



# Basic Income Experiments

## A critical examination of their goals, contexts, and methods

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\* The book is co-authored by Roberto Merrill, Catarina Neves e Bru Laín

## Agenda

- The goal of the book
- Methodology: our case studies and our interviewees
- The outline of the book
- Part 1 - What have we learnt?
- Part 2 - New questions
- Part 3 - Our answers
- Why should we conduct basic income experiments, pilots, or policies?

## **Before we start... Why Basic Income Experiments?**

Common, but controversial... what can be their role?

Several basic income experiments' waves

## Four common criticisms and limitations addressed to UBI experiments

1. Even with positive results from a UBI experiment, popular or political support for the establishment of a permanent and universal basic income **will not automatically be won.**
2. Even if the experiments show the viability of a UBI and the advantages vastly outweigh the disadvantages, **there will still be opposition to it.**
3. A third criticism that can be made of UBI experiments is that they necessarily refer to a **specific UBI model** (or a range of models). Thus, while this model is being tested, it will be difficult to move forward with the discussion on alternative models.
4. If it is understood as a right, then the UBI **should not be subject to this experiment.**

## Advantages of UBI experiments

Despite the legitimacy of the doubts about UBI experiments, the truth is that they allow a clarified analysis of the role that UBI can play:

1. By entering the public discussion as something that is in fact being done, many of less reflected criticisms that are made of the UBI could disappear.
2. By allowing for a comprehensive public debate in which everyone can clarify their doubts regarding basic income and the impacts it may have on their lives.
3. The results from experiments can be used to justify (or reject) its full implementation.



**EXPLORING THE BASIC INCOME GUARANTEE**  
Series Editor: Karl Widerquist

This book brings together insights and reflections following a set of interviews conducted with the main stakeholders involved in past, current, and future basic income experiments. It provides an analysis of some of the major elements and factors influencing experiments, as well of some of their most important outputs understood as results of their own experimental design, their sociological and political basis, and the epistemological status of their results.

By pursuing a bottom-up strategy, where the interviews conducted take a pivotal role in the collection and analysis phase of the book, this book gathers key questions relating to policy experiments. Some questions reflected upon include the general idea of why one should engage and implement a basic income experiment, and the paradox consisting in the fact that most basic income experiments fall short of being closely considered "pure" basic income schemes. In facing the question and the paradox head-on, the book assesses questions of experimental design, the political and social context surrounding the policy, and the main results and what can they tell us about basic income.

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**Catarina Neves** holds an MSc in Management with a minor in social enterprise from Nova School of Business and Economics. She is currently working in her PhD thesis on the philosophical justification of Unconditional Basic Income, and in what way can the theoretical concepts be found in empirical experiments of UBI.

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Basic Income Experiments: A Critical Examination of their Goals, Contexts, and Methods  
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## **The goal of the book**

Inform students, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers about the main philosophical, epistemological, and sociological questions stemming from basic income experiments past, present and future.

Through the interviews conducted on the fifteen case studies, we wish to provide a comprehensive landscape of learning, pitfalls, existing evidence, strategies, and recommendations for those engaging in experimentation, assessing results, or even those curious to know more about UBI experiments and their overall impacts.

## Methodology

The book brings together insights and reflections following a set of **interviews conducted with people** who have been involved in past, current and future basic income experiments, pilots, and policies.

It aims to provide analysis of some of the major elements and factors influencing experiments, as well of some of their most important outputs (understood as results of their own experimental design, their sociological and political basis, and the epistemological status of their results).



## The general underlying question

### **‘Why should we have basic income experiments?’**

However, we do not provide any general theory as an answer on the role experiments can play, but rather use the particular and general findings from our case studies to come up with several possible answers to our underlying question.

## Additional questions

- What is the impact of the different motivations to conduct basic income experiments in the overall implementation?
- What is the role of the political context when deciding to implement a basic income experiment, throughout the project, but also in ensuring its future?
- Can we draw differences between research on UBI experiments, and research on basic income implemented as a policy in each context?
- How is the overall reception to basic income experiments from the different stakeholders?
- What are the main difficulties in conducting a basic income experiment and why?
- What are the main results taken from different basic income experiments, and what changes were most relevant according to the stakeholders involved in the research?
- In what way do basic income experiments generally contribute to the basic income debate?

## Bottom-up strategy

Since the main insights of the book are a direct result of our interviews, the methodology of the book follows a **bottom-up strategy**.

In each interview, key questions on the methodology, political context, and the future of the basic income debate in each context were assembled and supplemented with specific questions pertaining to the case studies. A general script was created.

## Bottom-up strategy

We conducted **18 interviews** over a period of six months\*.

Most of our interviewees are researchers involved in the design, implementation and/or evaluation of the experiment, pilot, or policy

\* The status of our case studies (finished, ongoing and planned) as well as some of the conclusions, reflect the data and information available at the time of the interview and writing the chapters

## Our interviewees: Finished Case Studies

Stakeholder	Role	Case Study
Minna Ylikännö	Senior Specialist, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.	Basic Income Pilot (Finland)
Roger van Loon	Utrecht Municipality (one of the institutions behind the experiment)	Utrecht Experiment (The Netherlands)
Timo Verlaat	PhD candidate at Utrecht University School of Economics, involved in the Utrecht experiment	Utrecht Experiment (The Netherlands)
Lluís Torrens	Director of social innovation at Barcelona city council, and one of the researchers responsible for the B-MINCOME experiment	B-MINCOME – Barcelona experiment (Spain)
Wayne Lewchuk	Researcher involved in the Ontario experiment, from McMaster University	Ontario's Experiment (Canada)
Dirk Haartman	Researcher hired by the BIG coalition to design and implement the experiment	Basic Income Grant Coalition experiment in Namibia)
Sarath Davala	One of the lead researchers involved in the design and implementation of the experiment	Madhya Pradesh experiment (India)

## Our interviewees: Ongoing Case Studies

Stakeholder	Role	Case Study
Stacia West	Co-Principal Investigator of the Stockton experiment in California, USA. Co-Founder of the Center for Guaranteed Income Research at The University of Pennsylvania.	SEED - The Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (USA)
Amy Castro	Co-Principal Investigator of the Stockton experiment in California, USA. Co-Founder of the Center for Guaranteed Income Research at The University of Pennsylvania.	SEED - The Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (USA)
Caroline Teti	Works for GiveDirectly, involved in the experiment happening in Kenya	GiveDirectly experiments in Kenya
Fábio Waltenberg	Lead researcher from Universidade Federal Fluminense hired to assess some of the results of the Maricá experiment	Renda Básica da Cidadania in Maricá (Brazil)
Fernando Freitas	Researcher in the team hired to assess the results of Maricá experiment	Renda Básica da Cidadania in Maricá (Brazil)

# Our interviewees: Ongoing Case Studies

Stakeholder	Role	Case Study
José Luís de Sales Marques	President of the Institute of European Studies; Member of the Board of Directors at Portuguese School Foundation-Macau	Macau's Wealth Partaking Scheme
Randall Akee	Public policy researcher at UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs	Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' Dividend
Hyosang Ahn	Executive director of BIKN – Basic Income Korea Network	Youth Basic Income Project in South Korea.
Djavad Salehi-Isfahani	Professor of Economics at Virginia Tech and Nonresident Senior Fellow, Brookings Institute	Iran

# Our interviewees: Planned Case Studies

Stakeholder	Role	Case Study
Jamie Cooke	Head of RSA Scotland	Scotland
Maheba Goedeke Tort	Conception and research coordination of the UBI experiment.	Berlin



## The case studies

- Their prominence in the basic income debate;
- Available evidence (reports and others);
- Proximity to the ideal type of basic income as defined above;
- Their contemporary nature.

**Contemporary wave of basic income experiments, namely the ones that took place in the first and second decade of the 21st century, but also some which are now starting.**

! Still... Limited sample: scope and stakeholders' perspective



Adapted from Stanford Basic Income Lab Map  
Available at: <https://basicincome.stanford.edu/experiments-map/>

**15 CASE STUDIES**

## Outline of the book

- Introduction: methodology, case studies, UBI and UBIEXP
- Part 1: What we have learned from the interviews
  - Chapter 2
  - Chapter 3
- Part 2: New questions the interviews have raised
  - Chapter 4
  - Chapter 5
  - Chapter 6
- Part 3
  - Chapter 7
- Conclusion

## Part 1: What have we learnt? (1/5)

- Five cases that are policies;
  - Nine which fall within the category of experiments and pilots;
  - One is a planned study for an experiment or policy.
- 
- Having an experiment or pilot, or having a policy;
  - Distinction between basic income pilots, and experiments.

## Part 1: What have we learnt? (2/5)

- Different goals, methodologies

*How basic income works.*

*What the broad impacts of implementing a basic income are?*

*What impacts an unconditional cash transfer can have if compared with conditional cash transfers?*

- What motivates an experiment? Science, advocacy or both?

## Part 1: What have we learnt? (3/5)

- Can we really call them **basic income** experiments?
  - Universal
  - Individual
  - Amount enough for a life with dignity
  - **Unconditional**

## Part 1: What have we learnt? (4/5)

Limited comparability and scalability

The role of the context

- The role of the methodology in the outcome; the role of the context in defining methodology
- Potential misalignment of interests among stakeholders

## Part 1: What have we learnt? (5/5)

Do we already know enough?

Welfare and health benefits – yes!

Labor market participation – not enough!

Autonomy – some evidence

Economic activity – little evidence

Investments in Education – not enough

**What is the role of basic income experiments: a political, research or advocacy tool?**

- 1) Providing evidence
- 2) Promoting the discussion and debate
- 3) Detrimental to implementation?



## Part 2: New questions (1/3)

- Moral arguments when implementing a basic income experiment?

Politicians and social scientists and the framing of an experiment on basic income (e.g. existing welfare state institutions and policies)

## Part 2: New questions (2/3)

What results are 'new' and/or which ones we would like to know more about?

Identity and power relations and community engagement

Empowering women

Community empowerment and trust

! Important shortcomings from experiments

! The role of the media in framing and interpreting the results

## Part 2: New questions (3/3)

Political or research tools? Or both?

! Populism and manipulation

! Lobbying or experimentation?

## Our (tentative) answers (1/3)

Are basic income experiments justified with the “need more data” argument?

**Yes!** Empirical data is useful: advocacy and ethical debates.

**But... No generalization.** Need to be framed in its particular context

## Our (tentative) answers (2/3)

Do stakeholders play a key role in basic income experiments?

**Tampering exists!** Self-contained experiments are not the answer -  
> limited evidence; also subjected to manipulation

Argue for: **context-meaningful experiments** – which questions are relevant for key stakeholders? Frame the experiment based on their concerns and particular agendas

## **Our (tentative) answers (3/3)**

**Did covid-19 change the debate on basic income experiments?**

**Yes! Accelerated the debate in most countries**

- Push for experiments e.g., USA
- Push for implementation e.g., South Korea or Namibia
- Implementation of quasi-UBI e.g., Spain

**We argue for focusing on permanent basic income (universal and unconditional) instead of short term emergency basic income**

## Why should we conduct basic income experiments, pilots, or policies?

Our case studies  
**cannot escape their  
context**

Social sciences'  
experiments;  
**Different** from UBI  
(definition)

None of the case  
studies led to **political  
implementation**

! Not entirely useful as research tools.

! Not entirely useful as political or advocacy tools.

**How can we justify having more basic income experiments or pilots?**

## 7 Principles for Basic Income Experiments

Experiments can be justified if **acknowledge and incorporate their limitations.**

- 1 Design to collect **robust empirical data** (both experiments and policies)
- 2 Sound **ethical designs** (before, design and implementation)
- 3 **Engage broad set of stakeholders** in different stages



## 7 Principles for Basic Income Experiments

- 4 Data should be **relevant for local stakeholders - relatable**
- 5 Know how to **communicate data** for different stakeholder
- 6 Engage with **normative debates on basic income**
- 7 Consider **the political window for basic income**

Thank you!  
Obrigada!

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