



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO  
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET  
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

## RURAL/LOCAL CULTURAL HERITAGE PERSPECTIVES

### Keynote speech: Remarks on rural co-operation in Finland

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Robert Wright argues in his book *Non-zero. The logic of human destiny*, that learning win-win games has been a necessary condition for civilisations to be able to adjust to new levels of technological development and managing of societies becoming ever bigger, more complicated and interconnected. Political and economical leaders of our time seem not have recognised this, giving priority to the believe in the invisible hand of the free competition of the market forces. Like Jeremy Rifkin, referring to Karl Polanyi, has written (Rifkin, *The age of access*), "markets destroy societies". Beyond the recent global economic crisis, there might now be right time to learn and re-vitalise our forgotten knowhow, experiences and competencies to co-operate, to find win-win solutions instead of bowing to wait for or intensify through resuscitation the creative destruction of the markets leading to harmony, becoming sometimes later.



## Types and characteristics of talkoot co-operation

- Getting together for joint work efforts, based on voluntary participation and collective rewarding through hospitality and enjoying of the shared work performance
- Temporary or occasional needs of united action (seasonal works in agriculture, assistance in constructing houses, roads, bridges, community festivals, later also material resources or fund-raising campaigns)
- Mutual aid between equals (smaller or bigger, more or less stabile talkoo circles)
- Assistance without direct reciprocity, shared responsibility of neighbours/community towards its weakest members (in case of burnt house, lost crop, getting sick, death of spouse)

In this presentation, the concern is given to talkoot, a special, "arch type", of co-operation. Talkoot is a very original form of co-operation, including the basic elements of co-operation as an idea and practical application. It is a win-win game with several shared benefits increasing the prosperity of the community and its members, making participation rewarding socially, emotionally and economically. It also makes co-operation profitable in the long run and the model can easily be learned and applied for many different purposes.

To define talkoot:

Talkoot (plur): Finnish name for people gathered together for a joint purpose of work. Talkoot is per definition voluntary, and the work is unpaid. Instead, invitation to talkoot includes hospitality (meals, drinks, festivities with music and dancing). See e.g. Wikipedia, Talkoot.



## Historical roots of talkoot

- Traditions of hunting and fishing together
- Co-operative medieval agricultural village
- Co-operation, War economy and reconstruction periods
- Social economy and rural modernisation in Finland

Co-operation has been especially important for Finnish people, earning their living in extreme climatic and agroecological conditions. To become left alone meant serious threat of misery or starving, but belonging to a group, like family, relatives, village or even temporary alliances made possible to overcome problems too big or complicated to be solved alone.

Talkoot may be best suitable means for societies not exceeding the natural limits of its members' ability to recognise familiar features in their fellow citizen. Some evolutionary psychologists would, perhaps, suggest not to organise talkoot for groups bigger than 150 people, a natural upper limit for the size of human living-communities. However, talkoot as a symbolic meaning of co-operation has been applied for targets as far-reaching as fighting against national disasters or even global threats.



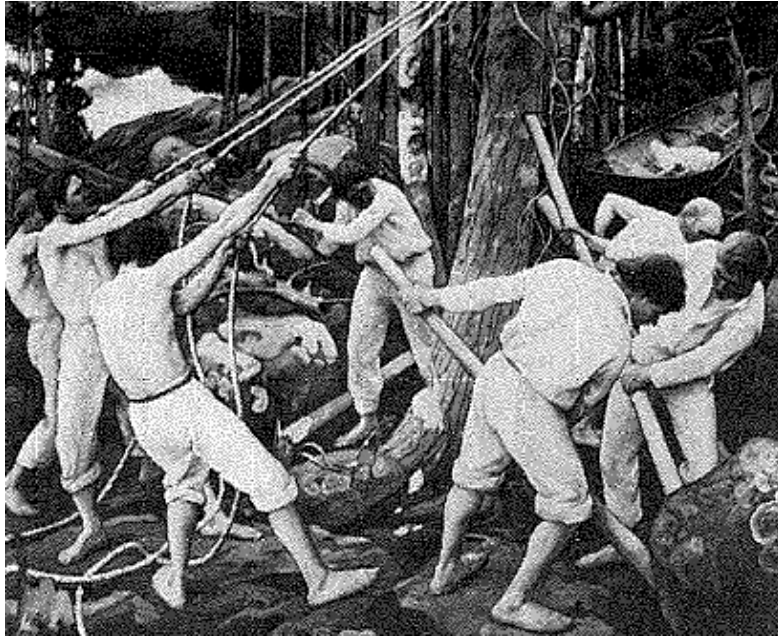
## **Traditions of hunting and fishing together**

- Added value of effectivity through hunting/fishing bands
- Decreasing the risk over time through sharing the bounty



## Co-operative medieval agricultural village

- **Mutual benefit** through joint work organisation (seasonal work periods, like seeding/harvesting crops, )
- Maintenance of **common benefit responsibilities** (constructing roads and bridges, caring for maintenance of travelling state/church officers)
- **Solidarity** to gather means to livelihood for the have-nots (delivering wood for construction or fire-wood for heating, work aid)



Kuva: Pekka Halosen maalaus "Tienraivaajat"  
Pekka Halosen seuran kuva-arkisto



## Co-operation, War economy and reconstruction periods

- Women compensating the shortage of adult male in productive work (farm-heads, professionals and industrial workers)
- Gathering of raw-material and energy, keeping the infrastructure alive
- Small farmers' joint efforts in farm mechanising
- Local services and community co-operation

Organising people of the "home front" to voluntary work during the wars 1939-40 and 1941-45 has been named talkoot, referring to the unanimity of the people to save independency of their nation.

Suomen talkoot was established in autumn 1940, followed later by Suurtalkoot, a coalition of 58 national civil society associations (continuation war). During the war, several massive talkoo campaigns were organised to gather scrap, berries, paper, rags, everything valuable to be reused. Volunteers were organised to work on farms to prepare soil, seed, harvest etc. In 1942, work made by talkoo volunteers were counted to exceed 3 million hours in ploughing and seeding (toukotyöt), and 12 million hours in harvesting. In 1942, 1,4 million cubic meter of firewood were made by talkoot.

For women, talkoot meant far-reaching learning works not traditionally regarded as female work. After the war, this led to "invasion" of women into labour markets in several new professions.

Reconstruction after the war strengthened the role of co-operatives as market organisations of farm products, financial institutions, as well as consumer needs. Rural co-operation at local level was important for small farmers to mechanise, and community life was lively.

We could imagine "climatic change" as a threat demanding for global talkoot to fight against, to-day. This requirement could be based on the knowledge, that the warming of climate is man-made, directly connected with our way of living. Unsustainable measures to exploit the planet maintaining our luxurious standard of material living have become a problem waiting for decisions to be made at personal level. Nobody can escape the responsibility. It may be a hard lesson to learn. Co-operative efforts, learning win-win solutions to common/global problems, will be a necessity.



Sota-ajan kotinäitä  
eli naisten, vanhusten  
ja lasten työn väässä.  
Naiset opettelivat niin  
hevosten kuin konei-  
denkin käsittelyn.  
Nuori emäntä on kes-  
ken peittoaiden saa-  
nut kenttäpostia ja  
pysähtynyt lukemaan  
miehensä kirjettä.



Emäntä väljastaa.  
Sotavuosien alkua-  
lokoine Pellervo  
hemmotteli lukijoi-  
taan kaurilla  
kansikuvilla, jotka  
yleensä teki Väino  
Hervo.

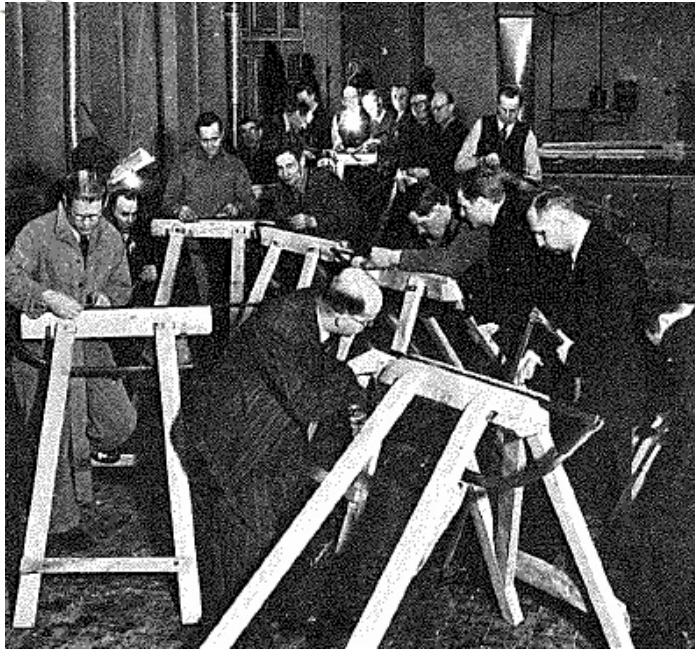


Kuvat: Kuisma ym., Kansan talous.

Pellervo-Seura



Kuva: Jermo, Aake, Kun kansa elikortilla



Kuva: Jermo, Aakr, Kun kansa eli kortilla.



## Social economy and rural modernisation in Finland

- The role of associations as breeding ground for co-op societies (early 20th century)
- Village movement empowering rural communities to revival (1970's onwards)
- Social economy as an emerging paradigm?
  - failures of the market
  - failures of the public
  - frontiers between markets, public and collective

There is an innovative element in co-operation: old forms of co-operation have disappeared with technological development, while new technologies have been diffused rapidly and equally among the small peasants, promoted by their "social economy" associations and networks. Good example is here the birth and distribution of co-operative societies during the first decades of the 20th century.

The role of local and national voluntary organisations has been decisive as a basis for recent rural development policies in Finland, too. Objections towards local passivity, central bureaucratic trends and rural exodus grew strongly among rural people during the late 1970's, and first village committees were established. The example was followed soon by other villages around the country, furthered by action research groups of university students and researchers. Village committees and other associations invited all villagers to talkoot, to work together for their common needs, like repairing the village house, fighting for the maintenance of local services or introducing entrepreneurial activities for the village.

Since 1990's, co-operative enterprises have been established in Finland also in new fields, having provided innovative contribution both to the changes of labour markets and to the emerging service needs. Co-operatives have, e.g. been able to combine diverse know-how into successful businesses, establish local energy production or water supply and sewerage co-operatives, open up work for unemployed and prevent social exclusion. The future of welfare services needs new approaches to the organising of service production: public means are scarce and diminishing, rural markets can't make private business profitable; at the same time, needs of care are increasing. Social economy could here play an important role to find new solutions. Co-operatives established by welfare service associations, e.g. could be efficient partners for the rural municipalities. They could be competitive alternatives for big, international chains of health service



Yhteistoiminta lankesi Suomessa jo valmiiksi muokattuun maaperään. Monet ajankohtaan tiukasti sidotut työt, kuten sadonkorjuu, saatiin nopeasti päätökseen suuren joukon voimin. Toisten kanssa tekeminen ja yhteiset ruokailu- ja kahvitauot loivat raskaaseen työhön iloista tunnelmaa, kuten kuvan puintivälle.

Kuva: Kuisma ym., Kansan talous. Pellervo-Seura



## Remained vs. lost values?

- Forms and motives?
  - Talkoot as mutual aid (volunteering, neighbourhood help)
  - Talkoot as caring of the weak and helpless (charity activities and movements)
  - Talkoot and public responsibilities (caring of the community and environment)
- Meaning and impact?
  - Professional solidarity: from co-operative work to collective representation (trade unions, farmers' unions, extension)
  - Social solidarity: from shared responsibility to commercial insurance or public caring
  - From exchanging services to making business: voluntary work imposed to tax – kiss of death for a lot of associations providing welfare services - and a blow at the heart of talkoot?
  - Co-operative competency (from caring and empathy to private concern and outsourced conscience)

Combined efforts of public, private and voluntary organisations are crucial to keep rural communities alive. Co-operative model might be used as an example to create bridges between the actors for a balanced win-win environment for business activities, public basic services and local initiatives of the inhabitants. Maintaining or increasing diversity in economic activities will be most important target for rural development, to get widest possible number of stakeholders to participate in the activities in different roles, like producers, consumers, donators, volunteers etc. Talkoot could be and has been used as analogy while referring to local gathering of people to find means to promote the development of their communities, e.g. in several EU funded development projects.



## Impacts of talkoot: transferring the art of harvesting





## **Spirit of the talkoot lamp re-empowered!**

- Combining high performance at work with enjoy and fellowship
- Recovering solidarity and returning to caring
- Reconstructing societies destroyed by market competition
- Responsibility returned to personal experience: giving and receiving
  
- Empowering the social economy
  - to be recognised by the public
  - to become competitive with the profit oriented business
  - to mobilise people to fulfill concrete utopias

Long co-operative tradition of rural people (also urban!) has been based on several social and practical grounds and motives. There is a rich variety of co-operative practices, habits, unwritten norms and values to be followed to get co-operation work. Our recent ways of thinking and acting of economy are biased towards competition and our understanding of co-operation is underdeveloped. The rich experience of past co-operation may be valuable also in the recent situation to find innovative solutions for solving problems connected with sustainable development, ranging from employment and services to several other smaller or bigger needs of people and local societies, and the society and economy at large.



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