

Basic income and the value of work

Vivan Storlund, Finland
Doctor of Laws, independent researcher

“[T]he introduction of the GBI (Guaranteed Basic Income) will be a historical milestone of the first importance. By officially disconnecting subsistence from paid employment it will mark the transition to the post-employment age, as surely as the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 marked the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society.” With this observation James Robertson hits the core of today’s challenges in his book *Future Work: Jobs, self-employment and leisure after the industrial age*. A basic income is central for the adjustments that need to be made to restore a balance in the transitory stage in which we are now. Robertson notes that a basic income “will start reversing the process that began several hundred years ago, when the common people were deprived of access to land and the wherewithal to provide their own subsistence, and so became dependent on paid labour.” (Robertson (1986 / 2006, p. 173)

The bigger picture

Hardly any piece of the jigsaw puzzle that the industrial society was made of fits today’s reality. New bits and pieces need to be gathered to display the bigger picture of today’s information and communication society - its challenges as well as the opportunities it offers. A basic income should be part of this new picture as it could play a pivotal role in unleashing knots in present day perceptions, structures and practices.¹

In short a basic income could

- counterbalance injustices and undo knots in institutional structures that have passed their best before date;
- reduce the price people have had to pay for reckless behaviour in the financial and business world;
- favour entrepreneurial activities that are more focussed on people's needs than big business does;
- favour artistic work, contributing thereby to a greatly expanding sector that do people good and does not burden mother earth;
- reduce our ecological footprints;

¹ This paper rounds up earlier research where I have mapped out changes in working life and contemplated remedies, among which a basic income is crucial.

- generate a virtuous circle with spin off effects for people as well as local and national economies.

By now, we do not lack information about the changes that have occurred during the past decades. Neither do we lack visions or ideas, but as Mark Newton puts it “the only problem with ... ideas is that it needs people to implement them for it to become more than just a dream”. This he says when commenting on Jeremy Rifkin’s book *The Third Industrial Revolution*.

(http://www.theecologist.org/reviews/books/1222135/the_third_industrial_revolution_how_lateral_power_is_transforming_energy_the_economy_and_the_world.html)

Changing mindsets

The bits and pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that make up today’s reality form new constellations and we need to be attentive to how they interact. To assist in this, I will here call to mind the ideas of some researchers who have been forerunners in pointing out social change and its directions, of which practical conclusions should be drawn.

Jeremy Rifkin was one of the forerunners when he in 1995 drew our attention to the changing role of work in his book *The End of Work*. He notes that jobs are disappearing, never to come back. Blue collar workers and clerical workers, among many others, are destined for virtual extinction. The new jobs that will be created are, for the most part, low paid and generally temporary. Rifkin foresaw a fast polarization into two potentially irreconcilable forces: partly an information elite that controls and manages the high-tech global economy; and on the other side, a growing number of permanently displaced workers with few prospects and little hope for meaningful employment in an increasingly automated world. By 1995, more than 15 % of the American population were living below the poverty line. (<http://www.foet.org/books/end-work.html>)

Also Richard Florida points to this development in his book *The Creative Class*. He warns of a social divide because of the detrimental effects the decline in industry has had on a large part of the population. He assigns the Creative Class three fundamental tasks:

- to invest in creativity to ensure long-run economic growth;
- to overcome the class-divide that weakens our social fabric and threatens economic well-being, as well as;
- to build new forms of social cohesion in a world defined by increasing diversity and beset by growing fragmentation.

Florida considers that we can meet these challenges only by ensuring that the creativity of the many is tapped and that the benefits of the Creative Age are extended to everyone. (Florida 2002, p. 318, Storlund 2006, p. 11) This gives the

members of the Creative Class an economic interest as well as a moral obligation to ensure that all are integrated into the Creative Economy. The motive of human dignity is thereby aligned with economic motives. (Florida 2002, p. 321)

Rifkin has taken an increasingly global perspective on the changes facing us, from how it affects working life to its effects on societies and the environment as well as its impact on us as humans. He points to how the global environmental crisis is forcing a profound shift in human consciousness. We have a historic transition from the geopolitics of the 20th century to the biosphere politics of the 21st century. "For the first time in the long history of our species, we are beginning to think as a human race, with responsibilities to each other, future generations, our fellow creatures, and the planet we jointly inhabit." Rifkin points out that renewable energy and Internet-like technology can create an entirely new blueprint for the world economy. (The Global Environmental Crisis, The Path to Sustainable Development <http://www.foet.org/lectures/lecture-global-environmental-crisis.htm> and The Third Industrial Revolution: How Lateral Power is Transforming Energy, the Economy, and the World (<http://www.theecologist.org/reviews/books/1222135/the-third-industrial-revolution-how-lateral-power-is-transforming-energy-the-economy-and-the-world.html>))

The broader human mobilisation that Rifkin points to has been going on for some time. Manuel Castells drew our attention to this in his comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the changes that have led to the Network Society (1996). He observed that identity has become a primary organising principle. Identity is for Castells the process through which a social player primarily perceives oneself and how meaning is formed out of given cultural attributes. (Castells 1999, p. 35, Storlund 2002, p. 3)

Richard Florida was on to something similar when working on his book The Creative Class (2002). This is how he conveys his own change of perception. "As I delved more deeply into the research, I came to realise that something bigger was going on. Though most experts continued to point to technology as the driving force of broad social change, I became convinced that the truly fundamental changes of our time had to do with subtler alterations in the way we live and work - gradually accumulating shifts in our workplaces, leisure activities, communities and everyday lives. ... it became increasingly evident to me that the emerging Creative Economy was a dynamic and turbulent system - exciting and liberating in some ways, divisive and stressful in others." (Florida 2002, pp. x, xi) Florida's conclusion is that "[a] new social class, in short, has risen to a position of dominance in the last two decades, and this shift has fundamentally transformed our economy and society - and continues to do so." (Florida 2002, p. 82, Storlund 2006, pp. 2-3)

All in all, we are faced with a profound paradigmatic shift that requires participation on a large scale if we want to seize the potentials today's conditions

offer. As always, in a transition we face a number of challenges. Calderon & Lasegna have caught the present ones in a nutshell when asking how we, in a world simultaneously characterised by globalisation and fragmentation should combine new technology and collective memory, universal knowledge and a culture of community, passion and reason. (cited by Castells, 1999, p. 35, Storlund 2002, p. 3) These are central ingredients when we seek new venues for our lives, to adapt to changing circumstances. In addition to people's subsistence, for which fresh approaches are needed, also identity becomes central, involving the human as a spiritual being.

In the Renaissance project young people give a refreshing view of the transformations of our time and how it impacts on our identity. There is a story to be told to capture this. See video presentation at <http://therenaissanceproject.com/>.

A new approach to work

The good news is that there is today abundant space for activities involving identity, creativity and community. This is because industrial work is no longer available on a large scale. And what is equally important, the creative sector has substituted industry as a driving force in the economy. This is a scenario full of potentials. The ecological footprint of art and culture is vastly smaller than that of industry. Ecology is therefore another strong argument for supporting the cultural sector, in addition to the role it plays for our well-being and identity. It is also to this sector we should look when striving for de-growth, as we here can combine activities that do people good with a minimal ecological footprint. Another important arena is civil society, where identity and community are central ingredients. In addition, activities in civil society are often sparing and caring of nature. So, instead of clinging to the chimera of the old industrial rationale, where people are often submitted to command and control, we should give recognition to activities that are already there, as well as facilitate activities that people are striving to do. Such activities are often done as unpaid work that should be compensated through a basic income.

Unpaid work is a fundament both for society and the formal economy, locally as well as globally. It represents largely half of all economic activity. The value of this 'hidden half' is estimated to be roughly equal to the world gross domestic product of the formal economy. (<http://www.ecovaproject.org/>) According to German statistics from 2001 unpaid work accounted for a good bit more than half the economic activities, 96 billion € as compared to paid employment 56 billion.

If unpaid work were properly valued and facilitated through a basic income, financial equations would greatly differ from present-day economic measurements. An illustration: According to its gross domestic product, GDP, Vanuatu is one of the least developed countries in the world. Yet the quality of

life for most people is remarkably high. “Nobody is hungry and there is a food security that comes from local access to fertile gardens. There’s no homelessness, everyone is cared for within extended family units. There’s relatively little violence, and disputes are resolved within communities by traditional leaders.” (Anita Herle 2010, Storlund 2011, p. 56). Vanuatu scored among the best in 2006, when the Happy Planet Index was used for the first time. This index is the first to combine environmental efficiency with well-being, that is, how long and happy lives people live. The Happy Planet Index has been developed by the new economics foundation, nef, (<http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/happy-planet-index>)

The bad news, if it is any news, is that we are stuck with old perceptions that act as a drag on desired change. There is therefore an urgent need to reconsider the notion of work and its value. The Joseph Stiglitz Commission (2008) on the measurement of economic performance and social progress made some constructive recommendations in this regard:

- look at income and consumption rather than production;
- take a household perspective, and;
- look at how people spend their time working. This is comparable both over the years and across countries.

Stiglitz considers that the commission’s report and its implementation may have a significant impact on the way in which our societies look at themselves and, therefore, on the way in which policies are designed, implemented and assessed (Stiglitz 2008, p. 9, Storlund 2011, pp. 56)

A welcomed reassessment of work and its regulation was made in the Supiot Report around the turn of the millennium. On the invitation of the EU Commission, a group of lawyers and economists lead by Alain Supiot looked at the needs for reforming labour law. Their report has by Marsden & Stephenson been characterised as “one of the most original contributions to thinking on the reform of the employment relationship and employment law.” (Marsden & Stephenson, 2001, p. 1)

Three fundamental observations are made in the Supiot report:

- the employment relationship in its existing form has reached its limits as many firms need more flexible relationships with their employees than it can currently provide;
- tinkering at the edges with special types of employment contract for different categories of workers has diluted protection without increasing new jobs; and
- reform of the employment relationship poses severe problems for labour law, collective bargaining and social insurance, because they have all based themselves on the standard employment relationship. (Marsden & Stephenson 2001, p. 3, Storlund 2011, pp. 58, 59)

There is a promise of something new in the experts’ observations. The

fundamental redesign of employment that Supiot and his colleagues proposed included the idea of an equivalent to citizenship rights in the field of work. A person would have an “occupational status” that establishes a citizen’s right involving access to markets and trade. It would also cover the transition between different kinds of activity, market and non-market work, training, re-training, and so on. The right to an income and other advantages would also apply in regard to socially recognised non-market activities. By making workers’ employment rights less dependent on their current jobs, such changes would spread the risks of short term and uncertain employment more widely, encouraging thereby different kinds of activities. (Marsden & Stephenson 2001, p. 6, Storlund 2011, p. 59) Unfortunately, politicians have not yet been ready to act on these proposals. (see Supiot 2009) Nevertheless, the report is a step in the right direction and hopefully its proposals could pave the way for a basic income.

And now finally back to James Robertson who already in 1985 drew attention to the changed nature of work in his book *Future work*. He there points to how work has become individualised and he coined the term *ownwork*, which he sees as the future mode of work. (1985 / 2006, Storlund 2011, p. 55) He then questioned the idea of full employment, a concern that he reiterates, now with focus on money in his recent book *Future Money, Breakdown or Breakthrough?* (2012). “Does it make sense to manage the money system to drive as many of us as possible into paid jobs working for other people and organisations richer and more powerful than ourselves? Might it not make better sense if the money system were managed to allow and enable more of us who wish to work, paid or unpaid, for ourselves and one another, on useful and valuable ‘ownwork’, to do so?” (Robertson 2012 p. 88). He illustrates this view with the opinion expressed by James Lovelock who, with his “Gaia” theory, is a central thinker for the environmental movement. “There are very few scientists who have the chances I’ve had of working entirely independently, and not being constrained by the need to do work that will bring my next grant in. I would never have been allowed to develop Gaia at a university or a government department or an industrial one. You could only do it alone.” (Financial Times, 27 April 2007)

Robertson himself shares this experience, as he was able to change to a more independent way of work in the 1970s. “[I]t heightened my awareness of how much a society loses, when greater numbers of experienced and open-minded people do not see similar changes as possible for them.” (Robertson 2012, p.15 footnote 9).

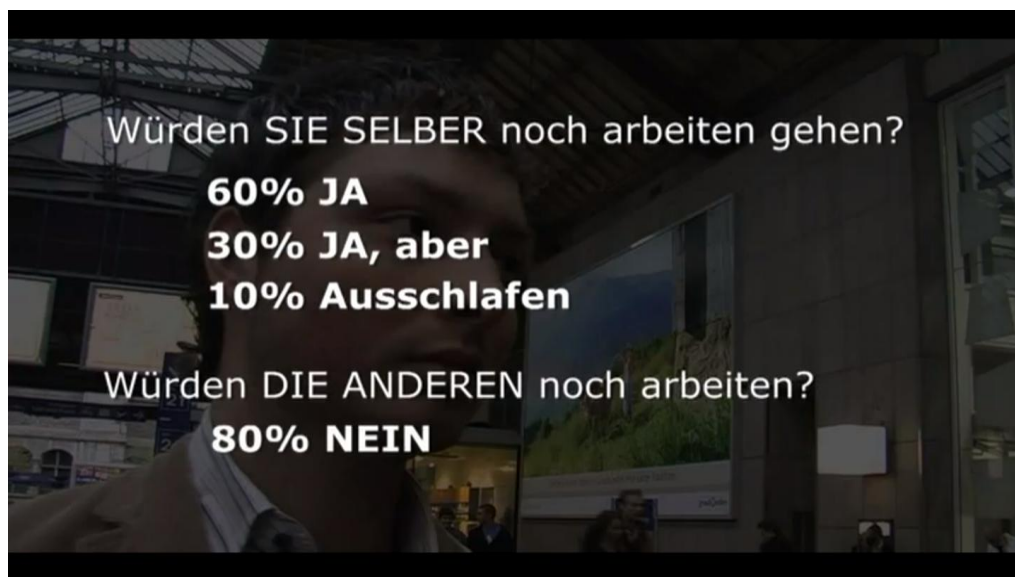
We are here faced with one of the greatest challenges of our time. Because of the narrow and instrumental focus on work as an employment relationship, many highly qualified persons are either unemployed or the work they are doing is invisible because it is not done in the form of employment. This is a typical scenario for artistic work and also for unfunded research. It is equally true for work in civil society and households. This is the kind of work that the Stiglitz commission, along with many others, want to have included in the measurement

of how we fare (GDP).

So instead of the idea that as many people as possible should be encouraged, and if necessary compelled, to work for others, Robertson's alternative is a basic income that would make people's independence a reality. A basic income would enable them to decide how more of their rightful share in the value of common resources should be spent. (Robertson 2012, p. 23)

Rifkin, for his part, considers that redefining the role of the individual in a near workerless society is likely to be the most pressing issue in the decades to come. He suggests that we should move beyond the delusion of retraining for nonexistent jobs and urges us to begin to ponder the unthinkable; to prepare ourselves and our institutions for a world that is phasing out mass employment in the production and marketing of goods and services.
(<http://www.foet.org/books/end-work.html>)

To recognise work that is factually done is a first step. Since some time back unpaid work is being quantified through different kinds of time accounts.² This data may offer valuable counter-arguments to the commonly held view that people would not work if they received money for free, as this slide shows from some German survey. On the question whether you yourself would continue working if you receive a basic income 60 % said yes, 30 % yes but, whereas 10 % said they would sleep. On the question whether they thought that others would continue working 80 % considered that they would not!



² See for example <http://www.levyinstitute.org/undp-levy-conference/> "Unpaid Work and the Economy: Gender, Poverty, and the Millennium Development Goals" Annandale-on-Hudson, NY October 1-3, 2005 [Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP](#) in partnership with [The Levy Economics Institute of Bard College](#)

From the assembly line to design

During the past three decades or so there has been a sea change in the way we work and gain our living. Since labour standards were flexibilised in the 1970s and 1980s working life has undergone profound transformations. It is a very diversified picture, out of which I will here recollect some general trends.

In the advanced economies the main features have been the dismantling of industrial work, along with a diversification of work formats in part kindled by new technology and in part by an explosion in the creative sector. Income-wise there has been a widening gap between high- and low-income earners, resulting in a growing number of working poor. Another distinct feature is that there is no longer a promise that a high educational level will lead to a job and high income.

This represents a new rationale in working life that requires the changed perception of work called for here. The instrumental way of viewing work as employment needs to be diversified to bring forth also human, social and environmental attributes to work on par with economic ones. Along with this, the traditional attributes of work supervision and subordination need to be questioned.

Furthermore, a diversified approach to work reveals that a simple call for increasing employment as an economic cure is no longer a sound alternative. Instead, we should explore the potentials of a basic income that would facilitate activities of a human, social and ecological nature. A basic income would in different ways compensate for the growing economic inequalities caused by changes in working life. At the same time it would offer flexibility to working people on par with employers' call for it. A basic income would offer autonomy instead of the control and constraints inherent in the structures that were tailored for the industrial society.

Tour d'horison

According to German (DGB) Statistics from 2005, 12 % of Germans perceived their work as good, 54 % of them were indifferent about their work (Mittelmässig), whereas 34 % considered their work to be bad. Not a very flattering picture of how work is perceived. And do we need all the work we're doing? In Rifkin's analysis from 1995 of how working life will develop, he estimated that in 2050 perhaps merely some 5 % of the adult population would be needed to manage traditional industrial work.

In contrast, Florida reports in 2002 in his book *The Creative Class* that more than 30 % of the American working population worked in occupations that involve creativity. Florida notes "the Creative Class has shaped and will continue to shape deep and profound shifts in the ways we work, in our values and desires,

and in the very fabric of our everyday lives." (Florida, 2002, p. ix). By 2006 the European cultural sector had been mapped out through a comprehensive study The Economy of Culture in Europe, which showed that the creative sector exceeded most other sectors in economic growth, added value and human input. (Study prepared for the European Commission 2006 by KEA European Affairs)

This transition from an industry-dominated working life to one that reflects features of the information and communication society requires new regulative approaches to work that are still wanting. And it is here that a basic income would have a compensatory and corrective function to the changes that have occurred, of which here some illustrations.

Flexibilisation:

Two studies made by the International Labour Organisation, ILO, on part-time work, 1993, and homework, 1995, revealed that while both employers and the national economy had profited from flexibilisation in the form of homework and part-time work, it was an exception rather than a rule that those working in these work formats would have profited. Here we see a major venue toward a growing number of working poor.

For a long time deviations from the 'standard' of fulltime work of unlimited duration was simply labelled 'atypical', despite the increasing reliance on it. Not only is it a contradiction in terms to talk about atypical in such a situation, involved are also deteriorating labour standards that may be ignored because of the convenient label 'atypical'. (see Storlund 2002, pp. 165-174) Thanks to the Precariat movement greater attention has become directed to the lowering labour standards involved.

Project work:

Parallel with the waning of industrial work, project work made headway. What had earlier been a work format typical for the academic world did now become a panacea not only for employment enhancing measures to compensate for disappearing industrial jobs, but for many other purposes as well. Projects were a convenient way of releasing blocked energies in outmoded institutions particularly in the public sector. For the fast expanding creative sector project work became something of an ordinary form of work. Project work has much potential if administered properly. But here an opportunity has largely been lost. The potential of paving ways for new forms of work and income has been frustrated by a formidable apparatus of selection and control associated with project work, not least by EU-funded projects. Along with project work also predictability has been lost. (See Storlund 2005, pp. 568-571)

The waning of industrial work coupled by an explosion in creative work gave rise

to quite a bewildered picture. New venues for work were needed but of what kind? Innovation became the catchword. There were many projects geared toward finding new jobs and it is from this setting that James Robertson developed his idea of 'ownwork' as the future mode of work.

Good examples became another catchword. But here it appears that policy makers and project administrators became hostages of their own aspirations. If innovation is what you look for, how can you make use of experiences gained even if they work well?! Another basic problem is the limited duration of a project. A basic income would do away with all the frustrating aspects of the project economy, starting with the selection process. It would allow for the use of good examples when they are seen as important and activities could go on for as long as they are meaningful.

Robertson points out that in the age of ownwork it will be accepted as normal that most people will work independently for themselves and one another. Institutions will enable them to do so instead of depending on employers for jobs. Such a scenario would do away with public spending on perverse subsidies as well as some of the dependency-reinforcing services now provided directly by big government. Also expensive contracts to big business and big finance could be dispensed of. Instead that money would be transferred to the distribution of a Citizen's Income directly to all citizens. (Robinson 2012, p. 23)

The changes in the way work is done and perceived requires an alternative approach to the employment-centred one. Reinhold Fahlbeck proposes value as a determining criterion. He considers "value provider - value receiver" to be more appropriate terms. Those who work provide / create / give / sell new and additional values, whereas their opposite party receives /buys / takes these newly created values." Fahlbeck (2000), p. 328) Fahlbeck observes that in ICT society knowledge is the commodity that is primarily held by the many and knowledge is never completely standardised. So even independently of personal preferences and choices, the structure of the ICT society in itself represents decentralisation and flexibilisation. (Fahlbeck 2000, pp. 333-334, Storlund 2002, pp. 192, 193)

Robertson may close this *tour d'horizon* of changes in the world of work. "The real problem is the false perception of the realities of work and incomes in the late industrial society as it has developed over the last 40 years.... The out-of-date prescription that the normal way for most people to get an income is to earn it in a job. In other words, it is time to introduce an unconditional Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) under which all citizens, rich and poor, men and women, old and young, will automatically receive a weekly basic income from the state." (Robertson, 1985 / 2006, p. 166)

Drags on change

What is at stake is both the need for a change of perception and the willingness to make changes. One or both of these lacking and we are stuck with business as usual.

As noted, we do not lack information about changes that have occurred and the new possibilities they offer. The problem is drags on change, to use Fernand Braudel's pertinent expression. In his book *The Wheels of Commerce*, Braudel observed about the ascending power of commerce that productive as it was of so many revolutionary changes during the 15th to 18th centuries, it would have been misleading to think that other sectors and society as a whole should not continue to play their part. The social response, he notes, rarely constituted an acceleration for change, but more often barriers; forces of resistance or drags on change, surviving and exerting their influence for centuries on end.

(Braudel, 1982, p 461, Storlund 2007, p. 9) When commerce was in its ascendancy it was a question of it asserting its place confronted with existing power centres and the interests they represented. Today it is above all a question of accommodating economic interests with human, social and ecological ones, giving them their proper space.

One contemporary illustration of this is that it took almost 20 years for the European Union to arrive at a major regulation of atypical work. Since 1982, the Commission had put forward nine drafts, before a directive was adopted in 1991, extending existing health and safety regulations to temporary workers. Not until 1997 was there a first major breakthrough in the form of a directive concerning the regulation of part-time work (See Storlund 2002, p. 168). The way the EU failed to act on the Supiot report that would have adapted the regulation of working life to changed circumstances is another illustration of this drag on change.

In his book *The Future of Money*, Robertson proposes a comprehensive set of reforms in the economic field that would help to avoid a forthcoming catastrophe. "But", he notes "because established financial and economic thinking is so limited and out of date, most practising professional and academic experts in economics, finance and banking may dismiss the book's proposals as outside the boundaries of their concern." This also concerns the politicians and government officials responsible for managing the money system. And not only them. "Even those few who see the need for the proposed reforms will find it impossible to put them into practice without strong support and pressure from outsiders, including active citizens and NGOs." (Robertson, 2012, p. 12.) In other words, we are all part of this exercise.

How to go about it?

Robertson's message with his book *Future Money, Breakdown or Breakthrough?* is that we need a Copernican revolution in human understanding of how the money system works and how it ought to work. He considers this revolution to be more and more urgently overdue. Robinson notes that this revolution will not only be intellectual and scientific. It will also be a revolution in practice. (Robertson, 2012, p. 11). This is an interesting aspect of the ways the thinkers look at here, look at our time. They directly refer to the degree of engagement of all of us.

So the question is, what role will human interests and concerns play in this new setting where people are the organising principle? Will it be possible, through this change of focus, to ensure an autonomous sphere for ordinary people thwarting thereby the dominance of the economy? This is how Rifkin looks at today's challenges: Old industrial giants such as General Motors, Sears, USX, Boeing, and Texaco, are giving way to the new giants of cultural capitalism, Viacom, AOL Time Warner, Disney, Sony, and News Corporation. These transnational companies, with communications networks spanning the globe, are mining cultural resources in every part of the world, repacking them in the form of commodities and entertainments. The top one-fifth of the world's population now spends as much money accessing cultural experiences as buying manufactured goods and basic services. (<http://www.foet.org/books/end-work.html>)

Rifkin warns that when the culture itself is absorbed into the economy, only commercial bonds will be left to hold society together. In his book *The Age of Access* he poses the central question whether civilisation can survive when only the commercial sphere remains as the primary arbiter of human life. Will there be any time left for relationships of a non-commercial nature? Here a basic income comes into the picture as an important countervailing power. A basic income would create a reserved sphere that would secure the autonomy of persons as a barrier against the commercial sphere.

An intriguing part of this scenario is that we might not be aware of how these changed circumstances impact on all of us. Florida noted on this score: "it struck me that the members of the Creative Class do not see themselves as a *class* - a coherent group of people with common traits and concerns." According to Florida we find ourselves in the puzzling situation of having the dominant class - whose members occupy the power centres of industry, media and government, as well as the arts and popular culture - virtually unaware of its own existence and thus unable to consciously influence the course of the society it largely leads." (2002, p. xi) It is time for the Creative Class to grow up and take responsibility. But first we must understand who we are, says Florida. (2002, p. xii, Storlund 2006, p. 4)

Critical mass

Both Rifkin and Robertson emphasise civil society as an important motor for change, “I still see this shift of emphasis towards local and personal co-operative self-reliance as a vitally necessary response to the future that human societies now face”, Robertson says, but he notes that in today’s global village there are obviously crucial matters to be dealt with at national and international levels as well. But how will the people running those big systems let go of the power they have over us now? “It is wishing for the moon to hope that they will voluntarily get off our backs without being encouraged or compelled to do so. Smooth and peaceful liberation will only be achieved when it is matched by deliberate, planned giving up of power – decolonisation.”

But on the other hand we have the developing capacity of the internet to provide people-to-people instantaneous mass communication. This may speed up the pre-political process that Robertson calls for. And we have, indeed, seen impressive popular responses in the past two years through social media and above all through Avaaz. Avaaz, which means "voice" in several European, Middle Eastern and Asian languages, is a great illustration of today’s potentials of grassroots mobilisation. It is a movement that was launched in 2007 with the democratic mission “to organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want”.

With a small core team and thousands of volunteers the Avaaz community campaigns in 15 languages on six continents backed up by more than 15 million members. They take action such as signing petitions, funding media campaigns and direct actions, emailing, calling and lobbying governments, and organizing "offline" protests and events, to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform the decisions that affect us all. Of this we have got encouraging experience with the Arab spring, the Occupy movement and many more campaigns. (See Highlights page at <http://www.avaaz.org/en/>)

Avaaz’ mission is to empower people from all walks of life to take action on pressing global, regional and national issues, from corruption and poverty to conflict and climate change. Their model of internet organising allows thousands of individual efforts, however small, to be rapidly combined into a powerful collective force.

In The Third Industrial Revolution Rifkin also emphasises bottom-up, collaborative effort rather than large political structures. Top-down structures can easily be targeted by corporate lobbyists aiming to prevent change. The challenge thus is to get past industry lobbyists who are concerned with further entrenching the status quo. If Rifkin’s opus can do this, it could genuinely have the power to change the world for the better, Newton notes.

<http://www.theecologist.org/reviews/books/1222135/the-third-industrial-revolution-how-lateral-power-is-transforming-energy-the-economy-and-the-world.html>

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Rifkin has been an advisor to the European Union since 2002. In that capacity, he is the principle architect of the Third Industrial Revolution long-term economic sustainability plan that addresses the triple challenge of the global economic crisis, energy security, and climate change. The Third Industrial Revolution was formally endorsed by the European Parliament in 2007 and is now being implemented by various agencies within the European Commission as well as in the 27 member-states. (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeremy-rifkin>)

There is thus no lack of civic involvement. What is required is enough enlightenment among people in power positions to take people's voice seriously; to promote the liberating potentials of information and communication technology. Along with this we need to identify and remove obstacles as well as devise structures and practices that will facilitate creative environmentally friendly activities throughout society. A basic income is ideal for this task. And now we have interesting test cases in this regard – the European Citizen's Initiative within the EU and also in Finland, where the prospects for a basic income will be tried out.

As hardly anyone in the Bien network would oppose a basic income I will close on an optimistic note, a favourite citation by Aristotle: "Investigation of reality is in a way difficult, in a way easy. An indication of this is that no one can attain it in a wholly satisfactory way, and that no one misses it completely: each of us say something about nature, and although as individual we advance the subject little if at all, from all of us taken together something sizable results – and as the proverb has it, who can miss a barn-door." (Cited in Barnes, 1985, p. 17.)

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