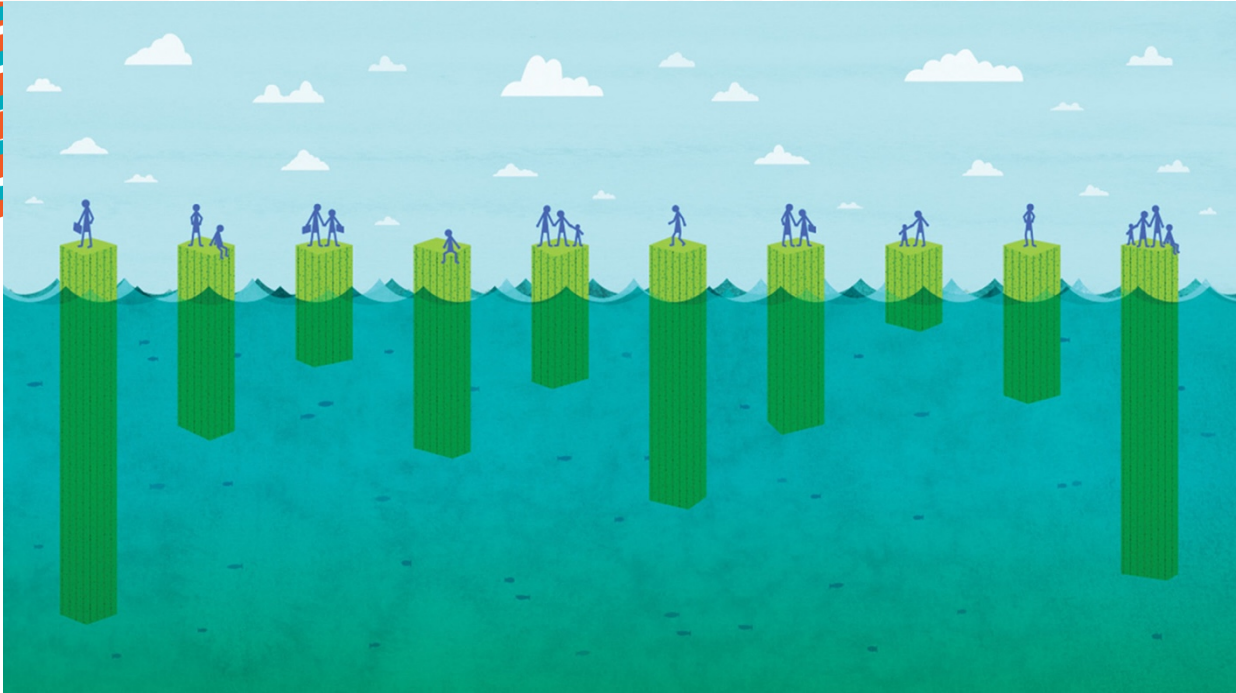


# transformative social innovation theory



## WP 4 | CASE STUDY

# Report: *BIEN and the Basic Income*

Theme [ssh.2013.3.2-1] [Social Innovation- Empowering People, changing societies]  
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## 1 Introduction

Basic income is not a new idea but despite its century-old legacy it remains —some small-scale experiments aside— still only an idea to date. At the same time, its implementation would constitute a societal transformation of unknown (yet much debated, researched and conjectured) magnitude. Over the centuries, in particular in recent decades since the 1980s, the idea of a basic income tended to resonate with a larger audience at times and in places facing high (structural) unemployment, concerned with justice and equality and seeking welfare state reform. Although the entire eventful history of the concept would make for an interesting object of study, we cast our view to the livelier and more recent developments and focus on BIEN (the Basic Income Earth Network), a (growing) network of basic income proponents, founded in Belgium in 1986. To trace the recent evolution of the concept and to chart the different (groups of) people involved in its co-production, we zoom in on the BIEN-affiliates, a number of other interest groups and individuals featuring prominently in public debates in two neighbouring Western European countries, Germany and the Netherlands.

The social context in which the idea of a basic income first emerged and still thrives is the poverty trap, social security and the “two-thirds society”<sup>1</sup>. It is argued that the safety net in the form of social security “in which the weakest and the unlucky get trapped” should be replaced “by a firm and unconditional floor, on which they can securely stand” (Van Parijs, 1992, p. 7). The main rationales presented include the declining number of households who can meet their basic needs based on the current or past paid income of (at least one) household member and rising inequalities, including an increased divide in terms of material welfare (thus tapping into issues of social inclusion). Uncounted additional rationales frequently invoked include (female) empowerment and emancipation, human dignity and humane working conditions, individual autonomy and the need to re-adjust the labour market to global competition and automated, computerised production and service-provision.

In the context of the TRANSIT project, we study the unconditional basic income as a social innovation with transformative ambitions and potential. Following our working definition of social innovation as new social relations involving new ways of framing, knowing, doing and organising, the basic income fits well into the round of social innovations the TRANSIT project considers<sup>2</sup>, based on its re-framing of the value of (paid) work, re-definition of equality, justice and community and (supposed and consequential) re-organisation of how people spend their time. Furthermore, the basic income itself forms a challenge, alteration and potential (partial) replacement of existing institutions by suggesting a radically different way to organise the redistribution of profits. Meanwhile, the basic income remains somewhat distinct from the other TRANSIT case studies. In the absence of countries or communities living with an unconditional and life-long basic income where we could study practices and implications, we turn to individuals and communities who uphold the idea of a basic income and study their private musings (by means of interviews), public relations (by means of internet and other media study) and publications (by means of literature research).

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of a two-thirds society captures a pattern increasingly recognised and criticised in Western societies where two-thirds of a society live in affluence while one-third remains trapped at or near the poverty level.

<sup>2</sup> An overview of the 20 social innovation networks studied in the TRANSIT project can be found here: <http://www.transitsocialinnovation.eu/discover-our-cases-2>.

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## 1.1 The Basic Income vis-à-vis other social welfare policies

Welfare and redistribution policies are numerous and exist in various forms and combinations. To contextualise the concept of a Basic Income, some existent and (more or less widely) used policy alternatives are outlined here that are often discussed in relation or opposition to the Basic Income. Commonly used definitions of the Basic Income share three fundamental characteristics in diverge on a forth. The three features of a Basic Income shared by all proponents are individuality, universality and unconditionality, i.e. a payment on an individual basis and without requirements, be it age, indigence or lack of a paying job. Nevertheless, details remain contested, such as the question whether children should receive a lower Basic Income and whether citizenship should be a requirement. The forth feature which gives rise to comparatively more debate is the definition of a Basic Income as a payment high enough to cover living expenses as well as social participation. While some proponents are in favour of lower payments, especially in the early phases of its introduction, others consider the assurance of subsistence and participation as a crucial characteristic of a Basic Income.

By contrast, policies that only apply to people in paid jobs include the minimum wage, wage subsidies and Earned Income Tax Credits. A minimum wage requires a certain hourly rate for and is, hence, conditional on wage labour. Minimum wages are usually agreed between governments and unions and often apply to a particular industry or employment sector. A wage subsidy, for which again only people in paid work are eligible, adds an extra amount to a given hourly wage and is often in place to support the (re-)employment of handicapped or long-term unemployed. Earned Income Tax Credits are comparable to a wage subsidy but instead of an addition to monthly wage payments they are paid at the end of a year to lift a person's total earnings above a certain (poverty) threshold.

The most widely used welfare policy to support those who no longer attend education or training programmes but do not have a paid job is the Guaranteed Minimum Income (or social security). A Guaranteed Minimum Income comes in the form of a monthly payment which is often tied to requirements such as active job-seeking or the carrying-out of low-skill labour. The level of this payment is usually set to allow basic affordances (food, shelter) and participation in social life.

A Negative Income Tax (NIT) is often discussed in comparison to a Basic Income but it differs in important ways. An NIT can be described as a Guaranteed Minimum Income coupled with Earned Income Tax Credits as it involves (the receipt of) a negative tax (payment) until a certain threshold beyond which the negative tax turns into a positive tax. The main differences to a Basic Income are that a Basic Income is paid unconditionally (without requiring a means-test), universally (hence also to those who were to pay a positive tax under an NIT scheme) and upfront, while an NIT is paid after the fact and only to those who find themselves below a certain threshold.

Family Allowances apply, as the name suggests, not to individuals but to households with children. In the case of the famous Bolsa Família programme in Brazil, poor families receive cash payments if their children attend school and are vaccinated.

A Citizen's Dividend (or social dividend or demogrant) is paid from earnings generated through the selling or use of a country's resources or commons. It resembles a Basic Income most closely compared to other schemes mentioned thus far as it is paid individually, unconditionally and universally. An often-given example is the Alaska Permanent Fund which was set up to ensure that future generations still profit from current oil sales. A dividend on these savings is paid to every citizen on a yearly basis.

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Table 1 Overview of welfare policies in comparison to the four criteria of a Basic Income

CRITERION	individual	universal	unconditional	sufficient
	paid on an individual basis	independent of income from other sources	no means test and no work requirement	high enough to live on and participate in society
<b>POLICY</b>				
<b>Minimum wage</b>	x			
<b>Wage Subsidy</b>	x			
<b>Earned Income Tax Credits</b>	(x)			x
<b>Guaranteed minimum income (social security)</b>	x			x
<b>Negative Income Tax</b>	x			x
<b>Family Allowance, e.g. Bolsa Família in Brazil</b>				?
<b>Citizen's dividend / social dividend / demogrant</b>	x	x	x	
<b>Basic Income (Guarantee)</b>	x	x	x	(x)

The idea of a Basic Income can be traced back to reflections by European writers on a guaranteed minimum income in the 1500s. The most frequently cited original thinker is Thomas More whose *Utopia* published in 1516 mentioned a guaranteed minimum income as a 'cure for theft'. Over the course of a few centuries, the idea re-emerged at different times in different places on both sides of the Atlantic. A common pattern found across time involves debates among academics that spill over into policy and in some cases even result in concrete experiments. This has been the case in the US in the 1960s and in Canada in the 1970s and more recently again in Finland, Canada and the Netherlands where experiments are ongoing or in planning on national, provincial and local level, respectively. Otherwise funded experiments have been conducted in Namibia as of 2008 and in India as of 2011. New actors entered the scene with US-American companies setting up and funding a direct cash transfer scheme to run scientific experiments in Kenya and Uganda (givedirectly.org).

Places where partial or full implementation of comparable schemes exists are Iran (where energy subsidies were turned into individual cash payments), Alaska (demogrant) and the Chinese city of Macau (small annual cash payments). A large welfare reform in Brazil in 2003 included cash transfers to poor families with the long-term goal to establish a Basic Income. This report focuses on the history of Basic Income from the 1970s onwards based on interviews, participant observations and document research and only occasionally reconstructs relevant earlier developments based on document research.

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## 1.2 Literature review

The literature on Basic Income is vast and varied.<sup>3</sup> A lot has been written by academic authors that is mostly intended for an academic audience, such as the papers presented at the bi-annual BIEN congresses<sup>4</sup>, published in the peer-reviewed journal Basic Income Studies<sup>5</sup> and occasionally in political science, sociology or economics journals, or collected in edited volumes. Furthermore, there are a number of monographs by prominent figures in the field that are intended for a broader, albeit given their density and complexity, still rather intellectual readership. Generally, academic contributions include (a mixture of):

- Ethical, political-philosophical examinations of underlying moral principles and rationales, specifying different kinds of justifications for Basic Income,
- Elaborations, mostly from an economics perspective, on welfare mechanisms to escape the poverty trap,
- Exegeses of what it means to be (defined as) poor and the potential effects of a Basic Income in that respect, often from a sociological perspective,
- Extrapolations of technological trends and their (future) implications for work and life,
- (Impact) analyses of current social security and minimum income policies and (financing) strategies for the (gradual) implementation of a Basic Income.

In addition to academic publications, there is just as much or even more material on Basic Income by authors and creators who would like to make the academic debate more accessible to the broader public or who are involved in political activism. Most of these types of publications are available on-line and for free and cover more than one medium. Since the boundaries between academic debate, journalistic reflections and political activism are fluid, many of the names also mentioned above, reoccur – and so does the name of the BIEN network. In fact, the BIEN network itself collects and disseminates news items about political developments, relevant events or noteworthy publications in different countries on its website. The same holds for its members, the national and regional Basic Income networks and countless other national or local activist groups. Next to “traditional” websites, other groups make use of the entire spectrum of social media to amplify the social movement on Basic Income.

To cover a large scope of the actors involved in the co-production of thought, research, debate, publication and activism on Basic Income, the following on-line sources (and some more) were consulted for the TRANSIT case study analysis: the [BIEN website](#), the websites of the Dutch [Vereniging Basisinkomen](#) and [MIES](#) initiatives, of the German [Netzwerk Grundeinkommen](#), the [Freiheit statt Vollbeschäftigung](#) and [Mein Grundeinkommen](#) initiatives as well as of [UBI-Europe](#) and their [Daily Basic Income Paper](#).

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<sup>3</sup> The BIEN archive in Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) hosts titles in about 15 different languages: <http://basicincome.org/bien/pdf/BIEN-Library-UpdatedNov2010.xls>. An overview of relevant literature has also been compiled by Michael Goldsmith, University of Waikato: <http://www.lchr.org/a/39/g0/BasicIncomeReadings.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Most papers can be found online: <http://www.basicincome.org/research/basic-income-studies/>.

<sup>5</sup> Basic Income Studies appears in two issues per year since 2006: <http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/bis>.



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## 1.3 Case demarcation

There are a great number of interest groups and initiatives globally that publicly promote basic income and seek to insert it into political agendas. The perhaps oldest and largest network is BIEN, the Basic Income Earth Network. It understands itself as a platform of exchange among individuals and groups interested in studying or promoting a basic income. Although this report primarily focuses on BIEN and its national affiliates in Germany and the Netherlands, a study of TSI emergence and dynamics calls for a broader focus because a simple case demarcation purely based on network membership would fail to capture important details. Firstly, people active in the study and promotion of Basic Income are frequently active within more than one organisation and also pursue personal agendas. Secondly, there are other important actors and actor groups that share the “discursive sphere” that makes up Basic Income studies, discussions and activism with BIEN, for example other (political and a-political) organisations, policy-makers and the media. Due to BIEN’s character as a network of networks and since a thorough study of agency and transformative social innovation dynamics around Basic Income necessitates a broad view on relevant research, activism and exchange, groups and individuals outside of BIEN (but often sharing some members or at least engaging in frequent exchange with BIEN) feature prominently throughout the report.

In terms of important actors and actor groups, the following demarcation has been made. On a transnational level, this case study focuses on BIEN and, taking into account some earlier landmarks in the history of Basic Income, traces its development from BIEN’s inception in 1986 until today. Further, BIEN’s regional affiliate UBI-Europe, a continuation of the (failed) European Citizens’ Initiative for Basic Income in 2014 which overlaps significantly in terms of membership, receives attention to gain insight into political activism on a transnational level. Further, developments in several countries are briefly outlined to contextualise developments and debates described.

To demarcate our local manifestations clearly, we opted for country boundaries and consider Germany and the Netherlands. A focus on neighbouring countries is interesting because spatial proximity —although modern ICT technology appears to render it less relevant— facilitates the flow and exchange of ideas. Further, while the Dutch national affiliate of BIEN is one of the oldest and will celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016, the German national affiliate is more than a decade younger but one of the largest and (politically) most active groups among BIEN affiliates.

To study transformative social innovation emergence and dynamics in the form of discourse coalitions and clashes related to the idea of a Basic Income on a national level, the report focuses on BIEN’s national affiliates in Germany and the Netherlands and, at the same time, pays close attention to other relevant groups and developments, namely a Basic Income crowd-funding initiative in both countries as well as relevant media coverage of the topic and its proponents in both countries, including several documentaries and a widely-read book in the Netherlands and another small, yet prominent initiative in Germany.

The first ‘local manifestation’ considered comprises the Dutch Vereniging Basisinkomen (VBI) as the Dutch branch of BIEN, the MIES<sup>6</sup> initiative, a second not officially affiliated but nevertheless Basic Income promoting association and third, various other actors such as opinion leaders, researchers, politicians and administrators who promote or discuss the unconditional Basic Income and are involved with BI-related experiments. The timeframe covered extends from about 1975 when the idea was first publicly addressed until today.

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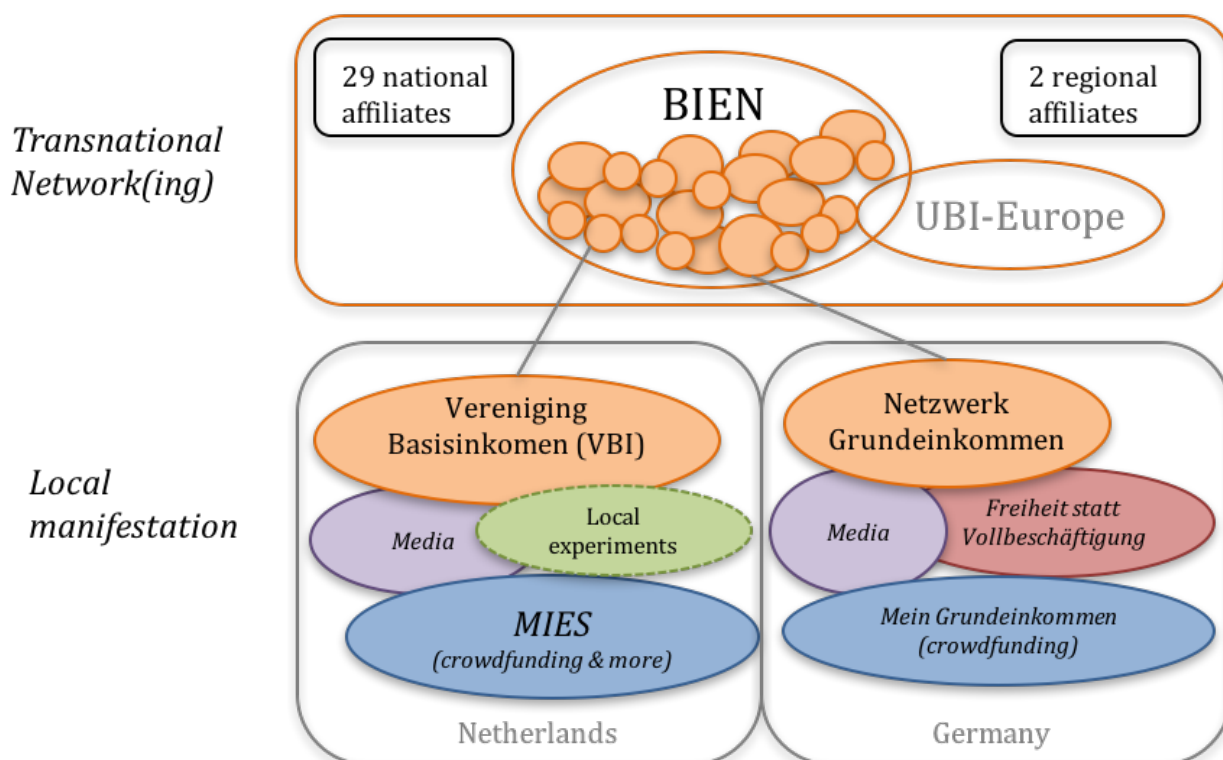
<sup>6</sup> MIES is short for Maatschappij voor Innovatie van Economie en Samenleving (Association for Innovation of Economy and Society).

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The study of the German 'local manifestation' includes BIEN's national affiliate Netzwerk Grundeinkommen (Network Basic Income), the crowd-funding initiative Mein Grundeinkommen (My Basic Income) as well as the Freiheit statt Vollbeschäftigung (Freedom, not Full Employment) group and a number of other vocal proponents. Historically, the case study commences with the first organised activism around an unconditional basic income in 2003 and extends until today.

The graphic below provides a snapshot of the actor groupings covered in this report according to the different "levels" the TRANSIT project studies: the transnational and the local (here, the national).

Figure 1 Key groups and initiatives discussing and promoting a Basic Income covered in this report



## 1.4 Overview and structure of the report

This report does not discuss the pro and contra of Basic Income or of different implementation strategies but – in the context of the TRANSIT project – it reflects on Basic Income as a transformative social innovation with a focus on its emergence, interactions among actors involved and (perceived) agency. After the introductory sections follows a chapter on the transnational BIEN network, a chapter on Basic Income initiatives in the Netherlands and a chapter on Basic Income initiatives in Germany. Findings are summarised, synthesised and concluded in the final chapter of the report. The Annex contains, amongst other, a short study on the framing of Basic Income in on-line discussions.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Researcher relations to the case

The Basic Income concept and associated ways of doing, knowing, framing and organising easily evoke partisanship and taking a firm stand pro or contra. Following from our ideological and political backgrounds, we both felt sympathetic to many (though not all) arguments that are advanced in favour of a Basic Income, also by our interviewees. During interviews, depending on our counterpart, we felt changing moments of proximity and distance. Occasional sympathy with normative principles, concerns or motivations could alternate with moments of stiff disagreement. We, however, decided to postpone our personal judgement whether we deem a Basic Income desirable and used this research as an opportunity to thoroughly study the debate. It certainly helped that neither of us is an economist nor a welfare specialist and that we approach the concept from the viewpoint of innovation sociology or science and technology studies. Instead of weighing our personal liking of arguments encountered, we focused on the discursive sphere in the media and in academic, activist and political circles related to Basic Income and traced how central notions and core activities are co-produced by a number of actors.

An additional relevant circumstance is the academic character of the BIEN network. The world of academic debate at congresses and through papers, (journal) publications and (increasingly) also online blogs is familiar to us. Due to a shared interest in scientific methods, we engaged in layered conversations with our interviewees at several instances. While we always addressed our case-related research questions we occasionally also pondered our overall project goals and how the case at hand may or may not provide insight in transformative social innovation processes. At moments like these the boundaries between research subject and object blurred to the extent that we ourselves became the “researched”.

We always communicated our willingness to feed our insights back to the network and to other individuals or groups whom we contacted. Although we always invited (additional) research questions, our informants preferred to delay reflections and debate until the publication of our results. The BIEN NewsFlash editorial team is keen to publish key findings and a link to the elaborate report on their website as soon as they are available. Further, we will both attend the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VBI, the Dutch BIEN affiliate on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2016, the chairman of which welcomed us to announce the report and open debate on our findings at the event. Another opportunity to engage in reciprocity is the 30-years commemoration of BIEN in Louvain-la-Neuve on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016. We have also presented our analysis of shifting claims to expertise in BI advocacy at a special session on transformative social innovation we organised at the Interpretive Policy Analysis conference (Hull, UK, July 2016), in a presentation at the 17<sup>th</sup> BIEN congress in Lisbon, Portugal (September 2017), and during a panel debate with representatives of different Basic Income initiatives that we convened at the TRANSIT final conference (Rotterdam, September 2017).

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## 2.2 Methods

### 2.2.1 Overall methodology

We followed the TRANSIT Bath II Methodological Guidelines closely. While we made extensive use of document research to cover historic developments as well as current online activity which is key to the network's activities, and interviews to gain insight into behind-the-scenes viewpoints, motivations and plans, participant observation was mainly used at international events organised by or with network members. These events included a congress on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dutch VBI, a congress to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the transnational BIEN network, a panel discussion with representatives of basic income initiatives from the Netherlands and Germany at the TRANSIT final conference as well as the 17<sup>th</sup> BIEN Congress in Lisbon, Portugal. Nevertheless, one of the blind spots of this study is the lack of insight into activities "on the ground" that local networks engage in to acquaint the wider public with the idea of a Basic Income. Some approaches and strategies are presented online and could hence be considered, but on-site experience could not be obtained.

Our focus on a network debating and promoting Basic Income locally, nationally and internationally entails a relative lack of attention to BI opponents. It can be noted, though, that opponents barely bother engaging in a debate unless invited or triggered to do so. Since BI proponents invest a large share of their time to refute opponents' prevalent arguments to counter the BI and its supposed merits compared to other welfare models, opponents' objections and arguments are easily traced and covered, however.

On a final note, we did not add or delete any research questions. We solely "translated" them to our specific case and developed tailored interview guidelines for each of our interviews to ensure the right questions were addressed to the most appropriate respondent.

### 2.2.2 Interviews

This reports rests on twenty interviews that were conducted with members of different Basic Income initiatives. At the transnational level, our research and analysis, including six in-depth interviews, focused entirely on the BIEN network. At the local (country) level, recognising the active role and relevance of people and initiatives that are not formally affiliated with BIEN, we broadened the view beyond members of the Dutch Vereniging Basisinkomen and the German Netzwerk Grundeinkommen. In total, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with Basic Income proponents in the Netherlands and six in-depth interviews in Germany. A complete overview can be found in Annex A.

### 2.2.3 Participant observation

During the extensive period that we followed developments in and around the networks, we attended several gatherings organised by the networks to participate in discussions. At the final conference of the TRANSIT project, we hosted a panel debate with representatives of different Basic Income initiatives. The complete overview, including an event by a local network, and event by a national network and two events by the transnational network can be found in Annex B.

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## 2.2.4 Document reviews

The complete list of references can be found at the end of this report (chapter 7). Crucial “documents” for our analysis include papers and books written by network members as well as a wealth of online materials both written and spoken. To stay up-to-date with recent developments, The Daily Basic Income Paper generated by UBIE proved invaluable. More specifically, we consulted:

- For BIEN (transnational level): academic publications (books, papers), Newsletters (available online since the first edition in 1986), basicincome.org website (wealth of material) and other online sources.
- For VBI and MIES (local/country level): Academic publications (especially Groot & van der Veen 2001) and VBI website archive for historical overview, newspaper articles and blogs via internet, and various YouTube videos of meetings, public appearances, and the Tegenlicht documentaries. Relatively substantial share of media analysis.
- For the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen and other German initiatives (local/country level): academic publications (especially Blaschke 2016; Liebermann 2012), websites (especially blogs by the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen, The Freiheit statt Vollbeschäftigung initiative and by Susanne Wiest), YouTube interviews/discussions.

## 3 BIEN – the Basic Income Earth Network

### 3.1 The emergence of BIEN

The Basic Income is one of those ‘big ideas’ that some people pondering societies’ persistent social problems have, like an epiphany. Philippe Van Parijs, without whom BIEN probably neither would have never come to life nor would not have stayed alive throughout the decades, had his epiphany in December 1982 while he was doing the dishes or some other household chore in the kitchen. He realised then that an unconditional basic income (a term he did not know at the time) could solve two major problems of the time:

“one was how can you address the problem of unemployment, being in the early 1980s, without relying on fast growth and ever faster growth, ... That was one problem and the other one was: how can you imagine a desirable future for our capitalist societies with the Soviet societies we saw at the time would not be desirable futures for our societies – and so I came to this idea and then produced a little text. I had to invent an expression in French, “l’allocation universelle” because I had never heard anything like this in the discussions.” (PVP)

Shortly afterwards, Van Parijs left for Manchester as a visiting scholar. During his time in the UK, he encountered a text “of someone at Aston University in Birmingham” who defended the same idea under the label of a social wage (“not the right name”) without any further reference. In addition, Van Parijs became acquainted with the idea of a negative income tax which he understood as a related but rather different concept. When he returned to Belgium, Van Parijs developed the idea further with his friends Philippe Defeyt and Paul-Marie Boulanger when writing the socio-economic programme of the newly founded Belgian Green Party Ecolo. Gradually, the group became aware of other academics who were working on the topic:

“From England, you had people like Bill Jordan or Hermione Parker. Hermione Parker worked already with some computations for a basic income scheme in Great Britain. When we start studying the idea we discovered that a lot of people already had the idea. And the more we dug into it, the more people we found; going back in time, you know, Thomas Paine, for instance. We discovered that Thomas Paine had already proposed something like that. We knew for Charles Fourier that’s why we called us Collectif Charles Fourier but we didn’t know for people like Thomas Paine or even people more remote in time who had a kind of idea like basic income already. It was very funny to discover that it was an idea that had a very long history. But a history that is forgotten and came back and forgotten, kind of oscillation. And it’s the same for us because after the boom, let’s say of the 80s, it disappeared the idea and there is now revival; a very surprising revival.” (PMB)

Inspired by the idea and existing literature, Van Parijs, Defeyt and Boulanger started a discussion group on the Basic Income at the Université catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain) that called itself the Collectif Charles Fourier (CCF) after a French philosopher and utopian thinker who had promoted the idea in the early 1800s. With the goal to make the idea better known in Belgium, the group decided to develop a special issue on the Basic Income for the magazine *La Revue Nouvelle*, a Christian, progressive journal. The special issue, published in 1985, presented arguments in favour and in opposition of a Basic Income and featured reflections on ongoing debates in other countries, including the Netherlands, the UK and Germany. Philippe Van Parijs experienced the debate in the Netherlands first hand as a visiting scholar at the University of Amsterdam in the spring of 1985 when the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy WWR discussed a Basic Income in its well-known report “Safeguarding social security” (see next chapter). In Belgium, the CCF’s tactic paid off in the form of a major public debate about the idea in the French-speaking

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Walloon region, thereby mirroring discussions in other countries at a time of high and persistent unemployment in the aftermath of the second oil crisis.

In addition to its national activities, the CCF also lay the groundwork for international collaboration and networking. The group submitted a little text about the Basic Income in a competition on solutions to the economic crisis by the Fondation Roi Baudouin and won the prize money. This prize was the seed funding for the BIEN network. In 1986, some 50 to 60 academics, mostly from Europe, gathered at the UCLouvain following an invitation by Van Parijs to the first international conference on Basic Income.<sup>7</sup> The name and acronym BIEN was proposed by Guy Standing, who was working at the International Labour Organisation at the time, at a gathering of a smaller group following the international conference. This group, including Claus Offe, the only “famous [academic] among the people there” (PVP) was keen to continue the exchange and unanimously decided to call itself BIEN – the Basic Income European Network.

## 3.1.1 BIEN’s main activities: regular congresses and news

Since its founding in 1986, the BIEN network held biennial congresses<sup>8</sup> and issued a regular newsletter<sup>9</sup>. The international conferences have always relied on the initiative and engagement of network members who would summon the necessary funding and organise the event. The newsletter has depended on a committed editor, especially prior to proliferation of the Internet, who would contact network members and ask for updates on national developments and summaries of recent publications. Philippe Van Parijs recalls that there was a period during the 1990s when the BIEN newsletter, “the lifeline of the network”, nearly died. Only one issue was published in 1995. In the year 2000, Yannick Vanderborcht took over editorial responsibility and soon shared it for a while with Karl Widerquist who eventually became the sole editor-in-chief and managed to recruit a team of volunteers to share the workload.

Opinions diverge on what makes a good newsletter, whether short pieces on every mention of Basic Income anywhere in the world or elaborate reflections, particularly on academic debates. Agreement prevails, however, about the crucial role of regular news that inform about developments in policy, academia and society across the world:

“One of the functions that BIEN serves and it serves rather well is that it scans the universe for a positive or sometimes negative mentions of basic income. Sometimes there are politicians or activists who aren't really aware yet but who've come across the idea of basic income and maybe write a blog post or an article or maybe a politician give a speech. One of the things that BIEN does with its newsletters and its websites is to aggregate these mentions so that members of the organisation become aware of others who are not yet part of the organisation but who are interested in basic income in some way or said something that might be. And then they reach out to them. So, it might be just an individual who reaches out to somebody he found writing about basic income or it could be for example the decision of a conference committee to invite a politician to give a speech at that conference. But sometimes people also find us as well.” (AZ)

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<sup>7</sup> At that time, next to the CCF only one other group working on the Basic Income existed: The Basic Income Research Group (BIRG), which later became the Citizen's Income Trust, was founded in the UK in 1984. The Werkplaats Basisinkomen, a Dutch network that merged into the Vereniging Basisinkomen in 1991, was initiated in the year following BIEN's establishment.

<sup>8</sup> <http://basicincome.org/congresses/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://basicincome.org/newsflash/>

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Encounters at congresses show that people are following developments in other countries with interest and since the most recent surge of Basic Income initiatives and activism in many places, the newsletter has even become a source of information for subscribers even on developments in their own country.

## 3.1.2 BIEN's growing aches

Since the beginning, people outside of Europe had attended BIEN congresses and subscribed to the BIEN Newsletter. In 2004, at the 10th International Congress in Barcelona, BIEN's General Assembly agreed to change the network's name from Basic Income European Network to Basic Income Earth Network, acknowledging its growing membership outside of Europe and yet preserving its by then well-known acronym. Again, it was Guy Standing who had the spark of inspiration. At first, initiator and co-founder Philippe Van Parijs had been reluctant mainly because a growing global network would pose new administrative and monetary challenges and because he assumed that a Basic Income was mainly a concept of relevance for mature welfare states. However, developments in Brazil had recently convinced him otherwise:

"In the end, I yielded, especially under pressure from our friend Eduardo Suplicy, a Brazilian senator, as I had attended this remarkable event in 2004, which was this law, which he had prepared,<sup>10</sup> signed by [President] Lula, that said that there would be a UBI in Brazil, so I thought: 'Well ok maybe it's more realistic than I thought.'" (PVP)

Next to the name change, the organization has undergone a lengthy process of revising and elaborating its statutes and is planning further changes to comply with requirements for registering as an official organization:

"Usually there's not so much disagreement because we always speak about basic income and everyone is interested in what the others are doing. But finally, we had some controversy at a meeting in 2004. It was rather chaotic, we didn't know which decisions we could make here, which in the executive committee, which by email – we had to clarify those things. We had to clarify what the roles of the people on the committee were. That's what that was about. Now what we want to do is to get recognised as an official organisation. We've never had an official status and you have to have that if you want to receive a significant amount of donations. So, we want to raise funds, and there are people out there who would like to help and donate. We want to do this, so we have to get registered as an organisation. Now we have to change the sections [of the statutes] again to conform to whatever it is that a legal system in any country where we end up doing this requires us... That's what we're in the process of now: looking at how do we make ourselves official." (KW)

While BIEN has always relied on members' voluntary commitment but with a growing number of affiliates, the decision to organize annual instead of biennial congresses and the desire to also help fund international or even national network activities, the need for a more stable financial basis has increased. In 2017, more than 30 years into its existence, BIEN boasts 29 national and two regional affiliates<sup>11</sup> Basic Income initiatives can apply to becoming a BIEN affiliate by proving the existence of a membership base as well as, ideally, by committing to open debate on the topic.

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<sup>10</sup> The law was based on a bill proposed by Senator Suplicy in 2001. With its passing in 2004, a first step in the progressive implementation of an unconditional basic income paid on an individual basis was set in motion in the form of conditional cash transfers to poor families. The Bolsa Família programme is the world's largest social transfer scheme, covering some 50 million people, in 2011 (Provost, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed overview, please consult: <http://www.basicincome.org/about-bien/affiliates/>.



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## 3.1.3 Basic Income – the social innovation behind all efforts

The Basic Income is a proposal for a drastically restructured welfare arrangement (new organising), allowing people to reconsider their choices of paid work, caring and volunteering and more generally their purposes (new doing). Finally, the concept is also used to provoke a reconsideration of conceptions of the good life and especially of the social norm of ‘earning one’s living’ through paid labour. It introduces a new understanding of what it means to be a good citizen or successful individual (new framing). The basic idea, the social innovation that the BIEN network promotes has remained unchanged, but the particular financial model and amount are subject to heated debate (see section 3.3). While some local networks are defining the amount of Basic Income they favour, others keep this open. In general, more academically oriented networks appear to work with less stringent definitions of Basic Income while more politically oriented initiatives are more likely to pursue particular implementation strategies based on specific definitions and models of financing. BIEN as a platform remains neutral. Its current mission statement proclaims:

The mission of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) is to offer education to the wider public about alternative arguments about, proposals for, and problems concerning, basic income as idea, institution, and public policy practice. To this end, BIEN organises public conferences around the world on an annual basis in which empirical research and new ideas are disseminated and discussed. BIEN promotes and serves as a repository of published research, including congress papers, an academic blog featuring balanced debate for and against the basic income proposal in different contexts and forms, and by means of an independent academic journal linked with BIEN – Basic Income Studies. BIEN does not subscribe to any particular version of basic income, and fosters evidenced-based research, plural debate, and critical engagement about basic income and related ideas and public policy developments. Individuals connected with BIEN – including affiliated organisations – may express particular opinions about basic income, but they are not opinions of BIEN. BIEN’s explicit mission is to remain neutral among competing arguments for and against basic income and the relation of basic income with other ideas and policies.<sup>12</sup>

BIEN, its affiliates and other Basic Income initiatives activities imply a materialisation or crystallisation of the socially innovative idea behind their efforts into policy-proposing texts, informative flyers, academic books, public events or other activities. Concrete activities intervening in practice, including petitions, policy experiments or crowdfunding initiatives are initiated by people that are situated outside or at least outside of the centre of the more academically oriented BIEN network (see chapters on local manifestations in the Netherlands and Germany). At the same time, their activities are legitimised and motivated by the vast amount of academic literature BIEN-members have studied and produced as well as by political and societal developments in other countries that BIEN keeps everyone informed about. For example, academic books may be on display at public events of local networks.

## 3.2 TSI dynamics

The Basic Income, as a social innovation under discussion and scrutiny, has interacted with its context through various initiatives, including the BIEN network, in four important ways (Pel & Backhaus 2016). Since its conception several centuries ago, the Basic Income has acted as a

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<sup>12</sup> <http://basicincome.org/about-bien/#overview>

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utopian idea(1), confronting and critiquing the status quo, whether that was a system without any social security or with a focus on workfare (3.2.1). Early Basic Income supporters as well as many BIEN members pursue the 'royal way' of implementation, trying to convince national policy makers of the adequacy or even superiority of the concept and lobbying for step-wise implementation (3.2.2). Increasingly, not least due to contextual developments, a shift to policy entrepreneurship and a focus on experiments for evidence-based policy-making has become apparent (3.2.3). In recent times, new actors and initiatives have entered the scene that are pursuing a pragmatic approach, cleverly using openings of the system for civic participation or relying on modern ICT to push their agenda of making the concept known and usable (3.2.4). Besides these transformative impacts in the form of presenting alternative framings, spurring political debate, inspiring policy experiments and motivating civic activism, a number of Basic Income-related policy schemes exist, including the Alaska Permanent Fund, the Brazilian Bolza Família programme, the Iranian cash transfer scheme or the city of Macau's Wealth Partaking Scheme.

## 3.2.1 Basic Income as social critique

The Basic Income has sparked and inspired social critique of the current system vis-à-vis a utopian ideal for centuries (More 1516, Olin Wright 2010, Bregman 2017). Van Parijs developed the idea as a 'third way' to address the excrescences of capitalism without succumbing to the impossibility of communism (Van Parijs, 1995). It is often claimed that the interest in Basic Income oscillating between hype and near-neglect follows the pattern of unemployment curves:

"Because clearly the welfare state is in crisis, public finance is down. Unemployment is massive. There is clearly no solution. And austerity is not a solution. So, in the same way... the situation was more or less the same in the 80s. There was also a huge public deficit at the time. So, it was impossible to be very generous. So, basic income appeared as a solution at that time to a crisis that the existing system was unable to address." (PMB)

Irrespective of the particular Basic Income model favoured, its proponents, including the small group in Louvain-la-Neuve some 35 years ago that prepared the ground for BIEN to emerge, have always understood and used the Basic Income as a witness of an alternative system possible:

"The objective was to have the debate and to shake the society and to have society think about its main system, its way of living, things like that. Really to have a cultural shock. More than a political proposal. We didn't really believe that it would be possible right now to have something real, concrete happening but we thought it was time to prepare the minds. And we knew it would take some time. So, we didn't expect at all to have some concrete realisation of the idea. But really, the idea was, the objective was to trigger a big debate, big discussion – and we had it!" (PMB)

While many people get tired of voicing the same critique and repeating the same arguments for years, for others the Basic Income becomes a long-term source of inspiration and question for exploration:

"BIEN is an organisation around an idea. And the promotion of an idea but an idea that didn't change any lives. At least until, as long as no basic income is really implemented, that they could benefit from, it didn't change their lives. It only changed maybe their intellectual interest or concerns but it doesn't change their lives. ... So, for me it is purely a think tank, BIEN. A think tank restricted to one idea. Also, an idea of change that is very wide and very deep but it's only one idea." (PMB)

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BIEN and its long-term members certainly deserve to be credited for preserving and keeping the idea of a Basic Income alive also in dry spells, for example during the economic upswing of the 1990s.

## 3.2.2 Basic Income for president!

The emergence social critique often entails expectations towards a government to address and fix socio-economic problems. Especially the Basic Income is often seen as a concept that should be realised by states or even several states acting in unison:

“So, if you're in a big country like the US which can move on many of these issues unilaterally I think it does make sense of thinking about national implementation. There is also very good work being done on a regional North-American basic income and particularly given the openness in the sense of our border with Mexico in particular and with the movement of workers from Mexico to the United States and a lot of money back from the US to Mexico. I think it absolutely makes sense to think about it in terms of a regional basic income for North America. Clearly, a basic income in the EU makes sense. ... This may apply to other regions as well. Globally, as well ... I mean you can take steps towards that unilaterally. So, the US gives a lot of foreign aid to countries. I would like to see that foreign aid moving towards basic income. ... I would rather like to see foreign aid given as a lump-sum that the local government has to give to its people with no leaking buckets, right, so the whole money goes to individuals. So, I think there are multiple strategies on multiple levels. I do think that Thomas Piketty's work is another evidence for a global conversation about basic income. He doesn't recommend it himself in *Capital in the 21st Century*, but clearly, it's not a big leap from a global tax on capital to a global basic income, redistributing that capital.” (AZ)

The above quote illustrates that for many BIEN members, national, regional or even global implementation is considered the most appropriate or ‘Royal Way’ of realising a Basic Income scheme. While the transnational BIEN network counts among its members several gifted public speakers who are ready to discuss and endorse the concept at any event of national or international relevance, many BIEN affiliates have active politicians in their ranks or seek to establish and maintain close relationships with political parties and national government to advance their political agenda.

## 3.2.3 Scientific evidence for Basic Income

A topic of eternal debate is the role and use of experiments with Basic Income. Arguably, ‘the real thing’ cannot be tested as no experiment can possibly deliver on individual, universal and unconditional cash payments that are transferred sufficiently long to allow real, long-term effects to become visible. Nevertheless, carefully set-up experiments can certainly deliver relevant insights, if only to advance the political debate. Experiments with Basic Income schemes have a long tradition, starting in the US during the 1960s and continuing in Canada in the 1970s. More recently, experiments have also been conducted in a development context:

“Our experiments for example that we've done in India ... have raised the idea that a basic income in developing countries is possible, is not only possible in terms of organisation and financing but that it has a lot of the positive effects in a developing economy context that we've believed in for a long time but we didn't have the evidence. I mean we provided the basic income for thousands of people in

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Indian villages and we've monitored the outcome and written a book and articles and so on which has gained a lot of interest in other developing countries and in the development aid business if you like, which has opened doors for others and all of us to advance the idea that you could have a basic income in developing countries as an effective development tool for aid policy etc. I think nobody back in the BIEN of the 1980s or 1990s thought that we would be able to do that. And the fact that we have been able to put it in the development context is a huge change compared with a 20 years ago." (GS)

Researchers have been creative in terms of finding interesting and relevant data to study to possible effects of a Basic Income, for example by focusing on win-for-life lottery winners (Marx & Peeters 2004), by asking for access to an archive filled with data on the Canadian Mincome experiment of the 1970s (Forget 2008) or by supporting the methodological set-up of policy experiments as in the case of the Netherlands, Canada or Finland. Often in opposition to Basic Income 'purists' who continue pointing out the impossibility of testing a Basic Income scheme to the full extent, some researchers are keen to provide data and offer conclusions with useful advice for policy-makers:

"We don't know a priori where big progress is going to take place. It could be in Germany, in Finland in the Netherlands, in Brazil, you know. So, there is lots of potential ... with some brave politician. Now we see in Alberta that the new government is suddenly very interested in the basic income. I think we gain collectively. I believe that what we're seeing is that it's regarded as a feasible instrument for dealing with the growth of the precariat in rich, developed countries and at the same time it's also something regarded as a feasible fiscal way of reducing insecurity and poverty in developing countries." (GS)

## 3.2.4 Citizens' initiatives and social movements

An interesting dynamic unfolded around a European Citizens' initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income that was initiated by several national BIEN affiliates and collected more than 300,000 signatures from across Europe in favour of a European parliamentary debate on the Basic Income. Although this initiative fell short of reaching the necessary 1 million signatures to achieve this goal, it succeeded in sparking or reviving public debate and triggered the founding of several new local and national Basic Income networks. To continue collaboration and to create a political pendant to the more academically and by now globally oriented BIEN network, it was decided to set-up a new European Basic Income network: Unconditional Basic Income Europe (UBIE). This development was met with mixed feelings by BIEN members:

After the initiative was running and failed there was the idea of creating a new European network. ... I welcomed it because the EU as such has become a locus of power for social policy and therefore you need, in addition to the activists on the Dutch level, Spanish level, Belgian level, you need one at the European level. They created that and ... there was a discussion on whether this new European network should be an affiliate of BIEN. They decided in favour of it and BIEN accepted to make them affiliates. ... On the whole, the relationship between the two organisations is fine, but it's really sensitive to individuals. (PVP)

The most recent revival of the Basic Income, emerging roughly after the economic crisis of 2008/9, is witnessed and supported but certainly not driven by BIEN. Instead, numerous initiatives specifically dedicated to the Basic Income or more generally interested in systemic change have sprung up in different countries and started 'doing something' with the concept, for example initiating an online petition or a popular vote, setting up a Basic Income crowdfunding platform or

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working on local experiments (Pel & Backhaus 2016). These developments are expected to be going hand-in-hand with increased interest by policy-makers, also in further experiments:

“Now suddenly huge numbers of people from outside BIEN have been writing and saying that the solution to social problems is moving to a basic income and it's very interesting that many of them are almost claiming as though it's their new idea when in fact a lot of people have been saying that for a long time. But that's great because it means that we've moved into the mainstream of discussion, of political policy-making. Now we're at a stage where in my case every single day I am contacted by somebody and often many people about basic income. It has come to the point where I could work on it full time, just on it, on basic income. That's a huge change that has taken place just in the last three years, ok? I don't think that's going to be reversed. I think we're going to see a continuing growth of interest and as that interest grows, and as mainstream voices come in in support, I think we are going to see more pilots, we are going to see more experiments, we are going to see more costings done, more alternative scenarios and we are moving into the zone of practical politics.” (GS)

The question whether BIEN should become more active politically has caused continuous debate:

“I would say what started in 2000, BIEN starting to become much more policy oriented. It became less of an academic network and more of an activist network. That was probably because the Geneva congress was organised by Guy Standing, who is an academic but much more interested in pushing the policy and in being actively involved in politics. ... There is now today in BIEN a consensus that BIEN should support more policy oriented initiatives.” (YV)

Recently, BIEN decided to endorse and even financially support national and international events of policy or civil society relevance. The desire to be able to support the grassroots may be one reason for trying to establish a formal organisation that is able to accept donations (see previous section). A connection between “the grassroots and the academic think tank” (PMB) is considered crucial for achieving desired impacts in the future:

“In the sense of connecting with the centres of power we have been less active, we have connected more with activists. And not so much because we have tried so much to contact activist movements, the Occupy or 99%, we haven't gone to them. ... I don't know whether it was because of anything that we did, but they have been finding it. Activists in a lot of countries have turned to basic income, because of concern with inequality, because of the great recession for one thing. The great recession and all these movements coming up against inequality. Now another group is coming: people who worry about automation, that we got self-driving cars, robotic factories ... So, a lot of people who are concerned about automation say what are we are going to do, when there are less and less jobs to go around – they are finding basic income. There is a rich literature out there, I don't know if we can take all the credit for it, but they're finding it and they're talking about it. And that's how basic income is taken on.” (KW)

## 3.3 Agency in (T)SI

This chapter addresses the questions where the agency lies in (transformative) social innovation processes and what processes of dis/empowerment can be distinguished in relation to the Basic Income. The Basic Income as a case study on transformative social innovation helps to gain insight into the visions, general strategies and practical projects that underlie a pursuit of a “real utopia” (Olin Wright 2010). Since its inception, BIEN has focused on providing a broad platform for debate, on facilitating exchange, on maintaining an archive of academic publications and ‘Basic Income

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news' and – for lack of full-fledged implementation – on collecting examples of partial realisation. While the BIEN network has been consciously set-up to discuss Basic Income, its form, financing and implementation in all possible variants, the network also takes utmost care to safeguard the idea itself, an individual, universal and unconditional payment in cash. Particularly vis-à-vis partial implementation efforts, policy experiments or crowdfunded projects the core idea is upheld, like a beacon providing orientation and marking a safe harbour amidst a stormy sea. Agency, therefore, is distributed, networked and fragmented: distributed because numerous individuals across the world take action and co-produce transformative change in the name of Basic Income; networked because since 1986, Basic Income supporters have connected to share ideas and collaborated to coordinate their efforts; and fragmented because different people take different roles and engage in different tasks in the process of trying to establish political and scientific authority.

## 3.3.1 Skills, time and financial resources

As an academic network by origin, BIEN has always relied on the time, financial resources and administrative support that come with the privilege of being employed as academic staff, particularly on higher-ranking positions. People who lost or never had that privilege often cannot attend BIEN congresses and yet dedicate much of their time to the cause on a voluntary basis. At the same time, everyone benefits from the resources invested by BIEN members as a lot of information and material is made available for free.

## 3.3.2 Utopian visions and theories of change: empowered by debate

People come to the idea of a Basic Income with different issues in mind, from different political backgrounds and with different motivations. Whether from a libertarian or human rights perspective, whether caring about unemployment, the future of work, social inequality, emancipation or sustainability, the Basic Income as a socially innovative concept offers interesting viewpoints in various issues.

“Throughout that period and I think even today there’s always been two strands of thinking. One is the more libertarian strand, and ... the other tradition that I’m closer to is that basic income should be seen as a progressive strategy of reform, moving away from the neoliberal economic system. ... In other words: I don't believe that basic income by itself would solve most problems but it must be part of a package. ... That perspective has differed from those who have taken a more political economy-type of approach and said that basic income is part of the answer to the problem of our income distribution inequality. So, I think the major theme has gone through all our debate. Not in a nasty, aggressive way. But it's provided a sort of ongoing intellectual tension which is good because it acts as a creative basis for dialogue.” (GS)

BIEN has always taken care to remain a neutral platform for broad debate:

“There were conflicts between certain groups related to basic income so one group pretended it was an affiliate to BIEN but we never agreed to have them as an affiliate because it was just one version of basic income associated just with one particular author and we wanted each of the national networks to be ecumenical.” (YV)

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Although for some people, the debate feels a bit like a stand-still, it continues to be interesting and the concept of a Basic Income continues to inspire and empower others:

“It’s a bit disappointing to see that the discussion is exactly the same that it was, let’s say, 25 years ago, not more than that, 30 years ago. The arguments are exactly the same. I have a kind of impression of déjà vue, déjà vecu, you know. ... I admire Philippe Van Parijs who has the capacity to repeat himself for 30, 40 years, repeating the same argumentation and convincing people.” (PMB)

Such discussions even have repercussions for some fundamental agreements, including the definition of the idea the network seeks to promote:

“There is a huge discussion on this; still; because I even think that BIEN wants or even has decided to change the definition of BI to change its official definition of BI. ... So, this is a discussion that has, I think, existed throughout the existence of BIEN when I was there, was always had discussion on that and apparently, eventually, I think BIEN has decided to include the idea in its definition ... that it should be enough to live on. Why it was such a long time that we decided not to do that... Perhaps it has to do with the fact that it was mainly an academic network.” (YV)

As discussed in chapter 3.2, BIEN and other initiatives relate to their context in different ways when seeking to create political or scientific authority, namely by means of voicing social critique, acting as policy entrepreneur, providing scientific evidence or ‘simply’ doing something with the concept. Over time, the Basic Income has become part of the mainstream as an alternative option on the political menu. Since the 1980s, Basic Income proponents have focused both on conveying the simple yet radical idea of a Basic Income to stimulate public debate and draw into question dominant (workfare) culture, its institutions and underlying idea of human nature and purpose of human existence as well as on expert exchange regarding particularities in terms of financing models, implementation strategies and possible effects.

“When you think of l’allocation universelle [Basic Income] there are a lot of thoughts that come to you about working, about life in general, about the meaning of life. You see the things very differently. You know it’s really a thought experiment that is very productive in terms of understanding the current system... So, even if you don’t believe in the possibility or even of the benefit of the [Basic Income] ... launching a public discussion is very productive.” (PMB)

The political neutrality of the network enabled acting as platform for everyone and anyone interested in the topic and avoided the pitfall of being pushed into a particular political corner, thus losing potential foothold on the other side of the political spectrum. The archiving of publications, including a dedicated academic journal, and news items on developments related to the Basic Income is not particular to BIEN but also done by numerous of its affiliates and other Basic Income initiatives. This strategy of amassing relevant information empowers and legitimises current efforts by highlighting the long history and impressive list of thinkers and activists connected to the concept. Moreover, these archives help monitoring progress.

“Sometimes in the course of the thirty years it surprised me what an impact such a tiny organisation could have. Because throughout these years, I mean what was BIEN? Three or four people exchanging information. But it looked much bigger from the outside and it could have a big impact simply by spreading information. So, people could feel from South Africa to Finland to feel more self-secure about making their claims because they felt backed by what other people were doing in different circumstances.” (PVP)

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## 3.3.3 On-line activism: (em)powering debate

Compared to other Basic Income initiatives that make use of the Internet and social media in particular to promote the concept very actively, BIEN and its website that collects and archives information on the network, the concept and its uptake appears like the slower yet more reflective giant. Snippets of information are picked up and not just simply re-tweeted but contextualised and presented critically. While not the most active generator of posts, BIEN is certainly the go-to place for reliable information.

“I always found it important doing a newsletter that we selected the information, put it in the context, so you don't just repeat things you don't feel sufficiently certain about without giving the information or without explaining what is important about it because saying the Socialist party of Korea is in favour of a basic income and then you go and check and you see that the socialist party of Korea has 0.3% of the vote and has never been in parliament and will never be in parliament, it's just called socialist party of Korea. So, if you spread that information you need to put it in context in this way and that requires effort. But that is what has given BIEN sort of the credit it has and why it was regarded important to people to say we are part of BIEN.” (YV)

## 3.3.4 (Dis)empowering practice

The fact that general arguments remain the same may look like a stand-still in some ways. At the same time, the growing interest in and support for the Basic Income has shifted the character of the network. How to balance academic work with political engagement remains a constant issue of debate:

“BIEN in the early 2000s was mainly a platform for the exchange between academics. Then gradually it became more of a network of activists. But there was inside BIEN a discussion about should we just stay a network of people exchanging information, making conferences ... in fact, BIEN conferences are still very academic-style conferences. ... But many, the majority maybe think that we should be involved, for instance BIEN should sponsor or support national affiliates when they take initiatives, or should BIEN for instance support the Swiss basic income initiative. Increasingly people within BIEN began saying that we should be more actively promoting basic income politically, socially etc. rather than just discussing it among us. (YV)

“I think we're moving into a much more activist direction. And I think BIEN's role is still going to be facilitating discussion between the people who are doing the activism. I think that's BIEN's role, that's what it does. To get these people to get active and talk to each other, to be sort of a hub. But the leading of the action seems to be done by local groups in the local groups in affiliate countries. In the US, there was BIEN's affiliate US BIG starting in December 1999 and a year ago there was still only this one group. Now there are something like six or eight groups – local groups are starting ... and that's just the US. Some stuff like that is happening around the world right now. A lot more activism is happening now. I don't see BIEN in the leadership of that but providing some of the research that people can point to back this up and facilitate discussion between them.” (KW)

“I think this is a tension in the organisation. I think there is split between the people, particularly academics, that are happy to meet every two years, learn about what has been researched and what everybody has been up to and then go away and to their work. Then there are other people in the organisation that are frustrated that every two years we meet and we're not any closer to a basic income in any country than we were two years ago. I think that's a basic tension in this organisation. I



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think it started very clearly as an academic organisation, although there were some non-academics in there from the beginning back in the 1980s – but at a point when so few people were talking about basic income and were interested in basic income, just the fact of finding and bringing together those people was a major achievement. Now that more people are talking about basic income, ... I think there are more people part of BIEN who think that BIEN should do more to advance basic income in the political arena. And I would say that many of the members of BIEN do not object to that goal, but many of us are academics that are not familiar or not comfortable or not interested in doing that. So, there is a tension that most of the officers of BIEN, the most active volunteers are academics, who really focus on the academic role of BIEN. We're trying to be very inclusive. So, we welcome and invite the activists and the politicians, but then they get frustrated because 'You've invited us to this conference ... but here we are, we're still talking about basic income in theory, what are we going to do about it in practice?' So, I think that's still a tension that remains in the institution. I don't think it's on its way to being resolved." (AZ)

## 3.3.5 Language as a (dis)empowering factor

"We had permanently this challenge, and we had it before the Americans came in because the Brits were in from the beginning. So, at meetings you had to make sure that it was not the Anglophones who were occupying half the time and that is a permanent challenge for that multinational network. Sometimes I made a remark about the launch meeting of the European Citizen's Initiative on Basic income which was held at the European parliament. It was hosted by a German green member of the European parliament and the people who had prepared it were also Germans but the way they had set up this meeting: Three quarters of the speaking time were by Germans, with simultaneous translation English and German but as a result of it... The whole beginning of the meeting was dominated by the German-speaking; there were Austrians, too, but for everyone to feel at home it's really important to be really sensitive to that. One way of doing it in general is in fact when people speak different languages of their own this creates this what we do now, sort of equality and blocks the tendency to have this domination for linguistic reasons and maybe other reasons. We had certainly that problem; we still do, because if the communication is in English, it makes sense to have the Anglophones as representatives." (PVP)

## 3.4 Synthesis

The Basic Income Earth Network emerged as an academic network during a period of heated debates in many European countries during the period of economic recession of the 1980s to enable informed debate about the Basic Income. Social, political, economic and technological developments since then have led to interesting and interrelated changes of the BIEN network and its context. During a period of little interest in the Basic Income due to little economic turbulence in countries where BIEN was active throughout the 1990s, the network continued discussing, thus building and preserving arguments for the idea. When interest in the topic revived at the start of the new millennium, many initiatives that sprung up to promote the concept looked at BIEN as the leader of a social movement. While the organisation is not experienced and institutionally set-up to organise political activism, it continues functioning well as platform for debate and archive of arguments.

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## 4 The Dutch ‘basisinkomen’, VBI & MIES

### 4.1 Emergence of ‘basisinkomen’, VBI and MIES

The basic income (BI) is a socially innovative concept with a relatively long history in the Netherlands. Before starting to promote the concept worldwide through BIEN, Belgian trailblazer Philippe van Parijs adopted the term ‘basisinkomen’ that he had encountered in the neighbouring Netherlands. ***How did this socially innovative concept, and initiatives like VBI and MIES that promote it, emerge? And how did the concept and these initiatives develop and spread over time?*** The timeline below provides an overview of this emergence and further development.

The timeline sketches the rather volatile development of BI in the Netherlands. A remarkable resurgence can be witnessed recently, the experiences with which will be highlighted mainly on the basis of interviews. The broader historical context of the emergence and development of BI will be reconstructed through document analysis: After an account of the emergence of basic income as a social critique in the 1970s and early 1980s (4.1.1.), it is described how the VBI was established as a Dutch BIEN affiliate in 1991 (4.1.2). Next, it is described how the basic income developed from an alternative vision into a policy option, with a peak in 2001 (4.1.3). Finally, the period after 2001 is described through the dramatic decline of this TSI concept after 2001 (4.1.4) and its spectacular resurgence from 2013 until the present. Currently, the BI concept is on the political agenda again in the form of various BI-inspired initiatives for local experimentation with social security. The emergence of MIES as an experimenting initiative can be considered a symbol for a broader wave of pragmatic, experimenting engagement with some BI elements. This development diverges somewhat from VBI’s continuing advocacy for full-fledged basic income (4.1.5).

#### 4.1.1 Emergence of ‘basisinkomen’: Social Critique

The (unconditional) basic income as promoted by BIEN is primarily a socially innovative *idea*, more than a set of concrete objects or actions (see Ch.3). Also in the Netherlands, the BI has been promoted and discussed as a political-philosophical concept and political vision, “entering public debate as an ethically inspired reform proposal” (Groot & van der Veen 2000:145). First describing its development as a social critique, following subsections describe its later translations into objects and actions.

In the Netherlands, ideas similar to the BI have been brought up right after the second World War already. After being discarded in favour of another security system with a greater role of employers (interview Roebroek), it was brought up again in the 1970s. In 1969, MP Willem Scholten from the Christian CHU party asked (unsuccessfully) for an inquiry into Basic Income. (Otjes & Lucardie 2015:1). From 1975 onwards, professor of social medicine J.P. Kuiper develops a morally inspired, protestant social criticism on the ‘merits of disconnecting productive labour and income’. He found inspiration in Robert Theobald’s ‘Free Man and Free Market’ (1963). His critique, more than concrete proposal, found some adhesion amongst intellectuals within the Christian radical Left, in connection with the zero-growth perspective. In 1977, the PPR (Political Party of Radicals), a leftist, post-materialistic political party that later became part of the Green Left party, included the idea in its election program. Initially it did not provide an explanation for the idea, yet elaborations followed in 1981: The Basic Income disconnected from labour would

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liberate people from economical coercion, and would simplify the framework of social security arrangements (Otjes & Lucardie 2015:1).

The Dutch term 'basisinkomen' was coined in the early 1980s, when Philippe van Parijs was developing his seminal work on this 'Freedom for all'. Especially in this period of emergence, the BI concept existed in the form of a social critique – a utopia (Groot & van der Veen 2000b: 147) questioning and countering the ways of doing, organising, framing and knowing that had become dominant in the Dutch social security system and its underlying principles of societal ordering. Several elements of social critique can be distinguished. The Left-wing political factions and union organisations that promoted BI voiced a broad set of interrelated critiques: Economical critiques were the rigidity of social security arrangements and the associated unemployment and poverty traps, social inequality, the taxation system and the resulting excessive labour costs, alienation from work and the difficulty to undertake not-for-profit economic activity (van Ojik 1989:41). Other critiques addressed the 'lifeworld-colonizing' instrumental rationality operations of the welfare state bureaucracy, the systematic incentives towards the male breadwinner model and its subjugation of women (idem:21-22). Particularly strong critique was targeted at the social security arrangements subjecting unemployed individuals to all kinds of control procedures and disciplining into paid labour – even if unemployment had taken on a structural character (see further sections 4.2.2 -4.2.4).

The BI critiques thus articulated a broad set of (interrelated) pathologies of dominant doing organizing, framing and knowing. The critiques proved convincing enough to evoke considerable, detailed political debates. Yet they also met with heavy counter-arguments, even within the political Left: If implemented, BI would lead to erosion of hard-won rights of unemployed and disabled workers, and spell economic disaster through the entailed increase in wages and prices. In 1983, the Labour party PvdA rejected the BI, in line with the position of its allied union organisation (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:148).

Still, as will become evident in the next two subsections, it is striking how the BI concept soon came to find stronger political support – notably also amongst several decidedly not anti-establishment actors.

## 4.1.2 The establishment of VBI

The BI concept emerged in the form of a quite diverse cluster of social critiques. The diverse group of actors that founded the Basic Income Association or Vereniging Basisinkomen (VBI) shows this diversity in a nutshell. It was established in April 1991 by several members of union organisations, benefits claimants' unions, volunteers' organizations and the progressive-confessional political party PPR (one of the constituents of the later Green Left party). Important motivating background was the high unemployment in Western Europe at the time. (VBI 2015a). Yet as the first VBI chair indicated in an interview in 2006, she herself had started considering the BI as a means towards gender equality. To her, the BI would crucially challenge the dominant model of the male breadwinner, keeping women in a dependent position<sup>13</sup>. First, she had found out that a foundation dedicated to BI already existed as a working group founded by several union organisations. That 'Werkplaats Basisinkomen' was founded in 1987, following the governmental decision not to follow up on the WRR (1985) recommendation to introduce a partial BI. Soon she took the initiative to reconstitute that BI initiative, making sure that the newly established VBI

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<sup>13</sup> The aspect of gender equality was also reflected in the official name of VBI: "Vereniging van Vriendinnen en Vrienden van het basisinkomen".

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become an association. That organizational form also allowed individuals to join, beyond the membership through organizations like the FNV working group and the other 13 initiators of 1987 (Boerlage 2007:2/3).

In line with BIEN aims, the VBI was established to promote the unconditional basic income and to have it introduced nationally. In fact, it had been in the wake of the first BIEN congress in 1986, that the precursor of VBI was established. Through that alignment with BIEN, the early VBI approached the BI in scientific fashion. Similar to BIEN, the VBI spawned newsletters (3 per year), “in which a small number of activists showed a remarkable dedication to keep the idea alive” (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:153). VBI and its precursor also held seminars on the economic feasibility of partial BI reforms, on economic effects, and on ethical aspects. Through the specialized researchers amongst its members, VBI was an active participant in the BIEN congresses. They organized a major international BI congress in 1996 and the 7<sup>th</sup> BIEN congress in 1998, and maintained intensive international contacts with researchers and activist organizations. In these early years, various implementation models were developed within VBI, theorizing forms of stepwise implementation and considering the specific taxation schemes through which it could be realized. The aforementioned ‘lean years’ in political acceptance were actually the blossoming years for VBI and its ‘Werkplaats BI’ precursor.

There was a certain optimism. The idea was that the BI would be realized if not tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow. (Boerlage 2007:3)

VBI largely shared the BIEN theory of change (Cf. Section 4.3) that the BI concept should be popularized, gain political support, and then be realized in the form of a wholesale reconstitution of social security. Likewise, it shared the typical BIEN activity of developing elaborate arguments and scientific justifications for BI, and to disseminate those towards the discussion fora of political parties, scientific journals, critical news magazines and newspapers. Still, VBI was also somewhat different from BIEN in its more activist attitude. This speaks from VBI’s strong engagement with oppressed groups, and especially with the recipients of social benefits. In the words of first VBI chair Boerlage, the VBI should aim for having the BI implemented in the Netherlands.

But it should be sufficient to live from. It should be provided on an individual basis, without reduction for cohabitating partners. Currently, people are belittled, and forced into following pointless [redeployment – B.P.] courses. There’s something insincere about the current approach. It mainly benefits the organisations and persons that generate revenues from it. If we take stock of what is currently spent on compulsory training and supervision within the framework of the Labour and Social Benefits Law, we arrive at a very high amount. If we abolish this law, this would create substantial scope, also financially, for a basic income. (Boerlage 2007:5)

VBI is generally considered by both insiders as outsiders as a group of political activists. Through its alignment with BIEN, the early VBI did develop more into an internationally oriented ‘think tank’. Still, the VBI has strong activist roots, and this activism has persisted over time – for better or for worse (see further section 4.1.4 and 4.1.5).

## 4.1.3 From alternative vision to policy option

The BI emerged as a critical, alternative idea. The utopian visions of a new constitution of labour and social security have also come to denote a more concrete set of policy arrangements,

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however. It has become a common term in Dutch political discussions. The VBI and its members have contributed to its significant dispersal, elaborating and materializing the idea into various studies and publications. But the VBI developed within broader societal and political discussions on BI and variations of it. Politicians and independent intellectuals have crucially helped to move BI from the broader societal agenda towards the narrower (and more difficult to penetrate) political agenda. Government-sponsored advisory councils and planning bureaus have been particularly important intermediaries – their forecasting exercises and policy analyses eventually allowed the translation of the BI into concrete policy proposals.

A first sign of political acknowledgement came in 1981, when the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) devoted a separate chapter to the BI in its 'Innovations in the Labour system' report. The report explicitly adopted several of the earlier critiques through which the BI developed (WRR 1981: 219-220). The assessment was quite negative, especially for export and employment effects, but the negative assessment would change in case of continued jobless growth and structural unemployment. In a subsequent socio-economic trend analysis in 1983, the "Policy-oriented Future Scanning" (WRR 1983) the WRR was thus already more convinced of the concept's political relevance – unemployment rates had doubled from 6 to 12% (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:147-148). This is how the WRR came up with a concrete reform proposal by the end of 1985 – somewhat surprisingly, as political support for BI remained limited to minor political factions on the Left. "Safeguarding Social Security" (WRR 1985) brought forward an ingeniously tailored policy package in which a partial basic income was combined with new schemes for general insurance, social assistance and wage-related benefits. In their detailed analysis of the Dutch BI discussion between 1975 and 2001, Groot & van der Veen consider the report as a landmark achievement in the elaboration of the BI concept:

With Safeguarding Social Security, the WRR performed a remarkable piece of social engineering. Addressing the major weaknesses of the Dutch welfare state in the mid-eighties, and taking into account trends such as persistent unemployment at the low end of the labour market, the demise of the traditional breadwinner family, the gloomy prospects of the poverty trap, and the growing informal economy, it came up with an adequate and logically structured new system. (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:150)

The so meticulously designed proposal was almost immediately dismissed, however, as the very many-sidedness of the reform proposal proved to leave it vulnerable to different counts: Cabinet parties had in the meanwhile opted for a rather incremental trajectory of reforms, oppositional parties felt the need to assert their own change programs, and both unions and employers' organisations felt threatened by the implicit dissolution of the traditional Dutch corporate bargaining decision-making. And apart from the unfortunate political timing, the proposal also lacked the quantification of expected economic effects and a principled justification for the so central element of partial BI (idem:152).

Even if only a part of the WRR (1985) proposal, the partial BI element in it served as the 'lightning-rod of popular indignation'. The political shipwreck of the proposal led to 'seven lean years' between 1986 and 1992 in which the political attention nearly disappeared. By contrast, the scientific debate flourished in this period. VBI and in its predecessor were established partly as a reaction to the dramatic dismissal of the WRR (1985) report (see section 4.1.2). Apart from their key role in scientific activism, influential studies were published as commissioned by the Labour Party research centre (de Beer 1988), and the Ministry of Social Affairs (Roebroek & Hoogenboom 1990).

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Again, somewhat surprisingly, the BI reappeared on the political agenda in 1992 through a foresight report by the Central Planning Bureau (CPB), the major governmental forecasting agency. The economic future scenarios in this 'Scanning the Future' report (CPB 1992) articulated convincingly what the Leftist critiques of VBI and others had also tried to bring across: The existing social security system would over time have to adapt to global economic trends, promoting a more dynamic labour market and ecologically sustainable economy. Two years after, the basic income seemed to become a serious policy option indeed, as the social-liberal coalition was converging on social security reforms. Government expenditures would have to be streamlined to qualify for the European Monetary Union, labour participation was to be boosted, and due to a mild recession, the unemployment rates were rising again (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:154-155). Importantly, prominent liberal politicians such as the ministers Zalm (Finance) and Wijers (Economic Affairs) spoke in favour of the basic income concept as it fitted with their visions of a dynamic, entrepreneurial economy and a deregulated, de-cluttered and more efficient system of social security. In 1995 these liberal impulses to the basic income debate led to intensive discussions in the media, anticipating the fundamental consideration of the social security system the cabinet had announced for 1996. No longer promoted only by left-wing factions with limited political weight but also receiving support from politically hegemonic liberal quarters and taken seriously by political commentators in the major newspapers, it can thus be said that basic income had turned from a critical alternative vision to a serious policy option – it gained its place 'on the political menu'.

It is true that the 'option on the menu' was discarded in 1996 in favour of subsidized labour schemes and a broad policy program geared towards employment and insertion of excluded groups into the labour market – an alternative course fervently promoted by Labour. Still, this continuation of the full-employment paradigm was weighed against the alternative of basic income (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:157). Another indication of basic income having gained a firmer position in the political mainstream was what Groot & van der Veen (2000b:157) called the 'pragmatic turn' of basic income. With this turn they indicate that on top of the continuing principled, moral discussion, a more pragmatic, empirical and consequences-oriented debate on basic income developed in the second half of the 1990s. Professional economists and spokespersons of political parties engaged in economically detailed debates about the effects of basic income, not limiting themselves to immediate effects but also theorizing the longer-term transformations that could occur. Somewhat ironically this next level in the debate seems to have brought forward a firmer consensus of the practical limitations of basic income – it would inevitably be either too high or too low to be politically acceptable and economically fruitful -, but that discussion is already addressing the scope for implementation of particular variations of basic income.

## 4.1.4 Decline

After its establishment in 1991 and including the few years before that as initiative residing under the unions' organizations, the VBI enjoyed good times up until the millennium turn. As described above, Dutch politics and media were quite receptive in the 1990s. But after the millennium turn, the VBI had drifted into a period of decline, the former chair reflected in 2007. A fierce headwind had come up from some political quarters, she noticed. And also, more generally, the enthusiasm amongst its members had faded.

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After a number of years, one has just more or less discovered, calculated and pronounced it all.  
(Boerlage 2007: 4)

In 2007, the former chair suggested her VBI successors to just await more favourable political times. Similar sentiments of declining political momentum were voiced at the VBI 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary congress held in 2007 (VBI 2011). What is more, also VBI's own account of its history is clear about declining support from political parties and unions. It mentions how the association 'took to looking across the border, the more Dutch politics were ignoring the basic income' (VBI2015a: 3/4).

A somewhat paradoxical indication of decline was the 2001 tax reform – an event that is tellingly marked in the 'what has been achieved' category of VBI's history (VBI 2015a :3). The tax reform, encompassing a broad range of shifts in taxation, included a personal refundable tax credit of about 1500 EU per year for adult residents. As part of a broader tax shift it is difficult to identify the overall cumulative shifts, but there are two shifts in the taxation approach that are clearly in the spirit of the basic income. First, the refundable tax credit implies an unconditional income entitlement. Second, it moves in the direction of individual rather than household income entitlements, which has always been promoted as a cornerstone of the basic income concept. Groot & van der Veen (2000b:161-162) tellingly describe this basic income-oriented element of the tax reform as the implementation of basic income 'by stealth', i.e. not under that name but implicitly.

So, even though the motives behind the proposed tax reform have little to do with the principled emancipatory or justice-oriented motivations that advocates of basic income usually deploy, the government is well on the way to conceding that a basic income-type scheme is at least part of a rational method for attaining fiscal individualization, a flexible and dynamic labour market, and a decent minimum income security for all. However, this concession is entirely implicit, since in defending the proposal, the social-liberal coalition has kept studiously silent about the fact that the measure entails an unconditional income. (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:162).

So even if the 'introduction by stealth' could be interpreted as a feat for basic income advocates, it simultaneously revealed how the newly emerged option on the political menu' (see 4.1.3) no longer could not be politically 'sold' under that banner by 2001. As BI experts Groot & van der Veen (2006) warned VBI in 2006, this political aversion to the concept also implied that what was introduced 'through the back door' could easily be shed through that same door.

The apparent feat of the 2001 tax reform can thus also be seen to indicate how the basic income had started to politically die out. The economical rise starting in the later 1990s is generally considered an important factor for BI's disappearance from the political agenda and broader societal debate. In the economic upswing of the first decade of the new millennium, the broad societal discussions on fundamental responses to structural unemployment faded, and the basic income debate became mainly confined to incidental appearances in progressive-left wing think tanks and discussion platforms. In a way, the earlier move from critique and alternative vision to 'option on the political menu' was made in opposite direction.

The period of decline spanned a long period between 1997 and 2012. During that period, VBI could not prevent the basic income from near-disappearing from the political menu – yet a longstanding VBI member does point out that it crucially 'kept the peat fire burning', through sustained website and newsletter activities and continued existence as a platform and memory for the concept. The wind to incite the peat fire gained force again from 2008 onwards, in the form of the global economic crisis and the ensuing rise in unemployment.

The economic crisis did not immediately translate in a resurgence of the VBI, however. Tellingly, the current chair and the vice-chair describe in 2015 how VBI is in a way only just

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beginning – despite its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The first joining in 2009 and the latter only just after the 2012 BIEN congress in Munich, they found the association in a dire state<sup>14</sup>. Whereas the website had been suggesting a certain continuity, there was little activity taking place beyond that. Moreover, there was little development in their basic income advocacy, a lack of organisation, and altogether little willingness of members to act on and confront the plans and decisions taken at meetings:

Then it became evident that the board had actually entered a kind of pioneering phase. Whereas the association as such had had 25 years (22 at the time) of existence already, it was nonetheless in need again of being revitalized. The dynamics had faded – even if the website manager had been keeping things going a little, over these years. (Gielingh, 2)

The chair found out soon enough that it was most difficult to arrive at the clear and concrete proposal that he hoped to present to the politicians. In 2013 a proposal was presented at the VBI annual meeting, but they remained far from reaching consensus on it.

In no time ten counter-proposals came up. It was a chaotic mess. We didn't come to resolving it, also as everybody was just that convinced of being in the right. (Planken, 1-2)

Both VBI chair and vice chair recall good experiences with the UBIE civic petition campaign, though. From mid 2012 onwards they had started working on it, lasting until January 2014. In the process, their contacts with BI advocates abroad intensified, and they learnt about experiences with organizing basic income advocacy elsewhere. This is how they came to renew their website communications, and to set up local basic income groups ('basisteam's', see further section 4.3.3) as ways for members to develop their own initiatives. Another deliberate change was their move away from the rather academic course that VBI had been going since its inception. Since 2011 they have taken a more practical course, also adopting a more 'emotive, creative and artistic' way of communicating that is more appealing to young people (Planken, 13)<sup>15</sup>. More generally, the chair considers it an important challenge to unite the various initiatives that somehow converge on societal transformations related or similar to BI. Such alignments and joining of forces through a platform would also help to mitigate the aversions against the VBI. Both chair and vice-chair are aware of a VBI legacy that has developed, namely the image of a radical-activist group.

In the eyes of many, the association is still a barricade movement... [a group of] radical guys. That deters people. (Planken, 14)

And even now, after 25 years, we still encounter reactions like 'Ah, that's that group of activists' – in the sense of 'and I don't want to have anything to do with those', or inversely, 'and that's what I was looking for'. So, we're left with a particular image, and it's an image that's not always favourable to us. (Gielingh, 20/21)

Still, the chair is modest about the above efforts to revitalize and rejuvenate VBI. He considers it of only relative importance for the greater cause of BI advocacy, especially compared to the major impact made recently by the independent writer Rutger Bregman. Through the latter's book

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<sup>14</sup> See further section 4.3.1 -4.3.2 on 'regaining a sense of agency'.

<sup>15</sup> The videoclip by Pharaos & Yara (2014) called 'the Good Life' is a clear example of this less academic, more emotive-artistic way of communicating. The artists express some key messages about basic income in the song.



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publication (Bregman 2014a) and public talks (Bregman 2014b) on the ‘Money for Free’<sup>16</sup>, a small media storm broke out that had basic income en vogue again as a fresh, counter-intuitive but promising concept. In the last few years VBI thus experienced a steep augmentation of membership, from 135 in 2012 to 500 in August 2015 (Planken, 5). The book publication was one factor, but another indication that something was in the air were the various initiatives towards basic income experimentation. Having joined VBI after it had had years of decline, he readily admitted how this turn of events took him somewhat by surprise:

Why all these initiatives towards ‘experiments with basic income’ suddenly started to pop up like mushrooms all over the country, it’s a bit of a mystery to me. We, the VBI, had nothing to do with them. We didn’t have an influence on it, and were even not maintaining contacts with the people. There were quite some individually operating people who wanted to undertake something. We saw it happening, and said, ‘do what you want, it’s only a good thing that the basic income is brought under the attention’. We ourselves, we stick to our story with the four criteria, which, we consider, a full-fledged basic income should be meeting. (Planken, 3-4)

## 4.1.5 Resurgence: MIES and the social security experiments

Around 2011, a few new members rose to the challenge of revitalizing VBI (see previous section). But as they indicate themselves, the long period of decline for the basic income discussion only came to a halt through some unforeseen events from the end of 2013 onwards – notably the publication of the well-received and compellingly written book Bregman (2014a). Between the end of 2013 –when Bregman’s ‘Money for Free’ came out as an article - and the time of writing (early 2016), there is a clear resurgence of the basic income as a transformative social innovation concept. Crucially, there are other actors next to VBI who have started to advocate the concept - or parts of it. In the following it is described how various actors joined the basic income propagation process, converging onto basic income inspired experimentation – and how MIES emerged as a ‘local initiative’<sup>17</sup> next to and different from VBI.

In 2014 a second Dutch UBI-initiative came up, next to VBI. MIES (‘enterprise for Innovation Economy and Society’, see [mieslab.nl](http://mieslab.nl)) can be considered a key player in and an exemplar for the recent peak of attention and support for BI in the last two years. They have attracted much attention for their crowd-sourced basic income, and have played a key role in the recent wave of BI-inspired experimentation with social security arrangements. MIES was founded in the summer of 2014 by a few critical, innovation-minded individuals in Groningen, a middle-sized city in the north of the Netherlands. Most of them worked as self-employed entrepreneurs, doing all kinds of not-for-profit activities on the side. A few of them had a radio show in which various actual and possible future societal changes were discussed. As the basic income concept came up, their current chair was invited for an interview on his earlier research and experimenting with it (Schepen aan de Horizon 2014). One thing that they converged on soon enough, was that the BI concept kept lacking transformative impact for being presented only as an abstract idea.

So, I started talking about it with some people here in Groningen, with the audience of the radio show, with some other enterprising people, and they often said: “Yes, you have a point there, but then again...a nice idea, that basic income, but how do you know if it works?” [...] Well, one can have long conversations about that, and think up a whole lot of issues. All very nice, but why wouldn’t we just

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<sup>16</sup> An expression that alliterates particularly well in Dutch: ‘Gratis geld’

<sup>17</sup> See our methodological approach to focus on local initiatives and on BIEN as transnational network.

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have a look whether it can be experimented with? Maybe that was just a bit in the entrepreneur's nature – if you think something is good, you're inclined towards trying it out. (Mulder, 1)

Further talking about BI and its benefits would only strand in ideological debates and entrenched positions (Mulder 2014). They therefore sought to engender a more fruitful discussion by translating the idea into action (MIES 2015a). This led them to contact the German pioneer Bohmeyer (see Chapter 5 on basic income in Germany) and follow his initiative towards crowd-funding of basic incomes for individuals<sup>18</sup>. This would not only set a concrete example, the MIES chairman indicated, it would also substantiate how such social innovation need not depend on government:

Yes, I've always said so: it is a marketing strategy. First, people in the Netherlands are always claiming, "yeah, that basic income is just an idea, it is an illusion". I said, "we're just going to realize it, and from then on we'll at least be talking about something factual. And then politicians are all welcome to come claiming that it has all kinds of limitations – that's all fine, but it is really out there. "And, second, we're also demonstrating to government that we're actually not needing them to achieve social innovations. We can do it in another way, by appealing to societal solidarity. The crowd-funding, that is of course something that is brought forth by societal solidarity. (Roebroek, 8)

By May 2015, Frans Kerver was the first Dutchman to enjoy a basic income through MIES' 'my basic income' initiative. He was selected as MIES front image (boegbeeld) for his various community-building and individuals' empowerment activities undertaken from his urban horticulture centre (tuin in de stad 2015). Through self-recorded accounts of his experiences and the 'our basic income' website (Onsbasisinkomen), he was to convey 'what he did with the money - and what the money did with him'. Also beyond the self-created stream of public exposure, this first Dutch basic income pioneer attracted considerable media attention (e.g. NRC 2015). The Dutch series of critical television documentaries VPRO Tegenlicht (2015), 'backlight' or 'counter-perspective', casted Kerver amidst a broader movement of other basic income related experiments, elsewhere and earlier in the world. The documentary series brought out most concretely and visually how the unconditional 1000 euros a month allowed him to sustain various well-considered, socially beneficial but generally not marketable activities – rather than the lapse into passivity often expected by BI sceptics. His alternative urban horticulture/community centre/tinkering free zone visualized how the theoretical 'uncoupling of work and income' could practically yield all kinds of meaningful work. His personal experience also allowed to articulate the theorized but not very communicable social advantages of individuals enjoying income security – or rather the hidden costs of insecurity:

What I'm starting to experience now myself, is that when I'm feeling stressed about money, that I'm regarding the world in a wholly different way... that I'm much more distrustful, that I'm much more easily inclined to 'pigeon-hole' people...that thoughts enter my mind like, 'yeah, yeah, that's easy to say for you, with that income of yours...' or things like that. It [income insecurity-B.P.] makes you look at the people in your surroundings in a quite dismal way. (Tegenlicht 2015: 24")

Through their 'our basic income' project, MIES distanced themselves from the VBI approach to promoting the BI. After all, the VBI had long been engaging in the ineffective 'mere talk' that MIES rejected. Even if sympathizing with the VBI individuals and their principled approach, and appreciating that they had both their own roles to play at the basic income discussion meetings at

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<sup>18</sup> That crowd-funding can itself be considered socially innovative, for its deviation from the state-led transformation path (see section 4.3 on agency).

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which they were both increasingly appearing, MIES members kept their distance. Considering VBI as a group of 'believers', MIES' mission was rather to *explore* the BI as but one direction for transformative change. To MIES, VBI represented in a way 'an earlier generation' of activism with its strategic focus on representative democracy (Mulder, 5). Moreover, they felt that VBI lacked well-developed ideas on the possible *implementation* of their ideas. What was lacking in particular, according the VBI chair, was an acquaintance with the concrete developments in local-level politics (Roebroek, 18/19). Also, more generally, beyond VBI, the basic income advocacy had this longstanding disconnect with policy practice:

On the local level, one is of course confronted with the fact that there is increasing numbers of people on the dole and in other welfare schemes as well. In Groningen it's [...], and the local administrators are surely aware that in that regional context, whatever one does, this number of people won't be helped into employment. [...] Any action will have to start at the local level. That's what's happening now, which is hugely different from what happened in the 1980s. Back then, the basic income was actually an idea that was still confined in the heads of researchers [and dispersed over some smaller organisations B.P.]. In any case, it wasn't anchored in politics, and surely not in local politics, and that is the great difference. (Roebroek, 7)

Beyond their own crowd-funded BI initiative, MIES sought to promote BI-inspired experimentation more broadly – with local-level governments as key allies. In August 2014, they organized a well-frequented kick-off meeting in Groningen, using the blossoming cultural summer festival as a platform. The meeting gathered longstanding BI researchers, a few politicians from national political parties, VBI members, the Groningen alderman from Social Affairs, and also managed to attract a broader public. The issue was not only to discuss what basic income could bring and lead to, but also how it could be experimented with (Mieslab 2014a). Soon after, by the end of November 2014, MIES followed up with an expert meeting on the development of BI-inspired experiments. The expert workshop featured a respectable group of researchers and was opened by the Groningen alderman (MIESlab 2014b). Also, that meeting in Groningen was captured in one of the earlier-mentioned VPRO Tegenlicht ('backlight') documentaries. These critical, transformation-oriented documentary makers became important allies. Not only did they produce these influential documentaries, they also organized 'meet-ups' for interested viewers to discuss these broadcasts - first only in Amsterdam, but soon expanding onto a multitude of regional cities (see for example VPRO Tegenlicht meetup 2015). The VPRO also invited BIEN champion Guy Standing for an enthusing speech, and the workshop also led to the establishment of a scientific committee of recommendation - the VBI had stressed the importance of both these measures to increase the credibility and status of the meeting. Eventually, that committee remained a formal reality however. The more enduring result from the workshop was the formation of a small group around MIES, who started crafting guidelines for small-scale BI-inspired experimentation.

Apart from MIES, that small group also featured a like-minded social innovation initiative in Tilburg (MOM 2015), a researcher including the project into his dissertation, and the 'enterprising idealist' Sjir Hoeijmakers who had managed to have himself crowd-funded to become a key policy entrepreneur for the sake of BI-inspired experimentation (Hoeijmakers 2015). Hoeijmakers had become interested in BI through a leaflet on the UBIE European civic petition for BI (see section 4.1.4) and Bregman (2014a) on 'Money for Free'. As he joined the VBI, he found out that he mainly wanted to clarify the BI concept and experiment with it, more than advocate it. Just having finished his econometric studies and confident in his professional future, he chose to first pursue his fascination for alternative economies and BI in particular. Initially proceeding his explorations on the basis of savings, he managed to have himself crowdfunded to support his activities. Quite soon,

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his supporting work for the various plans for BI-inspired experimentation became a full-time occupation.

As he reconstructs it, the recent wave of BI-inspired experimentation rests on a broad actor coalition that grew through several key events. First of all, there was the attention raised by the 'Money for Free' publication by the end of 2013. The term with its high shock value was soon taken up by the critical documentary makers of VPRO. He himself, members from MIES and VBI and other BI-experts were often invited to speak at the VPRO meet-ups, and this is how the first contacts developed. The Groningen expert meeting in November 2014 was an early landmark for this emerging network. A next breakthrough event was the meeting they held in Tilburg, early 2015. This meeting targeted not researchers, but rather the parties that were able and willing to organize experiments, and in the first place municipalities. The organizers wanted to provide advice, secure sufficient learning potential in the experimental set-ups, and prevent municipalities from 'going about reinventing the wheel' (Hoeijmakers, 1). MIES published a brief note on their website, outlining 'six concrete proposals for local experiments within the Participation Act' (MIESlab 2015b). The crucial challenge was to see how their envisioned experiments with the administration of social security benefits could be fitted in with this newly introduced policy framework. The various plans for BI-inspired experiments on the municipal level had in common that they explore the unconditional aspect of the basic income concept. Considering that the control procedures put on benefits recipients were proving ineffective at activating them (into paid jobs), governments of various municipalities had taken to explore the scope for experimentation. The self-appointed experimentation brokers found out that municipalities were moving at different speeds in different directions, though – some mediation between their local plans and the national-level policy framework would be indispensable.

And it was a fruitful meeting. Municipalities were in different development stages, it is true. For some municipalities, there was already a civil servant charged with elaboration – Utrecht was well ahead, for example. In other municipalities, it was a matter of a few council members who found it interesting and considered taking it up in one way or another. Well, the result was that we agreed that we'd like to have a deliberation on it with the Secretary of State to discuss what could be done, and decided to jointly send a letter about it to the Secretary of State – jointly, or as organizers of the meeting. Because, otherwise the Secretary would end up being confronted by it for each and every municipality separately. Somebody from the Ministry of Social Affairs was present, somebody from Interior Affairs, there was somebody from the social security services, the national-level management.... So, we had a broadly scoped approach. A little network had been formed, and we went on to consider how to take it further. (Hoeijmakers, 4)

After approaching the ministry of Social Affairs, it did take some time for the responsible Secretary of State to respond. One complicating factor seemed to have been the difficult balance between Labour and the conservative liberals' party, of which especially the latter seemed not at all in favour of the experimenting (Hoeijmakers, 3). Still, much proved to depend as well on the particular affinities of individual civil servants. Some were very innovation oriented, whilst others were more inclined to remain close to the Participation Act framework and its apparently little scope for experimentation. This willingness-to-deviate he considered to pose a second, quite elusive factor (idem, 4).

Meanwhile, the member congresses of the environmentalists, progressive democrats and Labour had all passed motions in favour of BI experimentation between November 2014-January 2015, despite aversions to BI-related agendas amongst their political leaders (Hoeijmakers 13/14). Moreover, individual municipalities kept pursuing their agendas of innovation in local governance, in which the experimentation plans were often embedded. Whether originating from aldermen,

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civil servants or council members, the ideas to explore alternative social security arrangements gained ground. As some gathered the internal political-administrative support needed and developed contacts with universities to discuss concrete experimental set-ups, a group of 'frontrunner' municipalities emerged. These local governments from four middle-sized cities (Nijmegen, Tilburg, Utrecht and Groningen) entered into negotiations with the responsible Secretary of State just before the summer of 2015. By September 2015, the responsible Secretary of State seemed reluctant to take the diverse experimentation proposals further, but by then the proposals had already gained political traction. In the first week of November 2015, the Dutch parliament passed a motion that urged the Secretary of State of Social Affairs to allow for diversity in experimentation set ups, and to allow not only the four 'frontrunner' municipalities but also a broader group of municipalities some discretion within the 'experimentation clause' to shape their own experiments (Tweede Kamer 2015).

The parliamentary motion provided group the 'frontrunner' municipalities with political leverage. As the awaited decision from the Secretary of State had still not taken place a few months later, the environmentalist MPs that initiated the motion followed up by an appeal in a national newspaper on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 (Voortman & Groot Wassink 2016). As one of the involved 'frontrunner' aldermen indicated in November 2015, the time had come for the national and local level governments to negotiate the precise scope for experimentation. He was keen to underline how the municipality's proposals for 'tailored unemployment benefits' had been developed through participative 'Change Labs'. In other words, they carried a particular democratic legitimacy that the Secretary of State better take into account with her decision on the experimentation plans.

And that's the phase in which we find ourselves now – how much scope do we have within that experimentation clause, and is that sufficient for establishing something that we can be enthusiastic about. Some action about which - and that's something I also pointed out to the Secretary of State – also the people in the Change Labs, and the people from MIES, can say, 'Look, something is really going to happen'. Because, if everybody is left with the feeling that nothing substantial is undertaken, then it is all a bit pointless. (Gijsbertsen, 8)

The account of the emergence and development of the basic income thus ends with a set of proposals towards basic income inspired experimentation that is to be decided upon in Spring 2016. Compared with the decided decline in the attention for basic income during the first decade of 2000, the resurgence in the basic income social innovation process is nonetheless remarkable. The next section goes deeper into the underlying interactions between the actors involved: *How do the proponents of BI (and BI-inspired experimentation) interact with the society that they seek to change? How does the concept fit in with dominant institutions?*

## 4.2 TSI dynamics of basic income in the Netherlands

As described in section 4.1, the basic income has become a well-known option on the welfare state policy menu. The option had been left nearly entirely abandoned however, before its rapid resurgence from the end of 2013 onwards. The Dutch societal-political support for BI displays an alternation of rise and decline, somewhat reminiscent of innovation 'hype cycles'. ***Why is that so? How do the social innovation and the SI-initiatives interact with/contribute to transformative change in its social context? Which are the major actors, organisations, regulations, social***

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***norms and societal developments that are targeted for change, and - inversely- shape the uptake of the basic income concept?*** These questions are answered in the next 6 subsections. These address transformative potentials and ambitions (4.2.1), the changing societal circumstances (4.2.2), the ways in which basic income clashes with dominant institutions (4.2.3) but also is in line with many of them (4.2.4), the many side effects that are perceived apart from these clashes and alignments (4.2.5), and finally the changing interactions of basic income advocates with an altogether not very receptive society (4.2.6).

## 4.2.1 High transformative potential, limited impact

The basic income has a great transformative potential. This is why initiatives like VBI and MIES promote it, but it equally explains some of the aversions against it in broader society (see section 4.2.3). As described earlier, the VBI has adopted most of the BIEN views on BI as an alternative constitution of social security. Through its roots in the Dutch social critiques of the 1970s and 1980s, it has become particularly attentive to the transformative potentials for gender equality and employment policy. A further distinct trait of VBI as a social innovation initiative is its moral line of argument: In their advocacy for new ways of organizing social security and moral-ethical transformations, they often refer to basic income entitlements and rights.

I prefer to talk about it in terms of a social, or societal, dividend. It was largely our ancestors, who made it possible for us to have all this current wealth. So how can it be that the profits of that accrue to only the few? That can't be the case. Everyone contributes his part. Surely the one can have a bit more than the other, that's not such a problem...but not at current proportions [of inequality-BP]. (Gielingh, 12)

From 1800 onwards, as the Industrial Revolution took off, an unbalanced development of society has taken place. It has been focused near exclusively on money, profits, and therewith, power. The human aspect of development has been left completely out of consideration. (Planken, 11)

As underlined by MIES chairman Roebroek, the BI involves not only a fundamental change in the particular policy frameworks through which welfare entitlements are governed, but also a broader paradigmatic change in the very constituting principles of the welfare state. Referring to his earlier publication on it (Roebroek & Hoogenboom 1991), he observes that the latter broader paradigm change is still too often neglected in BI discourse – even by its proponents.

Our book at the time was named “Alternative welfare entitlements or new paradigm?”. I've always remained an advocate of that paradigmatic understanding, underlining how the basic income impinges on the very institutional order structuring society. The basic income is not about money. In the Netherlands that is a bit of the disturbing aspect of that – an excellent intervention, by the way – book by Rutger Bregman. But his concept of ‘Money for Free’ is quite a burden for the idea of the basic income. I always use a sociological definition of the basic income, which is about creating the room [opportunities] for citizens to make a contribution to society on the basis of whatever talents and skills they have... (Roebroek, 6)

Also within his MIES group they had some tough discussion on the precise goals that their ‘our basic income’ experiment was to achieve. To some members, the efforts towards and realization of crowdfunded basic incomes to individuals were the essence of MIES activities. Others (like himself) considered the crowd-funding initiative rather as a marketing or publicity tool – an

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element in a broader ambition to evoke critical discussion, experimentation, and small steps towards societal transformations.

Apart from the different emphases laid on its particular transformative potentials, little of these potentials have materialized however. VBI's advocacy for full-fledged BI has hardly managed to mobilize political support for the desired national-level reforms. Likewise, even if there are substantial indications that the plans are gaining political support, it yet remains to be seen what impact the recent initiatives towards BI-inspired experiments will have in the end. On the other hand, the basic can be seen to have made an impact as an ideologically influential and indeed 'persistent' idea (Otjes & Lucardie 2015). As described in section 4.1.3, it did become an option on the political menu, and has become a common reference in Dutch political life. As such it has arguably helped to shape other changes in the Dutch social security system, such as subsidized labour or the 2001 tax reform - which may have appeared as lesser transformative evils. According to a longstanding VBI member and basic income researcher, the inclusion of basic income in official advisory reports (see section 4.1.3) has been an important counterfactual example for challenging the "There Is No Alternative" understanding of the welfare system. Yet, that alternative was generally used as an argumentative ploy to pave the way for other, less radical proposals:

So, it may have been that the CPB [planning bureau] included it in their analysis as knew the concept to hold sway in Dutch society. Yet what can be observed as well, when reading these reports in which the CPB discusses simulations of basic income, is that they always use it as a kind of stepping stone...saying, 'so, this is what we should not opt for, this is not optimal, this is not according to optimal taxation theory insights the best policy to pursue', so, they always use that basic income to demonstrate that...well, not that the economy will completely collapse, but, 'well, there are some others measures that we can take'...like labour subsidies, child care facility arrangements, and that kind of measures. (Groot, 4)

In fact, considering the combination of high transformative potentials and limited impacts, most actors involved seem to agree that the advocacy for a full-fledged BI has little prospects for substantial impacts – at least where institutional implementation is concerned. Hence the recently emerging turn towards practicable ways of introducing some elements of BI's many alternative knowings, framings organizing and doings – re-inventing and translating its utopian-critical roots (section 4.1.1). One of the 'frontrunner' aldermen is quite outspoken about his pragmatic approach. He wants to avoid being bogged down in ideological discussions, and instead pursue the most relevant and applicable transformative potentials of BI in the here and now:

To reinstate my point, I don't find the debate about basic income very helpful. It's really too narrow. So, I try a bit to stay out of it. As it's simply not yielding anything. Let's just start out from where the energy can be found, from where steps can be made... and in terms of contents the approach is perhaps a bit more practical: What is it, concretely, what we will be doing differently? And then one could once again go about making propaganda for a new system, and urge to gave the current system supplanted by a new system, - but it strikes me a bit as an old-fashioned approach. Just let it take its course! And let the municipalities experiment with different variants. And do not immediately approach it with the stamp of approval, as something to support or to be against. That is also the debate I would like to have in our party: What are the things that we can still think up together? How could things be done differently? Instead of developing a new sacred model, that at the end of the day has many people return home dissatisfied. (Gijsbertsen, 12)

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## 4.2.2 Changing tides for BI

The time line and the account of basic income development (section 4.1) are somewhat suggestive of a 'hype cycle' Several analysts explain it through the economic cycle and the associated changing unemployment rates (e.g. Otjes & Lucardie 2015). In times of high unemployment, the institutional arrangements geared towards full employment are typically becoming under a cloud. And accordingly, alternatives like the BI gain interest. MIES chairman Roebroek broadens this analysis somewhat, indicating that radical concepts like BI come forward as alternatives through *various* welfare system tensions.

So, the current policy arrangements is still firmly founded on an institutional ordering, but that institutional order is increasingly becoming disconnected from what is actually happening in the social and economic spheres, and in the labour market and so on. That amounts to an enormous set of forces. If things like that happen, and that can also be observed in history, dynamics emerge that render transformation a more likely outcome, and make it gain traction. To me that is also the explanation – and now we're talking about the present again – for why that basic income has come up in the Netherlands over the last year...in a variety of societal sectors one sees that the old system, well, it's not that it doesn't work at all but it displays hitches, and moreover, in many cases it has the effects of putting a brake on developments, and of creating barriers. (Roebroek, 3)

Indeed, as described in section 4.1.1, the social critiques through which BI emerged in the Netherlands have articulated a variety of structural tensions and societal developments that made it a salient alternative. Examples are the aversions to the increasingly alienating and disciplining practices of the welfare bureaucracy, the politicization of the work-life imbalances, the gender-political emancipation from the male-breadwinner model, and the concerns over the unsustainable development of consumption society. As the VBI vice chair reflects on the Dutch context in comparison to that in developing countries, he indicates that the security about basic needs is not main issue in the Dutch basic income discussion. Instead, the Dutch interest in BI rather seems to stem from dissatisfaction with the patronizing, disciplining operations of the bureaucratized welfare system.

The basic income developments as they take place in India, in Namibia and in Brazil, they have really emerged out of another kind of motivations. There you had a different kind of misery that is of a more essential nature...so it is there that you had this development of cash transfer systems, other than in the Netherlands or in Europe, where the poverty is only relative. Here the key issue that incites the thinking about alternatives is rather that regulation pressure, the meddlesome attitude of the government towards citizens. (Gielingh, 25)

Another development in the Dutch context that is often referred to as a justification of BI is the structural nature of unemployment. As mentioned earlier, several analysts explain the attention cycles of BI through the mass unemployment in economical downswing periods. Yet the concerns about structural unemployment have been recently reinforced through the (again) growing public awareness that the Dutch economy will soon be revolutionized through a profound 'robotisation' of labour. The latter development features prominently in the discourse of MIES and other newly entering actors through which BI is resurging (Cf. Bregman 2014b and Tegenlicht 2014 in section 4.1.5). In his typically scientific argumentation for BI, the MIES chairman underlines the decisive significance of this major economic transformation – an already emerging reality that is neglected through the still widely persisting preoccupation with full employment:



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'What will become of us, once people are no longer obliged to do paid labour? Society will completely run aground'. Every entrepreneur or any academic researcher involved with technology and ICT with whom I have conversations about this, they all laugh at this [line of thinking]. They think, 'well, just let government persist in that story, but we know better, and we have moved on'. Entrepreneurs themselves don't believe anymore in that story – even if government always claims to speak on behalf of, or in the interest of, industry and entrepreneurs. (Roebroek, 11)

Still, these anticipations of a robotized and labour-scarce society seem not to be the key motivating background for the recent resurgence of BI. Even it demonstrably provided analytical force and ideological persuasiveness to the much-broadcasted 'Money for Free' storyline, this visionary, future-oriented account of societal developments was not that decisive. For the municipalities aiming for BI-inspired experimentation, the key development that triggered them into experimental action rather seems to have been the inertia and failing of national government. The recent decentralization of unemployment benefits administration through the Participation Act were considered to reveal a failure to relate to the challenges of social security and unemployment as they are experienced on the ground. A VBI member and basic income researcher pointed out that the devolution entailed a shift of administrative burdens and financial liabilities that evoked very practically and financially motivated searches for ways out of the administrative squeeze – the municipalities were simply facing complicated and costly executive tasks of which it was uncertain to what extent the lump sums from national government would cover them (Groot, 11/12). But also on a more principled account, the decentralizing policy change left local administrators and citizens wondering how the system of extensive controls and incitation towards paid labour related to the complex realities of unemployment challenges. The sudden rise of initiatives towards BI-inspired experimentation had thus everything to do with the recalibration of the relations between local-level and national-level government. One of the 'frontrunner' aldermen clearly understands the experimentation initiatives as moves in a broader game of adapting government to a changing society:

National-level government is of course hopelessly running behind on matters like citizen participation and societal changes. In municipalities and especially the bigger municipalities, administrations are closely observing these changes, and trying to find solutions that fit them. Comparing all the coalition agreements coming out of the latest [local-level –BP] elections, then it's all about 'different government', and related things. We have all understood that we can't go on like that – admittedly, [smiles], apart from the issue of what these novelties will eventually deliver. And that approach, on the national level one is very far from removed from that – there one has pushed through the institutionalization to such a heavy extent...and then where Social Affairs and Labour Affairs is concerned, that is a particularly exemplary case of course. So, there is this distance regarding the societal changes...consider also the decentralization in Health care policy, which brings us as municipal organization that much closer to the people – something I find really a good thing-, and which enables us to bring things together in their personal lives that really make a difference...that poses a very stark contrast with the way in which the national-level operates up until today. That tension, you see it manifesting continuously. [...] The Hague [residence of Dutch national-level government-BP], on the one hand they decentralize, on the other hand they don't dare to let go... (Gijssbertsen, 11)

## 4.2.3 BI and its clash with dominant institutions, interests and norms

The transformative potential of BI can be considered huge - especially in relation to the limited transformative impacts it has had (section 4.2.1). This discrepancy has much to do with the

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multiple frictions it has with dominant institutions, interests and norms. The involved actors only differ in their assessments of which friction counts most.

One crucial friction that has become evident already, is the divergence from the institutional architecture Dutch welfare system. The substantial collection of future scenarios, policy advice reports, failed policy proposals and the intensive debate on those brings forward a large complex of implementation cul-de-sacs, financing gaps and controllability issues (see section 4.1.3). The multitude of arguable (but not measurable and controllable) unintended consequences (see further section 4.2.4) exacerbates the difficulty to fit in even partial BI schemes with the complex and matured welfare system of the Netherlands. One major institutional friction resides in the enormous reorganisation of financial flows entailed with a shift to a BI-based social security system. The economic justification and calculation of policy proposals carries particularly heavy political weight in the Netherlands – something crucially neglected in the otherwise WRR (1985) proposal, as indicated by Groot & van der Veen (2000b:152, see section 4.1.3). A MIES member expressed how he is willing to engage in a debate in economic terms only up to a point, as this easily reproduces the too narrow and outdated framings and knowings in which the merits of BI cannot be articulated (Roebroek, 16/17). Also, VBI has long persisted in its confrontations with dominant procedures of macro-economic modelling, but kept running into the altogether unfavourable model assumptions of the leading economic planning institutes CBS and CPB.

CBS [Central Bureau of Statistics] and CPB [Central Planning Bureau] aren't getting very far with their models. As they just can't calculate the side effects and the cumulative effects on housing policy for example...people will be making decisions to go live together, or to divorce, yielding large demographic shifts also impacting on housing policy. But there's also effects like reduced domestic violence – once there is no longer this economic dependence on the other, there will be lesser grounds to go abuse the other. (...) So, that reduction of Health care costs, that's something incalculable. It's just incalculable – also reduced crime rate is something incalculable. All these experiments show it will happen. But well, how will that turn out in the case of the Netherlands? They're things that can't be calculated by CPB. So, that discussion about the models, it keeps stagnating on that point. We'd appreciate getting into contact about it with people from CPB, sure we do. (Gielsing, 29/30)

Major frictions are involved with full-fledged BI implementation, the discussions on the economic model outcomes bring out. But the institutionalization challenges become even apparent already through the much less drastic proposals for BI-inspired experiments and their alternative ways of administering unemployment benefits. MIES' chairman explains that the Dutch provision of unemployment benefits is very remote from the BI approach of providing unconditional income. These entitlements are firmly anchored in a system of monitoring and enforcement, in order to activate benefits recipients into acceptance of paid work. Especially in its most recent 'Participation Act' version, the national policy framework hardly allows for local initiatives towards more lenient and trust-based approaches:

For example, at one point the Arnhem municipality [a middle-sized Dutch city] announced that they would no longer be demanding the demonstration of job-seeking activity, and check whether this condition of 'return effort' has been met. Well, they have immediately been summoned to withdraw, on turn back to the policy framework – and there was the threat of administrative fines. So, there is that odd situation in which it is claimed on the one hand that things will be decentralized, and that municipalities will have their own responsibilities to fulfil, whilst on the other hand there are these overarching considerations that create fears of letting go. (Roebroek, 7)

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As one of the ‘frontrunner’ aldermen recalls, their first proposal for experimentation with less conditional unemployment benefits evoked quite some debate in the municipality council. Especially the benefits recipients’ freedom to generate additional income proved to be a controversial topic. What also struck him were the principled arguments against experimentation with specific sub-groups: The leniency granted to some, would basically amount to unfair treatment of those remaining under the prevailing conditions. He came to realize that deviation from the rules, even if only in the form of an experiment, would indeed easily challenge such principles of equality and fairness:

The main sources of resistance related to the issue of unlimited scope for generation of additional income. And there were just a few valid points being raised. And people said, ‘isn’t that taking things a bit too far? Shouldn’t some maximum be introduced? To allow for more scope is nice, but unlimited, that’s really extreme...’ And there’s of course truth in all that – but underneath it there is the quite fundamental debate that arose, in that commission debate, on the issue of what we are actually considering fair here. That’s a debate I find interesting to have- also in society. (Gijsbertsen, 5)

Considerations of equality, fairness and uniformity also seem to have played a part in the difficulty for the Ministry of Social Affairs to fit in the various local-level initiatives towards experiments with the Participation Act experimentation clause. The lenient ‘unconditional’ income aspect was politically controversial, and the apparent nibbling at the newly introduced national policy framework did amount to certain ‘implementation problems’. Moreover, there was also the procedural difficulty that the Act was first of all made to *regulate*, more than to guide experimentation. Apart from political controversy and considerations of smooth administrative implementation, there was also the procedural-technical difficulty of finding out what actual experimenting would be possible within the experimentation clause. The civil servants of one of the ‘frontrunner’ municipalities could find detailed descriptions of formal discretions, the alderman recalled, but they had a difficult time in finding out how their basically different approach could be fitted in with national policy.

Public servants in our organisation indicated that they encountered a mechanic’s approach in that experimentation clause, rather than an inventor’s approach. In that experimentation clause, it is possible to pull some switches, here and there. Yet when it is about an entirely different systemic approach, premised on placing the individual centre stage and considering from there what arrangements are needed to empower that individual, then more is required than that. (Gijsbertsen, 8)

As a national regulating framework, the Participation Act was naturally geared towards regional uniformity. In September 2015, the Secretary of State thus seemed to repress the experimentation initiatives when demanding a more consistent, joint experimentation approach from the four ‘frontrunner’ municipalities. The media reports were somewhat suggestive of a Secretary of State who just sought to stifle the experimentation initiatives (Hoeijmakers). Against this apparent stifling of emergent social innovation initiatives, opinion articles in newspapers (for example Nootboom (2015) and the parliamentary motion of November 2015 stressed instead the importance of diversity in the experimentations.

Finally, it can be considered how the above institutional frictions may also reflect frictions with dominant beliefs and social norms. As mentioned earlier, the institutional arrangements that BI runs up against have been meant to consolidate earlier democratic political choices for equality and fairness. In this regard, it is evident to most BI advocates that the concept is not only running

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up against rigid, inert institutions that ensure the strong conditionality of welfare benefits entitlements – it also runs up against the social norm institutionalized through them. Especially in the Netherlands, there is a widely developed moral conviction that ‘one should earn one’s living’. BI is highly controversial, according to Groot (2006:2), “because it hits the ‘moral core’ of the existent welfare state, which provides benefits conditionally, temporarily and selectively”. The shock value of the ‘Money for Free’ slogan (see section 4.1.5) clearly resides in its frontal challenge of that ‘earning one’s living’ principle or the ‘decoupling of work and income’ (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:145). In different ways, VBI, MIES and the experimenting municipalities can be seen to confront dominant views on citizenship or human nature that they deem incorrect, namely the view that people need external pressures to become valuable/productive members of society. A MIES member explains that intellectual discussion and advocacy typically fail through these unshakable convictions on human nature. Their concrete, experimenting approach is meant precisely to bring the discussion beyond the stage of repetitive juxtapositions of convictions and beliefs.

You’re getting stuck in the different basic conceptions that people have on individual agency and on society. It becomes no longer a matter of arguments, but a matter of convictions. ‘I don’t *believe* that that will work’, ‘I *believe* that people will become lazy’. This prevents you from getting further. People who don’t believe in something, you can’t convince them with arguments. From there on, you can only show them: ‘well, this is what we did, then and there...and this is what we saw there – so is this still what you’re believing?’ So, we found this [ the basic income-BP] in particular an issue with which one should be experimenting, as otherwise there’s no ways of making headway. (Mulder, 4)

## 4.2.4 BI and its convergence with dominant institutions, interests and norms

The frictions of BI with dominant institutions, interests and norms are clearly numerous and profound. Still, there is the somewhat paradoxical fact that at least some of its new ways of doing, organizing, framing and knowing are also quite in line with those. As the recent resurgence of BI strongly suggests, some of its transformative aspects come actually very timely.

VBI, MIES and the experimenting municipalities can all be seen to appeal to basic norms, established facts and considerations that are more generally shared in society. Similar to (or explicitly following) intellectual standard bearer van Parijs, they argue that the BI maximizes the freedom, self-determination and fairness that most Dutch citizens and institutions subscribe to as core values. The VBI chairman considers that their more fundamental considerations on emancipation and self-determination may not be of main concern in wider society. Still, he sees how their association meets with increasing endorsements and new members, especially out of widespread concerns over the fate of the unemployed and the economically less well off.

The issues that are currently appealing to people are the labour market, the unemployment, and the lack of social subsistence means of the households on social minimum level. That is what people are concerned with. Those other considerations that I just exposed, as for now most people don’t care about those. (Planken, 13)

Somewhat similarly, MIES’ chairman signals the growing disenchantment with the bureaucratized welfare state system, its over-regulated administration and the lack of trust in citizens that accompanies it.

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Government is actually organising that mistrust. Over the last fifteen years, everything has been based on that mistrust. If one for once is late with his submission of his status report, there is a deduction on the unemployment allowance – or even, as a figure of speech, if one misplaces a comma. All of that is a matter of mistrust. The assumption is that citizens are just fraudulent, waiting for the opportunity to swindle government. That yields a serious non-communication between government and the citizens with an unemployment allowance, a great mistrust, and due to that, one is no longer seeing each other, understanding each other, and no longer able to help or support each other in whatever way. And the purpose of these experiments is actually to break through that situation. (Roebroek, 4/5)

‘Experimentation broker’ Hoeijmakers also points out how easily the BI concept can be communicated and discussed. Apart from the decidedly driving role of the media and the ‘hype’ that developed around the ‘Money for Free’ storyline (see further section 4.3 on agency), he also considers the concept itself to be accessible, and somehow appealing to people’s lifeworlds.

It is just entering people’s minds directly. I think it was just often discussed at the kitchen table, or in the train, or wherever people meet. Anybody can relate to this, and form himself an opinion about it. So, it is really a topic that could ‘go viral’ in society, and it did. It has been much discussed, and I have just encountered it in many places. (Hoeijmakers, 14)

Another line of resonance with societal norms and beliefs seems to be MIES’ experimenting approach, which clearly caught on with the wider public and the media. Their commitment to local initiative, concrete action and especially their crowdfunding construction- in itself a socially innovative strategy of pursuing change - resonate with contemporary narratives of social innovation and social change more broadly: MIES sought to show that transformative change can be pursued independently from the national government, on the basis of civic involvement and an entrepreneurial ‘can do’ attitude. From the viewpoint of VBI and its insistence that BI should be provided universally, this reliance on private initiative may seem a relapse into pre-welfare state ‘Caritas’. This does not deny that the crowdfunding is very timely though, for the way in which contributors can *see* the crowdfunded individual, and thereby trust that their donation is well-spent. The crowd-funding seems a very contemporary detour from the government-led social transformation that advocates of full-fledged basic income deem indispensable. In fact, the trust in national government’s willingness-to-change seems low even amongst the VBI membership (interviews Planken, Gielingh).

Finally, a recently increasing convergence of basic income advocacy with dominant institutions, interests and norms becomes particularly clear through the experimentation initiatives of municipalities. For obvious reasons of political acceptability on both local and national levels, these initiatives are generally couched in the governance philosophy of the ‘participation society’ that has come to hold sway. The initiatives are claimed to explore improved implementation of the ‘Participation Act’. Not its ultimate ends of unemployment reduction and conditional welfare entitlements are questioned, but rather some of the means to achieve them. As indicated by an alderman from one of the ‘frontrunner’ cities, local-level governments are actually seeking to embed this ‘experimental implementation’ of the Participation Act in broader programs of reinvented government. Even if the thrusts towards basic income-like welfare may not be to the liking of the political majority, their experimentation proposal does fit with the generally endorsed political program of inclusive, participative and experimenting governance. Their proposal also deserves credit as a social innovation initiative that has been co-shaped with their constituency:

We have also concluded, - some time ago already, last autumn I think -, that social innovation is just very ‘alive’ in this city. The social lab and MIES are involved with it, for example. At one moment, there

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was also this Tegenlicht documentary edition [see section 4.1.5 – BP], dedicating a lot of air time to the basic income, and I saw the reactions that it evoked. Well, myself I have decidedly mixed feelings about the basic income, we'll return to that later maybe. But well, then we considered, 'this is really something, and there is some movement going on in the city, we should really be creating opportunities here, and it is just important to bring out as government that that can really lead to something'. So, that is where the Change Lab came from, and the particular project of the 'tailor-made unemployment entitlements' [their Participation Act experimentation proposal – BP], that is actually one of the things that came out of the lab and were actually adopted by the administration. (Gijsbertsen,1)

## 4.2.5 BI and its unknown ramifications

As described in the previous two sections, the basic income resonates with some, but also clashes with several dominant institutions, interests and norms. Apart from the quite direct and evident interferences with established ways of doing, organising, framing and knowing, the BI is also mistrusted for its various undesirable unintended effects, however. To be precise, it is mistrusted for *expected*, modelled and theorized unintended effects – one difficulty in itself is that the ramifications of a full-fledged BI are difficult to oversee (Elster 1986; Groot 2006).

As observed by MIES member Mulder (2014), the BI discussion tends to remain stuck in entrenched opinions and repetitive exchanges of expected (side) effects. Indeed, there are several unintended side effects that keep being brought up – ever since the period in the 1980s and early 1990s in which the BI idea was becoming a policy proposal (Cf. Section 4.1.3). All political quarters have brought forward their particular accounts of unfortunate ramifications. On the political right wing –see for example the opinion letter by a liberals' municipality council member (Poot 2015) - the BI is mainly mistrusted for its apparent endorsement of passivity and resignation into unemployment. The unconditional entitlement to welfare benefits – even if well below average wage would introduce perverse incentives towards “sitting on the couch with a can of beer”, i.e. benefits dependency. Pervasive free-riding on society or underinvestment in personal development would also soon erode the tax base from which to finance the BI. On the political left wing, it is feared mainly that the BI would distract from the societal challenge to create full employment. Yet other than the fear of passive indulgence in too substantial BI, the left-wing fear is rather that it will eventually leave welfare recipients in the cold: Introduction of BI would contribute to a hollowing out of the welfare state and its unemployment benefits, as historical achievements of labour unions and progressive politics. After all, the BI has been endorsed by centre-right-wing politicians as a drastic roll-back of the social security bureaucracy (section 4.1.3). Finally, the BI principle of *individual* rather than household income entitlements has been mistrusted in religious-communitarian quarters. This would accept and increase the already far advanced individualization in the Netherlands, and further erode the traditional family household and the associated single (male) bread winner model (Groot & van der Veen 2000b:148).

By contrast, the latter side effects of financial individualization were rather considered as fundamental added values by the feminist co-founders of VBI: Women would no longer be dependent on their (male) partners. Also, more broadly, the Dutch debate on BI has brought forward several accounts of *positive* unintended effects: The BI has been appreciated for the ensuing re-balancing of work and care activities, and for its promise of allowing people to find a purpose in life and work. Related to that, BI has been considered a lever in relaxing the excessively tense and overworked Dutch society, a prominent theme for the opposition against the dominant political preoccupations with economic productiveness. Finally, in environmentalist quarters the

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BI has been considered as an element in de-growth and sustainable development: Individuals would reorient their consumption from maximization towards sufficiency.

Compared to the discussions on broad, nationwide implementation, the unintended effects are less of an overriding issue regarding the local BI-inspired experiments. Experimentation advocates are keen to explain that the very experimental approach helps to gain insight into direct and indirect effects. Furthermore, the negotiations between the ‘frontrunner’ municipalities and the ministry keep the experimentation within policy bounds – and within the associated practices of monitoring and evaluation. Still, expectations of positive and negative side-effects play a part in the shaping of the experiments. For ‘experimentation broker’ Hoeijmakers it is crucial that the scope for learning is maximized, and that set-ups with control groups do not prevent a broad range of effects from being monitored. Similarly, the MIES chairman – a sociologist – would prefer to experiment with communities, rather than with individuals, thus allowing positive ‘externalities’ for communities to surface. In fact, the ‘frontrunner’ alderman already had to anticipate undesirable unintended effects in the process of shaping and gaining internal support for their experiments. The initial plans proved to evoke doubts of inequality between participants and the broader population (see section 4.2.3), but also discussions on their practical implications for other means-tested benefits schemes. Valid points, one of the ‘frontrunner’ aldermen indicated – but it would be painfully contradictory to try to suppress these unintended effects through further regulations and conditions:

Relevant points of course, and they should be resolved somehow. But there you also see that tendency to immediately create rules to these issues. ‘It can’t have unlimited scope, can it?’ ‘What if people start taking advantage from it?’ That’s how it’s always done, isn’t it – always yet another rule, always seeking to prevent that somebody abuses the policy, and introduce control on fraud... (Gijsbertsen, 5)

## 4.2.6 Changing interactions: Contested BI translations

The transformative potential of BI is much higher than its transformative impacts **(4.2.1)**. The BI concept clearly clashes with many institutions, interests and norms **(4.2.3)**, but is also unpredictable for its consequences **(4.2.5)**. Still, it also proves to resonate with several of those **(4.2.4)**, and in some respects the initiatives of MIES and VBI come quite timely **(4.2.2)**.

The BI ups and downs or ‘hype cycle’ can now be better understood. Moreover, a sense is developed of the dynamic interactions between BI proponents and the society that they seek to change. These dynamics become particularly manifest through the changes that the BI concept undergoes underway. It took the shape of many lines of social critique and materialized in various policy proposals, analyses and forecasts. Moreover, the recent resurgence of BI clearly amounts to an adaptation or ‘translation’ of the concept. Actors stretch and bend the concept, emphasising some aspects and leaving out others<sup>19</sup>. In fact, also the recent turn to so-called ‘BI-inspired experiments’ can be seen to have evoked contestation about the narrowing down, broadening, changing or other translations that the concept is undergoing:

First of all, it is striking how the earlier ‘implementation by stealth’ theme – the 2001 tax reform introducing some BI elements but crucially not under that heading (section 4.1.4)- seems to make a new appearance. The various experimentation plans go under many headings, such as ‘trust experiment’, ‘regulation-scarce unemployment benefits’ or ‘tailored unemployment benefits’.

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<sup>19</sup> See Pel (2015) for a reflection on the twin innovation strategies of ‘Trojan Horse’ and ‘sheep in wolf’s clothing’.

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But the municipalities and the MPs supporting the parliamentary motion clearly do not want to jeopardize the experimentation trajectory by labelling it as basic income. They consider the notion too politically controversial. Likewise, ‘experimentation broker’ Hoeijmakers prudently speaks of *BI-inspired* experiments:

So, myself I called it ‘experiment in the mind-set of the basic income’. And that’s how I consistently frame it since. I never speak of ‘experiments with basic income’, nor do I ever say that it has nothing to do with basic income – it is really something in between, it is ‘in the mind-set of’. (Hoeijmakers, 17)

By contrast, MIES did undertake its crowdfunded BI under the heading of ‘our BI’ (Onsbasisinkomen). Considering this project, a ‘marketing strategy’ for their broader aims of awareness raising and provocation of societal debate, they eagerly deployed the radical ring of the BI concept. Bregman (2014 a, b) went even further in this regard: His provocative term of ‘Money for Free’ can even be considered to exaggerate the transformative potentials of BI – the ‘for Free’ element downplaying how many people will be receiving income that they themselves have financed through their tax payments. As a publicist in search of readership, he can be seen to have seized the shock value of the BI concept. Bregman’s framing was subsequently adopted by the VPRO documentaries and by various media reports – eagerly taking up the ‘shock value’ framing.

As self-volunteered ‘experimentation broker’, Hoeijmakers indicates how much of his mediation work has involved the navigation of these framing dynamics. He stresses that the framing of the experiments was at least as important as their methodological-organizational set-ups. Regarding the BI resurgence of the last two years, he feels that Bregman’s ‘shock value’ framing has been both a stimulating and a hindering factor:

Yes, I know that there are two sides to this. It’s quite funny, I once spoke with Rutger Bregman and he even said to me, ‘Well, that ‘Money for Free’ has surely helped in getting quite some books sold, but now it’s up to you guys to set the record straight again’, as now it has become more of a hindrance...as it is something that is really bothering the VVD [conservative-liberal party – BP] and preventing them from endorsing it. Meanwhile, when it comes down to the pure contents, they are not that opposed to it, really...As you know, the basic income often comes from liberal or neo-liberal quarters, Milton Friedman for example– his negative income tax ideas are quite similar to it. So, in that way it is an unfavourable framing, even if it continues to generate media-attention, which is a good thing as it keeps the discussion going. Overall it has had a net positive effect, if you take everything into account, but now I’m mostly occupied, at all these meetings, with nuancing the matter, and removing that framing – as it leads to many misunderstandings. (Hoeijmakers, 15)

Even apart from the issue of whether the ‘Money for Free’ label applies to them, VBI have mixed feelings about the experiments. On the one hand, they praise the initiators for the ways in which they have resuscitated the societal BI debate. On the other hand, they are critical about the ways in which the experiments seem to water down the BI concept. The so fundamental BI aspect of universality is abandoned for example, and BI seems to be reduced to poverty alleviation. In the end, much of the transformative potentials are likely to be lost in this translation:

Well, these ‘de-regulated welfare benefit experiments’, or ‘trust experiments’, these are targeting those entitled to unemployment allowances. They are related to the formal discretion or task that a municipal government has to fulfil towards a part of its citizenry. It is all related to the welfare benefits – those in the framework of the Participation Act, and taken together with people in Jeugdwet and WMO arrangements that makes for a substantial group, but anyway, it is targeting people relying on welfare benefits. The basic income, that is for everybody. It is for those who earn the most and for those who earn the least, that doesn’t matter. It is an entirely different line of approach. The



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discussion is often narrowed down to combating poverty however. Personally, I'm not at all in favour of that, the idea that 'if basic income is introduced, it will be helping to combat poverty. To me, it is much more a matter of a shift in culture – a shift in which everybody is involved. (Gielsing, 11)

Also, MIES' chair sees a risk of transformation potentials being watered down. It is not so much the deviation from the universality principle and the experimentation with specific target groups that he has doubts about, though. Instead, he rather fears a narrowing down through the evaluative frameworks that are being constructed around the experiments. These ways of knowing risk to reduce the BI-inspired experiments to regular employment and social security projects:

A second problem with these local experiments is an issue that I've become strongly aware of, namely that the local politicians and also the researchers sitting around these experiments are still very much focused on income effects and labour market effects. And therewith they lose sight of the integral character that is such a typical trait of the basic income. Which is not only about income, not only about labour...it is about participation in the broadest possible sense of the word, it is about educating, is about caring, it is about housing, and it is also about energy... (Roebroek, 5)

Finally, the 'frontrunner' alderman is not very worried that the BI concept gets narrowed down through the experiments. On the contrary, he considers that issue of staying true to basic income principles rather beside the point. To him, such debates should rather focus on current developments in local governance and on the needed reforms in the Dutch social security system – and the BI discussion would at best be an element within that discussion.

It is about a societal broadening [of political decision-making-BP]. It has turned into what came close to a battle with the media...I've really tried to point it out to the journalists: 'please do not narrow this down...this is all about what is happening in all these municipalities concerned, and it is not just about basic income. But it does involve the observation – and I try not to state this in too confrontational terms – that the current social security system is really functioning inadequately. And that something else is needed, and that it is outdated. And that is what we're all trying to find solutions for. Please, take a broader perspective on this, and draw that conclusion together with each other.' (Gijsbertsen 4)

## 4.3 Agency in TSI – VBI, MIES and the BI discourse coalition

The BI is a radical and encompassing social innovation with many potential ramifications. The recent resurgence shows that some elements of the BI concept are finding resonance in Dutch society. Still, these recent achievements cannot obscure the circumstance that initiatives and individuals promoting the basic income are waging an uphill struggle. It is therefore interesting to consider how the social innovation initiatives VBI and MIES take up this challenge. ***How do they position themselves as actors within the broader constellation of actors that shape BI dynamics? What are their theories of change? Through what practices do they empower themselves? Where lies the agency in the basic income transformative social innovation process, and how has this changed?*** These questions on the agency of VBI and MIES will be answered by discussing their development within broader BI 'discourse coalitions'<sup>20</sup>. After sketching the uphill struggle that BI advocates are facing (4.3.1), it is described how they position

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<sup>20</sup> Discourse coalitions are alliances of otherwise diverse societal actors that converge on promoting a certain set of ideas and associated practices (Hajer 1995).

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themselves and what their theories of change are (4.3.2). Further discussing how VBI and MIES seek to empower themselves and develop alignments with others (4.3.3), a summary actor map allows to reflect on the so dispersed BI agency (4.3.4).

## 4.3.1 An uphill struggle: Looming resignation and developing a sense of agency

BI advocates in the Netherlands are facing an uphill struggle. The following confession of a VBI member captures it in a nutshell:

“So, I’m waging a somewhat principled fundamental struggle that I won’t be winning, of course. I’m aware of that. And well, I’ve also reached the age for being aware of that.” (Gielingh, 12)

In this regard, it is also telling how the first VBI chair advised in 2007 to await a more favourable tide for BI. Several earlier prominent VBI members even seem to have abandoned the project. This resignation speaks for example from the altogether discouraging report on the 15<sup>th</sup> VBI anniversary meeting (see section 4.1.4), and from the difficulty to organize the next one, five years later. Another indication of a weakened sense of agency was the inertia and limited participation that had taken hold of VBI around 2010. As mentioned earlier (section 4.1.4), the current chair and vice-chair coincided in their bleak assessment of VBI when they joined only a few years ago. As can be read from the academic-intellectual discussions from 2000 onwards, various left-wing politicians and opinion leaders came to consider BI as a still inspiring idea –yet the wrong battle to wage in the particular time. In 2013, one of the earliest BI advocates from the PPR progressive party van Ojik (see section 4.1.2), leader of the Environmentalist Party by then, stated quite clearly how he no longer considered the BI a viable project for left-progressive politics.

In the 1980s, I – employed at the scientific bureau of the PPR - travelled throughout the country with ardent pleadings for the introduction of a basic income. In those times of high unemployment and rising labour productivity there was considerable interest for the idea. (...) All of that sounded pretty nice. Yet there were also plenty of objections. The affordability of such system constituted the main objection, in most of these discussions. In order to provide a basic income for every Dutch citizen would require a gigantic reshuffling of national income, a redistributive operation of as yet unknown proportions. An exercise like that is only conceivable if there is great public support for it. Such public support wasn’t there. (...) In the 1990s, the idea of a basic income has disappeared from the political agenda as suddenly as it had earlier made its appearance on it. The crisis went out of focus, employment figures climbed back, and less people had to rely on unemployment benefits. It is interesting how the idea, as we have become wound up in recession again, is rising again. It fits well with the ideal of a relaxed society. Yet in order to get there, a great many of other steps need to be made. There are too many other measures that for now are greater priorities. (van Ojik, 2013:21/22).

Where others resigned and abandoned the BI project for ‘greater priorities’, as in the above citation, current leaders of VBI rather persist. Their initiative may be growing, but still they consider VBI to be in a ‘pioneering’ phase’ (see section 4.1.4). They have developed a sense of agency that is, similar to the earlier social critiques of the 1970s-1990s, strongly grounded in moral conviction. This principled rather than consequentialist attitude leaves them relative immune to the discouragement of lack of impact. As mentioned earlier, VBI have developed a

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modest sense of agency. Yet even if relatively isolated, with less ties to political parties, universities and unions than VBI used to have, their sense of agency rests on the confidence that they are far from 'lone wolves'. As expressed by the VBI vice chair, their sense of agency is strongly reinforced by the apparent interest that other actors have in their messages and ideals:

I cherish the fact that it is not just a little club of mutual acquaintances within the VBI, and internationally some people, that wants to occupy itself with that basic income. That there are also other groups in the Netherlands involved with it – that stimulates me, it is as simple as that. That you [TRANSIT-BP] have an interest in us, that's just nice. And that also applies to the VPRO [documentary makers-BP], that applies to MIES, that applies to the various municipality council members throughout the country. The FNV [union] will be having a whole series of meetings, there's the 'Common Sense Evenings' organizers inviting us every now and then. We're being heard, and that is just a good feeling. It stimulates, and it is good to be aware of that [interest-BP]. (Gielingh, 17)

MIES members largely share the considerations that led many progressives to resign on the BI front. Their reading of the BI discussion over the last decades is that little has been achieved, and that VBI has been rather toothless. The latter is hardly a rapprochement of VBI: MIES is highly conscious of the uphill struggle for BI advocacy more generally. Other than the principled advocacy of VBI, MIES *explores* what transformative social innovation can be pursued through BI (and other concepts). MIES takes a more pragmatic approach. Key consideration is that social innovations like BI should just be explored and done, rather than endlessly talked about. They believe in the power of example and substantiation. The MIES mission statement is clear about this commitment to doing, demonstrating and experimenting. This somewhat more confident 'Yes we can' mentality was quite natural to MIES, one of the members explains, as many of them have entrepreneurial, creative and in a broad sense enterprising professional backgrounds. MIES thus stays far away from resignation, partly by focusing on the transformative action that they can take up themselves (or help others to do).

In fact, there seems to be a certain confidence in their possibility to make a difference that is shared more broadly by the various actors involved with BI-inspired experimentation. The 'frontrunner' municipalities are encouraged by the idea that they are channelling and articulating the impulses for change as they develop in broader society, and take the recent devolutions of discretions to imply that it is now their move. The 'experimentation broker' also indicates to be part of a generalized sense of transformative agency that seems to have developed around the BI-concept. Whether individual experiments are set up sufficiently ambitiously or true to BI principles or not, he is reassured by the assessment that the very multitude of these initiatives will make for a broad societal process of learning about the basic income:

To me it is the greater collective that counts. In the end, I just hope that we'll as much as experiments as possible, from which we can learn as much as possible. So, with that in the back of my mind I am always considering what is the best thing to do, and how I can help with it. Sometimes it seems best if a certain municipality can just get things started as soon as possible, out of their own interests as municipality. And then it may become a somewhat less neatly set-up experiment from the scientific point of view, but things get going at least, and people can start working on it. And it's just a matter of the development phase that other experiments have reached, and how they can mutually reinforce...And one of the things that can happen is that some experiments are set up a bit less ambitiously and less radically in approach, but still they form the basis that makes other experiments possible – experiments that *are* more ambitious. (Hoeijmakers, 21)

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## 4.3.2 Positioning and theories of change

VBI, like most affiliates of BIEN, stays quite close to the visions, strategies and theories of change around basic income that have developed within this network (see Chapter 3). VBI advocates an unconditional, individual, universal income, and sufficient to meet basic needs. Because of the so crucial aspect of universality, VBI has long followed BIEN in the implication that such universality needs to be effectuated through structural reform of the welfare state, i.e. through democratic governmental decision. By consequence, VBI has targeted the national political system from its inception onwards. Especially political parties and unions were considered key avenues for the requisite political mobilization, whilst engaged academics, think tanks, progressive media and opinion leaders would raise awareness amongst the public. The various researchers and intellectuals within VBI have actively been developing the economic-scientific underpinning of BI and its variations – especially in the early period, in which also governmental advisory councils and planning bureaus were developing BI-related scenarios and proposals (see section 4.1.3).

The positioning of VBI has not changed much over the years. State reform and democratic decision-making are still considered the necessary vectors of transformation. What also has remained, is the positioning as an advocate, continuously creating publicity and bringing out the merits and the underpinnings of the BI concept. Still, there some notable shifts. First of all, it appears that the VBI has gradually detached itself from the left-wing political parties and unions out of which it grew. Various web posts of the last decade express calls to maintain political neutrality – underlining that BI can be endorsed on various grounds, and that it strikes a balance between political values. Second, many members VBI seem to have become disenchanted with the democratic system and party politics. This became apparent especially through the website messages in the years of decline, featuring sometimes bitter comments on the ways in which the basic income was ignored by the establishment. Other indications are the rather ethical-moral positioning of VBI, the visionary-critical discourses of which remain at some distance from the sphere of political decision-making. Third, the association has also become less of an academic think tank, as in the early years, and more of a civic activist group. This may have to do with the resignation of some academic members, but there is also the gained experience that may weigh in: the earlier academic efforts to provide scientific underpinnings of basic income once seemed to yield results and influence, but in more recent experience the dominant institutions have proven to be not receptive. All in all, the strategy of the Royal Way (see Chapter 3), of evidence-based convincing of the public and subsequent governmental reforms, is adapted in some respects. Forms of direct democracy and civic referenda are more and more considered as necessary elements of change towards BI – a line of approach VBI pursues through UBIE, more than through BIEN. Likewise, the revitalization efforts after 2011 (see section 4.1.4) have involved a greater emphasis on awareness raising within society more broadly. Through the ‘basisteam’, local groups of activists, VBI has started to reach out to citizens more directly, instead of targeting political parties.

As long as my neighbours don't know what a basic income is, then we can better forget about it. That is what should be our concern – not that politician in The Hague or in Brussels, so to say. Well, that too, but that societal basis is crucial, isn't it? What the voter wants, what the citizen wants, in the end it will be followed by the political elite. That is how it goes with all kinds of things. The ‘basisteam’, they are there of course, there at the basis of society. That is the citizen in the street, living his life in the neighbourhood and the village, who has ideas about people and society. And who encounters issues that he wants to help resolve, or change, etcetera... (Gielingh, 3)

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Still, notwithstanding the move away from party politics and the diminished confidence in political leaders' inclination towards structural reforms, the VBI does stick to its commitments to *universal* BI. As discussed earlier, they therefore have some suspicions towards the experimenting translations of basic income that appear to water down the concept (section 4.2.6). The experimentation is welcomed for their publicity effects, as 'stepping stones' and 'marketing tools' in a broader strategy towards universal BI schemes (Gielingh, 15). Yet they fear that this experimenting theory of change does bear the risk of the basic income becoming contained and bogged down in narrow discussions about scientific evidence -distracting from the principled debate. Moreover, the local and temporary experiments could easily end up into an only short-lived wave of attention, and eventually even serve to dismiss BI from the political agenda:

We have been a bit anxious about the scenario of the scorched earth: Once these experiments have been held, it is concluded that the basic income is not a feasible option. Attaching the concept to the experiments as they have been proposed, and about which the Secretary of State has voiced some things, we were a bit reluctant there. (Gielingh, 5)

MIES' theory of change stands in stark contrast with the altogether still largely state-oriented theory of change of VBI. MIES starts from the understanding that the welfare system institutions have developed into such a locked-in and inert constellation of rules, interests and ideologies, that even the most marginal reform attempts tend to meet with insurmountable resistance to change. National-level politics are considered a strategical dead end. Instead, the needed transformations and social innovations should therefore come from the bottom up, initiated by enterprising groups of individuals and civil society organisations like MIES.

The VBI, just as can be seen with regard to nature and environmental groups, they try to change things through politics. They try to influence political parties. And well, myself I don't find political parties particularly relevant. We [MIES] try to bring out as clearly as possible, 'this is what we do, and whoever who wants to join in it is welcome - and if not, just don't bother'. And we try to ignite the broad discussion. My ideas about this are quite simple: Politics have become so much a matter of market research and marketing. If there are enough people starting to claim that they consider basic income interesting, political parties will follow. Regardless of what their ideology may be. (Mulder, 5)

Eventually, even if slowly, political decision-making will have no choice but to follow. MIES and VBI share this particular 'theory of change' element. A conspicuous difference is that MIES sees local governments as key allies in this bottom-up social innovation (see section 4.2.2 on the changing tides for BI).

So, whilst VBI repositions its critical advocacy somewhat within a theory of change that is still quite state reform-oriented, MIES positions itself rather as an initiative that catalyses local-level, bottom-up change. And whereas VBI is more principled and advocacy-oriented, MIES is more pragmatic and explorative. This clarifies why MIES was a key actor the recent 'resurgence' of BI, actively shaping the experimentation trajectory that developed, whilst VBI remained at a distance of it (see section 4.1.5). 'Experimentation broker' Hoeijmakers considers that VBI, even if at a distance from the experimentation initiatives, contributed in a more indirect way as activists. Member of VBI but relatively more closely akin to MIES in his pragmatic-explorative attitude (Hoeijmakers, 2/3), he considers that their sustained advocacy has prepared the ground to a

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certain extent. And they continue to remind of the *universal* basic income as future vision and normative compass:

Their [VBI] role is rather that of the advocates, who keep bringing out the future vision, stressing what is at stake and explaining what ideas are behind these experiments. But that is a more ideological approach of course. Well, not everybody in the association has that approach, certainly not everybody, and I'm happy with the sometimes pragmatic approach of the board, of seeing how far one can reach, and keeping a broad perspective, but the constituency of the association is generally activist in mind-set... 'we want a basic income because it is a human right', or 'because that is how things should be' – and currently, that represents only a very small minority of society, of course. So, then you're having rather a political movement, whereas the characteristic feature of these experiments is often to be pragmatic, to just see whether it works and not to assume from the beginning – well, one has hope that it will work of course -, but not to assume from the beginning that this is what one should be doing. And that is the role I myself have trying to fulfil, to move the debate out of the hypothetical sphere and the pro and contra positions, and instead explore 'what can we do with this' – with all political parties together, that is. (Hoeijmakers, 16)

## 4.3.3 Empowerment, resources and alignments

The initiatives promoting the basic income, or even only some elements of it, are waging an uphill struggle (4.3.1). Apart from resignation there are different ways in which the initiatives position themselves, informed by different theories of change. In this regard VBI and MIES operate through clearly different theories of change, the first more principled and advocacy-oriented, the second more pragmatic and explorative (4.3.2). In this section, it is considered further how the basic income initiatives empower themselves to stand stronger in their uphill struggle – and what tools and resources they seek to acquire in light of their different theories of change.

Starting with VBI, a first striking observation to make is that the idea itself has for a long time been the key tool or resource for the realization of basic income as a transformative social innovation. Especially in the earlier years, when the basic income critiques were articulated and subsequently elaborated into economic forecasts and policy proposals, BI action was all about the production of knowledge, argumentation and credibility. A longstanding member tellingly indicated during an interview that he could not say much about their strategy at the time - as there was no such shared plan of action, and meetings were scarce and small in size. The VBI members mainly went about relatively independently, writing and exchanging scientific articles and other publications. Against the background of an implicit 'Royal way' strategy, in which convincing the voters and the politicians was the key challenge, the availability of strong arguments was the key resource.

A second and closely related resource were the alliances with transnational networks BIEN and UBIE (see Chapter 3). Both networks make their advocacy part of a broader political movement – UBIE more regarding the activism and political action, BIEN more regarding the development of ideas and arguments. The network connections are important for the exchange of ideas and updates about local developments, but they also provide VBI with credibility. Especially in the times at which the attention for basic income was declining in the Netherlands, VBI's international connections were important ways of showing their alternative to be real, and seriously considered all over the world.

Yes, it's for that feeling of being embedded in something. And for the awareness that it's not on this square kilometre only that we make an issue of it, but that it's going on worldwide. So, the information

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that we get from BIEN, and pass on to them to have it taken up in publicity actions, that is supporting our activities and it supports activities elsewhere in the world. (Gielingh, 24)

A third set of important resources are thus the communication tools. As described earlier, it was a difficult task to keep the fire burning between 1997 and 2012. The basic income had fallen from grace in the political and societal debate. The basic income concept was 'kept burning' to a large extent thanks to the newsletter and the website. One could wonder whether the VBI would even have managed to survive without the internet. In any case, the association's key activity is the exchange, dissemination and commenting on of basic income-related developments from all over the world through their website. The website's continuous proliferation of basic income related activities and events is crucially reinforcing the aforementioned resources of knowledge and network relations – it establishes both to insiders and to outsider website visitors that the basic income is real, and that the There Is No Alternative myth is misguided – the basic income is shown to be seriously considered, or at least talked about, all over the world. Fourth, there seems to be an increasing awareness within VBI that they need organizational capacity – beyond the unorganized dissemination of academic knowledge of earlier days. The current lead members within VBI have taken several initiatives towards a revitalized VBI, and a VBI with a greater capacity for collective action. They seek to attract younger members and members from broader societal backgrounds than only academics, they set up the 'basisteam' in order to facilitate local action and spontaneous initiatives by groups of members (see previous section), and they initiated the Platform Basic Income – an attempt to unify the various basic income advocates in the Netherlands, including activist groups and small political parties that have included the basic income in their programs. For a large share of these initiatives towards organisational changes, their German counterparts (see Chapter 5) formed sources of inspiration.

Just a glance at their website suffices to see how structured they are operating. I wanted to know the nuts and bolts of it, as I think we're doing a lousy job at this in the Netherlands. From the beginning on I've found that people are occupied with it in a too fragmented way. You have, amongst others, the New Netherlands Now organisation, Dynamic Netherlands and the Greens. All of them were carrying that basic income in their banners. It was my ideal to unite them. Now it is materializing in the establishment of the Platform Basic Income. We've founded it on a declaration that we all subscribe to – this is a movement towards network formation. (Planken 7)

The VBI is empowering itself in various ways. In line with its theory of change, much of it serves the spreading of the basic income message. As discussed earlier, MIES considers that all this empowerment is not enough, and probably will never be enough, to make the uphill struggle successful. According to their theory of change, there are some other resources and ways of empowerment that are essential. First of all, whilst relying heavily on communication tools and skills just like VBI, MIES is seeking for ways of communication through to make the basic income idea concrete. One important striking example of this *concretizing* communication is their deployment of the self-reporting movies in their 'our basic income' initiative. These video reports, broadcasted through their website, crucially helped them in their goal of moving out of the abstract discussions of beliefs – instead, viewers could see Frans Kerver's experiences with 'what he did with the money, and what the money did with him'. Their picture below is another example of the concretizing, personalizing communication: *'What would you do with a basic income?'*

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Second, and closely related to the concretizing communication, MIES can be seen to reach for civic involvement as an important resource. The crowd-funding of a basic income, and the name 'our basic income' frames its explicitly as such, makes for an initiative that is collectively owned by a multitude of citizens- all having contributed with modest amounts. In MIES' theory of change, this is a crucial form of empowerment. It is shown that the initiative does not rest on abstract and non-committal declarations of sympathy and a waiting attitude that expects government and politicians to step in, but rather exists because citizens prove willing to reach for their wallet. Also 'experimentation broker' Hoeijmakers has managed to crowd-fund his activism for two years, on a minimum income level. Communicating with his funders through a newsletter, Twitter updates and a website, he similarly generates a certain legitimization for his initiative. This organisation of civic involvement and legitimization through crowd-funding is a striking innovation itself, a new way of empowering social innovation initiatives.

Third, MIES' pragmatic theory of change implies of course that they consider political support, policy relevance and in the end power and influence essential resources for realizing some of their transformation ambitions. Other than the VBI visionaries with their commitments to *universal* basic income, they seek to create alignments with *local*-level administrators. They consider that that is the administrative level and societal scale at which they can develop shared programs of actions, mobilize allies and eventually get things done. The local level of municipalities and cities is where societal challenges are felt and acknowledged most, and where there are opportunities for setting up social innovation projects in collaboration with change-oriented aldermen, municipality council members, civil society organisations and universities. They can clearly be seen to play into the administrative tensions arising from decentralization operations like the Participation Act, into the locally felt urgency to address the problems and discrepancies in the administration of unemployment benefits. Another element in their efforts for alignment with policy and congruence with governance trends is their experimenting approach. This experimentation fits well with the trends towards experimenting, co-creating government (as voiced clearly through one of the 'frontrunner' aldermen, section 4.1.5).



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Guided by their different theories of change, VBI and MIES rely on different resources to empower themselves in their 'uphill struggle'. Adding up the resources developed and gathered by these initiatives, we get an understanding of how the basic income is promoted in the Netherlands. The resources of these two initiatives do not account for the whole story of 'Dutch basic income agency', however. There are two other resources in the basic income development process to consider that are brought forward by other actors

First, the various BI initiators agree that the media attention has formed an essential complement to their own communication resources. The websites of VBI, MIES and 'experimentation broker' Hoeijmakers all generated the exposure, propaganda, network formation knowledge exchange etcetera that they were meant to generate. Yet they could not by themselves achieve that, in the words of Hoeijmakers, the basic income 'went viral'. He indicates that there was a self-reinforcing interplay of various media reports, actively incited by Bregman (2014a, b), the Tegenlicht documentary makers and various engaged 're-tweeting' individuals and organisations.

Every time you saw attention grow, following these Tegenlicht editions. Once they started addressing the experiments and the first cities that announced their joining in, then other media became interested as well. Local news media, in any case, and in turn that reached the major news media. But what also played a part, are the various other things going on with regard to basic income...MIES, and 'our basic income' of course, that crowd-funding that also generates a lot of attention, well, that is a 'media event' of course...I myself have also undertaken this crowd-funding, to generate my subsistence income, and that was also something that had one broadcasting organization after the other approaching me...I think I've more or less appeared at every national broadcasting channel by now, all of them thinking 'hey, this is something new'. They were following one by one. And then another thing that sustained, and allowed the momentum to keep building up, was that every time again there was a new city joining us...and every time again this constituted 'news'. So, there was not this one-off event - first came Groningen, then came Nijmegen, then came Tilburg, - I'm not sure about the precise order - ...and then Utrecht came forward...Well, that was not the order in which it actually took place, as Utrecht was actually ahead, amongst the frontrunners but happened to be later in coming forward with it...(...). And the media really jumped upon that 'Money for Free' term. (Hoeijmakers, 13/14)

Apart from the media dynamics, the VBI and MIES resources were also being complemented by a second set of important empowering efforts and activities, which is often referred to as 'policy entrepreneurship'. The sudden resurgence of basic income (section 4.1.5) and especially the Participation trajectory experimentation trajectory are hardly conceivable without sustained efforts to form a group of 'frontrunner' and follower municipalities, organize meetings, and eventually persuade MPs to pass a parliamentary motion to support that trajectory. According to a longstanding VBI member and basic income researcher, this policy entrepreneurship marks a fundamental difference between the earlier critique and advocacy and the current resurgence.

But this Sjir guy [Hoeijmakers]...that is really one of the turning points. He has been busy for months and months. Last year he has managed to stage all these meetings, to make appointments with politicians, with spokespersons of political parties, in order to have them come up with that parliamentary motion. And that motion made it, urging the Secretary of State to approach the municipalities with experimentation ambitions with an appreciative attitude. (Groot, 16/17)

In a way, Hoeijmakers could be considered a third one-man 'social innovation initiative' next to VBI and MIES for his policy entrepreneurship. He himself would probably not agree however, as he has

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constantly been collaborating with the many other individuals that have shaped the network of basic income experimenters. The crucial resource added seems indeed to be a collective policy entrepreneurship, with Hoeijmakers volunteering to be a key agent in it. The next section provides a brief overview of the network of agents that shapes the development of basic income in the Netherlands.

## 4.3.4 BI, a dispersed discourse coalition

VBI and MIES can be considered weakly positioned in their attempts to promote the basic income. Some potential allies resign in the face of the uphill struggle, or prefer to invest their transformative efforts in other projects. Considering further that VBI and MIES are still two of the most visible initiatives promoting the basic income, the agency to carry this particular social innovation seems just sparse and weak (4.3.1). Still, an important nuance to this surface assessment is that both VBI and MIES have their theories of change through which do they get a sense of agency. They position themselves in a broader process of change in which other actors play important parts as well (4.3.2). What is more, VBI and MIES clearly manage to empower themselves along the lines of their respective theories of change. And as other resources are provided by other actors, it can be understood how the basic income has resurged in the last two and a half years despite the ‘uphill struggle’ predicament (4.3.3).

Relevant actors as focal ‘social innovation initiatives’ in this study are **VBI** and **MIES**. Both local initiatives are embedded within networks of likeminded actors. For VBI it is important to be part of a network with **BIEN**, **UBIE**, their German counterparts **Netzwerk Grundeinkommen** and other organisations promoting unconditional basic income – worldwide but also nationally, such as those gathered through the **Platform Basisinkomen**. MIES is relatively less international and more local-national in orientation; for them the German crowdfunding initiative **Mein Grundeinkommen** was an essential example to follow, but for the rest they are mainly interacting with the network on BI-inspired experimentation. Third, that **experimentation network**, with **Sjir Hoeijmakers** as spider in the web, also involves **MIES**, **Ralf Embrechts** in Tilburg, and various **researchers**. Fourth, there are the experimenting municipal governments, sometimes working together with **change labs** or other co-creation arrangements involving citizens. They have organized themselves into a group of ‘**frontrunners**’, to coordinate their deliberations with the Ministry. Fifth, there is the **Secretary of State** for Social Affairs who is crucially in charge of the Participation Act implementation and the scope for experimentation within that framework. The Secretary of State is informed by more or less innovation-minded national-level **public servants**, and dealing with **social security sector organisations**. Importantly, the Secretary is also to take into account the **parliament** that passed a **motion** on the local-level experimentation plans, and the political developments in the various **political parties** – in which their motions have been passed in favour of experimentation with basic income. Sixth and finally, there is a multitude of actors that together shape the so important media dynamics. Notable actors that deliberately incited the basic income to go viral are – apart from VBI and MIES - **Rutger Bregman**, the **VPRO Tegenlicht** documentary makers and their meet-ups and several other **BI-minded opinion leaders** on both ‘old’ and ‘new’ media. Apart from these purposive promoters of the BI-discussion, there were the **local, national and international press**, the national **television** and **internet** that disseminated the concept and created exposure.

In short, a picture arises of a quite pluricentric discourse coalition on basic income. Actors may come and go. As Circumstances change, other projects and challenges gain public attention. Some of the current actors can thus be seen to have ‘joined the bandwagon’ as the basic income

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started to resurge - whilst an actor map of the preceding years of decline would have displayed a far smaller network.

## 4.4 Synthesis: Key observations on BI in the Netherlands

This chapter recalls the insights developed in the preceding sections, namely the emergence and development of basic income and the initiatives promoting it (4.3.1), their interactions with dominant institutions and structures (4.3.2) and the agency that shaped this development (4.3.3). In the following, some key observations are singled out. These are observations that are somehow striking from a transformative social innovation point of view, and seem to have a significance even beyond the development of the basic income discussion itself.

On the emergence and development of basic income and the initiatives promoting it, the first thing to observe is that the basic income has a **long history** in the Netherlands. Second, this history displays a striking **oscillating movement**: Already considered in the post-WW II reconstruction period, the concept has gained intermittent political attention and support: distinct periods are the social critiques of the 1970s-1980s, the development into an option on the welfare state policy menu in the later 1980s and 1990s, the decline between roughly 1997 and 2012, and the resurgence of the basic income from 2013 onwards until the present. Third, this study has highlighted how the focal social innovation initiative VBI and its precursor have recently become accompanied by other actors promoting (aspects of) the basic income – with MIES as a contrasting initiative. We can observe **two generations of basic income initiatives**.

On the interactions of the basic income concept and the initiatives promoting it with dominant institutions and structures, the first basic observation is that the basic income fundamentally runs against the dominant social norm – particularly strongly rooted in the Netherlands - that ‘one should earn one’s income’ and against the associated institutions, policies and regulations (administration of unemployment allowances, tax regime, labour and employment policy) that consolidate this norm. This particular concept of transformative social innovation has **deep and strong frictions with dominant institutions and structures**. Second, however, it **also is in line with some dominant institutions and structures**. The basic income appeals to the quite general conviction that everyone should be entitled to income security, and be free to contribute to society on the basis of own talents and initiative. Likewise, and in line with the general commitment to individual self-determination, basic income is in line with the widespread rejection of the inefficient, patronizing and in some ways counter-productive administration of conditional unemployment benefits. Third, the oscillating support for basic income can be seen to depend strongly on the economic cycle and the rises and declines of structural employment. **Next to structural unemployment as main influencing societal development, there are also various other developments that make it gain political traction**: The expected robotization of work and associated scarcity of paid labour, the administrative tensions surrounding the decentralization of welfare state policies, critiques of the over-productive and rushed society, and the recent trend towards experimenting and co-creating government. Fourth, there is the recent **development towards basic income inspired experimentation**, as a **half-way institutionalization** of the unconditional income aspect. From the perspective of the principled advocates of universal basic income, VBI, this implies a watering down of transformative ambitions. From the perspective of MIES, their allies and various local governments, the experimentation initiatives rather represent pragmatic moves towards realizing at least some key transformative potentials of the high-potential but minimal impact concept.

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On the agency of the basic income initiatives that shaped the development of the Dutch basic income discussion, the first observation to make is that promoting the basic income amounts to an **uphill struggle** that had many actors resign, or shift attention to other projects. This particular transformative social innovation concept, at least in its BIEN/VBI understanding of *universal* basic income, relies on grand-scale, structural governmental reform. Basic income advocates can thus be seen to **rely on broad support** for a scheme that is **generally found far too radical** to be considered for implementation. A second observation is that VBI and MIES are **two initiatives** that do develop a sense of agency nevertheless, yet with quite **contrasting theories of change and associated resources they draw upon to empower themselves**. Whilst VBI is principled and advocacy-oriented, MIES is more pragmatic and explorative. Third, both VBI and MIES can be seen to **rely strongly on communication resources**, on the construction of **credible, persuasive knowledge** and on **maximized exposure** as ways to empower themselves in their ‘uphill struggle’. In the case of VBI, academic research, scientific credibility and detailed expertise have been key instruments in their strategy of convincing politicians and voters into the desired structural reforms. In the case of VBI and ‘experimentation broker’ Hoeijmakers, it is rather their ways of organizing exposure for their crowd-funded initiatives towards experimentation. The experimentation typically serves to make the basic income concrete, and bring discussion beyond abstract beliefs. Fourth, the **agency** behind the promotion of the basic income (or rather certain elements of it) is clearly **involving new actors** next to the academics, activists and incidental political supporters advocating full-fledged BI – and it is **reinvigorated through the policy entrepreneurship** of a network of dedicated individuals. The municipal governments are crucial actors in the recent wave of basic income inspired experiments, in turn prompting the Secretary of State and national-level political parties to take a position on a less conditional administration of unemployment benefits. Fifth and finally, the two initiatives VBI and MIES are significantly empowered in their ambitions through the **exposure-enhancing media ‘hype’** that took off by the end of 2013. Some critical writers, opinion leaders and documentary makers have actively incited this media hype, with an influential book publication and ‘meet-ups’ dedicated to the documentaries as notable actions. Other media, including both the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ media, have followed suit, eagerly picking up on the **proliferation of media events**. An important factor seems to have been the ‘shock value’ that independent writer Bregman added to the basic income concept – his ‘Money for Free’ storyline provided a mediagenic (yet not entirely correct) framing of the basic income –inspired experiments.

## 5 Basic Income initiatives in Germany

Developments around the Basic Income in Germany seem to follow a similar temporal pattern as those in the Netherlands with an initial emergence of discussions in the late 1970s which subsided in the late 1980s and remained confined to mostly academic circles until the 1990s. Also, similar to yet earlier than in the Netherlands, a surge of initiatives to the BI can be observed since the year 2000. In Germany, this turn of events was triggered by a major political reform of labour laws and unemployment benefits under chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Agenda 2010) during the first years of the new millennium, and probably propelled by the rising interest in the concept also in other countries.

For most BI initiatives that emerged in Germany during the noughties a Dutch counter-part exists that is somewhat similar in outlook and approach. The official BIEN affiliate Netzwerk Grundeinkommen, however, was founded in 2004, thirteen years later than the Dutch VBI. Due to its roots in and continued collaboration with organisations of unemployed, the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen tends to advocate the BI from a rather left-wing, anti-capitalist perspective. Another marked difference to developments in the Netherlands can be found in a striking absence of parliamentary exchanges on the topic in Germany, be it on local, provincial or national level. Although political parties and individual politicians advocating the BI exist, the concept has not yet managed to push past a small commission dealing with public petitions onto the political agenda of the German Parliament.

For the time being, the topic continues lingering in some party programmes and mainstream media – unlikely to ever disappear due to the tireless effort of many. This chapter introduces the heads and hearts of the main German BI advocacy groups, addressing their emergence (5.1), dynamics (5.2) and agency (5.3).

### 5.1 Emergence

Focusing on the emergence of organisations and initiatives in Germany inspired by the idea of Basic Income, this chapter addresses the questions: *How does social innovation (SI) emerge? How do SI-initiatives, SI-networks and the 'SIs themselves' relate and develop through space and time?* Although the main focus is on Germany, a discussion of relations between BI-initiatives necessarily requires an international focus. BIEN was founded as an international network (chapter 3) in 1986 and, following its founding in 2004, the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen applied to become an affiliate. Especially in the European context, international collaboration hardly comes as a surprise. People interested in the idea and committed to its proliferation, including everyone interviewed for this chapter, tend to be internationally networked. Ideas and strategies to make the concept publically and politically known and acceptable travel across borders – just like the concept itself has travelled across space and time.

#### 5.1.1 An emerging idea: intellectual battles over historiographic authority

Ronald Blaschke, a co-founder and key figure of the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen, has undertaken notable historiographic efforts to trace the idea of a Basic Income back to its origins. English

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statesman Thomas More continues to be cited, also by well-known BIEN members (Vanderborght & Van Parijs, 2005), as the thinker who first envisioned a system where theft becomes unnecessary because everyone's basic needs are met. According to Blaschke, however, a close reading of More's book *Utopia*, published in 1516, suggests a repressive system with compulsory labour and little mercy for those unwilling to contribute to agricultural and economic productivity.

Blaschke further impugns other famous thinkers who have been credited with contributing to birthing the idea, including the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives, the Dutchman Hugo de Groot and the English-American Thomas Paine. The first to propose a BI that most closely resembles the concept that the German Netzwerk Grundeinkommen advocates (i.e. an individual, universal entitlement without means test and work requirement, sufficiently high to live on and ensure social participation) is, according to Blaschke (2015), the Englishman Thomas Spence. In his essay *The rights of infants*, published in 1796, Spence openly critiques some of Paine's propositions in his pamphlet *Agrarian Justice*, published in the same year.

This short historic excursion shows that like the exact definition of the concept, its exact emergence remains contested. Clearly, intellectuals and academics have pondered possible solutions to structural inequalities for centuries – and continue doing so today with unremitting eagerness and a thirst for interpretive authority. The ensuing sections dealing with the emergence of BI-initiatives in Germany are recounting events and developments that took place at most five decades, rather than five centuries ago.

## 5.1.2 An emerging debate: BI-inspired social critique during the 1980s

Sascha Liebermann, professor of sociology and co-founder of a BI-initiative (see next section), published a comprehensive review of "Basic Income in the German Debate" in 2012. Liebermann's contribution describes the 1980s as a prequel to current debates. Then and now, confusions of BI with a social dividend or a negative income tax persist and BI is frequently discussed as a necessary reform of the welfare state due to high or (expected to be) rising unemployment rates.

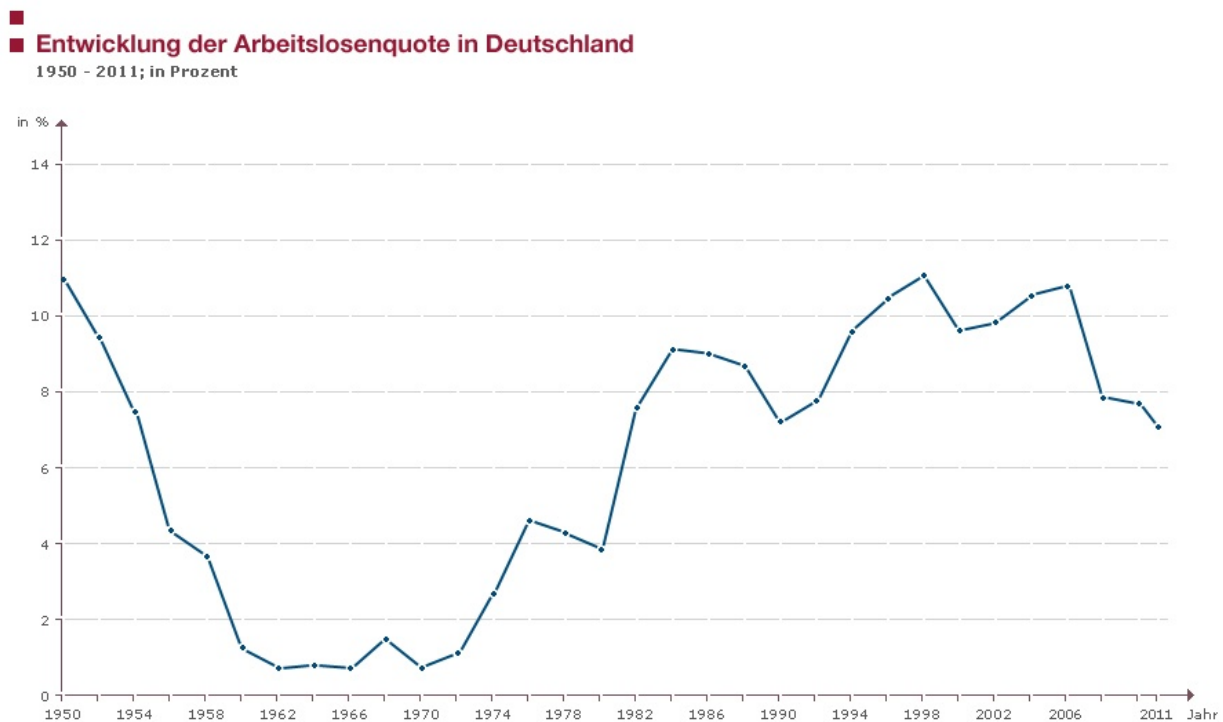
After the economic boom (*Wirtschaftswunder*) in post-war Germany, unemployment rates began climbing during the 1970s due the first oil crisis and surged during the 1980s in the aftermaths of the second oil crisis (see figure below). In the early 1980s, BI emerged as a hot topic in associations of unemployed and welfare recipients as well as among academics<sup>21</sup>. In 1982, both groups gathered separately, yet united in the spirit of BI: Associations of unemployed proposed a "right to income" at a conference in Frankfurt and the German Sociological Association hosted a congress on "The Crisis of the Employment Society" in Bamberg (Liebermann, 2012).

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<sup>21</sup> Some, in the German context well-known academic authors at the time include Ralf Dahrendorf, Michael Opielka, Georg Vobruba and Claus Offe.

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Figure Development of the unemployment rate in Germany, 1950-2011; Source: BPB



Quelle: [http://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/nn\\_31892/SeiteGlobal/Forms/Rubrikensuche/Rubrikensuche\\_Form.htm?view=prozessForm&resourceId=210358&input\\_4=&pageLocale=de&topicId=17588&year\\_month=aktuell&year\\_month.GPOUP=1&search=Suchen](http://statistik.arbeitsagentur.de/nn_31892/SeiteGlobal/Forms/Rubrikensuche/Rubrikensuche_Form.htm?view=prozessForm&resourceId=210358&input_4=&pageLocale=de&topicId=17588&year_month=aktuell&year_month.GPOUP=1&search=Suchen)  
Lizenz: Creative Commons by-nc-nd/3.0/de  
Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013, [www.bpb.de](http://www.bpb.de)



According to Ronald Blaschke (2012), co-founder of the German BIEN-affiliate Netzwerk Grundeinkommen (see next section), associations of unemployed, “independent from state, church, welfare organisations and labour unions” (p.5) spearheaded a movement that viewed BI as a cornerstone of a new socio-politico-economic system. The alternative system envisioned included a BI allowing for livelihood and participation, self-organised material production in solidarity economies, self-organised education and culture, minimum wages and the reduction of working hours, gratis use of public infrastructure and gender equality in the distribution of paid labour and reproduction (Blaschke, 2012). Strikingly, this movement combined the ‘real utopia’ of a BI (Olin Wright, 2010) with challenges to a number of other existing institutions, demanding expansion of state intervention in some and state retraction from other areas *en route* to an alternative system.<sup>22</sup>

Besides support for BI among academics and independent organisations of unemployed, Liebermann (2012) pinpoints another parallel of spiking interest. Comparing the first and second waves of enthusiasm for the topic, gathering momentum during the 1980s and since the early 2000s, respectively, he indicates that the topic gained some traction among members of the Green Party. During the 1980s, libertarian Greens active in the then newly-founded party avidly supported the idea. It did not, however, feature in any official party statement or party programme

<sup>22</sup> Wright (2011), however, argues that a BI would preempt any necessity for minimum wages “because there would no longer be any reason to prohibit low-wage voluntary contracts once a person’s basic needs are not contingent on that wage” (p. 11).

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of that time. Another parallel Liebermann (2012) highlights is the substantive media response throughout the period when the topic first surfaced, especially in more left-leaning newspapers, resembling current articles in tone and arguments “as if times have not changed at all” (p. 181).

The emergent and escalating interest in the topic subsided after 1989. The fall of the Berlin Wall in the same year and the German reunification in the following year dominated public debates and political day-to-day business. Although unemployment rates continued to rise throughout the 1990s, public interest in BI dwindled drastically. Two reasons have been proposed: a failure of early advocates to effectively reach out to their fellow citizens and anchor the concept in mainstream critiques of the welfare state and the continued or even growing “ideology of labour”. While prevailing everywhere, this ideology has been described as stronger in East Germany as a residual of the former communist regime. More generally, the persistence of this ideology has been accredited to a dominant understanding of female emancipation as an equal right to paid work (Opielka, 2000 in Liebermann, 2012).

Although the BI almost vanished, it was never forgotten. At the end of the 1990s, about a decade after its disappearance, chancellor Schröder announced far-reaching reforms of the welfare system and labour laws in view of soaring unemployment rates. This announcement triggered a rekindling of the idea by the same groups who had embraced it during its first emergence in public discourse: associations of unemployed and academics.

## 5.1.3 A re-emerging debate: BI-initiatives in response to welfare state reform in the new millennium

In 2002, the German Federal Court of Audit (Bundesrechnungshof) promulgated a history of fraud in the German Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit) in the form of fake job placements to manipulate statistics. Following these allegations, the German government under chancellor Schröder installed a “commission for modern labour market services” (Kommission für moderne Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt), led by Peter Hartz, a board member and the chief human resources officer of the Volkswagen AG at the time. The commission, which included representatives of policy, research, business and labour unions, presented a set of recommendations for reforming labour market policy, social services and the Federal Employment Agency in the same year. The recommendations given were to a large extent inspired by British social policy (Bundesrat, 2004). Over the course of several years, these recommendations were translated into policies and adopted by the German government as part of Germany’s *Agenda 2010* to “improve the framework conditions for more growth and more employment” (government declaration by Gerhard Schröder, 2003). Policy changes included more favourable conditions for unemployed people interested in setting up a small enterprise, for so-called mini-jobs generating a monthly income below €325 (now €400) and for labour leasing organised by temporary employment agencies.

The fourth and final policy package, often referred to as “Hartz IV”, stipulated a significant reduction of unemployment benefits<sup>23</sup> for long-term unemployed<sup>24</sup> at the level of social benefits.

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<sup>23</sup> Until 2011, a small extra amount, colloquially known as the “poverty familiarisation premium”, was paid for a period up to two years when people had to transition from higher to lower unemployment benefits (from *Arbeitslosengeld I* to *Arbeitslosengeld II*).

<sup>24</sup> The moment from which a person is considered long-term unemployed and thus to receive lower unemployment benefits (*Arbeitslosengeld II*) is age-dependent. At the time when the new regulation came into force, people at the age



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People who would not actively seek and, if offered, accept “reasonable work” became more likely to be sanctioned in the form of cuts to their benefits.<sup>25</sup> The then current Minister of Work reiterated much of the dominant discourse at the time when justifying the reform as better support and challenging (“fördern und fordern”) of unemployed, promising improved incentives but also more rigorous sanctions (Bundesrat, 2004). The official adoption of the Hartz-concept was followed by extensive public protest, especially in East Germany, including weekly marches and the chanting of the political slogan born at the time of reunification: We are the people! (Wir sind das Volk) (taz, 2007).

## 5.1.3.1 The first BI-initiative: *Freiheit statt Vollbeschäftigung* (Freedom, not Full Employment)

Against this backdrop of reform, debate and protest in the early 2000s, when the government’s workfare policies polarised the public, the BI re-emerged as an alternative proposal. The first to promote the idea publically in a way that had not been used in the previous period of BI-advocacy (see previous section) was a small group of academics.<sup>26</sup> For about one year, the group had been discussing the BI in a loose network of interested people in Frankfurt and Dortmund. Recognising that BIEN existed already as a (mainly) European and academic network, the question emerged how to contribute. The small group split over the question whether to pursue the topic academically or whether to invest in public promotion.

Eventually, in 2003, five people agreed that creating public visibility for BI was of paramount importance. As Sascha Liebermann, co-founder and spokesperson of the group recalls:

“It was like an internal impulse as if you owe this to society. There was a very strong feeling that if you have an alternative idea, you need to put it up for debate because it could be that others share your view. ... There was a strong urge to make this contribution to the public debate. ... It felt like an internal call of duty. Very strange. Like an “ought to”, not a “want to”. Like an “ought to” that you want.” (SL, 12)

The group named its initiative “Freedom, not Full Employment” (*Freiheit statt Vollbeschäftigung*) in response to the continuous focus on full employment in dominant discourse. They set up a website, rented advertising space in the Frankfurt subway in December 2003 and put up fifty text-heavy posters arguing that an “unconditional basic income for all citizens strengthens people’s readiness to assume responsibility and provides the freedom to do so”. The general tenor of the nine theses displayed suggested that the political focus of an economy that can increasingly rely on machines and computers for automated production should not be on full employment as this would imply compulsory labour, often under precarious conditions.<sup>27</sup>

To the group’s surprise, the media response to their poster campaign was enormous. Emails with supportive statements, critique or requests for further information started trickling in

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of 58 where entitled to 32 months of higher unemployment benefits (Arbeitslosengeld I). Between 2006 and 2007, this period was reduced to 18 months. Since 2008, it has been extended again to 24 months.

<sup>25</sup> Sanctions can imply a reduction of payments below the “socio-cultural subsistence level”.

<sup>26</sup> Around the same time, the working group “Enough for all” (Genug für alle) of the German attac network started discussing the BI. The group developed a poster exhibition for the 2008 BIEN congress in Berlin. It has been updated in 2015 and is available in German and English: <http://grundeinkommen-attac.de/index.php?id=74821>.

<sup>27</sup> Link to the original poster: <http://www.freiheitstattvollbeschaeftigung.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2006/10/fsv-plakat-2005.pdf>.

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immediately. Interview invitations followed soon. Over the course of the following year, several major newspapers (FAZ, taz, Frankfurter Rundschau), two TV shows and a radio show ran features about BI and the initiative. After this experience, the group continued campaigning with posters, stickers and postcards at intervals in several major German cities (Berlin, Dortmund, Cologne, Bonn and Hamburg) until 2010.<sup>28</sup>

## 5.1.3.2 The first BI-network: BIEN-affiliate *Netzwerk Grundeinkommen* (Network Basic Income)

On 9 July 2004, the same day when the final policy package for modern labour market services (Hartz IV, see section 5.1.3) was approved by the German Federal Council, the *Netzwerk Grundeinkommen* was founded “just around the corner”. A small team had invited a variety of people whom they knew to be in favour of BI. As co-founder and board member Ronald Blaschke explains:

“There was the announcement of Hartz IV which implied an increased compulsion to work and increased pressuring of low incomes ... and the idea was born: we need to revive the idea of BI as a countermove to Hartz IV. ... The new social legislation was the trigger.” (RB, 1-2)

At the event, members of religious organisations, of associations of unemployed and of political parties (The Greens and the PDS, a predecessor of The Left) as well as students and academics, including some who had already been part of BI-related discussions about two decades earlier, agreed to form a network. The *Netzwerk Grundeinkommen* aimed to serve as a “pluralistic platform for scientists and politically active people who advocate the introduction of a BI” (Opielka in press release 1-04). The newly-founded network publically announced its agreement to become an affiliate of BIEN, to support a BI defined by four criteria (individual entitlement, securing subsistence, no means-test, no work requirement) and to abstain from advocating a particular BI model. Over the course of the first decade, the membership base grew above 3,500 members. At the end of 2017, the total number of members included more than 100 organisations and was nearing the mark of 5,000 individual members:

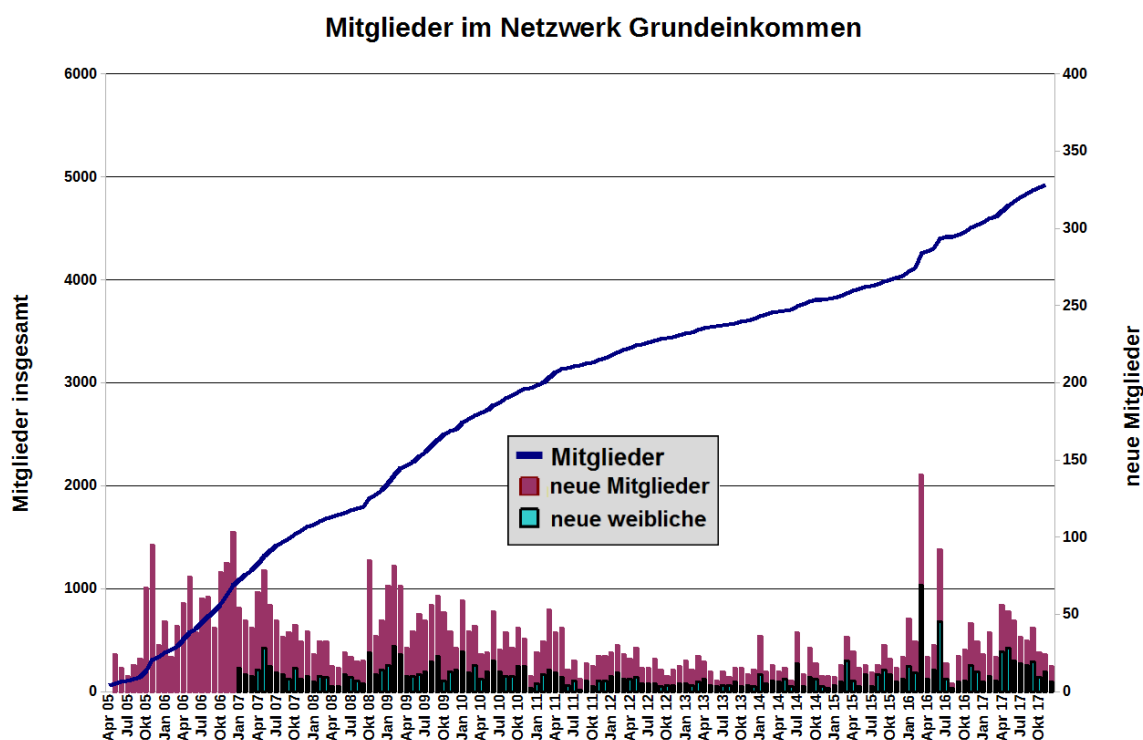
“We fight for a BI according to the four criteria. In the beginning, we were more academically oriented, analogous to BIEN. ... BIEN is also an academic organisation by origin which is mostly concerned with the academic dissemination of BI-related ideas. They have also become more active politically over the last years. This does not mean that science is not political but political advocacy is something else still. And in the *Netzwerk Grundeinkommen* there was also a shift of emphasis in the last ten years – not away from science but a broadening from scientific to political activities. ... Everything started with 50 people and everything [Basic Income Week, a supporters’ association, different platforms, webpages, regional networks] has been built up successively.” (RB, 2)

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<sup>28</sup> An overview of all campaigning activities can be found here: <http://www.freiheitstattvollbeschaeftigung.de/plakataktion/>

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Figure: Membership numbers of the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen<sup>29</sup>



The declared overall goal of the network is “the introduction of a BI in Germany and, as a human right, *de facto* worldwide” (RB, 2). Besides organising the biennial BIEN congress in Munich in 2012, the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen has been centrally involved in bringing to life a number of remarkable and internationally relevant initiatives: international congresses, the international Basic Income Week and the European Citizen Initiative which led to the establishment of UBI Europe:

In 2004, at the Attac Summer Academy in Dresden, Ronald Blaschke and Andreas Exner, member of Netzwerk Grundeinkommen und sozialer Zusammenhalt (Network Basic Income and social solidarity B.I.E.N. Austria) agreed to establish new (plat)forms of collaboration, including German-spoken international congresses: “*This idea was the starting point of a long-standing and fruitful collaboration between German-speaking networks and basic income initiatives in Europe*” (RB). The first international German-spoken congress was held in Vienna in 2005, the second in Basel in 2007 and the third in Berlin in 2008. For the organisation of these congresses, an ‘international German-speaking round table basic income’ was set up to coordinate the collaboration of various networks and initiatives from Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and Italy (South Tyrol) as well as of representatives of Attac Austria, Germany and Switzerland (Blaschke, 2016).

In the context of the EU-project “Basic Income on the Way to Europe”, which was amongst other set-up to finance the 2008 congress in Berlin, the idea emerged to organise an International

<sup>29</sup> Retrieved in December 2017 from <https://www.grundeinkommen.de/mitglieder-netzwerk-grundeinkommen-deutschland>. Left axis: total members. Right axis: new members. A geographical overview is available here: <https://www.grundeinkommen.de/karte>.

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Basic Income Week.<sup>30</sup> Public information, demonstration and outreach events have taken place during a dedicated week in September every year since then. In 2008, the first International Basic Income Week took place in Austria, Germany and Switzerland in the run-up to the Berlin congress. Over time, this initiative spread across Europe – not least due to the European Citizen Initiative (see next paragraph) – and eventually across the globe. In 2017, events in the name of the International Basic Income Week were organised in 24 countries on 6 continents. The organisational set-up has remained the same throughout the years, with a central committee agreeing on a common theme of current relevance, advertising the week on-line as well as centrally collecting information on events planned. Every individual or initiative organising an event is free to follow or deviate from the central theme:

“The idea was that, you know, for example Day of Democracy or Labour Day, all these social movements have proclaimed a special day when they actively promote their ideas. That was the same for us in the case of basic income. [...] Yet we said we would like to have a whole week to make it easier to organize speakers etc. And this idea, emerging in Germany, has globalised since – but the extent and characteristics depend on locally participating initiatives in the different countries.” (RB)

Another spin-off of the collaboration of German-speaking basic income networks was the European Citizens Initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income, an initiative that was started in 2013. It was initially led by the German-speaking networks and resulted in a concentrated pan-European effort to collect the 1 million signatures needed to achieve a public hearing at the European Parliament. Although the required target could not be attained, the initiative itself created a lot of attention and led to the formation of a lot of new local, regional and even national basic income initiatives. To keep up the momentum, a formal organisation – UBI Europe (UBIE) – was founded in the aftermaths of the European Citizen Initiative, also to function as political pendant to the more academically oriented BIEN network. UBIE was founded and registered as a sister network of BIEN in 2014.

### 5.1.3.3 The first prominent supporter: Götz W. Werner, successful entrepreneur and gifted speaker

As the long-term CEO of a large national drugstore chain, who has always shown concern and conscience with respect to his employees and customers, Götz W. Werner is a well-known and well-respected entrepreneur in Germany. In 2005, he became a public advocate of basic income in an interview with the business magazine “brand eins” (Fischer 2005). In the interview, Werner reiterates the frequently raised argument that basic income will become a necessity due to technological progress. In addition, he notes the philosophical justification of basic income as a way to decouple work from income.

The basic income that has become known as “the Götz-Werner-model” was initially developed by his tax advisor Dr. Benediktus Hardorp. Hardorp, who played a role in the introduction of a VAT in Germany in the end of the 1960s, always favoured a VAT-financed basic income model and apparently succeeded in convincing Werner of his idea. Susanne Wiest, the initiator of the first online petition for a basic income (see next section), met Hardorp in person shortly before her public appearance in front of the Commission for Petitions of the German Bundestag:

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<sup>30</sup> [basicincomeweek.org](http://basicincomeweek.org)

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“He said that great sentence to me: Basic income is the disbursed tax-exempt amount of the VAT. He anyways always said that [the VAT] is the tax of the future ... and when looking at the national tax revenue, the VAT is indeed becoming more important than the income tax. He [Hardorp] was able to talk about money and these flows in such an accessible way that I gained freedom by learning about movements and effects – rather than numbers. ... And I liked it! (laughs) I thought this is the easiest thing. Why bother with all that ‘scrap for redistribution’ – taking from some and not giving to all?” (SW, 11)

Although the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen does not promote any particular basic income model, it recognises the value of a prominent supporter of the idea:

“I read this [the brand eins interview] and thought: yes, it’s good that there is someone and that this will certainly lead to ripple effects because an entrepreneur is not just ‘someone’. And he was the dm-boss, everybody knows it in Germany, the drugstore chain. And it did cause major ripple effects! That’s how it is with the media: if a prominent figure, whether the Pope, or the Federal President or Götz Werner, they launch into it. It could have also been any other prominent figure. Media are also a bit simple in that way. ... It is also part of the game for social movements to have prominent supporters. This is a little difficult for us as a network, though, because firstly, we are a collective, and because secondly, we are a platform for the grassroots, so to speak and because thirdly, our membership covers an ideological spectrum and ... we do not want to emphasise [one model] to avoid being pushed into one particular political corner.” (RB, 12)

Clearly, people and initiatives supporting a basic income are well aware of each other and follow each other’s manoeuvres, not necessarily neutrally. With Götz Werner publically taking a stance, which was the starting point of a long-term project to support the basic income in general, and his favoured model in particular, a new actor to be reckoned with had entered the scene. In the same year, Werner started the initiative “Unternimm die Zukunft” (Undertake the Future)<sup>31</sup> which runs an elaborate online portal, manages his public appearances related to basic income and markets his numerous publications on the topic.

It is worth noting that Werner’s basic income model inspired a Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS) initiative known as the BGE-Kreise (BI-circles) that was started in 2010/2011 by computer scientist Dirk Schumacher. Participants receive a monthly ‘basic income’ financed by a membership fee and a ‘tax’ on every transaction – all in a complementary currency. By now, 48 BI-circles that use Schumacher’s concept and software exist. Most of them are situated in Germany but there are also circles in Switzerland, the US and Brazil.

## 5.1.4 An emerging opportunity: an online petition addressing the parliament

On 10 December 2008, Susanne Wiest submitted an online petition for the introduction of an unconditional basic income in Germany with the Federal Parliament (Bundestag). This initiative triggered large media and societal resonance and rather inspired and inspiring civil activism, and because it succeeded in achieving a public hearing in front of the petition committee of the German Bundestag (Federal Parliament) on 8 November 2010. Although on 27 June 2013, the Bundestag rejected the admission of the petition for plenary debate, Wiest’s petition brought the idea of a

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.unternimm-die-zukunft.de/de/>

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basic income closer to the centre of German policy-making than any other previous or subsequent initiative and made the concept a lot more widely known than previously. Furthermore, it kicked-off a period of significant political activism that forms part of the (still ongoing) efforts by groups and individuals to make the concept widely known and accepted. Along the way, the petition process revealed the unwillingness, inability and inadequacy of the current political system to deal with societal concerns that require radical and systemic changes rather than piecemeal undertakings.

Susanne Wiest, a day care provider for children in the province of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, found out about the, then only recently established possibility to submit online petitions to the German Bundestag, somewhat by coincidence when trying to make heard her concerns about changes to the taxation of work in childcare. She submitted a petition regarding these changes in taxation, which effectuated a decreased net pay when her work already meant precarious living conditions, as well as a petition asking the Parliament to introduce a basic income. The latter idea emerged spontaneously while elaborating the first petition. Wiest had come across the concept of a basic income a couple of years earlier through the website of the Swiss initiative for a national referendum asking for the introduction of a basic income and was immediately hooked. Since then she had discussed the concept with friends and family, was often reminded of the idea when encountering situations in daily-life that would profit from the availability of a basic income for all (e.g. in the context of voluntary environmental work) and had browsed through a book published in 2007 by Götz W. Werner (see previous section).

While Wiest's first petition pertaining to the taxation of childcare work was immediately rejected, the basic income petition was rubber-stamped. Susanne Wiest stated, somewhat mocking the opaqueness of the initial selection hurdle and procedure:

“One could say, an employee was in a good mood and said: I'm gonna put a chequered egg into the nest! Or enjoyed it, or even liked the idea... I have the feeling this somehow slipped through. It slipped through super-well! (laughs) And then it was online.” (SW, 1)

It was only later that Wiest realised that a petition enables or even requires the collection of signatures to be eligible for public hearing at the Federal Parliament's petition committee. Despite, or probably rather because she started this initiative following a sudden impulse, based on personal observations, experiences and evaluations, and without affiliation with or backing by any of the already known and established basic income advocates, a large number of individuals and groups gathered around and behind her, helping to spread the word and collect the 50,000 signatures needed. In the process of this and in the entire time between successful submission of the petition with 52,973 signatures in February 2009 and final rejection of public debate by Federal Parliament in June 2013, the keen anticipation, substantial media attention and additional initiatives by Susanne Wiest and others formed part of one of the liveliest periods of basic income activism in Germany.

## 5.1.5 Emerging experiences: a new initiative raffles off basic incomes

In the summer of 2014, the first of its kind basic income crowdfunding initiative started in Germany. Tech-savvy web developer Michael Bohmeyer was enjoying something like a basic income based on a small percentage of earnings from every transaction on an online platform he

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helped creating but was no longer actively involved in when had had the idea that he would like to spread this experience – as well as the idea of a basic income. Together with a friend, Johannes Ponader, who had been active in the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen in Munich, then moved to Berlin and firmly established the topic basic income on the agenda of the German Pirate Party, Bohmeyer set to work on creating a crowdfunding initiative. The basic mechanism involves a raffle of monthly basic incomes of 1,000 EUR for one year whenever 12,000 EUR have been collected. Relying on social media campaigning, public appearances, clever technical solutions and a committed and continuously growing team, the initiative became rather successful, not least because crowdfunding had become a known mechanism and platforms existed that easily enabled donations. Less than four years later, [Mein Grundeinkommen](#) (My Basic Income) has more than 10 permanent staff working full-time on the project and raffled off 150 basic incomes that have been funded by nearly 90,000 people.

While most people working on the initiative share a leftist ideology and are critical of the German social benefit system and its sanctioning of ‘disobedient recipients’ in particular – a characteristic they share with the BIEN-affiliate Netzwerk Grundeinkommen – like the Netzwerk, Mein Grundeinkommen seeks to retain a politically neutral appearance:

“We are consciously trying to not act politically and not to be perceived as belonging to the radical left, simply because we can reach a lot of people and we need to reach a lot of people if we want the basic income to be introduced in Germany at some point.” (AJ, 5)

Due to the crowdfunders’ focus on action rather than public debate and on the creation of personal experiences rather than political or scientific arguments, Mein Grundeinkommen could be considered to be more successful at remaining ‘neutral’. Their [website](#) plainly states:

“The unconditional basic income is a political concept that implies a monthly payment by the state to every citizen without any service or requirement in return. The unconditional basic income aims to enable people to live a dignified life. There are several amounts under discussion in Germany. We decided for 1,000 EUR because this amount is slightly above the subsistence level (currently 735 EUR/month). Thereby, people are better able to participate in social life.

You can find more information on the concept provided by the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen here: <https://www.grundeinkommen.de/die-idee>.”

The organisers of the crowdfunding initiative notice that people ‘of all walks of life’ participate. However, people in need are overrepresented among those who register for the drawings:

“Generally, we would like more people participating who are not in need. But often people who are not in need do not take part in the lottery as they think there are people who could make better use of the money. From our perspective that’s kind of sad as we are advocating for an unconditional basic income that is not related to need. Therefore, we are trying to explain this over and over again that a basic income from our perspective does not stand in relation to indigence. [...] We advocate for a basic income for everyone and therefore we do not want to restrict the lottery. The only condition we have is that the participant has to be a human, no matter where the person is from, where the person lives or how old the person is – of course kids can take part in the drawings too.” (AJ, 3 + 7)

Earlier established basic income initiatives, including the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen, tend to view the crowdfunded basic income lottery critical. Its success surprises the sceptics in longer-existing initiatives and yet sometimes prove a point in practice that has often been made in theory. For example, the first comment on the first Mein Grundeinkommen crowdfunding page allegedly

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was: “Hell will freeze over sooner than someone will donate for someone else’s laziness.” Yet, the first 12,000 EUR were collected in four weeks’ time and the intervals have only become shorter since.

While noting the “media hype” (RB) the initiative creates for the concept, it is often maintained that a yearly payment to an individual is simply not the real deal. A lack of universalism and time restrictions on payments are also criticisms that are often voiced with respect to scientific experiments. Although there have been a lot of requests for being allowed to study the effects of a yearly basic income based on data that could be collected on the winners, the intention behind the crowdfunding initiative is not of a scientific nature. Instead, winners of the lottery are encouraged – yet not forced – to share their stories. They are, however, free to remain anonymous should they wish so. Since the German initiative started in 2014, similar initiatives have taken off in other countries, for example in the Netherlands and in the United States, always supported with know-how by the German team.

“For us it is just important that as many people as possible, in the best case globally, have received a basic income at some point, had this experience – and that is why we also support every initiative and every group from every country that would like to do the same. ... It internationalises the idea. That’s the goal.” (AJ, 5).

## 5.2 TSI dynamics

The idea of a basic income challenges a social order based on workfare, where subsistence, participation and recognition are mainly earned through paid labour and where those who cannot work to earn a living are considered less worthy – or even a burden for society. The proposition to de-couple income from work is as simple as it is radical because it fundamentally calls into question some of the core values modern welfare systems and our social order in general are based on. The Netzwerk Grundeinkommen pursues a number of strategies to achieve the major political changes that are necessary to implement a basic income as well as the required shift in values: raising public awareness and support for the idea, also among other social movements (e.g. degrowth), lobbying for the idea in and with political parties as well as networking and streamlining activities across political levels, from the local, to the national and international sphere. As highlighted above, other initiatives have followed other approaches, for example, by making use of crowdfunding, local bartering schemes (LETS) or campaigning.

Major changes in the social context that triggered or enabled particular activities in the name of basic income are the introduction of Hartz IV, implying reduced social benefits and increased sanctions for the unemployed, which spurred the founding of several basic income initiatives, including the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen. Another institutional change in the social context that enabled a change where the opening up of the German Federal Parliament to a more participatory form of democracy, allowing the submission of online petitions. The technical possibility this mechanism offered was soon used by a vigorous basic income supporter who has since become firmly established in the scene and has not grown tired of fighting for more participatory democracy – also as an enabling setting for the introduction of a basic income.

Interesting dynamics related to basic income occurred around an attempt to establish an Enquête-Kommission (commission of enquiry) to look into basic income as a policy option at the German Parliament in 2013. Members of the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen joined the German Pirate Party that was considered a new force to be reckoned with on the left side of the political spectrum and managed to write the support for a basic income in general and the establishment of a



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Commission of Enquiry in the party's election programme. Worried that the public support of a basic income by a yet unknown competitor might cost votes, the Green party and the Left party followed suit. However, the election result of the Pirate Party was not as favourable as expected and although the three parties together held sufficient seats in the Federal Parliament to install the desired Commission of Enquiry, the Green party eventually decided to no longer support this initiative. This episode in German politics may provide an indication for the long, if not impossible distance that the basic income has to cover from idea to policy. Asked about the possible change mechanisms that might work in their favour, basic income supporters either point to an unexpected major event comparable to the Fukushima disaster in the context of nuclear energy policy that might cause a sudden turn-around – or to long-term technological trends in robotics and artificial intelligence that are often framed as necessitating a basic income eventually. Some people hope for more prominent support for the concept, for example by a famous athlete, the German chancellor or even the Pope. While a recognition of the value of unpaid work seems to have grown in recent years and while views on what 'the economy' is and provides seem to have broadened, support by more prominent figures for basic income in the spirit of this recognition is lacking.

There is an overlap in membership of the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen and parties on the left side of the political spectrum. Nevertheless, this overlap has not yet worked to the Netzwerk's advantage because either basic income was not acceptable to the majority of party members and hence did not find its way into party programmes, or because the party itself did not win much support among the constituency and could hardly shape policy processes. For the most recent national elections, the Bündnis Grundeinkommen (Alliance Basic Income) was founded as a one-topic party to compete against established parties as a work-around in the absence of popular votes as they exist in Switzerland. Despite the struggles that hardly resemble a coordinated 'long march through the institutions', Netzwerk members maintain a positive spirit:

"Across the party spectrum, there is a concept for a basic income in the drawers of every party. In every party. The SPD (Social Democrats) developed a concept together with one of our local networks. ... They are trying to insist since 2010, I am trying to get into the unions – but there are walls. That is not a problem because we have learned from Montecristo that you can dig through any wall. All you need is a spoon and a lot of time. Not a problem! Nobody said it was going to be easy or happen immediately... I actually see allies everywhere!" (FC)

## 5.3 Agency in (T)SI

Whichever person involved in a German basic income initiative one talks to, one is stricken by the sense of meaning and purpose statements made and actions described are imbued with. A lot of passion can easily be detected, not least in people's readiness to take time to share their stories, their convictions and their feelings. Every interviewee could remember when and how they first encountered the idea of a basic income and every one of them claimed to be instantly convinced that a basic income is the (political) way to go. In many ways, becoming active, taking a public stance and continuously investing time into talking about basic income seems to have an empowering effect. For people active in the different initiatives, their activities imply dedicating a good part of their life to a cause they are convinced of. While reasons for their convictions and the basic income model they favour may differ, the underlying premise, namely that a state should grant subsistence and participation universally and unconditionally, is shared by all. This creates

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an interesting sense of companionship where one agrees on something basic or fundamental, while acknowledging diversity 'in the details'.

The central institutional arrangement of the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen comprises a membership base and a board that is registered as an association to enable the receipt of donations and funding. This set-up has been copied from similar initiatives. The core organisational arrangement, i.e. networked structures at and across different levels from local to regional, to national and international, allows for the necessary flexibility to feel enabled rather than restricted. No level or person dictates any other level or person what to do. People are free to commit as much of their know-how and resources as they wish. If local initiatives have a good idea for promoting the basic income, the national network ensures that other local networks hear about it, potentially even providing necessary materials or funds. Local networks have regular meeting times to plan events. Especially the International Week of Basic Income, a global event that was started based on a collaboration of German-speaking basic income networks, is filled with public activities and events. Membership numbers tend to increase in September, most probably due to people becoming aware of the idea and the network during that week. Good arguments and strategies flow freely through the networks, not least because of digital media. Social learning is thus fostered and enabled through virtual and physical personal encounters.

## 5.4 Summary, synthesis, conclusion

Developments around the basic income in Germany followed similar patterns as developments in the Netherlands, with some distinct differences. A main difference is the much later founding of a basic income network in Germany. While the Dutch VBI was founded during the 1980s and mainly took an academic approach to the topic, the German Netzwerk Grundeinkommen was founded in the early 2000s and has, from the start, pursued a more political strategy. Nevertheless, historic roots of the basic income debate in a social critique that first emerged in the late 1970s are shared by the two geographical neighbours – as is the oscillating patterns of submergence and re-emergence. Contrary to the Netherlands, however, there were no serious political debates or advice considering the introduction of a basic income during the 1980s. Moreover, while the most recent re-emergence of the topic may have been earlier, triggered by a major reform of the German welfare state at the start of the new millennium, there have never been activities for experimenting with a form of basic income in Germany.

One conclusion certainly is that, contrary to the Netherlands, there have never been any serious advancements in favour of the topic in local or national policy. While principled trench wars between supporters and non-supporters as well as between supporters of different basic income models exist on both sides of the border, the German landscape of basic income initiatives lacks the kind of pragmatist characters that choose to ignore ideologies and push for experimentation. The only initiative trying to bring the concept to life, the Mein Grundeinkommen crowdfunders who inspired the Dutch MIES to copy their concept, acts a-political and has no ties to government at any level.

Regarding agency, argumentative ammunition mainly in the form of philosophical arguments collected across centuries has become the main resource of empowerment. It clearly sparks and drives conviction, dedication and commitment among proponents. Contrary to the Netherlands, however, public debate in major media is lacking. While there are occasional articles in some of the leading magazines or newspapers covering experimental initiatives in other countries, a publication with an impact comparable to Bregman's 'Gratis Geld' is yet to be written.

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## 6 Synthesis

This concluding chapter presents several synthesis observations, comparing and combining insights developed on the Basic Income as social innovation and on the initiatives promoting it in Germany, the Netherlands and internationally. Our empirical research investigated the transnational network BIEN as well as SI initiatives in two different national contexts. Broadening the scope of our national studies beyond the German Netzwerk Grundeinkommen and the Dutch Vereniging Basisinkomen proved too valuable in capturing dynamics also between several SI initiatives promoting a concept in the same context. In the following we present synthesis observations on the emergence of BI and its promoters **(6.1)**, on the TSI dynamics of the BI **(6.2)**, and on the agency and empowerment of BI promoters **(6.3)**.

### 6.1 Emergence of BI and BI initiatives

It is a difficult task to reconstruct an overall timeline of the Basic Income. The concept can be traced back to Thomas More's 'Utopia' of 1516, and according to some BI experts even earlier. At the BIEN conference in 2017, BIEN co-founder Guy Standing pointed out that the idea of every 'free man's' right to basic subsistence was already suggested in Henry III's 'Charter of the Forest' in 1217. By contrast, the history of BIEN as a transnational network studying and promoting the BI spans only three decades. Some other BI initiatives described in this report have often emerged 'with a splash' but are only a few years old. Considering these different timescales, the above questions lead us to four key synthesis observations, pertaining to the long existence of the BI as a persistent utopian ideal **(6.1.1)**, the apparent fading and re-emergence of the concept in societal debate **(6.1.2)**, the significance of BIEN as a unifying platform for BI discussion and advocacy **(6.1.3)** and the traveling of different approaches to promoting the BI through space and time **(6.1.4)**.

#### 6.1.1 The BI, a persistent utopian ideal

Compared to many other SI initiatives studied in the TRANSIT project, the BI, the core idea lying beneath and driving all efforts studied in this report, has a particularly long tradition, emerging most explicitly in writings by Thomas More in 16<sup>th</sup> century England, travelling across the Atlantic two centuries later with Thomas Paine and eventually inspiring policy proposals and policy experiments in North America in the 1960s and '70s, respectively. The public radiance of the idea subsided on that side of the Atlantic when policy interest had dwindled and the evaluation of BI experiments remained confined to academic circles or even discontinued. Curiously, interest in the BI re-emerged in Europe's North-West in the following decade. Along its way forth and back across the big pond, the BI assembled an impressive list of prominent supporters, which added to its persistence: every new proponent could point to its intellectual lineage.

One of the reasons why the idea seems to persist across time and space may be its transformative promise, suggesting simply yet radically basic subsistence for all, irrespective of immediate or at least desired economic productivity. Thereby, BI challenges and proposes to replace dominant institutions that – also across time and space – have produced social inequalities. In that sense, the concept is firm yet volatile, bearing the promise of a 'simple solution' to many

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problems that persist, emerge or become apparent, including poverty, gender inequality or sustainability. In the context of late welfare states, BI is often promoted as attractive alternative to bloated administrative systems. More recently, BI has become tied to the notion of de-growth as cure for some of the negative outgrowths of the global capitalist economy.

Another reason why the concept persists, although to date it is still ‘just an idea’, ironically lies in materiality. While other SI-initiatives often struggle to survive and maintain a sufficiently large membership base practicing alternative forms of organisation, the BI as another way of knowing or viewing dominant institutions has left historic marks, has been transmitted through texts and archived in a continuously growing conglomerate of books, papers or pamphlets and records of experiments, protests or petitions. In other words, the BI is an idea that seems impossible to suppress. Instead, over the course of five centuries, it has inspired innumerable thoughtful reflections and reframings, rigorous economic, political and philosophical reasoning as well as evidence of possible alternatives to organising welfare and workfare. One results of all efforts that BI proponents may record as success certainly is that this radical idea seems to strike people as less odd or counter-intuitive. Some are even heralding the BI as inevitable due to advancing automation and artificial intelligence.

## 6.1.2 The fading and emergence of a TSI ‘peat fire’

Over the long history of the BI, it has largely remained an unrealized utopia. Recent history shows some oscillating patterns, known in technological innovation as ‘hype and disillusionment cycles’. In NL, it seemed to break through at several times between 1980-2000 – only to almost disappear entirely in societal debate for more than a decade and then re-appear around 2013. In this regard, the ‘peat fire’ is a telling metaphor raised by Dutch BI researchers/BIEN members. It is a rich metaphor that articulates the longevity of timeline as well as the fading and re-emergence. And it raises pertinent follow-up questions on winds that incite the fire and also on the fuels – which change over time (see 6.2 on dynamics).

## 6.1.3 BIEN, a unifying platform?

Since centuries, people arrived at BI-like concepts through different lines of reasoning, and within different social contexts. Prior to BIEN’s establishment, isolated individuals were ‘re-inventing the wheel’ in different places. Often people were unaware that the wheel had been invented already and often could not even know about it.

Important convergence occurred from 1986 onwards as BIEN was established to provide platform for BI debate and (somehow concerted) promotion of it. This dual rationale for BIEN establishment can be understood through the self-understanding of BI as a real-utopian project: In this understanding of promoting the BI, the former platform for discussion serves to generate the ammunition (critique, visioning, articulation of moral principles and criteria for institutional arrangements, evidence base) for the latter implementation objective.

Still, the dual goal already indicates the existence of different streams within BIEN, from the very outset. Researchers and activists have different emphases on former or latter function of BIEN. Some (potential) members keep a distance from advocacy as independent-neutral researchers, or as activists for whom the scientific debate is of lesser importance. The emergence of a European network in the aftermaths of a European Citizens’ initiative for an Unconditional

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Basic Income can be seen as a clear sign that a different, more activist platform was desired by some.

Finally, in recent times we see an even greater diversification, a development we identified as a ‘fourth wave’ in Basic Income activism (Pel & Backhaus 2016). Our study has been attentive to the fact that the BIEN affiliates cannot be considered the only ‘local SI initiative’. The VBI has for long time ‘kept the fire burning’, yet still had a relatively marginal position in the overall BI debate in the Netherlands – in which also other, non-BIEN affiliate BI advocates played prominent parts (chapter 4). In recent years, the moves towards BI-inspired experiments similarly indicate the relevance of other initiatives next to the BIEN network. BIEN affiliates typically continue their efforts to organize unifying platforms. Still, the unification is a permanent question mark – as the constant emergence of new initiatives and new voices indicates.

## 6.2 TSI dynamics of the BI

The BI ‘peat fire’ offers a general understanding of development and dynamics over time. It begs further questions on what keeps the long-lasting fire from breaking into a full blaze, on what keeps it from extinguishing, and on what winds and other context circumstances are shaping it. Hence the following questions: *How do social innovations, SI-network and Si-initiatives interact with/ contribute to transformative change in a social context?*

Considering how this ‘peat fire’ metaphor does not seem to apply to TSI cases generally, there are three key observations to make. These pertain to the particularly demanding nature of the BI transformation, as both counter-intuitive and far-reaching (6.2.1), the ways in which it nevertheless stays relevant to various societal issues and contextual developments (6.2.2) and its partial ‘realization’ in both political and scientific sense (6.3.3).

### 6.2.1 A counter-intuitive and far-reaching transformation

The BI is a very simple concept, but the associated new ways of framing, knowing and organizing income are quite frontally challenging and seeking to replace various formal and informal institutions. The BI is difficult to institutionalize for two major reasons. As argued by Elster (1986), the BI is a proposal that not only entails a far-reaching (and highly unpredictable) transformation process, it is also counter-intuitive and lacking the convincing moral justification that might make such risky undertaking nevertheless politically acceptable. Throughout our empirical accounts, we have seen various concrete instances of these two compounding factors:

On the one hand, the BI is a counter-intuitive concept, clashing with various informal institutions, norms, moral principles, and especially broadly shared ‘earning one’s income’ convictions. The BI would imply far-reaching transformation. It is aiming for major replacement of whole constellations of formal institutions – and especially GER in NED contexts there are very matured, elaborate, complex welfare systems which are hard-won achievements by unions and socialists, who therefore cling to them. More generally, a certain political equilibrium has been reached on workfare entailing many vested interests, backed by macro-economic models and expertise.

The heavy interference with dominant ways of organizing became particularly clear through the administrative difficulty to create exemptions for the BI-inspired experiments within the Dutch national policy framework for social security. Even the relatively minor move towards a

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BI (less rigorous conditionality in income entitlements) entailed a series of administrative issues. (See subsection on Experimentation trajectory).

## 6.2.2 A plausible and relevant reconfiguration of ‘income’

Even if there are several dynamics that keep the BI fire from turning into a transformative blaze, there are also dynamics that keep the BI ‘peat fire’ burning. The rather permanent dynamic is that the proposal is counter-intuitive in some respects, yet also quite plausible as far as it reflects some widely held values. The more transient dynamic is that the BI proposal proves to be a relevant possible solution to various societal problems.

While being counter-intuitive in some respects, the BI is also based on values and normative principles that are widely endorsed (Van Parijs, 1995). The slogan that the BI is “Neither Right. Nor Left. But forward.” captures the sentiment that a BI as a universal principle is hard to defeat. The relevance of BI is changing almost in parallel with societies’ economic development. Other contextual developments that relate to the ebbs and flows of the BI’s prominence in public debate are, amongst other:

- the shortcomings and inefficiencies of social security systems
- gender and emancipation
- work/life balance
- sustainability and de-growth (Dutch case)
- the growing class of the precariat (Standing 2014)
- robotization, automation and artificial intelligence

## 6.2.3 The partial ‘realization’ of the Basic Income

The BI is easily dismissed as a ‘merely utopian’ idea. This is relevant for TSI more generally: The fact that SI concepts are not realized is easily held against them, as evidence that they are ‘unrealistic’, and probably flawed. There is thus the risk of a self-fulfilling prophecy, when the lack of (envisioned) transformative impacts makes it only more difficult to achieve them. It is therefore important to articulate that the BI has already been institutionalized in various ways. A very useful concept in this regard is the notion of ‘realization’ (Cf. Pel & Backhaus 2017). In terms of political and scientific authority of this policy concept, *various* SI impacts can be observed:

First of all, there are various forms of BI arrangements in place (Alaska, Iran) Beyond these examples, one can think of very implicit implementation through the tax system and of basic income entitlements only for certain groups – such as for the elderly, in the Dutch case. These examples may not show the full-fledged BI as BIEN members envision it, but do demonstrate that the BI is not just a dream.

Second, we have seen how the BI has made certain steps on the ladder of political agenda-setting. The commissioned studies by governmental advisory boards and planning agencies, the Dutch governmental decision to allow for BI-inspired experiments, and especially the agenda-setting petitions and the Swiss referendum are clear indications that the BI proposal has gained significant political societal authority.

Third and finally, it is important to realize that the BI has already a long existence as a codified idea. Apart the many treatises, pamphlets and analyses that have been produced over

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several centuries, the concept has institutionalized as an academic discourse. BIEN has been important in setting up a dedicated peer-reviewed journal, and various members have ensured its embedding in academic research and education. The gained scientific authority is a quite striking example of institutionalizing new ways of framing and knowing.

## 6.3 Agency in (T)SI

Qua socially innovative agency, the BI is an intriguing case. As indicated in section 6.2.1, this change in social relations relies on large-scale reforms by governments – as one important trait of the BI is that is a *universal* entitlement. For BIEN, its affiliates and other SI initiatives it is therefore quite dramatically out of reach to make their utopia come true by their own actions alone – it suddenly makes the development of a social enterprise, sharing circle or Hackerspace look easy. Because of this inherent commitment to large-scale transformation, the BI case yields instructive answers on the following key TSI questions: *Where lies the agency in the (T)SI process under study? How are/were actors dis/empowered?*

In this regard, there are three observations to make. First of all, it has become evident how BI agency revolves around expertise **(6.3.1)**. Second, it is striking how the apparent uphill struggle does not lead to massive resignation **(6.3.2)**. Third and finally, we underline the importance of the changing social-material context, and the empowerment through changing communication infrastructures **(6.3.3)**.

### 6.3.1 Agency through (claims to) expertise

Authority and legitimacy are key resources in claims to expertise that have undergone interesting shifts over time. Starting with the BI as a social critique, calls for national policy implementation soon followed. Policy experiments have always played a prominent role and have more recently become accompanied by practical experimentation with the concept by other actors.

### 6.3.2 Resignation and perseverance

Support the BI has always been an uphill struggle. While there are various reasons to resign (e.g. disenchantment with concept or disappointment with lack of impacts), many people keep going, along with BIEN's three decades' existence. Especially in recent years, the number of initiatives, BIEN affiliates and membership continues to grow. Many people may persevere based on their feeling of belonging to a network with a respectable utopian tradition and an unbroken trust in collective efforts paying off. Connecting with like-minded people is for some a significant factor in itself (relatedness). Some people keep going strong based on a deep personal, ideological conviction (autonomy – acting on one's values). Moreover, there is perseverance based on curiosity, intellectual drive and practical results towards proving one's points. In other words, BI promotion is a self-fulfilling activity through one can exercise and develop competence.



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## 6.3.3 Empowerment through communication infrastructures

The emergence of the 4<sup>th</sup> wave (6.3.1), but also the perseverance and self-empowerment of knowing oneself part of a movement, and indeed the recent move of the BI from an irrelevant or tabooed concept to trending topic show that social innovation is shaped by a changing social-material context. As we have focused on the activities of various initiatives and individuals, we should not overlook how they are empowered through recent major changes in the communication infrastructures – through which transformative ideas travel ever-faster and wider. This speaks from the following observations:

The times of individuals ‘re-inventing the wheel’ in isolation (6.1.3) has become a thing of the past. Since its inception three decades ago, the functioning of BIEN as a platform for discussion and advocacy has been greatly enhanced. Instead of enveloping, stamping and posting newsletters to a circle of directly interested members, the current website provides appealing, rich and highly up-to-date contents to a much wider audience – crucially reaching well beyond the network itself. Through further linking to other websites and communication platforms, the BI becomes ‘ubiquitous’ – especially the media ‘hypes’ around the Dutch experiments, the German petition and the Swiss referendum showed how the idea becomes ever more ‘real’ by the simple fact of ever more people talking about it and apparently considering it a ‘realistic’ option.

Second, the rise of a ‘fourth wave’ in BI activism is clearly tied up with broader shifts in political life. The German and Dutch crowd-funding initiatives are clear products of the internet age. Even apart from the fact that the latter easily ‘copied’ the former after they stumbled upon it in an internet search, the whole scheme of their activism rests on ICT. The recruitment of funders, also making them co-owners of the experiments, requires a platform on which to provide feedback – the kitchen-table accounts of the BI-receiving individuals. Moreover, these combinations of websites and ‘vlogs’ make for a whole other kind of arguments about the BI: People can see through the individual accounts how it could change the lives of individuals, families, neighbourhoods and society. The wider public is provided not with scientifically elaborate answers on the desirability and feasibility of the BI, but with questions: *What would you do with a BI?*

The above kinds of communications have been described as ‘out-formation’, as distinct from less suggestive, better underpinned and more transparently presented *information* (Cf. Ezrahi 2004). This summarizes a challenge for BIEN. Not only within BIEN there are different generations and kinds of activists with different convictions about how to promote the concept, but also beyond the network: New communication platforms and voices are emerging next to BIEN – UBIE being a prominent example – and it accordingly becomes a more important question how BIEN can influence the BI debate and make the gathered expertise count.

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## 8 Annex

### A. List of interviews

Inter-viewee ID	Position	Name	Date(s)	Duration	Interviewer(s)	Relevant for cases:
1	Member of Collectif Charles Fourier	Paul-Marie Boulanger	30/07/15	2H00	JB & BP	Transnational
2	Chairman VBI	Adriaan Planken	26/08/15	1H26	BP	Dutch
3	MIES member	Ronald Mulder	27/08/15	1H10	BP	Dutch
4	BIEN co-founder (PVP), former newsletter editors, members of BIEN's Int. Advisory Board	Philippe van Parijs & Yannick Vandenborgh	01/09/15	1H20	JB & BP	Transnational
5	BIEN co-chair & NewsFlash editor	Karl Widerquist	07/09/15	1H05	JB	Transnational
6	Board member of Netzwerk Grundeinkommen	Stefan Ziller	11/09/15	1H15	Tim Strasser	German
7	Netzwerk Grundeinkommen, co-founder and board member	Ronald Blaschke	12/09/15, 14/01/16	1H15, 0H45	Tim Strasser, JB	German
8	Former BIEN board member	Almaz Zelleke	16/09/15	0H50	JB	Transnational
9	BIEN co-founder, member Int. Advisory Board	Guy Standing	16/09/15	1H00	JB	Transnational
10	MIES member	Joop Roebroek	24/09/15	1H47	BP	Dutch
11	Freiheit statt Vollbeschäftigung, co-founder and spokesperson	Sascha Liebermann	29/09/15	2H30	JB	German
12	Board member of Netzwerk Grundeinkommen Cologne	Felix Coeln	29/09/15	2H20	JB	German
13	VBI vice-chairman	Willem Gielingh	04/11/15	1H38	BP	Dutch
14	MIES member	Frans Kerver	05/11/15	1H29	BP	Dutch
15	Alderman Groningen municip.	Matthias Gijsbertsen	06/11/15	0H51	BP	Dutch
16	Experiment promoter/VBI	Sjir Hoeijmakers	12/11/15	1H34	BP	Dutch
17	Managing Director Mein Grundeinkommen	Amira Jehia	21/12/15	0H39	JB	German
18	BIEN Int. Advisory Board member	Yannick Vanderborgh	30/07/15	0H38	JB	Transnational
19	VBI member/experiment researcher	Loek Groot	23/02/16	1H35	BP	Dutch
20	Initiator of online petition	Susanne Wiest	22/04/16	1H30	JB	German

## B. List of meetings and events attended

Table

<b>Meeting and events attended as part of data collection, dialogues, etc.</b>	<b>Purpose of attending</b>	<b>Date and duration</b>	<b>Attending from the research group</b>
Panel discussion organised by the Netzwerk Grundeinkommen during “Basic Income week”, Aachen (DE)	Participant observation	17 Sept 2015, 2H	JB
VBI 25 years conference, Maastricht (NL)	Participant observation, presentation of intermediate findings	29-31 Jan 2016	JB, BP
BIEN 30 years conference, Louvain-La-Neuve (BE)	Participant observation	1 Oct 2016	JB, BP
Studium Generale event at Wageningen University & Research (NL)	Presentation of intermediate findings, panel debate	6 Dec 2016	JB
Session at TRANSIT final conference, several German and Dutch initiatives represented, Rotterdam (NL)	Hosting, chairing	14 Sep 2017	JB, BP
BIEN congress, Lisbon (PT)	Participant observation, presentation of findings	25-27 Sept 2017	BP

## C. Framing analysis of on-line discussions on Basic Income

### Framing Analysis Robots Will Take Your Job: The Role of Framing on Social Movement Participant Mobilization

Maximilian Matuschka  
December 2015

#### Introduction

The Internet has grown into a digital public sphere with global proportions. As such, the World Wide Web, and social media in particular, become ever more important for social movements transgressing national boundaries and subsequent societal change. Highly interactive and participatory digital networks like Facebook are crucial for modern communication. The almost instantaneous dissemination of information around the world makes gathering support for a cause, discrediting opponents and organizing marches, demonstrations, rallies, meetings and the sort that much easier. On the downside, it might become overwhelmingly difficult for people within a movement to keep track of what exactly is happening which might have a deteriorating effect on the movement's momentum. In any case, it seems increasingly important to keep a close eye on the digital communication of such transnational movements. It is important to observe how a certain topic is represented in the pursuit of informing and mobilizing people because this might tell us something about how the movement develops.

This paper takes a comparative look at two international networks – European and global – pursuing the same goal: the introduction of an unconditional basic income. It presents an in-depth analysis of entries published on the Facebook page of Unconditional Basic Income Europe (UBIE) and in the news archive of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) homepage in order to find out how the topic of basic income is framed online to better understand how these organizations (re-)present the basic income discourse with the goal of pursuing their cause. In other words, by understanding what kind of content is represented in which ways it is possible to better understand related processes of participant mobilization.

This question will be answered by looking at the degree to which various material (e.g. articles, videos, press releases) produced or shared by both organizations attend to the three core framing tasks necessary to achieve consensus and action mobilization. This paper is not an exhaustive media analysis of UBIE's and BIEN's web presence but simply identifies the major narratives that are told about basic income at this specific point in time. The actual effects of framing on existent or potential movement participants are not studied.

First, the theoretical framework for this paper will be provided by introducing the TRANSIT project, one of its case studies and the framing approach. The following part will explain the source selection process and the method used to analyse them. The actual analysis of the collected

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material takes up most of the paper and offers detailed insight into context and content of all examined online entries. Findings gained from this in-depth frame analysis are then compared to each other and interpreted. A short summary and suggestions for further research conclude this paper.

## TRANSIT, Basic Income, and the Three Core Framing Tasks

This paper was written as contribution to TRANSIT (Transformative Social Innovation Theory), a four-year project co-funded by the European Commission with the goal of developing a theory of transformative social innovation with practical relevance. Informed by other theories such as transition theory and social movement theory special attention is paid to the study of how social innovation can bring about empowerment and societal change. Although social innovators often work locally they are usually interconnected with others around the world. Hence, there is an emphasis on the qualitative and quantitative examination of international social innovation networks, particularly in Europe and Latin America (TRANSIT, 2014).

One of the many case studies explored within the TRANSIT framework are basic income networks, the two largest organizations promoting basic income being Unconditional Basic Income Europe (UBIE) and Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN).



UNCONDITIONAL  
BASIC INCOME  
EUROPE



The general ideal of a minimum income guaranteed by the state to all members of a certain community probably appeared for the first time in Thomas More's famous book *Utopia*, published in 1516, as means to decrease theft. Since then the notion has been promoted by philosophers, politicians, economists and novelists. Well known proponents include, for example, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Edward Bellamy, Bertrand Russell, Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman, Erich Fromm, Martin Luther King, Jimmy Carter and Jeremy Rifkin (UBIE, A brief history of basic income ideas, 2015). However, the basic idea reappeared in all kinds of variations. Social dividends, for instance, are financed through the returns of publicly owned enterprises (e.g. Alaska's Permanent Dividend Fund which distributes some of the state's oil wealth to its citizens) while the so called guaranteed minimum income is a kind of welfare based on means testing.

The kind discussed here as social innovation is unconditional basic income (UBI) which is defined by UBIE as:

“an income unconditionally granted to all members of a political community on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement. Unlike existing minimum income schemes in European countries, UBI is universal, individual, unconditional, and high enough to ensure an existence in dignity and participation in society” (UBIE, What is basic income, 2015).

That means that UBI would be allocated to every individual, irrespective of age, descent, place of residence, profession etc. and independent of marital status, cohabitation or household configuration, or of the income or property of other household or family members. UBI is furthermore envisioned as fundamental human right without any preconditions (e.g. obligation to take paid employment, involvement in community service, means testing, etc.). And lastly, the paid



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amount should be high enough to secure a decent standard of living according to the respective society's social and cultural standards – it should in any case prevent recipients from material poverty and provide the opportunity to participate in society and to live in dignity.

Similarly, BIEN defines UBI on its homepage as “an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement” (BIEN, About basic income, 2015). It differs from other minimum income guarantees currently in place in European countries in that it would be paid to individuals instead of households, irrespective of any additional income, and without requiring the performance of any work or the willingness to accept a job if offered. Notably, BIEN's definition does not include the criterion of UBI being ‘high enough’ to enable a decent standard of living.

One approach used by TRANSIT researchers is to develop a middle-range theory, integrating empirical research and theory. “Middle-range theory starts with an empirical phenomenon (as opposed to a broad abstract entity like the social system) and abstracts from it to create general statements that can be verified by data” (Haxeltine et al., D3.2, 2015, p. 4). What this paper will do primarily is to provide the ‘lower end’ of this equation: conducting an in-depth analysis of empirical material which can then be used as basis for further theoretical interpretation. In other words, the focus here is on gathering all the details in regard to content rather than on theoretical explanations. TRANSIT also adopts a co-evolutionary perspective on societal transformation which means that social innovations are seen as “heterogeneous sociomaterial collectives comprising human and non-human elements, mutually constituted through the interweaving of the cognitive, the material, the social and the normative” (Haxeltine et al., 2015, p.11). Such a relational co-productive approach envisions social innovations to consist of, being shaped by and also producing:

- Meanings or framings (e.g. issues of definitions, visions, imaginaries, often expressed in the form of discursive commitments).
  - Doings/ material commitments (e.g. through performance of practices, technologies, etc.)
  - Modes of governing/ organizing (i.e. the specific way in which any given collective of social innovation is configured, organised and governed)
  - Knowings (e.g. knowledge, cognitive resources, competencies, etc.)
- (ibid.)

It is with the first of these elements, the meanings or framings, that this paper is concerned. Special attention will be paid to the systems of basic values and beliefs, and the meanings, issues, visions, imaginaries, and discursive commitments. Framing, however, is quite an ambiguous concept. Firstly, because it is used across disciplines for various purposes and secondly because it is directly related to subjective perception and applicable to many different situations in which communication takes place. The basic assumption is that the manner in which something is said determinates how it is perceived. In his seminal work *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974), Erving Goffman describes frames as just that: conceptual ways to organize human experience – as “schemata of interpretation” that allow people to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” events in their own lives and in society at large, thus rendering them meaningful (1974, p. 21). Frames are sets of perspectives that structure a person's perception of society and consequently guide the actions of individuals, groups and societies. Goffman uses the example of a picture frame to illustrate the concept: people use frames (structures) to hold pictures (content) of what they experience together. Put differently, “Framing is the process by which a communication

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source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy" (Nelson, Oxley & Clawson, 1997, p. 221).

According to prominent framing scholar Robert Entman, frame analysis is important because it illuminates how meaning is created by exploring the precise manner in which influence over human consciousness is exerted by the information transfer from one locus – such as the news report – to human consciousness (1993, p. 51). Additionally, framing and reframing promotes one course of action over another. Hence, different forms of communication such as the news discursively construct fields of action and fields of inaction (Carvalho, 2007, p. 238).

To frame means to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). These four functions can all be performed by one single sentence but are not necessarily present in every frame.

This differentiation between presented problems, causes, and solutions goes back to the earlier works of David Snow and Robert Benford, who were amongst the first to employ frame analysis to explain processes of social movements. Movements, they argue, carry along beliefs and ideologies and thus play an important role in the construction of meaning for both (potential) participants or activists and opponents. In their own words, social movements “frame or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198). To better understand why certain movements succeed and others fail they introduced the concept of frame alignment. “By frame alignment, we refer to the linkage of individual and SMO [social movement organization] interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 464).

The first step of such an analysis consists in looking closely at the framing effort in terms of robustness, completeness, and thoroughness. Does it equally attend to consensus and action mobilization – both necessary for a successful participant mobilization campaign – or is it partial and incomplete? A study of frame alignment processes thus usually begins with an examination of the three core framing tasks. Diagnostic framing presents a problem and suggests a likely cause for it. Prognostic framing proposes a solution to the identified problem and motivational framing provides an additional call to arms or rationale for participation. While the diagnostic and prognostic framing tasks are supposed to achieve consensus mobilization, the third task is about action mobilization and provides the motivational impetus for active participation. The success of participant mobilization depends on the degree to which these tasks are attended to. The more robust, richly developed and interconnected the tasks are, the more successful is the mobilization effort (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 199). The example used to illustrate this approach is the peace movement of the 1980s. There was little disagreement about the problem: the threat of mutual nuclear annihilation. Perceived causes for this problem were already much more diverse and were categorized as political, technological, economic and moral. Those seeing politics as being the most salient one also tend to think of solutions in political terms (e.g. world federation, international treaties); just as those seeing technology as being the root of the problem consider technological countermeasures (e.g. complete retreat from realm of technology, scientists being against the construction of weapons). But because mere agreement on problems and solutions is not enough to prod action mobilization, extra incentives are needed – like moral outrage about the looming nuclear holocaust.

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Identifying the major narratives fulfilling these three tasks and studying the degree to which they are attended to by UBIE and BIEN is the goal of this paper. The premise is that too many different voices providing information – too many different narratives – might suggest a broad divide regarding basic income which might lessen the chance of the movement’s success in the eyes of a potential participant. On the contrary, too much of the same arguments by the same actors might suggest a tunnel vision and/ or be perceived as manipulation instead of information.

## Source Selection and Approach

With currently 1.55 billion monthly active users (MAU)<sup>32</sup> Facebook is undoubtedly the most popular and influential social network on this planet. In addition, 85 % are mobile MAU – people using the platform mostly from their smartphone or tablet (Statista, 2015). Searching Facebook for the keywords ‘basic income’ yields a fairly long list of various organizations, associations and other groups with considerably low success as measured by the number of likes (compared to the total number of MAU and a country’s population): ranging from just 54 for Basic Income in Canada to 23.259 for Basic Income Ireland<sup>33</sup>. With now a bit more than 39.000 likes, UBIE seems to be the most popular basic income page on Facebook.



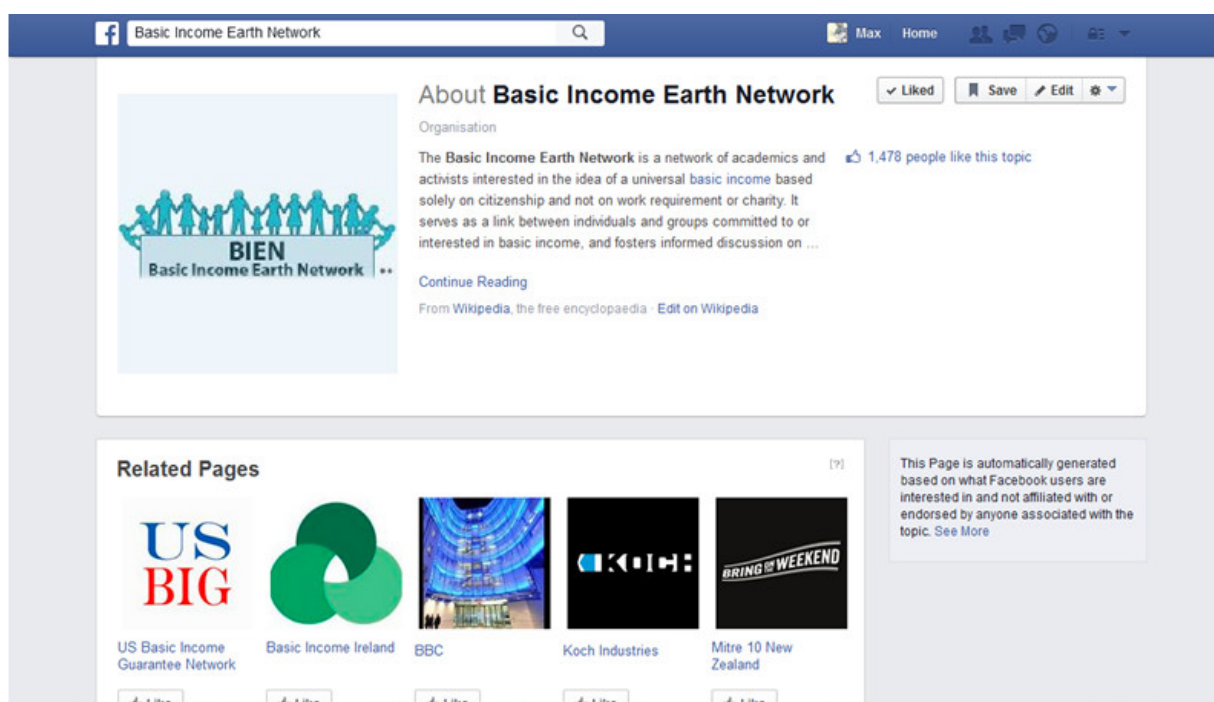
<sup>32</sup> As of the third quarter of 2015. MAU are those who have logged in to Facebook during the last 30 days.

<sup>33</sup> *Facebook for Every Phone*, Facebook’s official page featuring its phone application has 512.250.200 likes, followed by Facebook’s official product and service page with 169.222.823 likes. Shakira managed a bit over 100.000, followed by Cristiano Ronaldo, Eminem, Rihanna and Coca-Cola.

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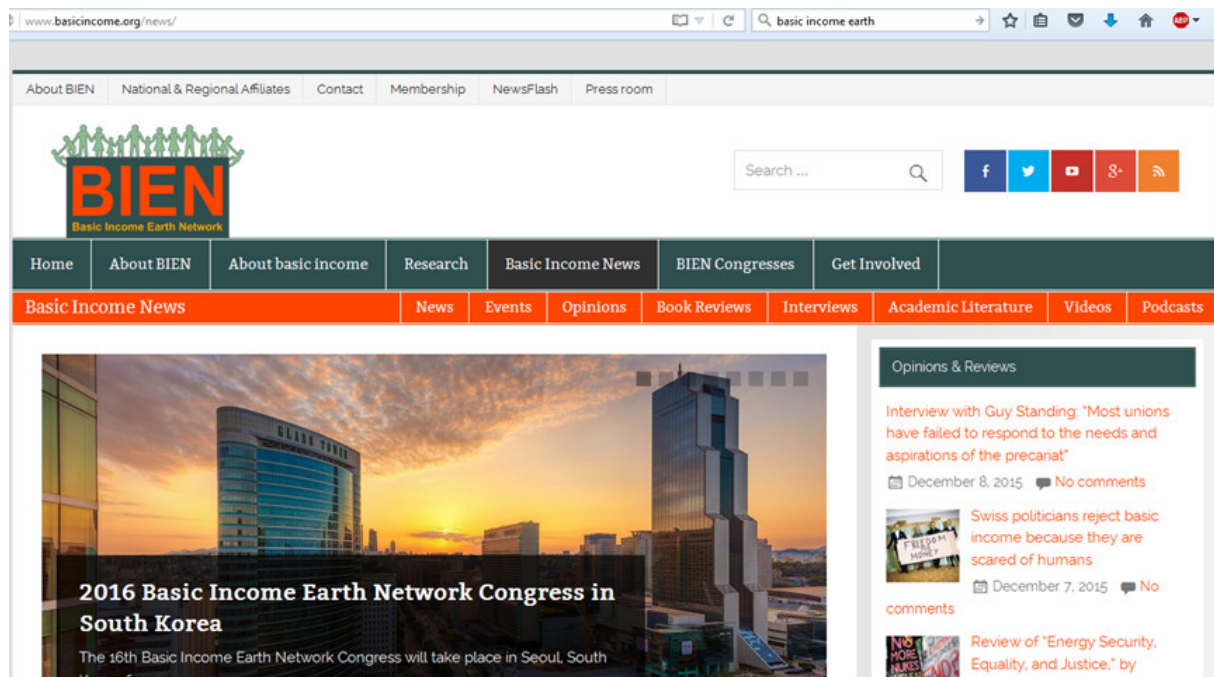
Being the most prominent promoter of basic income in Europe and having the most popular basic income Facebook page, UBIE was thus selected as starting point for a frame analysis of the topic of basic income in on-line social media. The timeframe to be analysed was selected according to feasibility (of the analysis in time of the research projects duration) and minimum representativeness (more material would have resulted in more detailed data but would also have been quite repetitive). Between October 21st and November 3rd, 2015, a total of thirty-one entries, ranging from news articles and TED talks to press releases and event invitations, have been uploaded to UBIE's Facebook page. Analysing these entries will provide something like a 'high-resolution snapshot' of how BI is currently represented online.

Initially, it was planned to conduct a comparative analysis of the two largest transnational BI networks (UBIE & BIEN) on Facebook. Surprisingly, however, BIEN does not run a Facebook page. The only information available on this platform is a link to the respective Wikipedia site.



BIEN does run a homepage, however, including a Basic Income News section. Interestingly, this is the main source of material shared by UBIE (twelve of thirty-one articles). In the period from October 21st to November 3rd a total of twelve articles was published by BIEN (4 news, 6 events, 2 opinions). But because UBIE shared BIEN material with a time delay of approximately ten days these two sets of twelve are not congruent. In other words, UBIE did not post everything that was published by BIEN. Why this is could not be answered. A sample of twelve seemed too small for comparison and, in addition, only few of these entries provide clear frames due to their briefness (e.g. short notices, announcements or invitations). Therefore, the timeframe was extended to October 14th on. This yielded 21 articles (11 news, 6 events, 4 opinions). So much for the selection process of material to be analysed. Next, I explain how the data was obtained.

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Both sources were subjected to an initial examination in order to better understand the context in which the 'news' were embedded. Contextual information was also collected on each entry individually. After transcribing occasional videos and interviews all individual texts were put into two contiguous documents with continuous numbering (which will serve as reference numbers), one for each organization. This process of not dividing texts up into chunks (as it is done with other textual analyses), thereby keeping the whole context in view, should ensure that no piece of information influencing the framing of an entry was lost on the way. Although visual material could also be included in a frame analysis, in this case it was too scarce and used only marginally to be considered relevant. Even in the case of videos of TED talks and the like, transcripts are sufficient for the project at hand. Factors like body language surely influence how a talk is going to be perceived but this is of no concern in this case as the focus is on the organization's framing and not on the individual's.

Where it applies, details like date and time of upload, shares, likes, respective sources, actors involved, and different types of entry were then noted in an Excel sheet, allowing for a general overview of the collected material and providing a quantitative basis for subsequent comparisons. For analytic purposes the individual texts were then examined with a focus on the three core tasks of framing (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 199-204).

- *Diagnostic framing* presents some event, process or situation as problematic and in need of alteration. It includes the identification of a concrete problem and the attribution of blame or causality. Sets of causal factors are further divided into technological, political, economic, and moral ones. There might be overlaps and the distinction between problem and cause is not always clear-cut (some causes may be problems in themselves and some problems can be causes for others) but usually there is one primary or overarching problem – cause framework. Nevertheless, diagnostic subsets can alter the primary framework and are thus also included in the analysis.

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- *Prognostic framing* proposes a solution to the diagnosed problem, specifying what needs to be done. If possible, this task can be subdivided into strategies, tactics, and targets in order for more details about the feasibility and possible implementation of the suggested solution to surface.
- *Motivational framing* is basically a call to arms or a rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action that goes beyond the two previous tasks. Often the problems and solutions presented by diagnostic and prognostic frames are in themselves reason enough to act but agreement about problems and possible solutions (consensus mobilization) does not automatically entail action mobilization. Such incentives to get active can be grouped under material, status, solidary, and moral inducements.

Each entry was scrutinized to see to what extent these framing tasks were attended to. Then the UBIE entries were compared amongst each other to determine to what degree they were aligned – in other words, to what extent are frames repeated and where do they differ? What is the story expressed through the sets of problem/ cause – solution – rationale? The same was done with the BIEN material. Finally, both organizations and the stories they tell are compared to each other and discussed. Identifying and naming frames – what Robert Benford calls the ‘frame-name-game’ (1997) – is notoriously difficult. Hence, the greatest limitation of the chosen approach is that I am the only coder. Usually, frame analysis requires at least two more independent coders to avoid subjectively biased results and blind spots. Documents containing the complete texts taken from both platforms can be found in the Appendix. I am also aware that framing processes are dynamic and that frames can change over time. The analysis at hand is thus to be seen as momentary snapshot of the current debate.

## Technological Unemployment, Neo-Liberalism and the Call for Experiments

### UBIE:

#### *Context:*

In terms of mobilization potentials, it is noteworthy that in the ‘about’ section of the page many ways of getting involved or learning more about BI are suggested. Apart from a dead link to the European Citizen’s Initiative which failed in 2013 due to insufficient support there are links to a new petition (by *Avaaz*), *The Daily Basic Income Paper*, the BI YouTube channel, a map of European BI communities, country specific pages about basic income, and, of course, UBIE’s official homepage. Finally, visitors are invited to promote material related to basic income through this page and to join the Facebook group to discuss the topic with the community. “Lets change Europe for ever! Sign for ‘Basic Income as a Human Right’” is the page’s mission statement (UBIE Facebook, About, 2012) showing the primary objective of compiling all this information on Facebook to be gathering support for the current *Avaaz* petition<sup>34</sup>. It is noteworthy that no other European Citizen’s Initiative on this subject has been created since. One reason might be that the

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<sup>34</sup> Started by a certain Koen from the Netherlands, the petition should be delivered to the European Commission as soon as enough signatures were gathered (83.609 as of Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>). The introductory text reads: “We demand that you facilitate research into Unconditional Basic Income, its implementation, and the effects on the economy at large, by encouraging cooperation between member states and providing funds for test programs.”

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result of the last campaign was too frustrating to try it again. In fact, one analysed entry indicated that only three of fifty submitted ECIs were considered by the European Commission since the Lisbon treaty (18). *Avaaz* on the contrary is backed by a global network of over forty-two million members and has plenty of successful campaigns to show for. Astonishingly, however, this petition or other means to get actively involved in the cause never showed up in the page's entries.

Established in December 2012 the page is listed as 'cause' and, as of November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, 38.899 people liked it, me being the 38.900<sup>th</sup>. On average, entries are uploaded twice a day, usually at one and seven pm, with just a few exceptions. What such a regular schedule means for the selection of material remains unclear (administrators have been contacted repeatedly but did not respond). Immediate signs of active participation on the page are the displayed 'likes' and 'shares' and a few scattered but unanimously positive comments. All entries, with one intriguing exception, were liked much more often than shared and even that quite scarcely relative to the total number of people who liked the page. BIEN's short article on the announcement of PAN politician André Silva being elected congressman for the Portuguese parliament was by far the most liked (262) and shared (77) entry. The one exception in this pattern (126 likes, 139 shares) was a fairly dystopian and lurid blog entry taken from *activistpost.com* according to which a "robocalypse" (4) of gigantic proportions looms large. The blog entry argues that in the "coming age of human pets", when most "will be kept alive as domesticated sheeple" while others are terminated, the human working force will be completely replaced by robots of all sorts and people will face existential crises leading to bloody riots. References within the text are made to the page run by the author (*SHTFplan.com*: "when it hits the fan, don't say we didn't warn you"), a British free tabloid and a news magazine. Why of all entries this particular one was shared so extensively (almost twice as many as the second most shared) cannot be said for sure. Maybe such dramatic and scary articles are just what people naturally respond to most. It could also be seen as sort of 'mind bomb' (in a Nietzschean sense, you have to exaggerate your point in order to leave a mark in people's heads), supposed to shake people up.

By far the most prevalent source of uploaded material is *basicincome.org*, the official site of BIEN, with twelve entries, followed by YouTube with six entries. Those twelve entries from BIEN are mainly taken from the news section (two events, one opinion) and were shared unaltered with a delay of three to twelve days, in most cases ten days exactly. This shows a strong connection between the two networks and might also explain why there are so many U.S. based entries (13) on a European basic income network's page<sup>35</sup>. Only one post – an invitation to an international conference in Budapest – came from UBIE's own homepage (*basicincome-europe.org*).

The analysed body of material is a colourful mix of different types with most entries being articles or short essays (16), followed by videos like interviews and TED talks (7) and some scattered official invitations to conferences or createathons and press releases. Some of the articles also had embedded videos and many others contained hyperlinks to related texts and videos, illustrating the increased importance of audio-visual material. Most entries featured economists, social scientists, philosophers, journalists and young activists – all experts of some sort. It does not make sense to distinguish between experts and activists as in this case some, if not all, experts could be seen as activists and vice versa. Experts on the topic often promote BI so zealously that they can only be described as activists, while activists, to pursue their goal, need to become very knowledgeable about BI. Some actors are quite prominent in the BI scene, like economist and

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<sup>35</sup> BIEN's Basic Income News are largely created by Karl Widerquist who is a US citizen and also the editor of the USBIG newsletter.

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BIEN's co-president Guy Standing (talking to Max Keiser on Russia Today UK; 17<sup>36</sup>), philosopher and political economist Philippe van Parijs (giving a short interview for TalkReal; 21), and BI activists Scott Santens (writing about the future of creative digital work and the importance of BI for social cohesion; 3, 19) and Federico Pistono (giving a TED talk; 23). Apart from the occasional debilitating of the classic counterarguments (it is not feasible financially and politically; people become lazy) there is no debate. All entries promote BI, albeit in different ways, using idealist, moral, economic and political perspectives, often with explicit utilitarian tendencies. This is done by using evidence of all sorts, ranging from newspapers (4, 20, 22, 30) and (academic) books and articles (5, 20, 31) to contemporary (3, 10, 19) and historical examples of BI (6, 24). Actors like Guy Standing (17) and Federico Pistono (23) also use their own research to underpin their arguments. Well known individuals that are referred to include Karl Marx (7, 11, 15, 29), Adam Smith (29), and Milton Friedman (16). Apart from the already mentioned lurid 'robocalypse' article the sources appear trustworthy and adequate for the made argument.

It is sometimes argued – by historian and journalist Rutger Bregman, for instance (2) – that BI is an age-old concept that spread across all political boundaries. In the analyzed material, however, the political dimension was scarce but when it surfaced BI was exclusively framed as an idea coming from the left, exhausting the spectrum from radical Marxism to centre-left politics. Marxist philosopher David Harvey, for instance, sees money as the 'great corruptor' and dreams of a moneyless economy as already suggested by Sir Thomas More in his *Utopia* (7). Brian Merchant, senior editor of *Motherboard*, *Vice Magazine's* science and technology channel, wrote an article in *The Guardian* with the provoking title *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*. He draws up a picture of a future communist utopia where robots do all the work but everybody benefits from the created wealth because the people has seized those electronic means of production (11). Less utopian than idealistic, Philippe van Parijs argues for BI as one component of freedom "in a vision of a good and just society which the left must have as its goal" (21). On the more pragmatic side of the spectrum we have, for example, the quite successful Portuguese centre-left party PAN (Pessoas-Animais-Natureza/ people-animals-nature) which is the only one in the country to actively promote BI (9, 13, 28). According to social policy professor Gregory Marston the Australian Greens now "accepted the normative argument that connects basic income with a concern for ecological sustainability". Unfortunately, this pledge seems to be mere lip service – maybe, Marston argues, because the party fears being ridiculed and labelled as socialists (14). The only exception is Finland's centrist government which, together with the opposition, supports the plan of conducting broad-scaled BI pilots in the country (22).

## Diagnostic Framing:

Now that the context has been established let us look at the content. Many different voices tell partly similar, partly very different stories from various perspectives, sometimes zooming in on concrete cases and sometimes zooming out, presenting the 'big picture'. Not all entries directly referred to the need of UBI but those that did followed a quite similar narrative. In the following I will deal with each framing task analytically and descriptively.

With regard to the diagnostic framing it is important to note that there is not always a clear-cut difference between a problem and a cause. One problem can be the cause of another or one cause of a problem might be a problem in itself – it heavily depends on the specific wording and

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<sup>36</sup> From here on the numbers in brackets refer to the number of the entry according to the continuous list containing full texts of all entries. They are only primary examples and not always exhaustive.



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context. Sometimes, problem and cause are fused together or are even identical, as seen in the frequently used terms ‘technological unemployment’ and ‘neo-liberalism’. Connected to this issue and dependent on the length of an entry, there are different levels or dimensions of framing. Within what might be called a main or master frame, consisting of a problem, the perceived cause, and the suggested solution, smaller sets of related sub frames can be found in most articles. In short, problems and causes are intermingled to such an extent that it does not make sense to deal with them separately.

With this in mind, the most dominant problem that is addressed is the uncertain future of work or labour<sup>37</sup> in the face of rapid technological advances (e.g. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 17). Many traditional jobs die out due to the tremendous increase in automation – machines steered by smart software and artificial intelligence. This issue is not new. In fact, there is a longstanding fear of mechanic novelties rendering human labour – the very means of existence – obsolete. Aristotle, Vespasian, Elisabeth I, and Mohandas Gandhi are just a few examples of people who openly expressed this view. But since the Industrial Revolution and the first (organized) outbursts of existential anxieties such as the Luddite uprisings in 19<sup>th</sup> century England this process took up speed and the fears now seem largely justified. In the 1930s economist John Maynard Keynes introduced the technical term ‘technological unemployment’ to describe this process – a term often used in the analyzed texts. The rate by which machines replace human labour is indeed breathtaking but the rate by which machines create new job opportunities is only marginal and does not sufficiently compensate the loss<sup>38</sup>. In addition, those jobs that are newly created are often highly sophisticated and require a very specific set of skills, as activist Federico Pistono pointed out (23). According to the American Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) some of the most common jobs in the United States are retail salesperson, cashier and truck driver – jobs which are already clearly jeopardized by self-checkout lanes in supermarkets and the first generation of self-driving cars. In the Keiser Report interview with Guy Standing Stacey Herbert referred to a study by Oxford University saying that within the next decade or two 47 % of U.S. jobs might be automated (17). In Europe, the picture is very similar.

Always closely connected to this is the issue of raging poverty and inequality created by the current economic system that has been described by Portuguese presidential candidate Manuela Gonzaga as “faceless and limitless brutal economic dictatorship” (13). In some cases, neo-liberalism, and those promoting it, were specifically made responsible for a number of deteriorating and “state eroding” (6, 31) effects. Increasing debt, lack of economic growth, the huge perceived influence of corporations in politics, and repeated austerity measures are the most frequent. This economical system is presented as pushing for the radical commodification of every aspect of human life, including knowledge (7) and people themselves<sup>39</sup>. One article put it bluntly: people on the ‘input side’ are workers who are paid the least possible while people on the ‘output side’ are consumers who have to be charged the maximum (29). Combinations of these elements are considered to lead to welfare systems and their unfair and dysfunctional state benefit schemes being in urgent need of complete overhaul (e.g. 22 Finland, 16 Australia). Social discontent (30, 15), anomie (6) and utter hopelessness are just some of the disastrous consequences that are mentioned. Some of the lesser problems, in the sense of a lower frequency of appearance, include

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<sup>37</sup> Work and labor are used synonymously throughout the analyzed body of texts.

<sup>38</sup> Those worrying about technological unemployment are sometimes accused of committing the ‘Luddite fallacy’ which means not accounting for potential compensation effects. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the consensus among most economists was that long term, structural technological unemployment was no real danger.

<sup>39</sup> The term ‘Human Resources’ is an interesting example of framing in itself.

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the perception that the whole BI discussion is held on a much too ideological level (19, 23) and that even proponents are often divided, particularly on the issues of the extent or amount of BI and its funding (12).

## *Prognostic Framing:*

Interestingly, about a quarter of the entries do not mention BI at all, neither as problematic in itself nor as solution to the above-mentioned problems. However, they do reinforce the main diagnostic frames, the problematic future of work and labour in the light of rapidly increasing automation in particular (e.g. 5, 7, 11, 25). Only a bit more than half of the entries called explicitly for UBI, some other form of BI or at least for some sort of objective and representative BI experiments. The latter is particularly interesting as it suggested the most concrete courses of action, thus overlapping with the motivational framing to some extent. Most articles ‘just’ presented the problems and suggested BI in very general terms as solution, a bit as if it was clear what form a BI should take and how exactly it should be implemented. Calls for experiments (6, 15, 19, 22, 23, 30) were quite diverse but similar in the most crucial points: pilot projects should be conducted over a longer period of time, including a lot more people, and, finally, the gained results should be compared to a control group. Social scientist Jon Altman, for instance, called for a BI trial in rural Australia in order to collect data which can then be assessed objectively and without ideological bias (6). The centre-left government of Italy’s Friuli-Venezia Giulia region agreed to launch a minimum income experiment. As the name suggests it would not be unconditional: families with an annual income of less than 6000 € who have been residents for at least 24 months would receive between 70 and 550 € per month (30). Another example is Finland’s centrist government teaming up with several institutions such as the Finnish social security and pension department and the University of Tampere to work out a plan to study the effects of BI on a wide variety of people in different circumstances and locations (22). The goal is either to carry out a randomized trial across the whole, geographically dispersed population or to conduct regional pilots in different locations with various sociological, economic and demographic profiles.

These examples may seem promising for proponents of BI but there are also problems with BI experiments. An extensive critique of already finished and still running pilots, for example in Canada or India, was offered by activist Federico Pistono: only fourteen out of 200 countries tried it, only three trials had a truly unconditional BI, and only two involved more than 1.000 participants. From a scientific point of view, he argues, there is absolutely no solid evidence for or against BI. That is why he calls out to policy makers, universities and everybody else with influence to promote more and better BI experiments. Pistono’s advice would be to launch projects involving the grant of a truly unconditional BI to at least 10.000 people over a period of minimum two years and, of course, a control group (23).

Still, practically all entries ‘beat around the bush’ when it comes to determining the exact amount of BI and how to fund it. Within the whole body of entries, the only actual suggestion on how to finance BI came from BIEN guest author George Spilkov who argues for what he calls a Market Driven Basic Income (MDBI). This scheme would use metrics and mathematics to calculate the amount of BI based on mechanisms of the free market. This would make BI independent from political or moral ideologies and ensure the existence of a wide base of consumers who will in turn ensure the prosperity of businesses and, consequently, society at large (29). Potentials of digital tools such as Blockchain and crypto-currencies like bitcoin for the successful realization of a BI were discussed twice (23, 26). More marginal solutions to the problems of technological unemployment and the dysfunctional economy are rethinking the basic principles of work and

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labour (3, 5, 8), voting for politicians promoting BI (13, 17, 19), welfare reforms (14), and working towards more media attention (14). Especially in the cases of voting and raising awareness we can see the spill-over into the motivational frame. However, these suggestions were framed as solutions to specific problems and not as reasons to do so.

## *Motivational Framing:*

Notably, only a couple of entries fulfilled all three core framing tasks. The arguments brought forward in favour of BI seem to be thought of as providing plenty enough reason to do something for the implementation of BI in Europe. Thus, explicit motivational framing in the form of additional rationale or real call to arms was scarce. Occasionally, however, texts were interspersed or ended with short slogans like “The time has come!” (6, 10) or “UBI is inevitable for freedom!” (12). Empowerment, in terms of increased bargaining power (more freedom to say yes to pleasant but low-paying jobs and to say no to exploitative jobs), was mentioned only once, by Philippe van Parijs (21). Positive effects of BI on social cohesion or inclusion were also only mentioned once (19).

As already mentioned, there are some overlaps between prognostic and motivational framing, especially in the case of calls for more scientifically grounded experiments (6, 17, 23). On the one hand, they could be seen as solutions to the problem of determining the exact amount to be paid and the problem of funding – which was quasi non-existent in the dominant diagnostic frames. On the other hand, calling for concrete scientific experiments could also be seen as motivational framing: here is something straight forward we should do! Anyways, the texts did not divide them up clearly. The only apparent difference is the addressed audience. Calls for experiments or announcements of them being carried out seem motivational only for those in power, like policy makers. It is doubtful whether a call for more experiments would directly mobilize activists – but that is precisely what motivational framing should do: incite action mobilization.

The more surprising then, that there is no mentioning at all of communal efforts such as Michael Bohmeyer’s crowd funding project *mein-grundeinkommen.de* – a real social innovation. Concrete financing schemes are generally very scarce. In most cases, the problem – solution sets simply stop at controversial questions regarding the amount of BI and how to fund it. This considerably substantiates a point made by Federico Pistono and others: too often BI is discussed in ideological terms instead of discussing realistic pragmatic approaches. In other words, the debate seems stuck on the principal question of whether or not BI is a good idea and not on how to potentially turn the idea into reality. This latter dimension is much more present in BIEN.

## **BIEN:** *Context:*

Under the heading *Basic Income News* on BIEN’s homepage are several categories: news, events, opinions, book reviews, interviews, academic literature, videos, and podcasts. Of the twenty-one collected entries eleven are news, seven events and three opinions. The remaining sections did not yield any result for the selected timeframe (except for one article posted in academic literature about a Korean study that finds increased birth weight in Alaska but this was also posted under news). The update frequency is about one entry in anyone section per day. As with UBIE the

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question of how material is selected within the organization remains unanswered. All pieces were written by five authors who are affiliated with BIEN, except for two guest contributors (19, 20). Most articles were written by university professors Toru Yamamori and Karl Widerquist, both members of BIEN's executive committee. In the news section the majority of entries were brief announcements and articles of different lengths. The event invitations were all quite short, naming only date and time, location and topic with some exceptions providing more contextual information.

## *Diagnostic framing:*

Very few entries attended to all three framing tasks and some, due to their brevity, to none at all. Only a bit more than half of all entries, mostly from the news and opinions sections, actually attended to diagnostic framing. Possibly this is because BIEN's readership is assumed to know the basic arguments and to be more interested in actual news from the 'frontline'. This is supported by the fact that almost all entries, besides the three opinions, deal with current (news) and even future events (event invitations). There are no extensive stories about technological unemployment and an economic system gone wild like on UBIE's Facebook page. Furthermore, practically all articles mention BI directly in the headline which also demonstrates a clear focus. Nevertheless, issues are quite varied and more or less evenly distributed. Inadequate social security systems (1, 9) caused by political inertia, increasing poverty and inequality due to the unjust distribution of wealth (5, 21), and social discontent (7, 11) caused by austerity, lack of economic growth and automation are the most apparent problems. The current economic system itself is explicitly addressed twice (6, 8) and the problem of technological unemployment is touched upon in one article (7), and that only marginally.

Overall, however, the most dominant diagnostic frame is that BI, or rather the details of its realization, are the problem. Particularly the issues of the exact amount, funding and implementation of BI divide proponents. The news, for example, report on the struggle of four Dutch municipalities to produce a uniform plan for basic income pilot projects to be presented to the state secretary of social affairs (1). One opinion piece written by a German activist who volunteers at a clothes depot for refugees in Hamburg addresses the worry about a lack of willingness to work once an unconditional basic income is implemented (19). His response is a combination of a felt duty towards the community and the total freedom of choice to start and stop working whenever he pleases: the "libertarian-socialist working feeling".

Most importantly, however, all seven events support this frame either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, because political parties, economical leaders, social organizations and citizens are seen to be divided over the topic, UBIE invited to an international conference in Budapest to discuss the concept and its feasibility (12). The invitation to the conference held in celebration of the Dutch Basic Income Association's 25th anniversary in Maastricht in January 2016 states that there is "much controversy and misunderstanding about all kinds of BI initiatives among activists, citizens, members of city councils, scholars, politicians, opinion leaders; most prominent issues for the basic income movement in our country – as well as for UBIE and BIEN – are questions about benefits and disadvantages of the introduction of a partial basic income and questions around the promises and limitations of experiments with a basic income" (5). Similarly, but with a stronger focus on technological possibilities (e.g. bitcoin), activist Tristan Roberts invites to San Francisco to discuss current and possible future implementations of UBI at the local, national, and international levels as alternative to the current economic system (17). Other events, such as the UBI createathon (15) or Guy Standing's tour through Poland, Austria and Spain (18), do not mention a particular problem but implicitly add to this frame by pursuing the same goal of clarifying the

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concept and debating possible forms of implementation. At the same time this suggests that BI is agreed on by everyone to be THE solution to problems that do not even need consideration anymore. In other words, the solution implies the problem.

## *Prognostic framing:*

Indeed, prognostic framing is the strongest overall, with all but a few entries suggesting a solution. There is not much variation in this frame. As just mentioned, conferences, meetings, debates and events of the likes, bringing scholars, activists and other stakeholders together, are the solution most frequently presented to face the predominant problem of uncertainty surrounding BI. Activist Timothy Roscoe Carter wrote a book in Q & A style called *The Poverty Abolitionist's Handbook* in which he also delves on some very specific details of BI, especially in terms of eligible persons in the United States (21) – parts of which are published in BIEN's opinion section. Closely related to this is the prognostic framing of experiments – they also serve to clarify issues of feasibility, benefits and disadvantages of BI in different circumstances. The Dutch cities Utrecht, Tilburg, Groningen, and Wageningen, for instance, are currently working together to develop a uniform plan for BI experiments (1). In Namibia, the current minister of poverty eradication and social welfare fights to continue a successful BI grant project that ran from 2007-2009 which granted N\$ 100 per month to all residents under sixty years of age in the Otjivero-Omitara region near Windhoek (5). In the beginning of November, a delegation of the Brazilian association ReCivitas touring Europe presented the BI project they conduct in Quantinga Velhol since 2008 at a conference in Paris (14). Finland revealed plans for a thorough BI experiment (9) and Italy's Friuli-Venezia Giulia region is also planning to conduct BI pilot projects, although not on a very broad scale and not unconditional (11).

Some entries, however, seem to be a bit further upstream when it comes to BI – they do not deal with details of funding or implementation but with the mere idea in a larger context. Portuguese presidential candidate Manuela Gonzaga, for example, promotes BI as way out of the current economic crisis that threatens to “suffocate humankind” (6). Two opinion pieces also discussed BI in rather general terms. One defended BI against the claim that it might undermine people's willingness to work (19) and the other made the argument that charities are abused quite often, especially when they have to compensate for political and economic failures resulting in weak welfare systems (20).

## *Motivational framing:*

Very few entries presented an additional rationale for working towards the suggested solution. Although quite implicitly, the whole article on a Korean study linking Alaska's Permanent Dividend Fund to increased birth weight presented a good reason to go ahead with BI most clearly (4). There is no problem – solution set and despite alluding to the difference between correlation and causation the study is said to provide good arguments for BI in terms of long term health benefits. The only other fairly strong motivational framing was found in the article on the Dutch cities planning experiments where the hope was expressed that BI would free recipients of restrictions and humiliation they might experience under the current system – a freedom that would lead to more creativity (1). However, there are strong overlaps between prognostic and motivational framing, not least because here the solution is presented as self-evident and without alternatives.

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## Discussion

In UBIE’s case two major narratives emerge, a greater and a lesser one (in terms of frame frequency). The greater comprises two different but related sets of problems and causes. One posits radical changes and uncertainty concerning the future of work as main problem. The cause is seen in rapid technological advances resulting in increasing automation of labour and hence the replacement of human workers. The other problem is the current economic system. Neo-liberalist capitalism is considered to be at the root of unjust wealth distribution leading to poverty, inequality and social discontent. Causes are seen in disinterested or biased politics and greedy corporations. The solution to both diagnostic framings is BI in one form or another. This links to the lesser narrative. Once BI has been accepted as adequate solution the problem is how to implement it – a problem which is aggravated by the occasional complaint that this discussion is led on a much to ideological level. Do we know enough about benefits and possible disadvantages? How should BI be implemented in different countries and cultures? Will people lose their incentive to work hard? And is BI really feasible, politically and financially? The solution to this perceived problem is to conduct more scientifically grounded experiments on which basis the introduction of BI can be reasonably assessed. Mostly, these two narratives are presented as being sound in themselves, meaning that no further incentives were given to see BI as the right solution to the problems addressed. In short, diagnostic framing considered technological unemployment and the current economic system as main problems. Prognostic framing mostly suggested UBI as right approach to these issues. The lesser narrative sees BI itself as ambiguous and proposes more experiments as solution. In both plots motivational framing is minimal although after reading all entries one cannot avoid the feeling that the time has come to give this idea that has been around for so long a try, precisely because the circumstances seem to necessitate radical changes.

In case of BIEN things are quite different. Here, there is only one dominant storyline. Problems (and causes) to which BI might be a solution are very scarcely addressed explicitly. Rather, the problem is conveyed implicitly – it is uncertainty about BI itself which is shown by the news reporting on actual political developments and struggles as well as events inviting experts and stakeholders to clarify the concept and think about ways of implementation. The latter, gathering people to think about BI, is the strongest prognostic framing which is reinforced by some calls for more experiments or announcements of pilot projects being carried out. Motivational framing was again very weak.

	Narrative Framing task	Diagnostic	Prognostic	Motivational
General	UBIE greater	Technological unemployment/ current economic system	Some form of BI	Time has come!
↓				
Detail	UBIE lesser	Not enough detailed information about BI	More experiments	
	BIEN	BI in detail	More deliberation about BI/ more experiments	

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	Storyline development	→	→
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So, the bigger part of entries on UBIE’s Facebook page deals with reasons for BI. They provide general information about what BI is, why it is an idea worth considering and offer background information on, for instance, the history of work and labour and the shortcomings of the current economic system. The entries in BIEN’s news archive on the contrary, deal with (the lack of) details of BI and recent political developments worldwide. It could be said, then, that seeing the whole topic of BI as a river slowly flowing towards the future, from general to detail, UBIE’s greater narrative is upstream, presenting the background of BI and justifying the notion in the light of fundamental and sometimes threatening economic and subsequently social changes. Then there are some rapids, represented by UBIE’s lesser story about the lack of objective data on concrete BI experiments, which lead to the river’s lower parts. Here, downstream, are the BIEN entries dealing with details of BI and its inherent problems. Accordingly, there seems to be a shift in the assumed audience from UBIE to BIEN. UBIE appears to address mostly ordinary people who happen to be interested in BI. The BIEN entries on the contrary seemed much more directed at experts, activists and policy makers.

Let us now take a closer look at the degree of attention paid to the three framing tasks. In both cases only very few entries fulfilled all three framing tasks equally. On UBIE’s Facebook page the diagnostic and prognostic framing tasks were attended to quite extensively. This indicates that the main goal of the site is to inform people about the mostly economic and technological dangers we face and about BI as the best solution – alternative approaches to the problems discusses are not mentioned. In contrast, the BIEN entries only had a strong prognostic framing, even if that implied the diagnostic frame to a large extent. One possible explanation might be that while visitors of UBIE’s Facebook page might still need to be convinced about BI, the BIEN homepage audience appears to be long past that point. The issue is not whether or not BI is a good idea but how to deal with disagreements about BI itself, its definition, which form of BI would best suit certain situations and how to finance it.

Motivational frames were very rare in both cases. This distinct lack of additional incentives to carry out the proposed solutions is quite remarkable. On the one hand this might indicate that the two other framing tasks are seen as providing sufficient arguments to mobilize people. On the other hand, it is strange that the two largest basic income associations do not motivate people more explicitly to get actively involved in the cause they are promoting. There is, however, a strong sense of urgency observable in the body of entries which might also work as incentive. BI gets across as being a necessary step that is long overdue and has not been made yet because of economic and political powers safeguarding the status quo. Although the idea of BI goes back hundreds of years it is seen as a sort of fringe idea or at least as something that people could use to challenge this status quo. In some cases where its political feasibility was questioned BI was compared to the abolishment of slavery, women suffrage, and same sex marriage – all ideas that were absolutely unthinkable at one point in time. From an activist’s point of view there is not much that would incite me to take action. I would not know what to do exactly. The only thing I would do after reading through the entries is signing the Avaaz petition, spreading the word and maybe contacting a local BI group in my vicinity. But it really seems like a movement that has not yet made it out of the heads and into the streets.

In both cases consensus mobilization is quite strong. The diagnostic and prognostic framing tasks are properly attended to and most entries align in terms of presented problem/ cause – solution sets. But concrete calls to arms are missing. One reason for the lack of distinct courses of action might simply be that there are none on which all would agree. There is still too much

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disagreement about the details of BI and that makes formulating clear strategies quite difficult. As can be read on the BIEN homepage: “There is a wide variety of proposals around. They differ according to the amounts involved, the source of funding, the nature and size of the reductions in other transfers, and along many other dimensions” (BIEN, About basic income, 2015). Another reason for the scarcity of motivational framing might be that the other two framing tasks are considered to provide enough incentives to engage in ameliorative action. What remains is plenty of potential for action mobilization.

## Conclusion

This paper contains an in-depth frame analysis of material published on UBIE’s Facebook page and in the news archive on BIEN’s official homepage. The goal was to find out how these two basic income networks represented the topic on the respective platforms in order to better understand processes of online participant mobilization. All entries were analyzed to see to what degree they fulfilled three core framing tasks in terms of robustness, thoroughness and completeness.

Two distinct storylines run through the entries shared on UBIE’s Facebook page. The greater one posits technological unemployment and the current economic system as dominant problems, both of which might be combated by the introduction of some kind of BI. This uncertainty about the form BI should take is the main problem in the lesser narrative. Here, the solution is to conduct more experiments to produce data on which decisions about BI can be based. Additional incentives in terms of possible benefits like less poverty and inequality, the empowerment of people in terms of more bargaining power, more social cohesion, more participation in culture and politics, more innovation, more entrepreneurship and creativity, are remarkably rare.

Posts in BIEN’s news archive show a strong overlap between diagnostic and prognostic framing. Continuing UBIE’s lesser narrative, so to say, the main problem is seen to be uncertainty about BI itself, the form it should take and its concrete implementation. Suggested solutions include the organization of more conferences to debate these issues and the realization of more BI experiments to have a solid base for these discussions. Motivational framing was, similarly to UBIE, very scarce.

This indicates that both social movement organizations are quite strong when it comes to consensus mobilization but far less so in regard to action mobilization. Both constructed robust and coherent narratives which people can believe in but there is much less motivational impetus for actual participation. A couple of entries in fact criticized that the debate is often ideological when it should be more pragmatic. The movement, it seems, loses momentum over the principal question of whether or not BI is a good idea, and if so, what concrete form it should take. The more striking, then, is the absence of any entry mentioning crowd funding projects, for instance, or the Avaaz petition or some of the local BI groups’ activities which might incite people to become active participants in this movement.

To corroborate or falsify these findings the same approach might be taken to analyse material published by the same two organizations but from a broadened or different timeframe. The next step would then be to study the recipient’s side by conducting interviews with actual and potential participants frequenting the BIEN homepage and/ or following UBIE on Facebook to determine the degree of frame alignment between them and the social movement organization. Hopefully, this approach will shed further light on online mobilization processes focusing on social media.



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