

Peter Fredriksson (eds.) (2018)

***Yömajasta omaan asuntoon. Suomalaisen asunnottomuuspolitiikan murros. [From a Shelter to My Own Home – Transformation of Finnish Homelessness Policy].***

Helsinki: Into, pp.213.

This book is a compilation of articles regarding the history of homelessness in Finland. In the introduction, the aim is defined as to ‘discuss the Finnish model [of reducing homelessness] – its birth, its turning point and the factors that affected the model’. In addition to examining homelessness from society’s and the individual’s point of view across different decades starting from the 1940s, the book’s plot is built on stories of people who have, in their own way, significantly influenced the development of homelessness policies and practices in Finland. I was excited to see what kind of contribution this book and its writers, whose backgrounds vary from researchers to policy-level experts and grass-root level professionals, offer to the Finnish homelessness discussion.

The first two sections of the book take place at the time after the Continuation War. Antti Malinen discusses successfully the ideals, practices and experiences of addressing homelessness in Helsinki during the years 1944–1961. Descriptions of people living in inhuman bomb shelters, barracks and other temporary accommodation solutions are thought provoking. The article gives valuable information on how homeless men without families were at the greatest risk of becoming more marginalised, as homelessness policy concentrated mostly on families, women and children. During that time, as a founder of the ‘Kovaosaisten ystävät’ association, Arvid von Martens had a very important role as homeless people’s spokesperson, especially in Helsinki. Ilkka Taipale illustrates vividly how von Martens conducted his active advocacy work through letters to the editors, arguing on behalf of homeless people on a policy level, closing the bomb shelters and opening new homeless shelters with more humane conditions.

In his article, Jouko Karjalainen stresses that during the first two decades after the Continuation War, homelessness was not seen as a question of social policy: for example, lonely men with alcohol problems were mostly treated as vagabonds. Karjalainen successfully portrays how changes in legislation and in social welfare

systems slowly changed the attitudes towards these people. In 1967, the Suoja-Pirtti association, took responsibility for the first shelters in Finland that accommodated homeless men with alcohol problems. Thus, the narrative of Arvo Parkkila's (the founder of Suoja-Pirtti) life gives an important contribution to the book – as does the story of Ilkka Taipale's accomplishments. As the founder of 'Marraskuun liike', the political movement, he has significantly affected the attitudes towards homeless people with substance use problems. With their declaration 'barrack policy is not enough', the movement wanted, and even managed, to point out that reducing homelessness needs long-term solutions.

The third chapter is a comprehensive description about how modern homelessness policy arrived in Finland. Peter Fredriksson writes in detail how during the 1970s it was realised that changes in housing policy were needed. The special needs of people with substance use or mental health problems were noticed and homelessness was thus finally approached as a complex social issue. Helsinki took a role as a trendsetter, as the housing service system was changed radically in the 1980s: the number of homeless shelters decreased, supported housing made a breakthrough, and the state and the municipalities got new kinds of roles and responsibilities in reducing homelessness. A significant policy-level change was the joint national development programme between social and housing services. Based on these actions and especially a few people's efforts, the amount of homeless people in Finland decreased. Thus, it is no wonder that Heikki S. von Hertzen's (deputy mayor of Helsinki, the founder of the Y-Foundation), Ulla Saarenheimo's (the head of the research and planning department in National Housing Board of Finland) and Juhani Roiha's (the founder of the NGO 'No Fixed Abode') merits are reflected in the book.

In the fourth chapter, Peter Fredriksson and Juha Kaakinen concentrate on the actual 'turning point' of Finnish homelessness policy. The breakthrough of Housing First happened during two national programmes aiming to reduce long-term homelessness in Finland, PAAVO I (2008–2011) and PAAVO II (2012–2015). The article draws an explicit picture of the Finnish Housing First model and its development process and how it has been implemented at policy level and in practice. The writers argue that despite the Finnish model having similarities to the model that the Pathways to Housing organisation created, the Finnish version is an independent model with its special features. For example, the possibility for individually tailored housing social work had been an important factor in preventing homelessness. According to the writers, the credit for PAAVO programmes happening in the first place belongs to Jan Vapaavuori, whose efforts as a minister of housing Fredriksson introduces in more detail in the book. According to Fredriksson, Vapaavuori wanted to develop the new housing policy, in spite of resistance. The

development strategy was based especially on the views of four homelessness specialists. The contribution of three of them (Paavo Voutilainen, Hannu Puttonen and Ilkka Taipale) are analysed in the book in individual articles.

Hanna Dhalmann and Jari Karppinen discuss in the fifth chapter the present state of homelessness prevention strategies in Finland. After the PAAVO programmes, the Ministry of the Environment launched the Action Programme to Prevent Homelessness (AUNE, 2016–2019). The writers construe carefully the benefits of investing in housing counselling services, floating support work and education of the social and health care workers. In order to prevent homelessness on the national level, the writers demand affordable rental apartments. All in all, they see the prevention of homelessness as an important ‘social investment’. For me, the most eye-opening was the sixth chapter that discussed the ethics of Housing First, written by Paavo Voutilainen. It was interesting to read how much confusion and resistance the Finnish Housing First model has created among people, despite the principles of the model relying on universal human rights. The ethical starting point of the Finnish Housing First model and thus this book can be summarised in one sentence, referencing Voutilainen himself: ‘for those who have lost everything, only the best is good enough’.

These two chapters include many descriptions of individual people’s missions on preventing and reducing homelessness in Finland: Paula Kokkonen’s (deputy mayor of Helsinki), Jorma Soini’s (who has the Finnish honorary title given by the President of Finland of ‘sosiaalineuvos’ or social counselor), Taru Neiman’s (the head of social services and housing support in Helsinki) and Maritta Närhi’s (the head of psycho-social services in Tampere). In addition, in the last chapter of the book, Johanna Maria Lassy concentrates on the stories of Juha Kaakinen and Peter Fredriksson, who are justly described as the ‘midwives’ of the Finnish Housing First model. As both Kaakinen (the chief executive officer of Y-Foundation) and Fredriksson (the specialist of the Ministry of the Environment) have remarkably influenced the improvement of Finnish homelessness policies during the last decades, writing about them is a natural and reasonable way to finish this book.

From the reader’s point of view, the book’s chronological perspective makes it possible to scrutinise the Finnish homelessness story carefully and logically. Focusing mostly on homelessness in Helsinki seems a justifiable decision: not only that it has had the biggest homelessness crisis during Finnish history, Helsinki has also been a clear forerunner in homelessness reducing strategies. The book fulfilled its aims as it introduced comprehensively the history of homelessness and the stories of multiple people behind the important changes in homelessness policies

and practices in Finland. The book is beneficial for instance for people studying homelessness and professionals and students in social and health care. Most of all, this book is written for the sake of the Finnish homeless people.

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