



Group Assembly Process (GAP) - Stirring Paper

Basic Income and a Degrowth Project?

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This stirring paper is inspired by [the interview made with Emmanuel Daniel for the French Basic Income Network website in April 2013](#).ⁱ

The book [A Degrowth Project: Manifesto for an Unconditional Autonomy Allowance \(Utopia, 2013\)](#)ⁱⁱ champions the instauration of an [unconditional partially de-monetised income](#)ⁱⁱⁱ, distributed in the form of usage rights on resources and in local currencies rather than in Euros.

Could you explain what the Unconditional Autonomy Allowance (UAA) stands for?

The idea emerged within the Degrowth movement together with propositions for a basic income, the extension of the sphere of gratuitousness, good use and misuse of resources and practical alternatives that are popping up everywhere. We discussed the [Maximum Acceptable Income](#)^{iv}, the debt crisis, regaining a democratic control of the monetary system and doing away with the religion of the economy.

Within the logic of transition and re-localisation, all these considerations led us to the notion of a partially demonetised subsistence allowance allocated in resources usage rights and local currencies.

[You asked people to sign the European Citizens' Initiative for the instauration of a basic income](#)^v and explained that it constituted a springboard towards Degrowth. But you

point out the limits of this measure. What are they?

We support a basic living income on social justice grounds since it would reduce the increasing sufferings linked to inequalities and austerity plans. We support it also because it constitutes a tool to get out of the alienation of work and the primacy of the value of work.

But we remain cautious because, if this measure is implemented without being coupled with a reflexion on the meaning of our productions, consumptions or the prominent role of advertising in our societies, it could lead to a rather worrying situation where it could kick start the consumption of rather-useless things. And the living income, according to Milton Friedman, could also lead to the removal of some basic social benefits or the right to work.

We fully support the subsistence income as an element of a societal project, a deeper reflexion around a transition towards new local, alternative economic models inclusive of environmental issues and the questions that are at the centre of our thinking: what do we produce? How? For what purpose?

Is the basic income a platform towards a UAA?

We have developed three scenarios of implementation of the UAA. In the first scenario, we rely on the [transition that is already underway](#)^{vi}: all the practical alternatives occurring around the world (local currencies, permaculture, and local repair-workshops, Local Exchange systems (LETs), etc.). Step by step, from grassroots movements, we can design a new production mode, new economic models and the implementation of the UAA.

In the second scenario, whilst we keep an interest in the concrete alternatives, we imagine an important reduction in working time so that work can be shared and put an end to unemployment. The resulting extra spare time could be used to develop local economic models, the re-appropriation of tools and local productions.

The third scenario is based on the instauration of an unconditional basic income. Its implementation is technically quite easy but it requires a strong political courage. It would also need a strong democratic political re-appropriation of the economic system. We would implement this unconditional basic income concurrently with a maximum acceptable income to start with. Then usage rights on primary resources and local alternative currencies would incrementally replace this income, initially allocated in Euros or national currency.

You want to fix energy quotas for each territory and tax the misuse of resources. But people don't have the same energy needs (old houses hard to heat, cold and humid regions, flat versus house...)? How can we manage these disparities?

With the UAA, people enjoy more rights and they can use them to organise local citizens' debates, strengthen democracy and reflect on consumption. We are trying to define what a sustainable consumption amounts to, how we can produce the energy required to achieve it, and how to deliver it and what is the threshold to start taxing usage.

All these measures take place within a long-term logic of transition and they cannot be enforced overnight. We start with a free, partial allocation of gas, water and electricity, followed by an incremental price increase (by announcing a 10 years increase projection curve), so that everyone has time to adjust. We can change our lifestyles, the way we live together and relate to each other.

Thus, it provides a protection for the most disadvantaged who can fulfil their basic needs for free. At the same time, it is a transition tool for a reflexion on how we produce and use energies and how we can change our lifestyle and our consumption in a significant manner for more autonomy, conviviality and well-being.

You anticipate that each territory will define its own quotas democratically. Wouldn't it increase competition among territories?

That is a possibility, but competition already exists and, it is particularly fierce for water. It is not managed in a democratic manner and it does not take environmental issues into

consideration, but by the completely crazy myth of the “invisible hand”. One of UAA aims is to open a reflexion on our needs and on the manner we can organise ourselves at the local level, or, if it is not possible to produce sustainably what we need through open exchanges.

Within the logic of transition, the end result is to reduce our ecological footprint. It is obvious that some solidarity measures will have to be imposed. The aim is to lean towards autonomous communities in the long term, but united communities open to each other.

By offering a free quota in energy to all, won't the people consume all their allowance even if they don't really need to? Is it really a good measure to reduce waste? Doesn't it contradict the wise use of resources?

We are outside a consumerist and capitalist imaginary. Within a logic of gratuitousness, such as with the outlets of free exchanges, our imaginary is conditioned and is ill-prepared to accept the idea to obtain things for free to start with. We do not use goods to accumulate them but only when we need them. Thus our relation to “things” changes.

It is the same with water, electricity or gas. A free quota does not mean that we must try to use it all. Our aim is not to optimise a consumption level but to strive for a decent way of life. These are means and not end in themselves.

If an UAA is implemented in a society that still functions in a consumerist/productivist society, the consciousness and behavioural changes you hope for will remain wishful thinking.

True, and we remain very critical of other experiences such as communism. That's why we talk of an incremental serene and democratic transition. But, when we see what is happening with the practical alternatives, we realise that there is an interesting dynamic and that, the people involved change their relationships to each other and to things. I don't know if it will take 10, 20 or 50 years?

Since the UAA is mainly allocated in usage rights and local currencies, is it not a way to deprive people from the right to consume a product that is not found locally?

We are not opposed to maintain local, regional, national or supra-national currencies. It is not “all local” against “all global”; it is a matter of finding the right equilibriums. Local currencies are not just economic tools but they are tools for the re-appropriation of politics, the re-politicisation of society since they lead people to question consumption, production and usages.

It is not oppose to freedom of movement and trade since national currencies will still exist. We do not support a ban on 4X4 rodeos in the forests. But they must pay the right price to do it: inclusive of environmental impacts, human labour and oil.

At the planet level, 20% of us appropriate 87% of its natural resources. In Europe we live in a cocoon, particularly the rich, since we never see the consequences of our consumption. Freedom to consume is an illusion that comes with a hefty cost, both at the environmental level and the exploitation of peoples and resources throughout the world. The logic of re-localisation of the productions entails breaking away from this illusory freedom. If environmentally dangerous products, requiring the exploitation of many at the local are produced locally, people are confronted with the consequences of their actions.

You talk about a lengthy democratic transition process, devoid of any authoritarianism, but you propose a maximum acceptable income as well as the compulsory acquisition of some housing. How do you get the people who have everything to loose, to accept it?

We have to choose between degrowth by choice and an endured recession. The Troika imposes the later in a barbaric manner, through austerity plans. The ecological footprint diminishes in Greece, because majority of the people, the poors, have nothing left, their consumption is minimal, and when they can, they no longer work and do not use their car anymore. Devastating human consequences ensue, while the richest keep enjoying useless and unsustainable consumptions.

But Greek people develop also alternative economic models: for example, the “[potato revolution](#)”^{vii} (farmers by-passing the middleman: farm-gate or farmers market selling points). Some print Drachmas (Greek currency), others set up time-exchange networks (an



unemployed GP trades a consultation to a carpenter and vice versa...). This enforced recession leads to the same outcome we are seeking with our logic of a degrowth by choice. But the journey is extremely different.

ⁱVincent Liegey : « *Le choix se situe entre décroissance choisie et récession subie* », interview by Emmanuel Daniel - <http://revenuebase.info/2013/04/25/vincent-liegey-dotation-inconditionnelle-autonomie/>

ⁱⁱ « *A Degrowth Project* », *why this book?*, Vincent Liegey, Anisabel Veillot, Christophe Ondet, and Stéphane Madelaine - *A Degrowth Project – Manifesto for an Unconditional Autonomy Allowance*, Edition Utopia, Janvier 2013. - <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=595>

ⁱⁱⁱ See: Momentum Institute analyses *Basic Income / Unconditional Autonomy Allowance: « Living income for free and egalitarian societies »*, Hugo CARTON – October 2013 – Momentum Institute - <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=1640>

^{iv} *A Maximum Acceptable Income: beyond the symbolic limits*, Vincent Liegey, Stéphane Madelaine, Christophe Ondet, and Anne-Isabelle Veillot, Moins! Le journal romand d'écologie politique - <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=1154>

^v A springboard for a Degrowth Project: the citizens' initiative for a basic income - <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=873>

^{vi} The transition is underway! – In Reporterre.net - <http://www.projet-decroissance.net/?p=689>

^{vii} See for example: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17369989>