

Mapping Voluntarism – Scandinavia in Comparison

Kristin Strømsnes

[\(kristin.stromsnes@rokkan.uib.no\)](mailto:kristin.stromsnes@rokkan.uib.no)

Dag Wollebæk

[\(dag.wollebak@isp.uib.no\)](mailto:dag.wollebak@isp.uib.no)

Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies / Department of Comparative Politics,
University of Bergen, Norway

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(1) Introduction

In a 1998 article, Paul Dekker and Andries van den Broek show that the Scandinavian voluntary sector abound in members. However, only a modest proportion of these affiliations entail any time spent volunteering or participating. Hence, the Scandinavian countries are characterized by a lot of passive members, or “check book members” as they are often called (e.g. Maloney 1999). Dekker and van den Broek (1998) call this type of voluntary sector “broad”. It is distinguishable from the “parochial” pattern found in South-Europe, in which members are few, but usually active, and from the “active” civil society found in North-America, in which both membership figures and activity rates are high.

It is well established that the strength of associations is correlated to measures of social capital, but the underlying mechanisms of this relationship is not as clearly understood. In this paper, we explore whether Dekker and van den Broek’s typology and its underlying dimensions help us understand variations in social capital between societies. Following the work of Robert D. Putnam (2000), there is widespread concern about the decline in civic engagement, trust and social connectedness in Western societies. These developments jeopardize the vitality of democracy. Putnam (2000) identifies the shift from active face-to-face engagement towards check book-engagement within the voluntary sector as a main reason for the decline in social capital in the US. Simultaneously, and in contrast to what should be expected in a “broad” voluntary sector characterized by widespread passivity, the Scandinavian countries score very high on most variables measuring levels of social capital, e.g. a high level of generalized trust (Rothstein and Stolle 2003a; Delhey and Newton 2004). This is a puzzle worth studying closer.

In this paper, then, we want to take a closer look at voluntary organizations as creators of social capital. Both the breadth and depth of the engagement within the voluntary sector – the underlying dimensions in Dekker and van den Broek’s typology – are important factors to analyze. What difference does it make whether the members are actively engaged in the organizations, or just passive members? And, is it possible that passive memberships in many organizations can compensate for active memberships in one or two? Hence, we want to look into:

1. The assumption that face-to-face interaction is more productive of social capital than is passive membership (the intensity issue).
2. The significance of multiple memberships (the scope issue).

The analysis proceeds at the aggregate as well as the individual level. What is the relationship between different types of organizational societies and resources of importance to democracy? The focus is primarily on the Scandinavian countries, which seem to present a paradox in Putnam’s theory of social capital development. What characterizes the Scandinavian third sector model in comparison to what is found in the rest of Europe? How does social capital and civic engagement in the Scandinavian countries stand in comparison with other nations? And are the Scandinavian countries as similar as is often presumed?

The data, which stem from the ESS CID-project (Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy), allows us to study in depth how participation within the voluntary sector differs cross-nationally in Europe. In addition to the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden, Norway), the data set includes countries from both Southern, Central and Eastern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, the Netherlands, West Germany, East Germany, Russia, Slovenia, Romania and Moldova). This rich data source allows us to study cross-national differences in voluntary participation, and how these differences are related to social capital and civic engagement.

In the next section we shall look at the expected relationship between social capital and engagement within the voluntary sector, before we discuss the special characteristics of the Scandinavian voluntary sector model in the third section, including the perspective presented by Dekker and van den Broek (1998). Data sources and indicators are presented in the fourth section. The fifth section contains a comparative analysis of the different European countries on the basis on the Dekker and van den Broek typology, focusing on differences in social

capital indicators between the countries. In the sixth section we use the Dekker and van den Broek perspective at the individual level, where we especially emphasize the interaction between affiliation and activity level. Finally, we discuss our results in the last section.

(2) The importance of voluntary organizations for the formation of social capital

In his ground breaking works about social capital, Robert D. Putnam (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000) call special attention to voluntary organizations as prime sources of social trust and civic engagement, i.e. social capital. Especially, he emphasizes the density of horizontal social relationships, arguing that these relationships generate social capital. These networks of civic engagement “increase the potential costs to a defector in any individual transaction, [...] foster robust norms of reciprocity, [...] facilitate communication and improve the flow of information about the trustworthiness of individuals, [...] embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a culturally-defined template for future collaboration” (Putnam 1993:173f.).

Likewise, in his more micro-oriented work on social capital in the US, Putnam (2000) is especially concerned about the decline in active memberships in voluntary associations – i.e. the kind of organizations which allow horizontal interaction and face-to-face contact between the members, and towards more passive forms of “belonging”. It is basically through interaction with people from different backgrounds that we learn to trust each other, and this, in Putnam’s view, requires face-to-face contact. “One distinctive feature of a social-capital-creating formal organization is that it includes local chapters in which members can meet one another” (Putnam 2000:51). Therefore, the loss of social capital resulting from the decline in membership based organizations in the US cannot be compensated for by growth in “tertiary” organizations (i.e. mailing list organizations), in which members do not interact personally (Putnam 1995a:70ff.; 1995b:666). Accordingly, Putnam basically dismisses passive membership as an important source of social capital

Putnam’s argument about association members being more trusting and more politically active and engaged is primarily the same conclusion as Almond and Verba draw in *The Civic Culture* (1963). However, Almond and Verba attached greater significance to passive memberships than Putnam does. In their classical study they found that passive members

displayed significant higher levels of civic competence than non-members, in addition to being more supportive of democratic norms and having a higher sense of political efficacy. In addition, Almond and Verba found the number of memberships held by an individual to affect civic competence. Hence, not only intensity (active vs. passive membership) but also the scope of the involvement in voluntary organizations may be important for the creation of social capital. Multiple affiliations ensure that most members belong to several and overlapping networks. Such overlapping membership between different organizations may be important for the development of social trust. A reason is that overlapping memberships entail crosscutting ties, which implies that one connect with people unlike oneself, i.e. the bridging form of social capital that Putnam (2000:22f.) finds most important. In addition to this *moderating effect* resulting from cross-pressure experienced through participation in multiple networks, a *cumulative factor* is probably also in effect as multiple affiliations simply mean more and broader linkages (Wollebæk and Selle 2003:71).

A reason why Putnam highlights face-to-face contact and horizontal relationships is that he is mainly preoccupied with the *socialization effect* of voluntary organizations. As Tocqueville also pointed out, associations “instill in their members habits of cooperation and public-spiritedness, as well as the practical skills necessary to partake in public life” (Putnam 2000:338). On the other hand, the organizations may also be important because they have an *institutionalization effect* (Wollebæk and Selle, 2005). An institutional approach rests on the argument that a strong organizational society may embed social capital and trust through people’s experience about how these civil society institutions function. Furthermore, a strong voluntary sector is important not only for those who are active within these organizations. In a strong organizational society, even non-members are aware of the opportunity to get involved in organizational activity or to contact organizations for assistance should the need arise. Finally, dense, overlapping and interlocking organizational networks create cross-pressures which have a moderating effect on tension and conflict – not only within the organizations but in society at large (op cit.). However, if the voluntary sector shall be able to play this role, it presupposes a special type of pluralistic and autonomous organizational society. This is mainly the kind of organizational society we find within the Scandinavian countries.

(3) The “broad” voluntary sector in Scandinavia

The voluntary sector in Norway, Sweden and Denmark have so many commonalities that it is frequently referred to as a Scandinavian third sector model (Klausen and Selle 1996). The Scandinavian countries are all thoroughly organized societies. Strong third sectors both in a numerical and political sense, evolved partly through common historical experiences. The voluntary sectors in Scandinavia emerged from broad and politically important social movements, and the development of modern Scandinavian society is closely linked to the growth of these social movements and the numerous associations and organizations in and around them (op. cit.). The strong mass movements in Scandinavia have also imprinted organizational structures, which are largely similar in the three countries. Since the late nineteenth century the bulk of voluntary organizations have been based on individual memberships, and the local branches have been the core of the organizational society. The same organizations are found at the local, regional and national levels – in contrast to the dual organizational society found many other places. However, changes within the voluntary sector in these countries, especially since the 1980s, have been in the direction of centralization, professionalization and specialization, and the local and national levels are increasingly leading separate lives (Wollebæk and Selle 2002; Selle and Strømsnes 1998).

The Scandinavian countries are furthermore all characterized by an encompassing and universal type of welfare state, in addition to relative high levels of income equality (Rothstein and Stolle 2003a; Kumlin and Rothstein 2005). The relationship between the voluntary and government sectors are characterized more by integration and collaboration than overt conflict. An inclusive state secured that these movements had influence on national politics, at the same time as they had strong local branches – thereby functioning as real mediating structures, linking individuals to the national political system. There is little to indicate that this has implied a loss in autonomy for the organizations. Rather, the open and inclusive political systems in these countries provide both autonomy and influence to the organizations. Voluntary organizations in the Scandinavian countries have a long tradition of internal organizational autonomy. Simultaneously, due to close relations between the state and voluntary organizations, the state is also influenced by the organizations (see e.g. Grendstad et al. 2006).

This federated organizational structure, the weight attached to individual membership and the democratic role of voluntary organizations all reflect the importance of their crucial *representative* function in Scandinavian democracy. The political origins of the voluntary sectors have resulted in structures designed to mediate effectively between citizens and polity. In this perspective, intense personal involvement and face to face contact is not the core of the issue; organizations may represent passive and active members alike. This contrasts with voluntary sectors less geared towards politics and democracy and more towards unpaid service delivery. Thus, a high proportion of passive membership is one of the main structural characteristics of the voluntary sector in Scandinavia (Wollebæk and Selle 2003; Selle and Strømsnes 2001). In Norway, for example, passive members outnumber volunteers by three to one (Wollebæk et al. 2000).

Dekker and van den Broek (1998, 2005) use two dimensions to distinguish between different types of civil society – membership of voluntary associations as the percentage of the population, and the percentage of volunteers among the members. Based on this they differentiate between three species of civil society – the parochial civil society, characterized by few members, but where a relatively high percentage of these members are participating as volunteers, the active civil society, characterized by a high proportion of members, as well as a high proportion of volunteers among the members, and lastly the broad civil society, which combines relatively high proportions of membership with modest proportions of volunteers among the members. They found the parochial pattern primarily in the Southern European countries, the active pattern in North America and the broad pattern primarily in the Scandinavian countries. West Germany and the Netherlands resembled the Scandinavian “broad” model more closely. The pattern found by Dekker and van den Broek (1998) is also mainly confirmed by Morales (2004), who finds both consistently higher percentages of associational membership, a higher tendency to join several associations, but a proportional lower level of active members in the Scandinavian countries, as well as the Netherlands.

Following Putnam, we should find lower levels of social capital in the “broad” voluntary sectors of Scandinavia than in more “active” sectors, as the level of face-to-face contact is relatively lower. However, according to Dekker and van den Broek (1998) both membership of an association and volunteering within an association were conducive to social cohesion and political democracy, a result confirmed by numerous studies from Almond and Verba (1963) to Wollebæk and Selle (2003). We will include both these elements in our analyses.

In addition, because the voluntary sector looks very different in different countries, its role in the formation of social capital may also vary across context. In the following analyses we will look both at differences between countries – to what degree the breadth of the organizational society and the proportion which are active have an effect on social capital and civic engagement, i.e. level of trust and political participation – and on the effect on social capital of differences in affiliation, intensity and scope of the involvement at the individual level.

(4) Data source and indicators

The data stem from the ESS CID-project (Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy). The data set consists of a total of 22,427 respondents from thirteen countries (where West- and East Germany are treated as different “countries”). The surveys were carried out in the period between 1999 and 2002.

Membership and activity in voluntary organizations were measured by asking respondents about their affiliation with and their participation in a range of different organizations. Active members are operationalized as those who have either participated in activities or undertaken voluntary (unpaid) work in the organization during the last year. The scope of the involvement is operationalized as the number of associations the respondents are affiliated with through membership, participation or work in the organization.

Social capital and civic engagement are measured in terms of social trust and political participation. Social trust is operationalized by using three self-placement scales (0-10) consisting of contradictory statements about trust in other people: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”, “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?” and “Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance or would they try to be fair?”. The variable used in the analysis results from a factor analysis including the three variables requesting a one-factor solution. The one-factor solution captures 73 per cent of the variables’ variation and the reliability of the three items is .81 (Cronbach’s alpha).

To measure political participation we construct an index based on 15 questions about participation in different activities in an attempt to bring about improvements or counteract deterioration in society.¹ We use an additive index with theoretical scores ranging from 0 to 15. The reliability of the index is .80.

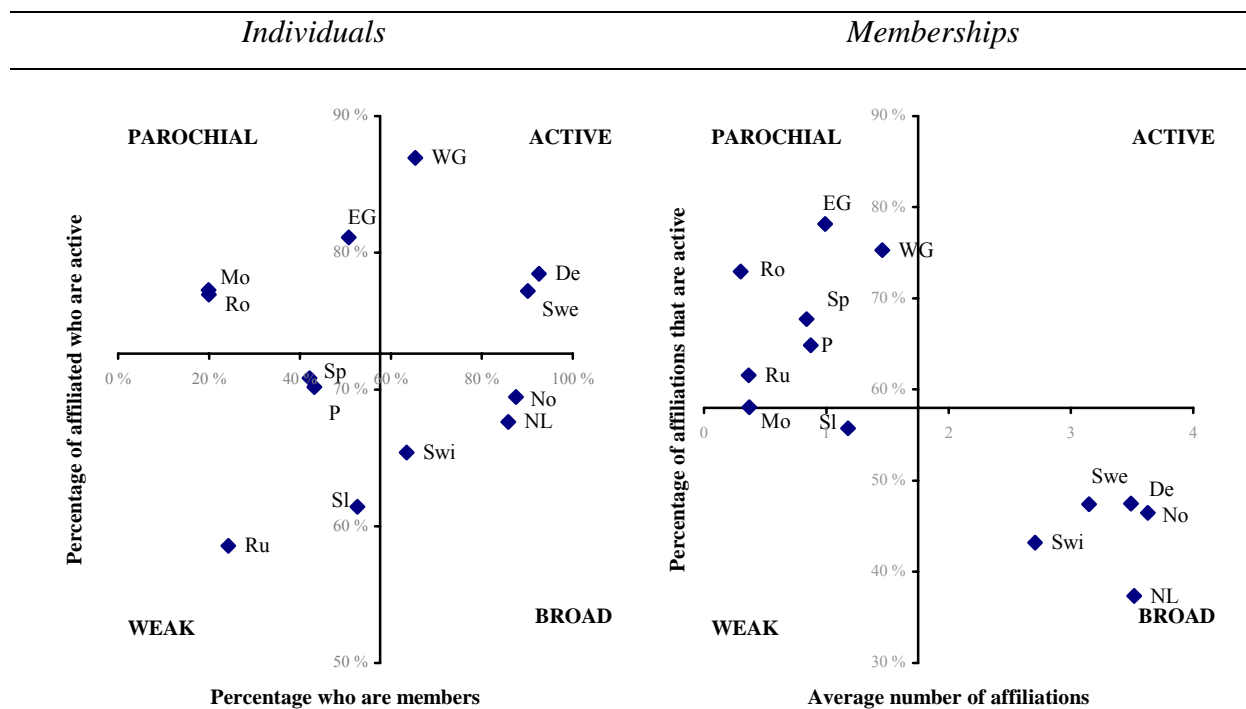
As control variables we include gender, years of education, year of birth, TV-hours and place of residence (rural-urban), which are all ascribed more or less central roles in accounting for variations in social capital by Putnam (2000).

(5) Differences between countries

This section gives an overview of the cross-national differences in involvement in voluntary organizations, as well as a comparative analysis of differences in social capital indicators between countries. We start by looking at how the 13 countries included in our study fit in with Dekker and van den Broek's classification. Figure 1 presents two alternative perspectives on this typology. The graph to the left takes *individuals* as point of departure. The percentages who are members in at least one voluntary organization are shown on the x-axis and the percentage of active affiliations among those who are members on the y-axis. The graph to the right in figure 1 shows how this picture changes if we take into account that one individual may hold several *memberships*. The x-axis here represents number of memberships held, while the y-axis shows the proportion of these memberships that are active. The axes in the figures cross at the weighted mean value of each dimension, thus giving an indication of whether each country scores above or below the average.

¹ These activities are: contacted a politician, contacted a civil servant on the national, regional or local level, worn or displayed campaign badge/sticker, signed a petition, taken part in a public demonstration, taken part in strike, boycotted certain products, deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons, donated money, raised funds, contacted or appeared in the media, contacted solicitor or judicial body, participated in illegal protest activities, attended a political meeting or rally and other activity.

Figure 1: Classification of voluntary sectors according to Dekker and van den Broek's typology.



In broad outline, our analysis confirms the pattern found by Dekker and van den Broek (1998). West Germany is the closest approximation of the ideal typical active voluntary sector. In West Germany passive memberships hardly exist. Almost 90 per cent of persons affiliated with organizations take part in activities or volunteer. The proportion of the population affiliated with organizations in West Germany is close to that of Switzerland, but there are an incomparably lower number of passive affiliations in West Germany. However, taking into account memberships as well as individuals, it becomes clear that the scope of participation in West Germany is much narrower than in Scandinavia and in the Netherlands. Germans are generally more intensely tied to fewer organizations.

The Scandinavian countries approximate a “broad” model as expected, but their placement in this category is not entirely unequivocal. The proportion of members who take actively part is in fact higher in Sweden and Denmark than in most other countries. Norway has slightly lower activity rates than is found in Sweden and Denmark. Their “broad” character becomes clearer when studying memberships rather than individuals. In all three countries individuals

hold in excess of three organizational affiliations each, and the majority of these affiliations entail no active participation whatsoever.

However, the most typical example of the broad voluntary sector is located outside Scandinavia. The Netherlands displays a very high number of per capita affiliations, the majority of which are passive. Switzerland is also an example of a country with a broad voluntary sector, even though there are fewer members here compared to the Netherlands and Scandinavia.

The parochial civil society is most typically found in Southern and Eastern Europe. The most typical examples are Moldova and Romania, but East Germany, Portugal and Spain also approximate the model. In these countries a much lower percentage of the population are members in voluntary associations, but there is a rather high percentage of active memberships.

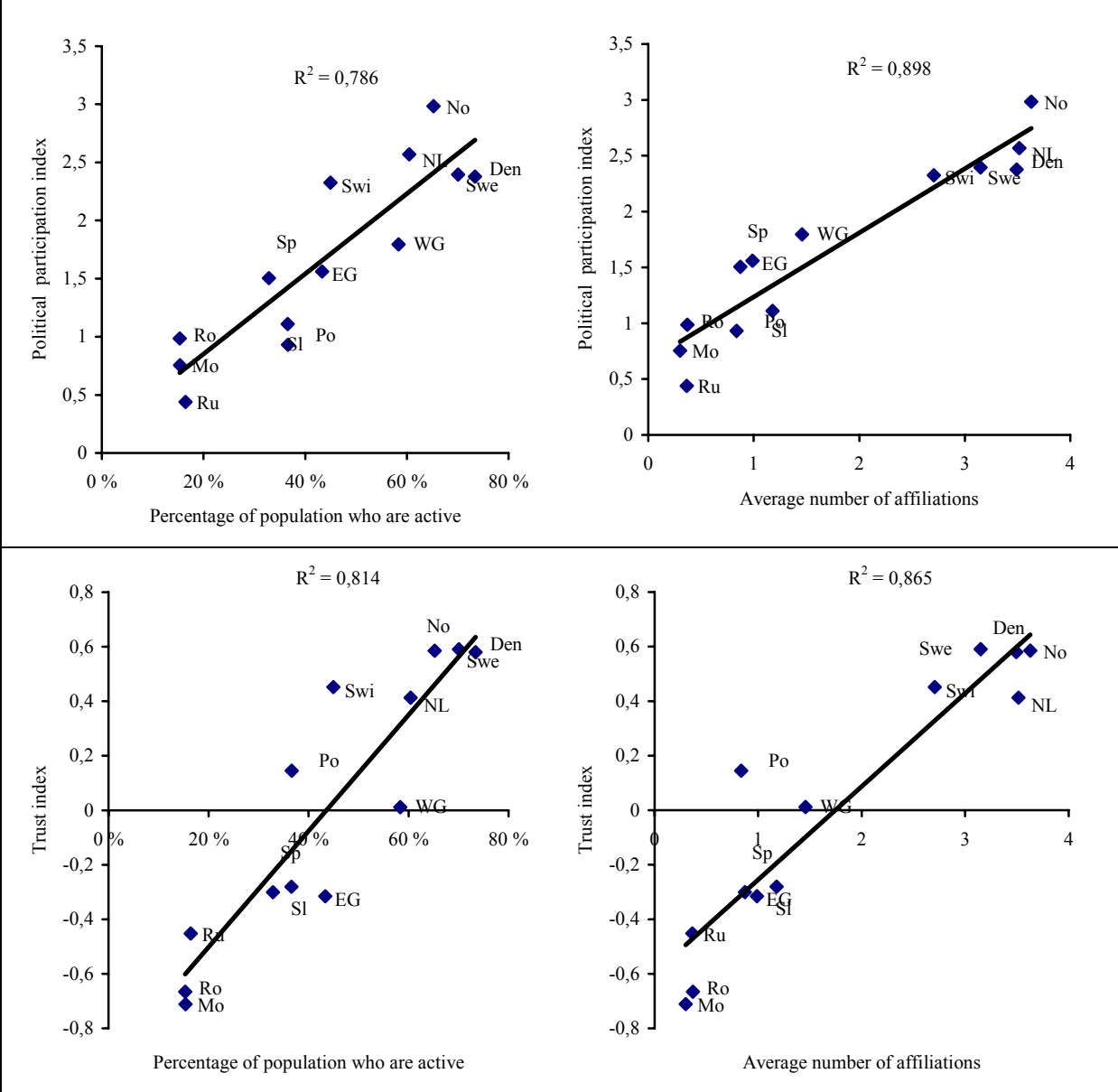
The most typical example of a weak organizational society is found in Russia. In addition, Slovenia falls into this category, both when analyzing individuals and memberships. The proportion of the population affiliated with organizations is low, albeit higher than in the “parochial” voluntary sectors of Romania and Moldova, and members are more frequently passive than in most parts of Southern and Eastern Europe.

When it comes to differences between the Scandinavian countries, we found that Norway had somewhat lower percentages who are members and noticeably lower activity rates among those affiliated. On the other hand, we found more cross-cutting memberships than in Sweden and Denmark, i.e. more affiliations on somewhat fewer hands. Thus, Norway stands out as the most typically “broad” voluntary sector in Scandinavia, while Sweden and Denmark display characteristics of the “active” model. However, the communalities between the participation patterns in the three countries are much stronger than the differences. Based on the two dimensions used in figure 1 it is not unreasonable to talk about a distinct Scandinavian model of voluntary participation.

What is the relationship between these characteristics of organizational society and resources of importance to democracy (political participation, and trust)? And which of the two dimensions in the typology – scope and intensity – is more closely related to social capital and

civic engagement, and how? We select the proportion of active participants in the countries' population as indicator of intensity, and the average number of affiliations held as indicator of scope.

Figure 2: Intensity and scope, and trust and political participation at the aggregate level.



NOTE: The trust index is represented by z-scores extracted from a one-factor solution including the variables described in section 4. The political participation index is an additive index where the performance of any one of 15 different actions gives one additional point on the scale.

The interpretation of these results is not straightforward. The measures are strongly intercorrelated and encompass some of the same variance; for example, the countries with a high proportion of members in the population are naturally more likely to have also a high

proportion of *active* members. The low number of observations further complicates rigorous statistical control.

Bearing these limitations in mind, the correspondence between scope on the one hand and trust and civic engagement on the other is clearly stronger than the relationship between intensity and measures of social capital. This indicates that the scope (breadth of organizational society) of a sector is a more important predictor of levels of social capital than its intensity (proportion that is active).

The correspondence between the scope of the sector, trust and political participation is remarkable. When it comes to trust, we find a perfect fit with one outlier (Portugal). If Portugal is removed from the analysis, $R^2=.95$. With regard to political participation, the scope of the sector “explains” 89 per cent of the variation.

Thus, we do find a clear effect of breadth of organizational society; i.e. a clear difference between parochial vs. active and weak vs. broad organizational society. The five broad organizational societies stand out with the highest values on both indicators (table 1).

Table 1: Trust and political participation by placement in Dekker and van den Broek typology. European countries.

	<i>Low scope</i>		<i>High scope</i>			
	Trust	Political participation	Trust	Political participation		
<i>High intensity</i>	Parochial		Active			
	Moldova	-0.67	1.16	W. Germany	0.01	2.22
	Romania	-0.71	0.88			
	East Germany	-0.32	1.91			
	Portugal	0.15	1.28			
	Spain	-0.30	1.90			
<i>Low intensity</i>	Weak		Broad			
	Russia	-0.45	0.51	Netherlands	0.41	3.28
	Slovenia	-0.28	1.36	Switzerland	0.45	2.76
				Norway	0.59	3.63
				Sweden	0.59	2.78
				Denmark	0.58	2.92

On the other hand, we find no systematic differences between active and broad and between parochial and weak voluntary sectors. The “active” West German organizational society, in which a lot of face to face contact in horizontal networks is taking place, but passive memberships hardly exist and multiple memberships occur infrequently, score lower on both participation and trust than any of the “broad” sectors. Russia and Slovenia, which are examples of “weak” voluntary sectors, display scores on social trust that are higher than “parochial societies” Romania and Moldova, and on par with East Germany and Spain.

We also find some inconsistencies when we look at other countries: Sweden and Denmark do not consistently display higher levels of trust and civic engagement than Norway and the Netherlands, as their somewhat higher activity levels would suggest. Slovenia and Spain have relatively similar values on all indices, although members in Spain are much more active. However, the high level of trust in Portugal gives some support to the activity hypothesis. Switzerland has a higher score than West Germany on all indicators, although a larger proportion of the population is active in the latter country while the proportion of members in the population is identical in the two countries.

In sum, the scope of the voluntary sector – that is, the number of memberships held and the proportion of the population which is involved – appears more important than activity level for the aggregate level of social capital and civic engagement.

(6) Individual level

In table 2 we analyze the data on individual level (OLS Regression, standardized coefficients). We use country dummies as control variables. As it is possible that activity works differently if tied to one or several networks, we introduce an interaction term between affiliation and activity level. This allows us to get at “parochial” and “broad” at the individual level (categories in opposite diagonal). Slovenia is excluded from the regression as education, an important control variable, is lacking from the data set. West Germany is baseline for the country dummies.

Table 2: OLS Regression of trust and political participation

	All respondents		Only respondents with organizational affiliations			
	Trust	Political participation	Trust		Political participation	
Organizational affiliation						
Affiliated	.07**	.21**				
Intensity (0-1)			.04**	.05**	.06**	.002
Scope (log(no. of affiliations))			.09**	.09**	.36**	.23**
Interaction (intensity*scope)				-.01		.17**
Control variables						
Female	.03**	-.001	.06**	.06**	.007	.008
Years of education	.10**	.21**	.09**	.09**	.19**	.18**
Year of birth	-.07**	.002	-.09**	-.09**	.05**	.04**
TV hours	-.04**	-.05**	-.05**	-.05**	-.05**	-.05**
Rural-urban	.03**	.01	.01	.02	-.008	-.008
Country						
Switzerland	.09**	.05**	.08**	.08**	-.03**	-.03**
Russia	-.10**	-.11**	-.08**	-.08**	-.07**	-.07**
Portugal	.09**	-.03**	.06**	.06**	-.005	-.005
Denmark	.15**	.03**	.15**	.15**	-.08**	-.08**
E-Germany	-.08**	-.002	-.11**	-.11**	.02	.02
Netherlands	.11**	.07**	.09**	.09**	-.009	-.008
Norway	.15**	.12**	.15**	.15**	.04**	.04**
Romania	-.17**	-.05**	-.14**	-.14**	.001	.001
Moldova	-.16**	-.04**	-.11**	-.11**	.01	.01
Spain	-.06**	.006	-.07**	-.07**	.03**	.03**
Sweden	.16**	.04**	.16**	.16**	-.05**	-.05**
R2	.24	.22	.21	.21	.21	.22
N	18088	18201	11121	11121	11032	11032

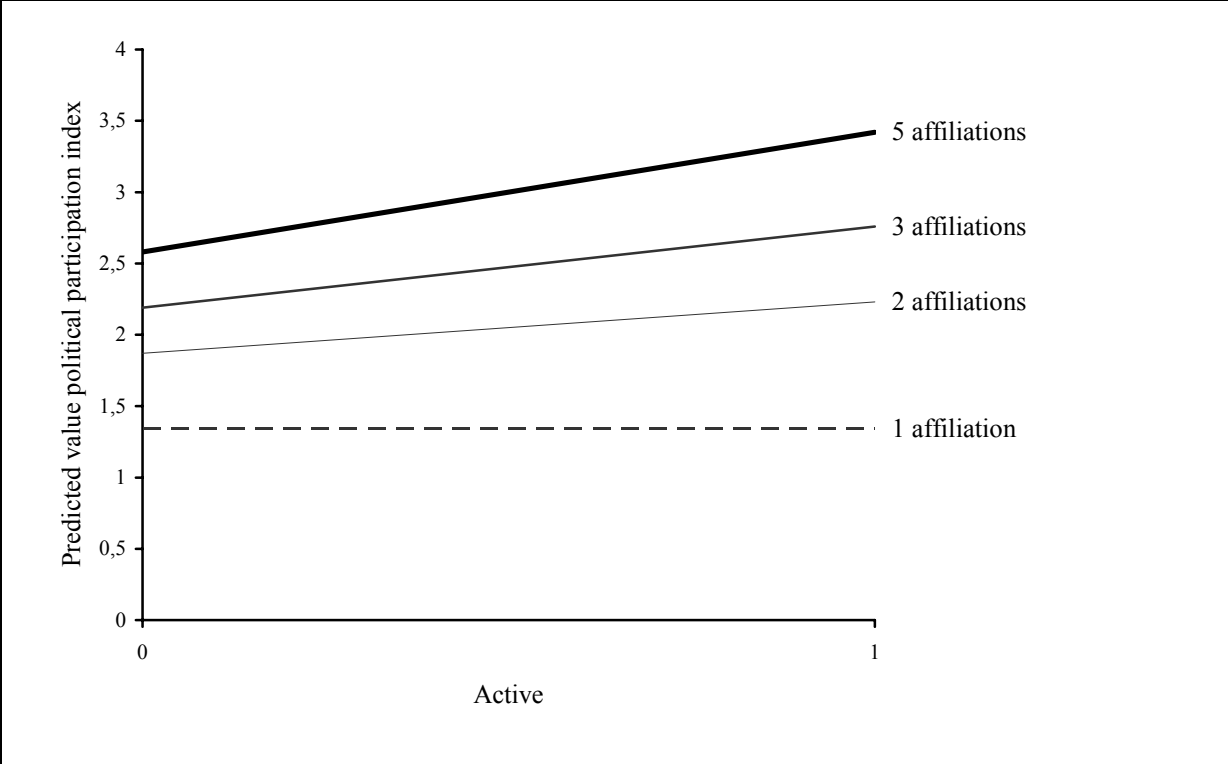
NOTE: The logarithmic transformation of number of affiliations is used as indicator of scope as it is assumed that the marginal contribution of each additional affiliation decreases with number of affiliations. The countries are all attributed the same weight in the analysis.

** p ≤ .01. * p ≤ .05.

The analysis shows that affiliation with organizations is related to levels of trust and political participation. The link with trust is weaker than with participation. We find very little additional effect of activity (subset of only respondents with organizational affiliations). The relationship between intensity and trust is significant only because of an extremely large sample. Scope has a somewhat stronger effect than intensity on trust. Adding an interaction term does not increase the explanatory power of the model.

While the effect of multiple affiliations on trust was modest, its impact on political participation is very strong. Again, activity level appears virtually irrelevant. When we look at the interplay between intensity/scope and political participation, however, we find that it is “parochial” participation, notwithstanding its active character, which has little or no effect on political engagement. Being active has no effect on political participation if connected only to one network, but a positive effect if connected to more than two (see figure 3). It should however be noted that the individuals that are counted as “active” with several affiliations usually have a mixture of connections to several networks of varying intensity.

Figure 3: Intensity, scope, and political participation. Predicted values from OLS regression.



Taking actively part in organizations increases the chances of political participation if one is connected to several networks, while the increased face-to-face contact has no effect among those with fewer linkages. This supports e.g. Eliasoph (2003), who finds that intense integration into narrow networks does little to foster political involvement – rather it may be a vehicle for civic apathy and withdrawal from politics.

The main finding is that activity level in the organization is not very relevant for civic engagement, and that the number of affiliations is much more important than the activity level. Ties to multiple networks of influence are more important for political participation than face to face meetings. Face to face contact primarily increases the political activity level among those already likely to have high levels of political activity.

It is also worth noting that we find almost no effect of hours spent watching TV, which is one of the main culprits in Putnam's (1995b, 2000) social capital mystery. Also, his theses of a generationally based decline in social capital and the virtues of rural areas over (sub)urbia find very little support. The only control variable with any effects on trust and political participation is, as usual, education. But not even this consistent predictor of social capital can compete with the explanatory power of multiple memberships.

(7) Conclusions

The analyses in this paper allow us to draw the following conclusions:

Firstly, it was demonstrated that there are strong communalities between the participation patterns in the Scandinavian countries. Norway, Sweden and Denmark all have voluntary sectors based on extensive, individual memberships, the majority of which are passive in nature. This model may be traced back to, firstly, the historical strength of popular mass movements in these countries, which served to connect individuals in local communities to political processes by means of representative structures. Secondly, the strong welfare states resulted in relatively weak service-delivery role of voluntary associations. However, the model is not entirely *distinct*; the same patterns are found in the Netherlands and in Switzerland. The label of a "broad" voluntary sector characterized by extensive memberships and moderate activity levels fits all five countries. The Scandinavian model can be seen as a subset of the larger category of "broad" voluntary sectors.

Secondly, countries with broad voluntary sectors scored consistently higher on measures of social capital and civic engagement than societies with other models of participation. However, Dekker and van den Broek's typology, based on the two dimensions scope and

intensity, did not prove extremely useful in analyzing differences in social capital and civic engagement. The intensity-dimension failed to distinguish clearly both between countries and individuals. Both at the individual and the aggregate level, a single dimension, namely scope of organizational linkages, appears to be sufficient.

Thirdly, broad scope – i.e. affiliation with several networks – did have an effect both on trust and civic engagement. However, the relationship on the individual level is much more tenuous than on the aggregate level. The weak effect of organizational participation on social capital on the individual level, and especially the absent effect of face to face contact have been confirmed by a number of studies (Freitag 2003; Mayer 2003; Dekker and van den Broek 1998; Wollebæk and Selle 2003; Stolle 2001). This suggests that the relationship on aggregate level is spurious and that the mechanisms of social capital construction is institutional (macro), not socialization (micro). The first argument is forcefully put forward by Rothstein and Stolle (Rothstein 2002; 2004; Rothstein and Stolle 2003a; 2003b), who argue that the role of associations is exaggerated in the social capital literature. Instead, it is claimed, we should divert our attention towards the role of public policy and how institutions function.

We agree with the institutional gist of this argument and certainly support the notion that organizations are not the only, and perhaps not even the most important independent variable in the analysis of the creation and destruction of social capital. However, we believe discarding the role of associations is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Instead, we would argue that it is possible to retain a pivotal role of associations in the formation of social capital without reverting to a pure micro-logic of individual socialization. An alternative interpretation is that organizations *institutionalize* rather than generate social capital. By virtue of their omnipresence in a well-developed organizational society, they continually demonstrate the rationality and utility of collective action. By choosing structures and purposes that enable them to play a political role *vis á vis* the government and other power arenas they represent a *democratic infrastructure* (Almond and Verba 1963). By creating institutional linkages between individuals of different values and convictions, they create cross-pressures and moderate overt conflict (Rokkan 1967). By the references, it is clear that these are not new ideas; rather they represent crucial insights from classical political theory which have faded into the background with the emergence of the predominantly micro-oriented social capital paradigm.

If we shift our attention from micro-oriented socialization effects towards institutional arguments about the importance of voluntary associations in democracy, other virtues of associations than the amount of face-to-face contact become more important. Rather than focusing on bowling leagues or picnics, we would argue that organizations that are visible, link localities and engage in politics are the most important institutions in conserving social capital and maintaining a belief that getting involved may indeed bear fruits.

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