

The utopian ideal of a Universal Basic Income has reached what author Malcolm Gladwell has coined the **tipping point**. This is the hard-to-quantify moment when an idea catches fire and becomes mainstream. Pain points caused by the stressors of the current capitalist system are becoming ever more acute for those most-targeted by its failures.

In Erik Olin Wright's *Envisioning Real Utopias*, he explores the necessary requirements for gathering momentum against today's malfunctioning structures. "What we need are "real utopias" that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity— utopian destinations that have accessible way stations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating the transition." With this, Wright posits that in order to begin working towards a better world, we must first **believe** such action is possible. "While it may seem naively optimistic to say "where there is a will there is a way," it is certainly true that without a "will" many "ways" become impossible."

Crucially, Wright notes, we must keep one foot on the ground while envisioning these real utopias. While we must imagine certain things to be radically different in the future, we must also make sure that the changes we propose do not exit the bounds of what is possible and practical. Wright states, "Instead of indulging in utopian dreams, we must accommodate ourselves to practical realities. The idea of "real utopias" embraces this tension between dreams and practice."

It is also important to note that while the capitalism we know is dramatically dysfunctional in many ways, it is not void of successes. There **are** systems set in place to aid those in need. However it begs the question whether those systems are "working" out of sheer coincidence or not... "The [relatively few] successful processes we have now are driven by *trial and error* much more than by conscious design... " What we must address now is the **quality and effectiveness** of those services – as well as the matter of adding more. As Wright suggests, "While today's social institutions may be far from perfect, they are generally "functional"." It will be the belief in the possibility of alternatives to our existing institutions that will inform our ability to impart meaningful action.

Emancipatory social science as Wright articulates it seeks to "generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging various forms of human oppression." As a sort of science, part of generating this knowledge involves small, incremental tests of which alternatives will provide effective solutions. For example, starting in 2017, the Dutch city of Utrecht implemented a pilot version of a universal

basic income. This two-year test period began in January of 2018, with the basis that citizens of Utrecht and some nearby cities would receive a flat sum of €960 per month (about \$1,100). This program was in part led by Loek Groot, an associate professor at the Utrecht University School of Economics. He is determined to find out if a guaranteed income might be a more effective approach than the current Dutch system. This is much like Wright's stance that in order to impart effective change, incremental steps must be taken to eventually evolve the whole. "Human behavior is always unpredictable," Groot says. "We want to know what motivates people, what people respond to." If everyone received a basic income, Groot argues, they'd have a better chance of learning to manage their money more wisely.

The results of this test program are still in progress. In 2019, the world will discover what effect a UBI had on the small sample size of Utrecht. If effective, the city will have done well by the standards of Erik Olin Wright in that they pursued their collective 'will' in order to achieve a better way.

**Envisioning Real Utopias** by Erik Olin Wright

**The Netherlands' Upcoming Money-for-Nothing Experiment**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/06/netherlands-utrecht-universal-basic-income-experiment/487883/>

**Stop working, universal basic income is ready to go mainstream**

<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/universal-basic-income-y-combinator-andrew-keen>