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From Rights to Activation: The Evolution of the Idea of Basic Income in the Finnish Political Debate, 1980–2016

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Abstract

The article contributes to the growing body of research on the politics of basic income by analysing the framing of the idea in the context of Finland, a country with a long history of debate and one of the forerunners in experimenting with this policy. Using a comprehensive dataset of political documents covering 36 years, the study shows how contextual factors and shifts in political climate shaped the framing of the idea. It also shows that the key frames describing basic income were widely shared among the politicians and parties discussing the policy. The study enriches our understanding of the politics of basic income by adding an ideational perspective that has for long been a missing element in this field of research.

1. Introduction

The idea of basic income, a regular cash allowance granted to the entire population of a given country or region with no strings attached, has recently become a hot topic in social policy debates. The idea has also risen on the political agenda in countries such as Finland, the Netherlands and Canada, as variants of a basic income model have been tested in local or nation-wide experiments.

The recent surge of attention has given rise to a growing number of studies discussing the political feasibility of basic income. There have been important contributions to understand the policy positions of parties and stakeholders related to the basic income issue (Chrisp, 2017; Sloman, 2018; Vanderborght, 2006; Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017; Stirton *et al.*, 2017), the challenges of coalition-building (De Wispelaere, 2016b), policy learning (De Wispelaere 2016a), and policy design and implementation (De Wispelaere, 2015; De Wispelaere and Stirton, 2012; Jordan, 2012; Martinelli, 2017). However, apart from Steensland's (2008a, 2008b) analyses on the failures of the American guaranteed minimum income policies in the 1960s and 1970s, studies have paid very little attention to the role of ideational factors and framing as determinants of the political feasibility of basic income. However, the positions of parties or stakeholders regarding this issue cannot be fully understood without knowing

how the basic income idea has been framed and communicated in the public and political discourse. Also, the discussion on political challenges remains vague unless we know whether the actors share the same frame concerning the basic income issue, or whether there are some crucial differences in their framing of this idea.

Ideas can be understood as broad political ideologies and policy paradigms, values and attitudes, cultural categories and beliefs, or as specific policy programmes and framing processes (Campbell, 1998; Béland, 2005, 2009; Béland and Cox, 2010; Béland and Mahon, 2016: 43–6). Ideational processes are not distinct from institutional realities or political power, but are intertwined with other factors to produce policy stability or change (Béland and Mahon, 2016: 43–44). Framing is the act of communicating policy issues and ideas; a frame sets a 'lens' through which the issue is viewed by 'highlighting some features of reality while omitting others' (Entman, 1993: 52–4). Policy framing is a deliberate and rhetorical activity aimed at generating support – or opposition – for given policies by mobilising and manipulating cultural and political symbols available in society's ideological repertoires (Béland, 2005, 2009; Béland and Mahon, 2016: 47–9; Hiilamo and Kangas, 2009). Just as frames can be used to seek legitimacy for policy ideas, they can also be mobilised to undermine support or to preventively tackle potential objections (Béland, 2005: 11–2). From an ideational perspective, the ability of policymakers to frame their proposals in a culturally resonant and normatively acceptable way is a key factor in explaining the triumph of some policy alternatives over others (Béland, 2005: 12; Hiilamo and Kangas, 2009: 458–9).

Programmatic policy ideas, such as basic income, are discussed in the context of institutional realities, real-world events, and in the discursive context of prevalent political ideologies or policy paradigms; these contextual factors can be expected to shape the framing of the idea. Also, shifts in what Kingdon (2010) calls 'political mood' may affect the understanding of a policy idea. For instance, when the political climate shifts, a formerly popular idea might be dismissed as 'heretical', as happened for basic income in Denmark in the early 2000s (Christensen, 2008). Alternatively, the idea might be re-framed to resonate with the new 'moods' in politics.

Variants of the basic income idea are enjoying support – as well as opposition – from across the political spectrum (e.g. Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: 189–206; Standing, 2017: 281–3). However, it has been argued that, when the policy is taken to practice, the perspectives of parties that have formerly expressed support on a general level may prove incompatible (Chrisp, 2017; De Wispelaere, 2016b). De Wispelaere (2016b) argues that when moving from the discussion on the abstract idea towards implementation, insurmountable obstacles may appear causing a 'persistent political division' between the basic income proponents. However, in his argumentation those obstacles

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mainly concern the questions of policy design, not the discursive disagreement concerning the purposes of the basic income policy.

This article sheds light on this largely understudied area of the discursive politics of basic income by examining how the idea has evolved in the framing of political parties in the context of the Finnish welfare state. Framing can be regarded as a key aspect of the public and political legitimacy of a policy such as basic income (De Wispelaere and Noguera, 2012: 29); yet, there has been almost no empirical attention to this issue. Parties are interesting targets of the research since they, apart from being important sources and promoters of frames, hold direct political power. Finland presents an interesting case for the study because its basic income debate has a long history and a relatively strong involvement of political parties (Koistinen and Perkiö, 2015), and it is also one of the forerunners in experimenting with the policy.

Drawing on a comprehensive dataset of political documents, the article sets out to answer the following questions: how did the idea of basic income emerge in the Finnish political debate? How has the framing of the basic income idea evolved to reflect changes in Finnish society and the political climate? How did different parties orient to the basic income idea in their framing? The study utilises documents generated by parties, both as electoral material and in parliamentary proceedings, starting from the onset of the basic-income-related discussion in 1980 and ending in 2016, just before the government's experiment was launched.

Drawing on Entman's (1993) definition of framing, the article introduces a method for identifying frames, tracing their evolution and linking them with political actors employing them (see also Steensland, 2008b). According to Entman (1993: 52) 'to frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient* (. . .), *in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation*' (italics in original). Operationalising this definition, the article attempts to build a systematic tool to identify and classify frames in the Finnish basic income debate. This method allows the study to quantitatively track the usage of each frame over time linking them with parties, and qualitatively analyse the contents of each frame simultaneously.

The rest of this article is organised as follows. The second section provides a brief overview of the Finnish political system and parties, as well as a short history of the basic income debate in Finland. The third section introduces the data and methods used in the study. The fourth and fifth sections present the findings of the empirical analysis, with the fourth concentrating on the evolution of frames over time linked with the parties using them, and the fifth analysing the contents of the debate with an attempt to contextualise the findings by linking them to economic, political and ideological changes in Finnish society. The sixth section concludes the article and discusses the relevance of the findings.

2. The idea of basic income in the Finnish welfare state context

The Finnish basic income experiment conducted by the present centre-right coalition government – consisting of the centrist-agrarian Centre Party, the centre-right National Coalition Party (NCP), and the right-wing nationalist and populist Finns (from June 2017 Blue Reform) has received worldwide media attention. However, this experiment builds on more than 30 years of debate, where variants of the basic income idea have been discussed in electoral and parliamentary processes.

The origins of the basic-income-related debate in Finland are usually traced back to the 1970s or early 1980s (Andersson, 2000; Ikkala, 2012; Koistinen and Perkiö, 2015). In contrast with many other countries where the idea has been widely debated, in Finland it has been political parties rather than social movements that have been active in the discussion from the beginning (Koistinen and Perkiö, 2015). Although individual supporters can be found in nearly all parties, the Centre Party, the Greens, and the Left Alliance come out as clear supporters of the idea, whereas the remaining parties can be described as falling in the neutral or opposing camps (Stirton *et al.*, 2017). Ironically, the most eager advocates, the Greens and the Left Alliance, are both in opposition as the proposal is being tested.

While, internationally, basic income advocates typically come from the relatively small green and left-wing parties, Finland is distinctive because the country's Centre Party – one of the most popular parties – has consistently expressed interest in the idea. The history of the party as the voice of the agrarian population – and thus an advocate of universal flat-rate benefits over income-related social insurance (Kangas *et al.*, 2013) – could to some extent explain the party's interest in basic income. Another country in which political interest has historically come from the centre-right is Britain (Sloman, 2018).

The Finnish multiparty parliamentary system has historically been characterised by three roughly equally sized major parties – the centre-right National Coalition Party (NCP), the centrist-agrarian Centre Party, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) – and a varying number of medium-sized and small parties. Consequently, there has been no single ruling party with an overwhelming majority; parties have been forced to form coalitions and seek consensus (Kangas and Saloniemi, 2013: 13–5). This has also left its mark on the Finnish social security system: although it is usually labelled social democratic (Esping-Andersen, 1990), it actually reflects a unique mixture of labour and agrarian interests (Kangas and Saloniemi, 2013). The Finnish political scene changed in 2011, when the nationalist-populist Finns Party gained a significant share of the vote in elections and joined the former 'big three'. After the 2015 elections, the party entered the coalition government led by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä of the Centre Party.

One of the greatest landmarks in Finnish politics is the deep recession of the early 1990s, which marked a departure from the old egalitarian ideals of the Nordic welfare model and the triumph of 'neoliberal' ideas of competitiveness and economic efficiency (Kananen, 2012; Kantola and Kananen, 2013). It changed the tone of social policy from the 'passive' distribution of benefits towards targeting activation policies (Kananen, 2012; Kantola and Kananen, 2013: 817–9). Although a paradigm shift of this kind could be expected to make the political atmosphere less welcoming for ideas such as basic income, as happened in Denmark (Christensen, 2008), basic income was widely discussed in Finland during the mid- and late 1990s, and some of the parties placed the proposal on their agendas (Koistinen and Perkiö, 2015).

A comprehensive social security reform has historically featured on the agendas of various governments, yet widespread agreement on systemic flaws has not easily translated into a consensus on how to put things right. One historical reason for this is the tripartite negotiating system, where no social security reform can take place without the consent of the employers' and employees' unions (Kangas and Saloniemi, 2013: 15–6). Apart from the genuine basic income models, in recent years there has been a boom of proposals that, while bearing some resemblance to basic income,[1] lack the full universality and unconditionality that are usually considered to be the key features of basic income (De Wispelaere, 2015: 50–4; Van Parijs and Vanderborght, 2017: 16–23).

The aim of the two-year basic income trial launched in January 2017 is 'to explore whether basic income could be used to reform the social security system so as to reduce incentive traps relating to working'.[2] The trial consists of giving – unconditionally and without means-testing – a basic income of €560 a month (that is, the equivalent of the minimum unemployment benefit after taxes) to 2,000 randomly selected individuals across the country who were formerly receiving unemployment benefits. The participants, aged between 25 and 58, are offered training and other employment services on a voluntary basis, and there are no sanctions for declining job offers. The participants' income taxation is not adjusted to the basic income system.

However, the scope and design of the trial have been considered by many to be insufficient for determining the real impact of basic income. Experimenting with an unconditional policy also contradicts with the main policy line of the government, which has consisted of a series of reforms to increase benefit conditionality and sanctions to incentivise job-seeking activities among the unemployed.

3. Data and methods

The data comprise political documents from 1980 to 2016 in which basic income or a related concept (see the keywords below) appears. These documents include

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party programmes and election manifestos (N=58), different types of parliamentary motions (N=28), written questions to ministers (N=5), and transcriptions of the parliament's plenary session debates (N=285). The documents examined represent electoral and parliamentary activities (not, for instance, the activities of ministries or municipal councils).

The data were obtained by making searches with the selected keywords from the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (party programmes and election manifestos) and the online archive of the Parliament of Finland (motions, written questions, and plenary session transcripts). Election manifestos from 1980 to 2000 were obtained from the National Archive, the Labour Archive, or the archive of the Centre Party. All parties that had at least one seat in the national parliament during the examined period were involved in the data search. The keywords used were (English equivalents in brackets) *perustulo* (basic income), *kansalaispalkka* (citizen's wage), *kansalaistulo* (citizen's income), *kansalaisraha* (citizen's money), *negatiivinen tulovero* (negative income tax), and *perustoimeentuloturva*, *kattava perusturva*, or *vähimmäistulo* (all translated as guaranteed minimum income).[3] The total number of documents yielded by the keyword searches was 506, but the analysis was restricted to only those documents that mentioned a given concept in a substantively meaningful way (not, for instance, as part of a list). This reduced the total number of analysed documents to 376.

All together 12 parties, or their representative members of parliament (MPs), discussed basic income or a related concept in their electoral/parliamentary activities during the examined period. These parties are the Centre Party, the National Coalition (NCP), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Greens (seats in parliament from 1983 onwards), the Finnish People's Democratic League (communist), whose successor from 1990 onwards is the Left Alliance (leftist), the Rural Party, whose successor from 1995 onwards is the Finns Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Swedish People's Party, and two minor liberal parties, the Liberal People's Party (four seats in 1980–1983 and one seat in 1991–1995) and the Young Finns (two seats in 1995–1999). In addition, there were some short-lived minor parties that did not take part in the basic income debate. Oppositional framing – that is, the framing of basic income in negative terms – occurs only in 17 per cent of all examined documents. Table 1 shows that there was great variation among the parties in the amount of basic-income-related discussion.

The data used for this study cover nearly all documented political discussion on basic income in the examined period. However, it leaves aside the public debate that occurred in the media; the views of experts, NGOs, and interest groups; and the internal debate within the parties. The data also does not cover the expert and stakeholder hearings concerning the 2017–2018 experiment, nor the statements of the parliamentary committees regarding the experiment law.

TABLE 1. The number of different types of analysed documents per party

Party	Programmes/ Manifestos	Motions/ Questions	Plenary sessions*
Greens	25	2	106
Communist/Left Alliance	14	11	78
Centre	14	6	79
Rural/Finns	0	9	49
Liberal**	3	0	27
NCP	2	1	29
SDP	0	2	50
Christian Democrats	0	2	14

*The sum is higher than the total number of analysed documents because in one plenary session there can be MPs from more than one party speaking.
**Liberal People's Party or Young Finns.

The study does not give an overall picture of all the framing of basic income in Finland, but it does give a comprehensive picture of the framing done by political parties. Yet, given the large amount of data and the long period covered, the analysis may hide some nuances of the debate. The reason for focusing on parties is that they are key actors in policy framing. The parties have also been central in the Finnish basic income debate (Koistinen and Perkiö, 2015); civil society actors, for example, have played a less prominent role.

Figure 1 shows the variation in the amount of basic-income-related political documents over time. It shows that there have been peaks in the basic-income-related political discussions and activities in the late 1980s, the mid-1990s, and from 2015 to 2016, but the peaks do not always correspond to the type of document.

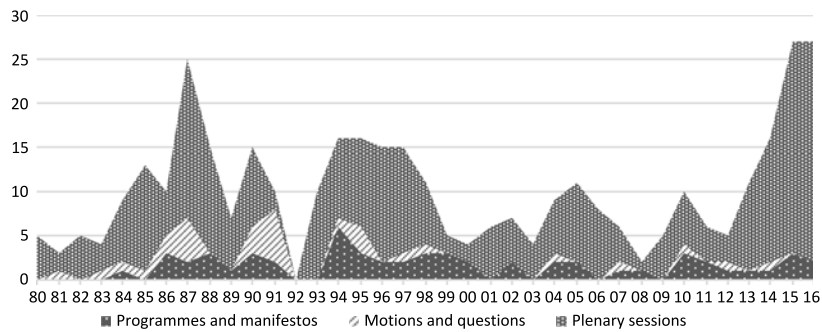

Figure 1 The number of different types of analysed political documents per year

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The starting point for the analysis is 1980, because it was in that year that the concept of 'citizen's wage' (which is often considered a synonym of basic income) first appeared in the data. The use of different concepts with somewhat similar meanings posed a challenge in the data selection, especially in the early part of the examined period. In addition, the basic income concept itself was sometimes understood in different ways. Because one purpose of the study was to examine the historical evolution of the idea, those ideas and concepts that bear similarity (though not full correspondence) to basic income (defined as universal and unconditional benefit) were also included. In the analysis section, the concept of basic income will be used, unless there is a reference to another particular concept.

The early idea of a 'guaranteed minimum income' has its roots in the debates of the 1970s, and it gained momentum as a part of the 1983–1987 government's agenda. The debate on the topic had died out by the early 1990s with no significant outcomes. The purpose of this policy was to simplify the social security system and make it more comprehensive by unifying different benefits, raising the levels of the lowest benefits, and guaranteeing a minimum standard of living for all citizens by legislation. The concept of a citizen's wage first appeared in the parliamentary proceedings in 1980. In use, it had various meanings: as something similar to the guaranteed minimum income, as an unconditional payment to welfare recipients or to all citizens, or as a 'wage' for civil work or activities for the 'common good'. In addition, concepts such as 'citizen's money' and 'citizen's income' were circulated, but less regularly used, during the 1980s and 1990s. The term 'basic income' was first introduced by the Greens and the Communists in the second half of the 1980s. It was most often described as an unconditional payment either to all citizens/residents or to all those whose income fell below a certain threshold, yet it occasionally also appeared as being conditional on some activity. From 1994 onwards, basic income was the term most often used. In addition, the concept of 'negative income tax' was occasionally used throughout the period, mainly as an alternative way to implement a citizen's wage or a basic income system.

The purpose of the analysis was to trace the origins of the basic income idea in the Finnish political debate, to identify the key frames used in the debate and examine their contents and evolution over time, linking them to the parties employing them. The first stage of the analysis was to identify the frames.

The analysis process began by coding the relevant data segments where basic income or a related concept was discussed into coding categories representing Entman's (1993) four elements of framing – that is, diagnosing problems (problem definitions), assessing causes (causal interpretations), linking policy options to social principles or values (moral evaluations), and prescribing solutions (treatment recommendations). A similar methodology for identifying frames was used by Steensland (2008b) in his analysis of the framing of the American guaranteed income plans in the 1960s and 1970s. The data were coded

manually by the author using Atlas.ti software, the coding unit being a meaningful text passage. The frames were identified by inductive methods from the coded data segments by observing linkages between problem definitions, treatment recommendations, causal interpretations, and moral evaluations that were bound together by a central organising idea or principle (Gamson *et al.*, 1992: 384) and by certain metaphors, catchphrases, representations and narratives (Steensland, 2008b: 3).

After identifying the key frames, their evolution over time linked with the parties employing them were examined by coding each document separately in Excel in terms of the frames they contained and the parties using those frames. Each frame, if used, was coded once per document (in the plenary session documents, the framing was linked to all parties whose MPs used it in that discussion). This coding allowed the systematic examination of the variation in framing over time. The unit of analysis at this stage was a policy document that could be a manifesto/programme, a motion or written question, or a plenary session debate.

4. Evolution of frames in the Finnish political basic income debate

Table 2 displays the 12 most frequently used frames in the Finnish political basic income debate.[4] It shows that the frame *Activity* has been the most prevalent (appearing in 47 per cent of all analysed documents), and the next two frames, which appear with an almost equal frequency, are *Subsistence* and *Systemic reform*. In addition, there are nine frames that were used with varied frequency. The coding process also identified several frames that were used less frequently, but those frames were omitted from the analysis.

TABLE 2. The most frequent frames and the number and percentage of all examined documents in which they appear

Frame	N of documents*	% of documents
Activity	176	47%
Subsistence	157	42%
Systemic reform	153	41%
Rights	89	24%
Transformation of work	69	18%
Work alternatives	69	18%
Justice	57	15%
Equality	52	14%
Autonomy	52	14%
Dignity	43	11%
Distribution	41	11%
Budget balance	31	8%

*Note that multiple frames can appear in one document.

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Table 3 shows the contents of each analysed pro-basic income frame using Entman's (1993) categorisation. In brief, the *Activity* frame portrayed basic income as a tool to incentivise work and other activities, *Subsistence* as a way to improve the income level or income security of deprived groups, *Systemic reform* as a policy to correct systemic flaws in social protection, *Rights* as a way to improve the fulfillment of social rights, *Transformation of work* as necessary because of the dearth of traditional forms of employment, *Work alternatives* as a search for alternatives to existing policies and forms of employment, *Justice* as a tool to increase justice, *Equality* as a way to increase equality, *Autonomy* as a policy to increase individual autonomy, *Dignity* as a way to provide a decent life in dignity for all, *Distribution* as a tool to change the wealth or income distribution, and *Budget balance* as a way to save public expenditures.

In many cases, frames did not stand as sole entities, but overlapped in their contents. For instance, the *Activity*, *Systemic reform*, and *Subsistence* frames were often intertwined as the reduction of welfare bureaucracy was argued to improve incentives to work, and thereby enable deprived people to improve their standard of living. Similarly, *Rights*, *Equality* and *Subsistence* often overlapped in their arguments that guaranteeing a sufficient income as a right for all would increase equality among people and reduce poverty. However, it makes sense to treat them as separate frames, as each of them focuses on a different issue as a central organising idea at the core of a frame (Gamson *et al.*, 1992: 384).

Figure 2 shows the evolution of the frames over time linked to the parties employing them (the unit of analysis being one document where the 'speaker' can either be a party or an individual MP). All opposing framing is placed in the category 'opposition'.

Figure 2 shows, firstly, the very different development of the *Activity* frame on the one hand, and the *Rights*, *Justice*, and *Equality* frames on the other. It shows that *Activity* was almost non-existent during the 1980s and the early 1990s, but suddenly grew in prominence in 1994, being the strongest individual frame during the 1990s, and particularly in the 2014–2016 period, when the plans for the current experiment were discussed. In turn, *Rights* was the strongest individual frame during the 1980s,[5] but it declined in the 1990s and was almost non-existent from the early 2000s onwards. A similar, yet milder, development can be observed in the *Justice* and *Equality* frames. The *Subsistence* and *Systemic reform* frames, instead, remained strong throughout the period. The figure also shows how the economic frames *Distribution* and *Budget balance* evolved in contrary patterns, *Distribution* being frequently used in the 1980s and 1990s, but no longer from 2000s onwards, and *Budget balance*, in turn, being non-existent in the early part of the 1980s but becoming somewhat frequent from 1987 onwards. In addition, *Work alternatives* was frequently used from the 1980s to early 2000s, but it became rare from 2003 onwards. The figure also shows that in the first two decades there was more variation in framing but, from

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TABLE 3. Contents of the frames in the Finnish basic income debate

Frame	Problem definition	Causal intrepretation	Moral evaluation	Treatment recommendation
Activity	Incentive traps, incompatability of work and benefits	Complexity of the benefits system	Virtue of diligence, activity should be rewarded	Incentivise work and activity with basic income
Systemic reform	Old-fashioned, complex, rigid, bureaucratic benefits system	Multiplicity of benefits, complexity of the welfare legislation	Values of simplicity and flexibility	Streamline the benefits system with basic income
Subsistence	Poverty and/or income insecurity among deprived groups	Incomplete coverage, low level of benefits, poverty traps	The need to fight poverty	Provide better coverage and/or income level with basic income
Rights	Shortages in the fulfillment of social rights	The flaws of the benefit system	Emphasis on social rights	Guarantee a right to an adequate income for all in all life situations
Transformation of work	Unsuitability of the benefits system to present day labour market	New technology, globalisation, increase in non-standard forms of employment	Social security should be aligned with labour market changes	Modernise the social security system with basic income
Work alternatives	Too narrow understanding of work	End of full employment, labour market change	Value to alternative forms of activity	Enable alternative policies and forms of activity with basic income
Justice	Injustices among people or in the treatment of welfare recipients	Existing social and taxation policies	Just treatment for all	More justice with basic income
Equality	Social/economic inequality	Existing economic and social policies	The value of equality	More equality with a social security reform
Autonomy	Compulsive and paternalistic welfare practices	Compulsive elements of the benefits system	Individual freedom and independence as values	More personal autonomy with basic income
Distribution	Unequal or unfair distribution of wealth or income	Policies that are benefitting the well-off and neglecting the poor	Justice in distribution	Fairer distribution with basic income, fair share
Dignity	Stigmatising benefits system and humiliating treatment of recipients	Welfare paternalism, bureaucracy	Human dignity	Decent life in dignity for all with basic income
Budget balance	Budget deficits, unaffordable welfare system	Inefficiencies of the benefits system, lack of work incentives	Virtues of financial discipline and frugality	Rationalisation and budget savings with basic income

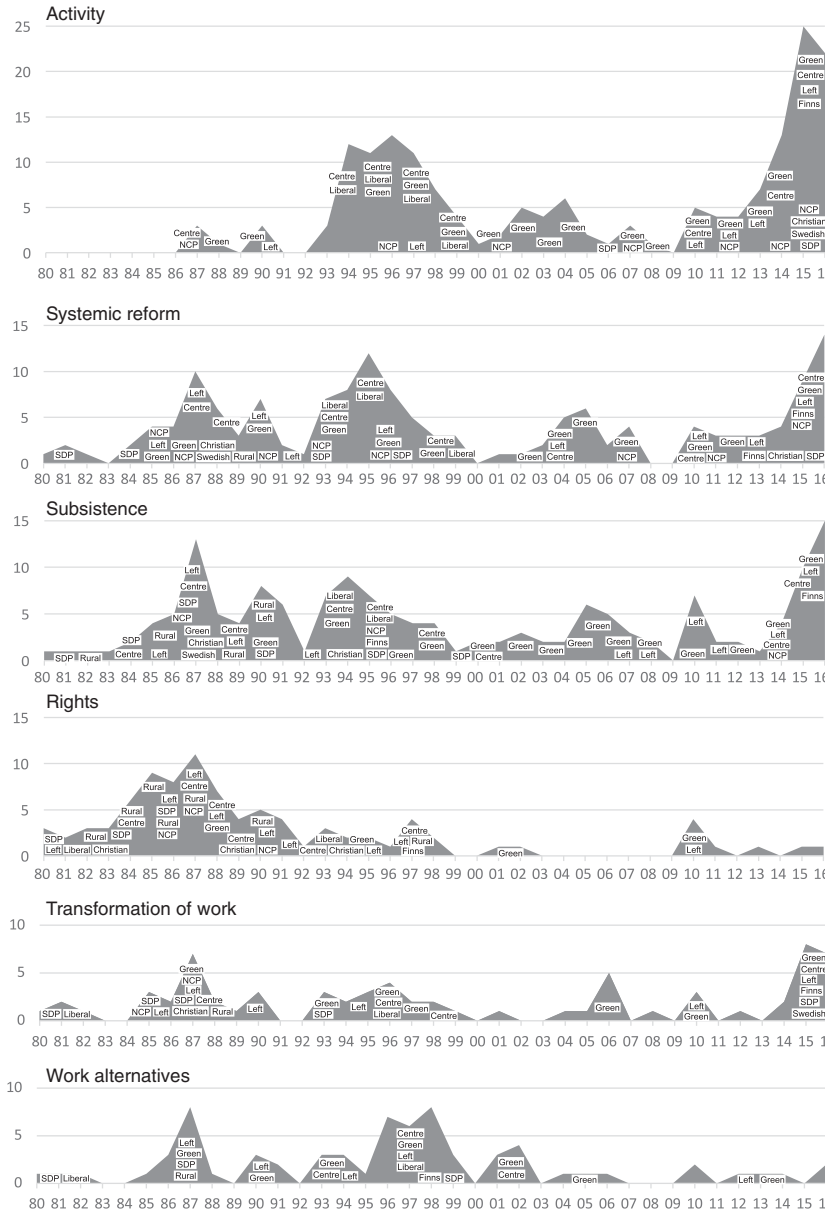

Figure 2 Evolution of frames over time linked to the parties using them

the early 2000s onwards, the discussion was largely dominated by the three strongest frames.

Figure 2 shows that the most frequent frames were used by (MPs of) all those parties that made positive statements regarding basic income or a related

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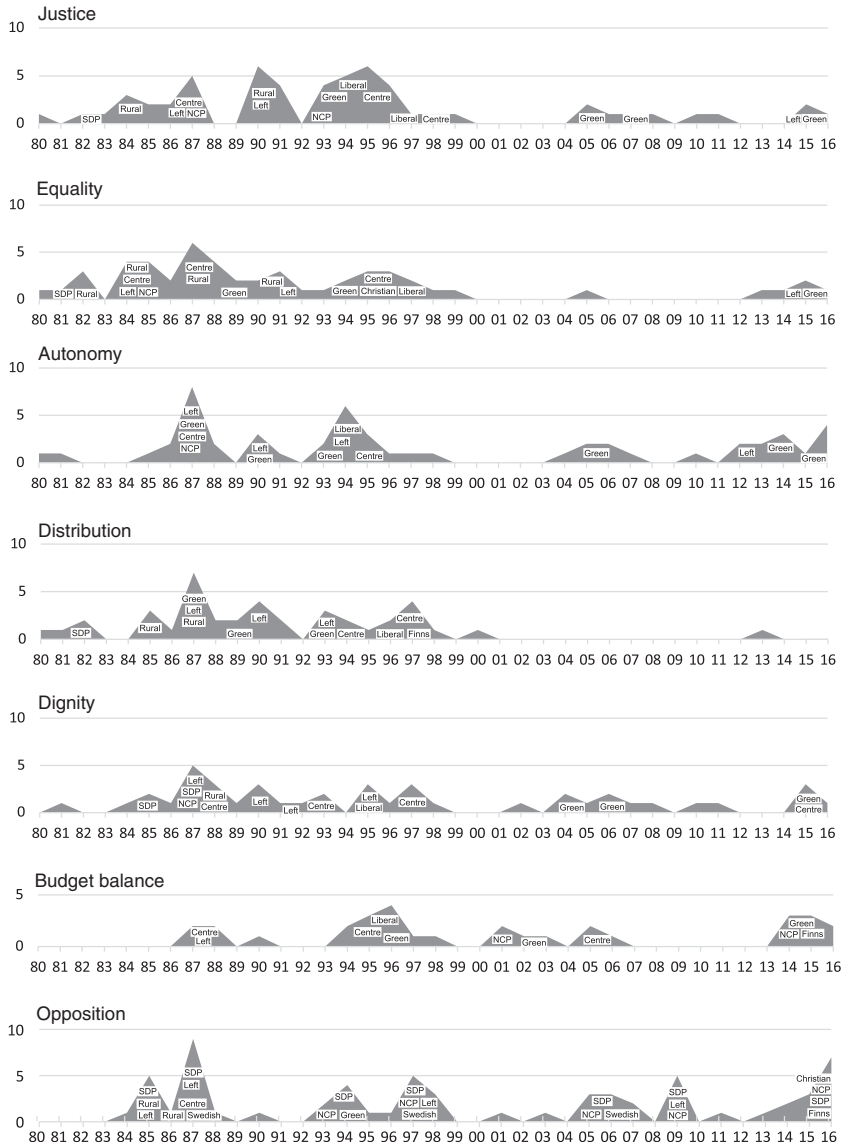

Figure 2 (Continued)

idea. It shows that the three major frames were shared, but the Left and the Green parties were using also some of the weaker frames more often, especially at the end of the examined period. Consistent with Steensland's (2008b) analysis on the framing of the American guaranteed income plans, the graph shows that ideational diffusion rather than a change of actors in the debate was responsible for the shift in framing. In other words, the shift of dominance from the *Rights* to

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the *Activity* frame was a result of actors adopting a new frame – and a new concept[6] – rather than a shift in the composition of actors. However, the usage of the same frame does not necessarily mean that all parties shared the same policy positions (see Steensland, 2008b: 19); rather, they debated the merits of basic income on the same grounds.

Throughout the entire period, most advocacy framing was done by the Greens, followed by the Centre and the Communist/Left parties. In the first years analysed, the SDP appears as the most active in advocacy framing, which was mostly due to the activity of one individual MP. Figure 2 shows that particularly during the peak years, the dominant frames were shared by MPs from various parties. It shows that during the 1990s, when the debate was peaking, the Centre, the Greens, and the Liberal parties were the most active in advocacy framing, particularly in the usage of the *Activity* frame. During the relatively quiet period of the 2000s, the Greens were nearly alone in keeping the basic income discourse alive. The figure also shows that *Rights*, *Work alternatives*, *Justice*, *Equality*, *Autonomy* and *Dignity* frames were shared among many parties in the 1980s and 1990s but, from 2000 onwards, only by the Greens and the Left Alliance. *Transformation of work* deviates from those frames, as in the last years it grew in strength and was employed by most parties in the pre-experiment debate. Furthermore, the figure shows that in 2014–2016, when the experiment plans were discussed, the *Activity* and *Systemic reform* frames in particular were widely shared among the MPs.

Figure 2 also shows the amount of oppositional framing over time. Oppositional framing occurred in 63 documents in total, which is 17 per cent of all analysed documents (in most of those documents advocacy framing also occurred). Most of the oppositional framing was done by the SDP (in 31 documents), followed by the NCP (in 12 documents) and the Communist/Left Alliance (in 11 documents). The Rural/Finns, Centre, Swedish, Christian, and Green parties' MPs used oppositional framing in fewer than ten documents each. The opposition was most often targeted at the concept of a citizen's wage, whereas a guaranteed minimum income received no opposition. There was no single dominating frame used by those opposing the concept. Generally, the normative resistance to the idea of 'free money' was intertwined with concerns about the negative impacts on the motivation to work and the economy.

5. The contents and context of the debate

The early 1980s, the period when the basic-income-related debate began, was an era of economic affluence overshadowed by a modest but consistent rise in the unemployment rate and the persistence of poverty among some segments of the population (Kangas and Saloniemi, 2013: 9). It was also a time of the incipient liberalisation of the Finnish economy and the widespread arrival of new

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technologies (Kangas and Saloniemi, 2013). Nevertheless, the principles of Keynesian economics, as well as the ideals of equality, solidarity and universalism, were still dominant political ideas (Kantola and Kananen, 2013).

The two early policy ideas, the guaranteed minimum income and the citizen's wage, were talked about in terms of streamlining the social protection system and guaranteeing a decent standard of living as a right of all citizens in all life situations (the *Systemic reform*, *Rights*, *Subsistence* and *Equality* frames).

However, there were some substantial differences between the two policies. The concept of a guaranteed minimum income enjoyed widespread support among the parties during the mid- to late- 1980s, whereas the citizen's wage was a rather radical proposal initially advanced by only a few individual politicians from the SDP, Communist and Green parties. Although the parties favoured their own slightly different versions of the guaranteed minimum income, there is no full correspondence between it and the idea of basic income that emerged later. Nonetheless, it can certainly be identified as one of the main roots of the basic income debate in Finland.

The guaranteed minimum income policy was strongly framed in terms of social rights and equality: 'Every citizen should be guaranteed a minimum income security in case of unemployment, sickness, or old age, regardless of their occupation and place of living' (Centre Party MP, plenary session 29 September 1982). This goal was to be achieved by reforming the complex and scattered benefits system towards one universal minimum income scheme. The left-wing and Rural parties' advocates also emphasised the redistribution perspective in their reasoning for the reform (the *Distribution* frame). Unlike the other basic-income-related concepts, this policy was discussed separately from employment policy issues, with the target group being the economically 'inactive' part of the population.

There was more variation in the framing of the citizen's wage. The concept was particularly linked to concerns regarding the breakdown of the traditional, full-employment society due to technological progress (the *Transformation of work* frame), and the alleged necessity to search for alternative employment policies (such as job-sharing) and ways to reconceptualise work (the *Work alternatives* frame). The citizen's wage was also often discussed from the perspectives of individual autonomy (the *Autonomy* frame) and human dignity (the *Dignity* frame), and as a new measure of income distribution in a future where an increasing amount of work will be done by robots (the *Distribution* frame). While a guaranteed minimum income strongly appeared as an amendment to the existing policies, the citizen's wage offered a whole new perspective on the questions of work, income distribution, and citizens' autonomy. This perspective was, in brief, to reduce the supply of labour and give more space to life choices and activities outside employment.

In 1987, basic income emerged as a new concept in parliamentary debates. Alongside basic income was the idea that instead of paying people for staying out of work, social security could be combined with small wages to make temporary employment more attractive. This thinking was introduced and promoted by the Green Party MP Osmo Soininvaara: 'Basic income or a citizen's wage means that everyone will receive a certain sum of money to form the basis of their earnings, and this will be topped up with labour income' (plenary session 5 October 1988). This new thinking possibly paved the way for the discursive shift in the basic income debate that happened in 1994, and it enabled basic income to be reframed in a way that resonated better with the changing political climate.

From 1991 to 1993, Finland experienced a severe financial crisis. The recession played a major role in a social policy paradigm shift that marked a departure from the traditional model of the Nordic welfare state and its core values, such as universalism and equality (Kananen, 2012; Kantola and Kananen, 2013; Kuivalainen and Niemelä, 2010). It opened a policy window for a series of reforms in social and employment policies (Kuivalainen and Niemelä, 2010; Kananen, 2012) and public administration (Niemelä and Saarinen, 2012) that were, following the international trends, guided by ideas such as productivity, competitiveness, and economic efficiency. The aftermath of the early 1990s recession brought about a new paradigm in which budget austerity defined the scope of social policy, and universal entitlements were replaced by compulsive measures of activation and selective anti-poverty policies (Kananen, 2012; Kantola and Kananen, 2013: 817–9; Kuivalainen and Niemelä, 2010). The recession also led to mass unemployment, a problem that was brought to the fore of all policy debates for years to come.[7]

The aftermath of the early 1990s recession also marked a discursive shift in the debate over basic income (which, from then on, was the most frequently used term), whereby the idea was reframed by its political advocates in terms of individual activity and activation policy. The new framing corresponded with the new reality of mass unemployment and budget deficits, as well as the new political climate and ideas of how to tackle these problems. The most active proponents of the new framing were the Centre and the Green parties, along with the two minor liberal parties, whereas the Left Alliance relied more on the framings of the 1980s. In this reframing process, basic income became understood increasingly as an employment policy instrument whose purpose was to 'incentivise work and activities' (Centre Party Programme, 1994) and 'create new jobs' (Green Party Programme, 1994). In the following two decades, *Activity* was the strongest frame in the Finnish political basic income debate, and the other frames were, with some minor exceptions, used in correspondence with this leading frame.

The new framing argued for basic income using the rationale of supply-side economics, where its purpose would be, on the one hand, to provide a low but unconditional minimum that 'will not let anyone in real destitution fall outside support' (Liberal Party MP, plenary session 13 September 1994), and, on the other, to 'supplement small labour and entrepreneurial income' (Centre Party MP, plenary session 22 February 1996). It would function as 'a trampoline, helping people to make the jump to independent survival' (Green Party Programme, 2002). Basic income was presented as a part of plans for labour market deregulation and reducing welfare expenses, the logic being that instead of keeping people fully unemployed within a system that penalised all activity by benefit cuts, it would enable every able-bodied individual to enter the job market, perhaps at first only partially or with lower salaries, but still ending up better-off than before. Together with deregulation, it was believed that basic income would increase the number of open vacancies and incentivise recipients to start new entrepreneurial activities.

The centrality of the activation idea in Finnish politics from the mid-1990s onwards can be observed, for instance, in the governments' programmes, where the concept of 'activation', which had seldom been used before, became a key concept from 1995 onwards (Saarinen *et al.*, 2014: 613). The advocates of basic income used this new popular idea as a framing tool by underlining the value of work and individual activity: 'we shall give everyone the opportunity to be active' (Green Party MP, plenary session 3 September 1998). Describing the demoralising effects of the existing welfare system (punishing the active and rewarding the idle) and emphasising the activating power of basic income helped the advocates to justify it as a normatively and ideologically legitimate alternative and to preventively undermine the common objection that 'free money' would lead to free-riding and idleness.

While from 1994 onwards, basic income was predominantly framed in terms of activation, its rationale was different from that of conventional activation policies. The basic income discourse questioned the industrial model of employment and the possibility of achieving full-employment as it had traditionally been understood (the *Transformation of work* frame). The solution was to overcome the rigid categories of (full-time) employment and (full-time) unemployment, to make partial employment a legitimate alternative, and to make the term 'work' understood more broadly than solely in terms of employment. Some proposals from the 1990s and early 2000s combined basic income with policies such as job-sharing and civil work (the *Work alternatives* frame). However, those proposals did not challenge the *Activity* frame; they were used complementarily. Although the value of activity and the targets of activation were widely endorsed by basic income advocates, the rationale of basic income as an activation policy was based on the autonomy to pursue a better standard

of living driven by people's own personal interests and motivations, free from compulsion and oppressive welfare paternalism (the *Autonomy* frame).

During the 2000s, there was growing political attention on non-standard forms of employment, and the framing of basic income shifted to emphasise the need for economic security for those working on a self-employed basis or otherwise on an occasional basis (the *Subsistence* frame). However, the *Activity* frame remained strong and, towards the end of the examined period, the basic income debate became more narrowly focused on activity as employment, entrepreneurship, or active job-seeking, leaving aside alternative forms of activity. The context for the discussion of the government's trial plans was the post-2008 economic stagnation and the increased rates of (long-term) unemployment. This is also reflected in the design of the experiment, the main objective of which is to test the basic income model's capacity to incentivise employment among the recipients of unemployment benefits.

6. Conclusions

This article shows how the framing of the basic income idea was shaped by contextual factors and how the framing evolved following issues rising on the political agenda and shifts in the dominant discourse. It adds to our understanding of the politics of basic income in the Finnish context by showing that there have been certain dominating frames and those frames have been widely shared among the politicians and parties discussing the merits of this policy.

Policy framing occurs in a context that is constrained by institutional, economic and political realities on the one hand, and by dominant ideas and discourses on the other; thus, frames are formed in accordance with what is considered politically possible. Steensland (2008b: 2) calls this a discursive field, which 'establishes the limits of policy discourse by defining the range of relevant problems to be addressed and by providing the fundamental categories that shape decision making'. In the affluent 1980s, when the ideas of universalism, solidarity and equality were still strong, the frames emphasising equal rights to benefits were resonant and widely embraced by parties. The recession of the 1990s created a new rationale, whereby the 'passive' distribution of benefits was replaced by an activation paradigm. In this radically changed economic and political climate, continuing with the 1980s framing would soon have made the basic income idea politically unthinkable, as happened in Denmark (Christensen, 2008). Nevertheless, the Finnish advocates found a frame that resonated widely with the new climate of the time.

The strength of the *Activity* frame from the early 1990s onwards makes the Finnish political discourse on basic income distinct from most of the international debate among scholars and social activists, which generally put emphasis on fairer distribution of income and individual liberties (De Wispelaere,

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2015: 28–9, 2016b: 31). However, though adopting the *Activity* frame as the key logic of reasoning, the advocates from the Left and the Green parties underlined the importance of positive incentives and personal motivation as drivers of activity, as opposed to sanctions. The advocates from those two parties also used a wider variety of frames, whereas the representatives of more hesitant parties more often relied on the dominating frames, especially at the end of the examined period. As the usage of some less frequent frames shows, the basic income discourse was not only about a technocratic solution to incentives problems but parties, especially the most eager advocate parties, were also looking for solutions to alternative futures in terms of widening the concept of work and increasing individual autonomy.

This analysis of policy documents suggests that – as the key frames were widely shared – there has been a widespread consensus on the purpose of basic income among the Finnish politicians and parties. In this overall analysis, the ideological differences among the parties did not feature clearly in their reasoning for basic income, but a more elaborate qualitative analysis could reveal more differences among them. However, most of the analysed discussion concerned the general aims of the basic income reform, not the policy design. A stronger division among the parties may appear if the basic income policy is put into practice, as the questions of financing, benefit level and replacement of existing benefits will come to the fore (De Wispelaere, 2016b).

Without understanding the centricity of the *Activity* frame – that is, reasoning for basic income using the logic of activation policy and supply side economics – the Finnish party positions regarding the issue – and, for instance, the enthusiasm of the centre-right coalition government to experiment with the policy – cannot be adequately understood. Framing the radical policy proposal in terms of mainstream values and ideologies and the readiness of the advocates to embrace new policy issues in their framing may be among the reasons why the idea has lived so long in the Finnish policy debates, being discussed at times by politicians and parties across the political spectrum.

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Notes

1 Proposals made by parties, think tanks and stakeholder organisations.

2 The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland (http://stm.fi/en/basic-income-pilot-study).

3 There was a variety of concepts with similar enough meaning to be all translated as 'guaranteed minimum income'.
4 There is some correspondence with the frames found by Steensland (2008b) concerning the US debate over the guaranteed income policy.
5 This frame was strongly connected to the idea of guaranteed minimum income.
6 About the same time, basic income became the concept most often used.
7 The unemployment rate was 3.2 per cent in 1990 and 16.7 per cent in 1994, remaining above 10 per cent until the end of the decade (Statistics Finland: http://www.stat.fi).

Data sources

Election manifestos and policy programmes: Finnish Social Sciences Data Archive FSD (http://www.fsd.uta.fi/pohtiva/)

Election manifestos of the Greens from 1987 to 2000: National Archive of Finland (https://www.arkisto.fi/en/frontpage)

Election manifestos of the Centre Party from 1980 to 2000: Archive of the Centre Party and the Countryside (http://www.keskusta.fi/Suomeksi/KMA/Etusivu)

Election manifestos of the Communist Party SKDL/the Left Alliance from 1980 to 2000: Labor Archive (http://www.tyark.fi/uk/index.html)

Motions, written questions and plenary session transcripts: Archive of the Finnish Parliament (https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/tietoaeduskunnasta/kirjasto/aineistot/eduskunta/Pages/default.aspx)

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