

UNCONDITIONAL BASIC INCOME AS A SOURCE OF SOCIAL GROWTH – SELECTED ISSUES

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to analyze the proposal of unconditional basic income (UBI) in the context of social inequalities and to elucidate the fundamental aspects of this concept. The analysis of the UBI concept is conducted without reference to the sources of financing for this solution.

Design/methodology/approach: The primary research methods employed are a literature review and the observation of reality.

Findings: The implementation of unconditional basic income, as envisioned by Klaus Schwab, is projected to lead to a significant increase in social inequality.

Research limitations/implications: To avert the potential negative outcomes, it is essential to initiate a robust discourse and develop a comprehensive system with detailed solutions. It is recommended to engage not only economists, lawyers, and policymakers but also entrepreneurs and trade unions, ensuring that the resulting concept is as optimal as possible.

Practical implications: (if applicable) What outcomes and implications for practice, applications and consequences are identified? How will the research impact upon the business or enterprise? What changes to practice should be made as a result of this research? What is the commercial or economic impact? Not all papers will have practical implications.

Social implications: (if applicable) What will be the impact on society of this research? How will it influence public attitudes? How will it influence (corporate) social responsibility or environmental issues? How could it inform public or industry policy? How might it affect quality of life? Not all papers will have social implications.

Originality/value: This article contributes to the academic discourse by evaluating the concept of unconditional basic income in relation to social inequality.

Keywords: Economic development, unconditional basic income.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The rapid technological and economic changes observed historically have always influenced social transformations (Chwalba, 2008; Reese, 2016; Rifkin, 2012). In the long run, these changes have improved the quality of life for society (Freese, 2016). Although the most

recent transformation, known as the third industrial revolution, led to a permanent decline in industrial employment, it significantly increased employment in the service sector (Brynjolfsson, McAfee, 2016). Currently, we are at the beginning of the fourth revolution, referred to as Industry 4.0. Characterized by the rapid development of cybernetic and cyber-physical systems (Harari, Huxley, 2022). The creation and dissemination of quantum computers (the first computer with a quantum register was developed in 2007 – PARP <https://feng...>) and advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and neuroscience may result in not only increased productivity but also a significant reduction in the demand for labor (McKinsey, 2017; Brynjolfsson, McAfee, 2016; Chui, Manyika, Miremadi, Ford, 2016; Horowitz, 2023). We are already witnessing the benefits of AI development, as indicated by data from a survey conducted by the strategic consulting firm McKinsey & Company. According to their 2021 data, the percentage of enterprises utilizing artificial intelligence is steadily increasing (from 50% of respondents in 2020 to 56% in 2021), and they are reaping financial benefits as a result (the proportion of companies achieving 5% or more EBIT from AI increased from 22% in 2020 to 27% in 2021) (McKinsey, 2021).

Despite the scientific advancements accompanying the fourth industrial revolution, the changes may negatively impact society. Many individuals could be permanently excluded from the labor market (Instytut Analiz Rynku Pracy, 2020; Bendkowski, 2017; Chui, Manyika, Miremadi). Consequently, there is an ongoing scientific discussion and practical experimentation on how to ensure a minimum standard of living for a significant portion of society under such circumstances. One proposed solution is the implementation of unconditional basic income (UBI), which is being considered by an increasing number of countries. This topic is also being addressed by numerous researchers (e.g., Lister, 2020; Somers, Muffels, Künn-Nelen, 2021; Gentilini, Grosh, Rigolini, Yemtsov, 2020; Hasdell, 2020). However, it is often overlooked that UBI is a key element of Klaus Schwab's "Great Reset" concept.

The aim of this article is to synthesize the proposal of unconditional basic income (UBI) as envisioned by Klaus Schwab in the context of social inequality and to elucidate the essence of this tool. The UBI concept is analyzed without reference to the sources of financing for this solution. The article first presents the concept of unconditional basic income, followed by an examination of Klaus Schwab's concept in relation to social inequalities, and concludes with the presentation of the analysis results.

2. The Essence of Unconditional Basic Income

Unconditional or universal basic income, basic or guaranteed income, salary or civic income, national or social dividend, and many other concepts can be found in the literature (Allas, Maksimainen, Manyika; Parijs, Vanderborght, 2019; Misztal, 2018; Parijs <https://www.boston...>; Caputo, 2012; Torry, 2013; Heydorn, 2016; Marangos, 2004; Standing, 2017; Zarzycki, 2017). At the level of pilot programs, various names also emerge, such as "Basic Income Guarantee" in the USA (Is Universal...), "Basic Income Grant" in Namibia (Basic...), "Garantirowannyj minimum" in Russia (Гарантированный...), "Social Credit" in Australia and New Zealand (Ford...), and "Grundeinkommen, Sozialdividende, Existenzgeld" or "Bürgergeld" in Germany and Austria (Wozu...). All these terms refer to the same concept—universal cash benefits granted to citizens. Generally, this means that the state systematically provides individuals with money without any conditions. In practice, it has often been reserved for those with low incomes. Many economists argue that the concept of unconditional basic income should only apply when such funds are provided to both adults and children, regardless of their financial status (Basic Income Earth...; Szlinder, 2018; Szarfenberg, 2018).

Synthesizing the various definitions, unconditional income can be characterized by the following features:

- **Unconditionality:** Payments are made without the need to meet any criteria.
- **Universality:** Everyone receives it regardless of age, gender, employment history, education, or labor market status.
- **Equal amount:** The amount is the same for everyone.
- **Regularity:** Payments are made systematically (monthly, weekly, etc.).
- **Subjectivity:** Payments are made to specific individuals.
- **Monetary nature:** Payments are made in cash or cash equivalents.
- **State financing:** Funds come from the central budget, although payments may be formally made at various administrative levels (e.g., county, municipality).
- **Minimum subsistence level:** The amount must guarantee the ability to meet basic needs.

The unconditional basic income projects implemented in practice have had various limitations, including time, territorial scope, or quotas. The aim of these initiatives was to support people in regions with difficult living conditions. For instance, residents of Alaska receive a dividend from the state government, and people in northern Norway receive subsidies (State of Alaska...). This is part of sharing the state's profits from natural resource exploitation. Similar programs have been implemented in Iran and Mongolia (O'Dell...). Another important reason for these programs is to test a concept that may be necessary in the near future. Such projects have been or are being implemented in Europe (Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Liechtenstein) (Koch...; Rebisz...; Gadzała, Kucharczyk, Pazura, Vääntinen...; Matthews...; Kangas, Kallioma-Puha...; Majchrzak...; Stech...; Basic Income in

France..., Departamento...; 1600 funtów...; Crace; Mróz...; Sterdyniak...; Crace...; Bezwarunkowy...), Iceland (Countries...), the USA (besides Alaska, in several cities or counties) (Moore...; Krueger...; Grunau...; Goodman-Bacon, Nunn, Palmer...; Breathe...; Niemeyer...; Brannen...), Canada (Quebec) (Programme...), Kenya, India, South Korea (Unconditional...; Baird, Ferreira, Özler, Woolcoc, 2013; Haushofer, Shapiro, 2016; Pega, Pabayo, Benny, Lee, Lhachimi, Liu...; Ministry...; South Korea...; Suzuki...; Venutolo-Mantovani, 2023; Kim), Iran (Rahbari) and Mongolia (Hurt).

In Poland, the UBI concept is also being developed and will be tested for a period of 2 years. The program will provide a monthly payment of PLN 1300 to a group of individuals living in nine communes of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (Terlecki...). The only country in Europe that has clearly rejected the possibility of testing unconditional basic income at this stage is Switzerland. This was decided by the public in a 2016 nationwide referendum, where 77% of participants voted against it (Gesley...).

The programs implemented thus far were temporary and focused on selected groups (usually the poor). However, there is an ongoing political discussion about implementing a basic income without time limits. Due to the high costs, no country has yet dared to introduce UBI on a large scale (Clark, 2002). For example, estimates for Poland show that granting a benefit of PLN 1200 for adults and PLN 600 for children would cost approximately PLN 376 billion annually (Polski, 2020). In the USA, providing USD 1000 per person would amount to USD 4 trillion (The Washington...), and in France, with an amount of EUR 800, the cost would be between EUR 600-650 billion (Clerc, 2016).

It can be argued that it is only a matter of time before unconditional basic income is introduced worldwide (Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, 2020). It is highly probable that such a project will be discussed at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos. The WEF brings together leaders of the world's largest economies and organizations, owners and top managers of global corporations, religious leaders, and graduates of Klaus Schwab's programs (founder and president of the WEF), who form the global elite that sets development directions. Schwab is already promoting the concept of stakeholder capitalism, supported by the owners and managers of the largest enterprises (Stakeholder...; Tomorrow's..., 2022), an important element of which is unconditional basic income (Schwab, Vanham, 2022). This is intended as a response to environmental degradation, which harms people's health and significantly increases economic costs (Moll, 2004). It also aims to ensure a means of subsistence amidst a significant decline in labor demand, anticipated in the near future, and the increasing number of people with low pensions due to aging populations, long periods of unemployment, or flexible employment forms (Ford, 2016; Van Parijs). The UN has already proposed introducing such a benefit for the poorest people globally (UNDP...).

3. A Synthetic Approach to Klaus Schwab's Concept of Unconditional Income in the Context of Social Inequality

At this stage, it is challenging to determine the precise impact of an unconditional basic income (UBI) on the economy. Introducing this instrument without time limits and simultaneously across many countries may yield entirely different economic and social effects compared to isolated experiments. Notably, many economists and organizations predict that UBI will not supplement income but will become its primary, and often sole, source (Bowman, 2013). Klaus Schwab posits that UBI will target individuals with the lowest earnings, set at a level between the subsistence minimum and the social minimum (Djankov, Saliola, 2019). Financing is expected to come from enterprises, which in return will bear greater responsibility for the global socio-economic situation (Schwab, 2018). The new era based on stakeholder economy will involve real governance of countries by corporations coordinating their activities globally (Schwab, 2018; Schwab, Malleret, 2020; Schwab, 2008). Schwab refers to these changes as the "Great Reset" and is convinced that this is the only way to prevent poverty (Schwab, Vanham, 2022). Notably, the "Great Reset" is supported by figures such as US President Joe Biden.

However, this paradigm implies a significant reduction in living standards compared to current levels. Hence, the World Economic Forum (WEF) promotes slogans like "we will own nothing" and "we will be happy" (World...; Auken...). The limited resources obtained by a large segment of society, due to basic income, will result in decreased consumption capacity, thus reducing production and positively impacting the environment (Van Parijs, Vanderborcht, 2019). As K. Schwab points out, people will not evaluate this negatively because many goods and services will be replaced with virtual substitutes (e-houses, e-furniture, e-clothing, e-tourism) and the concept of property will fade (sharing and carsharing will become more prevalent) (Wielomski...). Furthermore, individuals without jobs and with ample free time will be able to focus on personal development and community engagement, potentially increasing self-esteem through self-fulfillment on many levels (Schwab, Davis, 2018). This shift will replace the current pursuit of possessions (Is Universal Basic...). If individuals struggle to accept this state and lack life satisfaction, pharmacological agents or direct brain modifications via microchips may be used (Song, 2019). For example, the first successful implant surgery enabling such modifications was performed in early 2024 by Neuralink (Elon Musk...).

Another challenge with Schwab's concept of UBI is the lack of real changes in the benefit amount. This assumption is rational since the costs will be passed on to enterprises, which will not want to see a decline in profits. Recipients of basic income may not pressure for increases, mistaking nominal changes for real ones. For instance, in Poland, between 2015 and 2023, the average pension decreased by 9.2% in real terms (Pensions...), yet significant inflation masked this for much of the population. The initial period of the "Great Reset" may see inflation

rise due to the widespread introduction of basic income before labor demand declines sharply. Consequently, additional funds for a large part of society will boost demand. The real impact will also depend on the extent of other social benefits' elimination (e.g., unemployment, family, parental, and upbringing benefits).

Implementing Schwab's concept will likely increase social inequality in developed countries to unprecedented levels. Resources and substantial incomes will be reserved for a select few. Furthermore, society will lose its ability to participate in decision-making (democratic systems will transform into quasi-regime systems) and have limited individual decision-making opportunities (e.g., regarding childbearing, with many people potentially only able to have virtual children). A social trust system, modeled on China's Social Credit System, will be introduced, where citizens accumulate points for activities influencing their ability to purchase goods and services (e.g., obtaining loans, purchasing or renting real estate, education) (Stevenson, 2019; Bernard...; Kobie...).

If Schwab's development scenario is not implemented (e.g., due to slower-than-expected innovative development), the situation may differ. In such a case, receiving UBI could positively incentivize entrepreneurship (Mączyńska, 2018) or motivate individuals to retrain and seek better employment (Kukołowicz, Szarfenberg, Trzeciakowski, 2020). Financial security could also reduce stress, enhancing concentration and self-confidence, leading to better problem-solving abilities (Weeks, 2020) and increased willingness to work (Gentilini, 2022). However, in countries with low social capital (e.g., Poland), UBI might encourage reduced professional activity in favor of rest, fostering a passive attitude and a culture of learned helplessness, which could be detrimental to the economy (Łętocha, 2021; Gilroy, Heimann, Schopf, 2013). This may particularly affect women who might forgo professional careers for family (Pasma, 2010). In the first case, UBI would reduce social inequalities, while in the second, it would increase them.

Guaranteed income could also influence employer behavior. Employers seeking low-skill workers might offer lower wages, knowing that these workers have a regular income, negatively impacting this group and worsening their situation (Murray, 2008). Conversely, other employees might strengthen their negotiating position, searching longer for better pay or working conditions (Graeber, 2019).

Regardless of how the UBI concept is implemented, a fundamental problem will arise: the financial capacity of countries to implement it. Highly developed countries with innovative economies may afford it (Countries with...). The state's wealth (or rather the strength of its entrepreneurs) will also determine the benefit amount. Economically backward countries may be unable to implement it due to lack of funds, creating a strong incentive for greater emigration from poorer to richer regions. Thus, implementing such a program will require effective measures to prevent population movement and uncontrolled increases in benefit recipients in wealthy countries. Co-financing UBI in poorer countries may be a solution.

UBI proponents often do not address the issue of what will happen to other public benefits and services. If these are limited, specific social groups (including disabled people) with greater needs could face even greater exclusion.

4. Conclusion

Given the current budget structures in developed countries, where a substantial portion is allocated to fixed expenses, implementing Universal Basic Income (UBI) poses significant challenges. Additionally, the existing labor market, which is relatively balanced, does not necessitate revolutionary changes at present. These factors create formidable barriers to the immediate introduction of UBI. However, lively discussions and pilot projects are underway, primarily in areas with high poverty rates and for short-term durations. This activity is driven by the belief that UBI will become necessary to mitigate the adverse effects on the labor market anticipated with the advent of Industry 4.0.

Klaus Schwab's proposed concept, which is actively promoted, suggests that the implementation of UBI could lead to a significant increase in social inequality. To avoid this scenario, several critical issues must be addressed:

- **Eligibility Criteria:** Clear criteria must be established to determine who qualifies for the benefit (e.g., unemployed individuals, low-income earners).
- **Benefit Amount:** The amount of the benefit needs to be defined, including whether it will be based on the social or subsistence minimum, or other parameters.
- **Indexation and Adjustment:** The frequency and criteria for adjusting the benefit amount (e.g., average salary, inflation, cost of living) must be determined.
- **Continuation of Other Benefits:** The extent to which other social benefits will be maintained and the targeting criteria for these benefits must be clarified.
- **International Financing and Immigration Policy:** The participation of highly developed countries (primarily companies based there) in financing benefits in less developed countries must be considered. If not, policies regarding income immigration (as opposed to economic immigration for job acquisition) need to be developed.

Due to the complexity of these issues, encompassing legal, economic, social, and psychological dimensions, it is imperative to start discussions and develop a comprehensive system with detailed solutions today. This endeavor should involve not only economists, lawyers, and politicians but also entrepreneurs and trade unions, which currently view the concept of basic income skeptically due to its generality (Surdykowska, 2021). Governments should take the lead in initiating these discussions.

In such a scenario, the introduction of UBI could have positive impacts, including reducing social inequalities. Failure to address these issues could result in the realization of the scenario proposed by the World Economic Forum, potentially leading to a system resembling neo-colonialism.

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