

## ARTICLE

## The Unconditional Basic Income Proposal as a Means to Promote Ecological and Socioeconomic Justice\*

Thiago Monteiro de Souza<sup>1</sup>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9093-3071>

<sup>1</sup>Universidade do Minho, Center for Ethics, Politics and Society. Braga, Portugal.

This paper elucidates the inseparable connection between the pursuit of a more ecologically sustainable society and the quest for socioeconomic justice. It also demonstrates why Unconditional Basic Income (UBI) is an effective policy to act on both fronts. First, the corresponding theory on environmental and socioeconomic oppression sheds light on the argument that both types of domination stem from the same historical process and are inherently interconnected. Addressing one without considering the other is essentially flawed; they are both features and consequences of present society. Acknowledging the historical debt owed to vulnerable economic classes and developing countries is imperative. Green republicanism could potentially establish a theoretical foundation for social-ecological thinking. Defining freedom as non-domination and applying this concept to nature are essential prerequisites for overcoming socioeconomic and environmental oppression. UBI is presented and discussed theoretically as a strong solution to address these two challenges. It serves not only as a means to facilitate the transition to a post-productivist society, transforming labor relations, but also as a catalyst for the development of circular economies and more sustainable occupations. Additionally, the basic income policy implemented in the city of Maricá, Brazil, is cited as empirical evidence showcasing the environmental and socioeconomic values of UBI.

**Keywords:** Environmental ethics; ecology; socioeconomic justice; republicanism; unconditional basic income.

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Correspondence: [thiagocmsouza95@gmail.com](mailto:thiagocmsouza95@gmail.com)

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**E**radicating poverty and tackling the urgent issue of climate change stand out as two key challenges in today's world. The United Nations, through its Sustainable Development Goals<sup>1</sup>, aims to address several aspects of both challenges.

The following years will be decisive for humankind as we confront pressing environmental and socioeconomic problems. The consequences of failing to address these challenges could be severe, potentially leading to a dystopian future and the rise of eco-fascist governments (GORZ, 1980). This urgency underscores the need for exhaustive political, social, and academic debate.

This article argues that implementing an Unconditional Basic Income (hereinafter UBI) policy could serve as a viable solution to address both global issues: 01. socioeconomic injustice and 02. environmental unsustainability (CASASSAS and DE WISPELAERE, 2016; PINTO, 2020). The concept of UBI, familiar to many, involves "an income paid by a political community to all its members on an individual basis without means test or work requirement" (VAN PARIJS, 2004, p. 08).

First, the focus will be on explaining why these problems cannot be addressed separately. Poverty and ecological disequilibrium are closely correlated issues, so they must be approached concurrently. The current state of the world and society's current organization result from centuries of ethical problems (BOOKCHIN, 1990), such as domination and segregation. These factors have contributed to a civilization grappling with significant challenges of identity between different human cultures and between humans and other living beings (NAESS, 1973). Extreme poverty, high levels of inequality, and ecological degradation are longstanding symptoms of historical processes. Also, it is essential to consider both international and national perspectives on modern ecological and socioeconomic issues. To achieve this, a series of relevant philosophical theories on environmental ethics is reviewed (e.g., BOOKCHIN, 1990; NAESS, 1973; ROUTLEY, 1973).

Republicanism offers another philosophical perspective that provides a theoretical foundation for addressing ecological and socioeconomic crises together (PINTO, 2020). This paper centrally engages with the debate on the limits of personal

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<sup>1</sup>All seventeen goals can be available at <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

freedom, democracy, and sustainable development. Additionally, the concept of freedom as non-domination (PETTIT, 2012), albeit insufficient (AUDIER, 2015), can be considered as a strong advocate for the defense of an ecological UBI.

Subsequently, the focus of this work shifts to UBI and, why it stands out as a robust solution to socioeconomic and environmental issues. The literature on basic income is then reviewed, specifically exploring the UBI's economic, labor, and ecological perspectives (MERRILL et al., 2019; PINTO, 2020).

The effects of implementing an ecological UBI (DOBSON, 2007) on issues such as productivism and economic development (BLOCK, 1990; JACKSON, 2009; OFFE, 1992) hold significant importance in this article. This policy has the potential to improve labor conditions, stimulate green economic transitions, and simultaneously uphold socioeconomic dignity for citizens (MERRILL et al., 2019). Even though it might not lead society to utopia, it could bring civilization closer to it.

Finally, the basic income policy implemented in Maricá is highlighted as a significant example of a complex but well-established ongoing case of UBI. This policy encapsulates the theoretical debates addressed in this research and offers insights into how a basic income policy can simultaneously address environmental and socioeconomic issues.

### **Socioeconomic justice and environmental protection: two inseparable demands**

The history of humankind is characterized by complex relationships with the environment in which we live. When addressing the history of environmental ethics, Attfield (2018) underscores the longstanding anthropocentric treatment toward nature, in which the value of the environment was determined by its impact on human society, be it positive or negative. However, philosophical and technological advances paved the way for new approaches to environmental ethics (ROUTLEY, 1973).

The 1970s marked a pivotal moment in this field, with several authors advocating for a new approach to environmental ethics. Arne Naess (1973), Richard Routley (1973), and Holmes Rolston (1975) were some of the leading theorists engaged in these discussions.

The hypothesis in Routley's 'Last Man on Earth' (1973) is particularly significant in reshaping the debate on environmental ethics. It proposed a post-apocalyptic scenario in which only one human individual, co-existing with other

species, remains on Earth. The philosopher (ROUTLEY, 1973) discusses whether it would be morally wrong if this hypothetical human were to eradicate all life surrounding them before their death. All this killing would happen without causing pain or suffering. After that, no human would be alive to deal with the consequences of this individual's actions.

That hypothesis was presented at the Bulgarian World Congress of Philosophy in 1973. Most of the attendees opposed the 'Last Man's' resolution. Like Routley (1973), they believed it would be wrong to kill any form of life without a reason, recognizing an inherent and intrinsic value in the lives of non-human beings. That acknowledgment was revolutionary at the time, as most environmental debates were approached from an anthropocentric perspective. Typically, discussions were focused on the impact of natural and environmental issues solely on humans, neglecting consideration for other living beings (ATTFIELD, 2018).

Routley (1973) helped to establish a non-anthropocentric position in the field of environmental ethics. Acknowledging the moral value of other living beings and advocating for a decision-making process that considers the rights of species beyond humans were innovative perspectives at the time. This paved the way for several environmental movements today, such as biocentrism, ecocentrism, and social ecology (ATTFIELD, 2018).

Recognizing Routley's (1973) contribution as an early form of biocentrism is relevant for understanding the dichotomy between the anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives. Many authors (ROLSTON, 1975; ROUTLEY, 1973; SINGER, 2002), despite advocating for biocentrist ethics, acknowledge the importance of anthropocentrism. While Routley's assertion (1973) that all living beings have inherent value is indeed necessary, it is still important to consider how this value is intrinsically constructed by each human being. In other words, moral value may exist by itself, but it is essential to empirically recognize the dialogical relationship between the intrinsic value of each being and the value attributed by the human individual. The sociological aspect of this value must also be acknowledged in this relation, without negating the intrinsic value of each being. Therefore, it is essential not to abandon anthropocentrism entirely, as human perception matters in the relationship between humankind and nature.

Arne Naess (1973) argues that one of the biggest challenges for humankind is the lack of identification with the environment. For the author (NAESS, 1973), the

concept of self<sup>2</sup> extends beyond the individual to encompass all life that sustains this individual existence. Therefore, Naess (1973) suggests that the surrounding environment should be defended as if it were one's own life. Based on this idea of self, Naess (1973) identifies the lack of identity between individuals and nature as the main cause of ecological oppression. Thus, by conceptualizing self as the combination of an individual and their surrounding nature, Naess (1973) clarifies that the central pillar of environmental oppression lies in the lack of identity between humans and nature.

Even though there are critiques of Naess' (1973) deep ecology movements (ATTFIELD, 2018), his work offers much to explore. The issue of lack of identity is central to comprehending oppressive relations of domination. Although Naess (1973) focuses on environmental issues, this framework can be expanded to encompass other types of social oppression, as many branches of ecological studies tend to do (ATTFIELD, 2018). For example, ecofeminism (WARREN, 1990) draws parallels between patriarchal oppression and environmental destruction, while social ecology (BOOKCHIN, 1990) explores the relationship between human ecological degradation and class domination.

Bookchin (1990) is considered a pioneer in social ecology and a green republican who offers essential insights connecting environmental oppression to socioeconomic class oppression. As Pinto (2020), puts it: "Green republicanism can be defined as the subset of republican political theory that overlaps with green political theory. (...) green republicanism is interested in promoting conceptions of the good that, on the one hand, promote ecological sustainability and, on the other hand, preserve and promote freedom as nondomination" (PINTO, 2020, p. 39). From the green republican perspective, Bookchin (1990) argues that human society depends on nature to exist and that humans should accept the natural constraints imposed by the world. This acknowledgment does not render human thriving impossible; on the contrary, it aligns the idea of socioeconomic development with environmental limitations.

The terms 'cooperation' and 'rivalry' are both essential notions for understanding how to overcome environmental and socioeconomic oppression.

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<sup>2</sup>According to Jung (2014), the self is the unification of consciousness and unconsciousness within a person, representing the psyche as a whole.

Bookchin (1990) recognizes a deep connection between oppressive human-nature relations and class exploitation. Just as it is negative for humans to exploit nature given their interdependency, interclass exploitation is also unfavorable since it undermines individual freedom and fundamental rights. According to the author (BOOKCHIN, 1990), even Marxist/communist literature fails to comprehend and discuss the oppression of human society toward nature.

Bookchin (1990) suggests that the origins of these environmental and socioeconomic issues trace back to the foundation of Western civilization and the Christian religion. He argues that the dualistic perspectives inherent in Western thought, which categorize the world into binary forms both physically and intellectually, contribute to the emergence of oppressive relations. As the author states, “The ecological crisis we face today is very much a crisis in the emergence of society out of biology, in the problems (the rise of hierarchy, domination, patriarchy, classes, and the state) that unfolded with this development, and in the liberatory pathways that provide an alternative to this warped history.” (BOOKCHIN, 1990, p. 120).

The philosopher (BOOKCHIN, 1990) also highlights the historical conditions that led humanity to the present reality of transnational inequality and environmental exploitation. Such criticism is essential for the ongoing debate on the climate urgency that the planet is currently facing. From a historical perspective, Baumert et al. (2005) also introduce relevant discussions on transnational inequality and historical responsibilities regarding global warming and climate change. Again, understanding the conditions that have brought the world to a state of environmental urgency is crucial. Identifying the events and actors that should have been more accountable for global warming will allow fairer reparation for the damage caused to nature and human beings.

As far as accountability in the global warming debate is concerned, two central facts must be acknowledged: 01. a select group of countries is responsible for most cumulative greenhouse gas emissions (BAUMERT et al., 2005, apud HUBACEK et al., 2017) throughout history; and 02. economic global elites currently bear the greatest responsibility for carbon gas emissions (HUBACEK et al., 2017). To illustrate the latter point, in 2010, it was estimated that the global elite was responsible for 36% of carbon emissions, while the extremely poor social segments, a considerably larger

demographic, were responsible for only 4% of the same emissions (HUBACEK et al., 2017).

In fact, climate change disproportionately impacts the poorer segments of society (DIFFENBAUGH and BURKE, 2019). Global warming already falls back more heavily on the least advantaged. Interestingly, this is also recognized internationally, as poorer countries are more vulnerable to the climate crisis (DIFFENBAUGH and BURKE, 2019).

The elites and richer countries bear a significantly greater responsibility not only for humankind's current climate issues (BAUMERT et al., 2005; DIFFENBAUGH and BURKE, 2019) but also for the existing exploitative socioeconomic system. Climate urgency and poverty are both consequences of centuries of domination and exploitation.

This conjuncture shows that the struggle for environmental sustainability should not be separated from the struggle for a more economically fair society. It is unrealistic to expect that both developed and developing countries will equally slow down their economies to reduce environmental harm. Economic and ecological efforts must be integrated and advance symbiotically. Defending a political agenda that prioritizes the environmental agenda while ignoring economic development may create several problems.

From a global and transnational perspective, it is unfair and unreasonable to demand all countries to tackle existing environmental challenges with equal measures. Recognizing each country's historical responsibilities regarding climate impact is crucial. Centuries of colonial exploitation divided the present world into what authors designate as Global North and Global South (FREMAUX, 2018). The Global North, comprising most of the wealthy countries today, not only bears greater responsibility for the climate crisis but also has a higher capacity to address environmental challenges compared to the Global South. This reality underscores the need to formulate international aid policies to correct the historical injustices affecting the Global South. Advocating for international actors to fight the climate crisis while ignoring socioeconomic inequality will most likely lead to more exploitation from the Global North. Socioeconomic and ecological issues must be tackled together to establish a more equal global landscape and reduce exploitation among countries. Additionally, recognizing the need to address both urgencies concomitantly will help

mitigate the economic sacrifices associated with environmental efforts since wealthier countries have more resources to tackle the climate urgency.

From a more individualistic perspective, it is crucial to understand that advocating for socioeconomic dignity does not imply perpetuating environmental oppression. Instead, it involves recognizing the interdependency between humans and nature's sustainable circularity. Studies show, for instance, that economic aid policies have a positive impact on reducing deforestation (HANAUER and CANAVIRE-BACARREZA, 2015; MIYAMOTO, 2020), highlighting the correlation between socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability. It is unreasonable to expect every citizen to prioritize environmental concerns when their basic needs<sup>3</sup> are not met. There is a symbiotic relationship between environmental sustainability and socioeconomic justice.

A possible critique of environmentalism revolves around the 'fear' of sacrificing liberal freedom. Attfield (2018) addresses this debate by pondering the extent to which liberalism can be defended considering the ecological limitations of planet Earth. Pinto (2020) argues that the only concept of freedom that is compatible with contemporary environmental challenges is the one defined as non-domination. The author (PINTO, 2020) contends that green republicanism is a powerful perspective to combine ecological and liberal demands in our present society.

Nevertheless, 'republicanism' is not necessarily associated with environmentalism. Pinto (2020) reminds us that a central element of republican advocates' thought revolves around the meaning of 'freedom', which is commonly viewed in two ways: positive and negative. Berlin (2002) defines negative freedom as liberty from external constraints; that is, an individual should live without constraints from external actors. Positive freedom, on the other hand, refers to the freedom to live according to one's will and achieve self-realization.

Pettit (1997) acknowledges the limitations of this conception of freedom from the environmental perspective and advocates for a concept that aligns with a reframed

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<sup>3</sup>Basic needs, in this article, "are defined in an absolute and physical sense but they include the human need for interpersonal interaction and fulfilling them will require access to different goods at different times and places" (WIDERQUIST, 2011, p. 03).



notion of non-domination, thus including other ecological actors<sup>4</sup>. The philosopher (PETTIT, 1997) connects this type of republican freedom to environmentalism by stating that any assault on the environment should be considered an attack on the undominated choice, thus limiting republican freedom (PETTIT, 1997, p. 137). In other words, if liberal freedom opposes environmental sustainability, undominated freedom is endangered.

However, some thinkers believe that Pettit's approach (2012, 1997) to sustainability, framed as a republican necessity, falls short in tackling the current climate and environmental crisis. Cannavó (2016), for example, argues that more structural and fundamental changes are needed in society and that republicanism shares little cohesiveness with ecologism. Audier (2015) considers the productivist-ecologist dichotomy, arguing that republican thinking should move away from productivism and the exploitation of nature. Freedom as non-domination should thus not only apply to individuals but also to nature and non-human creatures. This perspective would put an end to the exploitation for human gain and recognize flora and fauna as democratic actors with fundamental rights. Both Cannavó (2016) and Audier (2015) partially agree with Pettit (2012, 1997), but they further explore the notion of nature as a republican actor entitled to freedom as non-domination. They emphasize the interdependency between humans and nature.

Radical changes in human consumption habits are, thus, a pivotal factor here. In this context, adopting a post-productivist agenda is essential to establishing a fair (green) republican relationship between humankind and nature. It is important to note that productivism identifies work, especially paid work, as a central pillar of society, making full employment a political goal (WIDERQUIST et al., 2013, p. 260). Therefore, 'post-productivism' refers to a society or initiatives that overcome the 'productivist' logic, where paid labor is not central to the economy. Conversely, 'non-productivist activities' encompass occupations that are not evaluated according to their contribution to the country's GDP, such as care work or social volunteer work (ibid WIDERQUIST et al., 2013).

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<sup>4</sup>This republican critique of arbitrariness is extensively discussed by Fremaux (2018), who engages in a debate concerning economic liberalism and market democracies. This is a topic that requires attention and is closely related to the present article. However, concerning the republican debate, this article, given its scope, focuses on demonstrating that the liberal republican perspective is not enough to satisfy freedom as non-domination, consequently leading to the emergence of green republicanism.

In its turn, the degrowth agenda, commonly associated with post-productivism, focuses on abandoning the idea that constant productivist growth equates to economic success. D'Alisa et al. (2014) claim that the concept of degrowth is grounded in three fundamental pillars: 01. growth is unfair and unequal in distributing its benefits; 02. growth is ecologically unsustainable; and 03. growth is perpetually insufficient. Additionally, the authors (D'ALISA et al., 2014) suggest that a degrowth agenda would lead to a fundamental transformation in how society organizes itself, comprehending relationships among individuals and international actors. Therefore, work and consumption would undergo substantial changes, ultimately fostering greater ecological sustainability in human societies.

Degrowth policies are beneficial, but short-term measures are necessary, such as green taxation, green growth policies, and basic income policies. Moreover, degrowth policies are much more tangible in the Global North than in the Global South, primarily because of the transnational concentration of capital (FREUMAX, 2018). Therefore, merely advocating for degrowth agendas is insufficient without pushing for a redistribution of wealth, both from the national and transnational perspectives.

Bringing the post-productivist debate to the center of socioeconomic and environmental concerns addressed here, Pinto (2020) characterizes green republicanism as both post-productivist and non-neutral regarding the common good. This definition is closely tied to the debate on flora and fauna rights and the post-productivist agenda, with the latter serving as a guiding political principle to guarantee the protection of the former. Despite the complexity and singularity of these topics, green republican theory is shaped by both. As the author (PINTO, 2020) suggests, republicanism envisions scenarios where forms of oppression between citizens, institutions, governments, and environmental actors are either absent or gradually decreasing, reflecting the idealistic perspective. Green republicanism plays a pivotal role in the present discussions, where the focus lies in recognizing that socioeconomic justice and environmental justice are interdependent. Exploiting nature for economic gains fails to address social inequality and leads to short-lasting palliative measures.

The oppression of ecological actors is, thus, 01. immoral – aside from the potential to avoid such oppression, one cannot ignore the inherent value in the lives of non-humans – and 02. unsustainable – humanity still has not found a way to dominate

nature sustainably. The argument of ‘immorality’ alone suffices for ecologism, as it identifies the competition for natural resource accumulation among humans as the main cause of socioeconomic and environmental oppression (BOOKCHIN, 1990). Therefore, even if humans were to find a way to exploit nature sustainably, the anthropological oppression of nature would still lead to negative consequences, such as the unnecessary accumulation of resources and the competition for accumulation among humans. This conjuncture is thus likely to lead to an oppressive human society<sup>5</sup>. However, the argument of unsustainability holds political importance in the debate, acknowledging that a significant part of human society still operates from an anthropocentric perspective and that history has proved the impossibility of sustaining the oppression of nature. In other words, while the unsustainability argument holds practical relevance, it is overshadowed by the moral argument theoretically.

One could argue that while it is possible to avoid harming the environment, society would find it more cost-effective to exploit flora and fauna, as it facilitates gathering resources for human subsistence. However, this argument ignores the heavy burden that exploitation brings and the cost of the climate crisis. Moreover, asserting that environmental oppression is immoral does not mean that humans should not use natural resources; rather, it means that humans will no longer exploit nature to accumulate resources. As argued in this article, an ideal circular relationship between humans and environmental actors involves continual interaction between them. The environmental oppression under scrutiny here includes 01. the accumulation of natural resources and 02. the abuse of flora and fauna, which disrupts the circular balance of nature.

In this sense, socialist/Marxist views that perceive nature as resources for human flourishing are challenged by both the argument of immorality and the practical argument of unsustainability. These thoughts diverge from anticapitalist movements that uphold productivist ideals. In other words, in the present debate, simply being anticapitalistic is not enough; it is crucial to defend post-productivist principles and oppose the commodification of nature. Consequently, green advocates should align

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<sup>5</sup>The anti-oppressive agenda toward the environment, based on the immorality argument, may sound radical. However, it is essential to view it as a philosophical and political debate. When considering the applicability of these arguments in human society, there should be reflections on how to implement such changes in a way that minimizes the burdens on humans and environmental actors during this transitional period.

with post-productivism, defend long-term degrowth, and embrace green republican ideals. Through this approach, both socioeconomic and environmental oppressions can be properly addressed.

The body of literature discussed so far interconnects environmental and socioeconomic issues. Nature serves as the central pillar of human flourishing, providing the resources for material sustenance<sup>6</sup> and facilitating the attainment of abstract resources. In this sense, human society perpetuates oppression by establishing and reinforcing a dominative relationship with nature. The oppression of nature leads to competition among humans for access to basic goods and the accumulation of resources. In today's society, this competition manifests through individual distinctions in consumption power, which fundamentally drive socioeconomic and environmental oppressions.

This theoretical debate lays the ground for political transformations that can unite economic security with nature preservation. Regarding access to natural resources and fundamental human rights, one may argue that irresponsible use of nature by humans results in environmental abuse and poses a threat to both human and non-human freedom. Recognizing ecological actors as entitled to rights is also key to building an interconnected and symbiotic society that includes human and non-human beings. (BOOKCHIN, 1990). Granting rights to fauna and flora is critical to integrating the inherent and intrinsic philosophical values of non-human actors into the legal and political realms of society.

Understanding the idiosyncrasies of human and non-human rights is crucial. Human freedom and the freedom of fauna and flora are profoundly distinct institutions, requiring a more practical debate in the political-philosophical realm. Defending the right to freedom of non-humans is a way to fight environmental oppression and align the philosophical and ecological debate with the political reality. All in all, green republicanism offers a perspective that opposes domination and exploitation in both interhuman and human-environment relations by encompassing the environment in the republican debate (PINTO, 2020).

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<sup>6</sup>It is important to qualify those resources as material because abstract resources are also crucial for human flourishing, such as conviviality and freedom of expression, which are not necessarily found in nature. Nevertheless, it can be argued that natural resources are the foundation of human material needs, thus allowing the attainment of abstract resources.

The main argument here is that environmental and socioeconomic dominations are intricately intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, underlying the critique of these forms of domination is a desire for society to transition to a state where humans refrain from oppressing natural actors and where competition among humans for natural resources ceases. In this alternative path, both natural actors and human actors are considered equal holders of rights rather than commodified social elements. This embodies the conjuncture of the green republican ideal, as advocated by Pinto (2020). This alternative does not mean that all humans will possess the same amount of resources or that competition between individuals will disappear entirely. Instead, it means that neither human nor non-human actors will endure domination. This allows individual, social, and ecological flourishing in a non-dominative reality, with an acceptable degree of inequality. These ideals resonate with the green republican theory that was previously discussed (AUDIER, 2015; CANNAVÓ, 2016; PINTO, 2020). The notion of ‘acceptable inequality’ does not involve the idea of domination, as every individual and environmental actor would have their fundamental rights, including their republican freedom, protected. This hypothetical inequality would be decided based on the principles considered most relevant within this alternative society.

Indeed, it is essential to theorize and implement policies that can integrate economic security, the fight against inequality and poverty, and environmental sustainability. Embracing a post-productivist approach is crucial for this pursuit (JACKSON, 2009). This involved introducing new economic activities, new taxation methods, and new social aid policies to promote economic justice and environmental sustainability.

UBI, as discussed in the next section of this paper, should thus be seen as a powerful alternative in this context. It can align with the green republican concept of freedom as non-domination and may provide society with a more just environment for relationships among all beings.

### **UBI: a road to sustainability**

Van Parijs (2004) defines UBI as “an income paid by a political community to all its members on an individual basis without means test or work requirement” (VAN PARIJS, 2004, p. 08). The fundamental aspects include: 01. unconditionality, 02.

individuality, 03. universality, 04. periodicity, and 05. cash payment, meaning it is a financial aid given periodically to every individual regardless of their economic situation.

The concept of UBI, tracing its origins to Thomas More and Thomas Payne (VAN PARIJS and VANDERBORGHT, 2017), has undergone several adaptations over time. Many iterations of alternative basic income models have emerged, each aiming to optimize results or make the proposition more feasible. Some examples are the negative income tax (FRIEDMAN, 1968), the stakeholder grant (FITZPATRICK, 2007), the sabbatical account (OFFE, 2001), the participation income (ATKINSON, 1996), and several conditional cash transfers policies, such as the Bolsa Família program (SOUZA, 2021).

Originally, the UBI was conceived as a solution to address and tackle socioeconomic issues and ensure access to basic needs. Although it has recently become part of ecological discussions (PINTO, 2020), the association between environmentalism and basic income is not that simple.

At first glance, basic income can be easily associated with an increase in consumer power, potentially offering socioeconomic security but also inadvertently leading to an increase in deforestation and pollution. However, given the dynamics of labor and consumerism, introducing a UBI policy is likely to bring about significant structural changes in society (MERRILL et al., 2019). As a result, the current productivist approach to organizing economies could also be transformed.

As Standing (2020) explains, implementing a basic income policy would give new value to a series of activities that are taken for granted, such as caregiving. Moreover, UBI would also allow people to turn down undervalued jobs and focus on long-term careers that are currently less viable. Also, with every citizen relying on a basic income, other undervalued occupations could receive more careful attention<sup>7</sup>. This shift in perspective, facilitated by UBI, has the potential to profoundly transform the economy and mainstream consumerism by enabling long-term plans via economic security. It is thus an opportunity for the market to value many non-productivist activities and stimulate individual and small entrepreneurs.

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<sup>7</sup>This depends on the value of the income transfer. In this example, it is assumed that the basic income amount is adequate for individuals to sustain themselves without relying on the labor market.

A UBI policy that secures individual fundamental needs through income and wealth taxation is a powerful way to build a more economically just society and promote green republican ideals (PINTO, 2020).

When it comes to the labor aspects of the basic income theory, several philosophers argue that the UBI proposal would indeed change the current society. Offe (1992), for instance, contends that the basic income proposal reduces pressures for full employment and productivism. Therefore, according to the author (OFFE, 1992), UBI opens the possibility for public policies to better align with environmental and sustainable agendas, given its post-productivist tendency. Also, proponents argue that UBI would be more effective than the traditional welfare state, as suggested by Esping-Andersen (1990), in fighting inequality and socioeconomic exclusion. Importantly, a UBI policy would not prevent the state from offering essential public services; rather, it would mean reforming the welfare state, not dismantling it.

The number of unworthy job positions, or 'bullshit jobs', as described by Graeber (2018), would considerably decrease if people no longer needed to accept precarious working conditions. Therefore, the introduction of a UBI policy could strongly stimulate automation. Additionally, employees would gain much more autonomy to negotiate with their employers.

Another philosopher who addressed the theme of basic income from a post-production and post-industrial perspective is Block (1990). The author's (BLOCK, 1990) main argument is that there is no direct relationship between full employment and economic growth. Thus, a UBI policy that reduces the number of employed workers would not have adverse effects from a macroeconomic perspective. In addition, in line with Offe (1992), Block (1990) recognizes the potential for UBI to empower beneficiaries to invest time and money into their ventures, thereby potentially strengthening causes such as feminism and environmentalism.

Van Parijs (2013, 2009) reminds us of a crucial intersection between 'greens' and basic income advocates (at least part of them): they both recognize the importance of free time and non-productivist activities. For these groups, there is an urgent need to revise the ideal of permanent economic growth and the reliance on gross domestic product as a measure of economic success. Hence, basic income can serve as a powerful policy tool to achieve that. Suppose basic income provides individuals with real freedom by enabling them to conduct less economically attractive activities. In that

case, basic income could lead to more eco-friendly and sustainable occupations being filled. This shift has the potential to help subvert the productivist logic.

On the other hand, some perspectives, such as that of Lavinás (2018), are skeptical about the UBI proposal. According to the author (LAVINAS, 2018), addressing economic vulnerability by conceding citizenship via money transfers does not solve the underlying issue; instead, it merely postpones the problem. Those who receive the benefit are still vulnerable to economic fluctuations, which are almost certain to occur at some point. Moreover, a UBI policy could drive up the costs associated with basic services, such as infrastructure (sewerage, water, light), education, and health, to name a few. Therefore, as the author (LAVINAS, 2018) claims, the anticipated positive outcomes of a UBI policy on the socioeconomic and environmental fronts might not materialize.

Lavinás (2018) proposes a solution to the UBI proposal involving three services offered freely and separated from the financialization<sup>8</sup> reality: 01. education, including professional capacitation; 02. healthcare; and 03. decent housing. Making such services universally available, unconditionally, and free of charge would require extensive taxation reform. Also, a UBI policy can be integrated into a broader set of policies aimed at reducing the commodification of basic needs.

Basic income is not an external solution, separate from the capitalist framework; rather, it emerges from the system itself. Aligned with Lavinás' criticism (2018), it should be argued that the main focus of a green basic income policy is to tackle productivism and promote a gradual degrowth agenda that goes beyond anti-capitalist struggles.

Therefore, it is crucial to promote a green economy alongside policies that address poverty and inequality. By doing that, a UBI policy can facilitate progress in two directions: promoting the transition to a green economy by fostering degrowth and post-productive capacities, while also helping overcome poverty and inequality (MERRILL et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of the UBI proposal, as with any policy initiative. While the basic income proposal leans toward a post-

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<sup>8</sup>Lavinás' concept of financialization (2018) refers to "the increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of the domestic and international economies" (EPSTEIN, 2005, p. 03, apud SAWYER, 2016, p. 43).



productivist approach, it is essential to supplement it with other policies. Without additional measures, there is a risk that UBI implementation could result in massive consumption, potentially exacerbating environmental exploitation (such as pollution and deforestation). Therefore, it is important to see UBI as a powerful proposal that can help; however, it is not self-sustaining, and it depends on a broader set of policies.

Moreover, another relevant aspect of UBI is its capacity to stimulate localism and circular economies. Providing economic security to small entrepreneurs will significantly boost local commerce and empower them to implement long-term plans (MERRILL et al., 2019). This localist perspective, combined with the potential for several non-paid activities (STANDING, 2020), has significant environmental consequences for sustainability. In addition, promoting socioeconomic justice also strengthens the economies of poorer communities. Empirical data suggests that investing in circular and small economies can positively affect environmental matters (STANDING, 2020).

When discussing the circular economy and strengthening regionalism, it is crucial to emphasize that this agenda tends to lead to less pollution than international economic systems (MERRILL et al., 2019). Nevertheless, strengthening regionalism via a municipal basic income policy does not prevent national basic income schemes from being implemented. Indeed, for large and diverse countries such as Brazil, it is desirable to respect regional singularities and design cash transfer schemes that align with their cultural and political realities. In other words, implementing a basic income policy with national, state, and municipal payment levels would be preferable to address potential gaps and existing idiosyncrasies within such countries.

Concomitantly, introducing local currencies in municipalities to strengthen their economies can help to reduce regional inequality. Maricá's basic income policy, for instance, uses its digital currency to keep money circulating within the community and promote individual entrepreneurial activities. Preliminary research suggests that the Maricá case led to job creation (LIMA and PERO, 2020), favored small businesses, and improved socioeconomic conditions (ALVES, 2022; SOUZA, 2022). However, further in-depth research is needed to substantiate these empirical findings.

Implementing the basic income proposal is also complex, especially when factoring in regional idiosyncrasies. Each country or region has its own unique socioeconomic characteristics and nuances that need to be taken into account (VAN

PARIJS, 2003, SHOOK, 2020). Ecological factors suggest that developing countries may adopt sustainable growth methods, while Global North countries have the capacity to transition to post-productivist and degrowth paths more rapidly.

Another central aspect of UBI concerning environmental ethics is how it will be financed. One effective approach to tackling ecologically irresponsible consumption is through taxation (MERRILL et al., 2019). Rising tariffs on fossil fuels, for example, can serve as an effective means to finance social and environmental policies while discouraging ecologically irresponsible consumption. This, in turn, could stimulate the adoption of green alternative fuels. Nevertheless, relying on this type of funding for policy financing might be a trap since the long-term goal is to end unsustainable consumption. In fact, such taxation would only serve as a temporary solution toward a green-transitional society. Moreover, using fuel taxation as a means to fund UBI does not directly address the issue of excessive wealth concentration and income inequality. These issues would need to be tackled through alternative taxation schemes.

In the practical discussion about the formulation of the UBI proposal, as noted by Merrill et al. (2019), two different approaches emerge concerning a green basic income: the environmental approach and the ecological approach. Both are based on Dobson's (2007) definitions of 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism'. The first refers to a "managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption". The latter is connected to "radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life" (MERRILL et al., 2019, p. 229.).

Pinto (2020) uses this classification to theorize about two pathways for a green basic income. The author (PINTO, 2020) considers the structural impact of how society organizes itself and its relation to the environment as central aspects to distinguish between these approaches.

An 'environmental' basic income focuses on adjusting society to achieve a more sustainable economy. This approach typically does not involve profound changes to social structures. In practical terms, following this 'environmental' path might involve implementing green economy political agendas that encourage reliance on renewable fuels. This type of basic income is one of many policies that help adjust

society to ensure that humankind does not run out of natural resources. An ecological UBI would also be designed to challenge capitalist society by moving towards a non-growth or even de-growth economy, profoundly transforming the relationship between humankind and nature. This model seeks to reduce consumerism and labor (SHOOK, 2020).

Merrill et al. (2019) suggest that most UBI policies are environmental in nature, meaning they do not bring about any radical changes in the economy or in the relationship human society establishes with nature. In other words, most basic income policies aim to adjust to the existing context rather than attempt to transform it (MERRILL et al., 2019, p. 229).

Regarding empirical data supporting the arguments presented in this article, it is worth noting that Maricá, a municipality in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, has been running a basic income project since 2019<sup>9</sup>. This case is currently one of the most valuable research objects within the UBI field. This interest stems from the project's longevity, complexity, and range. Despite not being a universal basic income policy (as only 25% of the municipality's population qualifies for it), it offers significant depth compared to other UBI pilots or programs (MEDEIROS and PIRES, 2021; SOUZA, 2022).

As for the socioeconomic and environmental aspects, Alves (2022) analyzes the policy's effects in these areas. The author (free translation) argues that Maricá shows a "strengthening of local commerce, a strong connection with nature in terms of food provisioning, production, and fishing, a warm local community spirit, and an interest in adjusting public policies to ecosystem capabilities" (ALVES, 2022, p. 114). Moreover, notable achievements of the city, regarding environmental factors, include the introduction of free urban transportation and upcoming low-29carbon options, educational and environmental programs, efforts to enhance workforce qualification, the expansion of sewage treatment infrastructure, and developments in agroecology (ALVES, 2022; PEREIRA et al., 2020; SILVA et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the productivist nature of the city's organization was not changed by the basic income initiative or by the other policies implemented. The continuous encouragement of fossil fuel consumption and projects concerning tourism in environmental preservation areas are two key aspects that can be viewed negatively from an ecological perspective. A green

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<sup>9</sup>Although the Citizen Basic Income of Maricá only officially began in 2019, there has been a cash transfer policy in the city since 2013, which was later incorporated into the basic income policy.

transitional approach has been adopted, with efforts directed toward fostering sustainable development to overcome the persistent poverty and inequality in the municipality. However, this path does not steer toward post-productivism or degrowth (ALVES, 2022). In fact, according to the municipality's official objectives, one of the primary aims of Maricá's solidary economy is to achieve sustainable development (MUNICÍPIO DE MARICÁ, 2013), with no mention of post-productivist agendas.

As for the increase in the consumption levels in Maricá, one can argue that this could lead to an increase in the ecological footprint and pollution. However, this surge in consumerism was accompanied by advancements in sanitation and recycling services in the city. Therefore, even though it is possible to identify an increase in the consumption levels in the city as a potential negative environmental effect, this was accompanied by efforts to mitigate the ecological impact. Nevertheless, the academic community has yet to pay more attention to the environmental effects of Maricá's basic income initiative.

Previous studies (ALVES, 2022; PEREIRA et al., 2020; SILVA et al., 2020) show that the policies implemented in the city have a more positive impact on the economy than on the environment. However, it is important to consider that Maricá is a small city with limited capacity to address significant environmental challenges. Moreover, one cannot forget this is a historically unequal and poor region. The example of Maricá reinforces the idea that it is crucial to respect the socioeconomic and environmental characteristics unique to each city. Despite the limitations, it is only fair to assume that Maricá is moving in a positive direction in the green economy transition due to its efforts to mitigate the environmental impacts of economic growth and the progressive, although slow, move toward reducing dependence on oil reserves. In this sense, the UBI initiative implemented in Maricá could be seen as an environmental basic income policy. While it might not aim to radically transform society and its relationship with nature, the UBI program in Maricá is oriented toward gradually steering the economy toward a more sustainable path. This is evident from the program's stated objectives (MUNICÍPIO DE MARICÁ, 2013) and preliminary results (ALVES, 2022).

Maricá is a significant case within this discussion because it serves as a clear and concrete example of how the government sought to integrate many fronts: expanding the public service network, investing in a basic income initiative, and

implementing green transition policies. The city's strategy has been to integrate these fronts symbiotically, although there remains a degree of independence between the UBI initiative and public services. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that Maricá is a particular case that will likely receive increasing attention in the future, potentially leading to changes in outcomes. It is also fair to say that not all basic income policies will follow the same trajectory, as there are countless variables in each empirical case (MERRILL et al., 2021). Still, the preliminary results have shown promise and can thus contribute to both the academic debate and the formulation of future policies.

The literature on ecology and basic income continues to expand and offers much to explore, especially in empirical research. Nevertheless, this article aims to contribute to and stimulate such debate by connecting the perspectives of both socioeconomic and environmental fields of basic income studies.

## Conclusion

This article underscores that the struggles for ecological sustainability and socioeconomic justice are intertwined. It is incoherent to address one without considering the other, as they are both features and consequences of present society.

There are arguments from different sources to justify the need for these efforts to be combined. It is important to acknowledge the historical debt owed to vulnerable economic classes and developing countries (BAUMERT et al., 2005; DIFFENBAUGH and BURKE, 2019). This starting point can set the stage for political and economic agendas aimed at correcting those historical injustices.

The debates concerning the rights of flora and fauna and the post-productivist agenda are central to building the concept of green republicanism. Therefore, green republicanism could establish a theoretical foundation for ecological and environmental thinking (DOBSON, 2007). Defining freedom as non-domination and expanding this concept to all living beings, while respecting their idiosyncrasies, are fundamental conditions to overcome socioeconomic and environmental oppression.

However, it is crucial to swiftly implement policies that cater to both environmental and socioeconomic needs. In this sense, the basic income proposal emerges as a powerful policy to tackle both fronts (MERRILL et al., 2019). UBI serves not only as a means to facilitate the transition to a post-productivist society

and transform labor relations but also as a driving force towards circular economies and more sustainable occupations. Providing a UBI to every citizen makes social work, political activism, and unpaid activities financially viable. Additionally, it can also complement other policies and stimulate sustainable consumption (MERRILL et al., 2019).

From an empirical perspective, the case of the Citizen Basic Income of Maricá stands out as noteworthy. It aligns closely with the social ecology theory, serving as a powerful example for future policies. By leveraging natural resources to create an eco-friendlier society, Maricá's initiative successfully combines responsible economic development, social justice, and green transitioning. A preliminary analysis may characterize such a policy as an environmental basic income.

The discussion promoted by this article emphasizes basic income as part of a journey toward a healthier society. Neither the policy nor the discussions about its implications should be seen as definitive or conclusive. Instead, it should spark conversations about social and ecological justice, encouraging humans to move toward a more utopian society.

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