

‘Experimenting With Unconditional Basic Income’ provides a deep-dive into the world of Basic Income (UBI), seen through the lens of the 2017 Finnish experiment. The purpose of this edited collection of balanced, yet detailed arguments is to communicate both the successes and failures of the Finnish BI experiment to civil society, academia, and is of socio-political interest.

Over the course of two years, 2,000 long-term unemployed individuals were provided with €560 per month, in an attempt to see if a new approach to social security would stimulate engagement with the employment market. As a social democratic nation with a strong association with a comprehensive cradle-to-grave welfare support, the Finnish social security system and its intricate nature is examined across the first several chapters of this book. Described as ‘labyrinthine’, given its complicated structure, this book does extremely well to untangle some of these knots, and thus provides a platform for the reader to understand the background of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA). What this book does perfectly is to then establish how the very notion of basic income ideologically fits well within a Finnish context as cradle-to-grave support. This is done through an understanding that the social security is enshrined in the constitution of Finland, and that it forms part of its promise to observe basic human rights.

The book also examines several evaluations conducted on both the target group (receiving BI), and the control group. The statistical data is drawn from quantitative findings and, in the main, is used in the book to show the target groups engagement with the labour market. What the chapter by Jaunhiainen et al does well to do here is to work - almost in combination with the chapter that follows (Ylikännö and Kangas) and evidences a balanced examination of Finland’s trial with BI and its relationship to employment, exemplified through tackling the socio-political dimension. Furthermore, the analysis of the Finnish experiment evidences other recognised echo-effects of introducing BI, wider than the statistical proof much sort after in

policy making. For example, subsequent chapters discuss the subjective findings of improvements in ‘health and well-being and cognitive capabilities’ (Simanainen & Tuulio-Henriksson), and the ‘financial well-being of recipients’ (Lassander & Jaunhiainen). Yet, it is discussions about BIs impact on the reduction in bureaucracy (Simanainen), and ‘trust, capabilities, and confidence’ (Kangas, Ylikännö & Niemelä) that encourages us to consider the viability of BI in reducing the potential damage caused by more conditional systems, intrinsic in more neoliberal welfare state approaches.

By chapter 12, Blomberg, Kroll and Tarkiainen bring to life qualitative evidence from people who participated in the experiment. Here, the authors note the qualitative evidence about the subjective nature of BI evidence an outperformance of established conditional welfare systems, and highlights BI as having positive cognitive echo-effects. These echo-effects can be roundly described as allowing the recipients to develop financial stability, nutritional stability, housing stability, physical and mental health stability, plus allowing for the development of healthy social connexions with friends and family.

As is clear, many of the chapters are written through academic lenses, thus providing the discussion as offering academic rigour and critique. Mäkkylä offers an examination of how the Finnish BI experiment was covered through the lens of ‘Media Framing Theory’. This chapter provides a fascinating insight into how BI becomes communicated to a widely unknowledgeable public, but whilst populating several frames of judgement (economic, conflict, and human-interest frames) - often applied by journalists.

Finally, Kangas’ concluding chapter presents an overall feasibility of basic income. In the case of Finland, Kangas is unequivocal that basic income is highly unlikely to be implemented anytime soon. It is true, that the Finnish experiment was conducted under a very limited time frame, Yet, as the authors state, the experiment demonstrates that it is possible to plan,

implement, and assess a national randomised control trial of BI and to draw balanced quantitative and qualitative evidence. It is also true that the more trials that happen around the world, the more evidence can be assimilated in support of UBI.

However, for academics, civil society actors and politicians interested in BI this book provides a detailed insight into one of the most recent and often cited experiments.