

Homelessness

Greenland

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Partners: Government of Greenland

Timeframe: 2012-13

Funding institution: Government of Greenland

Homelessness in Greenland Objectives and Outcomes

Homelessness is a severe threat to general living conditions and health. This goes for all countries; however, in an arctic setting accommodation is an absolute necessity for survival: Temperatures below -40°C makes it practical impossible to survive without decent shelter. Around 2010, several cases of people frozen to death alarmed the media and politicians. Eventually, the Government of Greenland asked AAU/ SBi to investigate both the presence and extent of homelessness in Greenland. The research was made 2012.

Homelessness is a broad term, which includes the specter from rough sleeping to having accommodation, although of contemporary art. Due to the climate conditions, rough sleeping is impossible, but other forms exist. Two particular forms appeared to differ from the usual pattern of homelessness: On the one hand households expelled due to not paying rent and on the other hand people living with relatives. The former is an outcome of a modernization of the rental sector; in the past access to housing was a part of salary, but since the 1990s all tenants have to pay rents. For those unable to pay rents, a special system is in operation in Greenland: Accordingly to the legislation nobody can be left on 'the street'; the land owner must offer a simple shelter. This is often done by offering a room per household in a flat. The expelled households do not pay rents and have no rights in relation to the housing except a heated room and access to bathroom often shared with others. The latter is a consequence of traditional close family ties, where people in need always could rely on support from family members, even when the connection was quite distant. Thus, for those deciding to settle in one of the larger cities without having accommodation, living with relatives is a usual way. The project aimed at investigating the presence and extent of homelessness; this did also include an attempt to find the causes behind the relatively high numbers and in particular what could be done about it.

The research proved a major gap between realities experienced by tenants and by government officers. A key result was the modification of process of expellation and a less judgmental treatment of tenants who cannot pay their rent.



Staircase in a run down apartment block, Qaqortoq used for expelled households. Photo by Knud Erik Hansen



Hunters' house Uummannaq. Photo by Knud Erik Hansen



Run down apartment block, Qaqortoq used for expelled households. Photo by Knud Erik Hansen

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- On the spot data collection involving a broad category of agents gives credibility.

Weaknesses

- Limited resources, cultural and linguistic obstacles for the research. Institutional resistance.

Opportunities

- Mobilise local politicians and civil society

Threats

- Challenges established orders and may be ignored