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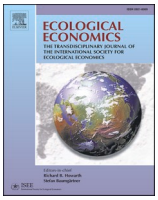

Methodological and Ideological Options

Sustainable welfare: How do universal basic income and universal basic services compare?

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ABSTRACT

The newly emerging concept of sustainable welfare refers to welfare systems which aim to satisfy everyone's needs within planetary boundaries and to decouple the welfare-growth nexus. Both Universal Basic Income (UBI) and Universal Basic Services (UBS) have been discussed as suitable, but potentially competing, approaches that could support sustainable welfare. This paper contributes to this debate by asking how UBI and UBS compare in relation to four sustainable welfare criteria: a) planetary boundaries, b) needs satisfaction, c) fair distribution, and d) democratic governance. The paper argues that UBI and UBS are not so much conflicting but complementary approaches for supporting sustainable welfare. UBI focuses on the consumption side of the economy while UBS addresses the production side more directly, both of which would be relevant in any sustainable welfare system. Sustainable welfare outcomes of UBI and UBS would be shaped by the institutional contexts within which they operate, especially by the governance of markets, collective provisioning systems and decision-making at all levels. More attention needs to be paid to these institutional contexts when discussing potential sustainable welfare outcomes of UBI and UBS.

1. Introduction

The increasing urgency to tackle the climate crisis and social issues such as global inequality and conflict calls for rebuilding economic systems so that they stay within planetary boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015) and satisfy human needs (Doyal and Gough, 1991; Max-Neef et al., 1991). Rebuilding economics systems in this way would also require the establishment of welfare systems that support the dual goals of staying within planetary boundaries and needs satisfaction. A debate about such sustainable welfare systems is beginning to emerge, but more work is required to develop concrete proposals for ways in which sustainable welfare systems could be designed. This paper compares two proposals for sustainable welfare policies that are sometimes presented as competing with each other – Universal Basic Income (UBI) and Universal Basic Services (UBS). However, I argue that both approaches could contribute to sustainable welfare and that they could complement each other, especially if their potential weaknesses are addressed by transforming the institutional contexts within which they operate.

I define sustainable welfare in this article as welfare or social policy systems that support the satisfaction of human needs within planetary boundaries, following the proposal by Raworth (2017) to combine the planetary boundaries framework with theories of human needs. To compare UBI and UBS, I will apply four criteria that sustainable welfare systems would need to meet and that I derive in section 2 from the emerging sustainable welfare literature: 1) compatibility with planetary boundaries; 2) needs satisfaction; 3) fair distribution; and 4) democratic governance.

While neither UBI nor UBS were primarily developed to deal with the ecological crisis, some authors have highlighted their potential benefits for addressing environmental issues or for supporting post-growth economic systems (e.g. Coote and Percy, 2020: 47–51; Fitzpatrick, 2002). UBI refers to the payment of an unconditional income to everyone in society. Contemporary debates about UBI emerged in the 1970s while early ideas can be traced back to the 16th century (Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: ch. 3). The proposal for UBS was put forward in 2017 (Institute for Global Prosperity, 2017). UBS refers to an unconditional provision of public services that address needs satisfaction to everyone in society.

UBS proposals have portrayed UBS and UBI as incompatible, based

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on the argument that they differ ideologically and would crowd each other out financially (e.g. Coote and Percy, 2020: 51–6) (but see Coote and Lawson (2021) for a more recent, conciliatory comment). In contrast, I will argue here that the two schemes could be compatible. A key difference between UBI and UBS is that UBI focuses on the consumption side of the economy while UBS focuses on production or provision (where "provisioning systems" are defined as "set[s] of related elements that work together in the transformation of resources to satisfy a foreseen human need" Fanning et al., 2020). UBI provides people with cash, giving them the choice to consume what is available for monetary exchange. UBS start from the identification of basis needs, organise the collective provision of goods or services required to satisfy these needs, and provide people with free access to these goods and services. Each of these approaches has distinct strengths and weaknesses which this paper discusses, and any sustainable welfare system is likely to require a combination of these approaches. UBI and UBS can even be seen as interrelated because the design of one would influence the design of the other. For instance, if a basic amount of free electricity or water was provided to everyone for free (UBS), the required UBI amount to satisfy people's needs would be lower. And if people were provided with an unconditional income, they would have more capacity to participate in the collective provision of basic goods and services.

Guided by insights from institutionalism (Hall and Soskice, 2001; Polanyi, 1997; Veblen, 1934), it is also important to emphasise that institutional contexts, especially the governance of markets and collective provisioning systems, would influence the performance of UBI and UBS, and that our experience of past and current institutional contexts shapes our conception of potential strengths and weaknesses of UBI and UBS.[1] This implies that debates about UBI and UBS cannot be decoupled from debates about the institutional contexts within which they operate. The paper will address the role of institutions in shaping the sustainable welfare performance of UBI and UBS throughout.

The debate about sustainable welfare, UBI and UBS is relevant across the world; however, these debates are shaped by specific economic and political situations in different world regions. This paper addresses the relationships between sustainable welfare, UBI and UBS in the context of the global north where advanced welfare states exist but are institutionally coupled with unsustainable economic systems that exceed planetary boundaries, and where state capacity for the provision of services is relatively high.

Section 2 defines the concept of sustainable welfare and explains the four criteria of sustainable welfare. Section 3 introduces UBI and UBS. Section 4 compares UBI and UBS using the four sustainable welfare criteria, and the last section discusses the complementarity of UBI and UBS, and ways in which their social and environmental outcomes would be shaped by a set of institutional contexts.

2. Sustainable welfare

Debates about sustainable welfare have only started to emerge recently and focus on re-defining welfare and wellbeing from an ecological perspective, often with an emphasis on human needs and planetary boundaries (Gough, 2017; Koch and Mont, 2016). Some of the earlier literature in this field started to raise questions about the connections between social policy and the environment, but remained on the margins of mainstream social policy debates (e.g. Cahill, 2002; Fitzpatrick and Cahill, 2002; Huby, 1998).

The current literature on sustainable welfare tends to support post-growth positions (Koch and Mont, 2016), where 'post-growth' can be understood as a generic term that covers a range of growth-critical approaches, including steady state economics (Daly and Farley, 2011), post-growth (Jackson, 2019), degrowth (Kallis et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2010), a-growth (van den Bergh and Kallis, 2012), doughnut economics (Raworth, 2017), and wellbeing economics (Trebeck and Williams, 2019). An important distinction needs to be drawn here between GDP growth and the growth of material throughput to the economy. The post-growth literature mainly focuses on material throughput as this is the main criterion for planetary boundaries. However, some of the post-growth literature also remains critical of GDP growth because currently available evidence suggests it is unlikely to be technologically feasible to stay within planetary boundaries while global GDP continues to grow. Even though there are examples of absolute decoupling between GDP growth and environmental impacts in some rich countries, decoupling only occurred at very low rates of growth, and the rate of reduction of environmental impacts remains too slow to be compatible with planetary boundaries (Haberl et al., 2020). Criticism of GDP and material throughput growth also has a social dimension. Growth-based economies tend to be exploitative and increase social inequalities. While not all growth-based systems are capitalist, all capitalist systems are by definition growth-based economies. Growth-critical positions hence tend to be critical of capitalism too (Hickel, 2021), and this includes most sustainable welfare positions.

Growth criticism has several implications for welfare states because current western welfare systems and growth-based economics are closely coupled and mutually dependent on each other: the financing of welfare states currently depends on economic growth (Bailey, 2015) while welfare states contribute to economic growth and act as economic and social stabilisers (Büchs, 2021).

Sustainable welfare systems would seek to overcome the mutual dependency between growth and welfare by making the financing of welfare independent from growth (e.g. by drawing on taxes that are less dependent on economic growth such as taxes on physical and financial capital, land, or inheritance) and by creating welfare systems that are not geared towards generating aggregate economic growth. While the question of how sustainable welfare systems, or UBI and UBS specifically, could be financed, is beyond the scope of this paper, the extent to which UBI and UBS could support a post-growth economic context will be one of the elements of evaluation.

In the remainder of this section, I will identify four criteria for sustainable welfare systems that draw on the doughnut economics framework (Raworth, 2017) and the literature on human needs (Doyal and Gough, 1991; Max-Neef et al., 1991). In later sections, I will apply these criteria to compare UBI and UBS. While there will be additional criteria that are relevant for sustainable welfare, I have selected these four because I think they represent four *essential* principles of sustainable welfare: 1) compatibility with planetary boundaries; 2) needs satisfaction; 3) fair distribution; and 4) democratic governance.

2.1. Compatibility with planetary boundaries

This criterion demands that the outcomes of welfare institutions respect planetary boundaries. Rockström et al. (2009) and Steffen et al. (2015) have identified nine planetary boundaries, four of which have already been transgressed by human activity: climate change, biodiversity, nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, and land use change. Climate change and biodiversity have been identified as 'core' boundaries, which means that substantially transforming them could undermine the "safe operating space" within which humanity can thrive (Steffen et al., 2015). Because of the close connection between the debate on

[1] For instance, in the context of the collapse of state communism and the 'New Washington Consensus', critiques of public provision have become influential across the political spectrum during the 1980s and 1990s when support for UBI started to emerge. Many (centre) left parties in the global north repositioned themselves by adopting 'third way' policies which promoted a greater role for markets in service provision through 'outsourcing', 'internal markets' and privatisation. This is not to say that UBI proponents necessarily agree with these positions, in fact, UBI has often been presented as an alternative to 'third way' labour market activation policies. But what can be argued is that some conceptions of UBI have been shaped by a context of greater scepticism of state provision.

environmental impacts and economic growth, this criterion also evaluates to what extent welfare institutions would aim at or have the potential to contribute to GDP growth or growth of material throughput.

2.2. Needs satisfaction

This criterion demands that welfare institutions significantly contribute to the satisfaction of basic human needs. Several sustainable welfare scholars have argued that wellbeing and welfare should be conceptualised in terms of human needs rather than hedonic, utilitarian or subjective wellbeing approaches (e.g. Gough, 2017; Koch and Mont, 2016). They maintain that needs approaches have greater scope to address planetary limits because needs, unlike wants, are satiable and non-substitutable (Gough, 2017). On an abstract level, human needs are objective and universal, but concrete needs satisfiers are culturally and historically specific. This article adopts Doyal and Gough's (1991) framework, in which the two main human needs are "health" and "autonomy of agency" or freedom, both of which are required for the ultimate goal of "minimally impaired social participation". I interpret "minimally impaired social participation" as including participation in democratic decision making at various scales of the political system and within organisations. Ultimate needs of health and autonomy are underpinned by material and immaterial needs satisfiers, for instance food, water, housing, health care, education, safety and security, and significant relationships. An important additional dimension should be the provision of sufficient amounts of energy for heating, cooling, cooking, cleaning and mobility because access to energy is a condition for good health and social inclusion (e.g. Brand-Correa and Steinberger, 2017).

2.3. Fair distribution

This criterion asks whether welfare institutions achieve a fair distribution of resources and opportunities, as well as of the costs and benefits of social and environmental policies. Fairness here means that the distribution of resources and opportunities should give everyone in society an equal chance to unimpaired social participation (Doyal and Gough, 1991) or equal capability to function (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 1999). Fair distribution is an important criterion for sustainable welfare because it is a fundamental condition for social functioning and stability, especially in post-growth economic systems (Daly and Farley, 2011). Rising levels of inequality and hunger in many countries suggest that, without redistribution, economic growth no longer 'trickles down' to improve living standards and opportunities of disadvantaged people. Even if growth could improve welfare through 'trickle down' effects, this vehicle is not available in post-growth societies. Rather, fairer distribution needs to be achieved through political decision-making. Furthermore, the criterion of fair distribution should not only apply to people within one country or locality, but also globally, and across generations. An assessment across countries and generations is outside of the scope of this paper, however.

2.4. Democratic governance

This criterion checks whether welfare institutions are being designed, adopted and changed through democratic and accountable processes at local, national and international scales. This dimension has been less prominent within the sustainable welfare literature so far. But I argue that it is an important element of an evaluative framework for sustainable welfare for three reasons.

First, democratic rights and opportunities are a core dimension of human needs and should be part of the definition of sustainable welfare. For instance, Max-Neef et al. (1991) includes "participation" in his list of nine "axiological" needs. Doyal and Gough (1991) conceive of rights and opportunities for political participation as pre-conditions for needs satisfaction, but one can argue that these rights and opportunities should be listed directly among the needs satisfiers given that "minimally impaired participation in society" is defined as the ultimate need in society. Based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Raworth (2017) also includes "political voice" in her list of social foundations of the "doughnut".

Second, human needs are only 'universal' and 'objective' in an abstract sense. Human needs approaches emphasise that needs satisfiers – the concrete ways in which needs can be satisfied within historically and culturally specific social contexts – can vary across time and space. To avoid a 'paternalistic', 'top down' identification of needs and needs satisfiers in welfare systems, citizens need to be given opportunities to participate in processes of defining needs and their satisfiers.

Third, post-growth economic systems only have a chance to function well in the long term if they derive from democratic processes. The move to an economic system that stays within planetary boundaries requires fundamental changes that citizens approve of. This can only be achieved through truly democratic and participatory processes (Büchs and Koch, 2019).

3. Universal basic income and universal basic services

3.1. Universal basic income

Core to most definitions of UBI is the payment of an unconditional, regular income by the state to every resident in a country (Standing, 2004; Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017). Unconditionality means that payments do not depend on levels of other income sources or wealth, willingness to work, or domestic living arrangements. Therefore, UBI is not a supplementary form of income support, minimum income guarantee, or a negative income tax, all of which would be withdrawn as soon as an individual receives income from other sources. The definition of UBI does not specify a set level of income, but supporters commonly argue that a UBI should be sufficiently generous to reduce poverty and increase people's 'real freedoms' (Raventós, 2007; Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: 10–11). Some proposals consider a 'partial' UBI at a lower level of income (Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: 165–9), and I will argue below that a partial UBI could complement UBS.

Most proposals emphasise that UBI would need to be financed by replacing existing income support schemes and through progressive taxes. In this paper, I assume a progressive system of financing UBI which would result in a net redistribution from richer to poorer people. An analysis of the financial viability of UBI (and UBS) goes beyond the scope of the paper. Financial viability will critically depend on societies' willingness to redistribute and target resources towards UBI and UBS schemes which could become fundamental for establishing sustainable welfare systems.

3.2. Universal basic services

While discussions about public services and universal provision have a long history, the specific concept of UBS was only proposed recently in a report by the Institute of Global Prosperity (2017). Fundamental to the UBS proposal is that services that satisfy people's basic needs, including health and social care, education, and basic levels of housing, food, mobility and information, should be provided to everyone through public or collective institutions according to need, regardless of ability to pay and free at the point of use (Coote and Percy, 2020; Gough, 2019; Institute for Global Prosperity, 2017). Here, I will use a broad definition of UBS that includes universal basic infrastructures (such as roads and electricity grids) and universal vouchers (e.g. for home energy or public transport) (Bohnenberger, 2020; Foundational Economy Collective et al., 2018) because services, infrastructures and vouchers can be seen as complementary mechanisms for providing goods and services that satisfy needs.

The universality of UBS mainly refers to the *right* to access services if need arises. The actual provision of UBS often requires some form of

needs assessment, for instance for health and social care. However, some goods and services could, in principle, also be allocated on an equal per capita basis such as internet access or even water and electricity. Equal per capita allocation removes needs testing and stigma, but bears the risk of over-providing for large households (which typically have lower per capita consumption due to economies of scale), and underproviding for people with additional needs, for instance due to old age or disability. This could be addressed by making the allocation tradable which maintains distributional outcomes of per capita schemes while achieving a more targeted allocation of the actual good or service in question. Which provision mechanism is more suitable for which type of need, and how levels of need would be determined, are highly complex questions that would need to be decided in democratic processes.

4. UBI and UBS comparison

4.1. Needs satisfaction

In this section, I discuss the potential of UBI and UBS to meet the sustainable welfare criterion of needs satisfaction, first focusing on material needs and then on needs for autonomy and freedom. Needs for democratic voice and participation will be discussed in the section on democratic governance.

4.1.1. Universal basic income

UBI would seek to address people's needs by providing a basic income to everyone, either at a level that is sufficient for satisfying needs, or lower levels that *contribute* to needs satisfaction. One of the advantages of universal, unconditional provision of a UBI is that it would remove means- and needs-testing. Means- and needs-testing can limit take-up of benefits among disadvantaged people due to stigma and bureaucratic hassle, a problem that universal provision would address.

A UBI could also contribute to needs satisfaction by freeing up time for people to engage in activities they value. The ability to pursue meaningful activities is often regarded as a human need in itself (Max-Neef et al., 1991), but many of these activities can also contribute to the needs satisfaction of others, for instance through care work, volunteering, or political engagement. Whether people can be trusted to spend their time in socially useful ways has been a point of controversy. In response to such concerns, some proposals combine a basic income with forms of conditionality, such as the one by Atkinson (1996). However, these versions are not included in the definition of UBI applied in this paper.

Some authors have raised concerns about UBI's ability to satisfy needs. UBI would provide cash so that people can satisfy their needs by consuming goods and services that are available for purchase. UBI critics often assume that goods and services would be provided through markets and raise the concern that if market failures occur, needs satisfaction through UBI could be compromised. Markets may not provide certain goods or services, or only at inadequate levels of quality or affordability (Coote and Percy, 2020: 51–5). Another concern is that a UBI could crowd out already existing public service provision, e.g. for health care or education (ibid.: 52). Since UBI focuses on the consumption side of the economy and does not specify whether goods and services should be provided by the market or collectively, it is sometimes perceived to favour market provision over collective provision. This perception may also have been bolstered through right-wing UBI proponents who have advocated the replacement of welfare state institutions with the private provision of health and social care, or education (Murray, 2008).

In addition, UBI has been regarded as a potentially powerful vehicle to support people's needs for freedom and autonomy. First, a UBI would make people less dependent on paid employment and thus support their 'de-commodification'. Greater autonomy in the labour market would strengthen employees' position vis-a-vis capital owners (Offe, 2008; Wright, 2006). Second, a UBI would reduce people's financial dependency on partners or other close relations, enabling them to leave abusive or unsupportive relationships (still mainly relevant to women). A basic income would therefore give everyone in society the capacity to 'be and do what they have reason to value' (Sen, 1999), and to enhance people's 'freedom to' make use of opportunities (rather than just reduce 'freedom from' poverty, oppression, etc.) (Van Parijs, 1995).

4.1.2. Universal basic services

The proposal for UBS focuses on how people's basic needs can be met most reliably and fairly. Proponents argue that a universal and free, public or collective provision of basic services which directly address people's needs would be more efficient and effective than a market-based approach (Coote and Percy, 2020: 39–43). UBS advocates argue that markets can be unreliable in meeting people's needs, as demonstrated by inflated housing markets or high prices for public transport, especially in systems with private monopolies and complex pricing structures that disadvantage consumers (Bowman et al., 2014; Foundational Economy Collective et al., 2018). They hence argue that public provision can be more effective here: "Providing a single mother with a cash payment to fend for herself in an inflated housing market is not as effective as providing quality public housing" (Pavanelli, 2019).

The arguments put forward by UBS proponents rest on specific assumptions: that UBI inherently favours market provision; that governments are not able or willing to regulate markets; and that governments are willing and able to provide high quality goods and services that satisfy basic needs. However, there is no reason why UBI could not be combined with collective provision or market regulation; and public or collective provision does not automatically guarantee that this provision is adequate for satisfying needs.

In addition to addressing needs satisfacton directly, UBS could contribute to needs satisfaction indirectly by increasing people's ability to engage in activities that they value. UBS would provide an in-kind, "virtual income" or "social wage" because individuals would no longer need to pay for these services from their income (Coote and Percy, 2020; Gough, 2019). Similar to UBI, this would make people less dependent on the labour market, increase their bargaining power in the workplace, and free them up to pursue activities that they value and that can address needs of others too, such as care and voluntary work. The provision of UBS would also create higher demand for workers in basic services sectors, including health and social care, education, housing, food production, energy, public transport and communication services. Many jobs in some of these sectors require direct personal interaction and are more difficult to rationalise. Since these jobs would be located in the public sphere, they would be sheltered from pressures of international competition (Coote and Percy, 2020: 48; Foundational Economy Collective et al., 2018: 3). This is a benefit in a context with low or no economic growth as it provides more stable job opportunities.

Critics of UBS see its weakness in its more prescriptive approach (Coote et al., 2019: 18) and its potential to bolster powerful state bureaucracies that are insufficiently responsive to people's needs. Where UBI would give people the choice about how they want to spend the money they receive, UBS would make assumptions about ways in which people's needs are best satisfied. Liberals view such assumptions as paternalistic. Those who defend the idea of universal basic needs and UBS counter that ensuring the satisfaction of basic needs creates the material *conditions* for people to be autonomous and make use of their positive freedoms. Much would depend on how democratic and participatory the political and administrative processes are through which needs and needs satisfiers are defined (see section 4.4).

4.2. Planetary boundaries

4.2.1. Universal basic income

Various scholars have promoted UBI from an ecological perspective (e.g. Birnbaum, 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2002; Lawhon and McCreary, 2020; Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017). Some argue that a UBI could aid

transitions to an environmentally beneficial post-growth economy as it would support people's livelihoods in the context of low or no economic growth.

Commentators remain divided on the question of whether a UBI would reduce environmental impacts. To assess this, one needs to consider the impacts of a UBI on the supply of labour and consumption (growth of material throughput). If UBI reduces labour supply and consumption, resource use and related environmental impacts would fall, but the opposite would be the case if labour supply and consumption increase.

Many supporters argue that a UBI has the potential to reduce the supply of labour and hence the growth of material throughput because it offers people an alternative source of income and increases their bargaining power vis-à-vis employers (Lawhon and McCreary, 2020; Offe, 1992; Wright, 2004). Spending and associated environmental impacts could also decline because people now have more time to engage in activities that serve their 'real' needs which they previously attempted to address through consumption. Greater equality that results from the redistributive effects of UBI might also reduce 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1934) through which people seek to boost their social status (Boulanger, 2009).

These views are countered by concerns that a UBI could increase material throughput growth if it increases economic efficiency. Economic efficiency could increase if UBI reduces administrative burdens as other welfare benefits are abolished (Birnbaum, 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2002). How UBI would affect employment levels and hence consumption is also unclear. UBI is sometimes promoted with the argument that it could increase the supply of labour among low income groups. This could happen because the universal provision of UBI removes eligibility criteria for benefits common in many current welfare regimes, and hence reduces disincentives for labour market participation that currently exist for benefit recipients (Raventós, 2007: 22). Several UBI experiments found supporting evidence for increasing labour market participation (Forget, 2011; Kela, 2020). In contrast, it has been argued, a UBI might decrease labour supply of better situated people because it provides a secure, alternative source of income and thus the opportunity to trade work with leisure or other 'purposeful' activities (Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017). An analysis of a UBI experiment that covered a whole town in Canada in the 1970s found an aggregate decrease of labour market participation and an increase in wages (Calnitsky, 2018). But things are complicated by the fact that higher income groups would experience a net loss of income from a UBI that is financed through progressive taxation. If higher income groups want to maintain their lifestyles, they may still increase supply of labour.

Impacts of a UBI on consumption also remain unclear. Even if a progressively financed UBI would not result in a net, economy-wide increase in income and only redistributes from richer to poorer people, it could lead to an increase in consumption and associated emissions as shown in recent modelling of a hypothetical reduction of global inequality (Oswald et al., 2021). This is because average spending by lower income groups is more carbon intensive per monetary unit than that of higher income groups since poorer people spend a higher proportion of their income on carbon intensive goods and services such as home energy or motor fuels (Büchs et al., 2014). However, the studies cited here do not take the impact of savings and investments into account. Rich people are far more likely than poorer people to invest their money for financial gain. Such investments rely on for-profit business models and growth-oriented economic systems which tend to be related to increased environmental impacts. If the environmental impacts of investments are taken into account, a redistribution from richer to poorer people could therefore have overall beneficial environmental impacts.

Furthermore, a UBI on its own would not change the way in which goods are produced or services provided, and it would not dis/incentivise what people could spend the additional income on. If there are few options for environmentally friendly consumption, or if people choose to spend their income on high-impact products, a UBI would have little capacity to reduce environmental impacts (Andersson, 2009; Boulanger, 2009; MacNeill and Vibert, 2019).

Some scholars have proposed UBI could be coupled with environmental policies, for instance by financing it through taxes on natural resources or pollution (Andersson, 2009; Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: 149–152). While at first sight this appears to be a win-win scenario, it has problems. For instance, financing a UBI through taxes on pollution would undermine its financial basis in the long run if these taxes successfully reduce environmental impacts (Calder, 2009). In addition, environmental taxes are often highly regressive because they burden low income households more in relative terms (Büchs et al., 2014). A UBI would need to counteract these regressive effects, which could reduce its redistributive capacity.

4.2.2. Universal basic services

To compare possible macroeconomic effects of UBS such as labour supply and consumption (material throughput) to UBI, one first needs to ask how the two compare distributionally. Similar to UBI, if UBS were financed through progressive taxes, we would see a redistribution from rich to poor because the provision of services is worth more to poorer than to richer people in relative terms (Gough, 2019; Verbist et al., 2012). Impacts on the supply of labour, consumption and related environmental impacts would hence be similar to UBI.

However, UBS differ from UBI in that provision could be explicitly designed in an environmentally friendly way. For instance, renewably generated electricity could be prioritised in the provision of basic amounts of free 'green' electricity; social housing could be built to net zero emission standards, etc. Supporters therefore argue UBS could be more effective than UBI in reducing environmental impacts since the latter would rely on the provision through (often insufficiently regulated) markets. However, whether governments would provide UBS in an environmentally friendly way largely depends on political decision-making and the way in which service provision is managed; it would not be an inherent feature of UBS; and as discussed above, UBI is not inherently reliant on (unregulated) market provision.

It should be noted that UBS could lead to a decrease in GDP because distributing certain basic goods and services for free to the population would not lead to monetary transactions and hence not appear in GDP accounting. As discussed above, the environmental impact of such a shift would depend on the ways in which provision is organised. But political contexts which do not prioritise GDP growth might be required to facilitate a shift to UBS.

Another factor to consider which relates to both UBI and UBS is that universal provision of income or services would likely increase the consumption of energy in the home, for travel and other consumption of people who were previously under-consuming due to fuel, transport and general poverty. Ending all forms of poverty and limitations of needs satisfaction would need to be at the core of sustainable welfare. However, to prevent an aggregate increase in energy and material consumption, this would need to be counter-acted with reductions in consumption at the top of the distribution.

4.3. Fair distribution

4.3.1. Universal basic income

Creating a fairer distribution of both material conditions and opportunities is one of the main aims of UBI. Even though every eligible person would receive the same income, this would be worth more to low income than high income households relative to their income. In addition, it is often assumed that a UBI would be financed through progressive taxes, for instance on income and wealth (but note that there are some proposals such as those summarised by Van Parijs & Vanderborght (2017: 154-8) to finance a UBI with sales taxes (value added tax) which tend to be regressive).

Estimating overall distributive outcomes would need to take into

account the effect of abolishing other cash benefits and the impact of UBI on real wages. Most proposals assume that a UBI would replace existing minimum income schemes. In relative terms, the removal of these schemes would reduce incomes at the bottom and middle of the distribution more than top incomes. For overall distributive effects of UBI to remain progressive, financing of the UBI would need to correct for this by putting higher burdens on rich households. Modelling by the OECD (2017) has shown that while the richest income groups would tend to be the greatest net losers from a UBI, there are some scenarios in which low to middle income groups would be the greatest net losers due to the removal of existing cash benefits.

Furthermore, distributional outcomes of a UBI would depend on effects on real wages. In response to a UBI, employers might decrease wages (Zamora, 2017) because they know that people's living costs are now partly covered by the basic income. In addition, producers might increase prices in response to higher taxes on capital or profits, thus passing costs on to consumers and reducing real incomes. Impacts on wages might differ by sector. For instance, wages of unpopular, low-pay jobs may increase if workers can reduce their labour supply for such jobs due to the greater financial security they would have with the UBI (Calnitsky, 2018). Conversely, wages in higher paid sectors might fall, for instance if a UBI would lead to higher labour supply here due to the impacts of progressive income taxation. Such shifts in wages may have additional redistributive effects.

Feminist supporters of UBI have argued that a UBI could contribute to greater gender equality because it could support women's autonomy by reducing dependency on male breadwinners and because it would compensate women for currently unpaid care work (Cox, 2019). At the same time, a UBI could remove career pressure on men and thus enable them to make a greater contribution to care and household responsibilities.

4.3.2. Universal basic services

In a UBS system, every person would be entitled to be provided with basic goods and services according to need and free at the point of use. UBS provide an in-kind income. While some services such as housing are targeted at low income groups, richer groups tend to benefit more from services such as tertiary education (Verbist et al., 2012). But on average, the value of existing in-kind public service provision has shown to be very evenly distributed across income groups in OECD countries (ibid: 35). Since the value of service provision constitutes a higher proportion of income for low income groups compared to high income groups (ibid.), the distributional effects of UBS would be similar to UBI. Tradeable per capita provision might be possible for certain services such as water, electricity and internet provision, and this would have equivalent distributional effects for the same amount of UBI.

Supporters argue that UBS would make the distribution of the capacity for needs satisfaction fairer compared to existing cash benefit systems which, in many countries, are not sufficiently effective in satisfying needs, lifting people out of poverty and reducing inequality (Institute for Global Prosperity, 2017: 18–9).

These redistributive effects of UBS could have similar impacts on real wages compared to UBI. If prices increase as producers pass on additional taxation to consumers, people would be shielded from such price increases for the portion of basic goods and services provided through UBS. Furthermore, UBI arguments about greater gender equality can be extended to UBS because the in-kind income would strengthen women's autonomy, compensate for care work, and support a more even distribution of care work and household tasks between men and women.

4.4. Democratic governance

4.4.1. Universal basic income

UBI could improve democracy as it would give people greater freedom over their use of time and hence greater capacity to participate in democratic processes (Casassas, 2016; Raventós, 2007). However, this only holds if supply of labour really decreases under UBI as its supporters claim. Furthermore, whether or not greater availability of time would result in increased participation and more democratic policy-making would depend on the design of democratic institutions. In more general terms, several UBI trials have shown that UBI can change people's self-perceptions and relationships in ways that could be beneficial for political participation and support for green policies. In several trials, the receipt of UBI was associated with lower stress and anxiety levels (Lawhon and McCreary, 2020), perhaps because the payment gave people a greater sense of social security. Potentially, UBI could thus make people feel more connected to the state and reduce perceptions of individual risk, which could increase political support for green policies (ibid.).

However, critics have argued that UBI would do little to enhance workplace democracy. While it may strengthen the position of workers vis-à-vis capital owners, it would not fundamentally change the relationship between them (Gourevitch, 2016). Additional measures would be required to increase workplace democracy.

4.4.2. Universal basic services

Since UBS would provide a 'virtual income' that could free up people's time from paid employment, UBS has a similar potential compared to UBI to enhance people's capacity for democratic participation (dependent on labour market effects). Similar to UBI, UBS could increase people's sense of social security, their perceived relationship to the state and to each other, with the potential to generate a more supportive context for radical green policies.

However, one likely objection against UBS is that the definition of needs and needs satisfiers can be paternalistic, and that the provision of UBS would require large state bureaucracies which might be managed top-down without much user participation. There are several ways in which these concerns can be addressed. First, several authors have emphasised the importance of deliberative democratic processes to involve citizens in the definition of needs and needs satisfiers in their respective contexts (taking into account planetary boundaries and needs of future generations and of other communities) (e.g. Büchs and Koch, 2019; Gough, 2017). Experiments with citizen juries that have emerged in response to the climate emergency are encouraging in that respect. Debates about basic needs satisfaction could be modelled on, and potentially even linked to such processes, to combine the debate about needs with debates about how needs satisfaction can be achieved within planetary boundaries. Second, UBS supporters stress that they envisage a re-design of public service provision that is user-led, co-produced and democratically accountable, and hence responsive to people's and communities' needs (Coote et al., 2019; Coote and Percy, 2020). Service delivery could be organised in collaboration with organisations that are more democratically and cooperatively run than traditional state administrations.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The comparison between UBI and UBS suggests that each of them would have the capacity to support sustainable welfare. At the same time, specific opportunities and risks can be identified in relation to each of these proposals. It is important, however, not to understand these opportunities and risks as inherent features of UBI and UBS but rather as co-shaped by institutional contexts that influence the ways in which UBI and UBS operate and the outcomes they generate. It follows that potential risks of UBI and UBS could be addressed through the design of institutional contexts such as the governance of markets, states, and decision-making; as well as policies that influence macro-economic and distributional effects of UBI and UBS. In this section, I discuss a set of institutions and factors that would influence the potential of UBI and UBS to support sustainable welfare (summarised in Fig. 1), and summarise the ways in which UBI and UBS can contribute to sustainable welfare.

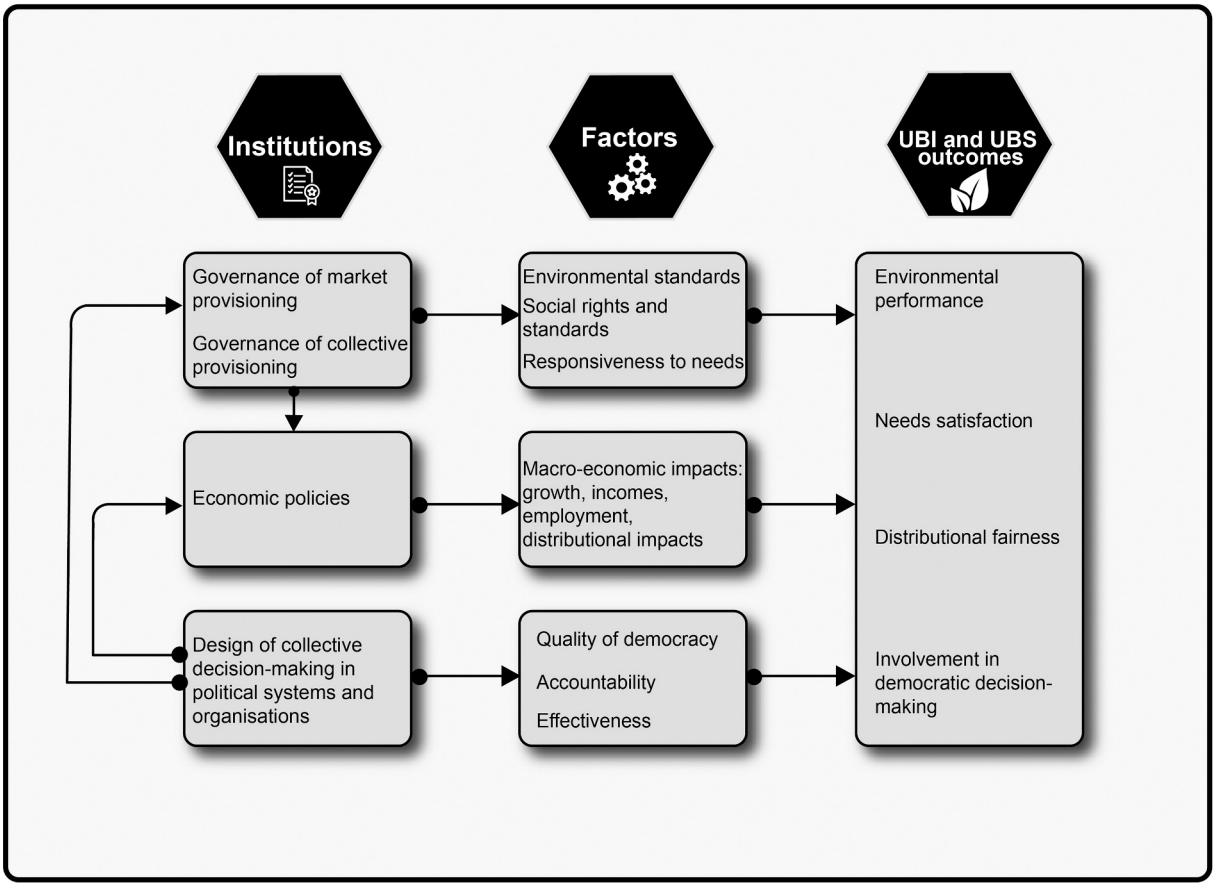

Fig. 1. Institutions and factors that would shape the sustainable welfare potential of UBI and UBS.

The main argument that I want to put forward based on the comparison of UBI and UBS is that they can be regarded as complementary modes of provisioning that can promote sustainable welfare if institutional contexts address their respective risks. In this scenario, a *partial* UBI at a lower level of income that *contributes* to needs satisfaction (Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: 165–9) would be sufficient and beneficial because it could avoid financial competition between the two approaches. How exactly UBI and UBS could be combined is an open question that would require further work and public debate.

An important difference between UBI and UBS is that UBI would focus on the consumption side of the economy while UBS more directly address production or provisioning. A UBI would be an income that everyone can choose to spend as they wish on goods and services that are available for monetary exchange, whether they are provided by privately or collectively owned and managed institutions. UBS are by definition collectively provided and access is free of charge at the point of use. It is plausible that sustainable welfare systems would require a mix of these two forms of support. For instance, in areas where preferences or personal needs matter more, as for example in relation to food or clothing, at least a certain extent of choice over purchasing decisions is important.

Collective provision can be a useful tool for tackling common market failures because it pools risks and resources. Collective provision is hence particularly well suited in areas such as health and social care or education, or the provision of relatively uniform goods and services such as water, home energy, public transport, and internet services (including the physical infrastructures that support them).

How UBI and UBS would perform in relation to sustainable welfare criteria would be shaped by institutional contexts. The first set of institutions in Fig. 1 relates to the governance of provisioning, i.e. market regulation and the governance of collective provision. The governance of provisioning impacts on environmental and social standards applied in the provisioning process, and the extent to which provisioning is responsive to people's needs. UBS advocates often portrait UBI as an approach that favours market provision, but UBI does not inherently rely on a specific mode of provisioning, just on provisioning for monetary exchange. However, the analysis in this paper demonstrates that the discussion about UBI cannot be decoupled from a discussion about the provisioning systems within which it would operate: a UBI could have vastly different outcomes depending on whether goods and services are provided through highly unregulated markets or through a more coordinated system which features market regulation and collective provisioning. The governance of markets would therefore influence sustainable welfare outcomes. Market regulation would not only be relevant for UBI but also for UBS because even public or collective institutions may have to purchase goods and services on the market to organise the provision of basic services to people in need (e.g. products for social housing developments, buses for public transport schemes, etc.). Better market regulation could address at least some types of market failures. For instance, if a right to housing was enshrined in law and if there were limits on the rents that landlords can charge, a UBI could contribute to the satisfaction of housing needs. Environmental and social standards could also be set for the provision of energy, public transport, food and other consumer items. International and national annual carbon budgets that contract over time could provide a framework that would limit the growth of material throughput and shape production and consumption.

Equally important is the governance of collective provision, both for UBS which are by definition collectively provided, as well as for UBI if collective provisioning is part of its institutional context. UBS advocates argue that collective provision could address needs satisfaction more directly and effectively, and achieve a reduction of environmental

impacts by designing provision in an environmentally friendly way. However, whether this potential can be realised depends crucially on the ways in which collective provision is organised. Collective provision would need to be governed such that it prioritises environmental performance and needs satisfaction which could be promoted by making provision responsive to user needs, and through state-citizen co-design, public accountability, and rigorous environmental assessment.

Both UBI and UBS thus have the potential to contribute to sustainable welfare outcomes. By providing cash or in-kind income, both UBI and UBS have the capacity to make people less dependent on paid employment, enhancing people's positive freedoms and their ability to engage in purposeful activities. This can contribute to people's own wellbeing, but also to needs satisfaction and environmental protection in society more widely. Both UBI and UBS could also support the goal of staying within planetary boundaries if a fall in aggregate employment equates to a fall in consumption and associated environmental impacts. Furthermore, both approaches are thought to have progressive distributional effects: if they are financed progressively, poorer people would receive a net gain from these schemes while richer people would experience a net loss of (cash or in-kind) income. In addition, distributional effects would be influenced by ways in which increases and decreases in labour market participation that result from UBI and UBS are distributed across different social groups, as well by the impact of UBI and UBS on wages, salaries and prices.

These considerations show that these environmental and distributional outcomes would depend on the ways in which UBI and UBS interact with a range of economic policies (e.g. labour market, monetary, taxation policies) and the macroeconomic effects that arise from this interaction. Very fundamentally, the quality of the institutions that would influence the sustainable welfare performance of UBI and UBS would depend on the design of collective decision making at all levels of policy-making and within organisations. The design of decision-making is crucial for the quality of democracy, as well as for the accountability and effectiveness of decision-making.

In conclusion, both UBI and UBS have the potential to contribute to sustainable welfare. There would be a place for both UBI and UBS in sustainable welfare systems because both have particular strengths that can be combined. The sustainable welfare performance of both UBI and UBS is likely to be shaped by institutional contexts within which they operate. Discussions about UBI and UBS hence need to address these institutional contexts more directly, including the governance of markets and collective provisioning, as well as decision-making at all levels.

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