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BASIC INCOME GRANT - THE CULTURAL IMPULSE NEEDED NOW!

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My approach to the idea of a basic income grant is the consequence of my analysis of the radical change of societies due to globalization, world economic crises, increasing unemployment and climate change... radical changes that affect indeed the possible role of artists and scientists. We live at a time of extensive social transition, a time of the no longer and the not yet. There is no longer hope for a "more, better, faster." There will be no longer a return to full employment in our countries, as in most high-price countries, but what is to take its place is not yet a subject of public debate. We live in an in-between situation: on the one hand, the economic and social "one size fits all" solutions of our political parties no longer work in a globalised, labour-division world that generates more and more productivity through fewer and fewer jobs (experts like Jeremy Rifkin call it "jobless recovery"). The political party concepts are no longer and not yet capable of reacting to the global challenges of economic and climate change and the social upheavals that come with it all. On the other hand, there is a significant increase of jobs -most of them badly paid - in the creative sector, in the non-profit sector, in NGOs, so that we may speak at the same time of an economic and social basis of a society that is looking for more than, and different things from, just an administration of its shortages. We live in an interim: we are no longer sufficiently provided for by the father, the state, but not yet able to break a new - our own - ground, because the preconditions for social constructions that could create hybrids between welfare, individual responsibility and self-organization are still missing. The no longer... not yet situation is scary. The lack of a guaranteed place in society frightens. I claim that artists and academics, cultural and social creatives, are more experienced in dealing with the incertitude of the open contexts of "liquid modernity," as Zygmunt Bauman characterizes our present. It is the nature of artistic and academic practice to deal with errors, doubts, rejections, to combine and recombine, to sample and mix, and to deal with imagination. And this is needed for all cultural and democratic development of our societies.

We find ourselves stuck in hardened, solidified structures which are empty, the facade covered with new neo-liberal garments.

What we need is to use the productivity of error, the ability to begin again and again, to navigate between shortage and abundance, to think in transitions, laboratories, models, movements, excess, energy, desires, potentials, visions, yearning, breathing... This is what liquid cities need. And this is what a society may learn from artistic and scientific practice. We need new forms of social coexistence, new resonance spaces. Based on the residents' richness of possibilities and various ways of life. What we need is their talents and creative power, their awareness of being able to participate in the extensive development of their city at work and in life. And what we need are flexible, creative counterparts in politics and administration.

Because creativity is flexible, liquid, "not a reserve, not a commodity, but a current!" An energy that runs dry if it is abused by reducing it to its immediate economic usability. To recognize the potentials of the creative industry is an immensely important step that the European politics is taking only very hesitantly. But in order to keep creativity in the city, a creativity that cannot be perceived as a model for a business plan, we need more. In the words of your Manifesto: It is not culture that needs "business exercises," it is the market that needs a cultural revolution!

As philosopher Hannah Arendt said: "The privilege of the human being is to call something new into the world."

This is why, culture-based society means a concept that doesn't just refer back to the rather small group of those for whom culture is their means of living, but those who perceive culture as a matrix for creativity as a general human capacity. Culture as an expression of the individual will to change that connects with others in order to try out, link and dismiss solutions, ways, views.

Albert Einstein puts the interrelationship between individual creativity and social development precisely: "Without creative personalities who think and judge for themselves, a higher developed society is as unthinkable as the development of an individual personality without the breeding ground of the community."

Creativity is not an exclusive property of the "happy few." There is no either-you-belong-or-you'll-never-belong. An environment in which creativity is perceived as a capability that lies within every individual is, in fact, crucial. Because every human being relies on resonances, wants to be useful, to create, to be valued.

A cultural society is about multi-dimensional and experimental ways of

thinking that also interlink the various fields of artistic, social, technical and economic creativity and whose chances are being decided as early as kindergarten and school. In this sense, creativity is the processor in the development towards something that is socially bigger as well as economically more powerful. Economy is not the driving force, but it ultimately profits when humans think, live and work creatively. What we need is a milieu that supports the idea of laboratories and strengthens the notion of empowerment for self-empowerment.

We need the required change to perceive arts and sciences not just as a subsidy burden, but as a long-term investment in a society capable of development. They must become experts for transitions and in-between certainties, a protagonist of change.

We need to face the question of what types of recognition and participation a society can offer to its members, taking into account the fact that for an increasing number of people from all classes, age groups and nationalities, there is no opportunity for a traditional sense of belonging. ("Not in our name" manifesto in Hamburg) We need creative solutions for education, for universities, for institutions, for social issues, for employment, for the recapture of public space.

Art and science are vital for a liquid city, especially where they generate socially relevant strategic concepts. Their actions, which might once have been attributed to bohemians, have by now become a model that can be generalized for future ways of working and living. Characterized by the abolition of work and leisure, sometimes a lot, sometimes not a lot of paid work, alone or in a team, often from home. However, these activities are completely connected with what we call "the precarious." New studies suggest that about half of those employed in the creative industries do not earn enough money to survive.

In this respect, Berlin, the city I come from, is the capital of precarious circumstances. It is visible to the naked eye that there isn't and won't be enough paid work in this city to counter the jobless rate of 14 percent. For some years now, this shortage has forced jobless artists and academics into new forms of working and living that arise from a lack of money and a simultaneous surplus of ideas.

If I am right in my analysis that our societies cannot renounce the artistic and academic practice, the question is: How to make this happen? It is the inability to tackle unemployment and escalating social and cultural exclusion with conventional means that has led in the last decade to the idea of the BIG (basic income grant). Social, economic and cultural policy can no longer be conceived separately, and the basic income is increasingly viewed as the only viable way of reconciling three of their respective central objectives: poverty relief, full employment and participation in the cultural production and richness.

The guaranteed basic income grant is the most simple and powerful idea for the 21st century. It constitutes the foundation of a self-transforming society, and it provides the idea for a society based on culture.

Unlike your manifesto, I am not standing up for the BIG primarily for artists and academics but for everybody. Also, from a strategic point of view, I would not advise to fight for the BIG as an exclusive right for artists and academics, or - as the manifesto says - for cultural producers. Even if it is only for a short perspective.

Liberty and equality, efficiency and community, common ownership of the Earth and equal sharing in the benefits of technical progress, the flexibility of the labor market and the dignity of the poor.

A fight against inhumane working conditions, against the desertification of the countryside and against interregional inequalities; the viability of cooperatives and the promotion of adult education, autonomy from bosses, husbands and bureaucrats, have all been invoked in its favor.

You'll find different approaches, terms and definitions concerning what a guaranteed income could be.

I assume, like most concepts do, four principles: the Basic Income Grant (BIG)

- _ is an individual right
- _ hedges one's existence
- _ is not means-tested
- _ is not under constraint to work.

It should be high enough to guarantee the participation in the cultural and social life, and

it is independent from maintenance obligations of spouses, parents and adult children.

The BIG gives an individual the freedom to choose between different spheres of her/his life the one that makes the surplus value for the society.

The BIG is a synonym for dignity.

The BIG is the right to say "No!" (The right to choose and to say "No" is then real in the "labor market.")

The BIG is empowerment for self-empowerment.

The activists of this idea expect that once the constraint of work is abolished, when "Income" and "Labor" are separated, multiple, co-existing forms of paid labor, caring, further education, social and cultural relevant occupations will be possible. And I will add: and also the right of idleness which is important to the health of a society.

The German Basic Income Network, more details:

- _ The paid amount secures existence and enables economic, social, cultural, and political participation and is not means-tested.
- _ The basic income is paid without making demands in return, such as forced labor or coerced return services.
- _ There are additional needs, special supports, and special needs for certain groups of persons in addition to the basic income. This concerns, for example, single parents, pregnant women, the handicapped, or people with chronic illnesses.
- _ The basic income is an aspect of the maintenance, extension, and the democratization of public infrastructures.
- _ The basic income stands in the context of the perspective of gender equality that realizes a radical redistribution of socially necessary labor (paid and unpaid) between men and women.
- _ The concept of basic income is embedded into societal development towards sustainability and a concept of society that focuses on ecological sustainability.

More details in German:

www.grundeinkommen.de
www.archiv-grundeinkommen.de
www.unternimm-die-zukunft.de
www.grundeinkommen.tv
www.initiative-grundeinkommen.ch
www.freiheitstattvollbeschaeftigung.de

The French economist and philosopher, André Gorz, gives his argument for the basic income: The connection between "more" and "better" has been broken; our needs for many products and services are already more than adequately met, and many of our as-yet-unsatisfied needs will be met not by producing more, but by producing differently, producing other things, or even producing less. This is especially true as regards our needs for air, water, space, silence, beauty, time and human contact..

The Basic Income Earth Network was founded in 1986 as the Basic Income European Network, expanding in 2004 to an international network. The basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without any means-test or work requirement.

* It is being paid to individuals rather than households; a basic income is paid on a strictly individual basis. Not only in the sense that each individual member of the community is a recipient, but also in the sense that how much s/he receives is independent of what type of household s/he belongs to. The operation of a basic income scheme, therefore, dispenses with any control over living arrangements, and it preserves the full advantages of reducing the cost of one's living by sharing one's accommodation with others. Precisely because of its strictly individualistic nature, the basic income tends to remove isolation traps and foster communal life.

* It is paid irrespective of any income from other sources. It is paid at the same level to the rich and the poor alike, irrespective of their income level. Neither a person's informal income, nor the help s/he could claim from relatives, nor the value of her/his belongings. Taxable "means" may need to be taxed at a higher average rate in order to fund the basic income.

* It is paid without requiring the performance of any work or the willingness to accept a job, if offered.

The right to a guaranteed minimum income is, by definition, not restricted to those who have worked enough in the past, or paid in enough social security contributions to be entitled to some insurance benefits. The basic income is paid as a matter of right – and not under false pretences – to homemakers, students, break-takers and permanent tramps.

The participation income is a model proposed by Anthony Atkinson, professor of economics in Oxford, that differs from the BIG at this point. A participation income would be a non-means-tested allowance, paid to every person who actively participates in economic activity, whether paid or unpaid. Persons who care for young or elderly persons, undertake approved voluntary work or a training, or are disabled due to sickness or handicap, would also be eligible for it.

After a while, one may well realize that paying controllers to try to catch the few really work-shy would cost more and create more resentment all over than just giving this modest floor income to all, no questions asked.

Frequently asked questions:

No. The BIG is not a remedy for all sorts of sicknesses and injustice in our societies.

Yes. The BIG is affordable. Dozens of studies in different countries and from different social backgrounds and perspectives show it. But as the BIG would be such a change of paradigm in our societies, I think we need much more interdisciplinary research on this subject.

What about migrants?

There are more or less inclusive conceptions how to deal with non-citizens. Some, especially among those who prefer the label "citizen's income," entitle people restricted to nationals, or citizens in a legal sense. The right to the basic income is then of a piece with the whole package of rights and duties associated with full citizenship.

Others, especially among those who view the basic income as a general policy against exclusion, conceive of membership in a broader sense that tends to include all legal permanent residents. The operational criterion may be, for non-citizens, a minimum length of past residence, or it may simply be provided by the conditions which currently define residence for tax purposes.

Children?

Some restrict the basic income, by definition, to adult members of the population. Others conceive of the basic income as an entitlement from the first to the last breath and therefore view it as a full substitute for the child benefit system. The level of the benefit then needs to be independent of the child's family situation, in particular of his or her rank.

But the majority of those who propose an integration of child benefits into the basic income scheme differentiate the latter's level according to age, with the maximum level not being granted until maturity, or later. Anthony Atkinson claims that Europe should introduce the basic income for kids. It would be the only appropriate way to fight back the tremendous poverty of the kids.

Does not make the rich richer.

From the fact that the rich and the poor receive the same basic income, it does not follow that the introduction of the basic income would make both the rich and the poor richer than before. The basic income needs to be funded.

Makes work pay?

The other aspect of the unemployment trap generated by means-tested guaranteed minimum schemes is the lack of a significant positive income differential between no work and low-paid work. Since you can keep the full amount of your basic income, whether working or not, whether rich or poor, you are bound to be better off when working than out of work.

Learning from Africa!

The Basic Income Grant (BIG) pilot project in a village in Namibia is continuing to make national and international headlines. The proposal for a Basic Income Grant in Namibia was made in 2002 by the Namibian Tax Consortium (NAMTAX), a government appointed commission. In January 2007, in the village of Ortijero, there started the two-year experiment, based on the following conditions: A monthly cash grant of not less than N\$100 (~13US\$/8-) is paid to every Namibian citizen as a citizen's right. Every person receives such a grant until pension age from where onwards s/he is eligible to the existing universal State Old Age Pension of N\$370. The Basic Income Grant experience in Ortijero is to date the biggest civil society project, united in fighting poverty and work towards economic empowerment in Namibia.

BBC World News summarized the enterprise in 2008 as follows: "Namibians line up for free cash." "Economic activity has picked up in the settlement since the beginning of the year and a grocery store, a hairdresser, a barber and an ice-cream vendor have opened for business. 'The opponents of the BIG always have the reasoning that people will become dependent,' says Pastor Wilfred Diergaardt. 'In fact, what we are seeing here is really lifting people up out of dependency into becoming human again.' (. . .) If the pilot project succeeds within the next two years, the BIG could become a national provision for all people under the pension age of 60. It could help balance one of the most unequal societies in the world."