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Job Guarantee as an Active Labour Market Policy for Tackling Long-term Unemployment: Empirical Findings from The Netherlands

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Abstract: This article analyzes two Dutch experiments in which the government guarantees a job to tackle long-term unemployment. The experiment with the Melkert jobs was carried out in the 1990s. Recently the municipality of Groningen implemented a project in which long-term unemployed people are offered a so-called basic job. The research results of this project demonstrate that the target group can do productive work on a regular basis and that basic jobs have a net positive social added value based on a Social Cost Benefit Analysis (SCBA).

In this article we also pay attention to the recent academic debate between an unconditional basic income (BIG) and a job guarantee (JG).

Keywords: *Job Guarantee, long-term unemployed, Basic Income, Social Cost Benefit Analysis, social security.*

1. Introduction

The right to work is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948, Article 23) and more recently in the Sustainable Development Goals (2015, goal 10). The right to work is also enshrined in law at national level. Article 19 of the Dutch Constitution states:” the

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promotion of sufficient employment is a matter of concern to the government.”

After the Second World War, the policy of Western European welfare states was aimed at achieving full employment. In cases of unemployment, sickness, and disability, these states chose to provide income guarantees to their citizens. During periods of unemployment, individuals could resort to reintegration schemes, like training programs, offering an internship, job mediation and wage cost subsidy (SCP/CPB, 2004). During the 1990s, a political and ideological shift occurred, causing the full employment policy to no longer be a priority (Mitchell & Muysken, 2008). Furthermore, technological developments led to unemployment, especially at the lower end of the labor market. The position of low-skilled workers was weakened by globalization and/or by the displacement of middle-skilled workers who became prevalent after the surge in automation since 2000.

These developments have sparked societal discussions about fundamental and radical adjustments/changes to the welfare state system. There are proponents for the introduction of an unconditional basic income for everyone (BIG) and advocates for a Job Guarantee for everyone willing to work. In the Netherlands, experiments have been conducted with forms of job guarantees. In our article, we analyze two Dutch experiments after which we aim to answer the question: what lessons can we draw from the introduction of JG (Job Guarantee)?

However, before delving into these experiments, we want to briefly touch upon the debate between basic income and job guarantee.

2. The recent debate between BIG and JG

The discussion between job guarantee or basic income relates to the three elements that, according to Hannah Arendt (2012), shape our active life. These three elements are labour, work and action. Labour is about shaping our natural environment to survive. We have to make fire, build shelters and make clothes. Labour is in our modern time transformed in the production and consumption of goods. Work is a creative, but lonely activity. And action takes place in the public space, where people engage in politics through negotiation. According to Arendt, that is where one acquires freedom.

With a basic income, citizens no longer are obliged to exchange labour for their livelihood. A person is free to organize their life according to their own wishes. But the freedom of those who must pay the higher taxes decreases. Marx et al. (2018) used a microsimulation to explore the effects

of basic income in the Netherlands. These effects are context-specific, because the social security and tax system differs per country. According to the authors, with a basic income of € 982 per month for an adult and € 165 for a child, the personal tax would increase from 40.8% to 50.6% for the income group € 19,982 - €67,072 and for the income group higher than € 67,072 from 52.0% to 64.5%. This calls for a strong sense of solidarity. As a result 3.6% of the population are out of poverty, compared to 3.2% who end up in poverty without a basic income. It would be effectively a small net profit. When it comes to combating poverty, the question is whether other positive freedom-expanding measures do not yield more profit (Robeijs, 2018). For example, regulations for better and more accessible education, adequate and affordable housing, and better legal protection of cheaper health care.

To be eligible for social security benefits in the Netherlands, the person must work or live in the Netherlands. In 2019, the Netherlands had 735 thousand foreign employees (Heyma & Vervliet, 2022). In the same year, more than 95,000 young people came to study in the Netherlands (Elfferich, Favier & Snethlage, 2021). They all fall under the definition of Dutch residents. In the discussion about basic income, it is not clear whether they are also entitled to a basic income. Or whether it only applies to people with a Dutch passport? Europe has freedom of personal movement. What pull effect would the introduction of a basic income have in one country? The ethical principle of reciprocity, in which people feel obliged to contribute to society through work and other forms of social participation, is at stake when European citizens move from a country without a basic income to a country with a basic income. This issue is identified in research, but mostly neglected in the public debate about basic income, because it leads to the exclusion of non-Dutch people, while basic income is inclusion-driven (Schuring & Driessen, 2021).

In addition to combating poverty, the introduction of basic income is intended to have a second effect, namely the liberation of work as a necessary evil. The basic income offers citizens the opportunity to negotiate with the employer in the public space about the amount of their salary. Basic income would increase the freedom to enter the labour market. This strengthens the employee's negotiating position.

But the question remains whether the position of vulnerable employees, for example those with disabilities, would improve, especially when labour becomes costly. Calnitsky & Latner (2017) report an 11.3% decline in labour force participation in an experiment with basic income in the US. It appears to be mainly non-single women who work less, because they

are often the lowest-earning partner (Brown & Immervoll, 2017). Basic income unintentionally perpetuates gender inequality.

There are indeed many negative aspects to work but work also has its positive sides. Work provides structure and social contacts (Paul & Batinic, 2010; Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2012). It has positive effects on health, self-confidence and self-esteem (Jahoda, 1982; Hollederer, 2015; Selenko, Batinic, & Paul, 2011). The Job Guarantee approach places particular emphasis on these benefits, but the labour must meet certain conditions. One of them is that the job must provide socially meaningful work. So they shouldn't be bullshit jobs, as described by Graeber (2018). The job must also offer development prospects. And not unimportantly, one must receive a salary that makes social participation possible.

This is also about positive freedom. However, this is not at the expense of the freedom of others. Such a job model, referred to in the Netherlands as "basisbanen" and in this article translated as "basic jobs", can be financed through savings from benefits and production can be financed from savings from benefits and production. This can be carried out in a budget-neutral manner without raising taxes.

3. Dutch experiments with basic jobs

In the 1990s, the Netherlands conducted nationwide experiments with a form of job guarantee. This involved the introduction of 40 thousand jobs, which were named after the erstwhile Minister of Social Affairs and Employment; the Melkert jobs. This experiment was studied using document analysis and interviews (Mosselman & Muysken, 2020).

More recently, there has been an experiment with 50 basic jobs in the municipality of Groningen. The municipality of Groningen is located in the north of the Netherlands and has over 210 thousand residents as of 2023. A formative evaluation study was conducted for this experiment, where data were collected through time registration, interviews with participants and supervisors, the self-sufficiency matrix, and file data (Mosselman & Polstra, 2023). Below, we will discuss both experiments separately.

3.1 Rise and fall of the Melkertbaan

In the 70s and 80s of the last century, unemployment in the Netherlands, as in the other Western European countries, was relatively high (CPB, 1994). High long-term unemployment and high youth unemployment were of particular concern. The government responded with

predominantly Keynesian policies in the form of support for companies, employment programs and increasing government spending and social security.

After a gradual fall in unemployment in the second half of the 80s, another worrying increase followed to almost even 10% in 1994 (Melkert & Linschoten, 1996). Within this, the weak groups in society were disproportionately affected. In this serious socio-economic situation, the government decided to create a total of 40,000 jobs in the public sector between 1994 and 1998, intended for the long-term unemployed and welfare recipients. This EWLW scheme (Extra Employment for the Long-Term Unemployed) was explicitly called a structural measure. The forty thousand jobs envisaged would be regular and permanent with a full salary. An important second objective of the scheme, in addition to promoting employment, was to improve the quality of services in the public sector. The remuneration started at the statutory minimum wage and could amount to a maximum of 130% of this statutory minimum wage and the saved social assistance benefits formed part of the financing of the EWLW scheme.

Over the course of the 90s, both the political and scientific economic climate changed. Responsible for this was the rise of neoliberal political economic ideas. In 1994, the OECD's Jobs Study was published, which was largely based on the vision of Layard, Nickel and Jackman (1991). This view, in which unemployment is attributed to obstacles in the labor market, gained a lot of authority within economic science. Because the socio-economic situation in 1998 was also better than in 1994, moving on to the regular labour market became the new credo. The 40,000 EWLW jobs were converted into entrance jobs (E-jobs) to illustrate that they were a stepping stone to a regular position. In the period 1998 – 2002, the number of E-jobs would be increased by 10,000. In addition, there were 10,000 transition jobs (T-jobs) with a better salary than E-jobs. Employees who had worked in an E-job for 5 years could move on to such a T-job with a higher salary. The biggest change, however, was that the E/T-jobs would be flexibly occupied. In fact, all E/T-jobs had been given an outflow target. This was a break with the original design of the Melkertbaan, namely an (extra) regular, permanent job within the collective sector.

Partly due to the favourable economic development in the cabinet period 1998 – 2002, there was increasing criticism of the design and financing of labour market policy (IBO, 2001). In accordance with the OECD's new vision, the abolition and phased phasing out of the E/T jobs scheme (Melkertbanen) was advocated. This plea was widely supported by

politicians and civil society organisations, including the trade union movement. In those years the neoliberal view was on the rise, that the government cannot be responsible for full employment. According to this view, it is the responsibility of the individual job seeker to obtain a job on his own (as much as possible). The government is supporting in providing additional wage cost subsidies as part of the reintegration schemes.

3.2 The experiment Basisbanen Groningen

A decade after the experiment with the Melkert jobs, a debate arose again about the desirability of basic jobs. It was experimented with in several cities, such as Amsterdam, The Hague, Tilburg and Heerlen. In almost all cases, these were temporary jobs, which made the jobs a reintegration tool to help the long-term unemployed move into regular employment. The municipality of Groningen decided to create permanent jobs for the long-term unemployed. This makes it the most compliant with the principle of job guarantee.

Characteristics of the Groningen approach

In March 2020, after a feasibility study (Mosselman & Ravenshorst, 2018), the municipality of Groningen started experimenting with basic jobs for welfare recipients who were longer than 3 years on benefits, with very poor or no prospect in the labour market. The first experiment involved 50 participants/basic job holders. Due to the corona pandemic, participants entered gradually. The study covers the period 1 March 2020 to 1 December 2022. In mid-2022, based on the (positive) interim reports of the researchers, the municipality of Groningen decided to change the basic jobs experiment into a permanent instrument as of 1 March 2023 and to expand it during the coming years to a total of 250 basic job holders. The aim of the project is to create employment for people who cannot participate in the 'regular' labour market because of a mix of external reasons (mismatch job demands with qualification, (age) discrimination) and interpersonal reasons (physical restraints, psychological problems, poor language skills). But still they can perform certain labour activities. These jobs must also contribute to the well-being and financial self-reliance of participants. The jobs consist of activities for which the market does not pay, but which do have social added value and contribute to the quality of life in the neighbourhoods and villages of the municipality. The local community determines which activities are useful and meaningful. Resources should be available for sufficient and professional

guidance/coaching of the participants. Selection of participants is done by 2 participation coaches from the municipality. The target group consists of people who receive benefits under the Participation Act, the so-called welfare recipients. These can voluntarily register as potential participants and case managers of the Service can also bring in potential participants. The two participation coaches held discussions with the potential participants and from these discussions 50 participants were selected on a voluntary basis.

Basic job holders, according to the file data, are older in age (averaging 54 years), are mostly single (90%), have been unemployed for a long duration (7.8 years), and have a lower education level (50% without an initial qualification). Basic job holders report facing numerous challenges, such as physical issues (33%), mental health problems (24%), and debts (30%), which places a regular job out of their reach. Half of them grapple with more than one issue.

Table No. 1. Characteristics basic job holders

		Basic job holders	
Age	20 t/m 29	0	0%
	30 t/m 39	2	4,1%
	40 t/m 49	10	20,4%
	50 t/m 59	20	40,8%
	60 and older	17	34,7%
	Avg./SD (years)	54,2	7,1
<hr/>			
Household composition	Single*	44	89,8%
	Single with children	2	4,1%
	Cohabiting	1	2,0%
	Living together with children	2	4,1%
	Otherwise	0	0%
<hr/>			
Education	Without qualification	23	48,9%
	Initial qualification	24	51,1%
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Duration of benefit	Less than 3 years	11	23,9%
	3 to 5 years	3	6,5%
	5 to 10 years	17	37,0%
	10 to 15 years	10	21,7%
	15 to 20 years	3	6,5%
	20 years >	2	4,3%
	Avg/SD (months)	94,4	64,9

Source: Mosselman & Polstra (2023)

Participating organizations include: neighborhood businesses, care farms, training and work enterprises, community centers, repair cafes, recycling enterprises, local schools, sports clubs, playground associations, childcare facilities, healthcare institutions, residents' organizations, and housing corporations. The guidance on and around the job is provided by four

professional work guidance/job coaching organizations that receive subsidies from the municipality for this purpose. They serve as the direct point of contact for employees, provide instruction and support in task execution, and represent the formal employer (the Municipality of Groningen) in matters such as sick leave notifications and leave requests. As the formal employer, the municipality pays the salary, which is equal to the statutory minimum wage. The contract duration becomes permanent after 3 years of positive assessment.

The tasks performed in the basic jobs include roles such as supporting community centers and sports clubs, assisting bicycle stewards, and cleaning up litter. The basic jobs often consist of sets of tasks. The majority of the basic job holders have an employment contract ranging from a minimum of 32 to a maximum of 36 hours per week, and the work should not displace paid employment or regular volunteer work. When drafting the project plan, it was further assumed that it should be possible to obtain a modest financial contribution from the job-providing parties. This assumption turned out to be overly optimistic during the research period.

Attention was paid to the need for adequate professional guidance. The participation coaches who conducted the selection interviews with potential participants continue to support the participants throughout the entire experiment, addressing changes in their daily life and the new income situation. These coaches, trained in the Mobility Mentoring methodology (Jungman & Wesdorp, 2017), regularly interact with the participants about various aspects of their well-being, such as perceived health, debt situation, housing, social network, family relations, etc. The work guidance is outsourced to four experienced and professional job coaching organizations. They receive a subsidy from the municipality for this purpose. Their coaching is based on the 'Supported Employment' method (Coenen, Hanegraaf & Valkenburg, 2012).

The intensity of guidance for the basic job holders by the work supervisors is around 2.5 hours per week at the start and in the initial months of the basic job. Afterward, the guidance and coaching intensity decreases to 2 hours per week, eventually stabilizing at a relatively consistent 1.5 hours per week. The work guidance encompasses both direct coaching and management.

Appreciation and well-being of participants

We will address consecutively (1) the assessment of well-being and health development, (2) the appreciation for the organization and structure of the basic jobs, and (3) the assessment of personal suitability.

The well-being of the participants has been monitored by the municipality's participation coaches using the so-called "Bridge to Self-Sufficiency" (Brug naar Zelfredzaamheid). This 'bridge' consists of five life domains: stability in the home situation, well-being, work and income, finances, and education. These life domains have been operationalized into eight variables: housing, care for family, health, social network, debts, savings, diploma, and net income. Each variable has five scoring possibilities, ranging from 1 to 5. The participation coaches, together with the basic job holders, fill in the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency. The complete scale is included in the appendix.

The assumption is that the degree of self-sufficiency and well-being of the basic job holders improves thanks to the fulfillment of the job and the associated guidance. Out of the 50 basic job holders, we have a complete data set on the self-sufficiency matrix for 38 of them. We made a comparison between the initial scores, scores after six months, and scores after one year. In the table below, we present the total scores for the eight operationalized variables. This clearly shows an improvement across the board for the group as a whole. Half a year after the start of the basic job, the total score improved by almost 8%, followed by a more moderate increase of 3.5% after the second half of the year. Considering that the score after one year is even 82.6% of the maximum achievable score. Therefore, the well-being of the basic job holders as a group has improved.

Table No. 2 total scores per pillar at start, after 6 months and after 12 months

	Start	After 6	After 12
Housing	154	172	176
Care	173	175	174
Health	146	146	148
Soc. contacts	152	153	161
Debts	163	171	180
Savings	81	108	116
Diploma	118	116	117
Income	140	175	184
Total	1127	1216	1256

Source: Mosselman & Polstra (2023)

Examining individual progress after 6 months, 30 participants scored higher, and 8 remained the same. After a year of working in a basic job, we mainly see further improvement. Only for 3 participants has the total score decreased very marginally compared to the score at the start of the work. For everyone else, we see an improvement.

We were able to interview 33 basic job holders about their perceived health, their satisfaction with life, their judgment on engaging in meaningful activities, and their judgment on the degree of involvement in society. Of the non-respondents some were long-term sick (not work-related), others had sheltered employment, had retired, voluntarily quit or refused an interview.

Out of the 33 participants, 20 find their health good to excellent, 8 consider it moderate, and 5 participants believe their health is poor. The average score of the basic job holders on satisfaction with their life and feeling part of society is 7.9. The score for satisfaction with what they do in life is 8.

The positive response from the basic job holders also applies to their tasks and their coaching. Basic job holders are enthusiastic about their tasks, their supervisors, and their colleagues. "This should have happened much earlier" was said multiple times. Most participants give a 7 for their tasks. Out of the 33 interviewed, 29 participants said they had a say in the choice of tasks. We learned from 2 participants that they suggested their tasks, and the remaining 2 did not want to have a say because they were fully satisfied with the tasks provided.

The average score for guidance is 7.4. They were almost unanimously enthusiastic about the tasks and the guidance. This applies to both guidance on the shop floor and coaching by job coaches and guidance and support from the participation coaches.

An interesting part of the interviews is the assessment the basic job holders had to make themselves about their suitability for a job in the regular labor market. We also posed this question about the suitability of the basic job holders for the regular market to their job coaches.

Out of the 33 basic job holders, 15 (46.9%) believe they are suitable for a regular job, and the job coaches consider 38.6% suitable (17 out of the total 44 guided participants) for the regular labor market.

The job coaches are enthusiastic about the commitment and learning ability of the basic job holders. Some participants appear to need little instruction and coaching, while others need more than average. In interviews with job coaches, it became clear that the guidance is much more and much broader than just 'coaching on the job'. Guidance is largely about promoting the personal development of basic job holders (OECD, 2006). Of the 44 participants they guide, 28 of them have potential for development identified, they are unsure about 6 participants, and for 10 participants, they believe that little to no development can be expected.

Social costs-benefit analysis (SCBA)

A fundamental point of discussion, shared by all parties involved, is the financing of a basic job. The total cost of the basic jobs consists of gross wages and employer charges, guidance costs, and implementation costs. Total savings come from dropped benefits and ceased implementation costs. In the Dutch situation, there is a substantial difference between a social welfare benefit, especially for singles, and the gross wage costs. When conducting financial analyses of basic job projects for people on welfare with very poor or no prospect for a job in the regular labor market, this special situation must be taken into account.

Viewing this through the lens of 'broad prosperity' - for instance, by using an SCBA - one can identify several societal benefits of employment that could cast a completely different light on the matter compared to a strictly business-economic calculation. There is now enough empirical research indicating that work has positive effects on the health and well-being of workers and their households, as well as positive effects on the livability and social climate of neighborhoods, villages, and cities - in short, of

communities (Jahoda, 1982; Hollederer, 2015; Selenko, Batinic, & Paul, 2011; Paul & Batinic, 2010; Stiglbauer & Batinic, 2012).

After completing the research project Basic Jobs Groningen, based on empirical material and recognized methods of monetizing the quality of life, we set up an ex-post SCBA (Van Eijkel, Gerritsen, Sadira & Versantvoort, 2020; Van Gils, Schoemaker & Polder, 2013). It appears that the Basic Jobs Groningen project yields a net societal benefit of just over €7000 per full-time basic job holder. The calculated business-economic loss for the municipality of Groningen is €5,000 per full-time basic job holder.

Of course, these calculations of societal benefits are fraught with great uncertainty, especially when dealing with small groups, as in our experiment. The significance of monetizing these societal benefits is to provide a valuation, allowing for comparison with the actual financial values. This is the advantage of this type of calculation. Work promotes health, and health has positive societal effects, which can be clarified by calculating the avoidable costs of illness.

4. Conclusions

Based on the two Dutch experiments, we can conclude that long-term unemployed people who cannot find a job on the regular labour market are capable of productive work. The condition is that job requirements are adapted to the capabilities of the long-term unemployed.

Another conclusion is, that basic jobs should not be judged on the transition to the regular labour market. Although basic job workers gradually develop new skills and abilities by working in a basic job, most of them remain at a distance from the regular labour market. We further conclude that in the financial analysis of basic jobs we should not only look at the business-economic calculation of costs and benefits for the municipality. Then the outcome is disadvantageous for the municipality even with a wage cost subsidy. A cost-benefit analysis that takes the social value into account (SCBA) provides a substantially positive outcome of basic jobs.

We learned the following lessons:

- The Groningen experiment shows that small-scale experiments with basic jobs are feasible. However, it proved challenging to organize combinations of useful tasks that can be executed as basic jobs and to select and motivate the individuals eligible for these basic jobs.

- When creating the job, the intrinsic limitations of unemployed individuals who cannot find a job on the regular labour market should have priority and not the job requirements. In other words, the job must adapt to the unemployed individual, not the other way around. The job itself should have societal value, be permanent, and not compete with existing jobs. These jobs should, therefore, be realized in the public or social sector.
- Working in a basic job and receiving guidance, both at work and in other areas of life, stimulates the development potential of the participants. After a few years, some participants might potentially move on to the regular labor market. However, transition in the long run should not be included as an objective. The Melkert jobs experiment teaches us that in the long run, this is the downfall of the basic job.
- Basic jobs at the statutory minimum wage are in the Dutch situation a financial loss for the municipality. Even after a wage subsidy paid by the national government, a substantial net cost per basic job holder remains.

5. Contemplation

Basic jobs can be seen as a collective provision, given that (a) people have the right to work, and (b) the regular labor market, including the reintegration tools, is unable to offer a job for a substantial group of people. As a collective provision, every citizen should be eligible. Municipalities could be held responsible for this. Tcherneva (2020) suggests transforming benefit organizations into employment organizations, which, in addition to a reintegration task for people close to the labor market, get a job creation task for those with no prospect in a regular job. The national government should take care of the financing. When introducing basic jobs, long-term goals must be set and legally established. The work must be permanent, it should be worthwhile, but it should also not hinder any potential transition to a regular job.

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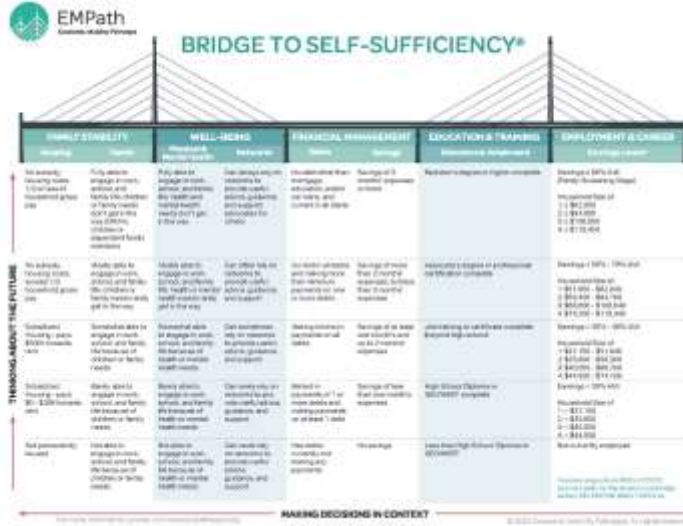
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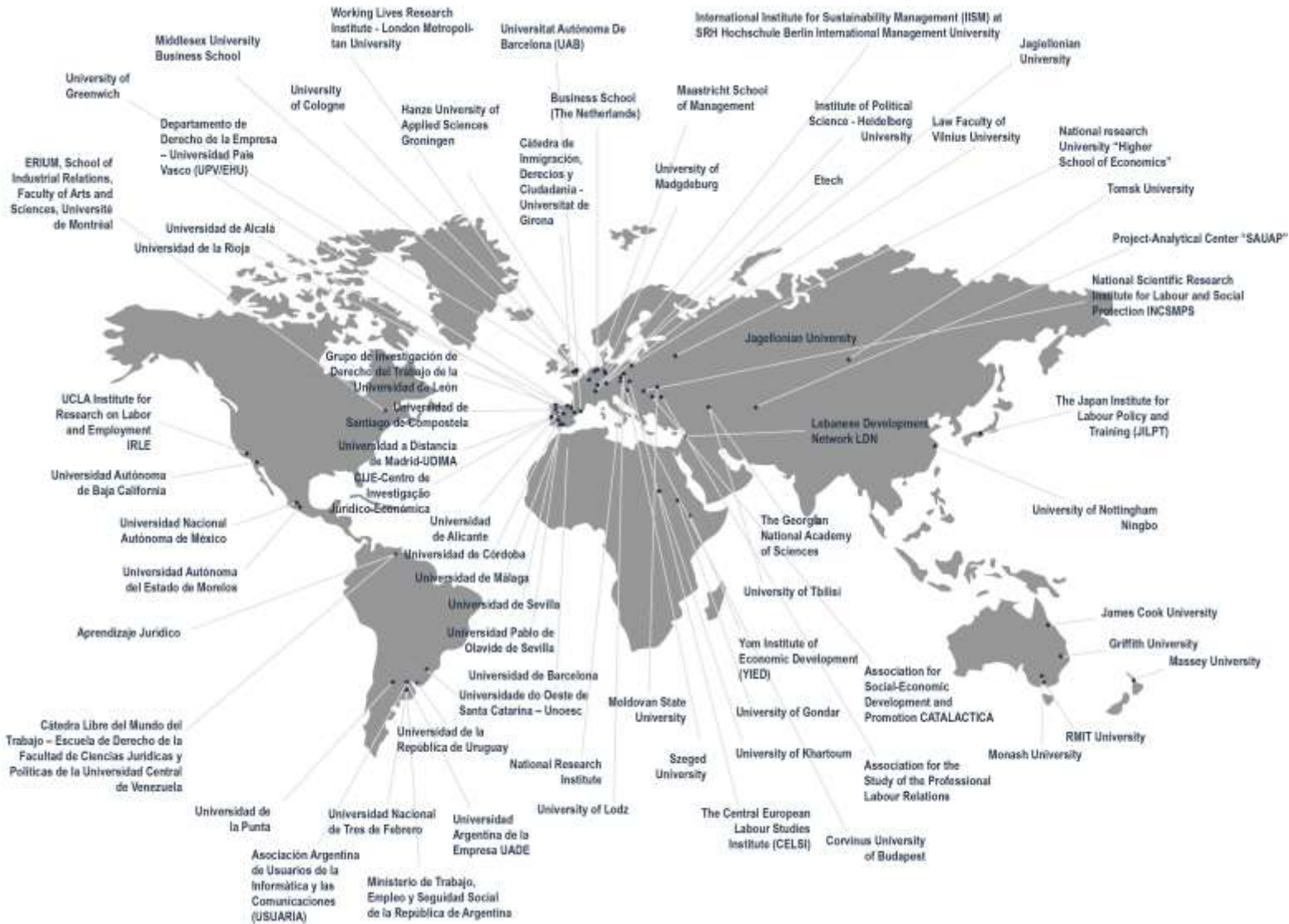
Annex

Title: The Bridge to Self-Sufficiency



Source: <https://coresonline.org/resources/empath-bridge-self-sufficiency>
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