

This article looks at how people can learn not only to cope with unemployment, but also to make themselves employable again, through joining the associations for unemployed people (AUPs) set up in Finland in the early 1990s. These associations offer a range of practical activities, some (eg, training, seminars) that can enhance employability, and others (eg, recreation, volunteering, self-help groups) that can help participants maintain their morale. AUPs also offer mutual support and the chance to feel part of the community. It is important for decision makers and volunteer managers to distinguish between volunteering as a means to improve employability, and the underlying personal motives people may have for volunteering.

Action and togetherness: volunteers in associations of unemployed people

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Rising unemployment

In the early 1990s a sudden increase in unemployment in Finland forced people to find new strategies for coping. In 1990 the unemployment rate had been only 3.4 per cent, but it rose to 7.6 per cent in 1991 and 18.4 per cent in 1994 (*Employment in Europe*, 1996): in other words, about half a million unemployed people in a country with a population of five million. This was one of the steepest increases in western Europe at that time.

The main reason for this rapid rise in unemployment was the global economic crisis, exacerbated by the

collapse of Finland's trade with Russia. A new phenomenon was the setting up during 1990-1997 of around 220 associations of unemployed people (AUPs) (Karjalainen, 1998a). In 1992 an umbrella organisation for local AUPs, the National Association of Unemployed People, was registered. The National Association does not accept employed people as members of AUPs, fearing that they will make decisions that affect unemployed people (Karjalainen, 1998b).

Volunteering and associations

The more pessimistic forecasts suggest that there will not be enough

(Rifkin, 1996). People will therefore have to find some other way of earning a livelihood and filling their time.

Unemployed Finnish people wished to find solutions for themselves, instead of waiting for the authorities to do something. The employment service and social welfare services seemed to be reacting too slowly to the needs of the growing number of unemployed people, and their responses, when they came, were often inappropriate. The associations of unemployed people can therefore be seen as a protest against ineffective bureaucracy. They are perhaps an example of 'sub-politics', reshaping society from the grass-roots rather through the political system (Beck, 1994). Sub-politics is a reaction against the dependency created by the welfare state, where citizens in crisis wait for government and the professionals to help them.

There are examples throughout the world of similar associations that act on their own initiative. For example, the Canadian Unemployed People's Committee ('workers who describe themselves as being unemployed') set up a soup kitchen for themselves and other unemployed people (Muller, 1987, p. 43). The author describes it as 'a small, isolated organisation' with a 'leadership structure whose existence is largely sustained by the labour of women'. Muller is very sceptical about the concept of self-help groups, which he thinks are a 'new form of oppression' that support the state. Seim (1997), on the other hand, gives

a very different picture in his account of unemployed people organising self-help groups in Norway. Their activities - which include demonstrations - make unemployment highly visible in the media, and strengthen the self-esteem of individual members (ibid.). In addition, they underline the value of the experiential knowledge that unemployed people acquire. The Finnish associations of unemployed people are closer to the Norwegian model than the Canadian one.

There are some studies of unemployed volunteers in voluntary organisations (Gaskin and Davis Smith, 1995; Davis Smith et al., 1998), but few about unemployed volunteers in their own associations. A recent British study found that the proportion of unemployed people who volunteer is lower than the average for the general population (Davis Smith, 1998). In Finland, the proportion of unemployed people who volunteer is as high (34 per cent) as that of people in paid work (*Living Conditions Survey*, 1994). In 1994, 11 per cent said that their participation in voluntary action had increased during unemployment, and only four per cent said that it had decreased.

Apart from some descriptive reports (Malin and Saavola, 1998; Pättiniemi, Nylund, and Kostilainen, 1999), Finnish AUPs have not been studied in any depth. One reason for this may be that they were expected to be a short-lived phenomenon. However, the associations have existed for almost ten years now, and although some of

them have closed down, this was for reasons other than a decrease in unemployment rates. The temporary nature of the AUPs may in fact have served as an incentive to unemployed people to join: they cannot be expected to commit themselves for long periods of time because they do not know how long they will be unemployed.

In this study, I treat associations of unemployed people as non-profit organisations situated in the voluntary sector. More specifically, they could be described as voluntary associations, because they are member-led and based on the concept of mutual support (Meeuwisse and Sunesson, 1998). The word 'members' refers to all unemployed people - including drop-ins and paid members, but not necessarily volunteers. 'Volunteers' are those who participate in some form of voluntary action at AUPs.

After presenting the findings, I will describe how the associations of unemployed people were set up and what their objectives and activities are. My discussions with unemployed people in the mid-1990s revealed that campaigning was far from being the only reason why the associations were set up; unemployed people were just as motivated by the desire to meet other people in a similar situation to themselves. Finally, I will discuss how unemployed people cope with unemployment, and how they can become employable again with the help of the activities on offer at AUPs.

The data

In this article, the empirical data consists of questionnaires from 23 associations of unemployed people collected in 1994. These were representative of local associations all over Finland. The number of members ranged from 15 to 200, and the number of volunteers from one to 35. In addition, the annual reports of seven AUPs (usually one report from the period 1993 to 1995) and 19 articles (1993-1998) from the journal *Areena* were used. *Areena*, the journal of the self-help movement, is published by the Citizen Forum Association and contains descriptions of newly-established AUPs, co-operatives, voluntary centres, action centres and self-help groups. Most of the articles used were written by active members of AUPs.

Further data included questionnaires from 43 unemployed people volunteering at AUPs in 1994 (response rate 48 per cent). The majority were women (60 per cent) and two-thirds were over 40. The amount of time they had spent in full-time education after basic schooling ranged from zero to seven years; half the respondents had had more than three years of further education (college or occupational training). Half the volunteers had either volunteered previously or were volunteering simultaneously at other voluntary organisations. The majority (60 per cent) volunteered for between ten and forty hours a month: one volunteer put in up to 200 hours a month.

The objectives of self help

In the early 1990s unemployed people began to come together independently to plan ways of coping with unemployment and of making themselves employable again. Some felt that the statutory employment services could do little to help them (Löppönen, 1993), and others were tired of waiting for the job situation to improve (Johansson, 1993). Among these prime movers were people from a range of occupations: construction workers, engineers, bank clerks, nurses, teachers and journalists. Some of them had been active trade unionists and therefore had experience of running an association.

There are various routes to self-help, and the following example from northern Finland will illustrate just one. The AUP in question began in autumn 1993 with a promotional campaign via local newspapers, posters and word of mouth. By summer 1994 the association had 49 members and was working with other self-help groups, voluntary organisations, the local parish and the city authorities. The chair of the association explains why it was set up.

When we realised that the economic situation in Finland was not going to improve - and therefore that unemployment was not going to decrease either - we decided to do something to ease the everyday existence of unemployed people. We began to meet at a youth centre to discuss the problems of unemployed people. Then we expanded our activities by playing volleyball twice a

week and going bowling once a week, which meant that we met four times a week. We are now [1 June 1994] renting our own premises from the local authority. This makes it easier for us to meet to discuss the issues around unemployment, and we plan to develop various activities there, such as a meals service and training in sewing and knitting . . . the main goal of an association of unemployed people is, of course, to put an end to unemployment. Because of the difficult situation in our country, we need to develop different ways of coping with unemployment and of raising the social status of our fellow unemployed people.
(AUP questionnaire from 1994).

One of the key aims of AUPs was to enable unemployed people to plan and develop their own activities without the intervention of officials. Jobless people were fed up of going to the cafe set up for them by the employment service simply to listen to weekly lectures about how the recession was getting worse and how unemployment affected mental health (Löppönen, 1993). Most of them wanted to work, and rejected the accusation that they were lazy and preferred living off the taxes of employed people (ibid.). After several meetings, the unemployed people set up a registered association to market their skills and began to plan a co-operative.

A place to meet

As we have seen, unemployed people decided to meet some of their day-to-day needs by organising various sports and recreational activities and by

engaging in mutually supportive discussions. The first step was to find a meeting place for these regular gatherings. Unemployed people need a place where they can go 'when walls are falling down, and one's mind is full of the misery of unemployment and one needs someone to talk to' (Malin and Saavola, 1998, 106). If there is nowhere for them to go, unemployed people may well decide that there is no point in getting up in the mornings. Meeting places are essential: people need to know that there is somewhere they can go where they don't have to explain why they are there.

The majority of AUPs provide just this: a place where you can read newspapers, have a cup of coffee or use computers to surf the Internet and send e-mails. Through these activities, or by simply 'hanging around', you enjoy an opportunity to talk to other people, not necessarily about unemployment, but about everyday things: politics, problems with the authorities - even the weather. Another place to meet is an AUP cafeteria (often organised in collaboration with the local Lutheran parish), where you can have an inexpensive meal. It is important for these restaurants to charge something for meals, however little, because it avoids the stigma of 'charity' that is attached to soup kitchens for unemployed people (Muller 1987, 36-37) - although volunteers are sometimes given free meals for carrying out voluntary work.

Unemployed people have an incentive

to come to an AUP if they know that the other people there will also be unemployed, and not the paid staff of a statutory agency. With your peers, you do not need to be ashamed of your unemployment. It may also be easier for unemployed people without any previous experience of volunteering to go to an AUP than to a mainstream voluntary organisation, where they might find themselves among employed volunteers. Of course, some unemployed people do volunteer for organisations like the Red Cross or at local voluntary action centres (Nylund, 1999), but this may be because they were familiar with them before they became unemployed.

Activities for employability and coping

The National Association of Unemployed People seeks to improve the income of unemployed people and to increase their mental and physical well-being. These aims were also adopted by several local AUPs, which provide information services, training, recreation and sports. Many of them began as informal groups, and gradually branched out into more organised activities as they acquired more members, funding and premises.

It is important to emphasise that unemployed people participate in these activities voluntarily. They are not forced by the statutory authorities to join AUPs in order to be eligible for unemployment benefits. In fact, volunteering has in some cases led to the withdrawal of benefits.

Table 1 summarises the range of activities found at AUPs, although they are not necessarily available at all associations. Many of the activities are employment-oriented, in response to the stated aims of AUPs. These include courses, training, seminars and projects that offer members the opportunity to maintain their existing working skills and to learn new ones (such as computer skills). Members can explore career options: for example, whether to start a co-operative or a small business, or whether to go on to further education. Training courses and seminars are often organised in collaboration with the employment service, the local authority or other voluntary organisations. Although expert lecturers are often used, volunteers are sometimes in charge of training, at least in the early stages of an AUP. In addition to the employment-oriented courses, there are coping-oriented courses and seminars on human relations, social security and coping strategies, often given by psychologists, social workers or priests.

Other activities are recreational, such as hobby and sports clubs. These can be oriented towards either employment or coping, depending on the needs of members. For example, handicrafts or the renovation of old furniture can be done simply for the pleasure of achieving something or to practise work skills. Hobby clubs and sports are often organised by volunteers and no fees are charged. Picnics and visits take people out of their everyday surroundings and enable them to see new places and meet new people.

Self-help groups usually form only a small part of the average AUP's activities, but they can be very important to their members. In order to cope with the difficult lives they lead as result of unemployment, group members seek to break their isolation by sharing experiences and supporting each other.

In a group you can see that you are not alone. You can get something for yourself from the experiences of others (Lehtiranta 1997, 13).

Self-help groups exist to meet individual needs and to teach coping skills. Participating in their meetings can increase self-esteem and confidence. However, it is not always easy to make a distinction between what is employment-oriented and what is coping-oriented, as different activities mean different things to different people (see table 1).

Voluntary action and *talkoo* work

The term '*talkoo* work' (from the Finnish *talkoot*) is not readily translatable, but it means something like 'spontaneous mutual help' (Leiponen, 1987; Stenius, 1987). *Talkoo* is a village tradition whereby people work together without pay for mutual benefit: for example, by harvesting, logging or constructing buildings. The work was sometimes done for individual families and sometimes for the whole community: for example, the building of a village hall. When the work was completed, the host family would offer food and drink, and there would be dancing and singing. Kropotkin (1987) describes similar traditions - calling them 'habits of mutual support' and 'communal

Table 1: Contents and objectives of activities at associations of unemployed people

<i>Activities</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Objective</i>
Courses, training	Languages; computer skills; interpersonal skills	To improve employability
Seminars, projects	Starting a co-op; motivating people; maintaining health, working skills and coping skills; human relations; human rights; multi-cultural projects	To improve employability and coping skills
Hobby clubs	Handicrafts; bike repair; theatre; photography	To improve employability and coping skills
Sport and recreation	Volleyball; gymnastics; bowling; swimming; skiing; hiking; biking; fishing; picnics; health spas; camping; parties; dancing	To improve coping skills
Voluntary action	Organisationally-oriented (administration, committee work, fund-raising); group-oriented (serving coffee and meals, kitchen tasks, leading groups); practical tasks (renovating neighbourhood, recycling, organising festivals); individually-oriented (advice and advocacy, information, counselling)	Self-development, to improve coping skills and employability
Meeting-point/cafeteria	Chatting, reading newspapers, playing cards, low-price meals, 'hanging around'	To improve coping skills
Self-help groups	Discussion groups; 'lonely hearts' club'	Self-development; to improve coping skills

spirit' - among villagers throughout the world.

Many AUPs did not explicitly mention volunteering in their annual reports, but they frequently referred to *talkoo* work. They avoided the term 'voluntary work' because they feared it might be used by the statutory authorities as an excuse to cut unemployment benefits, as had occasionally happened in Finland. This same problem existed (and sometimes still exists) in other European countries (Gaskin and Davis Smith, 1995). However, *talkoo* work has a much less problematic image and is therefore less dangerous for unemployed people.

In Finland, *talkoo* work is still practised in both rural and urban settings, as neighbours, friends and relatives gather together to help someone move house or to clean up the neighbourhood. The survival of this tradition may be due to the persistence of the agrarian way of life in Finland, which did not begin to decline until after the Second World War. Today, 42 per cent of all Finns still participate in *talkoo* work among neighbours (*Living Conditions*, 1994); interestingly, 40 per cent of unemployed people are also involved in *talkoo* activities. People do not benefit financially from this work, but it creates a feeling of togetherness, of working for the common good.

Most accounts of the *talkoo* tradition concentrate on its positive aspects: the fact that it involves participation, helping others and working towards common goals (*Areena*, 2/97).

However, the concept can also have its negative side. For example, politicians have called upon citizens to help alleviate the recession by participating in *talkoo* work - which some commentators have interpreted as asking ordinary people voluntarily to do the work that the state ought to be paying for (*ibid*).

In this study, I define *talkoo* work as group-oriented volunteering, such as working in a cafeteria or leading a group (see table 1). The other forms of voluntary action at AUPs are individually-oriented and organisationally-oriented:

- Individually-oriented action involves advising and informing others: for example, how to apply for welfare benefits, jobs and training. It can also be one-to-one counselling by lay people: 'We are not - and we are not even trying to be - experts, but we will refer a person to a professional when necessary' (Kaitera, 1994).
- Organisationally-oriented volunteering includes administration, committee work and fund-raising.

The three most important reasons unemployed people gave for volunteering were to help others (88 per cent), to learn (74 per cent) and to feel needed (65 per cent). Improving one's employability (35 per cent) and 'social pressures' (7 per cent) were considerably less important. These figures do not differ significantly from those for volunteers in paid work,

except for the employability motive (Nylund, 1999). This wide variety of motives has also been found by other studies of unemployed volunteers (Gay, 1998; Davis Smith, 1998; MacDonald, 1996).

A person's own experience of unemployment can motivate them to help others:

Being unemployed, I want to help others to get a job.

Because I am unemployed, I have time to help others - it makes me feel good.

In addition to this desire for mutual support and to share one's experiences and knowledge with others, people often have more personal motives, such as educating themselves for a new profession:

I want to gain experience of leading a group. My aim is to train myself to be an art therapist - a job as a engineer does not interest me any more. I have learned a lot about myself, and about life in general, through art, and I want share my experience with others. Creating art by yourself is rather a lonely occupation - as a group leader I can interact with other people (woman aged 32).

Voluntary action at an AUP offers the chance to acquire practical experience of leading a group, teaching, cooking, etc. According to Gay (1998), these volunteers can be called 'career builders'. Another group is the 'job hopefuls' (Gay, 1998): unemployed volunteers who want to maintain their

existing work skills - and perhaps learn new ones in order to make themselves more employable - but do not necessarily want to change their occupation. For example, one volunteer at an AUP conference expressed an interest in the possibility of a 'paid job from the same branch where I now volunteer'.

Experience of voluntary work or a self-help group increases a person's self-confidence, and therefore makes them better prepared for job interviews (Gay, 1998). Several volunteers said that volunteering made them feel as if they belonged somewhere and were not left out of society. For some, volunteering 'is like being at work', but others enjoyed the fact that they were under no pressure to do anything at all.

Action and togetherness

The AUPs have created a new kind of meeting place where unemployed people can not only take action to improve their employability but can also meet other people in a similar situation to themselves. Statutory employment services and social services seldom succeed in creating an atmosphere of togetherness, where people will spontaneously talk to each other (Eräsaari, 1995). Service users tend to see public offices as diametrically opposed to the private sphere, and will try to put as much space as possible between the two (ibid.).

AUPs have developed activities with three different orientations: employability, recreation and coping. There is a similar diversity among unemployed people. Some are clearly

employment-oriented 'job seekers' (Seim, 1997) who know what kind of work they want, and therefore participate in activities at AUPs that help them to reach their goal. This is possible for some people, but not all. If someone has failed to obtain even an interview after dozens of job applications, it is not going to be easy for them to realise their individual goals (Mäkelä, 1998). However, they do have the option of changing over to recreational or coping activities, such as sport, self-help groups or volunteering for self-development (Seim, 1997).

Volunteering is not explicitly mentioned in the constitutions of AUPs, but is implied in the stated goals of the associations to 'increase the mental and physical well-being of unemployed people'. Some jobless people are, however, sceptical about volunteering, because they think it involves doing boring tasks for elderly or sick people (Lehtinen, 1996), or working for nothing instead of getting paid. By contrast, *talkoo* work is viewed as a natural (and neutral) way to participate in the community. Motivated by the *talkoo* spirit of mutual support, unemployed people who were disappointed by the 'top-down' approach of the statutory authorities and wanted to do things their way set up AUPs.

In AUPs, employability is the main product and volunteering is a by-product, whereas in other voluntary social welfare and health care associations the converse is true (Gay, 1998). Furthermore, AUPs are 'we-for-

us' associations, rather than 'I-for-you' organisations that provide services for people outside the organisation (Meeuwisse and Sunesson, 1998). Consequently, there is not the same need in AUPs to take great care over matching volunteers and clients (Gay 1998), as the members all share the same basic experience. However, conflict can arise in AUPs between volunteers and paid employees - many of whom were previously volunteers - because of the imbalance between those who are receiving a salary and those who are not, or between those who receive basic unemployment benefit and those who receive the higher trade union benefit. This, by contrast, is not a sensitive issue in voluntary organisations that provide care services rather than employment services.

The advantage of AUPs is that they enable experiential knowledge to be accumulated (Borkman, 1976; Schubert and Borkman, 1994). Hence the members and volunteers of AUPs could be called 'alternative experts' (Beck, 1994). This has led to the emergence of a new kind of occupation, 'peer adviser of unemployed people' (Hokkanen, 1998), which is only open to people who have personal experience of being jobless. Members and volunteers of AUPs have also related their personal experiences to professionals and policy-makers at national conferences and in the media. In this way, individual needs and everyday experiences can influence policy (Schmitt-Beck, 1992): for example, the greater visibility of volunteering at AUPs has increased

awareness at benefit offices - officials no longer cut the employment benefits of voluntary workers as they did in the early 1990s.

One of the original promises of AUPs had been that they would disband themselves when full employment was reached. With the unemployment rate in Finland still at around 10 per cent, this objective now seems very unlikely to be attained. There are now long-term employed people who have been out of work for up to eight years. So it is more likely that, rather than being disbanded, AUPs might develop into some kind of meeting place or neighbourhood cafe for all local residents. Some AUPs have already expanded their activities by setting up neighbourhood clubs and ethnic associations. Other possibilities include setting up co-operatives or social enterprises.

Approachability

Those who promote AUPs should emphasise their approachability: these are places where you can meet other people in a similar situation to yourself, and where you can join in various employment-oriented and recreational activities. Talking about individual activities and self-development with your peers might be more attractive than a traditional volunteer recruitment campaign that seeks people to 'help others' or 'contribute to the community'. For example, *talkoo* work (or its equivalents in other languages) would be a useful concept to use in promoting voluntary action because of its positive image, combining practical activities, mutual support and togetherness. Unemployed people also value free

meals, bus fares and the chance to attend a free seminar or hobby club.

However, politicians, local authorities and volunteer managers should not assume that volunteering is the answer for every unemployed person. Many such people join AUPs for other reasons than to volunteer: for example, to get back into paid work, to receive training, to fill up their time with meaningful activity or to belong to a group. They might acquire an interest in volunteering later, but you cannot force the issue.

Unemployed people have the resources and experiential knowledge to be able to plan and lead activities by themselves. But this need not preclude all collaboration with professionals and the public sector. Professionals can play an important role in empowering unemployed people, listening to their views and publicising AUPs. In addition, they can support AUPs by offering meeting places, guest lectures and seminars (see Baistow 1994/95 for critiques of professional empowerment).

For unemployed people, genuine mutual support and togetherness cannot be organised by paid professionals and statutory services - it has to be created by unemployed people themselves.

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Volunteering as the idea of serving society is as old an idea as society. Throughout the centuries there have been people who have realized themselves in communicating and helping their community. What do volunteers do in our society? Volunteering as the idea of serving the society is the same old concept, as well as "socium". Throughout the centuries there have been people who have realized themselves in communicating and helping their community. What do volunteers do these days? Let's look at this article. What is a volunteer activity? Volunteering is an activity that is aimed at providing gratuitous services to a person or group of people who are not relatives of the volunteer, without calculating the monetary compensation. This chapter reviews prior research and theory on both purposive-activity and analytical-theoretical typologies of associations and volunteering, with some attention to related typologies of nonprofit agencies and of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) generally. After sketching the history of such typologies, Smith presents several improved purposive-activity and analytical-theoretical typologies, including a Tenfold Purposive Typology of associations, a Membership Typology of associations, an Analytical Typology of associations, and a Territorial Scope Typology of associations. You feel so broke that you isolate yourself from people and relationships. Even love is for people who have jobs and money. It seems too much for you. 9. Handling unemployment becomes harder if you have habits like smoking. You feel stressed from both being unemployed and not having money. You try not to smoke that much and try to quit, but fail all the time. 10. You lose hope after every bad job interview.