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Research Paper

Global Trends and Knowledge Structure of Universal Basic Income Research: A Bibliometric Analysis (1990–2023)

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ABSTRACT

Universal Basic Income (UBI) has emerged as a significant policy proposal in response to rising inequality, labour market precarity, and the future of welfare. Despite growing scholarly and policy interest, the structure and evolution of UBI research remain fragmented. This study applies a bibliometric approach to systematically analyse global UBI research indexed in Scopus between 1990 and 2023. Using the Bibliometrix R package and Biblioshiny interface, the analysis maps key authors, sources, institutions, countries, and thematic developments. Bibliometric methods are essential in synthesising large bodies of literature to identify intellectual trends, research gaps, and collaboration patterns. Findings reveal a sharp increase in research post-2016, reflecting global pilot programs and pandemic-driven discourse. The UK, US, and Finland lead contributions, while themes shift from normative debates to empirical evaluations. This review offers a comprehensive foundation for scholars and policymakers seeking to navigate the rapidly expanding and interdisciplinary landscape of UBI research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Universal Basic Income (UBI) has transitioned from a fringe ideological proposal to a mainstream policy consideration, particularly in the context of technological unemployment, economic inequality, and evolving welfare state models. Defined as an unconditional, regular cash payment delivered to all individuals regardless of income or work status, UBI represents a radical rethinking of income support systems (Gentilini et al., 2020). Its appeal spans ideological lines: proponents argue it simplifies welfare administration, mitigates poverty traps, and ensures a dignified standard of living amid growing automation and precarious employment (Standing, 2017; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017).

Interest in UBI has intensified notably since 2016, driven by a confluence of academic inquiry and real-world policy experimentation. The Finnish government's national pilot, various NGO-led trials in India and Kenya, and heightened debates during the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated scholarly attention toward UBI's feasibility, effects, and philosophical justification. As UBI debates move from theory to policy, there has been a substantial increase in multidisciplinary academic contributions spanning economics, political science, ethics, public policy, and development studies.

In this rapidly expanding knowledge landscape, a systematic bibliometric analysis becomes essential. Bibliometric analysis offers a structured means to map the intellectual, social, and

conceptual structure of a research field. It allows scholars to trace the evolution of research trends, identify the most prolific authors, institutions, and countries, and understand collaborative networks and thematic transitions over time (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). For a topic as interdisciplinary and globally debated as UBI, such an approach provides not only a snapshot of scholarly progress but also a roadmap for future inquiry.

While narrative reviews on UBI have examined policy outcomes or ethical dimensions, there remains a gap in the literature that holistically evaluates the scholarly ecosystem of UBI research using data-driven methods. This study seeks to fill that gap by conducting a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of UBI-related literature indexed in Scopus between 1990 and 2023. Through this, we aim to answer key questions: Who are the leading contributors? How has the field evolved thematically and geographically? Which concepts and collaborations dominate the discourse?

This contribution is particularly valuable at a time when global social protection systems are under stress, and UBI is being seriously considered as both an emergency relief mechanism and a long-term structural reform. By synthesising three decades of research using robust bibliometric tools, this study provides a foundational resource for academics, policymakers, and practitioners alike.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric methodology to systematically analyse the global research landscape on Universal Basic Income (UBI). The analysis was conducted using the Bibliometrix package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and its graphical interface Biblioshiny in RStudio. Bibliometric methods are well-suited for exploring the productivity, influence, and structural patterns of scientific output, particularly in emerging and multidisciplinary fields such as UBI (Donthu et al., 2021).

2.1. Data Source and Search Strategy

The data for this study were extracted from the Scopus database, which is among the most comprehensive citation indexes for peer-reviewed literature. The search was conducted in July 2024 using the following query:

"Universal Basic Income" OR "Basic Income Guarantee" OR "Unconditional Basic Income" OR "Guaranteed Basic Income" OR "Basic Income" OR "Citizens' Income" OR "Guaranteed Minimum Income" OR "Minimum Income Guarantee"

To maintain academic rigour, the document types were filtered to include only articles, reviews, books, book chapters, and conference papers, and the language was restricted to English. The time frame selected was 1990 to 2023, covering over three decades of scholarly output. After applying these filters and removing duplicates, a total of 1310 documents were retained for analysis.

2.2. Analytical Tools and Indicators

The cleaned dataset was uploaded into Biblioshiny, the web interface of Bibliometrix, which allows for interactive and reproducible bibliometric analysis. The study used a combination of performance analysis and science mapping techniques across the following dimensions:

Descriptive Analysis: Annual scientific production, average citations per year, and document types were analysed to track research growth.

Sources and Authors: The most influential journals, authors, and affiliations were identified using productivity and citation indicators.

Collaboration and Social Structure: Co-authorship and international collaboration networks were mapped to reveal the social dynamics of the field.

Conceptual Structure: Keyword co-occurrence, factorial analysis, and trend topic evolution were analysed to uncover the thematic landscape.

Intellectual Structure: Co-citation and historiographic mapping were used to trace influential works and chronological development.

Visualisations such as word clouds, tree maps, thematic maps, co-occurrence networks, country collaboration maps, and author clusters were generated and interpreted to uncover deeper insights. Supplementary Excel outputs (e.g., annual citation trends, word frequency over time) were used to validate and enrich the findings.

2.3. Limitations

While the use of Scopus ensures broad and high-quality coverage, the exclusion of non-English and grey literature may underrepresent certain regions or policy documents. Also, bibliometric analysis is inherently quantitative and may not capture the nuance of argumentation or qualitative depth of individual contributions. Nevertheless, it remains a robust and scalable approach for exploring macro-level patterns in academic discourse.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Annual Scientific Production and Citation Patterns

The bibliometric landscape of Universal Basic Income (UBI) research, spanning from 1990 to 2023, exhibits a dynamic and nonlinear pattern of scholarly attention. Annual publication trends (Figure 1) indicate that scholarly interest in UBI remained limited throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. From 1990 to approximately 2007, the number of publications per year remained in single digits, indicating the marginal status of the topic in mainstream academic discourse during that period.

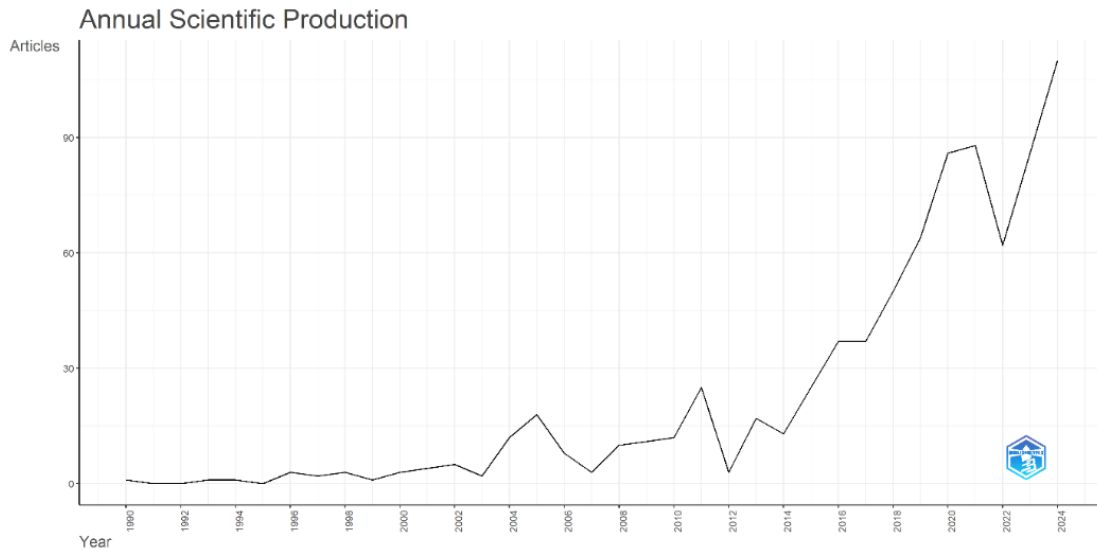


Figure 1: Annual Scientific Production Graph

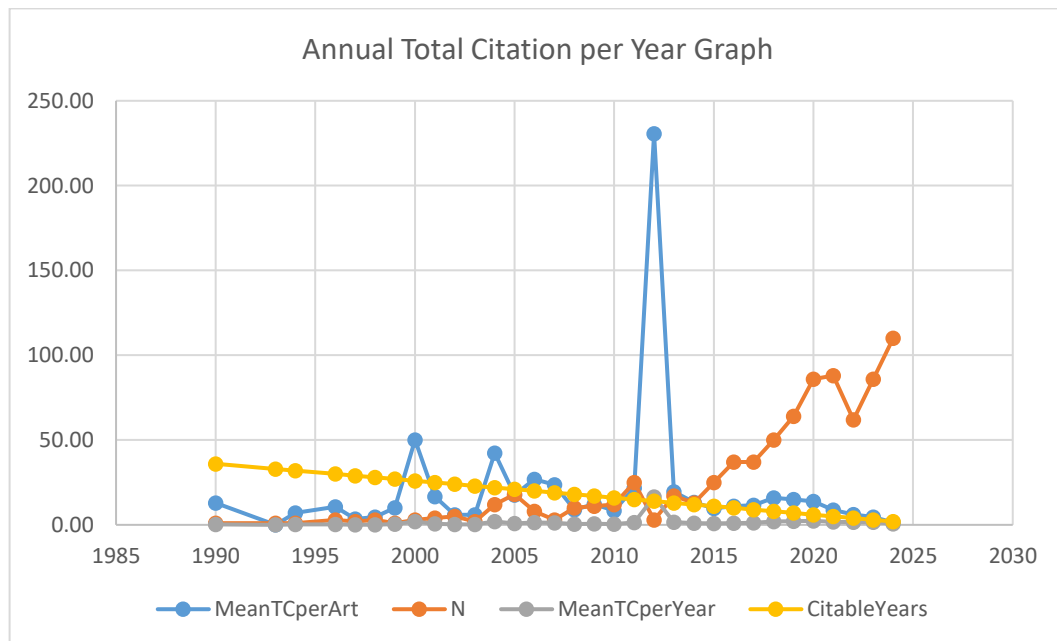


Figure 2: Annual Total Citation per Year Graph

A notable upward trend began around 2008–2010, coinciding with the global financial crisis that sparked renewed attention toward welfare reform and income redistribution mechanisms. The years 2011 to 2013 mark a major inflexion point in both the number of publications and average citations, suggesting that foundational theoretical works were published during this phase. Indeed, this period includes increased scholarly output by prominent UBI theorists such as Philippe Van Parijs and Guy Standing, whose works began shaping modern discourse around inequality, labour precarity, and social justice. The peak in publication output is observed in 2020 and 2021, with a sharp rise in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This global crisis

exposed the limitations of traditional safety nets and amplified discussions around unconditional income support. Several countries initiated emergency cash transfer programs, and leading international institutions, including the World Bank and International Labour Organisation, actively explored UBI as a plausible alternative. Correspondingly, the citation counts also spiked, reflecting the urgency and relevance of UBI in real-time policy discussions.

The annual citation profile (Figure 2) reveals that papers published during 2011–2013 attracted the greatest scholarly attention, indicating that papers published during this time had a lasting academic impact. These citations largely stem from

seminal theoretical papers that shaped future empirical and policy-oriented studies.

All things considered, our time-based study indicates that UBI research has developed from a specialised philosophical subject to a widely acknowledged field that intersects development studies, political science, and economics. Every historical event, from technical advancements to economic crises, has had a noticeable effect on the output and impact of scholarship.

3.2 Source Distribution and Core Publication Outlets

Understanding the distribution of scholarly output across journals and sources offers critical insight into the disciplinary scope, quality, and reach of UBI-related research. The bibliometric output, extracted from the Scopus database and visualised via Biblioshiny, reveals that publications are dispersed across a diverse range of academic journals, with contributions from fields including political science, economics, philosophy, social policy, and public administration.

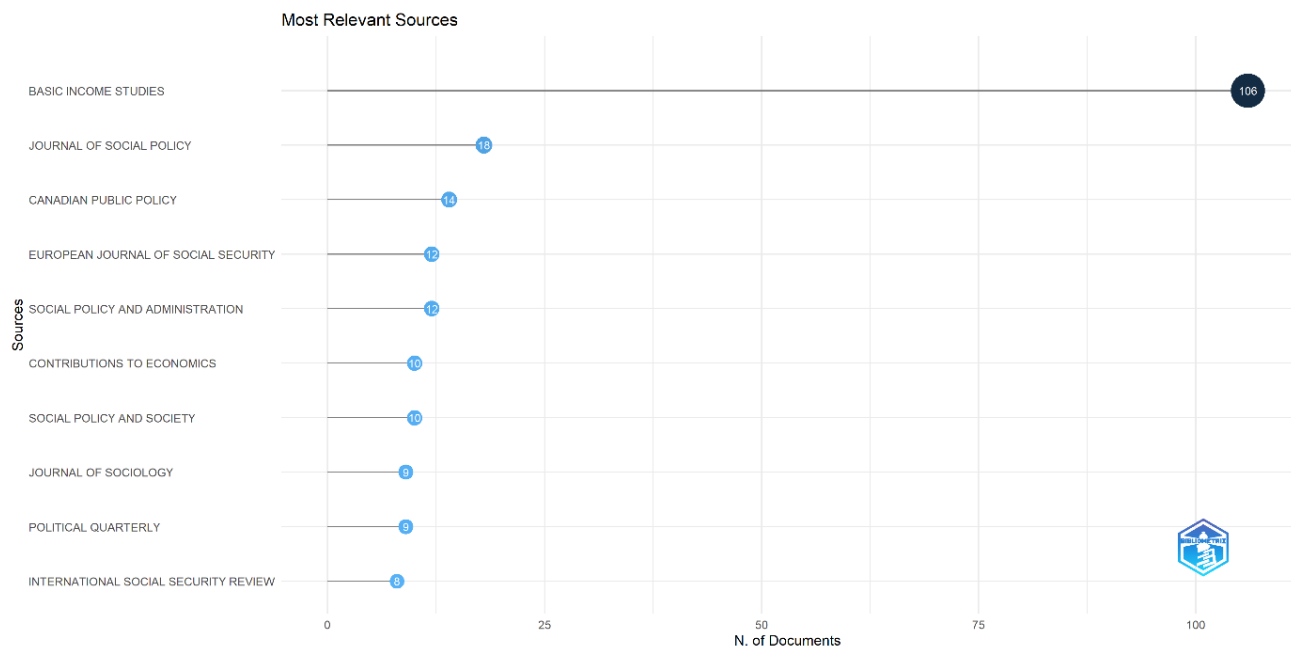


Figure 3: Most Relevant Sources (Biblioshiny Bar Chart)

As illustrated in Figure 3, the top contributing sources include: Basic Income Studies – a specialised journal dedicated solely to debates on unconditional income guarantees, Social Policy & Administration, Political Quarterly, Philosophy & Public Affairs, and World Development.

This diversity underscores the multidisciplinary nature of UBI research. While Basic Income Studies provides a dedicated outlet for UBI discourse, mainstream journals such as World Development and Social Policy & Administration reflect the scheme's increasing traction within broader development and governance debates.

It is interesting to note that these sources do not always have a significant impact on citations. For example, there are fewer papers in journals like Philosophy & Public Affairs and Ethics, but the average number of citations per document is larger. This pattern implies that, while being less common, theoretical and normative considerations are more frequently cited in later works, indicating their fundamental influence on UBI discourse.

A lack of focus, which is common in developing or multidisciplinary subjects, is further shown by the wide distribution across publications. This presents a challenge as well as an opportunity: fragmentation may impede knowledge consolidation, but it also highlights the scheme's applicability to

a variety of policy domains, including automation, inequality, and economic crises.

This source analysis reveals that UBI is no longer confined to theoretical margins but is being actively examined through applied empirical lenses, particularly within public policy, development economics, and political theory domains. The emergence of UBI-related publications in globally reputed outlets adds legitimacy to the field and indicates growing institutional and academic interest.

3.3 Author Contributions and Scholarly Impact

The development of Universal Basic Income (UBI) research has been shaped significantly by a cohort of committed scholars whose works have established and expanded the theoretical, normative, and empirical foundations of the field. An analysis of author productivity and impact reveals a combination of consistently active contributors and highly influential thinkers, many of whom have been instrumental in steering the discourse through periods of major socio-economic transformation.

Based on the Biblioshiny output, the most prolific contributors to UBI literature include Philippe Van Parijs, Jurgen De Wispelaere, Yannick Vanderborght, and Louise Haagh. Their extensive involvement in the field, particularly over the past two

decades, is reflected in both the number of documents authored and their steady production across time. This pattern is visualised in Figure 4: Most Relevant Authors, which shows

their dominance in terms of total article count, and in Figure 5: Authors' Production Over Time, where their sustained contribution to annual scholarly output becomes evident.

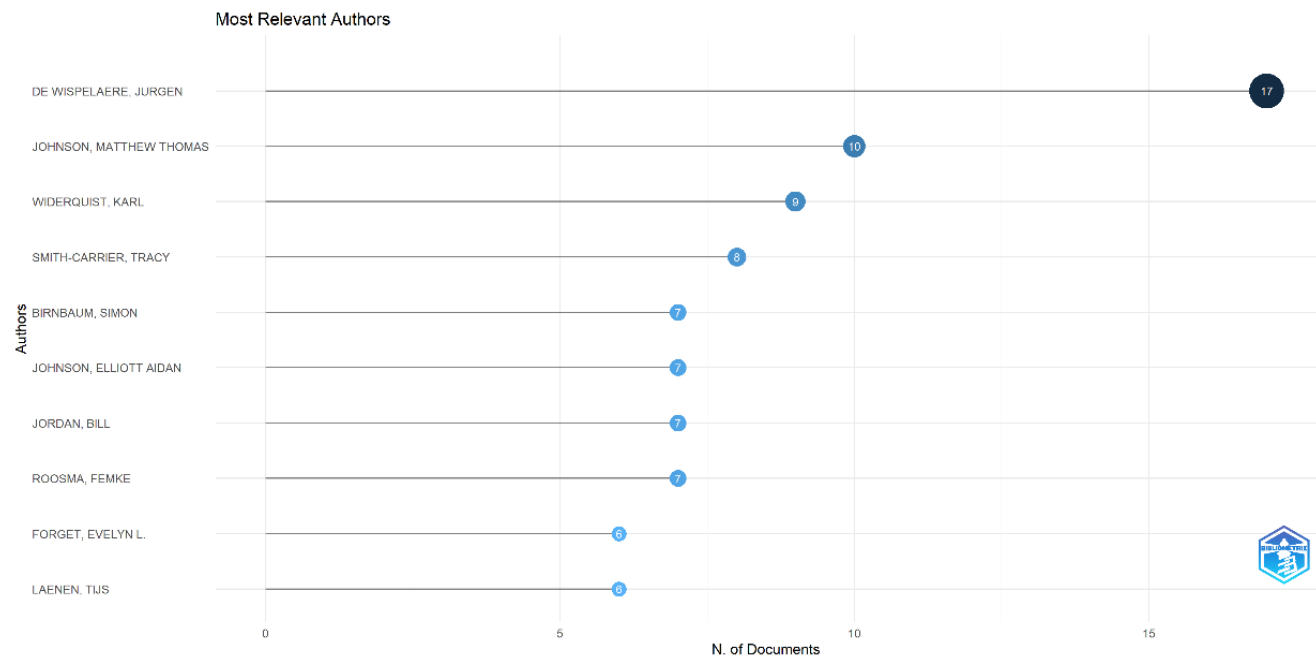


Figure 4: Most Relevant Authors

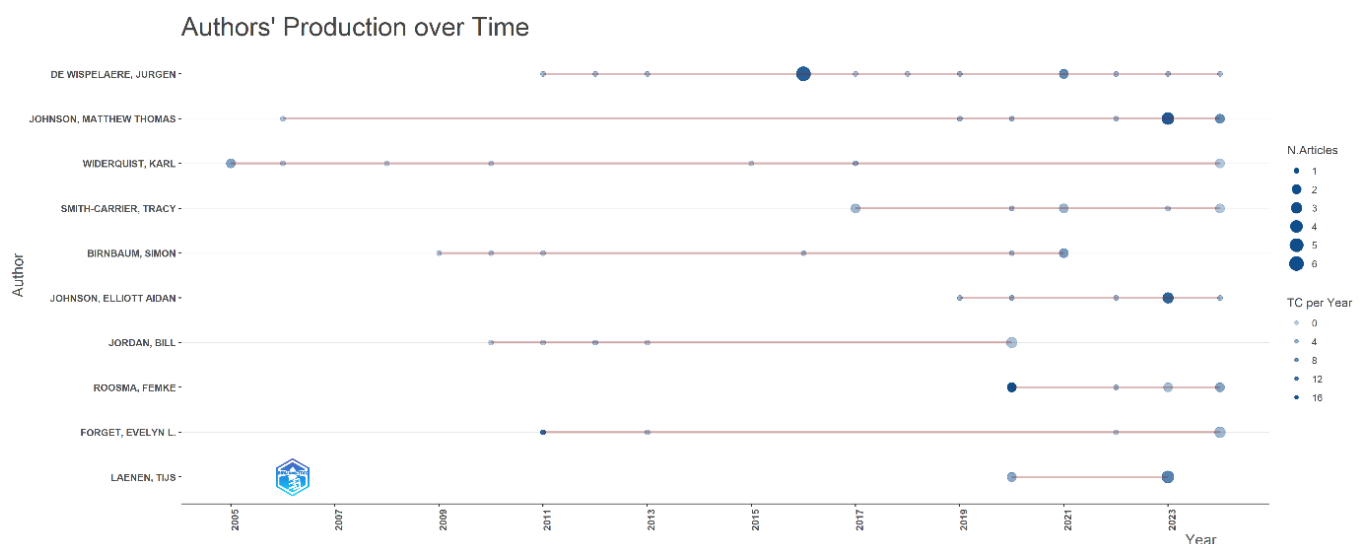


Figure 5: Authors' Production Over Time

These scholars have extensively explored questions of justice, freedom, and institutional feasibility, contributing a normative depth that has anchored much of the subsequent empirical work on UBI. Their works have helped define foundational debates on whether basic income should be universal, unconditional, and financed through taxation or dividends.

However, scholarly influence and author production are not always correlated. Some scholars have made significant

contributions in terms of citation influence, despite being less prolific, according to the impact analysis, which is shown in Figure 6: Author Impact. Guy Standing's conceptual framing of "the precariat," automation-induced unemployment, and economic insecurity has influenced both scholarly and policy conversations, despite the fact that he does not rank among the top ten most prolific authors in Figure 4. His two major works,

Basic Income: And How We Can Make It Happen (2017) and The Precariat:

The New Dangerous Class (2011), have become indispensable resources for scholars and professionals.

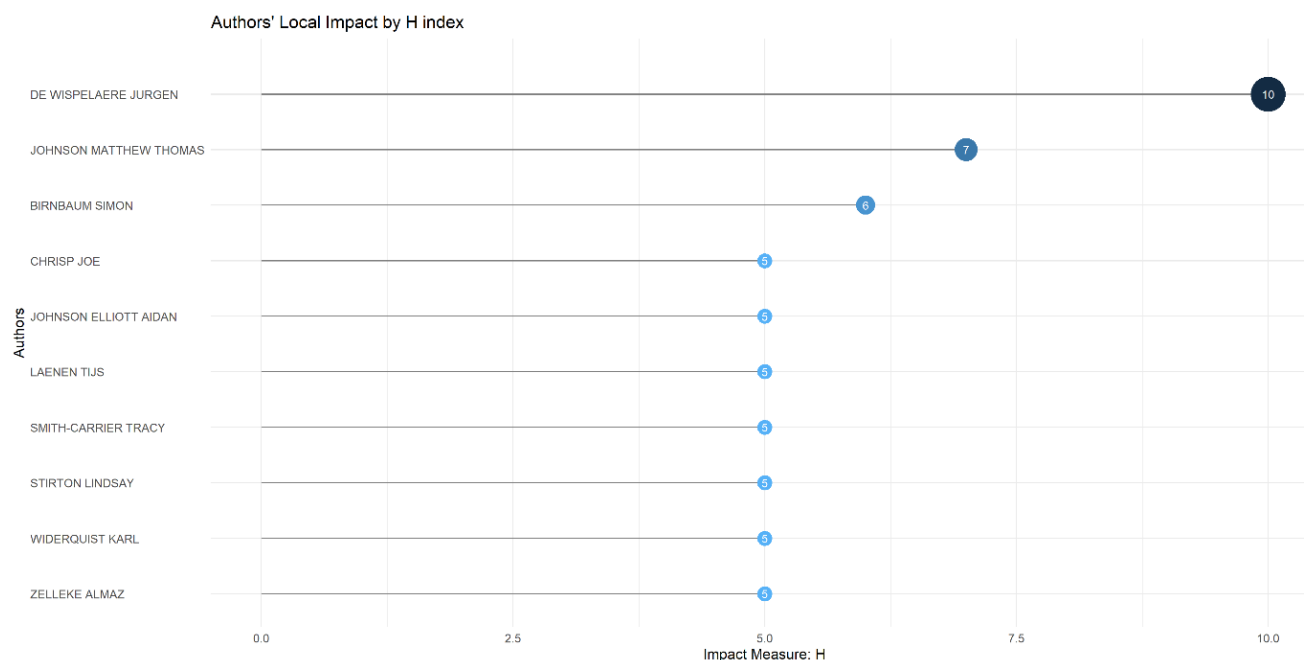


Figure 6: Author Impact (H-index / Citations)

Standing's frequent appearance in co-citation networks, reference lists, and policy-oriented literature illustrates that scholarly impact in this field must also be evaluated qualitatively. His ideas have been particularly influential in positioning UBI as a structural response to labour market precarity, especially in the post-2008 and post-COVID global economic environments.

The authorship landscape also indicates a dense and interconnected research network, particularly among European scholars. Co-authorship trends suggest frequent collaborations between researchers based in Belgium, the UK, Finland, and the Netherlands. Yet, more recent data indicate the emergence of new voices from North America, East Asia, and the Global South, signalling a gradual expansion in the field's geographic reach and institutional base.

Together, these findings suggest that UBI research has evolved through the efforts of both core contributors and globally influential voices. The field continues to benefit from a mix of theoretical rigour and empirical exploration, driven by scholars whose work remains central to debates on welfare reform, social protection, and economic justice.

3.4 Institutional and Country Contributions

An important dimension of any bibliometric analysis involves identifying the key institutions and countries that serve as the intellectual and geographic centres of knowledge production. In the context of Universal Basic Income (UBI), the results show a high concentration of scholarly output originating from universities and research organisations located in Europe and North America, alongside a growing interest in regions of the Global South.

The most productive institutions include KU Leuven (Belgium), University of Oxford (UK), University of Bath (UK), and the University of London. These institutions have published a consistent stream of articles and are notable for hosting scholars such as Van Parijs, Vanderborght, and Haagh, who have been instrumental in shaping UBI theory and policy evaluation. The prominence of these institutions is visually evident in Figure 7: Most Relevant Affiliations, which presents the top affiliations by publication count. The graph highlights a few dominant academic hubs, suggesting the presence of localised centres of excellence that have nurtured ongoing research collaborations and debates on basic income.

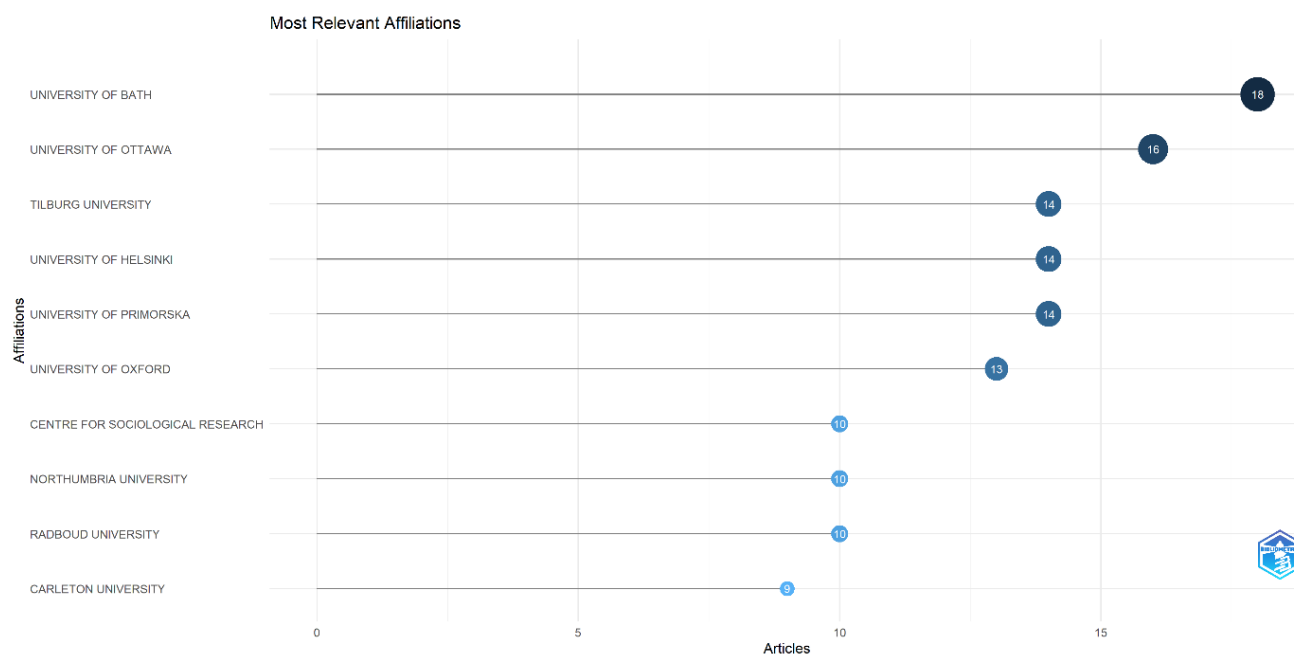


Figure 7: Most Relevant Affiliations

Further insights are provided by Figure 8: Affiliations Over Time, which illustrates how institutional involvement has evolved. Early leadership came from European institutions, particularly in Belgium and the UK, while more recent years have seen increased participation from North American and

Scandinavian universities. This temporal expansion may reflect the shifting global relevance of UBI, especially in light of policy trials and pilot programs in countries like Canada, Finland, and Kenya.

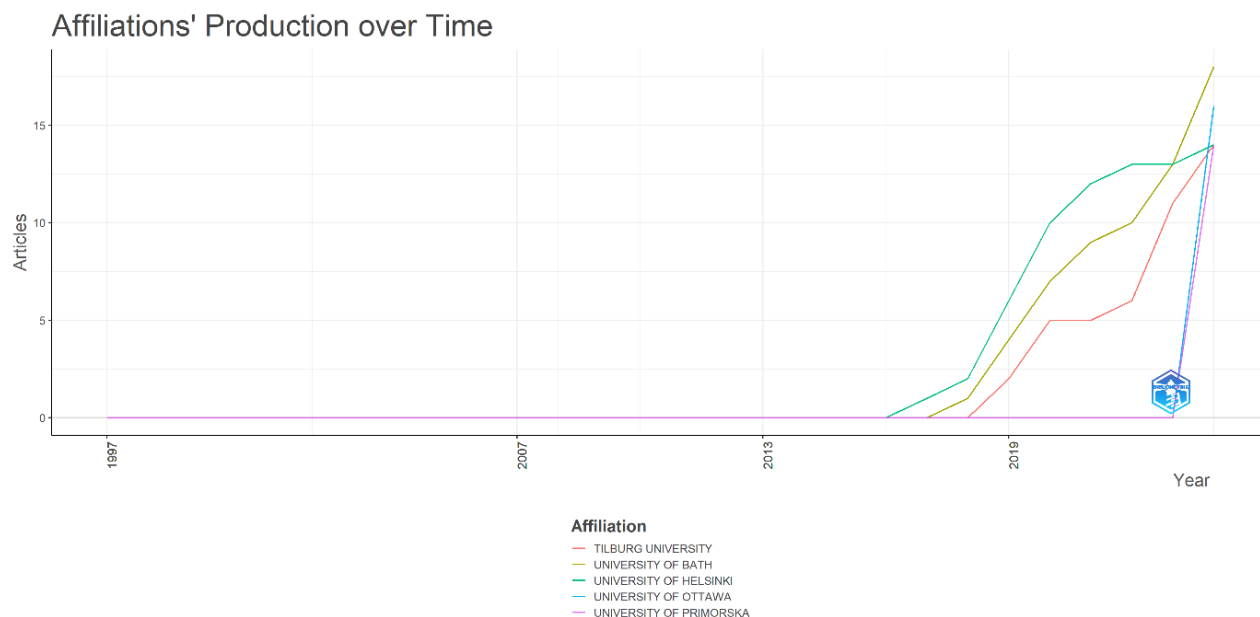


Figure 8: Affiliations Over Time

At the country level, the United Kingdom and the United States dominate in both the number of publications and total citations. This is clearly demonstrated in Figure 9: Most Relevant

Countries and Figure 10: Most Cited Countries, where these two countries consistently top the charts. The UK's dominance is not only due to its academic contributions but also because it has

been a historical site for philosophical and policy debates around UBI. In contrast, the United States has contributed heavily to theoretical and critical discussions, particularly in relation to

income redistribution, poverty alleviation, and post-industrial labour markets.

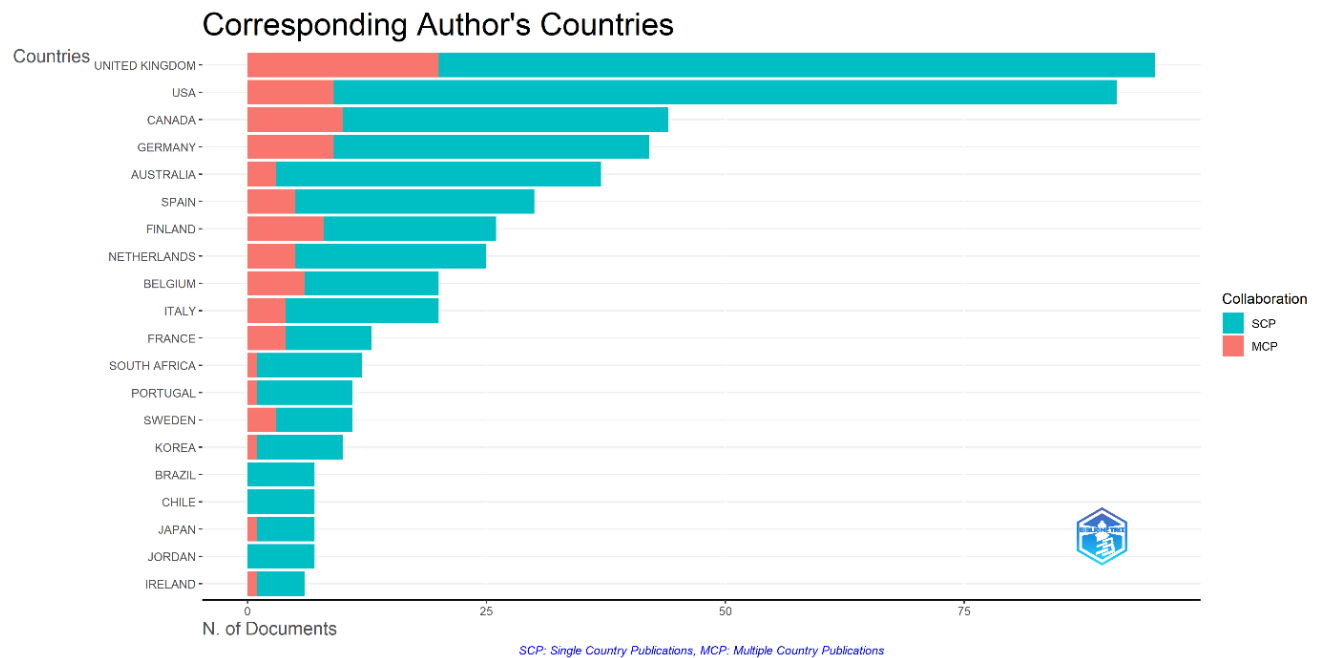


Figure 9: Most Relevant Countries

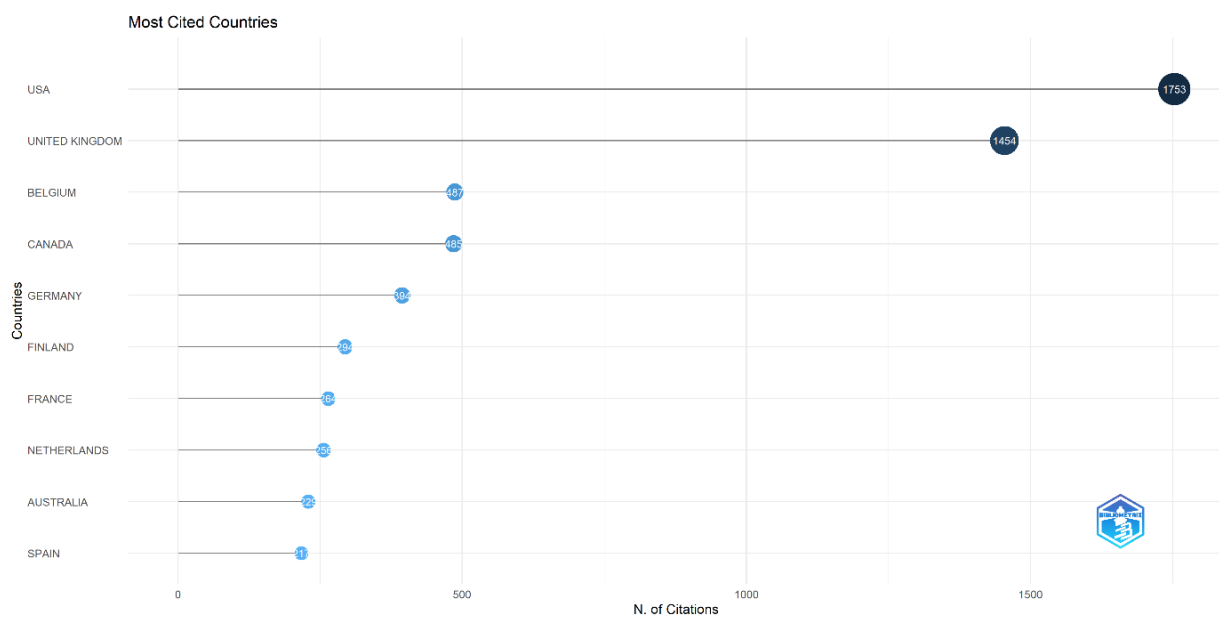


Figure 10: Most Cited Countries

Figure 11: Country Scientific Production Over Time, which shows significant increases in Finland's publication activity between 2016 and 2020, further illustrates the dynamic pattern of research output per nation. This is in line with the first national-level randomised trial of its kind, the Finnish government's UBI pilot program, which attracted interest from

academics and policymakers worldwide. In a similar vein, Kenya and India have started to show up in recent years due to their participation in UBI pilot programs and the increased focus on direct cash transfers as alternatives to conventional welfare programs by policymakers.

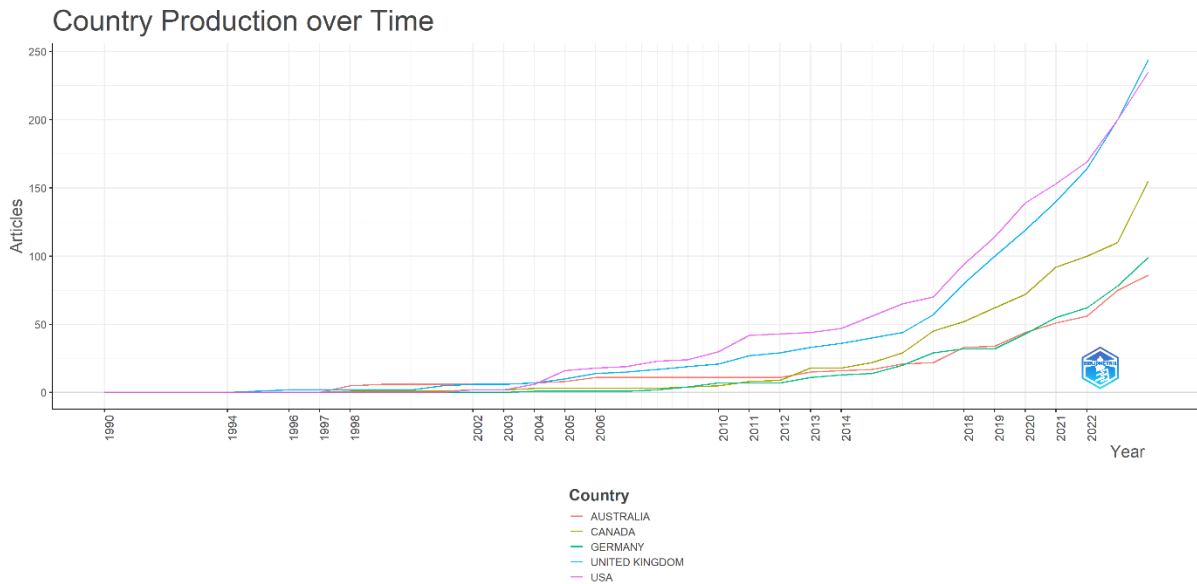


Figure 11: Country Scientific Production Over Time

The data reveal that while high-income countries remain the primary centres of UBI scholarship, the field is gradually globalising. The emergence of countries like India and Kenya in the bibliometric landscape is particularly important because it signals a shift from theoretical exploration to empirical implementation in diverse socio-economic contexts. These developments suggest that UBI is no longer just a philosophical ideal but a live subject of global experimentation and policy innovation.

The geographical and institutional patterns thus underscore a critical evolution in UBI research: from its origins in European philosophical thought to its current expression as a transnational policy question, increasingly tested in the developing world. This broadening of scope enhances the relevance of the field and offers valuable opportunities for comparative analysis and cross-country learning.

3.5 Keyword Analysis and Thematic Focus

Understanding the recurring keywords in academic literature is crucial to uncovering the conceptual foundations, emerging areas, and evolving directions of research. In the case of Universal Basic Income (UBI), keyword frequency and co-occurrence analysis reveal a field that is both thematically rich and dynamically responsive to socio-economic and political changes.

The most frequent terms associated with UBI literature are “basic income,” “universal basic income,” “inequality,” “poverty,” “social justice,” and “automation.” These core keywords represent the enduring pillars of debate: the ethical rationale behind basic income, its role in alleviating income

inequality, and its potential as a policy response to labour market disruptions caused by technological advancements. This is evident in Table 1: Most Frequent Keywords, where these concepts dominate the visual hierarchy.

Table 1: Most Frequent Keywords

Terms	Frequency
basic income	361
universal basic income	187
poverty	110
income	94
social policy	86
welfare state	62
income distribution	47
inequality	45
covid-19	44
welfare	43

To explore the structure of the keyword network, the co-occurrence map provides deeper insight into how these terms cluster into conceptual themes. Figure 13: Keyword Co-occurrence Network displays several tightly interconnected clusters, each representing a subfield within the UBI discourse. For instance, one cluster connects “automation,” “robotics,” and “digital economy,” reflecting growing scholarly concern about job displacement due to AI and the need for income security in post-industrial societies. Another cluster emphasises terms such as “inequality,” “poverty,” “welfare reform,” and “social protection,” aligning with UBI’s traditional role as a redistributive mechanism.

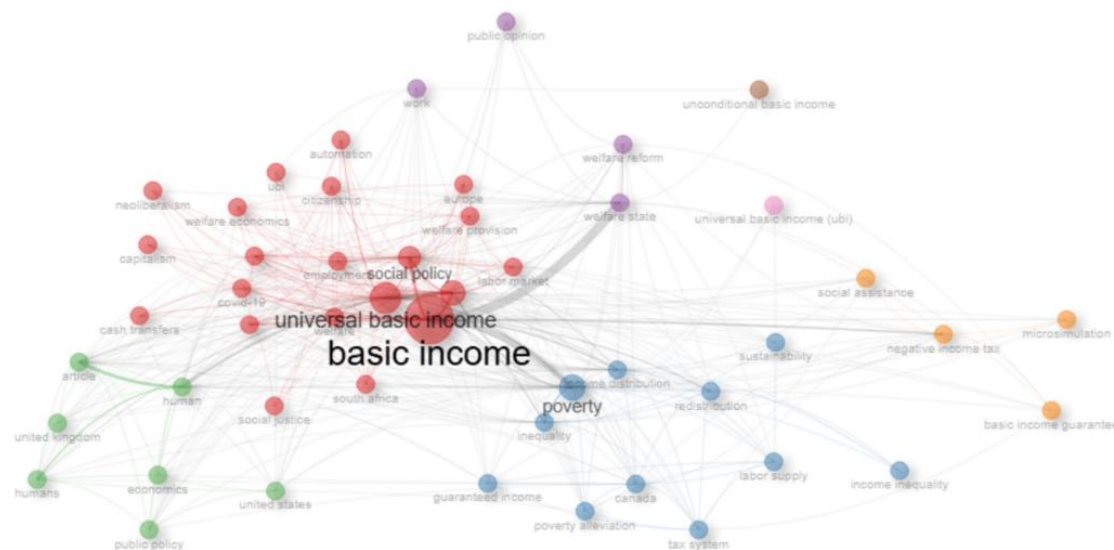


Figure 13: Co-occurrence Network – Keywords

To supplement this, Figure 14: Word Cloud and Figure 15: TreeMaps visually highlight the prominence and relative frequency of keywords. The term “universal basic income” unsurprisingly appears most frequently, with related themes like “employment,” “welfare,” “citizenship,” and “social justice”

recurring at notable levels. The visual density of the tree maps supports the view that UBI research is positioned at the intersection of labour market dynamics, ethics, governance, and fiscal policy.



Figure 14: Word Cloud



Figure 15: Tree Maps

To understand how thematic focus has evolved, Figure 16: Trend Topics tracks the emergence and decline of key concepts. For example, before 2010, keywords such as “negative income tax” and “libertarianism” were more prominent, reflecting a focus on early theoretical and ideological debates. However, between 2016 and 2020, terms like “pilot studies,” “experimentation,” and “randomised controlled trials” gained

prominence, aligning with real-world tests such as the Finnish and Kenyan UBI pilots. More recently, keywords like “COVID-19,” “gig economy,” and “digital transformation” have surged, indicating that scholars are responding to the pandemic and structural labour shifts with renewed interest in UBI as a stabilising mechanism.

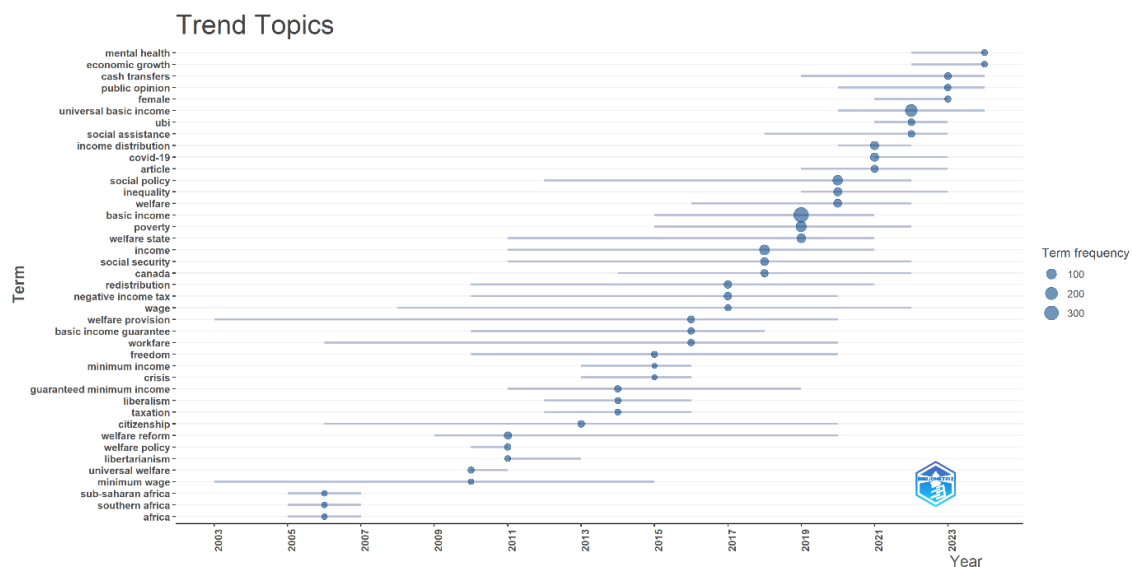


Figure 16: Trend Topics Over Time

These findings are further supported by Figure 17: Word Dynamics, Frequency Over Time, which shows that terms such as "cash transfers," "automation," and "gig economy" have become increasingly frequent since 2016. This trend indicates

that scholarly attention has expanded beyond normative and economic debates to include policy feasibility, pilot programmes, and international experimentation.

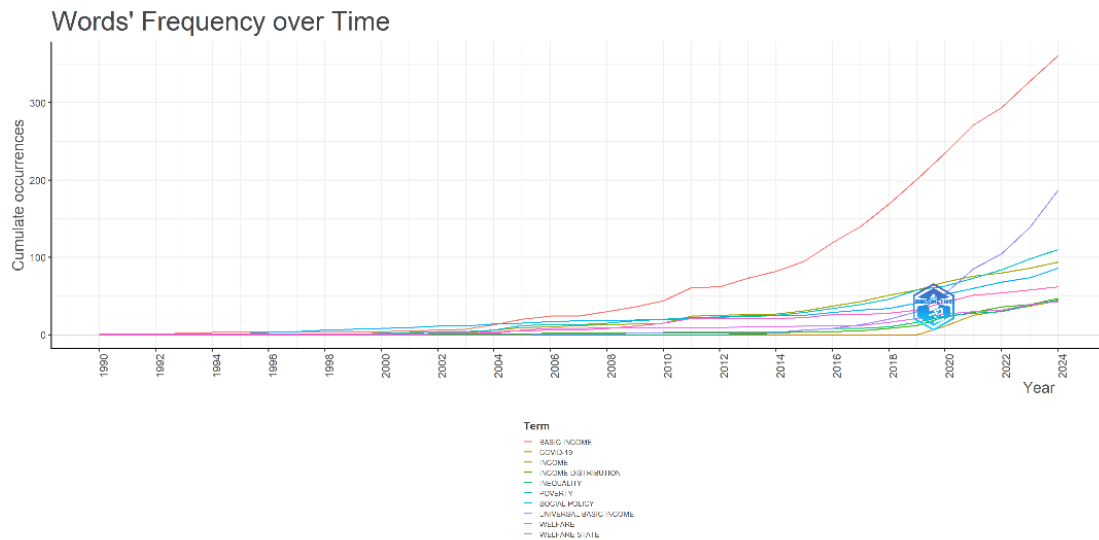


Figure 17: Word Frequency Over Time

Finally, factorial analysis reveals how keywords are grouped based on latent dimensions of similarity. Figure 18: Factorial Map identifies clusters that represent specific research streams. For instance, one cluster emphasises welfare economics and income redistribution, while another focuses on automation,

labour markets, and digital disruption. These conceptual groupings provide a high-level map of the knowledge structure in UBI literature.

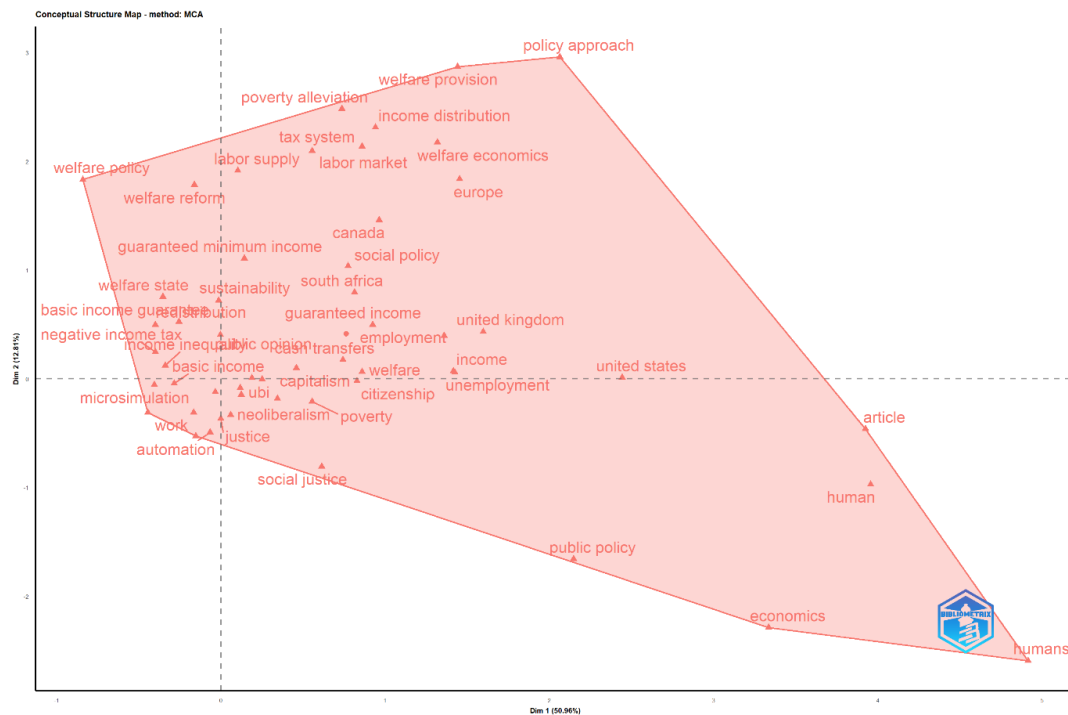


Figure 18: Factorial Map

In summary, keyword and thematic analysis demonstrate that the UBI discourse has grown from a relatively narrow normative domain to a multidisciplinary and policy-engaged research area. It is now deeply embedded in broader conversations about inequality, labour transformations, and institutional design, all of which reflect pressing global challenges. This thematic richness not only enhances the relevance of UBI but also underscores the need for continued interdisciplinary engagement.

3.6 Thematic Structure and Research Maturity

A key dimension of bibliometric analysis lies in identifying not only what topics have been studied but also how thematic areas have evolved and how they are structured intellectually. This

provides clarity on the maturity of subfields, emerging areas of inquiry, and conceptual depth.

First, by arranging themes along the two axes of centrality and density, the thematic map provides an overview of the conceptual structure of the research field. Density reflects the level of internal development or maturity of a theme, while centrality indicates the extent to which a theme is connected with other themes and its overall importance. Themes such as "basic income," "welfare state," and "social justice" appear in the top right quadrant (high centrality and high density) of Figure 19: Thematic Map, identifying them as motor themes that are both well developed and central to the overall discourse.

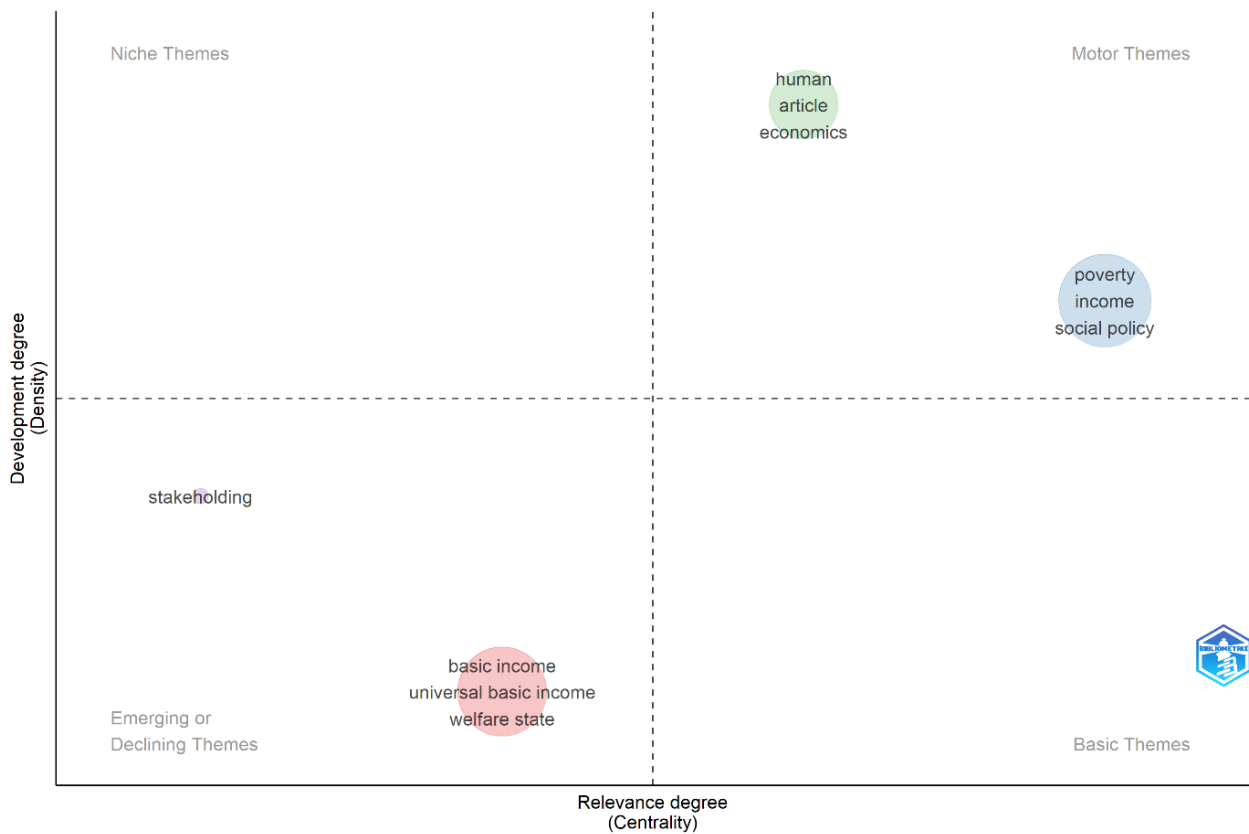


Figure 19: Thematic Map

In contrast, themes such as “automation”, “technological unemployment”, and “digital economy” appear in the lower-right quadrant (high centrality, low density), suggesting that these are important but underdeveloped. These topics are attracting attention due to growing anxieties over AI and job displacement, yet the literature is still forming around empirical cases and methodological standardisation.

Meanwhile, the top left quadrant includes themes such as “citizenship” and “libertarianism”, which are classified as niche themes. These areas are conceptually well developed and theoretically rich, but they have relatively limited connections with the wider research landscape, suggesting a certain level of

isolation. The bottom left quadrant contains emerging or declining themes such as “negative income tax” and “post-Keynesian economics”. These may represent topics that were once influential but are now receiving less attention, or newer areas that are still in the early stages of development.

3.7 Intellectual Structure: Co-Citation and Historiographic Analysis

To fully comprehend the scholarly foundations of the Universal Basic Income (UBI) discourse, it is essential to map its intellectual structure. This involves identifying the most influential authors, publications, and citation linkages that have

shaped the field's development. Through co-citation and historiographic analysis, we can discern how theoretical paradigms have emerged, which texts have gained foundational status, and how the discourse has evolved chronologically. The co-citation network, illustrated in Figure 20, offers a visual representation of the key intellectual anchors within UBI literature. At the centre of this network are highly co-cited works such as Van Parijs & Vanderborght (2017), Standing (2011,

2017), and Pateman (2004). These scholars have established the ethical, philosophical, and economic case for UBI, positioning it as both a rights-based entitlement and a mechanism for democratic citizenship. Despite not appearing in the top 10 most prolific authors by publication count, the presence of thinkers like Guy Standing and Philippe Van Parijs in the co-citation map highlights their enduring influence as intellectual architects of the UBI paradigm.

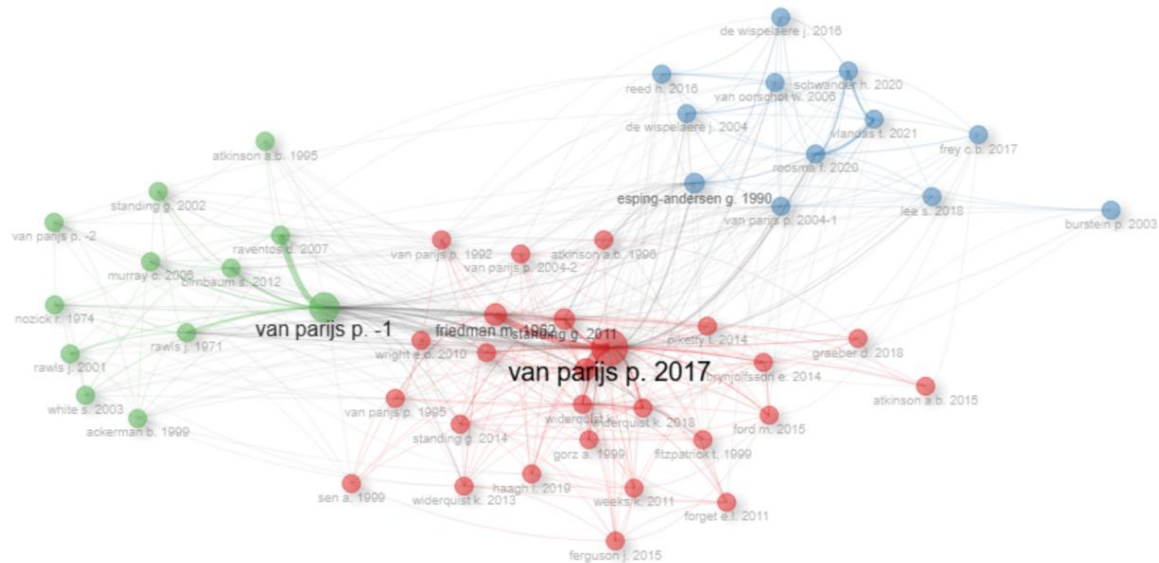


Figure 20: Co-Citation Network – References

This reinforces the distinction between author productivity and author impact, a pattern commonly observed in mature academic fields. While many recent researchers have focused on empirical evaluations and policy modelling, the foundational works of Standing, Van Parijs, and other leading scholars continue to shape the philosophical and ethical debates surrounding UBI. The historiographic map, presented in Figure 21, complements this insight by tracing the chronological development of key

publications. Early studies published during the 1990s and early 2000s focused mainly on normative frameworks, including liberalism, justice, and freedom. In particular, Pateman's (2004) arguments on strengthening citizenship through UBI and Van Parijs' (1995) emphasis on real freedom provided the foundation for later research. From the mid-2000s to the early 2010s, the focus gradually shifted toward fiscal feasibility, labour market implications, and comparisons of social policy.

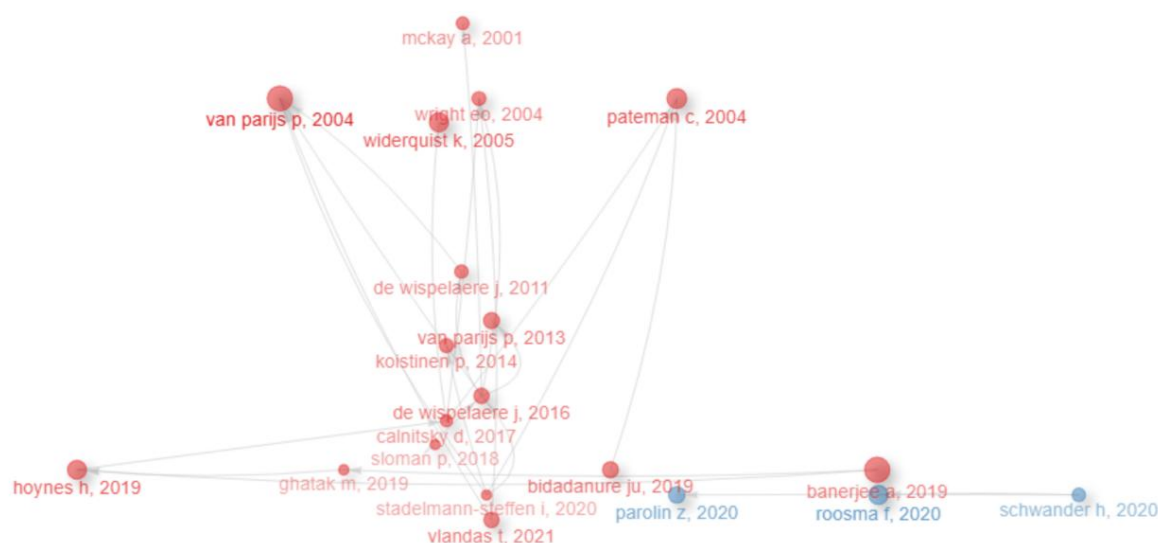


Figure 21: Historiograph Map

Post-2016, the historiographic structure becomes denser, reflecting the surge in empirical studies and experimental designs following high-profile pilot programs in Finland, Kenya, and Canada. During this phase, scholars began evaluating UBI's real-world implications, including behavioural responses, work incentives, and poverty alleviation outcomes. This trend is also correlated with heightened political interest and media coverage, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Together, the co-citation and historiographic maps underscore that UBI research is intellectually rooted in a robust philosophical base, which has gradually evolved to incorporate interdisciplinary and policy-focused dimensions. These visualisations not only identify thought leaders but also map the theoretical and empirical milestones that have shaped the discipline's trajectory.

Importantly, they also serve a forward-looking function: by identifying which intellectual paths have been most influential and which topics are gaining traction, these analyses help future scholars position their work in alignment with both foundational texts and cutting-edge debates.

3.8 Social Structure: Collaboration Networks

Understanding the social structure of the Universal Basic Income (UBI) research landscape involves identifying how authors and countries collaborate to produce knowledge. This dimension is vital for assessing the degree of internationalisation, the existence of research clusters, and the openness of the field to interdisciplinary and cross-border contributions.

The author collaboration network, visualised in Figure 22, reveals several tightly knit clusters of co-authors. These clusters are predominantly centred around European scholars, particularly from Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the Nordic countries. Authors such as Jurgen De Wispelaere, Yannick Vanderborght, and Louise Haagh frequently appear within these networks, indicating sustained collaboration among theorists and policy scholars working on UBI. While there are some inter-cluster linkages, the network generally exhibits a moderate degree of fragmentation, suggesting that collaboration is somewhat limited to regional or thematic niches.



Figure 22: Author Collaboration Network

Interestingly, the structure of the co-authorship network also reflects the dual nature of UBI research. One set of clusters is dominated by philosophers and political theorists engaged in normative debates, while another includes economists and social scientists conducting pilot evaluations and simulations. This partial compartmentalisation highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the field while also suggesting potential areas where deeper integration could be fostered.

The country collaboration map, shown in Figure 23, provides further insight into the international dynamics of UBI research. The strongest collaborative links are found among high-income

countries, particularly the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Finland, and Germany. These countries have played a leading role in shaping the UBI literature because of their well-established academic institutions, growing interest in welfare policy experimentation, and the relevance of UBI to public policy debates. For example, Finland's national pilot conducted between 2017 and 2018 attracted considerable academic attention and encouraged collaborative research involving scholars from the United Kingdom and Germany.

Country Collaboration Map

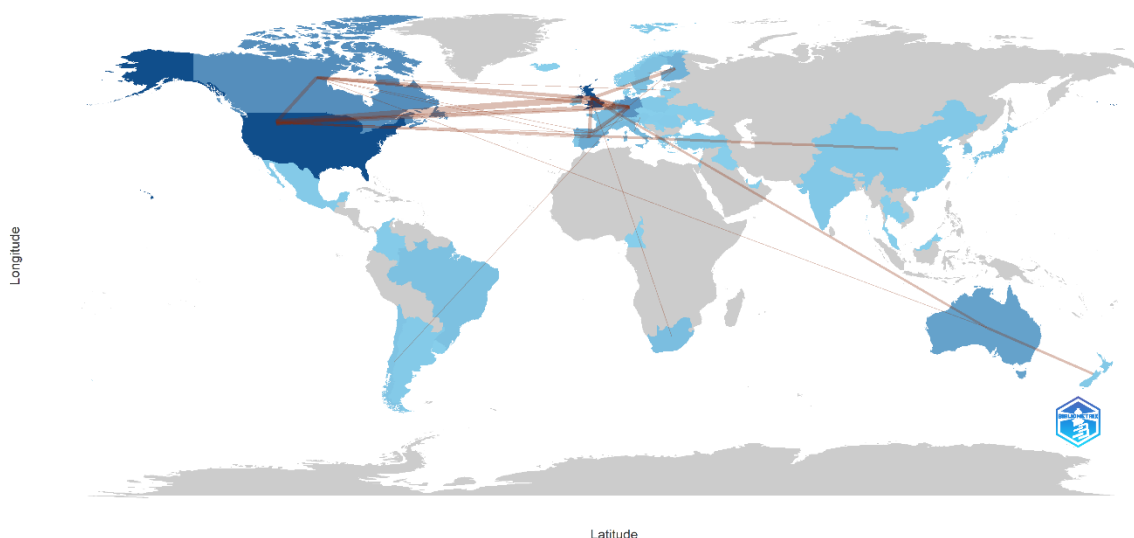


Figure 23: Country Collaboration Map

While collaboration within Europe is extensive, research partnerships with developing countries remain relatively limited. However, countries such as India, Kenya, and Brazil are beginning to play a more active role, primarily as locations for pilot programmes and policy modelling studies. This pattern suggests that the UBI research agenda is becoming increasingly global, with high-income countries contributing theoretical perspectives and financial support, while low- and middle-income countries provide practical settings for policy experimentation.

These patterns are consistent with broader trends in public policy research, where empirical field studies in the Global South complement theoretical innovations in the Global North. Yet the relatively low density of South-South collaborations and the limited integration of non-Western scholars into dominant author clusters suggest opportunities for more equitable knowledge exchange.

In sum, the social structure of UBI research is moderately collaborative and increasingly international, though it still exhibits asymmetries in terms of geography and academic power. Fostering broader, more inclusive collaborations could enhance the field's empirical richness and policy relevance, especially as debates around UBI become more global in nature.

. In the case of UBI research, a clear pattern emerges: high-income countries dominate the literature in terms of both volume and impact, with Europe leading the way, followed by North America and, more recently, select regions in the Global South.

3.9 Research Gaps and Future Directions

The bibliometric evidence reveals that despite rapid growth in UBI scholarship, several important research gaps remain. First, most empirical evidence originates from high-income countries, whereas developing economies continue to be underrepresented despite facing greater challenges of poverty and informality. Second, relatively few studies investigate the long-term macroeconomic consequences of UBI, including inflationary effects, labour supply responses, and fiscal sustainability. Third, interdisciplinary integration remains limited, with economics, political science, philosophy, and public policy often evolving as parallel rather than interconnected research streams. Finally, recent keywords such as artificial intelligence, platform work, digital labour markets, climate resilience, and adaptive social protection indicate promising avenues for future investigation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Universal Basic Income (UBI) has evolved from a predominantly philosophical concept into a mature and multidisciplinary field of research. Although the idea has long been discussed in the works of Friedman (1962), Rawls (1971), and Van Parijs (1995), scholarly attention remained limited until the early 2010s because UBI was widely regarded as politically and economically impractical. Early studies, therefore, concentrated on normative issues such as distributive justice, citizenship, and social rights rather than empirical policy evaluation.

The sharp increase in publications after 2015 reflects major global developments that transformed both academic and policy discussions. The Finnish Basic Income Experiment (2017–2018) marked a turning point by shifting research from theoretical debates toward empirical evaluation of employment, well-being, and administrative feasibility. Similar pilot programmes in Canada, Kenya, the Netherlands, and other countries further encouraged comparative policy research. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend by exposing the limitations of conventional welfare systems and demonstrating the importance of rapid, unconditional income support during periods of economic uncertainty. Consequently, research expanded beyond philosophical debates to include crisis resilience, social protection, and public policy implementation.

The growing prominence of keywords related to automation, artificial intelligence, labour markets, and unemployment further illustrates the changing focus of UBI research. Increasing technological disruption and the expansion of platform-based employment have encouraged researchers to examine UBI as a mechanism for ensuring income security in an increasingly uncertain labour market. Rather than being viewed solely as an anti-poverty measure, UBI is now widely discussed as a broader institutional response to structural changes in the future of work.

The thematic analyses confirm that poverty, inequality, income redistribution, and welfare reform remain the intellectual core of UBI scholarship. Although automation has emerged as a significant research theme, the literature continues to frame UBI primarily within the context of social protection and welfare policy. The conceptual structure further demonstrates the interdisciplinary character of the field, integrating perspectives from economics, political science, philosophy, sociology, development studies, and public administration. This convergence reflects the complexity of UBI as both an economic policy and a social institution, suggesting that future research will increasingly require interdisciplinary collaboration.

The geographical distribution of research remains highly concentrated in North America and Western Europe. The United Kingdom, the United States, Finland, Canada, Belgium, and Germany dominate publication output and citation impact due to their strong research infrastructure, active welfare policy debates, and experience with basic income experiments. In contrast, developing countries remain underrepresented despite facing greater challenges related to poverty, informality, and limited social protection. This imbalance highlights the need for more empirical evidence from low- and middle-income economies, where the effectiveness and feasibility of UBI may differ substantially from high-income contexts.

Collaboration and citation analyses further reveal that UBI research continues to be shaped by a relatively small group of influential scholars. Authors such as Philippe Van Parijs and Jurgen De Wispelaere occupy central positions within collaboration and citation networks, while Guy Standing, despite not being among the most prolific contributors, remains one of the field's most influential scholars through his conceptual contributions. These findings illustrate that scholarly influence cannot be assessed solely by publication volume, as foundational

works continue to guide contemporary research long after their publication.

Overall, the bibliometric evidence suggests that UBI research has reached a stage of intellectual maturity characterised by thematic diversification, methodological advancement, and growing interdisciplinary engagement. Nevertheless, important research gaps remain, particularly regarding long-term fiscal sustainability, political feasibility, behavioural responses, and implementation in developing countries. As economies continue to experience technological change, demographic transitions, and climate-related uncertainties, UBI research is likely to expand beyond traditional welfare economics toward broader questions of economic resilience, inclusive growth, and the future design of social protection systems.

5. CONCLUSION

Universal Basic Income (UBI) has become one of the most debated social policy proposals of the twenty-first century in response to rising inequality, labour market transformation, technological disruption, and concerns over the sustainability of conventional welfare systems. As research on UBI has expanded rapidly over the past three decades, this study systematically mapped its intellectual evolution through a bibliometric analysis of Scopus-indexed literature published between 1990 and 2023 using Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny.

The findings reveal that UBI research has evolved from a predominantly philosophical debate into a mature and multidisciplinary field. While scholarly output remained limited until the early 2000s, publications increased substantially following the global financial crisis, major UBI pilot programmes in countries such as Finland, Canada, and Kenya, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which reinforced the importance of income security and social protection. The analysis further demonstrates that UBI research is supported by a relatively small group of influential scholars while increasingly attracting contributions from economics, political science, sociology, philosophy, development studies, and public administration. Although poverty, inequality, welfare reform, and income distribution remain the dominant themes, recent studies have increasingly focused on automation, artificial intelligence, digital labour markets, and unconditional cash transfer programmes, reflecting the changing socio-economic context of the debate.

The study also identifies a clear geographical concentration of research in the United Kingdom, the United States, Finland, Canada, Belgium, and Germany. While these countries continue to lead scholarly output and citation impact due to strong research infrastructure and active policy experimentation, the comparatively limited contribution from developing countries highlights an important gap in the existing literature. Expanding empirical research in low- and middle-income countries is essential, given their distinct institutional settings and growing reliance on income support programmes.

By integrating performance analysis, collaboration networks, co-citation analysis, thematic mapping, and keyword evolution, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the intellectual,

conceptual, and social structure of UBI research. The findings offer valuable insights for both researchers seeking to identify influential studies and emerging themes and policymakers interested in understanding the evolution of evidence surrounding UBI. Nevertheless, the study is subject to certain limitations, including its reliance on the Scopus database, the inclusion of English-language publications only, and the inherent limitations of bibliometric methods, which measure research patterns rather than policy effectiveness.

Future research should focus on developing-country experiences, long-term fiscal sustainability, labour market responses, political feasibility, and the implications of emerging challenges such as artificial intelligence, climate change, demographic ageing, and digital public infrastructure. Overall, this study demonstrates that UBI has evolved from a normative policy proposal into a globally significant and interdisciplinary research field. By systematically mapping its development, it provides a robust foundation for future research and informed policy discussions on the evolving role of UBI in modern social protection systems.

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