



JURGEN DE WISPELAERE

An Income of One's Own?

The Political Analysis
of Universal Basic Income



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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For Leti, unconditionally

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the political feasibility of an individual, universal and unconditional basic income, a policy that radically departs from the mainstream means-tested and work-dependent perspective on income maintenance in the traditional welfare state. The basic income idea has gained considerable traction in both policy and scholarly communities, but its politics remains little understood. Scholarly attention in recent decades has focused largely on the ethics and economics of basic income, with marginal effort spent on political analysis. In addition, existing political studies are predominantly focused on descriptive case studies with only a few engaging in analytical examination of the role between design, implementation and politics.

This dissertation engages in a political analysis of the basic income proposal by reviewing both extant descriptive country studies and the rapidly growing scholarly literature on basic income. Since basic income in its fully developed version is nowhere implemented at this moment, robust empirical evidence is scant. Instead, this study proceeds by systematically applying established policy theories and evidence from analogous schemes (such as Alaska, Brazil or Iran) to the basic income proposal. The results of this study are presented in six articles, published in peer-reviewed political science and policy journals.

The main contribution of this dissertation is twofold. First, whereas the orthodox view suggests basic income advocates face an uphill battle against political actors and a general public that is broadly skeptical about giving “money for nothing”, I argue that there exists a second critical political frontline. A widespread tendency to think about basic income as a general idea rather than a set of specific policy proposals obscures the extent to which key design dimensions produce internal disagreement and division between basic income supporters. This internal division has a major impact on the political stability of a broad enacting basic income coalition.

Second, this dissertation argues that the internal tensions inherent in basic income design become salient once we consider basic income implementation. In contrast to the bulk of basic income research which eschews administrative analysis, this study adopts a public administration perspective and identifies a range of key implementation challenges that need to be carefully resolved for basic income to

become a practical policy proposal. Furthermore, I demonstrate that these administrative challenges are decidedly political in nature, reinforcing the potential for persistent internal disagreement amongst basic income advocates.

Tiivistelmä

Väitöskirja käsittelee henkilökohtaisen, universaalien ja vastikkeettoman perustulon poliittista toteutettavuutta. Perustulo poikkeaa politiikkana radikaalisti perinteisen hyvinvointivaltion valtavirtaisista tarveharkintaisista ja työsidonnaisista näkökulmista toimeentulon tukemiseen. Perustulon idea on herättänyt runsaasti kiinnostusta sekä poliittisissa että akateemisissa yhteisöissä, mutta siihen liittyvä politiikka on edelleen heikosti ymmärrettyä. Tieteellinen huomio on viime vuosikymmeninä keskittynyt pääasiassa perustuloon liittyviin eettisiin ja taloudellisiin kysymyksiin, ja poliittisten kysymysten analyysi on saanut vain marginaalisesti huomiota. Olemassa olevat politiikkaan keskittyvät tutkimukset ovat enimmäkseen kuvailevia tapaustutkimuksia. Vain harvat niistä ovat ryhtyneet suunnitelmien, toimeenpanon ja politiikan välisen roolin analyttiseen tarkasteluun.

Tämä väitöskirja kytkeytyy perustuloehdotuksen poliittiseen analyysiin luomalla katsauksen sekä kuvaileviin maakohtaisiin tutkimuksiin että nopeasti laajentuvaan perustuloa koskevaan tutkimuskirjallisuuteen. Koska perustuloa täysin kehittyneessä muodossaan ei ole toistaiseksi otettu käyttöön missään, vahvaa empiiristä näyttöä on vähän. Sen sijasta tutkimus etenee soveltamalla systemaattisesti vakiintuneita politiikan teorioita ja perustuloa vastaavia järjestelmiä koskevaa tietoa. Tutkimuksen tulokset on esitetty kuudessa artikkelissa, jotka on julkaistu vertaisarvioituissa politiikatutkimuksen lehdissä.

Väitöskirjan pääasiallinen kontribuutio on kaksiosainen. Ensinnäkin, siinä missä ortodoksinen näkökulma esittää, että perustulon kannattajat kohtaavat työhönsä taistelun poliittisia toimijoita ja ilmaista rahaa kohtaan laajalti skeptistä yleisöä vastaan, väitän että on olemassa myös toinen kriittinen poliittinen etulinja. Laajalle levinnyt taipumus mieltää perustulo mieluummin yleisenä ideana kuin sarjana erityisiä politiikkaehdotuksia hämärtää sitä laajuutta, missä toteutusmallien keskeiset ulottuvuudet tuottavat sisäisiä erimielisyyksiä ja jakoja perustulon kannattajien välille. Tällä sisäisellä jakautumisella on merkittävä vaikutus laajan perustuloa ajavan koalition poliittiseen tasapainoon.

Toiseksi, tässä tutkielmassa väitän, että perustulomallien muotoiluun luontaisesti liittyvät sisäiset jännitteet tulevat keskeisiksi siinä vaiheessa kun ryhdytään harkitsemaan perustulon toimeenpanoa. Toisin kuin valtaosa perustuloa koskevistä

tutkimuksista, jotka karttavat hallinnollista analyysiä, tämä tutkimus omaksuu julkisen hallinnon näkökulman ja tunnistaa sarjan keskeisiä toimeenpanoon liittyviä haasteita, jotka täytyy selvittää huolellisesti jotta perustulo voisi muotoutua käytännön politiikkaehdotukseksi. Lisäksi osoitan, että nämä hallinnolliset haasteet ovat selvästi poliittisia luonteeltaan, joten ne lisäävät mahdollisuutta pysyvään poliittiseen erimielisyyteen perustulon kannattajien välillä.

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Thomas Malthus famously argued in his *Essay on the Principles of Population* that economic catastrophe is inevitable when an unchecked population multiplies geometrically while the food supply only increases arithmetically. A similar (but decidedly less gloomy) equation holds with respect to doctoral dissertations: as the thesis drags on year after year, the number of individuals who went out of their way in supporting its completion grows exponentially. I am most grateful to anyone who over the many years it took to complete this project helped out, and apologize in advance for those I fail to list by name.

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discussing and writing with smart friends on a topic that intrigues us all has been a formative experience, but most importantly a continuous source of intellectual pleasure. I am grateful to Lindsay and Leti for granting me permission to use some of our joint research in this dissertation.

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Belfast, Northern Ireland — November 2015

Jurgen De Wispelaere

List of Original Articles

This dissertation consists of six published articles, which will be referred to throughout this general introduction with the Roman numbers I-VI.

- I. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2007), “The Public Administration Case Against Participation Income”, *Social Service Review* 81(3): 523–549.
- II. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2011), “The Administrative Efficiency of Basic Income”, *Policy and Politics* 39(1): 115–132.
- III. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2012), “A Disarmingly Simple Idea? Practical Bottlenecks in Implementing a Universal Basic Income”, *International Social Security Review* 65(2): 103–121.
- IV. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton (2013), “The Basic Income Guarantee: Bringing Bureaucracy Back In”, *Political Studies* 61(4): 915–932.
- V. Jurgen De Wispelaere (2015), “The Struggle for Strategy: On the Politics of the Basic Income Proposal”, *Politics*. DOI: 10.1111/1467-9256.12102.
- VI. Jurgen De Wispelaere and Leticia Morales (2015), “The Stability of Basic Income: A Constitutional Solution to a Political Problem?”, *Journal of Public Policy*. DOI: 10.1017/S0143814X15000264.

1. Introduction

“Give all citizens a modest, yet unconditional income, and let them top it up at will with income from other sources.”

Philippe Van Parijs, 2004: 7

This dissertation examines the politics of basic income, understood in its generic form as a guaranteed income provided by the state to all citizens or long-term residents.¹

Basic income constitutes a guaranteed income in two relevant senses. It is *non-withdrawable*, comprising a guaranteed income floor below which no eligible individual is expected to fall. Basic income is the level of income a person maintains even when all other sources of income provision, whether private or public, fail. Conversely, the basic income floor allows individuals to complement the basic income with other private or public sources of income, including earnings and state benefits.²

In addition, basic income is *non-contingent* or guaranteed by right: it is an income that every citizen receives irrespective of individual background circumstances — e.g., alternative sources of income, household or family composition, age or gender — that customarily condition eligibility for support programs. Most controversially, basic income understood as a citizen’s right (Plant, 2005; LoVuolo, 2012c) is decoupled from present work status, past work experience, and even a demonstrated willingness to work.³

These two senses of a basic income guarantee are closely related: basic income is able to perform its function as an income guarantee precisely because it is provided

¹ The distinction between citizens and residents is highly relevant but will not be further discussed here. See Van Parijs (2004), Howard (2006), and ARTICLE I, II and III.

² This sets apart basic income from other policies that aim to provide workers with a guaranteed income, such as wage subsidies (Phelps, 1997) or employer-of-last-resort programs (Harvey, 1989, 2002, 2013; Solow, 1998). The International Labour Organization (ILO) has spent the last few years developing a Social Protection Floor instrument that is more inclusive but nevertheless eschews basic income (Deacon, 2013).

³ Reference to the right to basic income refers to the so-called “legislative level of social rights” (King, 2012: 19), leaving open whether basic income constitutes a constitutional right (ARTICLE VI).

as a matter of right (Offe, 2008; De Wispelaere and Morales, 2015b). Because of these features, its advocates maintain, basic income radically departs from contemporary welfare models, offering a “Paineian” alternative to the Bismarckian or Beveridgean welfare state model (Van Parijs, 1995b; Noguera, 2001). However, as outlined in the next sections, within the generic model we find important variations affecting detailed program design, expected outcomes on individuals or particular groups (e.g., women), the particular social values that underpin its moral foundation, and the competing political doctrines and ideologies that support getting basic income off the drawing board and into the real world of policy implementation. In this dissertation I argue that those advocating basic income must pay more attention to these “differences within”, for the variation amongst basic income models invariably affects both the ethical desirability and the political feasibility of basic income.

1.1 Why Basic Income?

Basic income is advocated⁴ from a broad range of perspectives, drawing support from both principled and pragmatic arguments (Van Parijs, 1992b; Fitzpatrick, 1999).⁵ A *principled* justification proposes that basic income constitutes an integral part of a just society. Two broad types of principled justifications can be distinguished in the literature. There is, first and foremost, the freedom-based argument for basic income, which regards basic income as a precondition for individuals having the freedom to live their lives in accordance with their own values and plans. The freedom-based argument comes in many forms, including a liberal-egalitarian (Maskivker, 2011; Birnbaum, 2012), republican (Casassas, 2007; Pettit, 2007; Casassas and De Wispelaere, 2015), and even a libertarian variant (Tomasi, 2012; Zwolinski, 2012). It is most importantly associated with the real-libertarian justification advocated by Philippe Van Parijs in *Real Freedom for All*

⁴ Throughout this dissertation I use the label “basic income advocate” to refer to a very heterogeneous group of activists, researchers and policy entrepreneurs who share a preference in favour of basic income. This heterogeneity reveals itself in competing ethical views and political ideologies as well as conflicting views regarding the goals, design features and expected policy effects of the basic income proposal. Leading advocates in the contemporary scholarly or policy debate are typically associated with the international basic income network BIEN or one of its affiliated national and regional networks (see www.basicincome.org).

⁵ On the distinction between principled and pragmatic justifications, see (Barry, 1996b; Van der Veen, 1997).

(1991, 1995b), where he argues that a basic income financed primarily by employment rents⁶ is justified on the grounds of securing real freedom compatible with equality. A second principled justification grounds basic income in democracy and individuals' foundational right to participation in the decision-making process of the polity (Pateman, 2003, 2004; Goodhart, 2007).

Pragmatic justifications also exist in bountiful variation. For pragmatists, basic income does not necessarily constitute a precondition for a just society; instead, the pragmatic case usually starts off by identifying a desirable social goal and then arguing that basic income fulfils this goal better than its leading competitors. Brian Barry writes “pragmatists are people who assume that social policy should serve certain ends” and then goes on to observe “that the existing forms of welfare state are not very successful at achieving these ends” (Barry, 1996b: 243).⁷ In recent years, basic income has gained considerable traction among scholars who claim positive effects on poverty and income inequality, unemployment, social inclusion, “discretionary time” and flexibility across the life cycle, and even gender equality among the scheme's many virtues (e.g., Van Parijs, 1992a; 1996; 2004; Standing, 1999; 2002; McKay, 2001, 2007; Groot, 2004; Wright, 2004; 2006a; Offe, 2008; Haagh, 2011; Zelleke, 2011).

There exist several important differences between the principled and pragmatic approach. On the one hand, pragmatic justification does not require that we buy into a particular theory of justice, merely a shared agreement on the desirability of a social goal (e.g., poverty reduction).⁸ This feature counts in its favour, as it partially bypasses the pervasive and persistent disagreement about social justice (Waldron, 1999).⁹ On the other hand, the validity of the pragmatic justification depends in the final analysis on empirical evidence corroborating the anticipated result — i.e., that a basic income will effectively reduce poverty and does so better than its main competitors (De Wispelaere and Morales, 2015b).

⁶ Employment rents comprise “the difference between the income and other advantages the employed derive from their jobs, and the (lower) income they would need to get if the [labour] market were to clear” (Van Parijs, 1995: 108). For Van Parijs, employment rents are captured by jobholders and can therefore be legitimately taxed and subsequently redistributed equally in the form of a universal lump-sum grant.

⁷ Barry rightly insists that pragmatism here should not be confused with political expediency.

⁸ Compare Cass Sunstein's (1995) arguments for the role of “incompletely theorized agreements” in law.

⁹ For an example of persistent disagreement internal to the basic income debate, see the dispute between Stuart White (1997) and Philippe Van Parijs (1997) about the role of the reciprocity principle (also De Wispelaere, 2000).

I must confess a personal affinity towards the pragmatic case for basic income, but in this dissertation I am not concerned with justifying basic income. Instead, I take for granted that there are good reasons for pursuing basic income, given the poor performance of current activation and austerity policies. Evidence from natural experiments and pilot studies suggests we have good reasons to believe basic income has a beneficial impact on a range of social goals (e.g., Davala et al., 2014). This does not mean that basic income is conclusively justified, as many factors may prevent the expected positive effects from materializing. While it is therefore perfectly conceivable that in some circumstances basic income may not be the best policy to adopt, this does not amount to a general argument against pursuing basic income. Similarly, the fact that there remain many open questions in terms of how basic income would perform once implemented is not an argument against basic income, as few (if any) social policies in advance of full implementation meet such an exacting evidentiary standard (Cartwright and Hardie, 2012).¹⁰

Importantly, having good reason to endorse basic income in general does not necessarily tell us which concrete basic income scheme to promote, for different ethical arguments impose non-trivial demands on the design and implementation of the desired scheme. Taking a principled perspective, different theories of social justice will proscribe one version of basic income rather than another. From a pragmatic point of view, prioritizing one social goal over another will likewise insist on distinct design choices within the generic basic income idea. I will return to this point again throughout this dissertation.

1.2 The Political Analysis of Basic Income

The main focus of this dissertation is on the politics of basic income, which I broadly understand as the examination of actors, processes and institutions that determine the enactment and implementation of a basic income policy. The political perspective takes into account a vast array of constraints that advocates face when promoting basic income, and is geared at both identifying those challenges

¹⁰ In addition, the interpretation of relevant evidence in terms of demonstrating policy success or policy failure remains problematic (McConnell, 2010; Marsh and McConnell, 2010). This is one reason why I am skeptical about the need for more basic income pilot projects. The sort of evidence we can obtain from large-scale pilot projects is already available from the NIT experiments in the US and Canada (Widerquist, Lewis and Pressman, 2005) and from the recent pilot studies in India (Davala et al., 2014), and large-scale pilot projects face a number of difficulties that hamper evidence-based policy-making (Widerquist, 2005; Noguera and De Wispelaere, 2006).

and finding ways to overcome them. Where ethical arguments merely give us reasons for pursuing basic income, political arguments sketch a trajectory by which those arguments can be translated into political actions and strategies that over time may result in basic income being instituted. As such, political analysis must go beyond the ethical persuasion of key actors, and enquire systematically into the constraints that hinder basic income moving ahead in the policy process.

The political analysis adopted throughout this dissertation is informed by Theodore Lowi's (1964, 1972) seminal work on policy feedback. Reversing the classical understanding of social policy as the outcome of an independent political process, Lowi instead held that *policy determines politics*. In a nutshell, different types of policies produce distinct political conflicts, which over time result in diverging political constellations of interests, actors and institutions. Building on Lowi's pioneering insight, Theda Skocpol (1992: 58) defined the concept of "policy feedback" as the ways "policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes." More recently, political scientists and policy scholars have developed a strong research program examining the various mechanisms through which policy affects both elite and mass politics, including the powerful idea of *path dependence*.¹¹

In this dissertation I employ the policy feedback approach to examine the political effects of adopting a *particular* basic income design. This approach can be cashed out at two important levels of analysis. First, there is the question of whether basic income needs a distinctive politics. While basic income shares many features with other income maintenance programs, and must contend with many of the same challenges (political or otherwise), its radical design may nevertheless set it apart from the policy trajectories that characterizes more mainstream support programs. For instance, the precise political effects of a truly universal program capturing each individual citizen (or resident) remains uncertain.¹² Second, within the *generic* form of a basic income, the precise political impact of key design decisions that differentiate one concrete basic income scheme from another requires

¹¹ For excellent reviews, see Pierson (1993, 2004), Mettler and Soss (2004) and Campbell (2012). The notion of path dependence has unfortunately fallen victim to concept stretching (Rixen and Viola, 2014).

¹² There are of course plenty of universal programs in place in many jurisdictions, but the characteristics of these programs differ considerably from that of an unconditional basic income and therefore we must be careful when attempting to deduce particular political effects by analogy (Mossberger and Volman, 2003). The prime example is no doubt child benefit, which while universal (albeit not necessarily uniform) within the specified age category nevertheless faces different political challenges from a basic income tailored to the working-age population. I am grateful to Heikki Hiilamo for this suggestion.

extensive analysis. A leading theme throughout this dissertation is the competition between different models, and its impact on the political feasibility of basic income.

1.3 Policy Context: Basic Income and Welfare Regimes

It is a truism of sorts to argue that policy context matters for the politics of basic income. Much less clear, however, is which aspects of the policy context matter, and how they impact on basic income politics. Although this dissertation engages in theory-building and largely abstracts from a specific policy context, I want to make a few brief observations.

Instituting a basic income in a developing world context is likely to constitute a radically different enterprise than attempting the same in a context with a developed welfare state in place.¹³ Closer to home, in a mature welfare state basic income will interact with a large variety of social programs, but welfare states themselves exhibit considerable variation. Comparative social policy usually kicks off by invoking Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) influential typology of three welfare regimes.¹⁴ Based on a complicated set of indicators, combining institutional characteristics as well as outcome indicators, he distinguishes a liberal (residual, needs-based), conservative (earnings-related, contribution-based) and social-democratic (universal, citizenship-based) regime-type. Esping-Andersen's analysis has produced a small cottage industry of scholarship engaged in replicating, extending and revising his key insights (e.g., Lewis, 1992; Svallfors, 1997; Goodin et al., 1999; Arts and Gelissen, 2002).

What does the worlds-of-welfare typology have to tell us about instituting a basic income? It seems rather obvious that regime types will have important effects on the performance of a basic income scheme for the simple reason that it will have to operate in close interaction with a set of policies already in place. The same basic income model would arguably produce different policy outcomes, depending on whether it would be instituted in, say, Australia or Germany, the UK or Finland, and so on. Further, regime constellations would likely impose different design and implementation constraints on the precise basic income model to be adopted. In part this may simply be due to advocates wanting to ensure that a basic income will

¹³ This is one reason to be mindful about generalizing evidence from recent field experiments in Namibia or India to a mature welfare context.

¹⁴ Esping-Andersen of course builds on earlier typologies, notably those of T.H. Marshall (1950) and Richard Titmuss (1958).

slot easily into a set of pre-existing welfare institutions and make good use of implementation capabilities already in place (“administrability”).¹⁵

However, none of the above tells us much about the *political prospects* of basic income. At first blush one would think the universalistic social-democratic model, commonly associated with the Nordic countries, would be a leading candidate for adopting a basic income model. Finland has proven to be the notable exception (Ikkala, 2012; Koistinen and Perkiö, 2014), while the debate about basic income has been comparatively muted in the Scandinavian countries. Examining the different attitudes about basic income amongst the Finns and the Swedes, Otto Jan Anderson and Olli Kangas (2005) show important variation within the social-democratic regime type. Experience with universalism may seem to suggest a preference for basic income, but in practice support for universalist policies customarily retains a strong connection to willingness to contribute (Mau, 2004; van Oorschot, 2000, 2006; Slothuus, 2007).¹⁶ Relatedly, public support often favours social insurance over redistribution (Moene and Wallerstein, 2001; Iversen and Soskice, 2001).¹⁷ One should be careful about deducing support for basic income from general support for welfare state programs.

Moreover, it could be argued basic income fits equally well within a liberal welfare regime, where it complements existing arrangements by providing a residual floor. Similarly, Claus Offe has argued for years that the immense stress on the contribution-based conservative model must be resolved by partially disconnecting income and contribution (Offe, Muckenberger and Ostner, 1996; Offe, 2000, 2008). Thus, there is no *a priori* reason to expect one regime type to favour basic income.¹⁸ Where social-democratic regimes have the benefit of policy experience with universal policies grounded in citizenship rights, in contrast to the liberal and conservative models the former may simply exhibit less *demand for* basic income reform.¹⁹ To put it differently, if basic income reform is in part motivated by the

¹⁵ Compare the implementation difficulties reviewed in Section 5.

¹⁶ In Europe this trend has crystallized in the so-called “social investment” paradigm. See Cantillon and Van Lancker (2013) for a critical discussion.

¹⁷ Peter Baldwin (1990: 18) wrote that “protection against risk has been sought more universally than a redistribution of resources.” More recently, Brooks and Manza (2006) note that retrenchment trends are most visible for *cash entitlements* while resisted for social services.

¹⁸ Goodin (2001b) proposes a fourth post-productivist regime type, centred around the principles of “income adequacy”, “temporal adequacy” and “minimal conditionality”, which seems to be a natural fit for the basic income model (Van der Veen and Groot, 2006; Offe, 1992).

¹⁹ Anderson and Kangas (2005) likewise argue that the success of the Swedish welfare state paradoxically may explain why the Swedes aren’t as thrilled about basic income as the Finns.

experience of economic insecurity, the Nordic countries may be comparatively insulated.

A better explanation for the political prospects of basic income may lie in the *political* rather than *policy* context (Korpi and Palme, 1998; Jordan, 2013; also Anderson and Kangas, 2005). It is entirely to be expected that political institutions of various stripes will play an important role in mediating how basic income ideas translate into policy (Häusermann, Picot, and Geering, 2013). Similarly, variation in political institutions across jurisdictions is likely to explain both public attitudes in relation to basic income — e.g., through framing effects (Kangas, Niemelä and Varjonen, 2012) — as well as windows of opportunity for basic income advocates to shepherd their scheme through the policy process. In what follows I largely abstract from the detailed political context to examine the core political questions that surround the basic income proposal in general.

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

In the remainder of this general introduction I offer a systematic examination of basic income design, implementation and politics. Section 2 kicks off by outlining the policy background for the subsequent analysis, briefly reviewing several recent efforts at moving basic income onto the policy agenda. The purpose of that section is to illustrate the variety of concrete schemes as they appear in the basic income debate. At the same time, I will offer reasons to think none of the existing schemes are all that promising in terms of generating a clear political trajectory that basic income advocates should adopt. These cases are interesting and informative up to a point, but basic income advocates should refrain from drawing too firm (or too fast) conclusions without further analysis.

Section 3 outlines the “many faces” of universal basic income, discussing briefly eight key dimensions along which basic income design can be varied. Several of these dimensions are typically unspecified when advocates debate basic income, yet they do need to be specified at some point to become policy. Other dimensions are very live in the debate, but here too it pays to briefly chart the possibilities for variation and, indeed, compromise. Section 3 concludes by suggesting that basic income advocates must start paying attention to the difference between arguing for basic income as a *social ideal*, (a vehicle for social criticism, as it were) and developing basic income as a concrete *policy proposal*.

Section 4 continues with a discussion of political feasibility. The section first briefly outlines a model framework for thinking about different feasibility dimensions, before introducing three key problems that hamper the political feasibility of the basic income proposal. The first problem pertains to the search for a robust basic income constituency. Basic income advocates often argue for the many advantages of basic income and throughout attempt to identify who benefits from its introduction, but identifying beneficiaries is not the same as identifying a political constituency. This subsection briefly reviews several factors that complicate the production of a stable and robust basic income constituency.

The discussion next moves to another key strategic issue: which political agents must be targeted in an attempt to build a robust political coalition in favour of basic income? I identify two difficulties that interfere with the process of coalition-building: the problem of cheap support and the problem of persistent disagreement. Section 4 concludes by examining the political stability of basic income, once enacted. Maintaining that basic income advocates ought to take seriously challenges to its resilience and robustness, I review a number of processes of policy change to which basic income seems particularly vulnerable. Examining ways to boost stability over time is an important topic of future research.

Section 5 moves to the implementation of basic income and adopts a public administration perspective to examine challenges emerging at this stage of the policy process. The section briefly reviews several arguments that might explain why basic income research has systematically ignored basic income administration, and finds these wanting. Inspired by the work of Christopher Hood, Section 5 introduces a model of basic income administration that informs the subsequent discussion. The remainder of the section then covers a range of different issues surrounding the administration of basic income. The main argument of this section, arrived at via different routes, is that administration is *inherently political*. Many of the challenges basic income advocates face at the level of implementation directly feed back into the discussion of political strategy in the previous section.

The dissertation concludes by reviewing the main points of the general introduction and outlining its relevance for future basic income research, notably in relation to identifying feasible political trajectories.

2. Basic Income – An Idea Whose Time Has Come?

“The history of social policy is more of a winding country lane, with poorly signposted crossroads, than a majestic highway. Important new principles have seldom arrived in gleaming splendor; they were more likely to be delivered in a mud-spattered condition, along with other, more dubious, baggage.”

Bill Jordan, 2012: 1

An obvious starting point for a dissertation examining the politics of basic income is to study the political debate surrounding basic income across the world. The last decade, and in particular the past few years following the successful Citizen’s Initiative in Switzerland proposing to give each adult citizen a monthly stipend of €2800, have witnessed an exponential increase in media and popular interest in the basic income idea, including a surge in basic income movements at local, national and international level.²⁰ This suggests that the time is ripe to push basic income onto the political agenda.

Of course, a boost in policy attention amongst traditional and social media and increased basic income activism is only the start of a successful political campaign, and the question remains how basic income advocates can build on this window of opportunity. Some advocates in fact argue that we have already moved on from mere discussion to genuine policy diffusion. One major achievement of the last decade has been a series of pilot projects, the most important of which has recently been completed in India (Davalá et al, 2014). New pilot studies are being proposed as well, including a surprise announcement by Juha Sipilä’s centre-right coalition government to conduct a large pilot study in Finland by 2017.²¹ The Guaranteed

²⁰ The passing of the Citizen’s Initiative in October 2013 commits the Swiss government to holding a referendum on basic income. For more information, see <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/04/us-swiss-pay-idUSBRE9930O620131004>.

²¹ There is also considerable interest in basic income at municipal level: Santo Antônio do Pinhal, near São Paulo (Brazil) has piloted a basic income scheme for its 6500 inhabitants since 2009, while in the past months the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary (both in Alberta, Canada) and Tilburg (Netherlands) have come out in support of local basic income pilot schemes.

Annual Income (GAI) field experiment that took place in Dauphin (Manitoba, Canada) between 1974-1979 has recently received significant renewed attention, largely due to the analysis of the health impact of the Dauphin data by Evelyn Forget (2011).²²

In addition, several countries have witnessed important legislative efforts furthering the cause of basic income, have implemented a version of basic income (notably, Alaska and Iran), or have instituted (or are in the process of instituting) a scheme that appears to lay the groundwork for introducing basic income. Each of these schemes offers important opportunities for drawing lessons that may positively impact on policy diffusion (Rose, 1991; Mossberger and Volman, 2003; Shipan and Volden, 2008). Allowing policy scholars and decision-makers to closely examine how a basic income scheme operates in practice is one key advantage of examining these schemes, but more importantly is the opportunity to study the respective *political trajectories* that helped to push the scheme from idea to (some form of) policy reality (Robertson, 1991).²³

In this section I briefly examine some of these cases, with no pretence towards comprehensiveness. The purpose of this section is twofold. First, the discussion illustrates the extensive variation in concrete policy proposals (and their origins) associated with the basic income debate. This variation plays a key role in the political analysis of this dissertation, as explained more fully in subsequent sections. Second, this section also briefly evaluates the lessons we can learn from these cases, in particular in terms of the political trajectories towards successful basic income implementation. I must confess at the outset to adopting a skeptical stance in this regard. The specific policy attributes in the most developed cases (Alaska and Iran), as well as several cognate schemes sharing important features with basic income, is argued to considerably hamper policy learning.²⁴ Furthermore, a leading theme of this dissertation, explored more fully in subsequent sections, is that lumping

²²The Dauphin experiment is part of the MINCOME experiments, which constituted the Canadian branch of the well-known NIT experiments in the 1970s-1980s in the US (Widerquist, Lewis and Pressman, 2005). Dauphin was a unique experiment in large part because it was a so-called “saturation site”, which meant that “[e]very family in Dauphin, with a population of approximately 10,000 and another 2,500 living in its rural municipality, was eligible to participate in the GAI” (Forget, 2011: 289).

²³ Gilardi (2010) argues that policy learning is about figuring out the *policy consequences* of adopting a policy but equally (or even more so) learning about its *political effects*, which may explain variation of similar policies across polities. In some cases political gains also explain foregoing policy learning for immediate adoption (Nicholson-Crotty, 2009).

²⁴ On the role of policy attributes in explaining policy learning, see Makse and Volden (2011).

together concrete proposals in a way that obscures key design differences between the schemes makes for poor politics.

2.1 Early Beginnings: Two Radical Proposals

In *Agrarian Justice* (1797), the American revolutionary Thomas Paine advanced two radical proposals to mitigate the extreme poverty of his time:

“To create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property: And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age ... It is proposed that the payments, as already stated, be made to every person, rich or poor.” (Paine, 1997 [1797]: 326–327)

Paine’s first proposal went through several permutations and received considerable attention in the 1990s under the name of “basic capital”, “capital grant” or “stakeholder grant” (Cunliffe and Erreygers, 2004; Dowding, De Wispelaere and White, 2003b; Wright, 2006b). In one familiar proposal, each US citizen at age 21 who has obtained a high school diploma and stayed clear of crime receives a “stake” of \$80,000 from the government for her to spend as she wishes (Ackerman and Alstott, 1999; 2004).²⁵ Another version, this time aimed at the UK, proposes to give each youngster upon reaching eighteen the sum of £10,000, paid into designated Accumulation of Capital and Education (ACE) accounts with qualified ACE trustees ensuring that the grants are spent towards genuine investment projects (LeGrand and Nissan, 2003; also LeGrand, 1989).²⁶

In 2005 the UK government introduced a version of this idea in the form of a Child Trust Fund (or “Baby Bond”). In this scheme the government contributes an initial £250 at birth to all parents of British children born after September 2002

²⁵ Guy Standing (2006) refers to this version of basic capital as “Coming-of-Age Grants” (COAGs), and argues they are inferior to capital sharing devices like “Community Capital Grants” (COGs).

²⁶ Approved investments include higher and further education, down-payments on a house or flat purchase, start-up costs of a small business, or even contributions towards a personal or stakeholder pension (LeGrand and Nissan, 2003: 38-39).

(£500 for the poorest families), followed by another £250 at age seven. Families can contribute top-up payments up to £1,200 per annum, all of which is kept in trust until the child reaches eighteen (LeGrand, 2004; Prabhakar, 2008). Although often publicly justified as a scheme countering wealth inequality and improving equal opportunity at the start of one's economic life (Ackerman and Alstott, 1999; White, 2003a; White, 2011), the scheme proved particularly controversial with those who believe we need new radical ideas to combat the plight of the worst-off in society (e.g., Standing, 2006). One recurring complaint maintains that the Child Trust Fund is inherently regressive, allowing those who have sufficient wealth to top up the account while mainly imposing a "savings culture" geared at improving financial literacy on the poor (Finlayson, 2008; 2009).²⁷ In the end little of this matters, as the Child Trust Fund was one of the first schemes to fall victim to the previous government's austerity policies, and effectively discontinued in 2011 after a mere decade in operation.²⁸

In this dissertation I focus on the second of Thomas Paine's proposals: to grant "the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age" (Paine, 1997 [1797]: 326). Paine here gives us an early incarnation of what is today most commonly referred to as basic income.²⁹ While Paine sets an age restriction to the receipt of this grant, contemporary proposals typically envisage granting each individual adult, irrespective of age, a regular income without means test or work requirement (Van Parijs, 1992a, 1995, 2004). Similarly, while Paine envisages a citizen's right to an unconditional income to follow from the fact that one's natural inheritance ("access to land") has been curtailed, contemporary justifications for basic income do not necessarily restrict themselves to compensation for lost entitlements but instead branched out to comprise the whole gamma of ethical theories (Van Parijs, 1992b).³⁰

²⁷ Financial literacy is integral to the asset-based welfare agenda (Sheraden, 1991).

²⁸ The Savings Accounts and Health in Pregnancy Grant Act 2010 amends the Child Trust Funds Act 2004 by closing the funds to new applicants starting in January 2011, while existing accounts continue to function as before. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10147773>.

²⁹ I subscribe to the view that basic capital and basic income are radically different ideas because of the likely effects on recipients and their respective justification (Van der Veen, 2003).

³⁰ For a revival of basic income as a resource dividend, see Widerquist and Howard (2012a, 2012b).

2.2 The Ascent of the Basic Income Idea

Thomas Paine and his fellow revolutionaries in both continents³¹ sparked an idea that two centuries later seems to have gained a proper foothold in contemporary policy debate. In the words of one of its most ardent supporters, “the idea of an unconditional basic income is now more than the sheer dream it was when it was first formulated by Thomas Paine in 1796” (Van Parijs, 2013: 176). In modern days, the basic income debate seems to have advanced in three waves.

The first wave focused entirely on the mature welfare states of Europe and the US. Following the criticism of welfare state arrangements in the 1980s and the rise of the workfare state intent to “end welfare as we know it” (Peck, 2001, 2003; Solow, 1998), basic income advocates argued that social insurance and social assistance programs fail to protect individuals from the precariousness of modern capitalist societies (Standing, 1999, 2002, 2009, 2011b; Offe, 2008; Handler, 2004).³² A universal basic income, it is argued, more efficiently plugs the holes in the patchwork of categorical and conditional support measures that make up the modern welfare state, guaranteeing an adequate safety net for all (Goodin, 1992; Offe, 2008).

Furthermore, proponents insist we need to rethink the strict focus on formal employment as a condition for receipt of assistance, pressed upon us by ecological, economic and equity concerns in the context of emerging post-productive welfare arrangements (Offe, 1992, 2008; Goodin, 2001a, 2010; Van der Veen and Groot, 2006; Haagh, 2011).³³ Of course, the idea of a universal and unconditional basic income guarantee still played second fiddle to the dominant paradigm of the active welfare state through targeted and selective labour market activation policies (King, 1995).

A second wave of debate emerged in the late 1990s. Much to the surprise of observers and advocates in Europe and the US, basic income entered the policy debate in developing countries in Africa and Latin-America, where welfare

³¹ Other historical figures proposing a version of basic income include, amongst others, Condorcet, Charles Fourier, Joseph Charlier, John Stuart Mill, and Henry George.

³² Bill Clinton’s campaign pledge to “end welfare as we know it” led to the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, which has come to epitomize workfare in the US and beyond. Note that the interest in guaranteed income in the US predates this era, with the 1960s Guaranteed Income Movement culminating in President Nixon’s (ill-fated) Family Assistance Plan (Harris, 2005; Steensland, 2007).

³³ Related to this debate is the need to address gender inequalities in current care arrangements (Robeyns, 2000; McKay, 2001, 2007; Zelleke, 2011)

programs are either non-existent or else take a highly fractioned and residual form (e.g., LoVuolo, 2012c; Matinsonn and Seekings, 2003; Natrass and Seekings, 2005). Following a 2002 recommendation for a basic income grant by the government-appointed Namibian Tax Consortium (NAMTAX), the first basic income pilot project took place in 2008-2009 in the village of Otjivero, Namibia (Haarmann and Haarmann, 2012).³⁴ Meanwhile, in 2004 Brazil enshrined a Citizen's Basic Income (Law No. 10.835) in legislation (Suplicy, 2005; Lavinias, 2006, 2012).

In response to these developments, in 2004 the leading international basic income network BIEN, originally conceived as a European network, reconstituted itself from as the Basic Income Earth Network, while regional networks devoted to the promotion of this idea have mushroomed outside Europe.³⁵ Nevertheless, it seems that in recent years most developing countries are by now fully wedded to moving down the road of *conditional* cash transfers (CCTs), which some critics argue have closed off the road to universal and unconditional basic income grants (LoVuolo, 2012a, 2012b).

The third wave of the debate brings us back to Europe, where the basic income proposal in recent years got a second wind as one of the leading ideas resisting the increasingly bankrupt politics of austerity (Standing, 2011a; LoVuolo, Raventós and Yanes, 2010). The 2008 financial crisis and subsequent barrage of austerity policies has in no way dampened the enthusiasm for basic income in Europe. On the contrary, basic income plays a growing role in social movements' battle against the austerity agenda (Malleon, 2014), and features prominently in public debates about alternative routes out of the crisis.

A good example is the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) for an Unconditional Basic Income aimed at initiating a public hearing by the European Commission.³⁶ The ECI ran from April 2012 to January 2014, and collected more than 285,000 signatures from EU citizens in 28 countries. While it failed in meeting its goal of one million votes, as required by the European Commission, the resulting mobilization and media attention dramatically raised the visibility of basic income

³⁴ The pilot project was run by the Basic Income Grant Coalition, a group of civil-society organizations, trade-unions and church groups. The project became rapidly marred in controversy, however, with critics challenging both the evaluative outcomes and any future impact on policy development (Osterkamp, 2013).

³⁵ For more information on the history of BIEN and details of the 20 affiliated national networks, see <http://www.basicincome.org/bien/>. BIEN also runs the dedicated BINews feature.

³⁶ See <http://basicincome2013.eu/>.

across Europe. It appears grassroots movements as well as policy entrepreneurs in countries as diverse as Spain, Germany, Belgium, Finland, Brazil, Mexico and India have made basic income an integral part of the social policy debate (for a recent overview, see Caputo, 2012a; Murray and Pateman, 2012). The Finnish government's commitment to conduct a large pilot study in 2017 represents the most prominent example of the recent surge of interest in the basic income idea across Europe.³⁷

2.3 The (Unbearable Lightness of) Basic Income Reality

Basic income has inspired decades of scholars and community activists, and continues to do so. Nevertheless, this fascination with basic income has yet to translate into widespread policy development. The lively discussion in town halls and cyberspace so far is not reflected in tangible policy outcomes. Basic income advocates counter by pointing at recent international experience, which seems to suggest that (embryonic) versions of basic income have already taken root throughout the world (Caputo, 2012a; Murray and Pateman, 2012). In this subsection I evaluate several recent developments on the ground.

2.3.1. *Legislative Efforts*

Let us first look at some recent efforts to legislate for basic income. Ireland is often referred to as an example where basic income made considerable headway onto the policy agenda (Healy and Reynolds, 2000). In 2002, following the Partnership 2000 Working Group on Basic Income, the government commissioned and published a Green Paper (Department of the Taoiseach, 2002). In contrast to previous studies (e.g., Honohan, 1987), the Green Paper concluded that a tax-integrated basic income would not only be affordable but have important distributive effects (Healy and Reynolds, 2012a, 2012b). However, the Green Paper (and basic income) was chiefly ignored in subsequent policy development.³⁸

³⁷ <http://www.basicincome.org/news/2015/10/finnish-government-research-team-design-pilots/>.

³⁸ One of the few political parties who adopted basic income in its election platform, the Green Party, never acted on its commitment when (briefly) becoming a government coalition partner following the 2007 Irish general election (ARTICLE V).

A similar fate seems to have befallen legislative efforts in the US. After a marked interest in guaranteed income in the 1960s and early 1970s, policy attention seems to have shifted decidedly towards support of the working poor through the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in combination with highly residual programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Steenland, 2006, 2007; Caputo, 2012b; Widerquist and Sheahan, 2012).³⁹ A recent attempt to build on the tax credit mechanism proved ill-fated. In 2006, the Tax Credit for the Rest of Us Act (HR 5257) was introduced in the 109th US Congress by then Congressman Bob Filner (D-CA), co-sponsored by then Congressman Jesse L. Jackson (D-IL). The Act proposed “to transform the standard deduction and personal exemptions into a refundable standard tax credit (STC) of \$2,000 for each adult and \$1000 for each child” (Widerquist and Sheahan, 2012: 25), which would include the non-working poor. The Bill failed to gather legislative momentum and is currently stuck in the House Ways and Means Committee, with both sponsors since having moved on.⁴⁰

In Spain, and in particular in the autonomous region of Catalunya, the basic income debate reached the parliamentary floor on various occasions (Raventós, Wark and Casassas, 2012). Legislative bills were presented and discussed in both the Catalan and (twice) the Spanish parliaments, but again with little concrete results. In a move that many a basic income proponent thought would present a unique opportunity, on 28 April 2009 the Spanish parliament decided to set up a parliamentary subcommittee with the explicit remit to study the viability of basic income. However, this opportunity rapidly turned sour when the conservative Partido Popular, hostile to the basic income idea, gained electoral majority and Spain’s economy rapidly spiralled out of control. Spain is today experiencing one of the most traumatic manifestations of the economic crisis in the EU – youth employment stands at more than 50% — and discussion of basic income has become entirely relegated to grassroots movements such as the *Indignados*. For a brief time Podemos, a new political party firmly grounded in the anti-austerity movement and populated by many basic income supporters, became the standard-bearer of the Spanish basic income movement. Having won a significant number of seats in the 2014 European Parliament election and in the recent regional elections, Podemos was expected to be a leading contender for the 2015 general elections. The impact of a strong electoral performance by Podemos on the fate of basic

³⁹ EITC is an example of what Christopher Howard (1993, 1999) terms “the hidden welfare state”.

⁴⁰ Jesse L. Jackson retired from politics, while Bob Filner first became the 35th Mayor of San Diego in 2012 only to end up resigning less than a year later under a barrage of sexual harassment complaints.

income remains uncertain, however: for tactical reasons the party has downgraded the proposal to a long-term aspiration in its 2014 economic policy program (ARTICLE V). Despite this tactical move (or perhaps because of it), in recent months the electoral appeal of Podemos went in free-fall as many of its erstwhile supporters appear to be returning to the mainstream parties.⁴¹

The most telling example, however, comes from Brazil. The widely heralded Law No. 10.835 (*Lei de Renda Básica de Cidadania*), authored by Senator Eduardo Suplicy and signed into law by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on 8 January 2004, appears to have achieved little more than enshrining the basic income “principle” into Brazilian legislation. Although by all accounts a unique political achievement, in practice the Law is hampered by internal contradictions as well as too many provisions accommodating an “executive opt-out”. As Lena Lavinas (2006, 2012) has documented, one concern is the fact that a law which is meant to legislate for a universal grant contains a provision that the government implement the law in stages, prioritizing the poorest. “Its format thus combines mutually exclusive requirements, targeting the poorest and aiming for uniformity and universality” (Lavinas, 2012: 30).⁴² This problem is compounded by the absence of a timetable for implementation and its subordination to budgetary and developmental priorities, with decision power entirely relegated to the sole discretion of the Executive.

Meanwhile, Brazil has devoted all its resources to instituting the flagship policy of the Bolsa Família, a conditional and means-tested program. Although the leading proponent of basic income in Brazil, Senator Eduardo Suplicy, believes this to constitute a step towards instituting a full Citizen’s Basic Income, critics insist the Bolsa Família program has entirely usurped and “ostracized” the basic income legislation (Lavinas, 2012; also LoVuolo, 2012a, 2012b). Consider the recent discovery of 15.1 to 20.5 billion barrels of oil and gas in the pre-salt fields, a situation remarkably similar to the case of Alaska. This petroleum windfall generated ample political debate but failed to kickstart the budgetary process necessary to complete to implementation of the Citizen’s Basic Income, as stipulated by Law No. 10.835 (Lavinas, 2012: 42-43). Nearly a decade after

⁴¹ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/19/us-spain-politics-poll-idUSKCN0PT08G20150719>.

⁴² As Lavinas (2012: 40) explains, the original bill drafted by Senator Suplicy contained no reference to the controversial last sentence in paragraph 2, which details how the implementation will proceed in stages “at the criterion of the Executive Branch, prioritizing the neediest segments of the population.” This is an example of political compromise on relatively minor design elements having a disproportionate impact.

legislating for a Citizen's Basic Income, preciously little of a universal and unconditional income guarantee can be seen on the ground in today's Brazil.⁴³

2.3.3. *Alaska's Permanent Fund Dividend*

When basic income advocates talk about existing basic income policies, they principally point to the Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD), which since 1982 has paid each eligible resident an unconditional annual grant (Widerquist and Howard, 2012a). The Alaska scheme comprises two separate programs: the Alaska Permanent Fund (APF), a publicly owned investment portfolio funded by 25% of the state's oil revenue, and the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) which allocates an annual grant of roughly \$1,200 to each man, woman, and child who meets the residency requirement.⁴⁴ The PFD is the sole example of an economic policy combining resource taxation — effectively transforming a depleting natural resource into a “sovereign wealth fund” — with the distribution of (part of) the revenue stream to each individual resident shareholders.

The PFD has proven to be a very successful program, enjoying tremendous support from citizens across demographic, socioeconomic, and political divides. As Scott Goldsmith (2005: 558) pointedly relates, in Alaska today it amounts to “political suicide to suggest any policy change that could possibly have any adverse impact today, or in the future, on the size of the PFD.”⁴⁵ In addition, advocates of this Alaska model claim the PFD is a strongly egalitarian policy, for it grants each citizen an equal share of a natural resource that is held in common ownership, rendering it immune to many of the intricate problems facing tax-and-transfer-style redistributive programs.

Is the Alaska model a good example of a basic income scheme? While the PFD meets the conditions of universality, individuality and unconditionality (Widerquist and Howard, 2012c), several elements of the Alaska dividend limit its

⁴³ The municipality of Santo Antônio do Pinhal, which in 2009 established a small municipal CBI pilot project for its 6500 inhabitants, is a notable exception (Lavinias, 2012: 46).

⁴⁴ The 2015 dividend will amount to \$2,072 per person (<http://www.pfd.alaska.gov>), but the size of the dividend fluctuates in line with the value of the APF earnings (Goldsmith, 2005, 2012).

⁴⁵ The recent budget crisis in Alaska has nevertheless put considerable pressure on the Alaska Permanent Fund, leading Senator Bill Wielechowski (D-Anchorage) to propose a constitutional amendment to protect the Fund from political interference (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jan/9/first-wave-of-prefiled-legislation-introduced/>).

usefulness for the basic income debate writ large.⁴⁶ The first is the meagre level of the grant: fluctuating between a low of \$628 (in 1984) and a high of \$2533 (in 2000) depending on the value of APF earnings (Goldsmith, 2012 [all figures in 2010 dollars]), the level of the dividend is substantially smaller than what basic income advocates — even those advocating a modest partial basic income — have in mind.⁴⁷ My concern here is not just with the low level of the grant but also the fact that the amount fluctuates significantly from one year to another, which is highly problematic for any policy that has anti-poverty or equality-promoting ambitions (Zelleke, 2012). Finally, the fact that the grant is paid out annually importantly differs from the customary basic income model that emphasizes regular monthly payments (Van Parijs, 1995; Standing, 2006).⁴⁸ These design features raise questions about generalizing insights from the Alaska dividend in its current form on expected individual-level or aggregate effects of introducing a basic income.

A different concern arises from the particular funding source of the Alaska dividend and its associated politics. Resource dividends is one model that can be used to finance and justify an unconditional basic income, but it has very particular features that may poorly apply to models that depend on raising income or consumption taxes, or reducing other social programs to secure its funding.⁴⁹ Many commentators insist resource dividends are windfall gains that appear to create little opposition as they do not rely on appropriation or disentanglement. “No one has reason to feel burdened by its creation and continued existence. The yearly dividends are financed by the returns on state-owned investments. They don’t cut into anyone’s perceived ownership” (Widerquist and Howard, 2012c: 226). But if this is true, one cannot help but wonder why the Alaska scheme is the only one of over 50 Sovereign Wealth Funds that pays out individual dividends (Cummine, 2012)? One answer to this puzzle may be that “the case for a resource-funded basic income policy may not be compelling prior to its enactment”, even if it becomes “very popular very quickly once instituted” (Bryan and Castillo, 2012: 74). The politics of resource dividend *predistribution* is undoubtedly different from the

⁴⁶ Zelleke (2012) disputes that resource dividends should be regarded as a proper basic income.

⁴⁷ These figures correspond to 1.7% and 6.4% of per capita personal income (Goldsmith, 2012: 49-50). Karl Widerquist and Michael Howard (2012c) believe this amount is non-trivial for low income families once we take into account the pooling of resources, but this also entails basic income can no longer remain indifferent to personal circumstances (here, household composition).

⁴⁸ A meagre yearly dividend falls short of what Standing (2002) terms the “Basic Security Principle”, in a manner that is reminiscent of the problems of stakeholder grants (Standing 2006).

⁴⁹ An extreme example of the latter is Charles Murray’s “Plan”, which proposes a basic income of \$10,000 per annum almost entirely funded by dismantling the US welfare state (Murray, 2006).

traditional politics of *redistribution* (Korpi and Palme, 1998; O’Neill and Williamson, 2012; Taylor-Gooby, 2013).

But here precisely lies another problem, for a basic income grounded in a resource dividend scheme may fail to be properly accountable, and even become regressive. On accountability, Bryan and Castillo (2012: 77) argue that since governments don’t have to obtain their revenue directly from the electorate, they will perceive opportunity costs of expenditures less clearly and this in turn implies less accountability.⁵⁰ The absence of income taxation — the feature that its proponents argue make resource dividends politically palatable — implies that resource-taxed basic income schemes have at best a modest impact on inequality reduction but more likely have “an overall regressive effect on income distribution” (Zelleke, 2012: 151). While the PFD is sometimes held to be responsible for making Alaska the most equal state in the United States (e.g., Vanderborght and Van Parijs 2005: 25), the empirical support for this bold claim remains weak.⁵¹ At the very least, this urges caution when relying on the Alaska model to argue for the benefits of introducing a basic income elsewhere (*pace* Widerquist and Howard, 2012b; Casassas and De Wispelaere, 2012).

2.3.3 Iran’s Basic Income Out of Price Subsidies

In recent years a second scheme has inspired basic income advocates as a model of how to institute a basic income. Both its location – Iran – and the pathway by which it came about are peculiar, to put it mildly. Like the Alaska scheme, the Iranian model is based on oil resources. However, in this case the funding does not come from a sovereign wealth fund, but instead from reforming the price subsidies on consumption. Iran, a major oil producer and exporter, for many years used the proceeds to implicitly subsidize the domestic consumption of private individuals and enterprises by keeping oil prices at one of the lowest in the region.⁵² This

⁵⁰ This argument puts the common view that resource dividends immunize revenue from political influence into a critical perspective. See Levi (1988) and Steinmo (1996) for an in-depth discussion of the politics of taxation.

⁵¹ This is true despite *some* evidence of a levelling effect of the dividend on after-tax income in Alaska (Goldsmith 2005, 2012).

⁵² “By official estimates, the subsidy bill in recent years has been of the order of \$100–120 billion annually, of which 70 percent went to only 30 percent of the population, mostly in urban areas” (Tabatabai, 2012b: 20). Thus, in addition to encouraging massive oil consumption the subsidy also disproportionately benefited the urban population at the expense of the rural, worse-off population.

extraordinary situation is untenable in the long run and, in a move towards rationalization, in December 2010 Iran initiated the first stage of a five year reform program (Tabatabai, 2011, 2012a, 2012b).

The reform program removes implicit subsidies, which amounts to a manifold price increase, in combination with the provision of a monthly cash transfer of Rl 455,000 (roughly \$45) per resident Iranian.⁵³ The explicit aim of the transfer is to compensate private individuals, business (e.g., to stimulate use of energy-efficient production technology) and even the government for the cost of rapid price increases on oil and fuel products.⁵⁴ Any effects on poverty or economic inequality are surplus to the goal of effectively rationalizing oil consumption without causing a massive uproar or widespread economic devastation.

Cash transfers are universally and uniformly paid independent of means or work tests, albeit to household heads — thus conforming to a de facto basic income (Tabatabai, 2011). The Iranian government initially wanted to restrict the transfer to the 70% of the population with incomes lower than the national average. However, it ran into many practical problems trying to identify the relevant beneficiaries, and in the end pragmatically decided to drop any restrictions.⁵⁵

“Rather than alienating a part of the population, the government eventually decided to abandon the exercise and declared everyone eligible for transfers, at least initially. The universal basic income was thus born as a means of ensuring wider public support for the price reform.” (Tabatabai, 2012: 20)

Government appealed to the better-off to voluntarily withdraw from the scheme, but as the value of the cash transfer became apparent and registration modalities simplified, many more applied for the transfer than originally planned: immediately after implementation, “the number of participants rose from 60 million to 72.5 million, or from 80 percent of the population to 96

⁵³ Both non-resident Iranians and non-Iranian residents are excluded from the benefits, whereas the latter nonetheless face the burden of the price hike.

⁵⁴ The scale of price increases ranges from 75% to 2,000%, depending on the item (Tabatabai, 2012a: 290).

⁵⁵ Government faced discontent over attempts to register individual households (which required providing social and economic information most objected to revealing to the government), the use of individual-level proxy indicators such as family loans or car ownership, or the use of broad categories such as regional residence (for variation in the amount of cash transfer) (Tabatabai, 2012a, 2012b).

percent” (Tabatabai, 2012b: 22). The near-universality of the basic income grant in Iran emerged quasi-spontaneously, rather than by design.⁵⁶

There are several intriguing features to the Iran basic income model. First and foremost, there is a marked similarity with the Alaska dividend, where politicians faced a decision on how to preserve the wealth associated with a newly discovered (and finite) natural resource. In Iran, too, there appears to have been no explicit discussion of providing a guaranteed income floor to resident Iranians out of concerns with poverty or inequality. Instead, as Hamid Tabatabai (2012b: 24) explains, “the birth of a *de facto* basic income owe much to the fact that cash transfers are universally seen as compensation for the loss of subsidies, not as a right or entitlement without a *quid pro quo*. That is how the hurdle of reciprocity was overcome.” In Iran, even more so than in Alaska, basic income emerges as a byproduct of economic policy. In both cases, the boost in income security was a fortunate side-effect.

The question remains whether the model is easy to export elsewhere.⁵⁷ In Iran, several factors combine to explain the fortuitous emergence of basic income: a pre-existing (implicit) price subsidy on a widely consumed good, at a level that is so high it is both distortionary — which gives government strong incentives for reform — and able to fund a basic income through the price differential after reform. The closest alternative for countries where such clear-cut price subsidies are not present would be a basic income funded through a consumption or a green tax.⁵⁸ However, this implies a distinctive type of politics altogether, departing from the focus on compensating-for-loss that defines the Iranian experience.⁵⁹

Moreover, even in Iran it is an open question whether the current cash transfer system will remain in place once the five year reform period is completed. Given its reliance on oil, the provision of the cash transfer is vulnerable to fluctuations in international oil prices and, to a much lesser degree (at least in the short run), availability of oil production (Tabatabai, 2012b). Once the reform completed, government may decide to keep the cash transfer nominally in place but at a

⁵⁶ For a model that introduces near-universality by design, see Eyal (2010).

⁵⁷ Philippe Van Parijs (2010) believes the price subsidy model is far superior to the resource dividend scheme because it is applicable to resource-poor countries (or, presumably, countries that have resources but are unwilling or unable to turn them into sovereign wealth funds).

⁵⁸ There are interesting similarities between the Iran model and the cap-and-dividend approach advocated by Howard (2012) in the context of reducing carbon emissions.

⁵⁹ The Iran case constitutes a clear example of the politics of blame-avoidance (Weaver, 1986).

deflated real value, thus further eroding the income guarantee component of this basic income.⁶⁰

The immediate challenge, however, appears to be the intense financial pressure on the system.⁶¹ In part because of miscalculating the expected revenue and in part because of increased demand after eligibility criteria were relaxed, 80% of the revenue from higher fuel prices go towards funding private household transfers (instead of the originally budgeted 50%). With the budget fixed by law, the future stability of the program requires a significant adjustment by either reducing the transfer amount for all or else giving up on the principle of near-universality and reintroducing the notion of eligibility criteria (Tabatabai, 2012a, 2012b). Neither solution is very appealing from the perspective of basic income.⁶²

Other elements of the Iranian case may also limit its suitability as a general basic income model. Cash transfers are paid to household heads because they are presumed to pay the fuel bill, and are thus the ones entitled to the compensation. As Tabatabai (2011) rightly notes, the Iranian basic income is independent of household composition — and in this sense, appropriately “individualized” — nevertheless there are good reasons why advocates insist that a basic income is paid to each individual separately (e.g., Pateman, 2003, 2004).

Furthermore, the same questions about effects on poverty and inequality that concern critics of the Alaska dividend such as Almaz Zelleke (2012) appear in the case of the Iranian cash transfer. Tabatabai (2012a: 292) believes the reform to have positive effects on income inequality, but since hard data are not available it is impossible to say how much. However, we should keep in mind the specificity of fuel consumption in Iran when considering exporting the Iranian model to other countries: effects on poverty and inequality will vary considerably depending on the choice of goods affected by any price reform. Moreover, the strict compensation rationale underlying the Iran model prevents it from addressing these concerns head on.

Finally, it is interesting to compare the Iranian experience with public support with that of Alaska, where the mere implementation of the PFD and the receipt of

⁶⁰ As a result of the economic sanctions against Iran and the resulting inflationary pressures, the real value of the cash transfer is conservatively estimated to have halved since 2010 (Hamid Tabatabai, personal correspondence on 24/05/2013).

⁶¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/19/iran-ahmadinejad-cash-handouts-rouhani>.

⁶² The strict choice between transfer level and universality is of course a consequence of the Iranian basic income being a byproduct of price reform. But this precisely shows the limits of using the Iranian case as a model for instituting a basic income explicitly designed to set a guaranteed income floor.

regular dividends appeared to have built its own constituency (Goldsmith 2005, 2012; Bryan and Castillo, 2012; Widerquist and Howard, 2012c). In Iran, the prospect of subsidy reform caused major anxiety across the population, and the purpose of the cash transfer was precisely to stymie public concern.⁶³ In part this was successful, as the population by-and-large seems to have accepted the reform. Nevertheless, the public response to the scheme is far from universally supportive. Many think compensation is better “redirected to other priorities, for example, job creation or expansion of public services” (Tabatabai, 2012b: 30). There is certainly no support for universality as such. The results of a recent opinion poll seem to suggest that a majority (62%) doubt the transfer is able to cover the extra expenses due to increased fuel prices for most households. Further, more people rate the likelihood of the cash transfers enduring over time as low or very low compared to those who rate it high or very high (42% compared with 36%) (Tabatabai, 2012b: 30). Whereas in the Alaska case there seems to have emerged a strong political constituency in favour of dividends, in Iran the public support remains comparatively weak.⁶⁴

2.3.4 *Basic Income Cognates as Stepping Stones?*

Whatever the merits or demerits of the two schemes outlined above, they may prove too idiosyncratic to serve as apt models for instituting a basic income guarantee in a policy context that diverges considerably from Alaska or Iran. There is another option. Perhaps we should take a closer look at policies that are not basic income models strictly speaking, but nevertheless have one or more elements in common with a basic income scheme. We can call these “basic income cognates”.⁶⁵ Isolating these elements could still teach us important lessons to move the institution of basic income forward in a piecemeal manner. Taking it one step

⁶³ Government consideration of public anxiety went as far as to affect the particular design of the scheme: in addition to making the cash transfer universal, government also decided to pay out on a monthly rather than bi-monthly basis as originally planned (Tabatabai, 2012b: 29).

⁶⁴ This does not mean we should not expect a significant reaction if cash transfers were abruptly discontinued. The results of the poll referred to earlier could as easily be explained in terms of general lack to trust in government as an assessment of the subsidy reform, but I have no information to confirm either option.

⁶⁵ I borrow the term from Van Parijs, Jacquette and Salinas (2000), who refer to policies that produce *outcomes* similar to basic income. By contrast, I employ the term to designate policies that share *design properties* without conforming to a genuine basic income model.

farther, cognate policies could quite literally serve as a *stepping stone* for implementing a basic income policy (e.g., Jordan, 2011, 2012).

One such cognate policy are the Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs), already briefly mentioned in a previous section. CCTs have become one of the dominant anti-poverty tools in Africa and especially Latin-America (LoVuolo, 2012b).⁶⁶ The details vary extensively but the general approach in all cases is to combine short-term poverty alleviation with long-term human capital-building. A typical scenario is for poor households with children to receive a cash grant on condition of school attendance and regular health check-ups for children, including vaccination requirements. Failure to comply with these conditions may result in financial penalties or even being removed from the program. The resulting incentives, proponents argue, ensure not only effective poverty alleviation but also a significant positive impact on health and education, which is a strong factor in reducing poverty in the long run (World Bank, 2009).

The effectiveness of CCTs remains disputed, in part because the more stringent schemes may have negative effects on those households — including the children (Barrientos and DeJong, 2006) — found to be non-compliant. One important study employing a randomized control trial designed to compare the effects of conditional and unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) found that “CCTs are likely to be more effective in improving outcomes that may be strongly affected by compliance with the conditions, such as test scores. UCTs may be preferred if there are many non-compliers who might experience strong and socially beneficial effects from regular income support. If non-compliers can be thought of as a vulnerable group in a given context, UCTs may deserve careful consideration given the possible trade-offs indicated in this study” (Baird, McIntosh and Ozlek, 2011: 1749). Nevertheless, CCTs play an important role in establishing the superiority of cash transfers, to be used by the recipient without strings attached⁶⁷, over vouchers or food aid in addressing issues of poverty and social inequality (Standing, 2008). Even in a developed world context, the idea remains prevalent that when we give people a non-directive benefit, many will use it in an inappropriate manner (Paxton and White, 2006; Goodin, 2003; LeGrand, 2004).

⁶⁶ Mexico’s *Progresas*, recently renamed *Oportunidades*, is often credited as the main inspiration for CCTs. Brazil’s *Bolsa Família* discussed before is perhaps one of the best known examples of a CCT. CCTs are also implemented in developed countries. For example, a three-year pilot CCT program in New York City ended in early 2010 (http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/html/programs/opportunity_nyc.shtml).

⁶⁷ The receipt of a benefit entails two dimensions of conditionality: eligibility for receipt and conditions of use. CCTs allow the free use of cash transfer but retain conditionality on (continued) eligibility; by contrast, a basic income scheme removes both types of conditionality.

CCTs of course remain highly conditional and thus are far removed from the universal approach basic income advocates. Ruben LoVuolo (2012b: 7) raises a key question, asking “whether they can then be viewed as a first step toward the application of a [basic income]” or instead “constitute a deterrent for such a proposal?” While some seem optimistic that there is a straightforward road from CCTs to a more universal and inclusive unconditional transfer approach (e.g. Standing, 2008), the case of Brazil seems to indicate the contrary (Lavinias, 2006, 2012).⁶⁸ While establishing the case for using cash transfers rather than directed aid, CCTs may nevertheless plant firm hurdles in the way of policy avenues to graft an unconditional basic income approach onto this basis. The resulting path dependence should not be underestimated (Pierson, 1993, 2004).

A similar fate afflicts a second cognate policy that has recently been likened to a basic income. While there has been little explicit acceptance of the basic income principle in the UK, Bill Jordan (2012: 1) argues that a first step towards the establishment of a universal basic income lies “concealed within a load of cuts, conditionality and means-testing” of the former coalition government’s proposals for administrative simplification of the tax–benefit system through the Universal Credit.⁶⁹ The UK has embarked on a major overhaul of the welfare system, to be phased in from October 2013 onwards.⁷⁰ The main goal is to make work pay and reduce administrative waste and fraud by integrating several benefit programs into one refundable tax credit that applies a single, progressive withdrawal rate to in-work benefits (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012: 41).⁷¹ Combined with increasingly stringent work requirements, the Universal Credit is meant to incentivize recipients

⁶⁸ The most recent development of the *Bolsa Familia* sees it expanded in a manner that further strengthens its “workfarist” dimension (Lavinias, 2012: 39–40), making its transformation into a basic income even less likely.

⁶⁹ The 2015 General Election returned a majority Conservative government, which has pledged to continue rolling out the Universal Credit.

⁷⁰ The planned pilot in four local authorities, scheduled to precede the national launch of the scheme in October 2013, was delayed and radically scaled down to a single borough in Greater Manchester (barely covering 300 claimants per month) due to persistent IT failures and delays in implementation (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/apr/26/universal-credit-pilot-launch>). Meanwhile, the program is gradually rolled-out across the UK, with completion forecast around the end of 2019 (revised upwards from 2017).

⁷¹ Specifically, the following working-age programs are subsumed under the new Universal Credit: Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income-Based Employment and Support Allowance, Income-Based Job Seeker’s Allowance, Income Support, and Working Tax Credit. Child Benefit and Council Tax Benefit remain separate. See Royston (2012: 70ff) for details.

to work (or work more) by allowing them to retain more of their benefits even when working in so-called “mini-jobs” (low pay, few hours work).⁷²

The newly minted program has proven highly contentious, even before its fraught implementation became public knowledge. Estimates suggest work incentives will not be universally positive and, contrary to the proclaimed aims, many workers will face higher marginal deduction rates and thus still face a benefits trap (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012). Council Tax rules that vary across the UK are likely to undermine the supposed advantages of the Universal Credit, and create severe horizontal inequality (Royston, 2012). Relatedly, paired with increased work conditioning for both groups currently out of work, the Universal Credit will impose further hardship on many individuals and households already hit hard by the economic crisis, notably the severely disabled.⁷³ Claims by the government that the Universal Credit will generally benefit low income groups seem hard to sustain in light of the focus on cuts as part of the coalition’s austerity program (Dean, 2012). Clearly, the Universal Credit is very far removed from being a basic income, whatever its name might suggest.

This point is of course well taken by Bill Jordan (2011, 2012) and other basic income advocates. They are perfectly aware how far removed Universal Credit is from the basic income ideal, but insist that tax benefits integration is a precondition for — and thus one big step towards — establishing a basic income.

“But whereas New Labour’s tax credit scheme emphasized the difference between in-work support and out-of-work benefits, the new proposals aim at simplicity and consistency by integrating benefits into the tax system, and this is the step which *opens up the way to gradually de-stigmatizing all state payments, and ultimately removing all the conditions which surround them.*” (Jordan, 2011: 2-3, italics added)

⁷² The initial proposal in the White Paper was for a 55% withdrawal rate, which changed into 65% in the actual legislation. However, even this simple rate is misleading, since the taper applies in combination with tax and social insurance contributions, the effective marginal tax rate can rapidly rise to in excess of 80% for some workers (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012: 47). It is worth noting that the estimated administrative cost of rolling out Universal Credit has been revised from an initial £2.2billion to £12.8billion in August 2014, a more than five-fold increase.

⁷³ Disability groups in the UK have been increasingly protesting the government’s emphasis on “sorting” the disabled into a group that “really” can’t work and those “shirkers” or “scroungers” that seem to take advantage of their purported illness or disability (Garthwaite, 2011).

Others have similarly emphasized tax benefits integration as a necessary condition for basic income to genuinely have a universal scope (LoVuolo, 2012b; Healy and Reynolds, 2012a).

A further important feature is that administration will be centralized through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which ought to make it easier for claimants to obtain the benefit — at least in theory.⁷⁴ This contrast with the current system, where HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) manages tax credits and the DWP administers most means-tested benefits (Brewer, Browne and Jin, 2012: 46). However, a Major Projects Authority (MPA) review of major Whitehall projects rated the welfare reform flagship at amber-red status, the category designating a project as being in danger of failing, and more recently listed it as “reset”.⁷⁵ What looks simple on paper proves rather complicated to deliver in the real world. These unfortunate developments are in line with recent work in the administrative hurdles faced by exceedingly “simple” policies such as basic income (ARTICLE II and III).

Granting Bill Jordan and Rubén LoVuolo their view that tax benefit integration is a key element for making basic income work (also Noguera, 2001), the question still remains whether a highly conditional program such as the UK Universal Credit should really be regarded as a stepping stone towards basic income. Bill Jordan seems to waver on this point. On the one hand, he observes “there is a real danger that the Duncan Smith⁷⁶ reforms will not be the first step towards a more just and equal order, but the consolidation of a profoundly unequal and exploitative one” (Jordan, 2012: 12). On the other hand, Jordan now⁷⁷ seems to think the imperative of cost-saving will over time turn against the labour market activation components, resulting in a more relaxed attitude towards voluntary participation instead of work conscription (Jordan, 2012: 14).

Unfortunately, this amounts to an example of wishful thinking. Historical evidence and public opinion clearly favours a strong moral division between the deserving and undeserving poor (e.g., van Oorschot, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2013), the so-called “cultural categories of worth” permeating the ideology of the welfare

⁷⁴ See in particular Seddon and O’Donovan (2013) for a critical review of the practical issues.

⁷⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/23/universal-credit-reset-ian-duncan-smith>.

⁷⁶ Ian Duncan Smith, MP is the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions responsible for the Universal Credit. The program was conceived in 2009 at the conservative think tank he founded and chaired, the Centre for Social Justice.

⁷⁷ He used to take a more skeptical view, see Jordan (1988).

state in Europe and the US (Steensland, 2006).⁷⁸ This gives us little reason to think conditions of need and, especially, willingness-to-work will disappear any time soon merely because they are costly. In the absence of identifiable policy levers that move us towards a genuinely universal scheme, we have little reason to regard tax benefit integration in the UK as anything but a scheme that reinforces the workfare state. I will return to this point in subsequent sections.

2.4 Political Lessons in a Constrained Policy Environment

Basic income advocates have high aspirations. Inspired by Thomas Paine's vision, they view basic income as a policy instrument that is capable of addressing many of the economic and social ills that permeate societies in both the developed and developing worlds. Ensuring every individual citizen a guaranteed income, they argue, plays a key role in combating poverty and promoting equality and social inclusion. It is true that this broad view comprises many variegated proposals, but on the standard view these are mere details to be resolved at later stage.

Putting basic income on the political agenda and push governments to seriously consider its implementation, however, has proven quite a challenge. On this front, there seems to be uncertainty and disagreement both in terms of where we are — has basic income now moved up on the political agenda, or not? — and where we should go next. What lessons, if any, can we learn from the diverse attempts at pushing for basic income around the world (Rose, 1991)? The brief survey of attempts to move basic income up on the political agenda in the world points at three broad sets of cases, each raising a particular concern regarding the politics of basic income.

To begin with, the bulk of campaigns to directly push for a basic income guarantee were blocked at various points on the long (and winding) road towards legislation. The cases of Ireland, Spain and the US demonstrate how important windows of opportunity nevertheless fail to produce basic income legislation, with legislative efforts effectively thwarted at various points in the political process. Basic income advocates often point at successes, such as the Irish Government producing a Green Paper or Spain setting up a Parliamentary Commission, in a way that fails to appreciate the many political hurdles that must be scaled before basic income

⁷⁸ Active framing of poverty discourse in the media plays an important role in maintaining the distinction between those deserving or undeserving of social support (Slothuus, 2007; Bang-Petersen et al., 2010; Rose and Baumgartner, 2013).

becomes policy reality. As I argue below, a critical problem beseeching basic income is the misplaced optimism attached to “gratuitous” support from political entrepreneurs or political parties, which fails to pay off in terms of political resources spent to shepherd the policy across the many hurdles (ARTICLE V).

The Brazilian experience is even more instructive of the Herculean proportions of the task at hand. Despite having dedicated basic income legislation on the books, the odds of the *Lei de Renda Básica de Cidadania* ever becoming instituted in a way that remains faithful to its aspirations seem very remote. As Lavinás (2006, 2012) has pointed out, this is partly due to how the law itself was drafted — small compromises in wording for the sake of getting the legislation approved are now having a disproportionately negative impact — but in large part because of the broader policy context, notably the existence of the *Bolsa Família* as a dominant competitor.⁷⁹ Here, there is an important political lesson to be learned about being wary about compromising legislative efforts in a way that subsequently renders its implementation hostage to the whims of political agents with little sympathy for (or interest in) furthering its cause. The larger lesson, however, must be an appreciation of the difficulties of pushing through a basic income in a direct manner, without having secured sufficient political support to steer the proposal around the many bottlenecks in the legislative process.

Basic income “stepping stones”, such as the CCT programs in place throughout Latin America or (more controversially) the Universal Credit in the UK, at first blush offer a more feasible approach to instituting basic income. Instead of taking the principled high road to pushing for what many still deem a radical proposal, basic income advocates might instead opt for the “low road” (Jordan, 2012) of building on existing policies, using an incremental approach of “muddling through” (Lindblom, 1959, 1979). Its proponents argue that the low road to basic income already puts in place some key conditions — such as the role of cash transfers or the integration of tax and benefits — without which a well-functioning basic income would not be feasible. With these steps already in place, the subsequent rolling out of basic income should prove much easier (compare Bonoli and Palier, 2007).

There are several problems with this line of argument, however. The fact that some background conditions are required does not as such mean that having them already in place implies a decisive advantage. First off, it may be possible to institute the necessary conditions for successful implementation fairly easily at a

⁷⁹ The Brazil experience points at how the layering of programs and the internal competition this generates can thwart the stability of a policy (Schickler, 2001; also ARTICLE VI).

later stage, in which case the alleged benefits of using cognates as a stepping stone are overplayed. More importantly, having these background conditions in place may hamper rather than help the case for basic income. One way in which this could happen is if the aspect of the cognate policy that is supposed to put us on the low road to a basic income fails.⁸⁰ A different problem is that moving from here to there is far from “automatic”: advocates of incrementalism still need to identify the *policy levers* that would transform the cognate policy into a proper basic income. This is a major impediment to gradual policy reform.

This is certainly the case where cognate policies remain wedded to the idea of means-testing or work-conditionality, which is a very difficult barrier to overcome (Steensland, 2006, 2007). Even with cash transfers and tax benefit integration in place, conditional cognate policies may simply have moved onto an entirely different path from that of a universal and unconditional basic income — a path from which it is very difficult to deviate over time.⁸¹ The main lesson of this set of cases is that, in the absence of clear mechanisms that function as policy or political levers, we ought to be careful about imputing the sequence, direction or speed of dynamic policy transformation. The low road to basic income is an important contender for a political strategy that takes into account the difficulties of pushing head-on for a basic income guarantee, but merely constituting an alternative road does not guarantee its success.

What about the third set of cases, the PFD in Alaska and the compensations for oil pricing reform in Iran? Here we seem to find policies that all but in name amount to a basic income, and are indeed put forward as models to be emulated elsewhere for that reason (Widerquist and Howard, 2012b). Here too, the picture is not as straightforward as often painted by its advocates. First, there is little dispute that the schemes currently implemented in Alaska and Iran leave something to be desired from the perspective of a full-blown basic income guarantee, whether it be the low level and variation of the grant, payment on a yearly rather than monthly basis, payment through households rather than individuals, or indeed uncertainty of the stability of the program over time (ARTICLE VI). Addressing these shortcomings within the particular policy context in which these schemes emerged

⁸⁰ In the UK example, the current difficulties of practically implementing the reform may lead the government to alter its proposed tax benefit integration in a way that would negate its role in a future basic income policy, or even abandon the approach altogether. The difficulties of integrating the council tax into the proposed scheme is often mentioned in this regard.

⁸¹ On the importance of path dependence and in particular the role of timing and sequencing in policy processes, see Pierson (1993, 2004).

may be problematic, for reasons mentioned (Zelleke 2012; Tabatabai, 2012a, 2012b).

The main limitation of these programs lies elsewhere, however. Both Alaska and Iran provide us with a (limited) basic income as a *byproduct* of a process aimed at, respectively, creating a sovereign wealth fund (Alaska) or reforming implicit subsidies on oil (Iran). These schemes may be performing admirably given their intended purpose, but this purpose is explicitly *not* to grant each citizen a basic income guarantee. Differences between the two examples aside, the many different grounds by which we can justify a basic income provide us with a radically different rationale for policy development from the one underlying Alaska or Iran. The absence of a well-formulated *independent* rationale for a basic income guarantee restricts not only the expansion of the extant programs in Alaska or Iran, but more importantly also limits their use as models for introducing a basic income elsewhere.

2.5 Under the Hood: Diversity Within the Basic Income Idea

I want to conclude this section by arguing that the cases discussed in the previous section points at a major challenge for basic income research and advocacy. Taken together, these cases strongly suggest that basic income advocacy is not about promoting the *generic form* of basic income outlined at the outset of this section. Instead, there are multiple reasons for endorsing a basic income, each of which specify a *particular* basic income model. For instance, some reasons for having a basic income insist on it being sufficient to cover basic needs — with some commentators even insisting on this feature as an integral part of the definition of basic income (Zelleke, 2012) — while others deliberately leave open this aspect (Van Parijs, 1991, 1995, 2004). This has important implications for the politics of basic income, as I will explain below: not only is the scope for forming a broad coalition in support of basic income smaller than expected (ARTICLE III and V), but the *strategies* available to pursue one's goal are equally reduced.

In particular, political strategies that may only get us partly to the goal of adopting a basic income guarantee congruent with the reasons for having such a scheme appear to be of little use. Consider again the cases of Alaska and Iran. Both of these cases depend on basic income essentially emerging as a byproduct. But the failure to enunciate strong reasons in favour of a basic income guarantee in both cases affect the design — and, by implication, the outcomes — of the policy

implemented. From the perspective of the basic income advocate, this generates at best a seriously watered-down version of the intended policy.⁸² By contrast, staying true to one's policy rationale and directly pushing for a specific design that will faithfully deliver a proper basic income guarantee is likely to encounter political resistance, as the cases of Ireland, Spain and even Brazil illustrate.

What emerges is that basic income advocates face a strategic choice between either promoting a *specific* basic income model, which they believe is justified by a particular set of principled or pragmatic reasons, but in doing so they face tremendous political opposition from political entrepreneurs and the general public who oppose *this* basic income model; or promoting the *generic* idea of basic income, which allows them to use a wider range of policies as stepping stones, but at the cost of potentially⁸³ ending up with a basic income scheme that falls short of the social ideal. There are no easy solutions, for the politics of basic income requires that we continuously balance the requirements of feasibility and desirability. In this dissertation I propose to examine in some detail the internal disagreements and division within the basic income debate, taking seriously the notion of basic income as a *policy instrument*.

⁸² One might think having a watered-down version of a basic income is better than none at all, but this precisely depends on the particular normative arguments that underpin one's case for a basic income (Casassas and De Wispelaere, 2012).

⁸³ "Potentially" here refers to two different type of contingencies. On the one hand, there is the contingency of whether a policy lever can be found that pushes the generic basic income as close as possible to one's preferred design. On the other hand, along the way, different factions supporting the generic model of basic income will separate into those whose preferred specific model gets adopted, and those who will have to compromise.

3. The Many Faces of Universal Basic Income

“Asking about the pros or cons of basic income as such is rather like asking about the pros and cons of keeping a feline as a pet without distinguishing between a tiger and a tabby.”

Brian Barry, 2001: 63

In this section I briefly discuss several aspects of basic income design that feature in the contemporary policy debate and the associated scholarly literature. The main aim is to show how the generic basic income model (“type”) that we encounter in such debates in fact masks a wide variety of concrete policies (“tokens”).⁸⁴ This opens the prospect of ethical disagreement and political division around specific basic income schemes; disagreement which is often obscured by the more visible opposition between those advocating basic income as an unconditional citizen’s right and those wedded to traditional welfare policies that retain a strong commitment to selectivity.

I would like to stress at the outset that the discussion in this section does not diminish the fact that basic income constitutes a significant departure from the familiar welfare state models based on Bismarkean or Beveridgean principles (Van Parijs, 1995b; Noguera, 2001). Nevertheless, I believe the basic income debate should welcome a corrective which sheds an important light on its *internal variation*, for reasons that are developed in Sections 4 and 5. Basic income constitutes not a single ideal, but rather a family of policies that harbours “many faces” in terms of design, aims, and expected social as well as political effects.

3.1 Dimensions of Universal Basic Income⁸⁵

As the debate on the desirability and feasibility of universal basic income reaches maturity, the standard definition of basic income as “an income unconditionally

⁸⁴ On the role of basic income “types” and “tokens”, see ARTICLE VI.

⁸⁵ This subsection is a revised version of De Wispelaere and Stirton (2004).

paid to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement” (Van Parijs, 1992a: 3), may no longer capture the diversity of policies advanced within the basic income community. In this section I briefly outline eight key dimensions along which concrete basic income proposals can be differentiated.

3.1.1 *Universality*

Universality refers to the extent of the population that is covered by a given policy. Typically, universal policies are open to all, while more selective measures single out a subset of the population as beneficiaries. One category of subjects often excluded from even the most universal schemes is non-citizens (however defined), while more selective measures discriminate even farther to restrict eligibility to a subset of individuals (or groups) within the reference population (Van Parijs, 2004). Selectivity immediately invokes debate regarding the principles and mechanisms employed to decide on eligibility (van Oorschot, 2002). In practice this implies building in some level of conditionality, discussed further below. The crucial point, however, is that universalism and selectivity are mutually exclusive.

Selective measures should not be confused with targeting in policy, however. Although all selective policies are necessarily targeted, *targeting within universalism* exists as well (Skocpol, 1991). For instance, policies can be designed to disproportionately benefit, say, the lower income percentiles by granting them a more generous allocation of an otherwise universal benefit.⁸⁶ Policies can also be targeted within universalism to the extent that even the same uniform allocation clearly benefits one group over another. This is arguably the case for basic income, where “giving to all, rich and poor, is not meant to make things better for the rich” (Van Parijs, 2004: 13). Interestingly, as the two scenarios above indicate, targeting can occur both at the level of *policy intention* (through differential allocation rules) or at the level of *policy outcomes* (same rules with different impact) (Van Lancker and Van Mechelen, 2015).

Basic income advocates often favour an incremental approach to instituting a full basic income (Jordan, 2012). One way in which this could be done is to have basic income type policies in a specific domain — child benefit, basic pension or sabbatical accounts — which are then gradually expanded or “universalized” over time (Offe, 2001; Frankel and Mulvale, 2014). However, we must remain cautious

⁸⁶ To illustrate, the (now discontinued) Child Trust Fund granted each newborn a £250 start-up fund, while those from poor families received an initial £500 stake. See Section 2 for discussion.

about attaching too much importance to the label and ignoring what happens on the ground. As I argue in Section 5, basic income advocates sometimes put too much faith in *nominal* over *substantive* universalism: the former obtains when formal barriers to eligibility are removed, while the latter requires that all those entitled effectively receive their basic income (ARTICLE III). In what follows I review various ways in which basic income schemes satisfy different degrees of universalism, as well as other salient dimensions in which concrete basic income proposals can be practically differentiated.

3.1.2 Individuality

Individuality refers to the standard unit at which a policy is directed. Welfare policy schemes commonly face a choice between administering their services either directly to individuals or to the household unit.⁸⁷ Basic income is routinely advocated as a form of income support that caters to individuals in two senses: the level of the grant is calculated independent of household situation, and it is allocated to individuals directly (Van Parijs, 2004). However, some advocates, mainly for reasons of goodness-of-fit with traditional approaches in welfare policy, have been willing to compromise on this and recommend instituting a basic income targeted to households (e.g., Offe, Muckenberger and Ostner, 1996). The dimension of individuality therefore does not lose its relevance for the basic income debate.

In the case of households many questions arise with respect to the appropriate definition of a household and its internal composition. Tony Atkinson (1998) distinguishes four types of household units, each with its own delineation and composition problems: “households” based on common residence; “spending units” based on common spending patterns; “family units” defined by blood ties or marriage; and finally the “inner family” defined in terms of a sustained dependence relationship. Switching from one household base to another in policy design has been shown to imply up to a quarter of reductions in the measurement of people on low income (Atkinson, 1998: 34-35). In short, measuring the actual effects of welfare policies is highly sensitive to choice of household type, and the same applies to basic income (Zelleke, 2007).

⁸⁷ The household unit is then assumed to be an indirect conduit for allocating benefits to individuals. However, many difficulties prevent this from happening in practice (McKay and Vanevery, 2000; Jepsen and Meulders, 2002).

From a normative point of view, the chief sources of concern are the often arbitrary discrimination of life-style choices associated with household-based policies; unacceptable inequalities between single-income and double-income households and between single persons and double-income households, at times leading to perverse redistributive effects from the poor to the well-off; and the fact that non-individualized rights often generate employment traps or lock partners into a dependence relation (McKay, 2001, 2007; Zelleke, 2011). While conservative political factions are often keen to use welfare policies to strengthen the traditional nuclear family unit (Lewis, 1992; Wax, 2009), the increasing variation of living arrangements within and across generations suggests this argument may have outlived its usefulness (Esping-Andersen, 2009). Although much attention has recently been devoted to the effects of individualizing benefits on intra-householder power relations, the research remains surprisingly ambivalent about its implications for basic income.⁸⁸

3.1.3 Conditionality

Conditionality refers to the extent of conditions built into a policy that may restrict a person's (continued) eligibility for a service. Most welfare policies come with different types of conditions attached that recipients need to satisfy to gain or maintain eligibility. Basic income is distinctive precisely in that it is purportedly unconditional or, failing that, at the very least only employs conditions that do not violate the programme's inclusiveness. An example of a conditionality requirement that ostensibly barely affects inclusiveness is Tony Atkinson's (1996, 2014) well-known proposal for a participation income. Atkinson's intention was to design a scheme that avoids political resistance by imposing a broad and inclusive participation requirement (including, for instance, care work, volunteering and education activities).⁸⁹

To understand better the dimension of conditionality a number of distinctions need to be kept in mind (Dowding, De Wispelaere and White, 2003a). Conditionality refers in the first instance to formal criteria of entitlement. Jochen Clasen and Daniel Clegg (2007) offer a useful three-fold classification of conditionality levels and associated policy levers. In the first instance, they

⁸⁸ For a contrasting view arguing that basic income may not necessarily promote gender equality because of an "inactivity trap", see Robeyns (2000).

⁸⁹ See Section 5.5 and ARTICLE I for a more detailed discussion of participation income.

distinguish *conditions of category*, which essentially refers to the membership of a politically defined social support category.⁹⁰ Next, there exist *conditions of circumstance* that determine the precise eligibility or entitlement of individuals to a particular scheme. Where “categories” are categorical (pun unintended), “circumstances” typically take a more gradual form, allowing for considerable variation in terms of width (what counts as “means” in means testing) as well as depth (how much income or assets disqualify one for means-tested support). The third type is arguably the most controversial: *conditions of conduit* regulating a host of behavioural requirements as a condition upon continued receipt of support. Regarding basic income both the lack of demonstrated willingness-to-work conditions and the absence of stipulations pertaining to the responsible use of the basic income are singled out as problematic by the critics, but in principle each of these admits to compromise.

Conditionality levers need not necessarily be formal, however. We can discern *hidden* or *implied* forms of conditionality: a universal basic income can become more conditional (in the “conduit” sense) because of the interplay with contingencies that result in a scheme effectively treating recipients differently within a formally uniform framework. Suppose we institute a fully unconditional basic income at a variable level related to a macroeconomic performance indicator such as GDP or employment rates. The level of the grant decreases when more people opt out of formal employment or if productivity decreases below a certain threshold indicator, which serves as a soft incentive to push people back into work. While such a scheme does not have any formal levers attached to it, it nevertheless institutes a set of incentives to contribute towards maintaining a certain level of production or employment; and these incentives will apply differently to differently situated individuals or groups.⁹¹

Next, conditions can be *strict* or *weak* depending on whether they are set in stone or there is a significant measure of bureaucratic discretion in assessing when a claimant has satisfied a requirement (Titmuss, 1971; Mashaw, 1983; Goodin, 1988). Bureaucratic discretion invites a measure of arbitrariness, and may induce welfare administrators to engage in behaviour that violates professional standards (Brodkin, 1997; Brodkin and Majmundar, 2010). Interestingly, welfare workers often oppose discretion and prefer a system that rigorously outlines their duties

⁹⁰ Clasen and Clegg (2007: 172) explicitly refer to “basic income for all” as a category confined by citizenship or residency.

⁹¹ For instance, a decrease in the level of basic income will more directly impact on a person who has no other sources of income, pushing her comparatively faster back into the labour market.

precisely because they want to minimize the risk of unprofessional conduct (Bane and Ellwood, 1984). In addition, bureaucratic discretion may boost administrative error, particularly when rules change rapidly and become increasingly complex (Atkinson, 1998: 131-133; Diver, 1983). At the same time, basic income research should be aware of the literature in public administration and administrative law that points to the limits of administration by rule and rote, and to the appropriate uses of discretion (Hood, 2010; Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2011).

Finally, conditions can also be *narrow* or *broad* depending on whether they result in more or less exclusive programs — that is, policies that capture a smaller or larger subset of the population. The Earned Income Tax Credit, for instance, only applies to those in work, whereas a participation income is meant to encompass a broader range of activities, and hence a broader range of target beneficiaries (Atkinson, 1996; Pérez-Muñoz, 2015). This of course raises the notorious problem of who ends up making the decision to value certain social activities by including them in the participation requirement (ARTICLE I). This is not a moot point: conditions are often introduced within a universal basic income for political reasons, because decision makers believe there will not be sufficient political support for unconditional measures, or to further a specific ideological agenda.⁹² Increased target efficiency associated with improved take-up rates is often cited as the strength of unconditional measures (Goodin, 1992; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Offe 2005; also ARTICLE III), while legitimation concerns lie at the basis for imposing some form of conditionality (White, 2003a).⁹³ In practice, the choice of a basic income scheme with or without any residual conditions attached will depend in large part on which constraint we believe to be the stronger.

3.1.4 Uniformity

Uniformity is the extent to which all those who are eligible receive a *similar level* of benefit.⁹⁴ Universal basic income schemes can deviate from this strict interpretation

⁹² The distinction between “technical” and “political” rationales is important in the conditionality debate more generally (e.g., Babb and Carruthers, 2008).

⁹³ Proponents of conditionality often take a too narrow view of what may be required on grounds of fairness or reciprocity. Goodin (2002) and Mau (2004) demonstrate the diversity of policy models compatible with taking a broader view of what reciprocity might require.

⁹⁴ We could also think of uniformity in a different way, as the extent to which individuals receive their benefit *under similar conditions*. Basic income advocates typically assume this is not an issue, but Section 4 will demonstrate that salient uniformity problems may arise at the level of implementation.

in at least two ways. First, we may decide to allocate different levels of transfer to different categories of recipients, thus imposing a form of *ex ante* conditionality within the scheme. A familiar example is the use of age to differentiate the allocation of grants to children, adults of working age and pensioners. By making good strategic use of a distinction that is already embedded in existing welfare systems, basic income proponents have a better chance of bringing basic income in through the back door. Even noted opponents of unconditional basic income, such as Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1999, 2009), favour universal child benefits and basic pensions, effectively endorsing a basic income ideal for the non-working subset of the population. In short, differentiating uniformity provides a handy tool for policy design and advocacy.

Social contingencies also affect the uniformity of basic income. Imagine, for instance, a universal scheme that is formally uniform but with the value to its recipients fluctuating in line with the regional variation in cost of living. It is a matter of some discussion whether a basic income should remain uniform, as argued by Philippe Van Parijs (1995), or whether regional price differences provide a legitimate departure from a strict uniformity rule.⁹⁵ Of course, policy-makers may well decide to use the differential value of a basic income grant to actively influence certain behavioural traits: like taxes, grants may end up serving multiple purposes that need to be balanced.⁹⁶ In principle, then, both uniformity and differentiation are consistent with most forms of basic income. Of course, one should keep in mind that at the margin a heavily differentiated scheme may no longer satisfy the key requirement of universality, effectively blurring the line between “differentiation” and “selectivity”.

3.1.5 Timing

Until recently, the dimensions of frequency and duration were somewhat neglected within universal basic income schemes. But at the end of the 1990s, a real cleavage emerged between universal basic income proposals that provide a regular income

⁹⁵ We could imagine a basic income top-up for those living in large (and expensive) cities, along the lines of the London Allowance in the UK.

⁹⁶ In an interesting variation on this point, Cristian Pérez-Muñoz (2015) has recently proposed a participation income that is varied according to whether its qualifying condition (e.g., volunteering or care work) contributes to the provision of essential services. Unfortunately, the author abstracts from any implementation considerations for putting such a differentiated participation income in practice.

stream, as in unconditional basic income or participation income, and schemes where beneficiaries receive a one-off payment, constituting a capital *stock*, as in stakeholder or capital grant proposals (Ackerman and Alstott, 1999, 2004).⁹⁷ With respect to income streams, a further relevant distinction should be made regarding the *frequency* of regular instalments. After all, it makes a considerable difference to receive your grant on a weekly, monthly or even yearly basis.⁹⁸ Shorter intervals often draw support from those who emphasize basic security, whereas advocates of equal opportunity, suspicious of any form of paternalism, typically favour longer intervals (De Wispelaere and Pérez-Muñoz, 2015). Of course, timing may simply be determined by the surrounding administrative time frame: until recently, wages were commonly paid in weekly instalments in the UK and Ireland as compared to the majority of European countries which employed a monthly pay system. Having basic income “piggy-back” on whatever system is operative in a given jurisdiction typically makes good administrative sense (ARTICLE II).

While the distinction between streams and stocks informs much of the current debate, the distinction is prone to overstatement. Under the right circumstances income streams can be converted into stocks and *vice versa* (Van Parijs, 2001, 2004), though it remains unclear whether such conditions are currently present in even the most advanced welfare regimes.⁹⁹ In addition, many of the basic capital approaches seem to have some in-built mechanisms of ensuring that the entire grant is not wasted on so-called stake-blowing activities, which in one more respect brings them closer to the ideal of basic economic security (Ackerman and Allstot, 2004; White, 2004).¹⁰⁰ Once we take this expansion into account, the distinction between income and capital grant schemes arguably diminishes.

A final consideration concerns the *duration* aspect of basic income. Putting a time-limit upon receipt of assistance is a measure common to most selective income support policies, but could also be used to render universal basic income socially and politically acceptable. Stuart White, for instance, argues for introducing a time-limited basic income scheme to combat exploitation and free-riding (White 2003b; also Offe, 2000, 2008). Restricting the receipt of basic income to, say, a total of five years may deflect free-riding by recipients who would otherwise take advantage of

⁹⁷ For a review of the debate, see Dowding, De Wispelaere and White (2003) and Wright (2006b).

⁹⁸ Compare the Alaska scheme, and its discussion in this respect, in Casassas and De Wispelaere (2012).

⁹⁹ For qualifications and criticism of the conversion argument see Van der Veen (2003), Standing (2006) and Fitzpatrick (2007).

¹⁰⁰ But see Standing (2006) and De Wispelaere and Pérez-Muñoz (2015) for a critique of the inherent paternalism of these measures.

the scheme, or at the very least render its overall effect less socially damaging. In addition to these normative considerations, a time-limited basic income policy may also reflect practical considerations, for instance fitting neatly with other policies (e.g., child benefit or universal pension provisions) that make up the institutional background of particular welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

3.1.6 Modality

Modality refers to the particular implementation format that a universal transfer adopts. When debating basic income we commonly think about cash transfers, but certain forms of in-kind transfers (for example, food coupons, education or travel vouchers, housing benefits) should not be dismissed out of hand (Van Parijs, 1995). The defining feature of a universal basic income scheme is not the distinction between cash or in-kind transfers as such, but rather whether social support takes the form of a public or a private good. Universally distributed private in-kind measures such as education vouchers may be considered part of a universal basic income, as opposed to strict public goods such as road infrastructure. Having said this, there are many good reasons why most universal basic income schemes will rely on cash transfers (Standing, 2008), but in principle at least part of a basic income could be transferred in-kind.¹⁰¹

Few researchers seem to appreciate fully how many distinct delivery mechanisms can be employed to disburse cash transfers, and how these compare in practice. Consider, for instance, the difference between schemes that deliver the grant by postal cheque, through a basic income debit card with automatic top-up, or as a refundable tax credit. Each of these forms has benefits and drawbacks that need to be carefully considered at the level of design and implementation (ARTICLE II, III and IV). One important administrative factor is the *level of integration*, which refers to the ease with which a given scheme operates within the existing policy environment and is able to make use of pre-existing administrative capabilities. Highly integrated grants primarily make use of tax-and-transfer mechanisms already in place, whereas weakly integrated versions may require additional, often costly, administrative measures to be set up from scratch.¹⁰² The latter must of course be offset by the corresponding advantages: for example, higher levels of take-

¹⁰¹ For an argument favouring in-kind over cash support, see Bergmann (2006) and Panitch and Heath (2010).

¹⁰² Compare the discussion of the UK Universal Credit scheme in Section 2 above.

up of schemes that operate independently of other, more selective, welfare benefits. I discuss some of these options in some detail in Section 5.

3.1.7 Generosity

A further dimension of universal basic income schemes relates to its level of generosity, in particular its capacity to satisfy recipients' basic needs. Strictly speaking, a universal basic income need not be fixed at subsistence level: it can conceivably both exceed as well as fall short of what is commonly considered as an adequate income standard (Van Parijs, 1995).

Some scholars have made the case for a partial as opposed to a full basic income, and most cognate universal schemes can be varied along this dimension (Van Parijs, 1992a, 2001; Van Parijs, Jacquette and Salinas, 2000).¹⁰³ A critical distinction lies elsewhere, namely between partial proposals that allow for basic income to be complemented by other types of cash (or in-kind) assistance, and proposals where the partial basic income becomes the sole means of public support. Not surprisingly, ideological positions differ considerably as to which option is most desirable. Critics of the welfare state, like James Buchanan (1997), Milton Friedman (1962) or Charles Murray (2006), have all at times endorsed a welfare state that adopts a single universal program of social support, *provided we simultaneously cut most other forms of state support*. Social democrats and socialists, on the other hand, oppose such proposals and insist that a partial basic income must always be complemented by other forms of assistance (Van Parijs, 1995; Wright, 2004, 2006). With respect to one-off grants, things are slightly different: in this case the goal is not primarily income security but rather improving one's stock of personal assets, but here too the level of generosity is crucial for determining its range of application (White 2003b, LeGrand, 1989, 2004; LeGrand and Nissan, 2003).

Focusing for the moment on income stream versions of universal basic income, the adequacy dimension raises a number of problems. There is first the familiar problem of defining and measuring the level of subsistence at any given time or place. There exists an immense literature on various ways of delineating basic needs in contemporary welfare societies (Loyal and Gough, 1991; Goodin, 1988). While most of this literature accepts that there is something arbitrary about determining a uniform level of subsistence across society (Sen, 1983), we should nevertheless

¹⁰³ For important criticism of the partial basic income option, see Groot (2004).

appreciate that even arbitrary benchmarks often serve a useful purpose in social policy. This is not merely a matter of debating the proper criteria but also of finding ways to properly assess how different contingencies affect people's lives.

A related concern is whether the level of a universal grant needs to be fixed at all. Perhaps we should take a dynamic approach by making the level of the grant periodically revisable, which could be done in two ways. First, the level of the grant can be periodically revised by Parliament or an independent commission, taking into account reflections of economic performance, political will and so on. A second possibility is to link the level of the grant automatically to some macro-economic indicators, as is already the case with other policies in various European countries. This indexation approach has the clear advantage of minimizing direct political interference, but it remains a question whether this is in all cases a good thing (Weaver, 1988; also ARTICLE VI). Two further advantages of the dynamic approach, whichever form it takes, are that the resulting level of grant reflects the overall state of the economy as well as being able to respond much quicker to dynamic changes in behaviour that will inevitably occur with the introduction of a basic income. A potential downside of such a dynamic approach, however, is perhaps that it does not instil the same degree of basic security as a fixed level grant achieves, which in turn may have adverse effects at the personal as well as the social level (Van Parijs, 2004; Standing 2002).

3.1.8 Financing

There is one final critical dimension along which basic income proposals are likely to differ, namely the funding base. Proposals on how to fund basic income are legion, comprising both the “classics” of partially redirected or additional income taxation, higher consumer or corporate taxes, resource or wealth taxes, as well novel ideas such as a Tobin tax on capital speculation, cap-and-dividend (cap-and-trade with an earmarked dividend component) or the use of crypto-currency as an alternative funding source.

Within this plethora of funding options, we can distinguish some considerations to guide basic income design. First, some advocates propose funding basic income out of the existing budget — largely redirecting current budget commitments — whereas others are keen to at least partially finance basic income through an additional source. The latter supports the Alaska Permanent Dividend Fund, discussed in Section 2, and there is keen interest in exploring the use of resource

dividends as a funding source for basic income (Widerquist and Howard, 2012a, 2012b). Political expedience strongly suggests favouring a novel funding source rather than having to take from some to give to others as income or wealth taxation would require (Widerquist and Howard, 2012c). Nevertheless, the political expedience of resource taxation should not be overestimated, as the availability of such a resource will immediately introduce competing views concerning its most suitable use.¹⁰⁴ And in each case there exists a question about which recourses are available and suitable for exploration in a manner that would reliably fund a sizeable basic income.¹⁰⁵

Another set of considerations pertains to a basic income that would be funded out of existing revenue streams. A first question concerns the precise source of taxation: are we to mainly focus on income taxation, or instead opt for consumption tax or even a wealth tax? Each of these come with their own economic and political challenges. Using inheritance tax to fund basic income would be another interesting option, but is likely to meet with unsurmountable public resistance (Maxwell and White, 2006). A related question pertains to the rate of progressivity of the tax rates. Should we use a flat or progressive tax rate applied to income or assets? Should we include consumer taxes, which are typically regressive? A final issue is whether we should fund basic income through a general tax (possibly a combination of all the above) or instead institute an earmarked model along the lines of national insurance contribution. While the standard argument suggests funding models based on earmarked or dedicated payroll taxes are more resistant to dismantling, recent research has demonstrated even earmarked programs are vulnerable to erosion through *fiscal constriction* (Hertel-Fernandez, 2013).

Finally, a major question pertains to whether basic income must achieve budget neutrality. One option is to insist that basic income financing is matched by a reduction in spending elsewhere as opposed to increased taxation. In effect, this means basic income is meant to be substituted for a number of currently existing programs or tax exemptions (Howard, 1997). The “rate of substitution” — the number of programs cut to pay for a basic income — depends in part on the size

¹⁰⁴ One should keep in mind that the bulk of the proceeds of the Alaska Permanent Fund goes towards paying off Alaska residents’ federal income tax, which of course disproportionately benefits those at the upper end of the income distribution. Resource taxation will always raise political competition driven by opportunity costs.

¹⁰⁵ This boils down to a question about which resources can be reliably turned into a Sovereign Wealth Fund that produces sufficient revenue for financing a basic income (Cummine, 2012).

of the basic income and in part on the political commitments towards existing programs. Either way, it should be noted that arguments about basic income replacing existing programs face their own challenges, as detailed in Sections 4 and 5.

A different route is to argue that basic income will pay for itself once we appreciate the barely obscured (if not counted) costs of poverty and economic inequality. For instance, one might argue basic income produces a “Health Dividend”, which could be calculated (conservatively) in terms of reduced hospitalization rates and other medical visits (Forget, 2011). Taking into account the broader health impact of economic inequality (e.g., absentee rates at work) would increase the economic cost of ill health exponentially (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). However, deciding on which effects to count within the budget is again very controversial, politically.¹⁰⁶

3.2 Basic Income: From Social Ideal to Social Policy

The eight dimensions charted in the previous subsection outline the main design contours of basic income. Policy makers intent on pushing forward with the basic income proposal need to make key decisions on each of these dimensions. The policy context may introduce important constraints in terms of the range of choice available to decision-makers in each of these dimensions. Some of these dimensions will need to be fixed in advance, while others can be allowed to vary over time without risk of disruption (e.g., to accommodate changing circumstances). Institutions matter too, with some dimensions allowing for considerable discretion while for others options are more or less fixed (e.g., the role of veto points). Jurisdictions will also vary extensively in terms of who makes the relevant decisions: basic income policy may be determined by legislators, by the executive, or through a political system that merely shapes the broad contours while leaving bureaucrats to fill out the details.

The combination of all these factors suggests that within the broad “type” of a general basic income ideal, we will necessarily find many concrete “tokens” (ARTICLE VI). Importantly, it is the tokens that are eventually implemented, and their design features largely determine what social effects basic income will deliver. The effects on a myriad of social dimensions are the bread-and-butter of basic income policy: irrespective of whether one prefers a “principled” or a

¹⁰⁶ For instance, as I argue in Section 5, counting administrative savings achieved at through the implementation of basic income is not as straightforward as basic income advocates maintain.

“pragmatic” approach to the justification of basic income (Barry, 1996b; van der Veen, 1997), without producing detectable material effects basic income advocacy is pointless. Even the most principled defender of basic income must at some point think through the nitty-gritty of practical policy design, given that the resulting social effects are political in Lasswell’s (1936) classic notion of “who gets what when” (and on which conditions). Basic income design is political in a second, closely related sense: given the distribution of winners and losers of a particular basic income scheme, genuine political disagreement about design choices and even political division about design clusters is entirely to be expected. In short, basic income design has both social and political effects that only become apparent in full *once we appreciate the many faces of the generic basic income model*.

Basic income advocates who insist on debating basic income at the generic level of a social ideal are not only at risk of rendering their proposals difficult (or even impossible) to implement if their proposed scheme conflicts with the administrative capabilities of the policy context, but also fall foul of Brian Barry’s apt simile: “Asking about the pros or cons of basic income as such is rather like asking about the pros and cons of keeping a feline as a pet without distinguishing between a tiger and a tabby” (Barry, 2001: 63). Most importantly, they will most likely fail to see that a critical frontline in the battle over basic income policy is located on the inside, as it were. Sections 4 and 5 develop this point in more detail.

4. The Political Feasibility of Basic Income

“[T]he basic income idea is capable of taking on a number of different guises in the hands of political forces or regimes with various ends, and in the contexts of a diversity of economic circumstances.”

Bill Jordan, 2011: 10

For much of the last two decades debate around the proposal of a universal basic income guarantee centred on arguing the ethical and economic case for instituting a policy that grants each adult citizen a guaranteed income as a right, without a means test or work requirement (Van Parijs 1992b; Dowding, De Wispelaere and White, 2003b; Standing 2005; Widerquist, Lewis and Pressman, 2005). The question of how to bring about such a policy — the question of political feasibility — has only recently gained traction amongst basic income advocates. Leaving aside some notable exceptions, much work remains to be done to further our understanding of the challenges faced by basic income advocates, and the strategies available to overcome these.

This section outlines several key political challenges faced by basic income advocates. Basic income may be a “disarmingly simple proposal”, as Philippe Van Parijs (1992, 2004) writes, but its politics is complex. Basic income advocates generally appreciate how difficult it is to convince the general public or political entrepreneurs to support a policy that amounts to giving “something for nothing” (Goodin, 2001a, 2003). Viewed this way, basic income advocacy becomes a matter of persuading those in opposition of its alleged beneficial effects and alleviate their fears of widespread family dissolution or labour market withdrawal, often by pointing towards an increasing body of evidence in favour of universal cash grants (Baird et al, 2011; Davala et al, 2014).¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, this approach overestimates the extent to which ethically or ideologically motivated opposition is susceptible to factual revision (Feldman and Zaller, 1992).¹⁰⁸ In addition, the

¹⁰⁷ The focus on family dissolution and labour market withdrawal was the sole focus of the famous NIT experiments in the US and Canada in the early 1980s (Widerquist, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ For example, research suggests ideology determines how individuals perceive whether an adverse event is a matter of bad luck or personal responsibility (Esarey, Salmon and Barrilleaux, 2012).

political feasibility of basic income is mediated by the internal divisions and tensions alluded to in previous sections, which implies an impossibility to jointly satisfy all aspects of a particular basic income design to the satisfaction of all key stakeholders. This, in turn, will inevitably lead to disagreement, conflict and perhaps compromise amongst the relevant political agents — the bread and butter of political analysis. In a nutshell, one could say that basic income politics is not merely *difficult* but more importantly *complex*, where “complexity” refers to the many interconnecting aspects of basic income design that jointly affect the political feasibility of the basic income proposal.¹⁰⁹

4.1 A Model Framework¹¹⁰

This subsection offers a basic framework to analyze political feasibility applied to basic income. I embrace a broad conception of political feasibility according to which a policy is politically feasible when the background conditions are such that there exists a reasonable probability of the policy becoming actualized in the foreseeable future. Viewed this way, “feasibility” covers the broad domain where a policy is neither immediately realizable, nor impossible to realize (Gilbert and Lawford-Smith, 2012; Lawford-Smith, 2012; Wiens, 2015), and feasibility analysis is aimed at investigating the factors (e.g., social conditions) that hamper a policy from becoming actualized. I adopt a similarly broad notion of “the political” by focusing on those feasibility constraints arising from the human will, as opposed to natural, physical or technological impediments.¹¹¹ The proposed framework offers a toolkit to think about political feasibility in a systematic comparative manner, exploring both differences and similarities across “feasibility types”. When applied to the specific context of basic income, insight into the distinctive dimensions of political feasibility offers a better understanding of the many complex challenges faced by those advocating basic income schemes. Distinctive aspects often require a specifically targeted political response, but an effective response is complicated

¹⁰⁹ I understand complexity along the lines of the concept of polycentricity, as advanced by Lon Fuller (1978).

¹¹⁰ The material in this subsection is adapted from De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012).

¹¹¹ The concept of political feasibility embraces the Searlean notion that individual or collective manifestations of the human will are causally relevant in bringing about institutional facts such as basic income (Searle, 1995, 2010).

considerably by the need to jointly accommodate several types of constraints, whether *simultaneously* or *sequentially*.¹¹²

Let us begin by exploring the two dimensions that construct the matrix illustrated in Table 1 below. I start from the simple axiom that politics implies agency. In one well-known phrase, politics is the purposeful act of deciding who gets what when (Lasswell, 1936). Politics is intimately linked with power, which, in turn, is the ability to produce intentional effects on other people (Dowding, 1996). Political power presumes not merely agency in an abstract sense, but concretely at least two sets of agents: those who exert political influence and those who are at its receiving end. On the supply side different political entrepreneurs — individual, collective, even corporate — employ political resources in an attempt to exert power and influence outcomes. More interestingly, however, is the demand side of the equation: those at which political power is addressed and who are the proper subject of specifically designed political strategies.

Here we can distinguish two very different types of agency.

- (I) *Discrete agency*: political agency addressed at readily identifiable actors with distinctive interests, roles, capacities and intentions;
- (II) *Diffuse agency*: political agency addressed at an amorphous set of actors, a “collective” in the loosest sense of the term, with little or no apparent coordination or collective intention.

Discrete agents form the most visible part of the policy process, comprising politicians, policy-makers, party cadres, social movement leadership, or bureaucrats, but also clearly identifiable corporate actors such as organizations or distinctive formal institutions (e.g., the executive). By contrast, the typical example of a diffuse agent in the policy process is the general public, which often exhibits the properties of “mass” rather than “collective” behaviour (Kornhauser, 1998). Both types of agency coexist and interact in a myriad of complex ways to constitute the environment in which political entrepreneurs operate.

The distinction between discrete and diffuse agency is important for understanding the different challenges political entrepreneurs face when exercising political influence addressed to each of these groups. Discrete agents are the subject of highly targeted political strategies. Strategies aimed at diffuse agents, by contrast, are necessarily less direct and typically take on a broad, “catch-all” character. Where

¹¹² While I will not here engage in any assessment of how different feasibility types interact, whether simultaneously or sequentially, the existence of such interaction is a key feature of the political analysis of basic income.

we might think of discrete political agency as similar to a line fisher carefully selecting his bait to capture a particular type of fish, diffuse political agency resembles the trawler fisher who sweeps the ocean floor in the hope to catch as many fish as possible, knowing that much of what he catches may be of little value to him. Nevertheless, even the trawler fisher must carefully select where and when to put out his net to ensure as good a catch as possible. Both approaches require careful strategizing. The main challenge is to simultaneously affect both types of agents.

Moving on to the second dimension, politics takes place between agents in a context that is highly constrained, requiring valuable political resources — time, effort, money, political expertise and reputation — to be expended in order to achieve intended outcomes. The constraints that make up a particular political environment are again very diverse and can be usefully characterized by adopting a sequential perspective.

- (III) *Prospective constraints*: constraints that affect the probability of a policy being instituted;
- (IV) *Retrospective constraints*: constraints that affect both the robustness and resilience of a policy once instituted.¹¹³

Prospective constraints affect the most familiar aspects of the policy process: agenda-setting, policy advocacy, coalition-building, political negotiation and legislation. These are the sort of constraints policy advocates face whenever they attempt to move their proposal from the drawing board to its actualization. Retrospective constraints, by contrast, are those background conditions that affect the outcome variables of a particular policy, including whether a particular policy will be vulnerable to internal contradictions or external shocks that may result in it being a very short-lived event (the stability problem). Of course, as with political agency, both sets of constraints coexist in the same political environment and typically influence each other various ways.

The distinction between prospective and retrospective constraints bears some interesting similarities with recent work by Erik Olin Wright (2006c, 2010) on emancipatory social theory. Wright makes a helpful distinction between the criteria of *viability* and *achievability*, both of which can be regarded as a subclass of the concept of political feasibility. Achievability refers to the practical task of realizing a particular policy outcome (or a social transformation), while the criterion of viability “asks of proposals for transforming existing social structures whether, if implemented, they would actually generate in a sustained manner the emancipatory

¹¹³ On the difference between “robustness” and “resilience”, see ARTICLE VI.

consequences that motivated their proposal” (Wright 2006c: 97). Viability enquires into the policy congruence of a particular proposal, the extent to which its outcomes might cohere with or deviate from the stated (or implied) objectives that constitute the reasons for adopting it in the first place. While most theorists debate the value of constructing proposals that may be viable but not achievable in the short run, equally interesting questions arise when considering proposals that are achievable but perhaps not viable (i.e., they may lead to results that are, all-things-considered, less than desirable because of unintended consequences). Mapped onto the proposed framework, we can see that both achievability and viability are necessary conditions and that political entrepreneurs must squarely face up to both prospective and retrospective constraints.

Table 1: Typology of political feasibility

	Prospective constraints (achievability)	Retrospective constraints (viability)
Discrete agency	A. <i>Strategic feasibility</i>	B. <i>Institutional feasibility</i>
Diffuse agency	C. <i>Psychological feasibility</i>	D. <i>Behavioural feasibility</i>

The resulting matrix, illustrated in Table 1, generates four types of political feasibility. Strategic and institutional feasibility share a focus on discrete agency. But where strategic feasibility requires a direct engagement to further a policy, institutional feasibility directs our attention to preexisting sets of rules and regulations that may affect the performance of a policy over time. Similarly, socio-psychological and behavioural feasibility both concentrate on diffuse agency with the general public. The former addresses the processes that *ex ante* affect popular support for a policy (Schmidt, 2002; Kangas, Niemelä and Varjonen, 2012), while the latter is mostly concerned with how behavioural changes *ex post* affect the performance or continued survival of a policy. In the remainder of this dissertation I will mostly focus on the strategic and institutional components of political feasibility, making occasional reference to issues pertaining to socio-psychological and behavioural feasibility.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012) explores all four types in some detail.

4.2 Basic Income – A Policy In Search of a Constituency?

The first strategic question in democratic politics is to decide on the core constituency for the program or policy one wants to institute. A “constituency” is a decidedly political category, referring to a subgroup within the overall population that has a significant vested interest in the proposed policy, and is subjectively aware of this interest.¹¹⁵ In addition, for a target group to become a constituency it must have a capacity to influence decision-makers — including, but not limited to, the power of voting in democratic elections. In a nutshell, a constituency is willing and able to put political resources towards promoting (or maintaining) a particular policy or program (Korpi, 1980, 1989).¹¹⁶ In this respect, the *political* category of a “constituency” is markedly different from the *policy* category of a “beneficiary”. When policy-makers talk about the target population that is expected to benefit from a particular policy, they may not be talking about a constituency in the relevant political sense. The distinction between beneficiary and constituency is highly pertinent for the politics of basic income.

Basic income advocates somewhat naively assume that because of its universal scope, basic income reform *ex hypothesi* has a large constituency. Unfortunately there are a number of reasons to think the constituency of a basic income may be smaller than hoped for by its proponents. In the first instance, while under basic income everyone is entitled to the unconditional grant, in reality of course some will be *net beneficiaries* while others will be *net contributors*. This distinction is most salient when basic income is financed through a general income tax, but equally applies for other funding sources.¹¹⁷ One of the main questions determining the size of beneficiary is the precise level of basic income, but it is not the only parameter. A key consideration is what in Section 3.1.8 I called the “rate of substitution”: the extent to which basic income replaces rather than complements

¹¹⁵ A constituency may falsely believe that it has an objective interest in a program. While the subjective aspect of a constituency therefore appears the more important, because there is always the risk that a constituency wizens up to its objective reality a *stable* constituency necessarily entails both an objective and subjective dimension.

¹¹⁶ A basic income constituency competes with traditional welfare state policies in attracting support of two key political actors, namely trade-unions and left-wing parties. On the continued relevance of both actors for welfare state support, see Pontusson, Rueda and Way (2002), Allan and Scruggs (2004), and Pontusson and Rueda (2010).

¹¹⁷ For instance, even a basic income financed by a resource tax (e.g., oil licenses as in the Alaska PFD) divides the population in net recipients and net contributors once we take opportunity costs in the form of alternative uses of tax income into account.

existing support programs. A basic income that mostly harmonizes the support system by replacing a host of programs may be a major improvement generally speaking, but still leave the bulk of the recipients merely as well off as before. This suggests that the category of net beneficiaries — capturing those whose tax contributions do not strictly speaking finance the basic income — can be further divided into those who genuinely benefit from instituting a basic income and those who *ex post facto* are roughly equally well-off.¹¹⁸

Basic income advocates rightly suggest that even when not amounting to a major increase in cash value, basic income outperforms other schemes by providing genuine economic security through a less stigmatizing program (Standing, 1999, 2002).¹¹⁹ This is no doubt true, but from a constituency-seeking perspective it remains to be seen how many within the target group *perceive* these added benefits as sufficient to strongly prefer a basic income over the policy already in place. Here several factors may work against basic income. First off, there is the familiar *status quo bias* in policy, perhaps exacerbated in the case of basic income by the fact that the proposal ultimately remains untested.¹²⁰ Prospective beneficiaries might rightly wonder about the long-term impact of a basic income on rental housing or minimum wages, and in the absence of persuasive evidence prefer to stick with “the devil they know”.

In addition, basic income may be plagued by what Brian Steensland (2006) has called “symbolic contamination”. The lack of clear programmatic boundaries separating different social groups — customarily hailed as a major advantage of basic income by its supporters (Noguera and Raventós, 2005) — causes the “morally tainted status” of one class of recipients to pollute receipt of a basic income for those otherwise regarded as “deserving” (Steensland, 2006: 1286). Unless carried by a genuinely broad support base in the general population, basic

¹¹⁸ We can ascertain one further level of division, as the class of real beneficiaries is not homogeneous in terms of the social risks to which a basic income is meant to respond. The importance of *homogeneity in the risk pool* is explored by Rehm (2011) and Rehm, Hacker and Schlesinger (2012).

¹¹⁹ This argument would appear to gain in importance for those who are part of the rapidly growing “precariat” (Standing, 2011b). However, two points potentially mitigate against this argument. First, some studies show that individuals support measures that compensate not for losing a job per se but rather for the loss of a “good job” and its associated benefits (Mughan, 2007). The problem is that basic income, at any plausible level, will not compensate in full for lost earnings and privileges associated with good jobs. Second, while economic insecurity is a prominent factor explaining people’s political preferences (Hacker, Rehm and Schlesinger, 2013) experiences of economic security by the precariat may nevertheless only have a transient effect (Margalit, 2013).

¹²⁰ Note here again the limitations of large-scale field experiments carried out in the last decades for generalizing across policy contexts (Noguera and De Wispelaere, 2006).

income may not be able to shed its stigma which, in turn, impedes the extent to which recipients will genuinely identify it as an improvement. Furthermore, symbolic contamination increases when the division between those who are net beneficiaries and those who are net contributors is more transparent. Here we encounter another alleged advantage of basic income — increased transparency — that rapidly mutates into a political challenge. Transparency produces a further problem in that social solidarity in the welfare state typically requires that the precise division of who receives and who contributes (and how much) remains opaque (Baldwin, 1990; also Clasen 2001).¹²¹ Basic income thus faces a real problem in generating sufficient support amongst net contributors who can clearly identify the winners of a supposedly universal scheme (de Beus, 2013), and most tellingly may lose the all-important support of the middle classes without whom welfare state reform remains a mirage (Goodin and LeGrand, 1987; Korpi and Palme, 1998).¹²²

The arguments outlined before all combine against a basic income in a rather paradoxical manner. While it is often argued that basic income should start off at modest levels for political reasons (Van Parijs, 1992a, 2001), a too modest basic income may simply not get off the ground for lack of building a sufficiently large constituency.¹²³ In the case of a partial basic income, for instance, it is entirely to be expected that the size of net recipients who are genuinely benefiting from the new scheme is rather small, while both symbolic contamination and middle class resistance increases whenever the benefits of a basic income policy are progressively targeted towards low-income and socially marginalized groups. These groups are easy to ignore because, for a variety of reasons, they are typically politically excluded (Soss, 1999, 2000; Mettler and Stonecash, 2008; Bruch, Ferree and Soss,

¹²¹ Jochen Clasen has observed that the “blessing of intransparency” integral to complex social insurance arrangements is a key determinant for legitimating complex social insurance schemes: “too much transparency might have a counterproductive effect in terms of diminishing rather than increasing legitimacy and support, and this applies much more to systems which provide flat-rate benefits than to those which are predominantly wage-replacement-oriented” (Clasen, 2001: 655).

¹²² Combined with the blame-avoidance stance of many political actors, overly transparent policies may produce Hirschman-type of “perversity effects”, whereby the resulting outcome is the diametrical opposite of the intended effect (Hood, 2007). Applied to basic income, we risk witnessing a policy intended to blur social categories in reality exacerbating them.

¹²³ Compare the challenges analyzed by Suzanne Mettler (2010) under the concept of the “submerged state”, the large area of state activity that fails to attract sufficient attention (and support) from dedicated interest groups or the general public (also Howard, 1997).

2010).¹²⁴ For basic income recipients to become a genuine constituency they must either become individually politically active — notably by voting on a regular basis — or else reconfigure themselves as an organized interest group. Neither of these scenarios is very likely, especially if basic income is primarily targeted to the poor and socially marginalized who face the highest hurdles in terms of political “presence” in contemporary democracies. The first challenge for the politics of basic income, then, is to go on a systematic search for a stable political constituency.

4.3 Building Coalitions: The Struggle for Strategy

This subsection summarizes the main insight in ARTICLE V. As mentioned in previous sections, public awareness and interest in basic income has grown exponentially in the last few years following the success of the Swiss Citizens’ Initiative and the media attention surrounding the European Citizen’s Initiative (ECI). It is fair to say basic income that is no longer regarded as yet another crackpot idea of the radical Left. The key challenge now becomes how to translate increased policy attention and awareness into full-blown political support, especially support from those who are able and willing to invest political capital into pushing basic income farther along the political agenda. This is the task of building a stable enacting coalition geared at instituting a basic income.

ARTICLE V discusses two thorny problems that plague basic income advocacy in this regard. The starting point of the article is to denounce the overly optimistic tendency amongst basic income advocates to play a numbers game by which every instance of political support counts as a small step towards instituting basic income in the not-too-distant future. By contrast, I argue that basic income advocates ought to be much more realistic in terms of appreciating which expressions of political support are actually instrumental in furthering policy development. I am equally skeptical about the associated strategy of indiscriminately eliciting support from a wide variety of political agents (individuals and organizations alike), irrespective of their particular political affiliation or their reasons for supporting basic income. This strategy is less effective — and likely counterproductive — in

¹²⁴ Even where citizens are not excluded in a strict sense there exist a severe political bias in responsiveness in favour of those at the top of the income distribution, whether due to political institutions (Solt, 2008; Rigby and Wright, 2013; Hayes, 2013; Griffin and Newman, 2013), different policy preferences of the wealthy (Gilens, 2005; Page, Bartels and Seawright, 2013) or opinion polls “silencing” the voices of the marginalized (Berinsky, 2002).

bringing about a stable enabling coalition in favour of basic income. ARTICLE V reviews each problem and set out its implications for basic income politics.

The first problem I call *the problem of cheap support*. It refers to the fact that many of those expressing support for basic income are doing so while being unable to offer few (if any) political resources to further the cause of instituting a basic income policy. Even a cursory review of basic income supporters in Europe and beyond immediately identifies basic income support is comparatively frequent amongst those who are at best marginal players in the game of politics. Thus, we find basic income support is high amongst political parties who are comfortably situated on the opposition benches — notably the Greens in Europe — or interest group organizations who again have little real political influence on policy formation (e.g., small trade-unions). These expressions of support do little to further basic income policy, apart from offering moral support to those activists battling in the welfare trenches.

Even more disconcerting is the fact that when individuals or groups who in the past expressed support for basic income suddenly gain political power, they systematically drop their support for basic income. The Green Party in Ireland refused to discuss basic income when they got into coalition government in 2008, while more recently the Spanish anti-austerity party Podemos took out basic income from its economic platform in the lead up to the elections. Strategically speaking, it makes perfect sense for political agents to drop support for basic income once gaining power, for it is only at that time that they face a real choice between expending political resources (e.g., time, effort, funding, organizational resources and political capital) on basic income as opposed to other, less controversial policies. In other words, at the margins of politics basic income support is cheap in two senses: it incurs few costs for those who give it, while it is of little use to those who receive it.

Needless to say, this perverse dynamic between the supply and demand side of political support bodes ill for the chances of building an enacting coalition in favour of basic income. In the absence of a stable core of supporters who are both *willing* and *able* to push for basic income, the wealth of media attention and public interest in basic income may not translate into policy reality. In terms of strategy, one lesson of the problem of cheap support is that basic income proponents should carefully identify stakeholders that are in a position to effectively contribute to basic

income policy development, and prioritize political advocacy accordingly.¹²⁵ A second important lesson is that the basic income movement must find a way to hold basic income supporters to account: there should be some political costs attached to dropping basic income once in power. Of course, here we find yet another problem for basic income advocacy, namely its inability to make use of the traditional mechanisms for incentivizing (potential) partners to join or remain in a coalition. Basic income advocates have little to offer in terms of Olsonian selective benefits (Olson, 1965) or, due to their single-issue focus, repeat interactions as part of a long-term collaboration across policy fields.¹²⁶

ARTICLE V next outlines what I call *the problem of persistent disagreement*, which builds directly on the idea that basic income represents a multitude of concrete proposals that can differ quite radically in terms of design, implementation and, ultimately, social effects. Building on the tendency to regard all instances of political support as genuine contributions to the cause, basic income advocates appear to elicit such support overly indiscriminately. Specifically, many in the basic income movement believe that one key advantage of the basic income proposal is precisely that it seems able to transcend ideological barriers, gathering support across the political divides (Barry, 1996a; Torry, 2013). However, as I argue in detail, this belief is false and the resulting strategy illusory. What basic income supporters across the divides agree on is the *idea* of basic income, while they share little more than the basic barebones of anything like a concrete basic income *policy*.

Yet it is ultimately basic income policy that we need to agree on. To illustrate, consider how radically different conservative and progressive proponents of basic income will answer the question of what level the basic income grant should be pitched at. Or, to use an even more telling example, consider the contrasting opinions amongst both camps on how many existing social programs a basic income policy is meant to replace.¹²⁷ The basic income policy that progressives advocate for is largely incompatible with the scheme conservatives have in mind, and no amount of agreement on the basic ideal will prevent opposition from blocking the policy as it moves along the legislative process. Basic income proponents sometimes counter that having agreement on some key principles of

¹²⁵ ARTICLE V discusses the problem of “marginalization-by-association”, in which the cause of basic income may actually suffer from “noxious support” by individuals or groups that would antagonize others from joining an enabling coalition.

¹²⁶ This leaves us with “reputational costs” as a possible accountability mechanism (Hojnacki, 1998).

¹²⁷ Another important area of disagreement concerns resources devoted to implementing a basic income. I discuss this aspect in more detail in the next section.

basic income policy (individuality, universality, even unconditionality) is sufficient to bootstrap basic income into place (Van Parijs, 2004), making it somehow unavoidable that a partial scheme over time will expand into a full-blown (progressive) version. But this argument faces at least two objections. First, policy development is not automatic; on the contrary, each stage of development requires a political battle in which, due to the existence of multiple veto points (Tsebelis, 2002), those pushing for expansion are often at a disadvantage compared to those who favour the status quo. Second, the very idea of bootstrapping basic income underestimates the difficulties in ensuring the stability of a basic income over time, a point to which I turn next.

4.4 Bootstrapping Basic Income? The Problem of Stability

ARTICLE VI examines the problem of stability as it pertains to basic income. The starting point is the following: a stable coalition in favour of basic income will have an interest in its *continued enactment* over time. This follows from a general precept of “policy consumption”, according to which those who have invested in the enactment of a policy objective “care not just about winning a near-term gain but about creating an enduring stream of policy benefits” (Jacobs, 2010: 99). There are at least two reasons to think stability concerns are salient to basic income. On the one hand, many propose basic income as a means to ensuring income security (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Standing 1999, 2002), which presumes the stabilizing expectation of an income stream over time.¹²⁸ On the other hand, intergenerational justice considerations apply where the provision of basic income funded at least in part through the use of external resources requires that future cohorts too should receive an unconditional grant of at least the same level than what the current generation receives (Van Parijs, 1995).

Unfortunately, stability considerations are either virtually absent in basic income discussion, or else narrowly focused on the motivation problem (Pérez-Muñoz, 2014). Here I am more concerned with *political* stability understood in two ways. First, a policy is said to be “resilient” when it can resist pressure for program change, whether through program abolishment or displacement, or whether through changes that alter key program features to such an extent that the policy is

¹²⁸ On the role of stabilizing expectations as a rationale of the welfare state more generally, see Goodin (1990).

barely recognizable.¹²⁹ We can distinguish a second, even less acknowledged variant of stability, according to which a policy is “robust” when it continues to deliver on its stated or implied goals (independent on whether the formal rules or regulations have been altered). A basic income coalition, *ex hypothesi*, should be concerned with both the resilience and robustness of basic income policy legislation and implementation.

Basic income policy is vulnerable to political instability of either type.¹³⁰ Inspired by the literature on institutional change (Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010), ARTICLE VI distinguishes four processes of policy transformation and outline how they might threaten the resilience or robustness of basic income. In the first place, basic income is vulnerable to radical transformation when subsequent legislators decide to change tack and abolish basic income or replace it with a different social policy. While certain welfare policies — notably, pensions — have been shown to produce positive feedback effects that prevent such radical change (Pierson, 1993; 2004), it remains unclear whether basic income would have such effects.¹³¹ In fact, the constituency problem outlined before suggests it may not. In addition, one must also take into account the presence of negative feedback effects that undermine the stability of a policy (Weaver, 2010; Jacobs and Weaver, 2015). In the case of basic income the continued presence of “symbolic contamination” may prove to be a major hurdle for making basic income resilient to radical change. While institutional veto points may prevent basic income being outright abolished or replaced, there exist gradual processes of policy change that succeed in bypassing such veto points.

Layering is a process by which new rules are grafted onto existing policy, hollowing-out existing policy by siphoning off public and political support (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). To the extent that many basic income proposals operate in tandem with other selective or categorical benefit schemes, they find themselves in a constant state of competition over funding, organizational resources and public

¹²⁹ Policy abolishment means the program is taken off the books, while policy displacement means it is being supplanted with another, competing program.

¹³⁰ Ultimately the extent of vulnerability depends on the contextual/institutional features of the jurisdiction in which basic income has been implemented, so the general remarks in this section must be qualified accordingly. At a minimum, however, the arguments give sufficient grounds for basic income advocates to start taking political stability more seriously than they have done hitherto.

¹³¹ In relation to the Alaska PFD, ARTICLE VI argues that it remains unclear whether its stabilizing features can be generalized across other jurisdictions, in part due to the particularities of the Alaska case.

support. In brief, the more layers remain in place, the more programs basic income has to compete against.¹³²

A second gradual process, *conversion*, impacts on the robustness rather than resilience of basic income. Under conversion, policy actors use existing rules and regulations to divert policy towards new goals or reorient its application to new beneficiaries. Conversion is made possible because of the gap between policy design and legislation and its discretionary implementation by street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980).¹³³ Although most basic income advocates have shunned administrative analysis, important implementation choices remain to be made and, under those circumstances, bureaucrats may gradually change how basic income operates from the bottom-up, as it were.¹³⁴ The next section develops this point in more detail.

A final destabilizing process is change through *policy drift*, which operates by failing to update existing programs to meet new or continued needs (Hacker, 2004, 2005). Like most policies, basic income will require a regular “tune-up” to ensure it still responds accurately to a changing social environment. The best illustration of this point concerns the level of the basic income grant which, at a minimum, should increase in line with inflation to ensure its goal of providing income security. Those who oppose basic income must only refuse to support a periodical upward adjustment by vetoing the required budget increase in order to ensure that, over time, basic income will be deemed to be ineffective and in need of replacement.

ARTICLE VI offers a much needed analysis of the sort of stability challenges a basic income could face. The question remains what mechanisms are available to basic income advocates to promote future stability. The article examines one option that some have suggested would result in increased political stability: enshrining a basic income in a Bill of Rights and have it protected by strong judicial review. Unfortunately, a careful analysis of judicial decision-making casts serious doubt on the usefulness of this particular solution. Specifically, both *judicial deference* (judges

¹³² It is interesting to reflect on an important implication of layering: most progressive advocates insist basic income complements rather than replaces other layers of the welfare state, but this means they risk trading-off protection for the current generation against protection of future generations.

¹³³ A recent study suggests bureaucratic preferences override those of political actors when it concerns matters that are not salient to the general public, leaving ample scope for bureaucratic discretion and thus conversion (Bækgaard, Blom-Hansen and Serritzlew, 2015).

¹³⁴ The real danger of conversion through implementation is not just that basic income is becoming relatively ineffective, but also that over time it would lose important public and political support. In short, conversion facilitates abolishment.

refusing to rule on the particular scope or reach of a constitutional right to a basic income) and *judicial activism* (judges putting forward their preferred interpretation of the right to basic income) may be insufficient to guarantee the stability of basic income as intended by the enacting coalition. Instead of constitutionalizing basic income we may need to look elsewhere. Following on from this point, one of the interesting avenues for future research is to examine which properties of basic income would produce the sort of policy feedback loop that produces a Piersonian path-dependence. In line with the general outlook of this thesis, “bootstrapping” basic income requires paying much more attention to the different design features of distinct basic income schemes and their *political* impact.

5. The Public Administration of Basic Income

“No system of law or administration is perfect. ... Try as we might, we are bound to err.”

Robert Goodin, 1985: 141

The political tensions and challenges canvassed in the previous section receive their fullest expression when we move from political debate to design and implementation. It is at the point where the basic income proposal meets the myriad of schemes that make up our policy environment that its design details matter most. It is also here that the internal differences between competing basic income models are most pertinent, and consequently hard to skirt over by the heterogeneous group of basic income supporters. Significant disagreement amongst those who advocate basic income from wildly diverging perspectives may be kept at bay as long there exists a need to maintain a united front against those who favour selective welfare arrangements or, worse, dismantling the welfare state altogether. But when practical implementation problems emerge, persistent disagreement reasserts itself in a way that resists easy resolution. This section develops this point and its consequences for the politics of basic income along several dimensions.

A central claim of this section, and the four articles that underlie the present analysis (ARTICLES I-IV), is that basic income advocates ought to take the implementation stage of the policy process seriously — certainly more seriously than they have done hitherto. Basic income advocates ignore what Bernard Schaffer (1973) has called “the administrative factor” at their own peril.

The basic income debate is notoriously hostile to anything even vaguely reminiscent of bureaucratic intervention. This deep mistrust of administrative analysis is largely misconceived, and its continued avoidance of public administration untenable in the long run. Simply put, policy implementation is impossible without administration, which means basic income advocates inevitably will face the many administrative challenges inherent to implementing a social program at an unprecedented scale. Resolving the implementation challenges of basic income requires not only careful administrative analysis of the expected problems and potential solutions, but also a strong awareness that such analysis will

be highly politicized, pitching proponents of different basic income models against each other. A key claim of the present section is that basic income administration is an integral part of basic income politics.

5.1. Uneasy Bedfellows: Why Basic Income Ignores Administration

The argument that administration matters for basic income design and implementation may seem like a truism to the general political scientist or policy analyst, but nevertheless faces an uphill battle with those engaged in advocating for basic income. Several reasons may explain this general reluctance to embrace administrative analysis, but none warrants the pervasive neglect of administration in basic income research and advocacy.

Basic income advocates customarily adopt a perspective where administration necessarily takes the form of a *controlling bureaucracy* in which welfare clients are required to submit to invasive and degrading people-processing procedures in order to receive the support they are entitled to (Standing, 2002). It is unfortunately a hallmark of most targeted or selective policies that bureaucratic interactions — including face-to-face interactions with street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980) — reduce claimants to a passive and subservient role, in which they are met with distrust and suspicion at every turn and their agency, dignity and self-esteem is hampered by the very system that is meant to assist them (Handler 2004, Handler and Hasenfeld, 2006). The outcome is not only the well-known negative effects on target efficiency (Craig, 1991; van Oorschot 1991, 1998) but also general distrust in government and a decline of political participation (Soss, 1999, 2000; Mettler and Stonecash, 2008; Bruch, Ferree and Soss, 2010).¹³⁵ A considerable literature reveals *bureaucratic disentanglement* (Lipsky, 1984) as a predictable side-effect of a system that prioritizes people-processing in line with a dominant eligibility-compliance culture (Bane and Ellwood, 1994), and in many cases even as a deliberate strategy for the state to exercise control (Piven and Cloward, 1993). For basic income advocates, the obvious solution is to combat bureaucratic discretion and paternalism by drastically reducing the scope of administrative intervention altogether (Standing, 2002; Offe, 2005). This perspective views basic income as an essential tool to “unclog the bureaucratic pipes” (Standing and Jhabvala, 2010).

¹³⁵ Considerable local variation in understanding of deservingness with frontline workers informs everyday practices in the interaction with recipients (Rice, 2013; Altreiter and Leibetseder, 2014).

We need not deny either the fact of administrative overreach — the pervasive extent of bureaucratic interference in welfare clients' lives — or its disastrous effects individually or in the aggregate to observe several weaknesses of this one-dimensional perspective on public administration. First, while social assistance is typically organized in a controlling fashion, many other support programs are not. In most countries a wide chasm separates the administration of entitlement programs, such as pensions or social security, from programs that embrace bureaucratic discretion, such as social assistance (Soss, 1999, 2000; Bruch, Ferree and Soss, 2010). This shows that revising administrative processes rather than reducing administration as such is a perfectly plausible — albeit a politically charged and operationally difficult — alternative. This last point, in turn, leads us squarely to a second weakness: laying the blame for controlling clients by intrusive measures solely on administrative systems and bureaucrats ignores the extent to which the latter operate within a political climate that is exceedingly hostile to providing a universal income guarantee. In the end, it is the political process that sets the goals that administrators must reach as well as providing the tools by which to achieve them.¹³⁶ To think that the problem of controlling bureaucracy merely requires getting rid of bureaucracy is largely misdiagnosing the real issue, namely the pro-activation and anti-welfare political climate that shapes and constrains administrative procedures and practices.

Of course, basic income advocates do not really believe we need no administration at all; rather, they advocate a policy that implies less rules, less regulation, less monitoring, and consequently less general bureaucratic involvement in people's lives. However, it is a fallacy to think that implementation without controlling bureaucracy — which basic income advocates rightly abhor — equates to basic income facing no significant administrative challenges. The fundamental mistake here is to reduce all implementation problems to what goes wrong when bureaucracies exert excessive and arbitrary control over the lives of welfare recipients. In reality, public administration covers numerous other aspects of the implementation process (Hood, 2010), many directly affecting the performance of whichever basic income model is instituted.

Several other reasons combine with the perception of a controlling bureaucracy to explain the reluctance to take the administrative factor seriously. For instance, basic income advocates may be buying into a version of the *transmission belt model* of public administration (Stewart, 1988), according to which implementation is

¹³⁶ There exists a large literature on the politics of bureaucratic discretion (e.g., Mashaw, 1983; Huber and Shipan, 2002).

mechanically concerned with executing legislative directives, allowing a clear distinction between politics and administration to be drawn (Wilson, 1887). The basic income version of the transmission belt approach maintains that fundamental questions emerge when we are discussing the ethics, economics and politics of the basic income guarantee; by contrast, implementation concerns are entirely instrumental, technical and presumptively a-political. However, the transmission belt model has long been discredited in public administration (e.g., Baldwin, Cave and Lodge, 2011), and so too should its basic income variant. It is simply not true, as I show in the remainder of this section, that administrative challenges are merely technical worries that require no hard political choices. Ditching the transmission belt model implies that public administration scholars be given a prominent place alongside philosophers and social scientists in the basic income debate.

A related view many basic income advocates ascribe to maintains that, with the rise of the technological society, implementation problems have declined sharply. Modern information technology may have increased the list of tools we have at our disposal to address implementation problems, and the temptation to think this means we have less to worry about on that score is understandable. Nevertheless, recent scholarship insists the emergency of new technology “does not mean that new policy problems have appeared or old ones disappeared” but rather that “they present themselves in new ways” (Hood and Margetts, 2007: 14; also Seddon and O’Donovan, 2013). The lesson is clear: implementation should not be equated with technological fixes.

A final reason for refusing to directly engage with the administration of basic income reflects the view that basic income will always outperform selective approaches to income support because it is simple, universal, uniform and unconditional, no matter what challenges arise at the implementation stage. Philippe Van Parijs, for instance, reflects this view by insisting that “assuming a computerized and efficient tax-collection and transfer-payment technology”, administrative costs are likely to be “lower under a universal, *ex ante* scheme than under a means-tested, *ex post* one” (Van Parijs, 2004: 20). The thought here seems to be that basic income administration only matters *comparatively*. Against this view I first want to point out that the comparative efficiency of basic income over that of selective programs is assumed rather than argued for, and we should be careful about deriving strong conclusions that can be robustly generalized across all basic income models.

More importantly, however, the comparative perspective contains a fundamental flaw: the *administrability* of a particular basic income proposal has important

implications on its ethical desirability and political feasibility, independently of how it fares against selective competitors. The comparative perspective gives basic income administration a free ride, as it were, by obscuring the extent to which competing basic income models resolve implementation challenges in radically different ways. The latter point matters because, as we shall see below, the resulting outcomes will benefit different target populations, which in turn directly affects the politics of basic income. This reinforces a critical point made earlier: basic income administration is inherently political.

To summarize, we may discern various reasons why the administrative factor continues to be neglected in the basic income debate, but none really justify doing so. Ignoring administration comes at a serious cost for those advocates committed to proposing a politically feasible basic income proposal that is not merely intended to stimulate debate about the foundational principles of an economically just society, but meant to be actually implemented. In the remaining sections I briefly discuss several aspects of the public administration of the basic income guarantee, with each section providing the main insight explored in full detail in a series of articles (ARTICLES I-IV). While each section focuses on a specific issue that is overlooked or under-analyzed in the current debate, together they lend support to the thesis that advocates and scholars need to fully engage with the administrative analysis of basic income as an intricate part of promoting the political feasibility of the basic income proposal.

5.2 Outline of a Framework for Basic Income Administration

In this section I first briefly outline the conceptual framework that underlies much of the analysis in the remainder of this section. Variants of this model underlies each of the articles discussed, with ARTICLE IV presenting its most developed form. The framework contains two dimensions. On the one hand, I distinguish four essential tasks that any income support scheme — including basic income — must perform: standard-setting; information-gathering and monitoring; payment disbursement; and oversight. On the other hand, I discuss two radically different senses in which implementing a basic income can economize on administration: minimizing on (governmental) resources and minimizing on intrusion/inconvenience.

5.2.1 Four Administrative Tasks

The starting point of the first dimension is to think about the different tasks that an administrative system would need to complete in order to successfully implement a basic income policy. ARTICLE IV distinguishes three key tasks, but here I add a fourth.

The first task is *setting the standards* that determine who is deemed eligible for receiving a particular kind of income support. From a public administration perspective it is of key importance that these are operational standards, and not merely conceptual or normative desiderata. Colin Diver (1983), for instance, has argued that operational standards should satisfy the requirements of “transparency”, “accessibility” and “congruence”. He also maintains that the internal tensions between these three desiderata means satisfying them simultaneously constitutes a serious challenge for any administrative system, immediately inviting discussion about strategic decisions regarding acceptable trade-offs and operational priorities. One key decision concerns the scope of bureaucratic discretion interpreting the precise meaning and application of such standard and rules, discussed before. While the unconditional and universal form of basic income appears to sidestep this first task — leaving aside issues pertaining to excluding non-citizens or non-residents — it is important to note that several proposals within the basic income family must nevertheless face squarely up to the challenge of standard-setting. This is most obviously the case with the participation income proposal, discussed further in Section 5.5.

The second task comprises designing mechanisms for *gathering appropriate information* to determine who meets the eligibility standards set out in the first task. This task also entails the *monitoring of eligible persons* to ensure they continue to meet the relevant criteria. This is the task most commonly regarded as responsible for the extensive bureaucratic interference in people’s lives as well as the lion share of administrative costs associated with selective income support programs. Again, basic income advocates rapidly claim that information-gathering and monitoring are superfluous for implementing a policy that has effectively eliminated eligibility criteria. However, in this basic income advocates move too fast, for eliminating restrictions to eligibility does not in itself identify those who are eligible; at least not in a manner that allows the administrators who are in charge of paying the basic income to identify them reliably. Following Hood (1985) I refer to the problem of “cadasterability”, and argue that in some

jurisdictions it constitutes an important bottleneck for the effective implementation of basic income.

A third task is one that is both of key importance — obviously so — and yet again insufficiently discussed: the *practical disbursement of the basic income*. Having properly identified those entitled to receive income support, a key part of basic income administration is to ensure that the money effectively ends up where it should — ideally without much extra cost or burden on those in receipt. In public administration this is known as the “conduitability” problem (Hood, 1985), and a number of mechanisms exist to handle the practical transmission of income support. Effective implementation would require a method (or combination of methods) by which all intended beneficiaries — in this case, roughly all citizens or residents — receive their basic income without undue inconvenience or cost, including vulnerability to error. Unfortunately, careful reflection reveals some of the leading candidates for disbursing the basic income grant are not without difficulties in this regard. Most challenging, in particular for those who favour basic income out of a concern for the worst-off, is the fact that some of the most vulnerable groups in the population are typically those who fall through the cracks of the usual payment conduits such as payrolls or direct bank transfers (e.g., the homeless and other “unbanked”).

Finally, a fourth task is the *effective oversight of basic income administration*. Oversight is a form of monitoring, of course. But instead of monitoring eligibility with the aim of excluding those who are deemed non-compliant with certain eligibility criteria, oversight is purposively inclusive and geared at ensuring everyone who is eligible receives their grant. Whereas basic income advocates resent monitoring, they should be supportive of oversight, in particular in a context that takes seriously the idea that implementation is near-always imperfect. Oversight is nowhere to be found in discussions of the implementation of basic income, whereas basic income arguably faces a number of specific challenges in this regard; in part because of the sheer scale of a policy that aims to cover the whole population (Seddon and O’Donovan, 2013), but in part also because basic income eschews traditional monitoring mechanisms upon which oversight could piggy-back (ARTICLE III).

5.2.2 *Economizing on Administration*

The four tasks outlined above paint one side of the implementation picture, namely the practical goals that need to be achieved for basic income to work as intended (“robustness”). The other side of that picture pertains to the capabilities of the administrative system tasked with carrying out the tasks at hand. Unfortunately, administrative systems rapidly run up to the “limits of administration” (Hood, 2010), imposing a need to economize on administration, where possible. Basic income advocates try to capitalize on this by arguing that making income support universal and unconditional is the best way to bypass some of the more stringent administrative challenges. However, at this point the question arises what is exactly meant by “economizing on administration”.

Inspired by the work of Christopher Hood (1983, 1986) we can distinguish two senses in which we can economize on administration. In its first sense, economizing on administration simply means administering basic income using the minimal amount of government resources possible, for any given level of target efficiency. The concern here is specifically with the transaction costs faced by governments of defining, monitoring and disbursing a grant, not with the overall program costs of a universal basic income (Offe, 2005). What makes administration costly is, on this view, the social opportunity cost of government resources spent on implementing policy (deadweight loss). The idea that basic income constitutes significant savings along this dimension is widespread and popular, but nevertheless needs to be scrutinized carefully and qualified in important ways (ARTICLE II).

The second sense of economizing on administration has quite a different focus. Here we are concerned with minimizing the level of (personal) intrusion of implementing a basic income scheme on its recipients. While much of the debate focuses on private intrusion in a strict sense, I favour the more expansive notion of minimizing inconvenience: this includes navigating the complexity of the system, obtaining relevant information, negotiating various stages of the application process (Van Oorschot, 1991; 1998), but equally the likelihood of administrative error and the processes of complaints and rectification associated with the latter. With respect to this sense of economizing on administration, basic income again easily seems to outperform any selective policy by a wide margin. But here too important qualifications apply (ARTICLE III).

The real challenge, however, lies in the fact that the two senses of economizing need not coincide. The two senses frequently point in different directions, most obviously in cases in which removing barriers to access and take-up of a scheme can

be accomplished only at the cost of expending considerable administrative effort or other resources. And, as I show in the next sections, basic income administration is not immune to this problem; in large part because the relevant considerations are of a political rather than a mere technical nature. Thus, a minimal governmental resources approach to basic income administration would be satisfied with the removal of formal barriers and conditions for eligibility, even if beneficiaries found the application process intrusive and burdensome. The minimal intrusion approach, by contrast, would justify going to great bureaucratic lengths to achieve a truly universal scheme, provided such universalism could be accomplished by relatively unobtrusive means. To emphasize again a point made before: where goals conflict and gather support from competing political factions or amongst the wider public, basic income administration is inherently political.

5.3 The Administrative Efficiency Thesis Re-examined

This subsection summarizes ARTICLE II. Basic income advocates regularly endorse one or other variant of the *administrative efficiency thesis*. The strong version of this thesis holds that reducing administrative costs is an important policy goal in its own right, and basic income is preferable amongst income maintenance policies precisely because it allows policy-makers to significantly economize on administration. The strong version is typically associated with conservative and libertarian proponents of basic income, who regard reducing bureaucracy as a chief political aim (e.g., Kliemt, 1993; Buchanan, 1997; Murray, 2006). A weaker but more broadly accepted version insists basic income is preferable over competing policies because it reduces administrative overhead costs (deadweight loss) for any given level of target efficiency.¹³⁷ The (weak) administrative efficiency thesis is both appealing and, when applied to basic income implementation, intuitively plausible. Nevertheless, upon careful examination ARTICLE II finds basic income advocates' reliance on the administrative efficiency thesis problematic in several respects.

Several reasons combine to suggest that administrative savings will either not materialize, or will likely be of a considerably lower order of magnitude than basic income advocates anticipate. One set of reasons applies to the administerability of competing basic income schemes, by which I mean that not all concrete proposals

¹³⁷ The main difference between both approaches can be illustrated as follows: where the strong variant supports reducing administration even when this implies some beneficiaries not receiving their entitlement, the weaker version prioritizes target efficiency over program efficiency.

entertained by basic income advocates imply a wholesale reduction of qualifying tests and associated implementation processing, which would be a necessary condition for generating the desired administrative savings. While the paradigmatic unconditional scheme proposed by Van Parijs (1995, 2004) appears to radically economize on administration in this regard, as soon as we compromise even minimally on one of the design features administration (and administrative overhead cost) is reintroduced.¹³⁸ To illustrate, the participation income variant that received considerable attention in the basic income debate is likely to require excessive administration, as I will argue in detail below. In short, the anticipated administrative savings critically depend on the particular model implemented.

But even where we restrict the choice of basic income schemes to those that seem to do away with the host of qualifying conditions present in selective programs (Offe, 2005), there are two further reasons to cast doubt on large administrative savings materializing in practice. The first reason is that even when basic income administration in principle allows us to dismantle a particular bureaucratic process, this process may still be required by other policies. For instance, if tax assessment requires continued administrative capacity for means testing, the savings from implementing a non-means-tested basic income will be considerably lower.¹³⁹ Second, much depends on whether basic income is supposed to replace or supplement other income maintenance schemes. The higher the “rate of substitution” — that is, the more basic income implies dismantling other policies — the more administrative savings basic income will generate. But of course, there will be plenty of other reasons of an ethical or political nature to resist such a move.

To summarize the argument of this subsection: the administrative efficiency thesis has some intuitive plausibility when comparing the administration of basic income with that of the patchwork of complex selective policies in the modern welfare state. But the precise extent of the anticipated savings is highly dependent on both the specific design of the basic income scheme and its implementation in the broader policy context. At the margin, these savings could be quite minimal, suggesting the weak version of the thesis may offer little in terms of independent reasons to support a basic income. Basic income advocates could still adopt the

¹³⁸ To put it differently: there exists a non-linear relationship between design features and their impact on administration costs, which means we cannot simply assume proportionality in savings as we approximate the “pure” basic income variant.

¹³⁹ In general, the more policies piggy-back on a particular administrative process, the less we can save on overhead costs.

strong variant, but only if they are willing to trade-off important advantages in terms of target efficiency.¹⁴⁰

5.4 Practical Bottlenecks in the Implementation of Basic Income

This subsection summarizes the material of ARTICLE III. Basic income advocates who refer to ease-of-implementation in regard to basic income do not necessarily (only) refer to the budgetary implications of implementing their pet policy. In many cases, what they have in mind is better captured under the second sense of economizing on administration outlined in Section 5.2.2 (Hood, 1983). What matters here is the relative ease by which basic income is administered that ensures that all eligible recipients effectively receive their entitlement. Here basic income administration responds to the problem of under-consumption or non-take-up identified in the literature of selective welfare programs (Craig, 1991; van Oorschot, 1991, 1998, 2002). ARTICLE III reviews the argument that basic income scores much better in terms of target efficiency when compared to more traditional schemes. The article finds that the assumptions underlying this claim again need careful assessment.

The starting point of this article is twofold. On the one hand, I accept the comparative advantages of basic income in relation to program take-up (Goodin, 1992). On the other hand, however, I also argue that basic income advocates cannot merely rely on the absence of eligibility rules to ensure higher take-up rates. This is because absence of rules that restrict eligibility (*nominal universalism*) is insufficient for ensuring that some hard-to-reach client populations effectively receive their entitlement (*substantive universalism*). It is the latter goal that motivates the bulk of basic income advocacy, which in turn implies that we need to examine in more detail if any barriers prevent take-up in practice. ARTICLE III argues that while basic income is likely to avoid some of the non-take-up trappings of selective schemes, it may also face specific bottlenecks of its own, for instance related to the large scale of the scheme (aimed at capturing, in principle, every citizen or resident in a particular jurisdiction). This scale effect also means that basic income implementation can only imperfectly piggy-back on existing (tried-and-tested) administrative processes.

¹⁴⁰ Importantly, the strong variant of the administrative efficiency thesis is also associated with lower political stability by removing any incentives for bureaucracies to combat political attempts at altering basic income implementation over time (Béland, 2010)

ARTICLE III reviews three distinct types of bottlenecks that basic income implementations needs to address. *Cadasterability problems* arise in those jurisdiction without a clear register of every entitled citizen or resident. Under such circumstances, basic income administration requires investment in the capability to generate a comprehensive and reliable cadaster, with particular attention devoted to capturing those vulnerable individuals who are often located off-the-grid (e.g., the homeless).¹⁴¹ A second bottleneck pertains to *payment modalities*, where again those in irregular employment or without proof-of-address are customarily excluded from the most common disbursement tools (payrolls, banks, postal cheques, etc). Addressing this bottleneck to ensure target efficiency amongst those most vulnerable again may require a considerable administrative investment. Finally, *oversight mechanisms* geared at detecting, redressing and preventing administrative error are also burdened by the scale at which basic income is meant to operate. Here too, important implementation choices will affect the extent to which error is minimized, but equally determine who bears the main cost or burden.

The difficulties reviewed in this subsection do not constitute an argument against basic income policy. They do demonstrate, however, that the refusal of basic income advocates to fully consider the range of administrative choices pertaining to basic income implementation is unwarranted.

5.5 Failed Compromise? Participation Income in Practice

This subsection summarizes the material in ARTICLE I. The two previous subsections already hinted at the extent to which administrative challenges are easily politicized. The remaining two subsections tackle the idea that implementation and politics are intricately intertwined. One of the best illustrations of how ignoring the administrative factor results in poor politics is the idea of *participation income*, a policy advanced by renowned economist Tony Atkinson (1996, 2014). ARTICLE I offers a detailed discussion of Atkinson's

¹⁴¹ The term “cadaster” originally referred to a tax register (*cadastre* in French), but here refers to any standardized list or register of individual activities or attributes that may be used to determine compliance with the eligibility conditions of a policy. “Cadasterability” refers to the ease with which eligibility criteria can be reduced to (or deduced from) such a list or register.

scheme from a public administration perspective.¹⁴² In brief, the article argues that participation income faces a trilemma, which results in it being unable to garner sufficient support from a broad enabling political coalition.

Politics is central to the inception of participation income. Atkinson (1996) believed that income maintenance should retain its individual and non-means-tested nature, but felt that making eligibility independent from a work or willingness-to-work requirement would render it politically infeasible. His solution was to adapt the scheme devised by Van Parijs (1995) to include a “participation requirement”, understood as “a wider definition of social contribution” (Atkinson, 1996: 69). His proposed participation condition would include a wide variety of socially useful activities — including working as an employee or self-employed, being absent from work on grounds of illness or injury, being engaged in training or education, caring or volunteering, etc. — which would render the receipt of this entitlement politically palatable (also Goodin, 2003). Many regard participation income as basic income’s politically feasible cousin: sharing a large number of design features and reaching an unprecedented share of the target population, while nevertheless being capable of garnering political support across a number of constituencies. Specifically, participation income is said to offer a compromise between those keen on universalizing income support as a citizenship right and those who insist on a reciprocal social contribution in return (White, 2003a, 2003b).

Unfortunately, a careful examination of the implementation challenges of participation income rapidly reveals the difficulties it faces on some of the key administrative tasks outlined before. ARTICLE I describes in detail how poorly participation income fares with respect to standard setting, identification and monitoring of beneficiaries, and payment disbursement. More to the point, it could be argued in each of these respects participation income is outperformed not only by basic income, but equally by workfare-type policies. From a public administration perspective, rather than constituting a workable compromise participation income is mired in implementation pitfalls.

Furthermore, I maintain that the resulting administrative instability translates directly into political instability, leading erstwhile political allies to opt for mutually incompatible routes out of a trilemma that imposes huge administration costs (budgetary/resource investment as well as personal vexation/intrusion) on a

¹⁴² It is worth noting that participation income gained fervour amongst basic income advocates with hardly any effort spent on analyzing the policy in any detail. For a recent exception, see the defence of participation income mounted by Pérez-Muñoz (2015).

commitment to simultaneously embrace both inclusion and participation. Contribution-leaning advocates would naturally prioritize participation over inclusion (*soft workfare strategy*), while basic income advocates insist on the contrasting route of ditching participation in favour of inclusion (*lax enforcement strategy*). A third option is to refuse any compromise and willingly accept the administration costs involved (*ironclad administration strategy*). What matters, politically speaking, is not so much which of these is the most appropriate option, but rather that the trilemma effectively forces the different partners of a political coalition in favour of participation income to go their separate ways. I conclude unambiguously that, politically speaking, participation income is a non-starter for getting anything like a basic income off the ground.

In his recent book, *Inequality: What Can Be Done?*, Atkinson (2014) revisits participation income and directly responds to some of the challenges raised in ARTICLE I. Atkinson believes the article overstates the case against participation income. After all, he writes, participation income is much simpler to implement than means- or asset-tested benefits and only requires the administration to make category decisions, many of which are already in place in other parts of the administration. In addition, he points out that where capability is too limited, the state ought to invest in social administration while acknowledging that what matters is “the quality of service rather than simply measuring cost-effectiveness” (Atkinson, 2014: 221). While I have little truck agreeing with any of Atkinson’s arguments in a personal capacity, it seems Atkinson has nevertheless failed to appreciate the main point of ARTICLE I: *once we accept the trilemma as a practical reality, political allies will likely opt for different routes out*. While many will wholeheartedly agree with Atkinson, there will be others who prefer to opt for a solution that inevitably puts them at loggerheads. As long as this is a plausible scenario, the trilemma and its political implications for participation income stand.

5.6 Basic Income Administration as Politics

In this final subsection I summarize the material in ARTICLE IV. The articles outlined in the previous sections take seriously the idea that basic income implementation implies a set of challenges that need careful consideration. These articles also share the view that the public administration of basic income is not merely a matter of resolving some practical problems following enactment, but instead amount to a series of first-order political problems. Whenever basic income

faces the sort of implementation challenges outlined before (the limits of administration), administrative decisions aimed at resolving the problem at hand take the form of *hard choices that trade-off one set of goals against another* and, in many cases, *pitch the interests of one social group against another* (also Goodin, 1985). While the administrative focus sheds an important light on the precise nature of the choices to be made, and offers insight in the variation of available solutions, the actual decision is political in the straightforward sense of allocating benefits and burdens amongst the different stakeholders. In short, basic income implementation implies a decision on who gains and who loses (and by how much).

In ARTICLE IV this political dimension of basic income administration is placed central stage. This article builds on the Hoodean distinction between the two senses of economizing on administration, and demonstrates how each takes a different approach to resolving some of the main implementation challenges. Adopting a political perspective, it is easy to see how the types of administrative decisions cluster along straightforward ideological fault lines.

ARTICLE IV proposes two ideal-type basic income models. First, the *aggregative* model primarily attempts to balance costs and benefits across the whole population. Concentrated costs on small subsections of the population are easily outweighed by overall benefits accruing across the board, which suggests a strong alignment with the “minimal resources” sense of economizing on administration. The aggregative model receives strong support from conservatives, libertarians and utilitarians who all (albeit for very different reasons) insist basic income implementation should retain a strong universal and non-targeted perspective. By contrast, a second model is explicitly *redistributive* and maintains a strong focus on prioritizing the fate of the worst-off in relation to allocating benefit shares as well as burdens, even where this implies higher overall costs. The redistributive model favours the “minimal intrusion” sense of economizing on administration, insofar as it applies to those who are most disadvantaged or economically and socially vulnerable. Politically, the redistributive model is strongly associated with a variety of progressive basic income advocates.

The politics of basic income administration reinforces many of the points made with respect to strategic feasibility in the previous section. In particular, basic income implementation lends further credence to the argument that basic income advocates should not indiscriminately gather support across the political divide, for the implementation stage will put the persistent internal disagreement between progressive and conservative basic income supporters in sharp focus (ARTICLE V). The radically different orientation with respect to resolving key administrative

problems may prevent basic income advocates from building a robust enabling coalition in the first place — as the case of participation income has illustrated (ARTICLE I). In addition, internal disagreement amongst basic income proponents is likely to negatively affect the political stability of basic income, whether through politically abolishing a basic income scheme one set of stakeholders no longer supports or resisting policy development through the processes of layering, conversion or policy drift (ARTICLE VI).

6. Concluding Remarks

This dissertation has contributed to the political analysis of basic income by examining the political challenges of basic income as a distinctive policy proposal. The basic income debate is not merely about constructing a social ideal to counter the current activation orthodoxy in welfare theory and practice, but also about designing a desirable and feasible program to be implemented in the near future. However, moving from social ideal to social policy implies that we take seriously a range of political challenges that impact on the prospects for enacting a basic income that robustly delivers on the expected benefits.

As this study has revealed, the politics of basic income faces many difficulties that are familiar from the politics of the welfare state more generally, but in certain respects basic income design entails unique features that translate into novel political challenges. The extent to which the individual, universal and unconditional design of a guaranteed basic income feeds back into long-term political effects remains little understood. The six articles underlying this dissertation contribute to this research agenda by discussing in detail some of these challenges, with primary focus on strategic issues (ARTICLES V and VI) as well as questions of implementation (ARTICLES I-IV). In this section I briefly summarize the main insights of the dissertation, and briefly explore future research and policy priorities.

6.1 Basic Income Politics: A Battle on Two Fronts

Adopting an explicit policy perspective implies realizing that the political battle for basic income is simultaneously fought on two fronts. The frontline that receives most emphasis is where basic income advocates encounter important resistance from elected officials, special interest groups, bureaucrats and the general public. Despite growing interest, basic income advocates continue to face entrenched opposition from a broad range of social and political actors.

Many opponents remain unconvinced basic income is affordable (especially at a time of crisis) or will generate the anticipated positive effects on poverty, education,

labour market reform, gender equality or health — to name but a few. In countering this criticism basic income advocates are hampered by the fact that evidence on the performance of basic income remains limited, in large part because there are no real-life experiences to refer to, or because the results of existing field experiments, while promising, cannot be easily generalized across jurisdictions. In addition, factual questions aside, a sizeable part of basic income opposition is grounded in persistent ethical disagreement about the desirability of indiscriminately giving income support to all citizens, irrespective whether they need it or are willing to reciprocate in return. Perceptions of deservingness and reciprocity are deeply entrenched in the general public and are shown to play a large role in the support for welfare programs (van Oorschot, 2000, 2006; Slothuus, 2007). Finally, opposition amongst political entrepreneurs is often tied in with strategic considerations, such as decades of explicit support for the active welfare state or, more recently, strong political commitment for austerity policies (Standing 2011a). The problem here is one of path dependence: political actors, once committed, are in need of a viable exit strategy before considering shifting policy tack (Weaver, 1986).

The divide between proponents and opponents of a basic income is a real and constant battleground. But there exists a second frontline which is often obscured by the former to even the most committed basic income advocate. This frontline consists of persistent disagreement on, and intense competition over, the details of basic income policy amongst the supporters. Basic income, I have argued, has “many faces”, a fact that becomes apparent once we appreciate the range of variation on a number of key dimensions. Policy analysis, as well as empirical observation of several schemes already instituted, reveals the generic basic income “type” consists of a large number of concrete “tokens”. This variation has a major political implication, insofar as distinct design features will produce different social outcomes that affect individuals (or groups) differently. Opting for one basic income scheme rather than another is hardly a trivial decision for those affected by the policy.

This dissertation argues that persistent disagreement about basic income design features will lead to intense political competition amongst its advocates. Internal political competition may prevent the establishment of an enabling coalition around a particular crystallized basic income proposal, cause an existing enabling coalition to fall apart, or even in due course threaten the political stability of a basic income already enacted. The *internal politics* of basic income is barely discussed in basic income research or the basic income movement. One contribution of this

study is to shed light on the undeniable fact that basic income advocates are engaged in a battle on two fronts, and that they need to tackle internal division head on.

6.2 Administration Redux: Design, Implementation and Politics

This dissertation has a second goal, namely to vindicate administrative analysis and the role of public administration more generally in the basic income debate. With a few exceptions, basic income advocates continue to adopt a negative perspective to all things administrative. Section 5.1 briefly reviewed the reasons for this aversion against administration, and by-and-large found these wanting. It is absolutely true that the administration of welfare as currently practiced is both demeaning and intrusive to welfare recipients and entails a massive deadweight loss to society. This warrants significant administrative reform, and the institution of basic income would offer an important window of opportunity in this regard.

Where basic income advocates go wrong, however, is to assume that basic income implementation itself requires no administration or, on a more charitable reading, that basic income simplifies implementation challenges such that its administration raises few concerns. The main reason for this assumption is that basic income advocates take a single-minded view of administration as a type of controlling bureaucracy predominantly aimed at restricting access to income maintenance. Viewed this way, the universal scope of basic income implementation by definition requires no administrative gatekeeping. The contribution of this dissertation lies in balancing out this one-sided perspective with a contrasting viewpoint, according to which important administrative challenges remain once we move from a focus on nominal universalism to one of substantive universalism. If one is serious about ensuring all those who are entitled effectively receive their basic income, bureaucracy is not something to happily get rid off.

The more important issue with the neglect of administration in the basic income debate, however, is one of politics. Basic income advocates seem to buy into the (much-maligned) transmission belt model of administration (Stewart, 1988), which assumes a strict separation of politics and implementation. By contrast, this dissertation expands on the work of Theodore Lowi (1964, 1972), which holds that *policy influences politics*. The public administration of basic income demonstrates the point made earlier that internal competition over concrete schemes is unavoidable. Basic income advocates of various stripes can avoid getting caught up

in design details when debating the general merits of basic income over selective welfare schemes, in an attempt at reaching agreement under a “veil of vagueness” (Gibson and Goodin, 1999). But the moment the policy enters the phase of implementation, concrete design differences matter critically in terms of producing the intended policy effects. These, in turn, directly feed back into the politics of basic income by determining who wins or loses from one scheme rather than another being adopted, which again will impact tremendously on the long-term stability of basic income policy. To ignore administration is to ignore a key aspect of the politics of basic income.

6.3 Where Next? Political Trajectories

Future research in basic income should build on the insights in this dissertation by examining in detail how specific design choices feed back into the processes that determine current and future political support for basic income. I call this approach “bootstrapping basic income”. Building on this approach, an important future research avenue concerns the *political trajectories* for moving basic income from social idea to concrete social policy.

Basic income advocates have proposed three avenues by which to pursue political progress in an incremental fashion. Underlying each of these proposals is the view that basic income is too radical a policy to enact in one go, and it is preferable to institute basic income gradually through the backdoor (Vanderborght, 2005; Offe, 2001; Goodin, 2003).¹⁴³ The first trajectory is to institute a partial basic income at a low level (e.g., half the poverty line) and build up towards a full basic income by incrementally raising the level (Van Parijs, 2001). A second proposal implements a version of basic income that compromises on unconditionality by introducing a participation requirement (Atkinson, 1996). Relaxing this requirement over time — in large part in response to the inevitable administrative challenges that were discussed in Section 5.5 — brings us closer to the ideal basic income scheme. A third avenue opts for implementing basic income sequentially for different target populations. A plausible scenario is to start with a basic pension, followed by an (expanded) child benefit, moving onto targeted

¹⁴³ The three avenues can be combined in more complex strategy that allows for multiple pathways that allow for expansion over time, as Claus Offe (2001) suggests. An additional advantage of the complex strategy is that it can build more straightforwardly on existing programs or policies, which may reduce some of the implementation challenges identified earlier.

education grants or a basic income for the disabled, before finally arriving at the most difficult group — working-age adults (Frankel and Mulvale, 2014). The political strategy is to start with politically favourable target populations and firmly embed the principles of basic income in each group before moving onto a more politically controversial target.¹⁴⁴

The political approach adopted in this dissertation offers some guidance for (provisionally) evaluating the political feasibility of each of these trajectories, pending empirical confirmation. Each of the three avenues focus on a *prima facie* plausible starting point, with variation in large part due to distinct beliefs about the main barriers hindering political acceptance. In the case of a partial basic income, the main worry is a combination of immediate cost and the ability to control for labour market effects: starting with a modest basic income would reduce anxiety in regard to both issues. In the case of participation income the main concern is to overcome resistance to citizens receiving “something for nothing” (Goodin, 2003). In the case of the sequential approach, the main target is a combination of all of the above: starting off a basic income for pensioners and children may sway those who worry about cost, labour market incentives, and social free-riding alike.

Unfortunately, good starting blocks do not guarantee a smooth run for the whole length of the track. Here all three trajectories must own up to important challenges. Partial basic income is vulnerable to the charge that the grant may simply be too low to demonstrate sufficient beneficial effects, or perhaps prevent them from materializing at a sufficiently early stage, to overcome continued resistance (Groot, 2004). As argued before, the lower the grant, the smaller the constituency. The concerns facing participation income evolving into a full-blown basic income have been described before (ARTICLE I), and need little rehearsing here.

The most interesting approach is likely to be the sequential model, but here again advocates tend to emphasize benefits without giving appropriate consideration to the potential drawbacks. At least three difficulties need to be addressed. First, a sequential approach assumes that constituencies who have obtained their basic income entitlement will not actively resist further expansion, perhaps out of a sense of solidarity with those who have not yet received their entitlement. But there is little reason to assume this is the case. Pensioners, for instance, may worry that if they support expanding basic income to other social groups, their basic pension may end up being at risk at some point in the future. In

¹⁴⁴ The policy logic here bears a close resemblance to the social construction approach pioneered by Schneider and Ingram (1993).

addition, pensioners may take the view that their basic income is a type of social insurance entitlement paid in acknowledgement of past contributions, and vehemently resist the idea that the same argument applies to other social groups.¹⁴⁵ In a nutshell, pensioners, children, students, the disabled and working age adults form distinct discrete constituencies that may fail to sufficiently overlap in their support for *expanding* the scheme into a basic income covering the whole population.

Second, the constituency problem also affects coalition building, with difficult questions of political strategy looming. For instance, should all political effort go into focusing on getting the first stage (e.g., a basic pension) off the ground, or should basic income advocates instead take the long view and avoid association with supporters who may prevent expansion over time?¹⁴⁶ Each stage amounts to a new battleground for expansion, and one cannot merely assume that political coalitions remain stable across each stage.¹⁴⁷ Third, each stage may also raise very distinct administrative challenges of the types discussed before (ARTICLE III). The administrative capabilities to ensure all pensioners or students receive their basic income is likely to be different from assuring the disabled or all working-age adults (including hard-to-reach populations like the homeless) are fully covered.

This discussion of the political trajectories for basic income implementation affirms a point made throughout this dissertation, namely that basic income advocates need to think through more carefully the specific political challenges faced by this proposal at every stage of the policy process. The political trajectories perspective also opens up a fruitful avenue for future research. Examining in more systematic detail the political pros and cons of each of the trajectories briefly discussed above is likely to generate crucial insight in the political feasibility of basic income. In addition, the notion of “bootstrapping basic income” must retain an important place in political analysis. If the particular design features of a basic income scheme produces political feedback in addition to policy outcomes, bootstrapping basic income through selecting the most politically feasible properties is a critical future research agenda.

¹⁴⁵ Needless to say this is mostly a problem the moment the sequential approach expands to cover working-age adult citizens.

¹⁴⁶ Compare the insights from Ingram and Schneider (1991) on the choice of target populations.

¹⁴⁷ ARTICLE IV and ARTICLE VI emphasize the asymmetry between those advocating and opposing basic income: the latter only need to block each subsequent step to prevent the full basic income from coming about. See more generally, Hacker (2004, 2005).

I have argued in these last paragraphs that the gradual approach to instituting basic income may face more challenges than its leading proponents admit. This in turn suggests perhaps we ought to consider again under what conditions a full basic income could be enacted in one go. Recent research into how risky policy adoption interacts with the politics of blame-avoidance may point towards scenarios where basic income becomes the lesser of several (political) evils (Weaver, 1986; Hood, 2002; Vis and Kersbergen, 2007). In my view, it is particularly fitting that a policy that offers a radical departure of the welfare state consensus comes about through radical politics.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ I am grateful to Joe Soss for stimulating conversations on this possibility.

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