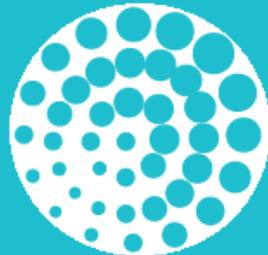


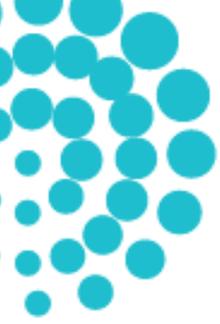
Living Income

For Free and Egalitarian Societies

Hugo Carton

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Despite the unsurpassed material opulence of contemporary Western societies, many can't fulfill their basic needs: healthy food, decent lodging, energy, drinkable water and an emancipatory and autonomous education. Whilst it eludes the question of a just distribution of the planetary dowry, Growth society increases inequalities. Two tools: Unconditional Autonomy Allowance (UAA) and unconditional basic income (BI) have the potential to stem the imbalances and initiate degrowth by choice. The UAA privileges drawings rights on natural resources rather than monetary transfers, whereas BI is a monetary allowance allocated on to each and everyone equally.

Two books¹ recently published by Utopia Editions in France, treat of two tools of degrowth: the UAA and BI. The proponents of the [UAA](#) ([Vincent Liegey](#), [Stéphane Madelaine](#), [Christophe Ondet](#), and [Anne-Isabelle Veillot](#)), try to nurture new imaginaries and new societal horizons. The UAA's ambition is simple: to guarantee a decent living for all: that entails to guarantee the right to housing, natural and energy resources usage rights², access to health, transports, education etc. The UAA stands for free access to certain goods and services that belong to and are managed by the communities inclusive of the right we share in determining their usage. The UAA ensures a small but sufficient share of collective resources.

The UAA would be attributed equally to each individual from birth to death, to guarantee a decent lifestyle disconnected from holding a job. It would be nominal, inalienable and cumulative with other incomes and it will embody every individual's contribution to society through all their activities, namely non-commercial ones.

The UAA is the synthesis of different measures put forward by the proponents of Degrowth who have already put some in practice: the concept of free reasonable use and incremental charges for misuse³, alternative local fluid currencies, maximum income threshold, total ban on advertising, critique of programmed obsolescence and unconditional basic income.

The unconditional basic income is an income paid by a political community to all its members, on an individual basis; it is not means-tested and is obligation-free. Unlike the UAA, the basic income is a money, not an in-kind, allowance: this income is attributed in recognition of the participation of all to the creation of social wealth, it

¹ Liegey, V., Madelaine, S., Ondet, C., Veillot, I., (2013), *Un Projet de Décroissance, Manifeste pour une Dotation Inconditionnelle d'Autonomie (DIA)*, Editions Utopia [A Degrowth Project: Manifesto for an Unconditional Autonomy Allowance].

Myllondo, B., (2010), *Un Revenu pour tous, Précis d'utopie réaliste*, Editions Utopia. [An income for all, Manual for a realist utopia].

² In this case, the drawing right is a right to use natural resources without any monetary transaction. For example, everyone is entitled to a free monthly water quota instead of a monetary allowance to pay for the water bills. In this case, the amount of water deemed sufficient is free: he/she enjoys a drawing right on a natural resource.

³ See Paul Ariès, (2007) *Le Mésusage, Essai sur l'Hypercapitalisme*, Parangon. [Misuse: Essay on Hypercapitalism]

would lead to the eradication of poverty, get rid of unemployment, reduce social and justice inequalities and emancipate people. Its aim is to revalorise activities outside the "sphere of work" paradigm and the questioning of the monopoly of work as the sole source of social recognition and integration. The thinkers and the practitioners of degrowth have been debating a flat-rate income at length. Among them, MEP Yves Cochet, a member of *Europe Ecologie Les Verts* (French Green Party), has been fighting for years for a minimum monthly unconditional basic income of 600 Euros. The instauration of a Universal basic Income is one of *Utopia Editions'* ten key themes.

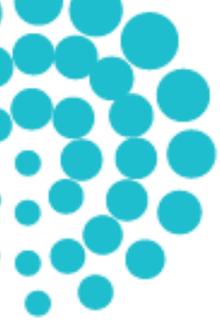
Without amounting to a desertion from the job market, the UAA and BI would trigger a slow-down of the economic activity. In fact, if everyone were given the opportunity to choose his/her own activity without the worry of "earning a living", it would more likely lead to a reduction in working hours – more so for the most arduous jobs – and to a shift in the economic activity and production. But is it really problematic since we already know that we produce too much and that we are living beyond our means and our needs? Every person would have to get organised and translate this degrowth in waste and the unnecessary in their daily life; that is to stop producing useless goods to sale to people who don't need them.

Furthermore, these tools will be coupled with the instauration of a Maximum Income Allowed (MIA) the level of which would have to be determined democratically with the view to reduce income gaps. Allocated to all and not means-tested, the UAA and the unconditional basic income would be a contributing factor in the reduction of inequalities. The MIA is designed to reduce the rich people' ecological footprint, to prevent scandalous wastes and outrageous practices, and, above all, to free our imaginaries from the grip of the lifestyle of the better offs.

Unconditional Autonomy Allowance (UAA)

The UAA is composed of two parts: drawing rights and access rights.

Drawing rights entail everything allowing us to lead a frugal and dignified life (lodging, food, clothing, energies, water and transports). Access rights entail public services (education, health, culture, information). These rights are not fixed and they will have to be adapted to society's needs progressively. Local currencies, together



with other transition tools, are directly associated with the UAA, which is just a tool to facilitate the emergence of new production methods and new ways of living, really.

The UAA is necessarily coupled with other measures designed to enhance autonomy and democratisation. Social dynamics will inevitably influence the definition of the UAA.

Right to housing and access to property

On the issue of housing and property, the UAA revolves around two main pillars: a decent lodging for all, access to land or a building for the pursuit of meaningful social or environmental activities. For example, each person could enjoy a fixed quota of square meters free of charge and pay extra meters at market price. A building for an activity or a piece of land would have to be made available for people who request it –for example by the local communities. Collective residential and ecological buildings (eco-village, green neighbourhood, housing co-ops, etc.) would have to be the norm for all new construction, to enrich peoples' lifestyles through the practice of solidarity on an everyday basis.

In towns, the UAA will be structured around citizens' initiatives such as community gardens and food belts. In the country a reappropriation of land will be essential to break away from the productivist agriculture and to revitalise rural zones around social diversity and conviviality. Usage right will have to prevail over ownership right in order to put an end to misuse and land speculation.

Right to decent food

Productivist and industrial agriculture is totally dependent on oil⁴ and favours mechanisms that maintain hunger in the world, impoverish the soil, expropriate local populations and produces low-quality and sometimes dangerous food. Freeing food production from its dependency on oil will have to be a priority.

For example, the UAA could partly be paid by local communities in local currency to favour local food systems. It will have to rely on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), permaculture and the examples of transition towns to ensure that everyone gets a minimum amount of healthy food (sufficient amount decided upon through citizens forums), but also to reappropriate food production, independently from the international corporations. The UAA would have to be linked with an access to agricultural lands, the way it is exploited, but also to the Western food imaginary that will need to be decolonised⁵.

Drawing rights on natural and energy resources

The UAA comprises drawing right on basic natural resources; such as water, gas and electricity, free of charge for an appropriate use and the taxing of misuse. At the beginning of every month, the meters for these three resources could be credited with an amount deemed sufficient

⁴ For the production of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, motorization, wrapping and conditioning, transport and distribution.

⁵ The meat consumption in the Western countries is not sustainable from an energy standpoint and can be criticized from an ethical viewpoint, in view of cattle living conditions destined for the slaughterhouse.

and decided democratically and at the local level. Beyond this amount, the price will have to rise substantially and prohibitively. Sobriety, efficiency and renewable energies will have to be at the heart of the energy infrastructure remodelling⁶. We will have to set up democratic tools to reach decisions on what we want and can produce, taking into account the common good and the limits.

Mobility rights

The automobile society has failed to provide a viable and sustainable transport system. To go beyond it, we must privilege direct trade and relocalise our lives. Travels will be slower, shorter and less polluting. Free local public transports must be offered and be coupled with a basic kilometers quota beyond which the user will have to pay for his/her transport costs.

It is also possible to provide soft transports such as bicycles and to encourage a collective approach to their maintenance and recycling. By limiting the free journeys to home-to-work or home-to-activity, the UAA will facilitate the re-localisation of activity. These measures must also be accompanied by a new development plan so that the proposed relocalisation is accessible to all. Transports deemed useless (transport of goods, short plane travels, etc.) will be heavily taxed or banned altogether. The rail network must be re-designed and slowed down and we will have to re-learn to travel rather than only moving around.

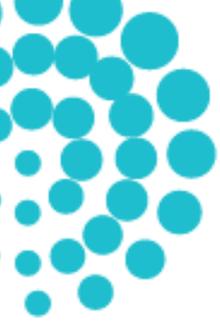
Access to health

Free health services are an essential right for individuals and it will be imperative to remodel the medical sphere. The patient will have to pay for every abuse. Research and manufacture of drugs should be put under state control, made public even, to break away from the medical industry paradigm, which is generating profits and subjected to the financial market fluctuations. Since food is the best medicine, a special effort targeting the regulation of the food industry is necessary to make our food safer together with a ban on industrial pollution etc. The emphasis would have to be on hygiene and to open the doors to "traditional" medicine thus allowing us to decolonise our technological Western medical imaginary.

Access to education

Education should lead to self-empowerment and emancipation, not to moulding people into efficient workers-consumers. Education must become independent and completely free and be available throughout life on an ongoing basis and in different forms.

⁶ We recognise *négaWatt's* three-pronged approach [an approach based on demand rather than offer - <http://www.negawatt.org>] proposed to address the programmed depletion of fossil and fissile resources and the climate emergency: 1) sobriety 2) efficiency 3) renewable energies.



Critiques and limits of this scheme

Objections on the feasibility and realism of the UAA abound. In fact, according to the thermo-industrial capitalist society's criteria, the UAA is an aberration since it pushes for a reduction of working hours and therefore of production and consumption: hello competitiveness! The main objection revolves around the so-called desertion from the job market that would leave the country with less wealth to share, even if people live frugally and democratically.

But this fear is unfounded. On one hand numerous studies have shown that with a guaranteed income, most individuals stay employed⁷. Furthermore, despite the harshness of the job market and the increased suffering at work, volunteering is quite important in France⁸. In addition the number of unemployed is constantly increasing and the productivist system has a rather substantial direct and indirect cost: unemployment cost, cost related to work-related diseases, the cost of industrial pollution etc. A decrease in the number of workers is not necessarily a factor of impoverishment. And, a greater desertion from the job market would only prove we need to overhaul an imposed lifestyle rather than a chosen one. Finally a substantial decrease of production and consumption is essential for the planet and for human beings. Thus, it sounds logical to encourage a reduction in working hours for the production of goods, but it will not necessarily lead to a decrease in activity.

The UAA is a complex toolbox with an impressive ambition to transform. Unlike the unconditional basic income, which is easier to implement, it requires a profound social transformation. There lies its merit and its difficulty. This refusal to be just an adjustment for an unequal society and the constant questioning of our social values (work, productivity, growth etc.) make the UAA a tool to transform the imaginary but its operational mechanisms are difficult to unravel. The modalities of its instauration are still in suspension. Will the implementation happen at the State or regional level? The proponents of the UAA do not pass judgment and they rely on a plethora of practical experiments undertaken by local communities before the State, drawn by the success of these alternatives, decides to extend it to the national level. The "snow-bowling effect" blurs the manner in which it could be implemented at the national level in France. As it stands now, the UAA constitutes a synthesis of varied degrowth proposals and it is designed to be a reflexive tool for the decolonisation of our imaginaries. But it could be even more if the thinkers of the UAA worked to give detailed operational mechanisms so that it could become a credible political platform.

The Unconditional Autonomy Allowance which, according to Michel Lepasant's formula, would become "sovereign usage rights on common goods" and would contribute to the advent of a voluntary, equitable and socially sustainable economic degrowth. The basic income is another tool that could produce the same result.

⁷ For a detail description of these studies, see Mylondo, B. (2010).

⁸ Around 12 millions French people participate in volunteers activities.

The basic income

Advocated by Baptiste Mylondo⁹ among others, the unconditional basic income is a basic monetary allowance, paid to all citizens, it is unconditional and obligation free. Unlike the UAA, the unconditional basic income is a monetary benefit and not an in kind one. It encompasses 10 inalienable characteristics that distinguishes it from its "false friends":

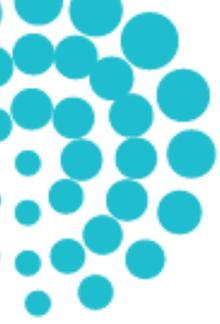
1. A cash income (not in kind)
2. Paid to every citizen
3. Paid unconditionally (not means tested, regardless of activity or inactivity, etc.)
4. Paid without obligation (job search, community work, etc.)
5. Cumulative with other incomes
6. Paid to each citizen (not to the family, as an entity through a payment to the head of the household)
7. Paid throughout one's entire life
8. A fixed amount (but distinguishing between children and adults)
9. A sufficient amount (allowing not to work)
10. On a monthly basis

Comparison

The design and implementation of the Unconditional Autonomy Allowance (a detailed estimate of all individuals' economic needs and a list of goods and services to be made available free of charge, etc.) would be more complex than a basic income where each person manages his/her own needs according to the importance they place on them within the allocated sum. Moreover, the lack of obligation, at the heart of the UAA, is itself conditioned: its entitlements and its implementation are arrived at collectively. The UAA is thus conditioned by deliberations. Only the fact that the UAA is allocated to all from birth to death is unconditional. Limits to the sphere of gratuitousness would have to be established since the UAA requires the knowledge and the control of the social circumstances of individuals to know the exact composition of each family. The proponents of the unconditional basic income denounce this as an intrusion into one's private life: a dimension the unconditional basic income does away with.

The UAA stands out from the unconditional basic income through its intent to get out of the dominant paradigm of the productivist economy altogether. It is not limited, unlike the unconditional basic income, to being a tool to address inequalities, but its ambition is to contribute to "Buen Vivir" by targeting the heart of social relations and our relation to the planet. Finally, the critique of money at the origin of the UAA calls for political measures that reach far beyond the scope of the unconditional basic income but we would be wrong to consider these two tools as alternatives. They are complementary. The unconditional basic income is a practical tool with an emphasis on unconditionality. The UAA is a complex, transformative tool with an emphasis on gratuitousness. Thus a scenario of degrowth by choice combines the

⁹ See Mylondo, B., (2010).



unconditional basic income and the UAA¹⁰. According to this script, local communities could implement an unconditional basic income, paid in local “fluid” currency, non-cumulative thus preventing all speculation. If this money were to be not only “fluid” but “framed” also; that is being usable in designated shops only or used to pay for some predetermined goods and services, the use of the unconditional basic income could be totally monitored. Communities would progressively opt for an evolution of the income by incrementally integrating drawing and access rights. The initial amount in Euros would shrink but new rights would compensate for it. From that point onwards, the UAA would impose itself. This scenario promotes a soft transition towards a new social and economic model represented by the UAA with an unconditional basic income as its starting point.

Funding

The issue of the funding of the free measures of the UAA – and of the unconditional basic income, costing more or less the same – is central. But, until now, the supporters of the unconditional basic income have addressed the issue of funding in more details than the proponents of the UAA. Let’s review the avenues for funding of the first tool. Reminder: the unconditional basic income must be as high as possible, be guaranteed throughout one’s lifespan and be attributed to all as a primary income. If the unconditional basic income is aligned with the poverty line – € 750 per adult and € 240 Euros per child -, its entire cost would amount to around € 470 billion per year. Many a solutions have already been put forward for the funding of the basic income; Baptiste Mylondo’s is particularly convincing.

In the first instance, the unconditional basic income is self-financing; thanks to the transfer of some of the benefits already allocated to social protection. The unconditional basic income substitutes itself to the additional income benefits¹¹: the RSA (*Revenu de Solidarité Active* – income supplement) for the poorest or the solidarity allowance (ASS – *Allocation de solidarité spécifique* for the unemployed coming to the end of their entitlements), do not need to exist if the unconditional basic income is implemented. Among the other non-contributory social benefits the unconditional basic income would replace, we can name: family allowances, housing allowances¹² and other welfare benefits¹³. Combined, all these social benefits already amount to more than € 70 billions.

An important part of the State budget could also be redirected to the funding of the unconditional basic income. In fact, it invalidates the fight against unemployment. Thus, the entire budget allocated to

employment subsidies as well as exemptions of social and employers contributions, fiscal exonerations and employment bonus (PPE- *Prime Pour l’Emploi*) and secondary and university scholarships. In total an extra € 50 billions could be re-allocated.

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As for the remaining funding, we must turn towards employment. A progressive income tax could fund the unconditional basic income, which should not be taxed to be effective. To find the extra € 350 billions required, we simply need to increase the level of social contributions (CSG: *Contribution sociale généralisée*) by 35 points to reach an average taxation level of 47% – by cumulating CSG and CRDS (*Contribution pour Le Remboursement de la Dette Sociale* - Social Debt Repayment Contribution)¹⁴ that constitute a weak distributive mechanism in our actual system. “The funding of the unconditional basic income would rely in part on a proportional tax (at a fixed rate) applied to all incomes (except the unconditional basic income) starting with the first extra Euro earned. Nonetheless, because the unconditional basic income is a non-taxable income, this proportional tax would amount to a progressive income tax: its rate will increase proportionally to the level of income. We can couple this proportional tax with a reduced rate of taxation on wealth (ISF – *Impôt sur la fortune*) or with the instauration of a Maximum Income Allowed (MIA), to accentuate its redistributive character¹⁵”.

To sum up, the funding of the unconditional basic income (and/or of the UAA) is not an insurmountable hurdle but it requires great will power and courage: this seems highly unlikely given today’s state of affairs.

¹⁰ Liegey, V. et al., (2013).

¹¹ The unconditional basic income must not amount to social regression: only the social benefits perfectly and advantageously replaced by the unconditional basic income can be eliminated. No benefits insuring a superior lifestyle than the one guaranteed by the unconditional basic income can be suppressed.

¹² If we combine a maximum rent threshold with the unconditional basic income.

¹³ Apart from the allowance for disabled adults AAH (*Allocation d’adulte handicapé*) that guarantees a basic lifestyle for the persons unable to work. The unconditional basic income would amount to a modest income that could be topped up by those judging insufficient. But the AAH recipients do not have this opportunity.

¹⁴ An impressive level that need to be relativised since, for most families – particularly households on low income, couples and families – it would largely be compensated for by a non-taxable basic income.

¹⁵ Mylondo, B., (2010).

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Change of Era

The Momentum Institute met for the first time on the 10th of March 2011, the day before an earthquake struck Japan and unleashed the nuclear catastrophe we know as Fukushima.

The starting point of the Momentum Institute is based on the awareness that today we are living at the end of the period marked by the greatest material wealth human history has ever known – a wealth that is founded on cheap, concentrated, temporary energy sources that made everything else possible. Just as the most important sources of energy for this material wealth are entering irreversible and inevitable decline, we are embarking on a period of generalised economic contraction.

The Momentum Institute is dedicated to responding to the challenges of our era: how can we organise the transition to a post-growth, post-fossil fuel, climate-altered world? How can we understand and act on the issues of the Anthropocene? What are the emergency exits? What will resilient societies look like in the time of the triple crisis: energetic, economic, and ecological?

The post petrol, post-nuclear, post-coal transition means completely redesigning and rethinking the infrastructures of society and alongside this, working to achieve a new social imaginary by envisaging a near future without petrol and without non-renewable energy. The objective of our approach is to establish a community of contributors made up of citizens engaged in the major areas of transition.

The contributors to the Momentum Institute intervene in their area of expertise, in relation with the thinking on transition. They produce diagnostics, analyses, scenarios, and original proposals regarding strategies of transition and resilience. The Momentum Institute is there to encourage them and to make them known, to individuals, to businesses, to local and national governments. We are also concerned with providing visibility to emerging solutions that are already put into practice by towns in transition, such as energy cooperatives, AMAPs (organic local produce cooperatives), non-profit businesses, social employment, and eco-districts.

If we manage to disseminate them, the initiatives and contributions for imagining and creating the post-petrol world will spread – both locally and globally. They will come to represent the status quo and the efforts that we go to today will not be unusual tomorrow. In the meantime, we have a chance, and it is perhaps our last chance, to step back from the precipice. A challenge, a singular moment, a window of opportunity: Momentum.