

## **A Case of Human Service Dominance: Volunteer Centres in Finland**

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### **Introduction**

Volunteering is an activity with enormous societal value. Politics are interested in its support since they have understood the large variety of possible beneficial effects. These are usually debated in the contexts of the production of welfare services, enlargement of democratic participation, the economic impact of the nonprofit sector, including its potential to offer a solution to the challenge of a redistribution of meaningful work in society, and finally its significance for integration in local communities (Hilger 2006, 17-19). When it comes to volunteer centres the service provision versus the political function are in a particular tension.

In Finland civil society is characterised by a strong notion of membership. Of the many proposals about how to understand civil society - ranging from a utopian project for a better future through a civic style of action, characterised by non-violence, communication and solidarity, to the widespread notion of a distinct kind of sector - the latter view to distinguish it from the state and the market is very common. It is closely associated with associations that act through affiliated citizens, usually with the status of a member. Researchers who have been interested in a political understanding of civil society have described Finnish civil society as cooperative, positively oriented towards the state, non-violent and respectful towards property (Siisiäinen 1998, 222-226). Further there is a strong sense for acting on a mandate to represent others instead of visibility of subjects themselves (Alapuro 2005, 394-95). This adds to an orientation towards an expert role. Civil society in Finland is best known as a more or less formalised sphere which gains its significance through its organisational strength. The downside is that the single citizen does not mean too much.

This is somewhat counterfactual to tendencies of individualisation and the accompanying structural change of patterns of engagement towards reflexive volunteering (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003; Rauschenbach et al. 1992). It becomes increasingly problematic to integrate individualised wishes for engagement. In particular volunteer centres have been an institutional innovation to react to this difficulty. This paper analyses the way such centres work in the Finnish context. After describing central features of volunteering in

Finland, it introduces three different empirical types of volunteer centres. A closer look at the most significant type illustrates peculiarities of the Finnish case, before conclusions take a broader perspective on four more general issues of volunteer brokerage organisations.

## **Volunteering in Finland**

In the Middle Ages membership in guilds and vocational brotherhoods was obligatory; and thus mutual help was usually part of the organisation of work life (Jaakkola 1991, 18). Volunteering and engagement of citizens for the community have existed for centuries and belonged to a self-conscious society. In many countries the origin of organised philanthropy and volunteering can be found in certain social and cultural milieus where people saw living conditions of the poor and felt an obligation to contribute to an improvement. An early example of volunteer engagement in Finland was an initiative for children's homes by an association of bourgeois women (*rouvasväenyhdistys*) in the 1840s. These women of higher class cared for others. This was not only about helping, the intention was also to educate the poorer classes and foster the values of the upper classes (Jaakkola 1991, 22-23). In Finland associations also have been decisive in the process of nation building which took off from a cultural awakening to create a status for the Finnish language and foster a distinct Finnish identity.

In the course of time associations and mutual help, often organised through workers councils, were built up through volunteering. After the establishment of a state-based social security system since the 1960s the state took over functions that earlier had been fulfilled by organisations of the informal sector. Volunteering was seen as a transitional phase. It was believed to disappear because the state would guarantee better and more equitable services (Koskiahio 2001, 20). The vast extension of public services until the early 1990s left little space for citizen's engagement (Jaakkola 1991, 25-26). "The construction time of the welfare state in the 1970s was a dismal time for citizens' associations. [...] Volunteering was not appreciated and it was even seen as a threat to recent professionalisation in care and social work." (Ruohonen 2003, 46; transl. by author). The voluntary sector was only tolerated when filling gaps in the public services.

This climate was hegemonic until the mid 1990s when the economic crisis changed attitudes. This crisis was the greatest watershed in recent Finnish history. Among its consequences was a reorganisation of public services, while at the same time neo-liberalist policies gained significance (Patomäki 2007) and competed increasingly with traditional

welfare values. This period resulted in a modernisation of Finnish society that found its expression in a remarkable innovative strength.

During the earlier period of welfare state expansion volunteering did not disappear though. Associations were still growing in number and members, and even the "talkoo"-tradition of targeted mutual help to achieve a tangible goal was transferred from the countryside into the cities. The role of volunteering was closely related to the future of the welfare state. It first left the welfare state at large unchallenged and the sector retained only a supplementary role in the shadow of the state (Matthies 1994, 55). Raija Julkunen, a student of the welfare state, concludes that "in the Finnish climate the associations and church are valued mainly if they help in the solving of social distress." (Julkunen 2000, 66).

Despite this trend already in 1981 the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health (at that time *Sosiaaliturvan Keskusliitto*) acquired the responsibility to advance volunteering by developing training for associations, and in 1984 a co-ordination group for aspects of volunteering was established. Having these developments in mind Pirkko Hakkarainen (1991, 130) speaks of the 1970s as a time where volunteering was already starting to be on the rise. She mentions that in the 1990s municipalities developed different ways of working together with associations. Some held annual consultations with associations, others nominated a municipal volunteer organiser or analysed the need for volunteer input in the community. People still believe strongly in the welfare state (Koskiahio 2001, 32) but gradually associations and volunteering started to develop into a significant factor.

Still today volunteering is characterised by a strong membership culture. It usually takes place in associations. Officially there are far more than 100.000 registered associations with a multiple number of members.<sup>1</sup> Voitto Helander (2006, 99), who has analysed the Finnish third sector intensively in the last decade, recently revised these numbers and estimated that there are about 70.000 active associations. Some claim that about two third of volunteers are located in associations (Pyykkönen 2002, 93), one third takes a more loosely organised form such as neighbourhood and informal help. Thus, membership is a weak indicator for voluntary engagement. It often refers to activities that do not go beyond paying a membership fee or receiving a regular newsletter. At the same time it overlooks the tradition of low organised voluntary work in neighbourhoods, the so called "talkoo" that is not acknowledged in those figures. Furthermore, the activity of associations is not always about volunteering. Though volunteers are important parts of the associational landscape -

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kolmassektori.net/jarjestot.htm> (retrieved: 23.2.2008)

volunteers usually do the foundation of associations and they are the initial resources - a large part of their activities is carried out by professionals, that is staff employed by an organisation of the third sector. Depending on the type of organisation in later stages professionals may acquire an increasingly important status for the functioning of an association.

The John Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project recently reported the number of people volunteering in Finland at eight per cent. That is below some European countries, in particular its Nordic neighbours.<sup>2</sup> However, such figures are highly vulnerable to methodological issues such as definitions and data sources. Yeung (2004, 89-90) reports a far higher number of volunteers. According to her analysis based on the World Value Survey 38 per cent of the Finns do volunteer. On average they are engaged 18 hours per month. The most prominent fields are sports where 30 per cent of all volunteering takes place followed by health and social affairs with 25 per cent and the educational sector with 22 per cent. The distribution among women and men is the same although women are active with a somewhat higher intensity. In the health and social sector middle aged and elderly persons are most active. More than half of the present non-volunteers would be willing to volunteer when asked to do so (Yeung 2004, 98). How do organisations then deal with volunteers?

### **Volunteer centres in Finland**

In general, voluntary associations work with volunteers by offering places for them within their organisation. Volunteer centres, on the contrary, can be characterised as brokerage institutions that match engaged citizens to opportunities to volunteer that are external to their own organisation. They are specialised organisations that are mainly concerned with allocating volunteers and opportunities to volunteer. They do not necessarily have to be based on volunteers themselves, although they often are. They may be established by civil society; still the public sector is often involved in them, too. Volunteer centres have been invented to facilitate the placement of those who are willing to engage at places of need. Sometimes their tasks extend beyond brokerage and also cover the general advancement of engagement. Different models have emerged elsewhere; complex centres include information, brokerage, qualification, consulting, networking and public lobbying in favour of volunteering (Ebert 2003, 58; Jakob and Janning 2001).

Matthies (1996, 22-23) mentions that in the mid 1990s in Finland very simple volunteer centres ("*Mummon Kammari-tyyppiset*"; Grandma's cottage-type) managed to recruit people from different age groups and both sexes to support others. They have emerged in an

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp/research/compdata.html> (retrieved: 16.6.2008).

organic process of daily work of associations faced with needs in times of the economic recession. A study of volunteering in the city of Jyväskylä includes one volunteer centre. The centre VaPari (*Vapaaehtoistoiminnan keskus*; Centre for Voluntary Activity) is a co-operation among the Red Cross, the Diaconia and the city (Pyykkönen 2002, 96-97). In the year 2000 there were about 300 registered volunteers, almost 500 placements and slightly more than 600 participants in volunteer training. Nylund (2000) compares volunteer centres, the Red Cross and unemployment associations with regard to volunteer's motivations.

There are no exact figures on volunteer centres in Finland. The activity of brokerage is performed informally also by associations that do not intend to specialise in this activity. The above mentioned grandma's cottage organisations, the Mannerheim Association for Children (MLL) and local congregations of the church are examples for intra-organisational, more invisible volunteer brokerage services. There is, however, an umbrella organisation that functions as a network knot and collects information on those organisations that identify themselves with the concept of a volunteer brokerage service (*vapaaehtoisvälitys*). There are 37 such centres in the country of which two thirds are located in the larger capital area around Helsinki.<sup>3</sup> The remarkable density in the capital region can partly be explained by the large spatial area covered. Another city with a significant concentration of brokerage services is the northern city of Oulu. Many centres are run as a part of the municipal administration. Another large sub-group are ten centres run by the Red Cross.

One might add Service Civil International which is specialised in international work camp exchange or the Martta association. These, however, are either too specialised or too directly affiliated to particular organisational goals. Therefore we exclude them from the concept of a volunteer centre.

Background of this paper is a study on the organisation of volunteering in the Helsinki region. The organisations covered can be divided into three types according to the way they work with volunteers. The first group uses volunteers closely connected to their own organisation, the second is the above mentioned umbrella organisation, and the third group places volunteers elsewhere in society:

- (a) Established traditional help associations: The *Finish Red Cross* in the district of *Pohjois-Haaga*, the Salvation Army (*Pelastusarmeija*), and a *Settlement House* project working with volunteers based at a religious organisation (*Kalliolan Setlementti*).

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.kansalaisareena.fi/toimintaa/verkostot.htm> (retrieved 23.2.2008).

- (b) The citizen based volunteer centre Citizen Arena (*kansalaisareena*) which offers a brokerage web service.
- (c) Municipal volunteer centres in the districts East Helsinki (*Itäkeskus*), *Kamppi* and *Malmi*. They are volunteer centres in the common sense of the notion.

Finnish volunteer centres are usually small. They are integrated into the local context and perform mainly the function of volunteer brokerage. Since many centres have been established as a reaction to demand in care work their structure and activities have developed around this task. An exception to this rule is the Citizen Arena that emerged out of a larger concern for societal integration and only later took the role of a brokerage organisation. Since volunteer centres usually cooperate with professional care services they receive some support from the municipalities. This support is most significant in the municipal centres which work with part-time paid employees. Therefore local government is a significant source of income. It is organised either on the basis of annual budgets in the municipal centres, or it is realised as project funding for similar periods. Other important sources of project funding are the Slot Machine Association (*RAY*) and the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health. The Red Cross as one of the largest host of volunteer centres runs its centres through its local branches which also receive some public funding.

In practice standards of good practice have evolved. These include introduction, training, support and recognition for volunteers. At present there are attempts to establish a national strategy that also formally establishes standards for volunteer centres. Membership in the European Volunteer Centre (CEV) contributes to the diffusion of good practice, as it is common in other European countries. To date there has been no volunteer survey in Finland. The debate on civil society organisations so far has been centred on associations and volunteering within these. The national register of associations offers rich data that repeatedly has been used for scientific analysis. Recently shortcomings of this source have been mentioned, but a volunteer survey seems to be of low priority. This has to be seen in the context of the strong membership culture. Although there are from time to time reports in the media on informal volunteering, the public debate has long been dominated by the notion of "the promised land of associations". This stresses the undeniably high involvement in associations. On the other hand it runs the risk of overrating cheque-paying types of membership at the expense of active involvement.

The volunteer centres do not report particular shortcomings of equipment. Space and computers create some difficulties, but basic functioning seems to be well guaranteed at the present rate of activity. In case of an attempt to enlarge the circle of activities it is likely that

the issue of equipment and finance has to be answered in a completely new way. This would mean a considerable restructuring of their nature and organisation.

**(a) The Finnish Red Cross**

The Finnish Red Cross (*Suomen Punainen Risti*) has worked as a volunteer services since half a century. In Helsinki there are five offices, we focus on one in West Helsinki. The "friendship clearing house" has been established in 1983. It is located in the *Pohjois-Haaga* service centre and co-ordinates services for a large area including neighbouring districts. The volunteering service works on Mondays and Thursdays between 12 a.m. and 4 p.m. A group of five volunteers organises a volunteer telephone. They co-ordinate an approximate number of 90 volunteers who are in steady friendship relationships with customers, and another ten who occasionally accompany people. The group of volunteers consists almost completely of elderly women, most of them are retired and nine out of ten are members of the Red Cross. A number of the volunteers have a professional background in the social sector or as a teacher. The volunteers come from the areas where they also serve. Many have been active for several years already. The main mode of activity is helping and accompanying other persons. Most customers are old persons; there are also a few younger clients who are mentally or bodily disabled. Some volunteers prepare every other Sunday a meeting cafe in the service house, the so-called friendship club where volunteers can meet and exchange.

The centre uses rooms of the municipality and gets an annual support of 1.000 Euro to cover telephone and internet costs, mailing, coffee for the friendship club and a tour for recognition at the end of the season. The tour is organised before the summer break for the support of volunteers. One venue, for example, was a visit at the cultural area around the lake *Tuusula* in which some 30 volunteers participated. The Red Cross has a close co-operation with the church congregation in the neighbouring *Kannelmäki* district. They sometimes exchange volunteers. A volunteer club meets once a month and offers exchange of experience and support. Similar structures can be found in the *Settlement House* and the *Salvation Army* volunteer services. Even more informal are the *Marttas* and the *Grandma' Cottage* organisations.

**(b) The Citizen Arena**

The Citizens Arena (*kansalaisareena*) is a network that originally served as a means of information exchange. It was established in times of the economic crisis with a focus on self-help for and of the unemployed. In the meantime it has developed into the central address for volunteering in Finland. It coordinates more general issues of lobbying, training and

information. In 2006 it also started to offer a brokerage service on the internet. The service's database covers the whole country. At the beginning of 2008 it listed about 170 offers for places to volunteer. About 15 per cent of them cover places abroad, usually in developing countries. The rest covers a range of activities, which are concentrated on helping the elderly, but also include youth projects, multicultural work or some kind of knowledge transfer, e.g. language teaching.

Another recent project of the Citizen Arena is the formulation of a national strategy on volunteering for the years 2008-2010. It includes health, social, cultural, youth, sport, religious and other associations as well as municipalities, the government and business firms. In other words, participants cover the full range of organised civil society actors who step into dialog with the two other sectors. Its goals are to develop a common understanding of volunteering, to define good practice of volunteering and its border to professional work. The strategy is an attempt to approach the complicated issue of volunteering, which is characterised by definitional difficulties and political controversy about the adequate choice of instruments to support it in a comprehensive way. The aims also include the development of a strategy to gain political influence and secure future support.

### **(c) Municipal volunteer centres**

The municipal volunteer service has been established around the turn of the millennium on the initiative of the Red Cross, congregations of the church and the social and health department of the city of Helsinki. The origin of the centres goes back to a project in the second half of the 1990s. The Red Cross and the church each maintained separate volunteer services until the idea emerged to put forces together by establishing "one common telephone number" (Interviewee). Another important reason to establish it was the insight that one does not always need professional staff to help people in their daily affairs; also lay people are willing and able to care for others.

At the heart of the three municipal centres in East Helsinki, *Kampi* and *Malmi* is the placement of volunteers. The general goals of voluntary effort are to strengthen the ability of people to help themselves, to prevent problems due to loneliness and advance the creation of community through volunteering. The outline for the centres also includes support for individuals who care for their relatives as well as for professional health care, home care and child protection services. Volunteering is usually directed to persons, the person supported is conceptualised as a customer.

The East Helsinki centre uses a telephone service and is open to the public on workdays between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Modes of volunteer work are accompanying, reading, general support, visits, friendship service, helping with the organisation of events, a crisis telephone, club activities among others. One central mode is the friendship service which includes regular visits of persons in need of support, usually once or twice a month. It is directed at lonely elderly, disabled, mentally disordered persons, single parents or migrants. Customers are accompanied when visiting health care centres, doctors, hospitals as well as stores, physical therapy, pharmacies or hair dressers; fairly often simply helping to go out for a walk is an important occasion for volunteer support.

The East Helsinki Centre, the largest of the three, has about 170 volunteers and more than 500 customers who request volunteer services. Customers with a more steady relationship to a volunteer occasionally phone the volunteer directly. The head of the centre describes the volunteers as "lively pensioners", mostly women, of different educational backgrounds. Some have been active for more than ten years. In 2004 volunteers have accompanied customers about 800 times and there have been more 1.000 requests. In 2006 the centre received on average five to six phone calls every work day. The head of the centre devotes only a part of her work to the centre, the larger part is support of and co-operation with other associations. A second employee uses half of her workload for the volunteer centre and the other half to organise groups, in particular for families, where she directly co-operates with volunteers. For example a group of single mothers is supported by five volunteers who look after children to offer mothers the opportunity to receive themselves support, take part in courses or talk to each other.

The three municipal centres share a common internet page which presents general information and contact persons. The page also lists a large number of associations that co-operate with the centres. Beyond placement, other activities are qualification courses for potential volunteers twice a year. They function at the same time as a channel for recruitment. Further, the centre arranges regular clubs, consultation for associations, administration of meeting spaces and internal activities like the documentation and development of projects. As regards volunteer management strengthening of volunteers through coffee afternoons, visiting museums or occasional trips are important. They are a significant element of the centres' activities. Presence at different kind of events, where information about the centre is given and local identity is created, increases public visibility of the issue to some extent.

The municipal employee who works as a head of the centre might occasionally do placement herself, but most of the time she organises the centre in all other respects. She

usually does the initial interviewing with incoming new volunteers. The placement of volunteers is then organised by volunteers, except for the East Helsinki bureau where the second employee is involved in placement activities. Together with a group of three to eight volunteers she takes care of placement by answering the telephone, searching the database for suitable volunteers and calling them to respond to the request of a customer.

The budget of the centres is decided by the social department. A board controls the activities of the municipal volunteer centres with representatives from the city council, the administration and third sector associations. They meet up to once a month to debate current and strategic issues. In 2001 the board was subdivided into five workgroups which dealt with the future strategy, a volunteer award, general information, training and the by then current celebration of the International year of volunteering.<sup>4</sup> The board also has contact to other associations. A survey of associations conducted by the board indicates a lack of knowledge about the existence of the board among associations, a desire for recognition and support of volunteers as well as concern about savings in the municipal budget,<sup>5</sup> which would effect the situation of old age care and increase the need for further unpaid support.

### **A Micro Perspective on the Flow of Volunteer Placement**

The above said indicates that securing and supporting the delivery of human services is central to Finnish volunteer centres. The embeddedness of volunteer centres in welfare related contexts can further be demonstrated by looking more closely at the volunteer service of East Helsinki. In 2006 the *VaTi* database had registered 168 volunteers. According to the database almost nine out of ten volunteers are women. The mean age of volunteers is 56,4 years and the largest group is between 56 and 65 years of age (34,5 %), the second largest between 66 and 75 years (22,8 %). Altogether almost two third are older than 55 years. Except for a handful of person the volunteers have Finnish (or Swedish, the second official language of the country) as their mother tongue. One quarter (23,2 %) attended a course or some other kind of training during their volunteer carrier, many of them with the Red Cross. Usually people have attended the so called "friendship course". Among these 39 trained individuals only one is male. In the age group between 56 and 65 a higher proportion has attended a course (36,0 %) than on average (26,9 %<sup>6</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hel.fi/vapaaehtoisty/toimintakertomus.html> (retrieved 20.7.2005)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hel.fi/vapaaehtoisty/kysely.html> (retrieved 20.7.2005)

<sup>6</sup> The value differs from the overall average because only for 145 individuals information on age is available.

**Table 1: Age groups among volunteers**

Age group	n	Per cent
-25	9	6,2
26-35	7	4,8
36-45	12	8,3
46-55	26	17,9
56-65	50	34,5
66-75	33	22,8
76+	8	5,5
<i>Sum</i>	<i>145</i>	<i>100</i>

*Source: VaTi Database, author's calculations*

The centre has also registered 522 customers in its database. Customers are on average 76,8 years old. Also among them women are the clear majority (82,2 %) but over representation is not as strong as among volunteers. Two third are older than 76 years, more than 80 per cent are over 65. The largest group is between 76 and 85 years (41,1 %).

**Table 2: Age groups among customers**

Age group	n	Per cent
-25	6	1,3
26-35	4	0,8
36-45	11	2,3
46-55	20	4,2
56-65	45	9,5
66-75	77	16,2
76-85	195	41,1
86-95	108	22,8
95+	8	1,7
<i>Sum</i>	<i>474</i>	<i>100</i>

*Source: VaTi Database, author's calculations*

Most customers are looking for a volunteer to accompany them to places; many also wish general support when going out for a walk. Other frequent wishes are friendship service, help with particular things, reading, company and conversation. A small number has very specific wishes like help with applying eye drops, sending letters or single instances like help with a barbecue in summer.

For 482 customers there is information on who has enrolled them as a customer to the volunteer centre. In half of these cases the initial request for help was presented by care

services (48,8 %), usually municipal or private home care services, and in some cases by municipal service centres. In 103 cases (21,4 %) the request was presented by the customers themselves, and in 42 cases by their relatives. Several types of entries have been classified as "other". The great majority of them were persons of an unknown relation to the customer (85 cases) who presented the request to the volunteer centre. It is unclear whether this was a friend, a professional or some other person who had a contact to the customer. There are slight differences among women and men. Still, both groups have most often been registered by care services (women 50,5 %, men 44,2 %), but women have second often registered themselves (22,9 %) whereas men have then been presented by others (23,3 %), relatives (17,4 %), and least often registered themselves (15,1 %). Middle aged customers have usually registered themselves whereas those older than 75 were mostly introduced by service professionals.

**Table 3: Registration as a customer of volunteer centre**

<b>Initiator</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Service professional	235	48,8
Customer herself	103	21,4
Relative	42	8,7
Other	102	21,2
<i>Sum</i>	<i>482</i>	<i>100</i>

*Source: VaTi Database, author's calculations*

These figures and the history of the Helsinki volunteer centres clearly indicate the significance of the welfare context for volunteer centres in Finland. The initial driver was the observation of need in human service related fields. Building on traditional styles of engagement volunteer brokerage institutions emerged. They have developed around the particular task of additional service provision and support.

The social structure of volunteers differs only slightly from those of the clients who are served. The centres manage to deal effectively and efficiently with demand for volunteers. Their volunteer "workforce" is integrated through at least two important factors. (1) The motive to help people in loneliness and distress combines with a desire for social integration and contacts among volunteers themselves. (2) Building on a fairly homogeneous social structure the measures of recognition creates a unique internal organisational culture.

The traditional feature of Finnish civil society, its close embeddedness and cooperation with the state is also decisive for the volunteer centres that have emerged. These function as very effective providers of human services. The downside, however, is a low

profile for independent organisation of civil society. Although reflexive volunteering and multifaceted styles of civic engagement are to some extent visible in the activities of the Citizen Arena, also there they mainly appear in its strategic and lobbying activities, less in its volunteer service. The volunteer centres function to a large extent according to the demand of professional care services. Consistent with the common logic of volunteer centres, i.e. organisations that are serving volunteers by helping them to find adequate opportunities in society, one would expect the driving element to be the individual citizen and her or his wish to get engaged for an issue of larger concern. The volunteer centres covered here, basically represent a reversed logic. They are suppliers of additional services who react to demand in society.

The dominance of embeddedness in welfare contexts is underlined by the absence of participatory elements in volunteering. The shaping of societal affairs ranks low in the motivation of volunteers and finds almost no public expression. Political influence is exerted to some extent through the contact to the administration and to local political parties. These contacts, however, are maintained by the management level of the centres. The volunteers themselves do not (use opportunities to) have a voice.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond these particularities of human service dominance and the direction of the flow of volunteering there are four issues that might also apply to volunteer centres in more general terms. One challenge includes the lack of an adequate understanding of the nature of volunteer centres in administration and politics. Although there is some basic funding, the dominant perspective on volunteer centres is still that they are perceived as something that comes "for free". Indeed, as the centre of the Red Cross in *Pohjois-Haaga* shows, it is possible to run such centres almost without financial support. This, however, can only be maintained through a high degree of social integration within the organisation. It is questionable whether it would be possible when reflexive styles of volunteering do spread and create a more heterogeneous volunteer constituency.

Related is the problem of administrative diversification. There is no single department in the administration that recognises volunteering as a substantial part of its portfolio. Responsibility is spread across departments which makes it difficult to lobby and negotiate with the public sector. In such a situation it is for example difficult to secure a basic support instead of project funding (Hilger 2008).

The embeddedness into welfare arrangements together with the close cooperation with municipalities make it also difficult to develop a political profile. In other countries a related problem is connected to the broadness of the character of volunteer centres. They do not develop a particular profile because they understand volunteering as a generic activity that goes beyond ideological orientations. People who want to express political views are likely to choose more profiled associations and initiatives. Thus, a central motive for a participatory function systematically lacks in volunteer centres. One solution to this dilemma could be projects for particular constituencies with more precisely defined goals. They could attract people with an ideological motivation while retaining the non-partial character of the organisation as a whole.

In the case of the Helsinki centres the internal, organisational culture is most significant for its good functioning. This aspect, however, creates the challenge of a cultural lock-in. The centres function well with their rather homogeneous constituency which is integrated by acknowledgement activities that foster community among volunteers. With their current profile, however, the centres do not attract other types of volunteers. If they change their profile, they, on the other hand, risk losing those volunteers who are currently contributing the lion's share of the centres' activities. Further, under conditions of reflexive volunteering, it would be difficult to develop a different culture and generate meaning beyond the status quo due to a higher turnover of volunteers who usually quickly leave the organisation to move on to other projects in their life-cycle.

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