

Article

Do Basic Income Models Cope with Poverty and Inequality Sustainably? Some Critical Reflections and Alternatives

Andreas Koch 

Department of Sociology and Social Geography, University of Salzburg, 5020 Salzburg, Austria; andreas.koch@plus.ac.at

Abstract: The United Nation's Agenda 2030, with its seventeen sustainable development goals, aims to alleviate poverty and reduce social inequality, among other things. The political program provokes numerous ambitious measures but leaves room for various definitions and interpretations about which measures perform well. The challenge lies in understanding poverty and inequality in ways that move beyond a pure income-related perspective. In accepting this challenge, measures have been elaborated, which are supposed to advise the Austrian government in their efforts to implement the SDGs. The 'unconditional basic income' and the 'all citizens' insurance scheme' represent two approaches among those measures, which call themselves for a comprehensive consideration of social justice. Both approaches will be discussed in terms of their political and normative claims. While basic income remains dominated by income, the insurance scheme engages with the question of who is entitled to benefits. Both approaches are ultimately unable to unfold their potentials as long as a territorial-administrative space concept is utilized. Since urban environments have their own specific social and spatial characteristics, it is essential to trigger a thorough discussion of political concepts which cope with the particular causes and effects of urban poverty, exclusion and inequality.

Keywords: sustainable development goals; solidarity; emancipation; self-determination; territorial space; social infrastructure; relational equity



Citation: Koch, A. Do Basic Income Models Cope with Poverty and Inequality Sustainably? Some Critical Reflections and Alternatives. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 4368. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14074368>

Academic Editor: Gideon Baffoe

Received: 15 February 2022

Accepted: 2 April 2022

Published: 6 April 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

In September 2015, the UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, intending to profoundly transform the contemporary economic, social and ecological circumstances at local, regional and national levels. Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 Targets have been framed to progress, monitor and evaluate this transformation process [1]. However, despite being operationalized by more than 200 indicators, the SDGs are politically phrased, allowing for controversial scientific, political and public debates about which instruments and measures are supposed to be proper and tailored.

In Austria, a network was established among universities in 2019 to elaborate measures derived from the targets and their indicators to advise the national government in the implementation of the SDGs within the given time frame to 2030 [2]. The responsible working groups have developed these measures in different ways over the last three years. However, a common methodological framework has been established that includes network analysis and integrated assessment models as the most promising approaches [3]. Some evolved target-wise, others by trying to create synergies across several targets. The working group SDG 1 (to which the author belongs) utilized the latter option and restricted itself to a few valued beneficial measures to meet the sustainable development goals' criteria. One of these suggested measures is the reform of the Austrian social protection system towards a poverty-reducing and poverty-preventing structure by strengthening the social inclusion of the vulnerable social groups and addressing their precarious income conditions. Concurrent options have been discussed, and we ultimately ended up with

an unconditional basic income or an all-citizens' insurance scheme model, among other options that are not discussed here in order to keep the thread of thoughts manageable. The two models represent two significantly different modes of coping with poverty and social inclusion. The paper attempts to condense the discussion by adopting an explicit standpoint, which is critical against the basic income approach in the light of aspiring social sustainability goals as outlined in SDG 1. Besides the general view on both approaches within a national context, a dedicated focus on an urban context has been considered relevant because urban residents mainly rely on social protection systems beyond traditional forms such as family relations.

The contribution aims to critically discuss the unconditional basic income approach with respect to achieving the targets of SDG 1 ("no poverty") and SDG 10 ("reducing inequalities"). Implicitly, SDG 11 ("sustainable cities and communities") is considered here, too, as income relates to the affordability of housing and access to services. Based on this, the approach of an all-citizens' insurance scheme combined with a needs-oriented minimum resources approach and an adapted supply of social infrastructure will be introduced as an alternative idea. This debate will be embedded into a broad understanding of poverty and inequality, commonly without geographical restrictions. However, as cities represent the dominant mode of cohabitation in modern societies and exhibit particular types of societal functions, the discussion of social security systems in the context of poverty alleviation and inequality reduction will be led by focusing on urban justice, poverty and inequality. Furthermore, the paper does not claim a global perspective on this topic but refers to the European context (and Germany in particular).

The targets of SDG 1 require by 2030 to, among other things, (i) reduce relative poverty by at least half, (ii) implement nationally appropriate social protection systems, (iii) progress equal rights to economic resources while improving ownership and control over land, and (iv) enhance the resilience of the poor. In a similar vein, targets of SDG 10 demand (i) a sustaining income growth of the bottom 40 per cent based on a national average, (ii) a comprehensive social inclusion policy, (iii) a progressive step towards equal opportunity rights, and (iv) a reduction of inequalities of tax and social protection systems [1]. While some of these targets can be achieved by applying monetary measures, others can only be realized with a broader understanding of poverty and inequality, including equal participation, relations and opportunities.

Basic income and insurance scheme models thus have to be multi-dimensional. They require considering basic monetary protection, rights of accessibility to different markets (education, housing, health), and measures that help reduce discrimination and unequal tax policies. Besides surmounting exogenous restrictions, the model also has to strengthen people's endogenous capabilities. Different types of basic income models have been developed worldwide and have been introduced as empirical experiments in some countries [4–7].

First, the paper presents some core principles of 'unconditional basic income' approaches. The intention here is to scrutinize their *normative* and *political* aspirations in the light of SDG 1 and SDG 10 within the existing economic paradigm of capitalism and not to reject the basic income idea principally. We particularly focus on the inherent weaknesses of their proclaimed characteristics outlined by the model's proponents. Our reference point is the transformative capacity towards a socially sustainable alleviation of poverty and inequality. Secondly, the 'all citizens' insurance scheme' model will be introduced to contrast an alternative to the basic income model. We anticipate a crucial precondition to its realization in properly equipped public spaces with social infrastructures and services, which will be briefly outlined. In the concluding chapter, we point to the problem of spatial constraints in implementing either model and refer to Rosanvallon's [8] relational equity approach as a potential solution.

2. The Political Nature of Poverty and the SDGs

The following discussion of two different approaches in social policy that are supposed to alleviate poverty and social inequality considers two circumstances as initial premises

(explanans). First, poverty and social inequality are non-crises phenomena with a definite temporality and transition period from a decent pre-situation to (another) decent post-situation. In fact, poverty and social inequality have been structural problems of societies from the very beginning. Therefore, poor people have been instrumentalized in various ways, from alms recipients to proletarian reserve army and as a threatening role model in neoliberal labour markets [9,10]. Any attempts to surmount poverty and social inequality sustainably have thus to engage with the underlying structural manifestations and less with different social manifestations, which mainly meddle with the symptoms. Structural transformation of poverty does not necessarily equate with an egalitarian society in terms of income, culture, education or health equity. However, relational equity is assumed to be a necessary condition, as will be outlined below. Thus far, such groundbreaking transformation attempts are not recognizable, neither in capitalist nor in socialist societies.

Secondly, the SDGs are a political program that aims to implement all three domains of sustainability by appreciating existing social and economic paradigms. Private property, competition, growth and accumulation of capital, mass consumption, and the preservation of social hierarchies—of classes, gender, citizenship, and ethnic backgrounds—remain the valid fundament on which a social-ecological transformation shall happen. The society–nature relationship will not alter significantly (this is, for example, revealed through the energy policies in Western European countries in light of the Ukraine war).

If these premises are accepted, we can conclude that the valid object of criticism is not the collection of SDGs itself as they reflect the societal conditions. Instead, the set of norms, laws, attitudes, values, and beliefs—the cultural and legal settings of a society—affects the formulation of sustainable development goals. According to Blühdorn [11] (pp. 76–77), sustainability is a political and controversial concept—its definition is changing continuously. However, “socio-cultural concerns” remain prevailing against “bio-physical facts”. Considering the deeply-rooted modern-capitalistic paradigms, it is questionable whether a transformation towards post-capitalistic circumstances will induce an altered attitude toward social and ecological issues. The overarching claim of SDG 1, “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” by 2030, is simultaneously utopian—because it would require overcoming capitalism and introducing non-monetary forms of wages—and dystopian, as it would require a global imagination of a decent life. Therefore, a core question is still awaiting an answer: “what state funding shall be free of charge to be used by the public and why?” (though for taxpayers, it is de facto not free of charge but an agreed or accepted redistribution of income and wealth).

Another conclusion we can draw on these premises refers to the limited opportunities of social policy systems to mitigate or even dissolve poverty functions. By taking the power of de-functionalizing as a standard of comparison, most basic income approaches remain within the logic of capitalism explicitly and positively, as they reward individual merit and inspire competition among market participants. Basic income will be paid to everyone in order to perform well as consumers and as individuals responsible primarily for themselves. An intrinsic aspiration to overcome poverty (and its structural manifestations) is largely missing. Basic income is akin to coded capital [12] that addresses the individual as the recipient of any action.

In contrast to this approach, the all citizens’ insurance scheme mitigates poverty functions—and thereby the capitalistic paradigm—because it disentangles individual and social merits, outlined in more detail below. Personal autonomy conflates with collective commitment, and this amalgamation provides an egalitarian approach to basic needs and an individualistic approach to wants. It is similar to what Pechmann [13] claims with respect to the legal status of private property rooted in many national constitutions: private property *must* serve and not *should* serve common welfare.

3. Social Protection in the Context of Urban Poverty and Inequality

A discussion of the Sustainable Development Goals and alleviating and preventing poverty is obviously not restricted to urban areas. Nor is it the case with social inequality

and exclusion. However, cities represent a typical configuration of social and spatial structures, functions and processes that justifies a different and particular perspective on all these phenomena. This peculiarity is not justified because more people live, work, or do something else in cities than in rural regions. Instead, urban often means a different way of life, work, consumption or other activities. According to Siebel [14] (p. 109), this difference can be phrased as “the city as a machine that relieves from labour and obligation”. Many duties and services related to households and enterprises have been outsourced to date, which have led to an enormous rise of new low-paid service jobs. While middle and upper classes make a profit with these businesses, the lower classes have increasingly been marginalized. The vulnerability of these classes has grown due to a boost of housing, energy, mobility and consumption prices. Outsourcing of low-income jobs produces and reproduces new social inequality and exclusion mechanisms in urban areas.

An assessment of different social securing models can be politically framed by referring to the idea of social justice. David Harvey, in his seminal book on “Social Justice and the City”, synthesizes social justice on labour, income and their modes of production and distribution. “The principle of social justice applies to the division of benefits and the allocation of burdens arising out of the process of undertaking joint labour. The principle also relates to the social and institutional arrangements associated with the activity of production and distribution” [15] (p. 97). Income turns out to be the core node in a network that relates to wage labour (and thus labour market integration) and its distributional structure. Based on this network structure, Harvey distilled several criteria relevant to a just distribution of benefits and burdens of which “*need* is the most important, *contribution to common goods* is the second and *merit* is the third” [15] (p. 100). While “*need*” refers to the quality dimensions of necessary goods such as food, housing, medical care, education or social and environmental services, “*common goods*” invoke the spatial allocation of these essential goods. “*Merit*” is translated in a normative and “a geographical context as an allocation of extra resources to compensate for the degree of social and natural environmental difficulty” [15] (p. 107).

The organization and redistribution of needs, common goods and merits are influenced by the socio-cultural compositions of communities, which in turn differ between urban and rural areas, albeit not dichotomously. Usually, urban communities are more heterogeneous in social classes, ethnic belongingness, household composition or occupational forms, even though segregation processes attempt to counteract urban social heterogeneity. With the occupational outsourcing strategies, the supply and demand of jobs has diversified and is likely to diversify further. However, only a tiny proportion of these jobs are facilitated by the official labour market. The complexity of the access to this market—and to other markets of health, education and housing as well—impacts the efficacy of social policy instruments.

All three criteria relevant to coping with urban social justice offer a sound stage on which income-based versus insurance-based approaches can be evaluated against their capabilities to comply with claims raised in the SDGs’ targets. They provide for the attributes and their disparate spatial incidence to be taken into account and for clues as to why and how spatial differences can be legitimated. Besides the structural and functional dimensions of dealing with urban inequality and exclusion from a poverty-related and sustainability-driven perspective, the processual extent of transforming patterns of exclusion and inequality towards more inclusive and just urban communities is vital [16,17]. This dimension, however, is out of the scope of this paper and dedicated to another contribution.

4. Characteristics and Aims of Basic Income Approaches

4.1. Common Properties of Basic Income Approaches

Currently, the unconditional basic income (after that BI) and the general, equal and solidary citizens’ insurance scheme (after that CIS) model represent two main approaches supposed to secure human life materially and socio-culturally. Although both models strive to alleviate poverty, reduce social inequality, and promote social justice, they differ

significantly in their normative principles and their societal targets. While the BI approach advocates a redistribution of income (seemingly) without any restrictions, the CIS stands for an economic and social risk-securing approach. BI is meant to be tax-financed (income and/or VAT taxes), while CIS relies on dues. The transformative capacity of CIS is based on a comprehensive reform of the existing social insurance system; however, BI's approach rests upon surmounting it and enhancing society's emancipation [7] (p. 6). The utopian character of BI makes predictions on its realization difficult [18] (p. 182).

Universalism in its range and emancipation in its scope are core premises of BI. BI's emancipatory claim rests upon the idea that income would be paid to everyone, which empowers everyone to live a self-determined life in freedom and supports everyone to turn their capabilities into practice. Universalism is purported because all humans would be paid, from the cradle to the grave. Moreover, everyone has the right to get an income, which safeguards life and enables participation without any reward, poverty test or compulsion to work. These highly ambitious characteristics align with political expectations of autonomy, solidarity and reciprocity—from the individual to different communities and further to society. In addition to these core premises, BI approaches differ in their spatial and social scope and their financing and exclusiveness (regarding potentially remaining insurance schemes and public infrastructure).

A concrete BI model for Germany, for example, proposes an income (i) to be paid to all German citizens, equivalent to the socio-cultural baseline, (ii) to be paid tax-free and without any conditions, (iii) that is financed by all income types beyond the BI, including rents, licenses, return on capital employed, and royalties [19] (pp. 97–109). The proposal is radical as it suggests abandoning all types of social welfare benefits, i.e., legal pension fund, unemployment insurance, state benefit, child benefit, and housing allowance. On the other hand, sick pay and additional wage benefits may maintain, and health and accident insurances could be considered as an additional increase to the BI or by establishing a state health care system.

The Straubhaar BI model rests upon a 50 per cent taxation on all incomes except the BI. An annual BI of 12,000 Euro plus an additional income of 12,000 Euro would mean a total available income of 18,000 Euro. If the extra income were 48,000 Euro, the total available income would be 36,000 Euro. This sample calculation of 1000 Euro BI per month implies that it would be sufficient to secure one's livelihood and social participation, which can be questioned not least because previous state insurances must be compensated. Furthermore, tax revenue remains low, although 50 per cent of income taxes are estimated. With an annual gross income of 48,000 Euros, it is possible to finance two basic incomes—one's own and one further BI. With an annual gross income of 12,000 Euros, it is 6000 Euro tax revenue to fund only half of one's own BI. If the at-risk-of-poverty threshold is taken as a minimum-level reference (1074 Euro in Germany [20]), a monthly BI of 1500 Euro, intended to secure one's livelihood, implies that only one-third of one's own BI would be financed with an additional annual gross income of 12,000 Euro. With an additional yearly gross income of 48,000 Euros, it is one full and one-third of another BI. Furthermore, these sample calculations presume that the entire income tax revenue is taken to finance a society's basic income. Public services (besides social securing) have to be financed by other (new?) fiscal sources, which, in turn, would generate an effect on tax allocation in general.

Other models prefer the value-added tax (VAT) as a suitable instrument to finance BI. Liberals even value the VAT as the best option because the responsibility of consumption will be delegated to the individual (low income would force low levels of consumption, high income would increase the scope for decision-making). However, welfare state positions reject the VAT as a proper financing instrument as this tax also would be equivalent to a redistribution from the income-poor to the income-rich [21] (pp. 192–195). Moreover, a VAT-based BI model would be inconsistent because tax revenue remains insecure if people of low- and medium-income levels are asked to restrain consumption. It would not be economically sustainable. The idea to tax consumption would also counteract efforts of a just climate and environmental protection policy, as consumption appears to

be convenient and profitable but would harm ecosystems. A tax on CO₂ emissions would likewise disadvantage low- and medium-income households if no social compensation were incorporated. As a result, a collective commitment to fulfil the SDGs would hardly be achievable, and both comprehensive environmental protection and comprehensive environmental justice would recede into the distance [22–24].

A far less radical model (concerning abolishing most of the social insurances) has been proposed by Blaschke [25]. This approach integrates the BI into a comprehensive social security system and participation. It includes an insurance scheme (health, care and pension) as well as public services and infrastructures, which can be used free of charge. The basic income level corresponds inversely with the demand for insurance benefits and publicly financed social infrastructure costs. The construction of such a BI model results in a monetary, temporary, spatial, political and biographical variation of the income paid to everyone because it depends on the individual needs and public supply precisely under these circumstances.

An intersection of variations may happen to those involved in caring duties (children or (aged) relatives), who got sick themselves, have retired, depend on public transportation, or wish to participate in educational programs. All these activities and obligations depend on urban-environmental conditions—both between and within cities of different sizes. Even though Blaschke explicitly claims a democratic legitimization of how a combination of basic income, social insurance and public infrastructure should be arranged, this BI approach loses its self-determination and social justice criteria. A basic—and unconditional—income of this type turns out to be highly complex, bureaucratic and fragile. To be clear here: this BI model approach contradicts its own idea of an income that is detached from bureaucratic state interventions, public control, and comprehensive inclusion of preferably all members of a nation. However, this model approach does not supersede a deeper reflection on its ideas.

Even a democratically legitimated conceptualization of a basic income model does not necessarily guarantee that the expectations of participation, emancipation, and self-determination are satisfied. Democratic participation depends on majorities, power relations, and compromises, implying inevitably new and different forms of inclusion and exclusion [26]. Questions that remain relevant in this debate are: which majority principle is in place to which social problem? Which reciprocity principle(s) suits giving and receiving mechanisms within communities? Which territorial spaces are adequate for democratic decisions? Is a spatial differentiation of the universal BI criteria feasible and normative imperative?

However, the following sections take the political (power-related) and normative (justice-related) aspirations proclaimed by mostly all types of BI approaches into account. These are emancipation, self-determination and solidarity. Although being relevant to every member of society, they need to be considered mainly for the poor and excluded people, as having been addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10. Likewise, they play a crucial role in urban contexts due to particular modes of cohabitation.

4.2. The Emancipatory Pretension of an Unconditional Basic Income

Many proponents recognize an emancipatory power in an unconditional basic income that helps oppose the capitalistic labour market with its exclusionary effects and oppose a bureaucracy with its means testing [25,27,28]. Emancipation, more generally, implies a critique of the anachronistic conservative wage labour model. Social change of the past fifty or so years has been caused and influenced by post-industrialization, urbanization, individualization and digitization, with an enormous appreciation of productive labour. The growing number and sustaining effects of economic, climate change and pandemic crises reveal the limits of the neoliberal paradigm, which results in a shifting appraisal of productive and reproductive labour [29] (p. 14).

A fundamental transformation of wage labour on the one hand and caring as well as voluntary work on the other is seen as a challenging task of modern societies in the near

future. Urban lifestyles with their comprehensive tendency of outsourcing home-based and family-related occupations are supposed to be affected mainly through this transformation. The introduction of a BI may have a negative effect on the supply and a positive effect on the payment of jobs in the reproductive sector. However, a sustainable transformation of the wage labour market with its consolidated recognition structures takes time and needs to be accompanied by institutional changes. An institutional failure of an adequate appreciation of reproductive labour has led to its precarious situation [30] (p. 467). In this context, the hope is that BI can bridge the gap between the individual labour situation and the institutional labour market to alleviate urban poverty and inequality fundamentally and sustainably.

Considering these implications, the emancipatory pretension of a basic income is meant to be overinflated concerning their normative aspirations. Also, a possible causality fallacy is implicitly given with this pretension. With a BI, it is believed that it relieves employees from capital owners and women from male breadwinner models. This belief insinuates a straight translation of individual financial independence through a basic income into a change of normative behaviour and institutional values. BI models do not inherently imply a societal appreciation of reproductive work, just because persons who receive a life-securing income will do it. In fact, the opposite might likely happen as reproductive work can increasingly be outsourced with a BI, resulting in a decline in its appreciation. Likewise, the structures, functions and norms of a BI approach do not causally involve an increasing number of men being now employed in (outsourced) caring work. A decline of “bullshit jobs” [31] is more likely to happen because employees of these jobs increase their economic autonomy with a BI. This does not necessarily mean that personal recognition and social integration grow simultaneously.

This interpretation does not justify a conservative plea for capitalistic wage labour. Instead, a shared recognition of work that redresses the prevailing labour market logic within the capitalistic paradigm is deemed necessary. This concern includes a recurring societal debate on the reasonableness and usefulness of occupations and their payment [18] (pp. 183–184). Care work, voluntary, and neighbourhood jobs deserve more than a symbolic acknowledgement, as seen in crises such as the corona pandemic. An unconditioned basic income implies a logic of recognition that is based on capitalistic value theory because it relates previously unpaid reproductive labour with a monetary value. The core problem of such a relation is the exploitative approach: the BI functions like a wage paid for reproductive or voluntary work. Even though the BI approach performs better than a simple symbolic appreciation of reproductive labour, it does not surmount an intended decoupling of wage labour and social participation. It is thus questionable whether a BI is exclusively capable of providing a sufficient societal recognition of reproductive work—exclusively according to the TINA paradigm: *there is no alternative* [7] (p. 10). A successive integration of reproductive work to the mechanisms of profit, productivity, added value, and scarcity seems to be more likely to happen. In other words, taking the idea of a BI as a source for a capitalistic transformation is less convincing. Reflections on how to implement a BI confirms this careful assessment [30] (pp. 479–480).

In conclusion, we anticipate little evidence that BI models will strengthen emancipatory efforts to alleviate poverty and inequality as Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 10 strive for. Likewise, urban inequality and exclusion mechanisms are not challenged sufficiently to mitigate them sustainably.

4.3. *The Self-Determination Promoting Pretension of an Unconditional Basic Income*

Another characteristic that is ascribed to BI models is their inherent capability to strengthen self-determination. With a BI, the fear of securing one’s material and social existence and the force to wage work can be eradicated. A BI would allow us to determine the form, moment in lifetime and volume of work ourselves [7] (p. 11). This assumption can be confirmed best if the focus is on people who do already have a well-paid wage work, and a BI would allow them to reduce working time. Therefore, the scope of freedom

and autonomy grows for members of the middle-classes. Unemployed persons, first-time employees, low-qualified persons, migrants, homeless people or people living in a stigmatized urban quarter may not necessarily benefit from a BI because most BI approaches overestimate economic capital and underestimate the remaining sorts of capital, such as social and cultural capital [32]. Social capital—the possession of resources such as trust, local knowledge and reciprocity needed to be embedded in social networks—grounds on different rules and mechanisms than economic capital. Also, economic capital does not necessarily provide social and cultural capital, as other circumstances of justice and equity (e.g., having equal access to labour, housing or education markets) have to be broadly accepted in society [33].

In conclusion: economic capital provided by the BI models may help mitigate income poverty and reduce material inequality. However, the narrow monetary focus of BI approaches does not sufficiently account for the other sorts of capital relevant to establishing common social appreciation in urban communities.

4.4. The Solidary Pretension of an Unconditional Basic Income

BI is assumed to help emerge or enhance solidarity in a similar vein. However, the simple fact that all citizens of a state would be provided with a life-securing income is not equal to a community of solidarity. In fact, if a BI model, according to Straubhaar's approach, would be implemented, everyone would be left alone with the risk of unemployment, health care or pension. Would there be a community of solidarity for those who fail with organizing themselves? However, even if BI models would be associated with a comprehensive social insurance system, they are not inherently solidary. Solidarity implies the inclusion of people who are then part of a community (or communities) and simultaneously presupposes the exclusion of those who do not belong. One significant assumption is that the entire community of solidarity is willing to pay for a basic income that will be redistributed in the outlined manner. One powerful exclusionary force is the territorially bounded nation-state. The methodological nationalism paradigm [34] serves as a political instrument for regulating entries and exits. This model has been translated in local contexts of urban gentrified areas or gated communities [35,36].

Solidarity can be justified if it promotes the execution of common rules [37]. For example, to support all students of a class irrespective of their parent's income. Or to pay housing benefits if housing prices increase faster than the income. Solidarity is meant not to be reduced to income but needs to include public social infrastructure, participatory and relational justice, and alternatives to wage labour markets.

Commonly, BI approaches are not only socially but also spatially blind since the income would be equally distributed. The distribution neither of living costs—including housing, social services or transportation—nor infrastructure is considered. Spatial injustice within and between urban and rural, central and remote, growing and shrinking regions would remain a political problem with the introduction of a BI [38,39]. Urban inequality and exclusion, as well as poverty alleviation and prevention, have thus to cope with spatial inequality explicitly to approach a sustainable solution. BI models have had to be adapted if they should be part of a comprehensive approach. Attempts to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (in our context SDGs 1 and 10) by a BI or similar model approach have thus to switch from normative arguments to power and execution relations [40] (p. 233).

Although solidarity across social classes and milieus is generally hard to achieve as long as a territorial space concept prevails, the BI models do not convincingly argue for solidarity. Instead, they strive for enhancing individual autonomy as much as possible without accounting for the social dimension of urban cohabitation. BI solidarity turns out to be a trigger to strengthen competition in producing and consuming goods.

5. Towards an Alternative Model: Disentangling Wage Labour and Social Participation

A transformation of the existing social policy structures that aims to reform the wage labour market and improve access to public social infrastructure should start with

a disentanglement of labour and social participation. Disentanglement of labour and social participation roots in ideas of the 1980s. Vobruba [41], among others, suggested decoupling (not suspending) societal labour and wealth within capitalism. Historically, the two components had been independent for a long time and until the advent of urban industrialization. During this period, with a considerable demand for labour force, tight coupling between labour and social wealth had been introduced politically. Labour houses had been established, and begging bans had been passed [42]. The political watchword was “who does not work, shall not eat” [9] (p. 23).

In the light of the problems of crude capitalistic exploitation of the labour force and hence the introduction of social insurances in the 19th century, a conditional disentanglement of labour and participation became more relevant. As a result, the political agenda changed to “who will eat, should be willing to work at least” [9] (p. 23). Current claims for a complete disentanglement of labour and social securing services are explained by a growing crisis of the wage labour market, the social insurance system, and environmental (ecological and climate) conditions. In order to meet the targets of SDGs 1 and 10, equal and just accessibility to material services must be created without being strongly interrelated with the wage labour market [41] (p. 345).

Furthermore, the claim to disentangle wage labour and social securing services (and participation) is politically correlated with a poverty policy that aims to break up all forms of poverty instrumentalization. Poor people are confronted with fateful ascriptions of their living conditions since medieval times, though with changing arguments by the powerful social classes. Those ascriptions range from “poverty as a change value” to “poverty as an immoral state” or “poverty as an exploitable state” [9] (pp. 53–55). Poverty instrumentalization has been translated into political programs to date to keep poor people obedient to the wage labour market regime. Examples are ‘the principle that benefits must be lower than wages’ or the ‘common definition of a breadline’ (by non-poor people). To de-instrumentalize poverty, a modification of property rights and the purpose of social insurance services is seen as an essential political aim [41] (p. 347). Modifying property rights is equivalent to giving precedence to participation; the correlation “the more you paid into the social insurance system, the more you get out of it” is no longer valid. Modifying social insurance’s purpose means linking social insurance claims to social reasons instead of yielded contributions. The correlation “you are eligible for services if and only if you paid into the insurance system” is no longer valid.

These modifications would result in a transformative step towards a model that aspires to true solidarity, self-determination and wage labour emancipation. Vobruba [41] refers to this model as “guaranteed basic income”, which grounds on at least two criteria at least. Firstly, that this income contributes to a relief of the wage labour market in terms of unemployment and their societal costs (stigmatization, bureaucratization, suspicion of misuse), and interrelates with an aligned labour time policy. The guaranteed basic income level corresponds with a minimum income necessary to survive economically and socially and depends on needs that allow for a decent life. Secondly, that this income intends to overcome poverty sustainably, which means to balance wage labour income and guaranteed basic income in a way that simultaneously appreciates wage labour and prohibits material and social impoverishment due to unemployment. Merits are positively connoted with labour income—in all income classes but mainly in the lower-income segments (which is close to a minimum income discussion). Moreover, wage labour income must reach a level that allows for flexible labour times over the entire personal labour biography.

A problem that has not been solved satisfactorily with this income approach is the political liaison with the territorial-administrative space. The introduction of a guaranteed basic income model has to deal with the question of who is considered eligible. Vobruba [40,41] (pp. 225–226; p. 350) has repeatedly pointed to the fact that any reference to territorial space inevitably produces social exclusion and spatial injustice. Even a broad definition of a ‘political community’ has ultimately to cope with justifications of inclusion and exclusion. One option might differ between “needs-oriented guaranteed minimum resources”, which are paid to everyone living

in a state for some time, and an income that provides for a “status-securing”, which rests upon specific contribution rules. Another idea could explicitly include infrastructure services substituting money payments.

6. Insurance Scheme and Minimum Resources as an Alternative Approach

A model that accounts for the problems of an unconditional basic income to alleviate and prevent poverty, as it has been outlined above, is given with a combination of an “all citizens’ insurance scheme” and a “needs-oriented guaranteed minimum resources” (CIS) approach [43,44]. The CIS model is embedded into a comprehensive political reform of wealth distribution and social infrastructure and services development. Its core target aims for distributive justice of labour, income, and life opportunities. With this aspiration, CIS seeks to reduce poverty and unemployment as well as to adapt to climate change requirements and thus complies with most of the SDG 1 and 10 targets. Furthermore, CIS explicitly speaks up for a general, standard and solidary insurance system. “General” means to include all insurance components (health, care, unemployment, etc.) and organize insurance services according to the same principles. “Common” implies that all insurance components are publicly provided, and private insurance services are accepted only as add-on services. “Solidary” accounts for all income types as a collective source to deposit money without any taxable base.

The CIS model rests upon a collective distribution of insurance services and risks by extending and harmonizing the recipients of benefits as largest possible. While the radical BI approach (according to the Straubhaar model) individualizes personal and social risks and, in so doing, jeopardizes social cohesion through an inevitable outsourcing of social costs, the CIS approach promotes a collective body of the insured, which is equivalent to the entire residential population of a city [43] (p. 399). However, what remains a difficult question is a concise definition of the “residential population”, as it affects dues and claims.

The all-citizens’ insurance scheme has to incorporate minimum resources, which secures social life above the poverty line without bureaucratic hurdles and degrading procedures. The minimum resources level is—to propagate the disentanglement of wage labour and social participation—varying in time, space and attribute, depending on all sorts of income, biographical and household situation, required insurance services and spatial differences of social infrastructure supply. Hence, social infrastructure happens to evolve to a cornerstone of poverty reduction, poverty prevention and public services in general, and the CIS approach in particular.

7. The Relevance of the Social Infrastructure

A sufficient supply of social infrastructure and social services provides a solid foundation of a decent quality of life. The elaboration of individual interests and social participation crucially depends on a well-established distribution (in quantity and quality) of educational, health care, public transportation, cultural and sports institutions. Therefore, promoting social infrastructure should encourage people or households. Having gratuitous access to kindergartens, schools, public transportation, or health institutions would enhance social justice more significantly than the payment of, for example, child benefits. This assessment is equally true for residential building subsidies. Public funds should be spent on social and local public housing instead of households [45].

The meaning of social infrastructure moves beyond material securing. It provides the means to constitute and preserve social relationships, as Klinenberg [46] (p. 5) points out in his book “Palaces for the People”: “Social infrastructure is not “social capital” [. . .] but the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops. [. . .] Social infrastructure is crucially important, because local, face-to-face interactions—at the school, the playground, and the corner diner—are the building blocks of all public life”. Taking a library as an example, he outlines: “The accessible physical space of the library is not the only factor that makes it work well as social infrastructure. The institution’s extensive programming, organized by a professional staff that upholds a moral commitment to openness and inclusivity, fosters

social cohesion among clients who might otherwise keep to themselves” [46] (p. 36). Another example would be spaces of urban gardening, which are places of social communication, subsistence economy, learning and ecological sustainability of city spaces [47].

Furthermore, well-functioning social infrastructures are highly appreciated in times of transformation or crises. They contribute to the material and immaterial safeguarding of all people, but primarily to marginalized and vulnerable social communities, as illustrated by the contemporary SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The highest excess mortality rates are given in countries with exclusive or low-level social infrastructures, exemplified by the existing public health care services (the USA and Brazil as unfavourable, Germany, Austria and Sweden as positive instances) [48].

8. Discussion

“Leave no one behind” is a paradigm of the UN Agenda 2030 and requires that every human being is considered an equivalent member of the global humankind. This paradigm appreciates the dignity and liberty of everyone, and, with its goals, ultimately strives to eliminate impoverished living conditions and moderate social inequalities.

Although everyone is addressed in this paradigm, it does not equate with methodological individualism. According to our interpretation, this type of individualism is exactly what unconditional basic income models rest upon. Every resident gets the same amount of money, irrespective of biographical and spatial circumstances, and poverty is expected to be surmounted by a basic income payment. Responsibility also becomes a predominantly individual requirement, again mainly solved by providing people with money. This reductionist approach conflates properly with the neoliberal market economy, and the proclaimed solidarity, self-determination and emancipation is firmly restricted to this type of economy. We thus consider basic income models less suitable to cope with poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

The all-citizens’ insurance scheme model performs better because benefits associate more strongly with biographical and spatial conditions than the unconditional basic income models. Solidarity corresponds with dues of those capable of delivering and to those who require help. Emancipation is not an abstract issue but relates to the concrete circumstances of one’s life in space and time. And self-determination rests upon the social context instead of individual wants. However, to achieve a more comprehensive model approach, a rigorous de-commodification of dues (the modification of property rights, as mentioned above) and a far-reaching inclusion of people (the above-mentioned purpose problem) is to be taken into account.

A core problem of both model types that remains to be solved in the future is their conservative character. Their ideas, aiming to prevent and alleviate poverty, reduce inequality and exclusion, tend to reproduce and thus stabilize existing market conditions and thus perpetuate poverty, inequality, and exclusion. The introduction of either a BI or a CIS model should initiate a reform of the labour, health care, housing and education markets in terms of accessibility and scarcity abandonment. From a geographical context, a break-up of the territorial space regime is considered necessary to avoid keeping in the exclusion-inclusion mode of belongingness.

A relational space approach of networks of places represents most people’s living conditions more appropriately than the containerized imagination of administrative territories. This approach allows for scaling down needs, common goods and merits in manifold ways to tailor these at varying community levels. In this context, a reference is given with the relational equity approach by Rosanvallon [8] with its three components of “singularity”, “reciprocity”, and “communality”. Singularity appreciates individual liberty and the relational nature of social embeddedness (pp. 309–310). Reciprocity defines the quality of mutual social relations as co-produced (and lesser than trade-off), for example, in common goods and services (p. 321). Finally, communality provides the social and geographical space to transform reciprocity and singularity practically (p. 330).

Rosanvallon's relational equity approach provides an appropriate epistemology of essential mechanisms of social relationships but needs to be downscaled to the local and regional levels. Moreover, relational equity does not aspire to equalize all social and economic inequalities that do exist in time and space. Such an aspiration would be neither desirable nor realistic. Not realistic because social and economic inequalities have existed since the ancient, segmented societies and continued to exist in stratified and functionally differentiated modern societies. It is not desirable, as it would imply the constitution of totalitarian surveillance, which would have to control the strict observance of the social and economic equity rules [49]. Furthermore, an irreversible agreement on equity rules would be required, not grounded on natural laws but ideology.

Instead, relational equity claims that given social and economic inequalities must not imply differences in primary living conditions that are health, education, security, nutrition, housing, and environmental quality. An all-citizens' insurance scheme accounts for this requirement. It rejects causality of individual property rights (insurance merits are proportional to the payment's level) and finality (fees determine insurance merits). A basic income approach is likely to mitigate extreme forms of social and economic inequality, if at all. However, it does not aim to overcome the structural dimensions of inequality and poverty.

Likewise, primary living conditions cannot be harmonized absolutely and globally since social living opportunities, constraints, and environmental circumstances are manifold, as are the needs and aspirations of people. Local collective negotiations of concrete and versatile lifestyles framed by commonly (=locally) accepted relational equity might thus contribute to a sustaining alleviation and prevention of poverty. Nevertheless, individual well-being remains valid as it is indissolubly implemented in the social networks of mutually tied actors and their well-being.

The conflation of relational equity and relational space approaches would ultimately create a social-spatial environment that has the potential to realize a societal model of libertarian socialism. Network resources of local knowledge and trust (social capital) would enable a tight linkage of individual and community needs that can be exchanged with different currencies (e.g., money or time). Personal autonomy is embedded in social networks that more likely prevent mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion as is given with territorial community formations. In turn, communities (collectives) are decentrally organized, which more likely prevent means of authoritarianism. Libertarian socialism can be thus characterized as local *and* trans-local, personal *and* trans-personal, present *and* trans-temporal, helping to transform social and ecological relationships sustainably. Consequently, with this triad of relational equity, relational space and relational insurance scheme, it should be possible to go a step ahead towards achieving some of the SDG 1 and SDG 10 targets.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

1. UN United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals. Available online: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/> (accessed on 22 January 2022).
2. Universities and Sustainable Development Goals, Austria. Available online: <https://www.uninetz.at/en/> (accessed on 14 February 2022).
3. Horvath, S.-M.; Muhr, M.M.; Kirchner, M.; Toth, W.; German, V.; Hundscheid, L.; Vacik, H.; Scherz, M.; Kreiner, H.; Fehr, F.; et al. Handling a complex agenda: A review and assessment of methods to analyse SDG entity interactions. *Environ. Sci. Policy* **2022**, *131*, 160–176. [CrossRef]

4. Diem, V. Wir würden öfter Nein sagen können. In Deutschland startet erstmals eine Studie zum bedingungslosen Grundeinkommen. *Die Zeit*, 21 August 2020, p. 22. Available online: <https://www.zeit.de/2020/35/bedingungsloses-grundeinkommen-studie-michael-bohmeyer-interview> (accessed on 14 February 2022)
5. Banerjee, A.; Niehaus, P.; Suri, T. Universal Basic Income in the Developing World. *Annu. Rev. Econ.* **2019**, *11*, 959–983. [CrossRef]
6. Haushofer, J.; Shapiro, J. The Short-Term Impact of Unconditional Cash Transfers to the Poor: Experimental Evidence from Kenya. *Q. J. Econ.* **2016**, *131*, 1973–2042. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
7. Reitter, K. *Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen*; Mandelbaum Verlag: Wien, Austria, 2012.
8. Rosanvallon, P. *The Society of Equals*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2013.
9. Dietz, B. *Soziologie der Armut*; Campus Verlag: Frankfurt, Germany; New York, NY, USA, 1997.
10. Piketty, T. *Time for Socialism. Dispatches from a World on Fire, 2016–2021*; Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, USA; London, UK, 2021.
11. Blühdorn, I. *Nachhaltige Nicht-Nachhaltigkeit*; Transcript Verlag: Bielefeld, Germany, 2020.
12. Pistor, K. *Code of Capital: How the Law Creates Wealth and Inequality*; Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, USA; Oxford, UK, 2019.
13. Von Pechmann, A. *Die Eigentumsfrage im 21. Jahrhundert*; Transcript Verlag: Bielefeld, Germany, 2021.
14. Siebel, W. *Die Kultur der Stadt*; Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin, Germany, 2015.
15. Harvey, D. *Social Justice and the City*, Revised ed.; University of Georgia Press: Athens, Georgia, 1973.
16. Fainstein, S. *The Just City*; Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, USA; London, UK, 2010.
17. Marcuse, P.; Connolly, J.; Novy, J.; Olivo, I.; Potter, C.; Steil, J. *Searching for the Just City*; Routledge: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2009.
18. Rätz, W. Digitalisierung? Grundeinkommen! Eine Notwendigkeit, die erklärt werden muss. In *Digitalisierung? Grundeinkommen!* Rätz, W., Paternoga, D., Reiners, J., Reipen, G., Eds.; Mandelbaum Verlag: Wien, Austria, 2019; pp. 180–196.
19. Straubhaar, T. *Radikal Gerecht. Wie das Bedingungslose Grundeinkommen den Sozialstaat Revolutioniert*; Edition Körber Stiftung: Hamburg, Germany, 2017.
20. DeStatis. Income, Consumption and Living Conditions. Available online: https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Income-Consumption-Living-Conditions/Living-Conditions-Risk-Poverty/_node.html (accessed on 13 February 2022).
21. Butterwegge, C. Weder gerecht noch sozial. Das bedingungslose Grundeinkommen schafft mehr Probleme, als es löst. In *Grund-einkommen Kontrovers. Plädoyers für und Gegen ein Neues Sozialmodell*; Butterwegge, C., Rinke, K., Eds.; Verlag Beltz Juventa: Weinheim, Germany; Basel, Switzerland, 2018; pp. 189–213.
22. Vanderheiden, S. Climate Justice beyond International Burden Sharing. *Midwest Stud. Philos.* **2016**, *40*, 27–42. [CrossRef]
23. Schlosberg, D. *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2007.
24. Adger, N.W.; Paavola, J. Analysis of Fair Adaptation to Climate Change. *Ecol. Econ.* **2006**, *56*, 594–609.
25. Blaschke, R. Grundeinkommen—Was ist das eigentlich? Und was ist ein emanzipatorisches Grundeinkommenskonzept? In *Digitalisierung? Grundeinkommen!* Rätz, W., Paternoga, D., Reiners, J., Reipen, G., Eds.; Mandelbaum Verlag: Wien, Austria, 2019; pp. 14–26.
26. Lessenich, S. *Grenzen der Demokratie. Teilhabe als Verteilungsproblem*; Reclam: Dietzingen, Germany, 2019.
27. Kovce, P. Wer frei ist, muss nicht faul sein. Der Tag der Arbeit und das bedingungslose Grundeinkommen. In *Grundeinkommen Kontrovers. Plädoyers für und Gegen ein Neues Sozialmodell*; Butterwegge, C., Rinke, K., Eds.; Verlag Beltz Juventa: Weinheim, Germany; Basel, Switzerland, 2018; pp. 50–63.
28. Häni, D.; Kovce, P. *Was Würdest du Arbeiten, Wenn für dein Einkommen Gesorgt Wäre? Manifest zum Grundeinkommen*; Ecowin Verlag: Wals bei Salzburg, Austria, 2017.
29. Kovce, P.; Priddat, B.P. Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen. Zur Einführung. In *Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen. Grundlagentexte*; Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin, Germany, 2019; pp. 11–53.
30. Offe, C. Das bedingungslose Grundeinkommen als Antwort auf die Krise von Arbeitsmarkt und Sozialstaat. In *Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen. Grundlagentexte*; Kovce, P., Priddat, B.P., Eds.; Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin, Germany, 2019; pp. 454–480.
31. Graeber, D. *Bullshit Jobs. The Rise of Pointless Work, and What We Can Do about It.*; Simon and Schuster Paperback: New York, NY, USA, 2018.
32. Bourdieu, P. The forms of capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*; Richardson, J., Ed.; Greenwood Publishing Group: Santa Barbara, CA, USA, 1986; pp. 241–258. Available online: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm> (accessed on 9 February 2016).
33. Koch, A. Capital, the Social and the Institution—Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Capital Revisited. In *Rethinking Social Capital: Global Contributions from Theory and Practice*; Kapferer, E., Gstach, I., Koch, A., Sedmak, C., Eds.; Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2017; pp. 3–18.
34. Beck, U.; Pöferl, A. *Große Armut, großer Reichtum*; Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin, Germany, 2010.
35. Atkinson, R.; Bridge, G. *Gentrification in a Global Perspective. The New Urban Colonialism*; Routledge: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2000.
36. Harvey, D. *Spaces of Capital. Towards a Critical Geography*; Routledge: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2012.
37. Bayertz, K. *Solidarität. Begriff und Problem*; Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt, Germany, 1998.

38. Kaltenbrunner, R. Der Unterschied zum Gleichen. Gleichwertige Lebensverhältnisse—Nur ein Mythos deutscher Politik? *Inf. Raumentwickl.* **2006**, *6*, 393–395.
39. Kawka, R. Unterschiede in den Lebenshaltungskosten: Ein Ausgleich für regionale Disparitäten? *Inf. Raumentwickl.* **2006**, *6*, 355–361.
40. Vobruba, G. Wege aus der Utopiefalle des Grundeinkommens. In *Grundeinkommen Kontrovers. Plädoyers für und Gegen ein Neues Sozialmodell*; Butterwegge, C., Rinke, K., Eds.; Verlag Beltz Juventa: Weinheim, Germany; Basel, Switzerland, 2018; pp. 224–236.
41. Vobruba, G. Die Entflechtung von Arbeit und Essen. Lohnarbeitszentrierte Sozialpolitik und garantiertes Grundeinkommen. In *Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen. Grundlagentexte*; Kovce, P., Priddat, B.P., Eds.; Suhrkamp Verlag: Berlin, Germany, 2019; pp. 338–355.
42. Geremek, B. *Geschichte der Armut*; Artemis Verlag: München, Germany; Zürich, Switzerland, 1988.
43. Butterwegge, C. *Die Zerrissene Republik. Wirtschaftliche, Soziale und Politische Ungleichheit in Deutschland*; Beltz Juventa Verlag: Weinheim, Germany; Basel, Switzerland, 2020.
44. Butterwegge, C. *Armut in Einem Reichen Land. Wie das Problem Verharmlost und Verdrängt Wird*, 2nd ed.; Campus Verlag: Frankfurt, Germany; New York, NY, USA, 2011.
45. Koch, A. Stadtökologie statt Ökologie. *Sub/Urban Z. Krit. Stadtforsch.* **2020**, *8*, 167–176. [[CrossRef](#)]
46. Klinenberg, E. *Palaces for the People. How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*; Crown Publishing Group: New York, NY, USA, 2018.
47. Leregger, F. Gemeinschaftsgärten als Beitrag zur Nachhaltigen Entwicklung Urbaner Räume. Available online: <http://n21.press/gemeinschaftsgaerten-urbane-entwicklung/> (accessed on 18 September 2021).
48. Eurostat. COVID-19: Statistics Serving Europe. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (accessed on 27 September 2021).
49. Zamyatin, Y. *We*; Vintage: London, UK, 2016.