

Towards a Basic Income Association in Italy

Bin Italia

Pubblicato in:

Translated by Sabrina Del Pico

ABSTRACT

The Bin Italia open letter.

Over the last decade, the national and international debate about Basic Income has been vibrantly developing and therefore it has achieved an extraordinary level of interest.

The most traditional justification of the *ius vitae* as a basic right had been disclosed at first by the pioneer thought of Tom Paine and by the courageous rules of the Jacobin Constitution which recalled the previous ones of public distribution in the ancient republican Rome. Later on, in the '70-'80's this justification was consolidated by the wide debate about the presupposition of a “just society” thanks to the masterpiece of John Rawls.

This branch of contemporary political philosophy has coherently carried on the work of theoretical support to include Basic Income among those fundamental prerogatives which western Constitutions should guarantee as a priority to each individual in order to allow everybody to have equal possibilities and “basic” chances. This is so unless they betray the liberal premises along with their proclaimed “democratic” orientation on which they base themselves.

During the last decades, the **basic income studies** school has provided a large body of argumentative material on which to base this thesis. It had important leverage with the Constitutions of the old continent through linking income with the meta-principle of personal dignity. In many European Charters, such as the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights for Workers (1989), the European Social Charter (1996) and finally the Nice Charter (2000) (which in third paragraph of article 34 refers to the former charters) the **ius vitae** assumes the **status** of the fundamental right of European citizens that can be judged before the Supranational Courts and in some cases before the ordinary Courts, too. Also the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in some decisions, suggests the existence of such prerogative by the individual even in very difficult contexts such as the South American one.

This fundamental dimension of the discourse holds further and important connotations in modern times when new productive conditions - namely Post-Fordism - have turned into the dominant system

of economic production. With the unprecedented opening up of markets and the so-called financialization of the economy bringing along explosive contradictions in the web of contemporary accumulation, **basic income** can play a new role in addition to those given to it by an influential branch of political theory to this point. It becomes the hub around which is possible to outline a new code that establishes new guarantees for the “laborious citizen” who can then be protected against both the “employment relationships” and the “market relations” also. It would give that support which shelters them from the dynamics of a turbocapitalism hardly governable through those rigid foundations on which modern labor law has been built up to now.

Therefore, basic income affects social infrastructure by helping to create a set of “new rights” that open the possibility of a subjective “choice” within labour and of valorisation of individual capabilities rather than maintaining a socially decorous level of existence (acting in this case like a social protection measure).

Besides, the theme of **basic income** has to do with the reflections on how to relaunch and transform the post-war **welfare state**. Up until the '80's this model was explicitly focused on the less and less dominant figure of the permanent full-time worker compared to the propagation of atypical employment relationships. Also in the official documents of the European Union, in particular in those related to the so-called **Lisbon Agenda**, the guarantee of continuity in income and the setting up of a public net to support and promote the “laborious citizenship” has become a much debated issue. Using the **Open Method of Coordination**, the different European organisms (States, Brussels bodies, Regions, Municipalities, social partners, NGO's) have been assessing the **best practices** of the EU. So far, the best practice has been found to be in the Scandinavian countries where the “new rights” (**basic income** and lifelong education) have been fully implemented. Finally, the theme of basic income comes out of a vast literature mainly from the critical and heterodox left (which followed the famous Marx's **Fragment on Machines**). It is related to the reflections on the contradictions coming out of the modern production system. Here, one finds that despite a whole series of “public” and collective goods (such as knowledge or information, emanating from the Internet) becoming strategic resources for profiteering, society doesn't benefit from the “private” use of these goods (in terms of rights, income, access to consumption, etc.). It is a kind of modernisation of the thesis of Tom Paine who demanded a guaranteed income for all members of the political community in exchange for the private appropriation of land (that belongs to everyone by nature).

Despite the shortcomings of our **welfare state** and of its social protection system¹ with its scandalous unbalance in protecting only standard employees², a lively and innovative debate about these topics has been developing. In spite of Italy being one of only two European countries along with Greece to have a lack of universal income support, new networks of social movements (such as those surrounding Mayday), some local bodies and a plurality of cultural and political initiatives – unfortunately still fragmented – have succeed in mixing the different levels of the debate about **basic income** in an original and promising way.

We intend to gather this rich debate and provide a common and open space where the different voices supporting basic income can be hosted connecting them to the other similarly pluralistic international experiences such as the Basic Income Earth Network or the Catalan network Red Renta Basica.

1 Italy is last in Europe as regards employment in general, long term unemployed, female unemployment, with a very high percentage of idle elderly, a low percentage of graduates, etc.

2 While the European average social expenditure is one third funded on a contributory basis and two thirds on a non-contributory basis, in Italy it is exactly the opposite

Currently we think that it is a priority to gather all material produced in Italy and present it along with that produced both in Europe and internationally in order to surpass the “archaism” of the Italian **welfare system** without losing those innovative ideas expressed in Italy.

Italian debate about basic income refers to a variety of topics and points of view - economic, judicial, sociological, political and philosophical. This peculiarity helps understand the originality and copiousness of debate especially as regards its ability to connect basic income to the emerging precarization of life and labour. In these terms, the analysis of productive transformation that occurred in the last decades has been very important and it represents without doubt the most interesting input that Italian debate can currently offer to the international context.

Therefore, we think it's time to give birth to a project that seeks to draw together this heterogeneous debate through creating an Association composed of experts on this topic such as sociologists, economists, philosophers and legal commentators. The Association represents a tool to gather together ideas and suggestions and to **coordinate** different skills in order to bring them in the same direction under one “common logo” that recalls the common goal to achieve the introduction of a **Basic income**.

The first goals of this Association are the following:

- to create a **website** that works as gathering place for the debate, providing information and communication. It will work as an archive of the Association as well;
- to produce a periodic **newsletter** that will be sent either to all members or to those who are interested in receiving it. The **newsletter** will highlight the development of debate, the issue of books, articles or essays, current and upcoming events;
- to gather material about **Basic income** through creating a documentation centre on Italian and international debate;
- to organize, likely in the next autumn, a national conference about basic income. The conference will be also an opportunity to publicly announce the project. National and international participants in the debate, politicians, social networks and Associate members will take part in the conference;
- to organize, on a local scale, meetings, thematic seminars, workshops and debates focusing on different **targets** depending on the context (social movements, political institutions, academic and cultural bodies);
- to issue a journal either electronic or printed that hosts international contributions, the publication of records of the conferences and the publication of books on specific aspects of the basic income issue.

The Association is not binding as regards individual choice. It means that no one will have to limit themselves as regards their individual choices in their political and cultural participation. The Association can't be represented by any member on individual basis. The Association is a network, therefore it has no official spokespeople who speak on the other members' behalf.

Each member can carry out their own social, political, cultural and academic activities in total autonomy allowing the association to act under the same condition of autonomy.