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Happy to help? Exploring the factors associated with variations in rates of volunteering across Europe

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Abstract

The frequency of formal volunteering varies widely across European countries, and rates of formal volunteering are especially low among Eastern European countries. Why are there such large differences in volunteering rates when it is known that volunteering is beneficial for well-being? Using data from the latest round of the European Social Survey, we test three hypotheses to explain these cross-national differences in volunteering. We ask whether people in countries with low frequencies of volunteering spend more of their time on informal volunteering activities; whether they differ on socio-demographic variables which are known to be linked to volunteering rates; or whether they show less well-being benefit from formal volunteering. Contrary to the first hypothesis, we find a positive correlation between formal and informal volunteering. We further conclude that national differences in rates of volunteering cannot be fully explained by differences in the social, psychological or cultural factors associated with volunteering nor the outcome of volunteering. It is likely that contextual factors, such as a country's historical background or institutions, determine levels of volunteering to a large extent.

Keywords: Volunteering, European Social Survey, subjective well-being, hedonic measures, eudaimonic measures

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“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

- *Winston Churchill*

1 Introduction

Well-being research has often focused on the effects of what people *receive* – be it in the form of income (e.g. Easterlin, 1995, 2001), affection from romantic relationships (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003; Zimmermann & Easterlin, 2006), one’s friends and social networks (Argyle, 1999; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Myers, 2000), or even winning the lottery (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bullman, 1978). Of course, being part of a romantic couple or social network involves many reciprocal exchanges, but fewer studies have analyzed how well-being is affected if the exchange is primarily about giving rather than receiving, such as using one’s time to help others or engaging in voluntary organizations. Virtually all studies on the effects of volunteering on well-being find that people who engage in unpaid work to help others benefit in some way (e.g., Meier & Stutzer, 2008; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Piliavin, 2003; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). For a brief overview of the recent research on volunteering and subjective well-being see Dolan, Peasgood & White (2008, pp. 103-104).

A large part of the research on the beneficial effects of volunteering on well-being focuses on older adults (Luoh & Herzog, 2002; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Wheeler, Gorey, & Greenblatt, 1998). For instance, it has been found that formal volunteering reduces depressive symptoms among older people, but informal volunteering does not help (Li & Ferraro, 2005). This research focus has often been guided by the observation that older people seem to benefit more from volunteering than younger people (Van Willigen, 2000). One possible explanation for this observation could be that older people, for whom there is typically a reduction in major role identity (i.e. being employed, or a partner), experience an increased sense of purpose in life through volunteering (Greenfield & Marks, 2004). Another possibility concerns the social benefits of volunteering. In a recent study, many volunteers indicated that they were seeking to make friends by joining voluntary associations (Prouteau & Wolff, 2008). The social benefits of volunteering probably apply across age groups, but they may be particularly

important for older adults who commonly report feeling lonely (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2001).²

Most of the early research on volunteering and well-being was based on U.S. data and it is not certain whether these results can be applied to other nations. Differences in national rates of volunteering (e.g. Anheier & Salamon, 1999) suggest that the determinants and outcomes of voluntary activities might indeed vary across countries.

Levels of participation in voluntary organizations vary widely among the European countries that are included in the third round of the European Social Survey (ESS). Formal volunteering – i.e. work for voluntary or charitable organizations – shows a ten-fold variation across Europe (Huppert et al., 2009). It is lowest in Bulgaria where only seven percent of the population volunteered at least once during the year preceding the survey (Figure 1).

- Figure 1 about here –

Bulgaria is followed by Poland, Russia, Estonia and Hungary – all countries in which less than 20 percent of the population engage in formal volunteering. At the other end of the spectrum are Switzerland, Austria and Norway; in Switzerland and Austria the level of voluntary participation exceeds 50 percent, while in Norway it reaches an astounding 67 percent.

Our aim was to establish why the level of volunteering differs so markedly between European countries, despite its supposedly beneficial effects. Among the questions we asked are the following. Do people who do not volunteer in formal organizations spend their time on informal activities instead? Do the factors leading people to participate in voluntary activities differ between nations? Or do people in some countries benefit more from volunteering than people in other countries? We formulate three hypotheses which consider the determinants as well as outcomes of formal and informal volunteering as possible explanations for the large variation in formal volunteering across European nations.

² A meta-analysis by Pinquart & Sörensen (2001) found that about 5-15% of people aged over 65 often feel lonely. Among those aged 80 and above this percentage increases to about 50%.

Hypothesis 1: Alternative forms of helping others. People in countries with low rates of formal volunteering spend more time on informal voluntary activities.

Hypothesis 2: Determinants of volunteering. The socio-demographic, psychological and cultural factors associated with volunteering are less prevalent in countries with low rates of volunteering.

Hypothesis 3: Outcomes of volunteering. Individuals in countries with low rates of volunteering gain less from such activities – in terms of well-being – than those in countries with high rates of volunteering.

With respect to its determinants, volunteering has been found to be associated with a range of socio-demographic variables including age, gender, race, income, work status and church attendance (Musick, Wilson, & Bynum Jr., 2000; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1999). Musick and Wilson (2003) have identified two psycho-social mechanisms that might explain both rates of volunteering and the positive effect of volunteering activities on well-being, namely psychological resources and social integration. They suggest that volunteering might increase self-confidence and equip volunteers with the psychological resources to handle stress. They further propose that volunteering improves social integration – i.e. the volunteer's social interaction with others – which in turn is associated with well-being (Musick & Wilson, 2003). Cultural resources, in the form of values and beliefs, are also likely to be associated with rates of volunteering (Musick et al., 2000). Our study thus examines three main mediating factors that are associated with volunteering as well as well-being: psychological resources, social integration and cultural resources.

Although most studies focus on individual-level characteristics, some researchers have studied similar concepts at the macro level. A cross-national study including 21 countries which participated in the World Values Survey assessed the effect of human capital, social capital and cultural capital at the country level and found that all three types of capital are positively related to country-level rates of volunteering (Parboteeah, Cullen, & Lim, 2004). Although it is informative to include contextual country-level data (Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006), in the present analysis we concentrate on individual level data.

With regard to the outcomes of volunteering (Hypothesis 3), a unique feature of the present study is the use of multiple measures of well-being which address both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of subjective well-being. Previous studies have often considered the benefits of volunteering by looking only at its impact on single-item hedonic measures, such as satisfaction or happiness (e.g. Meier & Stutzer, 2008), while multiple-item measures of well-being are rarely considered (with the exception of Thoits & Hewitt, 2001 who use single- and multiple item hedonic measures). Hedonic measures regard well-being as the experience of pleasant states, and three components have been identified – life satisfaction, the presence of positive feelings, and the absence of negative feelings (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Eudaimonic measures conceptualize well-being in terms of fulfillment and a sense of purpose or meaning (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2001). Since both types of measures are available in round 3 of the ESS, we can ask which of the two is more strongly associated with volunteering. Further, since both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being are represented by more than one item, we can establish the extent to which our findings can be generalized to specific ways of operationalizing the two concepts.

2 Data and Methods

Data

The data are from the Well-being Module in the European Social Survey (R. Jowell and the Central Coordinating Team, 2007), which was created for the third round of the survey conducted in 2006 (see Huppert et al., 2009 for an overview of the well-being module). We include 23 of the 25 available ESS countries³ and group them into three categories based on their frequency of formal volunteering. For this purpose we dichotomized individual responses according to whether the participant had or had not been involved in work for a charitable or voluntary organization during the past year. The low-frequency group, which consists mostly of Eastern European countries, comprises those countries with volunteering rates of less than 30 percent. The middle-frequency group contains the nine countries with formal volunteering

³ The full ESS sample also includes Latvia and Romania, but these two countries were omitted from the analysis because of missing design weights.

rates between 30 and 45 percent. The remaining high-frequency group includes a set of seven countries with volunteering rates of more than 45 percent (See Table B-1 in Appendix 2). We also experimented with country groupings based on geographical location, i.e. Eastern, Western, Southern and Northern Europe, and the results were quite similar to the ones reported here.

Volunteering

We distinguish between formal and informal forms of volunteering. To measure formal volunteering, respondents were asked how often they were involved in work for voluntary or charitable organizations in the twelve months preceding the survey. The measure of informal volunteering involved asking about help for others that is provided outside the family, workplace or voluntary organizations. Providing help to family members, such as caring for an elderly family member, is therefore excluded in both measures (see Appendix 1 for the full survey questions). The six response categories for both items range from ‘never’ to ‘at least once a week’.

Measures of well-being

In this paper we focus on six measures of subjectively assessed well-being, examining whether volunteering has similar effects on each of them. Diener et al. (1999) have identified three major components of subjective well-being (SWB) – life satisfaction, the presence of positive feelings, and the absence of negative feelings. While these three components tend to be positively correlated, some studies have shown that they can be relatively independent of one another (Huppert et al., 2009; Huppert & Whittington, 2003). Accordingly, we sought to establish which component of SWB shows the greatest effect of volunteering. Is volunteering primarily associated with increased life satisfaction, enhanced positive mood, or decreased negative mood?

Many large surveys have included a question about general satisfaction with life, and much of what we know about subjective well-being is based on how respondents answer this question. Another commonly used SWB question concerns the person’s general level of happiness, and the two questions tend to behave in very similar ways in relation to basic socio-demographic and health variables, and are therefore often used interchangeably (Donovan, Halpern, & Sargeant, 2002; Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Layard, 2005). Both types of questions are included in the core set of the ESS items which are administered to large cross-national samples every two

years. Both general life satisfaction and happiness are rated on a scale from least (0) to most (10). In round 3 of the ESS, these core SWB questions were supplemented by about 50 additional items from the well-being module in order to develop a more detailed understanding of well-being constructs and the factors associated with them. The module includes an 8-item version of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale – CES-D (Radloff, 1977), which comprises six items about negative experiences during the past week (depressed, everything an effort, sleep was restless, lonely, sad, could not get going) and two about positive experiences (happy, enjoyed life). The module contains a further four items about positive experiences during the past week (full of energy, calm and peaceful, felt rested, absorbed in activities). Each of these affect items is rated on a four-point scale ranging from ‘none of the time’ (0) to ‘almost all of the time’ (3).⁴ For the purpose of the present analysis, we derived a positive affect variable which summed the responses to the six positive items. We also analyzed responses to a subset of the CES-D measure, which includes only its six negative items, and we label this measure ‘*negative affect*’.

In addition to these four hedonic well-being measures – i.e. satisfaction, happiness, positive affect and negative affect – the analysis further includes two eudaimonic measures which relate to how well a person functions. The first of these measures indicates whether an individual feels a sense of accomplishment from what they do (*accomplishment*), while the second eudaimonic measure refers to whether a person feels that what he/she does is valuable and worthwhile (*worthwhile*). The six well-being measures are further described in Appendix 1.

Psychological resources

The two measures of psychological resources assess the respondent’s level of self-esteem. Respondents are asked to indicate whether they generally feel very positive about themselves (*feels positive about self*), and if they sometimes feel as if they are a failure (*feels a failure*). Responses to both questions range from ‘disagree strongly’ (1) to ‘agree strongly’ (5).

⁴ The original values were 1 to 4, but we recoded the items to reflect the standard coding of the CES-D.

Social integration

Social integration was assessed by three items which indicate: (a) how often the respondent meets socially with friends, relatives or colleagues, ranging from ‘never’ (1) to ‘every day’ (7) (*meet people*); (b) how often the respondent takes part in social activities compared to others of the same age, ranging from ‘much less than most’ (1) to ‘much more than most’ (5) (*social activities*); and (c) the frequency of attending religious services (*religious attendance*). These or similar measures have been used as indicators of social integration (or ‘social resources’) in previous research on volunteering (Musick & Wilson, 2003; Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006).

Cultural resources

Cultural resources are measured in the form of values, following Musick et al. (2000), who use measures of ‘helping values’ and religiosity to describe cultural resources. Schwartz describes values as motivational constructs which guide individuals in selecting their personal actions (S. H. Schwartz, 1992; S.H. Schwartz, 1994). He identifies ten basic values which can be found in different cultures around the world (S. H. Schwartz, 2004). The Schwartz human values have been found to have equivalent meaning across countries in the ESS (Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008) and are therefore suitable for our analysis. The ten core values comprise self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence and universalism. After reviewing the detailed description of each core value we identified five values which appeared to be most relevant to an analysis of volunteering. The first value – benevolence – captures the desire to enhance the welfare of people who are close to the individual. Universalism describes the desire to protect the welfare of all of society and nature. Those with hedonistic values seek pleasure for themselves, while those striving for achievement aim for personal success. The last value we selected – power – captures the aim of gaining social status and control over other people. We expect a positive association between volunteering and benevolence and universalism, while hedonism, achievement and power are likely to display a negative association. As recommended by Schwartz, we adjusted the five selected values for scale use (or ‘response style’) to account for the fact that some individuals tend to always report high or low scores (Shalom H. Schwartz, 2007).

Control variables

Work status variables are included because volunteering activities compete with paid work for an individual's time and effort. Similarly, volunteering activities might depend on the time and resources that are available despite family obligations, such as childrearing and caring for other members of the family. We include indicators for having a child at home (*child at home*) and a parent living in the same household (*parent in household*) to account for such competing demands. Some people might be less able than others to devote time and effort to volunteering because of their health status, and we therefore also account for self-rated health ('very bad' = 1 to 'very good' = 5). Other socio-demographic factors which are controlled for in the analysis include: age (in continuous form), marital status (married = 1), gender, education (greater than high school = 1), religiosity ('not at all religious' = 0 to 'very religious' = 10), and country-specific income quintiles. For an overview of the association of socio-demographic factors with volunteering see Wilson (2000).

Analytical methods

In the first part of the paper, we compare national differences in various forms of volunteering, and analyze the determinants of formal and informal volunteering. The two dependent variables in our analysis are categorical variables ranging from 0 to 5 and we therefore use multivariate ordered logit regressions.

In the second part of the study, we look further at the outcomes of volunteering in terms of its impact on various measures of well-being. Our well-being measures employ a number of different scales; accomplishment and worthwhile range from 1 to 5, satisfaction and happiness range from 0 to 10, while the positive and negative affect variables range from 0 to 18. We use ordinary least squares regressions to estimate the association of volunteering with well-being.

3 Results

Alternative forms of helping others

We began by testing the hypothesis that there would be an inverse relationship between formal and informal volunteering. Maybe people who are engaged in informal care lack the time to volunteer in formal organizations and vice versa. Thus,

countries with low levels of formal volunteering might display high levels of informal engagement, and volunteering is simply a less formalized activity in these regions. This hypothesis is not confirmed by an analysis of the percentage of the population that helped others outside of formal organizations, their family and workplace at least once during the previous year. Although, in general, more people participate in informal rather than in formal help, informal volunteering is also lowest in Eastern European countries (Figure 2).

- Figure 2 about here –

Norway is once again among the top three countries on the list, showing an informal volunteering rate of more than 86 percent. Only two other Northern European countries, Sweden and Denmark, display higher levels of volunteering. Pearson correlation coefficients between formal and informal volunteering in each group reveal that there is in fact a significant positive relationship between the two types of volunteering. The values range from 0.34 in the middle-frequency group to 0.38 in both the low- and high-frequency groups ($p < 0.001$). Our first hypothesis, stating that informal volunteering might replace formal volunteering could therefore not be confirmed.

Determinants of volunteering

It has previously been found that volunteering is related to a variety of socio-demographic characteristics (Musick et al., 2000; Wilson, 2000; Wilson & Musick, 1999). Although we observe socio-demographic differences in volunteering, these do not account for the differences in the frequency of volunteering across the three country groups (Table 1, model 1). We found that on average, people who are healthy, better educated, religious, older, married, living in a larger household, or have higher incomes volunteer more frequently than others. Not surprisingly, people who have children or elderly parents at home devote less time to formal volunteering activities. Women are also found to be less likely to volunteer than men. However, socio-demographic differences at the individual level between countries do not fully account for the differences in volunteering across country groups. The coefficients of the variables representing the low-frequency and middle-frequency groups remain negative and significant. Do cross-national variations in volunteering disappear if we

account for differences in psychological resources, social integration and cultural resources?

Previous research has found that those with good psychological resources are more likely to volunteer (Musick & Wilson, 2003). Indeed, we confirmed that people who feel positive about themselves report a higher frequency of formal volunteering than others (Table 1, model 2), but not much additional variance was explained. Our three indicators of social integration all proved to be positively associated with formal volunteering (Table 1, model 3) but the differences in the cross-country variation in volunteering rates are still not fully explained. Cultural values also matter for rates of volunteering, but contrary to our initial expectations, those individuals displaying hedonistic or achievement values are in fact more likely to volunteer in formal organizations than others (Table 1, model 4). Despite accounting for cultural values which are known to differ between countries, these factors in addition to psychological resources and social integration have not been sufficient to explain differences in the frequency of formal volunteering across ESS countries.

- Table 1 about here -

The results for informal volunteering are quite similar to those for formal volunteering, but even less of the variance in informal volunteering is explained by the explanatory variables (Table 2). One of the notable differences between the two forms of volunteering is that income does not show a strong association with informal volunteering considering the large sample size. Hours worked and being in paid employment matter for informal volunteering. The small variance explained in both sets of regressions (Tables 1 and 2) indicates that the current, widely used set of variables that we employ here does not contribute substantially to our understanding of the determinants of volunteering.

- Table 2 about here -

Outcomes of volunteering

Analyzing the determinants of formal and informal volunteering did not fully explain differences between national groups. We therefore explore our third hypothesis, which states that individuals in countries with low rates of volunteering might gain

less from such activities than those in countries with high ratios of volunteering. We test this hypothesis by looking at the outcomes of volunteering in the form of six different measures of well-being. These measures include hedonic as well as eudaimonic indicators. The highest correlation between well-being measures is found between happiness and satisfaction (Table 3).

- Table 3 about here -

In general, we found that countries that are high in volunteering also show high levels of well-being (see Figure 3). The correlation between mean satisfaction and mean formal volunteering across the 23 countries is 0.74 (not shown).

- Figure 3 about here -

Within groups, formal and informal volunteering are generally associated with higher levels of subjective well-being, but these effects differ across measures of well-being. Happiness is significantly lower in countries with low frequencies of volunteering, but those who engage in formal volunteering in these countries have higher levels of happiness than their counterparts in countries with higher rates of volunteers. In contrast, informal volunteering is associated with comparable increases in happiness in all country groups (Table 4). The results for our second measure of hedonic well-being are quite similar, except that informal volunteering is associated with significantly higher levels of satisfaction in countries which volunteer with middle frequency.

Turning to our multi-item measure of positive affect, one can observe a positive association between formal volunteering and positive affect in the low-frequency group. Informal volunteering is positively associated with positive affect only in countries with middle- and high-frequency volunteering. With regard to negative affect, we do not observe any significant association with formal or informal volunteering.

Formal volunteering is positively associated with one's sense of accomplishment in high-frequency countries and to an even larger extent in low-frequency countries (Table 4). Informal volunteering displays a positive association with sense of accomplishment in all regions, and is somewhat strongest in middle-

frequency countries. We only find an association between formal volunteering and a sense of doing something worthwhile in countries with a low frequency of volunteering. All six models presented in Table 4 take account of differences in socio-demographic variables, health and measures of psychological resources, social integration and cultural resources.

- Table 4 about here -

For five of the six well-being measures, formal volunteering is associated with higher levels of well-being in countries with a low frequency of volunteering, but only one measure – accomplishment – shows such a relationship in high-frequency countries, and none in middle-frequency countries. The association of accomplishment with formal volunteering in these regions is barely significant given the large size of the sample.

Informal volunteering, on the other hand, displays a positive association with four of the six well-being measures in all countries. The exceptions are negative affect which is non-significant in all regions, satisfaction which is only associated with informal volunteering in middle-frequency countries, and positive affect in low-frequency countries. Contrary to our initial hypothesis, volunteering is not higher in some countries because of more beneficial outcomes for volunteers.

4 Discussion

We considered three hypotheses to account for the very large variation in rates of formal volunteering found in 23 countries that were included in the third round of the ESS in 2006. We first found that informal volunteering does not appear to replace formal activities. On the contrary, informal and formal forms of volunteering are positively correlated in all three country groups.

Our second hypothesis stated that previously found determinants of volunteering – including socio-demographic characteristics, health, psychological resources, social integration and cultural resources – might be prevalent at different rates across countries and this may explain the observed difference in volunteering. However, we found significant country differences in the level of formal and informal

volunteering even after accounting for such cross-national compositional differences, which refutes this hypothesis.

Our third hypothesis proposed that the psychological benefits of voluntary activities might differ between countries such that volunteering was associated with higher well-being in countries with a higher frequency of volunteering. This might lead to higher volunteer motivation in these countries. In fact, volunteers in countries with a low frequency of volunteering displayed higher values on several of the well-being measures than those in other countries. This result indicates that in countries where volunteering is generally less common, those who do participate in formal or informal volunteering have the highest levels of well-being. It may be that in these countries, only those who are most likely to benefit from volunteering actually volunteer.

Does the often-observed positive association between volunteering and well-being indicate that volunteering causes happiness or are happy people more likely to volunteer? Our data are cross-sectional and it is therefore impossible to establish a causal link between volunteering and well-being. Other studies have tried to assess causality by studying panel data. Meier and Stutzer (2008) address the question of causality by analyzing voluntary activities in East Germany after German unification. East Germany provides a natural experiment for studying volunteering because with the fall of the Berlin wall its infrastructure of volunteering deteriorated sharply. The authors find that causality runs both ways – volunteering seems to increase well-being but at the same time happier people are more likely to become volunteers (which indicates a selection effect). A similar reciprocal relationship was found by Thoits and Hewitt (2001) who studied the impact of volunteering on six different measures of subjective well-being using US data. The present study does not attempt to establish causality, but rather focuses on cross-national differences in rates of volunteering.

We further want to point out that the country group variable that was used to assess the differences in well-being captures contextual differences at the country group level, such as GDP or common historical background. Such macro-level indicators may play an important role in determining volunteering activities. It has previously been suggested that the association between quality of life indicators and civic participation depends to some extent on a country's welfare regime and level of GDP (Wallace & Pichler, in press).

Considering that all of the countries with a low frequency of volunteering are located in Eastern Europe and share a common historical background shaped by years of enforced volunteering behavior before the collapse of the Soviet Union (Kuti, 2004), it is likely that these macro-level factors play a more significant role than individual characteristics and cultural values. Anheier and Salamon argue that in many former socialist Eastern European countries the “concept of volunteering became obsolete” because of party requirements to volunteer time and effort for social, cultural and political causes (Anheier & Salamon, 1999, p.44). For instance, membership in organizations such as the Red Cross was often encouraged by the Communist Party and membership levels dropped markedly after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Anheier & Salamon, 1999). However, there is evidence that during the communist era people in the countries of the former Soviet Union often engaged in informal help, for instance by standing in long lines to obtain goods for others. Smith describes how in the 1970s it would have been an “unforgivable sin” to “run across something as rare as pineapples, Polish-made bras, East German wall-lamps or Yugoslav toothpaste” without purchasing extra items for friends and family (Smith, 1976, p. 85).

The decline in volunteering in the transition economies of Eastern Europe could further be related to the disruptive impact of economic collapse after 1990 on employment, income and families. Easterlin found that in 2005 subjective well-being in these countries finally returned to the levels measured in the early 1990s (Easterlin, 2008). It is likely that the severe economic stress of the previous 15 years left people little time for the ‘luxury’ of volunteering.

It is also possible that the infrastructure for volunteering is missing in the countries with a low rate of volunteering, and therefore only highly motivated individuals engage in voluntary activities. The association between well-being and volunteering might therefore reflect a selection into volunteering rather than being a consequence of volunteering. A possible lack of a suitable volunteering infrastructure would nevertheless not explain the differences in informal volunteering, which requires neither organizational resources nor governmental support. However, it is possible that forced volunteering during Soviet times largely replaced people’s intrinsic motivation to volunteer. Hence, few people may feel the desire to provide assistance to others without specific extrinsic motivation.

The present study did not fully explain regional variations in the frequency of formal and informal volunteering. Future research should take further into consideration country-level differences, including historical and institutional differences between countries to explain regional variations. An important contribution of our analysis is the use of six different types of well-being measures, including hedonic as well as eudaimonic measures. We found that both were associated with volunteering, but the magnitude of associations showed marked differences depending on the measure used. The most striking difference was found within the domain of hedonic well-being. There were strong associations between volunteering and the presence of positive affect, but little or no association between volunteering and negative affect. This confirms previous findings on the relative independence of positive and negative affect (e.g. Huppert & Whittington, 2003) and reinforces the importance of using a range of well-being measures.

Figures

Figure 1: Formal volunteering in ESS countries. Percentage of people who volunteered at least once in the past year.

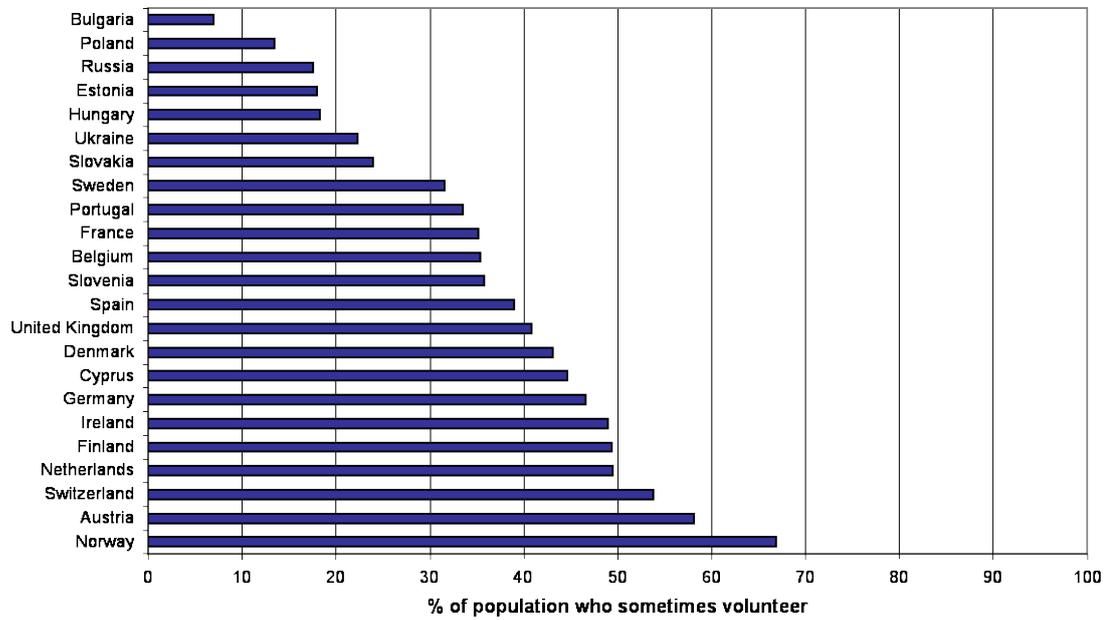


Figure 2: Informal volunteering in ESS countries. Percentage of people who helped others at least once in the past year.

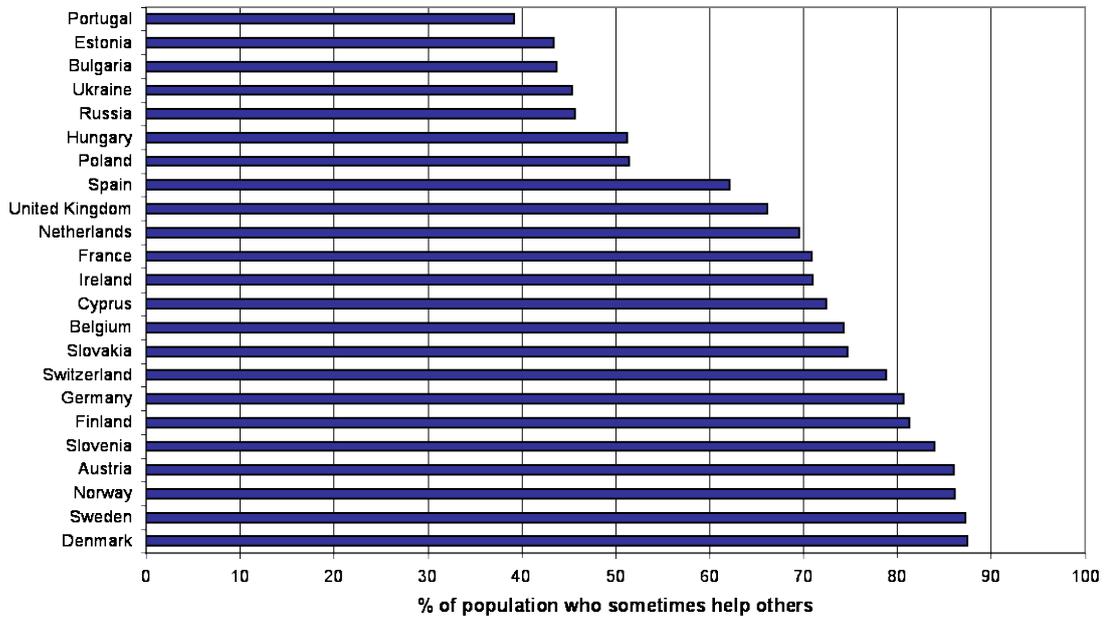
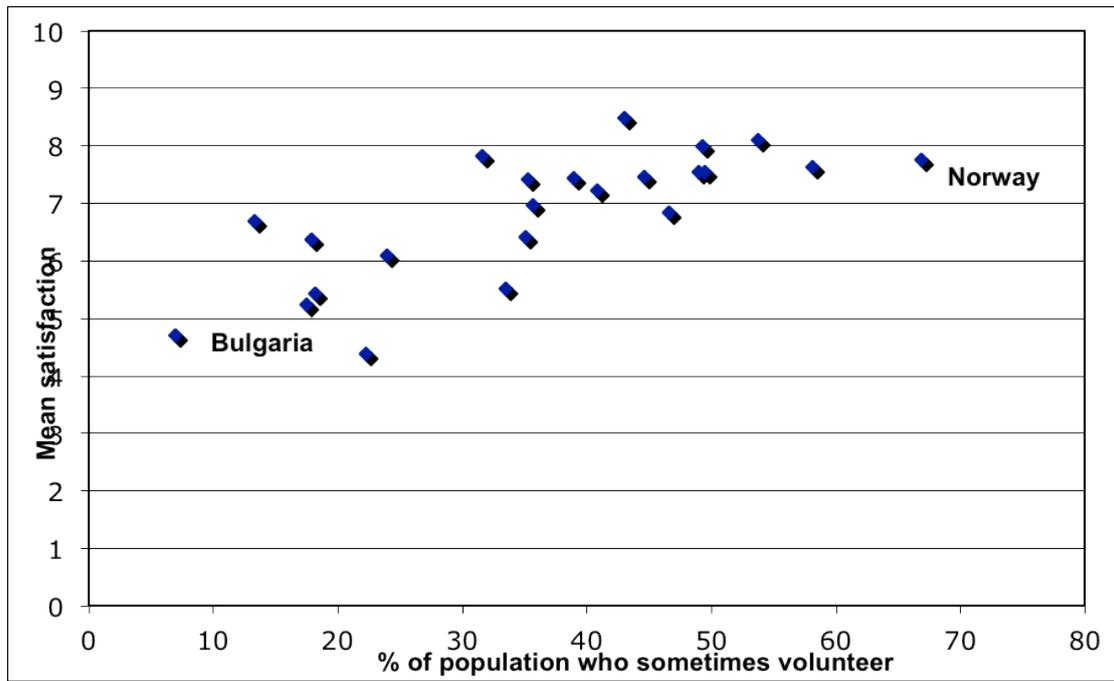


Figure 3: Association between formal volunteering and life satisfaction across countries



Tables

Table 1: Factors associated with formal volunteering (Ordered logit regressions)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Low-frequency vol.	-1.705***	-1.705***	-1.744***	-1.683***
Middle-frequency vol.	-0.603***	-0.601***	-0.609***	-0.619***
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>				
Self-rated health	0.110***	0.099***	0.031	0.025
Female	-0.141***	-0.136***	-0.159***	-0.226***
Education > HS	0.441***	0.445***	0.404***	0.369***
Religious	0.082***	0.081***	0.015**	0.016**
Income quintile	0.069***	0.067***	0.050***	0.061***
Age	0.038***	0.039***	0.045***	0.038***
Age, squared	-3.9 x 10 ⁻⁴ ***	-3.9 x 10 ⁻⁴ ***	-4.5 x 10 ⁻⁴ ***	-3.9 x 10 ⁻⁴ ***
Work hours (log)	-0.025	-0.028*	-0.008	-0.014
Household size	0.086***	0.087***	0.062***	0.061***
Child at home	-0.151***	-0.153***	-0.082*	-0.092*
Parent in household	-0.173**	-0.175**	-0.204**	-0.208**
In paid work	-0.006	-0.013	-0.023	-0.013
Retired	0.037	0.033	-0.019	-0.025
Married	0.110***	0.107***	0.121***	0.124***
<i>Psychological resources</i>				
Feels positive about self		0.055***	-0.003	0.005
Feels a failure		0.005	0.029*	0.039**
<i>Social integration</i>				
Meet people			0.105***	0.096***
Social activities			0.414***	0.405***
Religious attendance			0.226***	0.227***
<i>Cultural resources (values)</i>				
Benevolence				0.181***
Universalism				0.162***
Hedonism				0.035*
Achievement				0.063***
Power				-0.019
Pseudo R2	0.0554	0.0548	0.0765	0.0769
N	29630	29362	28853	26073

Notes: Reference categories are: high-frequency countries, other employment. All Schwartz values (cultural resources) are adjusted for scale use.

Significance level: * for p < 0.05, ** for p < 0.01, and *** for p < 0.001

Table 2: Factors associated with informal volunteering (Ordered logit regressions)

	Base	Psychologic al resources	Social integration	Cultural resources
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Low-frequency vol.	-1.157***	-1.164***	-1.120***	-0.989***
Middle-frequency vol.	-0.214***	-0.206***	-0.198***	-0.252***
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>				
Self-rated health	0.116***	0.103***	0.060***	0.047**
Female	-0.046*	-0.046*	-0.053*	-0.134***
Education > HS	0.269***	0.276***	0.248***	0.237***
Religious	0.047***	0.045***	0.012**	0.013**
Income quintile	0.027**	0.025**	0.013	0.023*
Age	0.053***	0.054***	0.058***	0.051***
Age, squared	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***
Work hours (log)	0.049***	0.044***	0.054***	0.043***
Household size	0.031**	0.034**	0.017	0.014
Child at home	-0.135***	-0.135***	-0.084**	-0.083*
Parent in household	-0.118*	-0.126*	-0.130*	-0.151**
In paid work	-0.107***	-0.108***	-0.102***	-0.087**
Retired	-0.060	-0.051	-0.086	-0.034
Married	-0.094***	-0.096***	-0.085**	-0.095***
<i>Psychological resources</i>				
Feels positive about self		0.108***	0.077***	0.077***
Feels a failure		0.048***	0.066***	0.072***
<i>Social integration</i>				
Meet people			0.084***	0.068***
Social activities			0.217***	0.197***
Religious attendance			0.107***	0.111***
<i>Cultural resources (values)</i>				
Benevolence				0.312***
Universalism				0.123***
Hedonism				0.072***
Achievement				0.055***
Power				-0.116***
Pseudo R2	0.0316	0.0317	0.0383	0.0413
N	29361	29114	28636	25902

Notes: See Table 1.

Table 3: Pearson correlations between all well-being measures (pairwise correlations)

	Happiness	Satisfaction	Positive affect	Negative affect	Accomplishment	Worthwhile
Happiness	1.00					
Satisfaction	0.69	1.00				
Positive affect	0.42	0.36	1.00			
Negative affect	-0.45	-0.43	-0.53	1.00		
Accomplishment	0.26	0.22	0.35	-0.28	1.00	
Worthwhile	0.27	0.23	0.30	-0.24	0.39	1.00

Notes: All correlations are significant ($p < 0.001$)

Table 4: Associations of formal and informal volunteering with six measures of well-being (OLS regressions)

Dependent variable	Hedonic measures				Eudaimonic measures	
	Single-item measures		Multiple-item measures		Accomplishment	Worthwhile
	Happiness	Satisfaction	Positive affect	Negative affect		
Low-frequency vol.	-0.863***	-1.319***	0.605***	0.912***	0.024	-0.084
Middle-frequency vol.	-0.014	-0.385***	-0.403***	0.439***	-0.213***	0.018
Formal volunteering	0.013	0.017	0.029	-0.012	0.035**	0.013
Low x formal vol.	0.173***	0.124***	0.265***	-0.031	0.085**	0.087**
Middle x formal vol.	-0.020	-0.017	0.041	0.022	-0.037*	0.013
Informal volunteering	0.029**	0.007	0.062***	0.018	0.041***	0.038***
Low x informal vol.	-0.000	-0.010	-0.109***	-0.049	-0.005	0.026
Middle x informal vol.	0.001	0.062***	-0.001	-0.039	0.050***	0.030*
<i>Socio-demographic variables</i>						
Health	0.484***	0.585***	1.013***	-1.005***	0.235***	0.194***
Female	0.122***	0.101***	-0.239***	0.397***	0.046	0.150***
Education > HS	0.038	0.054*	0.062	-0.121**	0.111***	0.067**
Religious	0.055***	0.057***	0.040***	0.043***	0.022***	0.026***
Income quintile	0.108***	0.198***	0.050**	-0.108***	0.002	0.006
Age	-0.054***	-0.066***	0.033***	-0.022**	0.024***	0.023***
Age, squared	0.001***	0.001***	-2.3 x 10 ⁻⁴ **	2.3 x 10 ⁻⁴ ***	-2.3 x 10 ⁻⁴ ***	-2.0 x 10 ⁻⁴ ***
Work hours (log)	-0.012	-0.003	-0.028	0.055**	-0.019	0.009
Household size	0.026*	0.006	0.062**	-0.068***	-0.001	0.038***
Child at home	-0.055	-0.110**	-0.396***	0.210***	-0.030	0.046
Parent in household	-0.243***	-0.382***	-0.125	0.095	-0.064	-0.102
In paid work	0.113***	0.208***	0.071	-0.400***	0.224***	0.164***
Retired	0.204***	0.322***	0.187*	-0.338***	0.190***	0.079
Married	0.542***	0.358***	0.577***	-0.582***	0.145***	0.175***
<i>Psychological resources</i>						
Feels positive about self	0.382***	0.371***	0.906***	-0.567***	0.536***	0.438***
Feels a failure	-0.151***	-0.145***	-0.593***	0.489***	-0.216***	-0.167***
<i>Social integration</i>						
Meet people	0.103***	0.068***	0.115***	-0.090***	0.026**	0.039***
Social activities	0.096***	0.089***	0.214***	-0.215***	0.110***	0.061***
Religious attendance	-0.030***	0.014	-0.002	-0.015	0.004	0.059***
<i>Cultural resources (values)</i>						
Benevolence	0.099***	0.135***	0.077*	0.002	0.083***	0.136***
Universalism	0.033	-0.043	-0.134***	-0.072*	-0.068**	0.038
Hedonism	0.081***	0.070***	0.141***	-0.031	0.019	-0.038**
Achievement	-0.091***	-0.161***	-0.154***	0.174***	0.101***	0.135***
Power	-0.100***	-0.097***	-0.235***	0.093***	-0.107***	-0.123***
Constant	3.842***	3.494***	1.187***	10.090***	3.161***	3.405***
R squared	0.2710	0.2699	0.2600	0.2937	0.1421	0.1374
N	23784	23784	23784	23784	23784	23784

Notes: See Table 1.

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Appendix 1 – Survey questions

Formal volunteering (Question E 1)

In the past 12 months, how often did you get involved in work for voluntary or charitable organisations?

Response categories:

- 01 At least once a week
- 02 At least once a month
- 03 At least once every three months
- 04 At least once every six months
- 05 Less often
- 06 Never

Informal volunteering (Question E 2)

Not counting anything you do for your family, in your work, or within voluntary organisations, how often, in the past 12 months, did you actively provide help for other people?

[same answer categories as above]

Well-being measures

Happiness (Question C 1)

Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?
- scale from 0 (extremely unhappy) to 10 (extremely happy)

Satisfaction (Question B 24)

All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays? Please answer using this card, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied.
- scale from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied)

Positive affect (Questions E 11, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22)

I will now read out a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved during the past week. Using this card, please tell me how much of the time during the past week:

1. you were happy?
2. you enjoyed life?
3. you had a lot of energy?
4. you were absorbed in what you were doing?
5. you felt calm and peaceful?
6. you felt really rested when you woke up in the morning?

Response categories: none or almost none of the time, some of the time, most of the time, all or almost all of the time

Negative affect (Questions E 8-10, 12, 14-15)

I will now read out a list of the ways you might have felt or behaved during the past week. Using this card, please tell me how much of the time during the past week:

1. you felt depressed?
2. you felt that everything you did was an effort?
3. your sleep was restless?
4. you felt lonely?
5. you felt sad?
6. you could not get going?

[same response categories as Positive Affect]

Accomplishment (Question E 27)

Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment from what I do.

- 1 Agree strongly
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Disagree strongly

[original coding reversed in analysis]

Worthwhile (Question E 40)

I generally feel that what I do in my life is valuable and worthwhile.

[same response categories as Accomplishment]

Appendix 2 – Tables

Table 5: Country groupings

Low frequency (below 30% formal participation)	Middle frequency (30%-45% formal participation)	High frequency (above 45% formal participation)
Bulgaria	Belgium	Austria
Estonia	Cyprus	Finland
Hungary	Denmark	Germany
Poland	France	Ireland
Russia	Portugal	Netherlands
Slovakia	Slovenia	Norway
Ukraine	Spain	Switzerland
	Sweden	
	United Kingdom	