

FORUM TEXT – BASIC INCOME AND SOCIAL SECURITY: A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM?

BY | YVES STEVENS AND JAKOB WERBROUCK

Basic income is seen by some as an answer to the flaws of modern systems of social protection. Ensuring the social protection of all citizens by providing for an unconditional and universal income, it is said to provide a solution to the disincentivising effects of current protection schemes, as well as an alternative to inefficient administration and complex structures of benefits, institutions and regulations. However, implementing a basic income in reality has so far been a difficult process. While several small-scale experiments have been carried out, they have focused mainly on modifying existing benefits within a framework of social security protection. As a consequence, their relevance can be questioned from a regulatory standpoint, as deregulated social security benefits do not necessarily represent a true basic income. We argue that the adoption of a social security perspective, paired with a lack of understanding of the structural qualities that define modern social security systems, lies at the heart of the problems associated with implementing basic income.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of World War II, a significant number of Western states enacted a series of social reforms that lead to the establishment of the so-called welfare state. Through the introduction and institutionalisation of several social benefits, welfare states have been able to provide a level of material security that is unprecedented in human history. The provision of this security comes at a considerable budgetary cost. Major economic events, such as the oil crises of the seventies, as well as major political evolutions, such as the rise of neo-liberalism in the eighties, have sent shockwaves through the Western world that have affected the character of welfare states. Especially since the 1990s, national social security systems have been dominated by the activation paradigm, according to which the provision of social benefits to claimants entails a reciprocal relationship in which the claimant must fulfil an active role in seeking support.¹

Not coincidentally, from the 1980s onwards, research into the concept of basic income has increasingly attracted attention. The past few decades have seen a significant number of studies on the concept of basic income. Sociologists, economists and philosophers alike have tried to make a case for the feasibility or improbability of

(1) For a more detailed account on the subject, see: Vandenbroucke, F., *The active welfare state revisited*, Bruges, Die Keure, 2013.

such an income, each from their own distinct viewpoint.² Although definitions may vary, basic income in essence represents a government scheme that indiscriminately offers a certain periodic amount of resources to all citizens, on the sole condition of their citizenship.³ This marks a notable departure from the currently prevailing social security schemes, which are inherently conditional upon the behaviour, past or present, of the claimant. Proponents of the idea of a basic income claim that it is situated at the crossroads of the dilemma which modern welfare states face: it provides both a radically new way to provide social protection that would eliminate excess budgetary and administrative spending, as well as promises to uphold or even improve the currently existing levels of protection.⁴

There have been numerous studies on the concept of basic income in the past few decades. Sociologists, economists and philosophers alike have tried to make a case for the feasibility or improbability of such an income, each from their own distinct viewpoint.⁵ While these efforts have been instrumental in popularising the concept and bringing it to the forefront of debates on social security, the problem of how to effectively implement basic income in any existing legal order remains opaque. Several initiatives testing basic income-like benefits have been launched around Europe, but these experiments have been decidedly small-scale and limited in scope and time. With the absence of any large-scale success stories that testify to its feasibility, the debate surrounding basic income can still be considered somewhat theoretical. Indeed, agreeing on the idea of a basic income is one thing, but making it work within a given

(2) Notable examples include Van Parijs, P., *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform*, New York, Verso Books, 1992; Van Parijs, P., *Real Freedom for All: What (if anything) can justify capitalism?*, New York/Oxford, Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1995; Ferry, J., *L'Allocation Universelle. Pour un revenu de citoyenneté*, Paris, Cerf, 1996; Groot, L. and Van Der Veen, R., *Basic Income on the Agenda: Policy Objectives and Political Chances*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2003; Atkinson, A.B., *Public economics in action: the basic income/flat tax proposal*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004; Widerquist, K., *Independence, Propertylessness, and Basic Income: A Theory of Freedom as the Power to Say No*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Terry, M., *The Feasibility of Citizen's Income*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Van Parijs, P. and Vanderborght, Y., *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2017.

(3) As definitions vary, the selection of essential characteristics associated with the basic income varies as well. Some of these essential characteristics include: the noncontributive nature, the all-inclusiveness of the personal scope of application, the undefined duration and the lack of any behavioural conditions related to the enjoyment of the benefit.

(4) Specifically the provision of a basic income would combat the stigma associated with receiving social benefits, as well as related problems such as non take-up of benefits or incentivising low-skilled workers to participate in the labour market.

(5) Notable examples include Van Parijs, P., *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform*, New York, Verso Books, 1992; Van Parijs, P., *Real Freedom for All: What (if anything) can justify capitalism?*, New York/Oxford, Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 1995; Ferry, J., *L'Allocation Universelle. Pour un revenu de citoyenneté*, Paris, Cerf, 1996; Groot, L. and Van Der Veen, R., *Basic Income on the Agenda: Policy Objectives and Political Chances*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2003; Atkinson, A.B., *Public economics in action: the basic income/flat tax proposal*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004; Widerquist, K., *Independence, Propertylessness, and Basic Income: A Theory of Freedom as the Power to Say No*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; Terry, M., *The Feasibility of Citizen's Income*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Van Parijs, P. and Vanderborght, Y., *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2017.

legal order is something else entirely. In what follows, we will give our analysis on how basic income experiments are being conceived and why this is problematic from a legal point of view.

2. BASIC INCOME EXPERIMENTS IN EUROPE

2.1. OVERVIEW

As mentioned above, basic income probably most visibly differentiates itself from modern-day social security benefits by indiscriminately offering means of living to all citizens. As basic income is thought to be both *universal* as well as *unconditional* in character: *everyone* should be able to enjoy the material security it provides, without having to comply with certain demands. Unlike for example pensions or unemployment benefits, one need not provide an extended history of employment or social security contributions, nor does one need to belong to a specific at-risk demographic, such as the unemployed or the elderly. The selectivity and conditionality that characterise modern social security benefits is replaced by the idea of a universal and unconditional benefit for all citizens. In the past couple of years, several initiatives have been launched, trying out benefits that try to implement this universal and unconditional way of providing material security. Building on the premise that modern-day social security benefits may need to be complemented or replaced by something different in order to better achieve certain anti-poverty and social participation objectives, they test benefits with a decidedly more unconditional and universal character.

Several examples can be noted in this regard:

- Finland: the *Perustulokeilun*

In August 2016 the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs announced a legislative bill that proposed to carry out a two-year basic income experiment in Finland. The experiment was officially launched on 1 January 2017, and is operated under the auspices of *Kela*, the Finnish Social Insurance Institution, running for two years. The trial came into existence as a way of finding out whether or not reshaping the Finnish social security system, by providing a basic income-like benefit, will enable it to respond more aptly to the challenges of a 21st century labour market. It wishes to assess if basic income promotes inclusion in the labour market and provides a positive incentive for the test participants to find employment. One cannot freely apply to be part of the experiment. The Finnish government has selected a test group of 2,000 persons living in Finland who in November 2016 received a basic daily allowance or labour market support under the Unemployment Security Act. The experiment entails providing these individuals with an unconditional income of EUR 560 per month. This corresponds with the lowest level of labour market subsidy and basic unemployment allowance under the Unemployment Security Act. Participation, if selected, is obligatory, as to ensure that the results obtained with the test group are not biased and the government can accurately measure the labour market effects of the removal of conditions on its unemployment benefits. The selected individuals' age ranges from 25 to 58 years old, which excludes

students and persons receiving an old-age pension, as they do not fit with the objective of promoting employment.⁶

- Barcelona: the *B-MINCOME* project

The City Council of Barcelona, with financial help from the European Union, launched its B-MINCOME pilot project in September 2017, with the project's end set in December 2019. As a reaction to the complexity and insufficiency of current aid systems, its goal is to try a new approach in combatting poverty and inequality in Barcelona's poorest neighbourhoods in the north of the city. To do this, the project offers "comprehensive" support to participating households, by combining both "passive" support (the provision of a benefit) and "active" support (four activation policies amongst which job training and a housing renovation programme). The benefit provided by the project is Barcelona's municipal inclusion support, which is designed to complement income depending on household structure and financial status, and can range anywhere between EUR 100 and EUR 1,676. The participating households are selected from Barcelona residents who have an open Social Services file or are taking part otherwise in other social programmes (such as the Social Insertion Service). Amongst the nearly 5,000 households eligible to take part in the project, a draw was held through a randomised stratified system to choose the 1,000 participants. A similar number of homes were selected to act as a control group. At least one member of the household must be aged 25 to 60 years old. If selected, participation is not obligatory. The 1,000 households who consent to participating in the project will be divided into groups that receive the aid following two criteria: whether or not their aid is limited, and whether or not receiving aid is made conditional. The first criterion means that the benefit will be reduced if the household obtains additional income; the second criterion refers to the obligation to participate in the "active" policies. Out of 1,000 participating households, 450 will receive the benefit without having to take part in the active policies.⁷
- Livorno: the *reddito di cittadinanza locale*

Medium-sized Italian city Livorno launched a six-month basic income pilot programme that began in June 2016, and was extended in January 2017. It ran from April to December 2017. Officially dubbed "*reddito di cittadinanza locale*" or 'local citizenship income', it aimed to provide "economic and social support" to those who are "temporarily in conditions that prevent them from providing in their livelihood and that of their family". The benefit was a monthly allowance of EUR 80 for one person, EUR 150 for two and EUR 220 for three or more. In order to be eligible for the benefit, one had to meet both a number of admissibility

(6) Kela/Fpa, *From idea to experiment. Report on universal basic income experiment in Finland*, Helsinki, Kela, 2016, <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/167728/WorkingPapers106.pdf?sequence=4> [accessed 12.06.2017].

(7) Ajuntament de Barcelona, *Barcelona launches a pilot project in the Besòs with the EU to create a municipal income for inclusion*, Barcelona, Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017, <http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/premsa/2017/05/31/barcelona-posa-en-marxa-un-projecte-pilot-al-besos-amb-la-ue-per-crear-una-renda-municipal-dinclusio/> [accessed 9.11.2017].

criteria as well as behavioural conditions. To be admitted into the programme, the applicant had to first hold Italian or EU citizenship, or non-EU with a residence permit, and reside in the municipality of Livorno. Second, the age of the person applying had to lie between 29 years and 66 years and 7 months. Third, one had to be unemployed at the time of application. Fourth, the applicant had to satisfy a number of conditions that measures both income and means. This meant that one may not already receive support through a similar government programme called *SLA*⁸, nor may the applicant's family have an *ISEE* attestation exceeding EUR 3,000.⁹ The applicant was also not allowed to own a car with horse power equal to or higher than 80 KW purchased in the last 12 months, as well as not own real estate, with the exclusion of only properties belonging to certain cadastral categories.

To effectively enjoy the benefit, the applicant had to furthermore commit to meeting with three behavioural conditions. One had to first provide immediate job availability at the local employment centre. Second, the applicant was obliged to offer his or her availability for participation in projects “useful to the community” managed by the municipality. This was broadly defined as projects in the fields of “cultural, social, artistic, environmental, educational and protection of common goods”. Third, one was under the obligation to communicate promptly to the municipality should there occur any change in income, wealth, work and family situation that may result in the loss of the right. Once the applicant had fulfilled all the required admissibility criteria, he or she was attributed a score on the basis of which a ranking is made. The 100 best ranked families out of 997 applications received the benefit.¹⁰

- The Netherlands: a framework for municipal experiments

As a reaction to the experiments proposed by several Dutch cities, the Dutch government adopted a resolution in February 2017 that establishes a framework for municipalities to experiment with the social assistance benefits provided under the Participation Act. By doing so, the government enables municipalities to research what the optimal way is for social assistance beneficiaries to obtain durable employment. Central to the Participation Act is the job-seeking condition in article 9, incumbent upon every benefit recipient: unless “urgent reasons” demand that a “temporary suspension” be given, every person must actively seek employment. The legal framework created by this resolution however enables cities to conduct experiments whereby this condition is suspended. More precisely, it allows for

(8) Acronym for “*Sostegno per l’Inclusione Attiva*”. This is a similar poverty alleviation programme for families in vulnerable socio-economic situations, applied nationwide.

(9) Acronym for “*Indicatore della Situazione Economica Equivalente*”. This is a tool used by the Italian government to measure the economic situation of a family by taking into account income, assets (securities and real estate) and the characteristics of a family (type of family and size).

(10) Comune di Livorno, *Reddito di Cittadinanza Locale/Contributo economico mensile 2017*, Livorno, Comune di Livorno, 2017, <http://moduli.comune.livorno.it/modulistica/schede/reddito-di-cittadinanza-localecontributo-economico-mensile-2017> [accessed 11.06.2017]; Comune di Livorno, *Bando per reddito di cittadinanza locale contributo economico mensile anno 2017*, Livorno, Comune di Livorno, 2017, <http://moduli.comune.livorno.it/modulistica/sites/default/upload/ServiziSociali/bando%20redditodi%20cittadinanza%202017.pdf> [accessed 11.06.2017].

conducting experiments with three experimental groups: a “suspension” group (*ontheffingsgroep*), an “intensification” group (*intensiveringsgroep*) and a “release” group (*vrijlatingsgroep*). The suspension group is relieved of all formal activation conditions. The intensification group is subjected to a doubling of activation efforts by the re-integration services. The release group is entitled to circumvent the existing cumulation rules and enjoy both the benefit and an income from labour up to a maximum of EUR 200 monthly. Participation in the experiment is not obligatory, and only a maximum of 4% of municipal welfare recipients may participate in the experiment at all times. The maximum duration of the experiment is limited to two years for every cycle of three years.¹¹

2.2. ANALYSIS: THE LIMITED RELEVANCE OF BASIC INCOME AS A MODIFIED SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFIT

The initiatives discussed above differ in the way that they are planned and executed. First, the Dutch, Barcelonan and Livornese experiments are decidedly local in scope, whereas the Finnish approach exhibits a nation-wide focus, even though it is highly selective. Second, the Dutch, Barcelonan and Finnish initiatives intend to introduce a basic income by deregulating existing benefits, while the Livornese scheme establishes an entirely new benefit. Third, the Livornese benefit scheme is more of a top-up than a real income replacement, whereas the other three initiatives can provide a full income replacement. However, different as these schemes may seem in their design, all of them are similar in their approach to implementing basic income into the legal order. All four experiments are typified by the will to provide a basic income through *modifying the currently existing social security structures in order to transform one or more benefits into basic income*. Either the regulatory frameworks of actual benefits are adjusted, or a new benefit is introduced that is clearly modelled after the framework of a current benefit, all the while navigating within existing social protection structures. Innovation is achieved through remodelling and reorientation. In this way, basic income is merely *one type of benefit* with specific, albeit unconventional, characteristics, such as universal application and the absence of behavioural conditions, while other benefits, related to exceptional costs or exceptional status, would continue to be awarded. This minimalist approach steers clear of the laborious task of developing an entirely new system of social protection, a goal which is often stated or implied when talking about basic income. As a result, it is uncertain to which extent the results produced by these experiments can be used to promote the idea of a practically feasible basic income.

The Finnish, Dutch and Barcelonan initiatives take an existing social security benefit and modify its conditions to make it more inclusive, mimicking the unconditional nature of basic income. In Finland, the benefits provided under the unemployment act are taken as a starting point, whereas both the Barcelona and Dutch initiatives propose using the benefits granted under social welfare legislation. The benefits are then deregulated, which in essence boils down to stripping them from the job-seeking

(11) Dutch government, Nota van Toelichting bij Besluit van 22 februari 2017, houdende vaststelling van het Tijdelijk Besluit experimenten Participatiewet, *Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, 1 March 2017.

requirement that makes up the essence of their behavioural conditions. In this way, much like true basic income, they become unconditional. This lack of conditionality is, however, immediately put into perspective by the specific personal scope of the initiatives. Non-conditionality is offset by selectivity. Only welfare or unemployment assistance recipients are targeted, and as a consequence, a rather specific demographic segment. Furthermore, only a relatively small sub-group of that target group is actually selected for the experiment. In Barcelona, only 1,000 out of 5,000 eligible families participate in the experiment, while the selectivity is much greater in the Netherlands (max. 4% of welfare recipients) and Finland (only 2,000 participants in the entire country). In Finland, this selectivity is compounded by an age limit that only allows for persons between 25 and 58.

As a result, the relevance of these initiatives is limited by the specific personal traits that define the participant group. It can only provide an answer to the question of how a selected group of *unemployed persons* or *persons on welfare*, within a certain age limit, would respond to receiving a deregulated form of unemployment or welfare benefits. Insofar as one considers basic income as a means of social protection for the weaker, negating the poverty trap associated with unemployment insurance and welfare policies, this is not a problem. However, if one views basic income as a more *general* tool for self-realisation for *all citizens*, as for example the 2016 Swiss referendum on basic income did, this selective target audience limits the relevance of the experiments to one aspect of basic income. As such, these experiments steer clear of one of the fundamental questions surrounding basic income: does receiving a basic income cause people *in general*, including non-vulnerable groups, to put down their work? These initiatives essentially boil down to granting a welfare or unemployment benefit, whilst simultaneously disabling the control mechanisms in place. Creating a more *inclusive* benefit is not the same as creating a *universal* one: while the specific scope of application can provide useful answers in the fight against social exclusion for the weaker, it simultaneously prevents any questions being resolved regarding the effect of basic income on the general population.

Likewise, the basic income experiment conducted in Livorno falls into the same trap. Whilst depicted by authorities as a new benefit, operating outside of the existing structures of social security benefits, it is another form of social welfare benefit in all but name. Unlike basic income, which is universal, the *reddito di cittadinanza locale* is designed to help only those families who are in poverty or at least close to such a state of need. To qualify as such a family, one must meet four different criteria that directly or indirectly test the means of the person seeking the benefit, including not owning real estate or having an *ISEE* attestation not exceeding EUR 3,000. Depending on how these conditions are fulfilled, a ranking is made, and only the best ranked families are eligible to receive the benefit. As such, the Livornese basic income clearly showcases a targeted anti-poverty objective that is hard to reconcile with the – theoretically at least – universal nature of basic income. Furthermore, the inclusion of three behavioural conditions, necessary for the enjoyment of the benefit, adds to the character of the local citizenship income as a form of welfare benefit. Not only must participants communicate on their material status to the authorities and prove that they are actively looking for employment, they must even participate in community projects. Again, with such an obviously limited scope of application, the question

must be asked what the relevance of this experiment can be for the goal of promoting the practical feasibility of a true basic income scheme.

3. THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM: A SOCIAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

By limiting their ambition to modifying existing benefits, the experiments prove above all what the effects of deregulated benefits are on certain demographic segments. Never leaving the logic of the current structures of social security, they fail to achieve what makes the basic income a *universal* tool for the benefit of *all society*. As we will argue below, this limited scope is emblematic of the use of a social security perspective when conceiving basic income experiments. By viewing basic income through the prism of social security, one unavoidably juxtaposes the monolithic structure inherent to the idea of basic income with the polyolithic structure that has long characterised modern systems of social security. This clash of contrasting structural characteristics results in the questionable relevance of these experiments. The only way out is to accept the structural limitations that come with a social security perspective and therefore to abandon it.

3.1. POLYLITHIC AND MONOLITHIC STRUCTURES OF SOCIAL SECURITY PROVISION

It is often argued that the introduction of a basic income within a given society can lead to significant efficiency and budgetary gains, by rendering obsolete the complicated and sometimes bloated structures that typifies social security nowadays. By condensing the existing forms of social protection into one benefit, there would no longer be any need for a multitude of different laws, institutions and benefits. Citizens can rely on one benefit for all their primary social protection needs, resulting in both a more transparent as well as cost-efficient solution, cutting away excess administrative costs.

Whether or not these statements are true is food for thought for economists and financial experts alike. From a legal perspective however, this argument marks a notable departure from the existing conceptions of social security. In the absence of a widely accepted definition, social security in a given society is often defined by the benefit schemes it intends to provide.¹² Following the minimum standards imposed by ILO Convention 102, a considerable part of the world views social security as a collection of benefits related to medical care, sickness, unemployment, old age, employment injuries, family, maternity, invalidity and survivorship. What benefits to include in the social protection states offer depends on what risks individuals are confronted with are regarded as *social* risks, and thus part of the responsibility a society must bear towards its members. This has led to both the inclusion of new benefits, such as those that support care for those unable to cope, as well as the gradual disappearance of old benefits, such as those that are based on survivorship. It is this institutionalisation of protection against certain risks that ultimately shapes the appearance of social security systems. In this way, what we consider to be social security is in fact determined by how we organise social security, making *essence follow form*.

(12) Pieters, D., *Introduction into the Basic Principles of Social Security*, Deventer, Kluwer, pp. 30-31, 1993.

What makes basic income relevant in this regard, is how they intend to deviate from this logic. Instead of breaking down social security systems into a multitude of different benefit schemes, basic income holds the promise of organising social security around one single benefit scheme, namely the basic income itself. Citizens can turn to social security for an unconditional and universal form of income that shields them against all risks they may encounter. In this fashion, what we consider to be social security is determined by the level of protection that the government wishes to provide, and not by a collection of different levels of protection offered in varying circumstances, making *form follow essence*.

As a result, the provision of a basic income leads to adopting a *monolithic structure* of social security: one benefit to deal with all primary social protection needs. This contrasts with the currently dominant view on the organisation of social security, which promotes adopting a *polylithic structure* of social security: each aspect of an individual's need for social protection is handled by a different benefit. Moreover, within the regulations of these different benefits, a differentiation is often made between employees, self-employed persons, civil servants and other special categories, further adding to the complexity. Especially in Europe, polylithic structures have become the norm. A part of the reason why is how social security systems have organically evolved throughout the past few centuries, gradually including protection against an increasing number of social risks. Another part of the reason is political, as integrative politics under the European Union have made countries' converge into the same polylithic model of organising social security.

3.2. BASIC INCOME: A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

As a consequence, basic income represents more than just a new type of benefit provided by the state to its citizens. Basic income has come to symbolise a *radical overhaul of the way social security is organised*. It means departing from the dominant polylithic model of social security organisation, and moving towards a monolithic model instead. This shift in the underlying logic of structuring social security systems is of profound importance. It is precisely because of these structural implications that the introduction of a basic income within a given system of social security leads to experiments with limited scientific relevance.

Polylithic structures split up an individual's need for social protection into a multitude of different benefits, each governed by its own laws and institutions. This does however not mean that this need can always be reduced to providing protection against one social risk. Overlap between social risks form a common occurrence. For example, a person who has been sick for an extended period of time may find it hard getting out of unemployment. Conversely, the need for protection against the negative effects of sickness does not end when receiving job-seeking support through social welfare programmes. As a result, polylithic structures are characterised by the presence of cumulation rules. These rules signify which legislation is to be applied in case of overlap. They can prohibit cumulation between two or more benefits in an absolute way; they can also allow the combination of certain benefits until a fixed level of income has been reached, or even stand for a total freedom of cumulation. In this way, cumulation rules lie at the heart of how polylithic structures work. They provide

a compass that shows the way to reconcile the complex nature of an individual's need for protection with the legislator's desire to reduce a person's reality to one social need. They are not only a practical consequence of how these structures are organised, but even a logical necessity: citizens are best helped when the right legislation, tailored to their specific needs, is applied.

Monolithic structures on the other hand have no need for these cumulation rules. An individual's need for social protection is met through the provision of one single income that encapsulates the protection against all social risks the individual may be confronted with. There is no overlap between different benefits, as there is only one. Benefits with a supplementary function, such as those relating to exceptional costs or costs related to an exceptional status of need, do not evoke the need for cumulation rules either, precisely because of their nature as a top-up for specific circumstances. This structural difference between basic income and the currently prevailing conceptions of social security explains why basic income experiments are likely to be limited in such a profound way in scope and objective. In order to materialise the concept of a basic income into a concrete set of rules, and with it the promise of a monolithic structure of social security provision, one must disentangle the whole cumulation rules that are inherent to polyolithic structures. Faced with the complexity of such an undertaking, basic income experiments will try and avoid confronting cumulation rules by situating the basic income fully within the currently existing structures of social security. This means either slightly modifying current benefits, as the Finland, Barcelona and Dutch initiatives show, or adopting a new benefit anchored firmly within the logic of the old ones, such as the case of Livorno illustrates. As these forms of basic income never leave the existing legal framework, there is no need to devise a work-around concerning the question of cumulation. Even though the Finnish experiment means a notable alteration of unemployment benefits, as job-seeking conditions are removed, the applicable cumulation rules still stand; the same can be said for the Dutch or Barcelona initiatives. The Livornese local citizenship income likewise features a set of explicit and implicit, through means testing, cumulation rules that prevent the benefit from clashing with currently existing ones. As a result, these results obtained by these experiments are of limited scientific relevance. At the most, they prove that existing benefits can be deregulated further to the advantage and emancipation of those in need of the benefit. They do not give clues to what the effect of the benefits may be on the general population.

3.3. DEPARTING FROM A SOCIAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

The question thus arises: is introducing a basic income at all feasible from a structural standpoint? Can basic income experiments be modelled so that they fit seamlessly into a modern legal order? As we have argued so far, introducing a basic income inside the current frameworks of social protection is problematic due to the difference in intrinsic structural qualities between basic income and modern conceptions of social security. Attempting to install monolithic elements within a predominantly polyolithic structure is trying to reconcile opposing views; attempting to replace a polyolithic structure by a monolithic one implies the strenuous task of having to disprove the merits of a risk-based system of social security. This condemns the basic income initiatives to being

forever stuck meddling with the specifics of existing benefits for specific demographic segments.

As a result, basic income will not likely form the solution to the problems modern social security systems are faced with, because introducing them either brings about a series of new – and possibly even more complex – problems by having to rethink an entire system of social protection, or does not fundamentally solve anything at all, by modifying existing benefits in the margin. However, a specification is needed: our assessment is only true *in so far as we view basic income from a social security perspective*. Experiments are only destined to fall into the same trap if we regard basic income as a form of social security, by either letting them play the role of a new type of social security benefit or constituting a new type of social security system as a whole. Crucially, if we want basic income experiments to succeed, and truly obtain a universal character, we should depart from the social security-oriented perspective that, due to its polythetic nature, will always be specific in scope. We need to stop regarding basic income as a social security benefit, but more generally, as an income provided for by the state. As basic income is universal and unconditional, it need not necessarily adhere to the logic of social protection. Even though granting every citizen an unconditional sum will likely better shield them against the negative financial externalities of certain risks, to require that the income be used exclusively for this protection would negate the unconditional and universal character of the basic income itself. Basic income is an indiscriminate form of government subsidy to all its citizens, with no specified purpose other than the belief that it will bring citizens better social protection and allow them to develop themselves as persons more freely.

Modelling basic income after social security benefits means accepting the inherent limitations such a perspective brings; precisely those limitations are what keeps basic income from becoming feasible. As a result, we could look at basic income from a different perspective; one that, like basic income itself, is not bound by a specific logic that targets only certain needs or a defined group of persons. Basic income is not by definition a form of social security, even though it may bring about similar effects as to the social protection of individuals. The question now remains what mechanism can make basic income achievable. In the history of research into basic income, the tax system has been the most prominent alternative to the social security paradigm; specifically, establishing a basic income through negative taxation.¹³ Closely studying this mechanism should be the object of further research into basic income; potentially mastering it to escape the theoretical deadlock put forth in this paper should be an objective.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have tried to make a case for developing a new theoretical perspective on basic income. Basic income is often viewed exclusively through the prism of

(13) Friedman, F., *Capitalism and Freedom*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, pp. 190-195, 1962; Friedman, F., *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement*, New York, Harcourt Trade Publishers, pp. 120-126, 1980.

economics or ethics, implying that if questions surrounding financial feasibility or moral choice are answered, implementing the basic income itself constitutes but a practical matter. In reaction to this, we have argued that the technical specifics of establishing basic income schemes, by way of laws and regulations, are crucial to the success of basic income experiments. At the heart of our argument is the observation that modern conceptions of social security employ a specific structure that splits out social protection into a multitude of different spheres, each with their own institutions, regulations and benefits. Basic income however is seen as the very negation of this way of structuring social protection, as it promises one single income to meet all primary needs. Experiments with basic income performed in the past year have all, in their own way, tried to either ignore or circumvent this structural difference. Yet their limited success and targeted relevance have shown that these structural characteristics cannot simply be put to the side. We therefore argue in favour of departing from the social security paradigm that is prevalent amongst those pleading the case of basic income. While it is true that basic income can lead to better social protection, this cannot be a logical necessity; arguing otherwise would contradict the very nature of basic income, as they are meant to be unconditional and universal. Instead of adopting the specific logic of social protection through which to view basic income, and accepting its limitations, the search must be on for other perspectives, and other mechanisms, that can materialise the idea of an unconditional and universal protection in a modern-day society.
