needs to be meaningful to the poorer half of the population.



What next?


- The world has suffered many (mainly man-made) crises over recent decades, some of the effects of which could have been lessened if a BI had been in place.
- The most urgent and challenging is the climate emergency.
- A World BI could help to bring about justice between nations, and provide financial security for all during the difficult times ahead,



The role of activists:

- To direct tailored messages to targeted audiences, especially opinion-formers and policy makers.
- To create an informed public who, in turn, will demand a BI programme.
- The informed public would persuade and educate their elected representatives, who will then feel confident enough to argue for it in public.

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- INTEGRITY
 - COMPASSION
 - WISDOM
 - JUSTICE



A big thank you to our wonderful Korean hosts for this inspiring conference



THANK YOU