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More Participation, Happier Society? A Comparative Study of Civil Society and the Quality of Life

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Abstract A 'good society' has recently been portrayed as one in which citizens engage in voluntary associations to foster democratic processes. Arguably, such a good society is considered as one where people are content with their own lives as well as public life. We consider whether participation in civil society leads to more satisfied individuals on the one hand and a better evaluation of society at a country level on the other. With data from the first round of the European Social Survey, we illustrate that participation in voluntary associations not only depends on individual characteristics, but that there is a clear country-level effect on civil society. This can be explained with measures of quality of society after socio-demographic determinants have been controlled for. Nonetheless, it remains difficult to say what comes first: a 'good society' or a thriving civil society.

Keywords Subjective well-being · Quality of life · Satisfaction · Happiness · Quality of society · Good society · Participation in society · Voluntary associations · Civil society · European Social Survey · Multilevel analysis · Cross-national survey research

1 Introduction

Participation in civil society is assumed to lead to a better quality of life. Putnam has pointed to higher levels of democracy and others have indicated that wealth, health and education are all improved through more participation (Field 2003; Fukuyama 2000;

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Halpern 2005; Putnam 2000). Indeed, the European Commission have made participation a main plank of their policy initiatives, assuming that this should lead to a better quality of life in European societies. Whilst the mechanisms by which this takes place are not always clear, the general improvement in social well-being through high participation is taken as a given. In this paper we want to look empirically at the consequences of civic participation for quality of life first of all by asking whether this is the case at an individual level: are people who participate in civil society happier individuals? We go on to look at well-being at the level of society: does participation in civil society lead to a better society as a whole?

We begin with a critical look at civil society and quality of life in general in order to understand how these concepts are constructed and how they can be operationalised. We then go on to construct an empirical picture of civic participation and the quality of life in different European countries using a variety of measures from the European Social Survey 2002/2003. At the next stage of analysis we look at the effects of participation in civil society first of all on individual subjective well-being and then on the quality of society as a whole. In this way we can test if it is indeed the case that participation in civil society can lead to either happier individuals or a better society or both of these things. However, these two levels of well-being do not necessarily coincide. It could be that although participation enhances individual well-being it does not make much impact on society as a whole. For example, participation in some associations could be a way of promoting particular groups at the expense of general welfare among all members of society (cf. Olson 1982). Clubs that discriminate against women or particular ethnic minorities would be a case in point. On the other hand, the level of well-being in the society might be more than what we would expect from the level of participation. Therefore we need to ask whether the benefits for society as a whole go beyond the benefits at the individual level and if so, what it is about particular societies that encourages these characteristics of societal quality.

2 Civil Society and Civic Participation

Participation can take many forms, but the link to societal quality comes about, it is argued, because participation is an essential aspect of civil society. De Tocqueville (1840/1969) famously identified civil society as an important element of US-American democracy, encouraging people to think about the interests of their communities and not about just themselves or their families. Civil society therefore has to be kept alive by a tradition of participation in associational life and it is this that fosters social cohesion. Whilst some have seen this as taking place outside—or even against—the state (Cohen and Arato 1992), in many European countries it is clear that civil society is often a different arm of the state as it is used for the delivery of various social services (and in fact this is also the case in the USA) (Evers and Lavalle 2004).

The usual indication of how vibrant this kind of participation in civil society might be is the level of participation in associational life. Associations represent a level of community that is beyond the individual but below government and can be used as a basis for mobilisation of various interests that may or may not take political forms. This rather limited notion civil society does not take into account participation that might be outside of associational life (as much political participation does in the age of network communication) nor does it take into account other organisational forms that do not require "joining" or becoming a member. Furthermore, it is not clear in this discussion if all associations are similar with respect to civil society. For example, participation in a human rights organisation or in a political party has the purpose of changing or improving society. But is

participation in a football team the equivalent? Nor is it always clear how active a person has to be in order to contribute to civil society. Just paying a membership fee every year does not necessarily lead to active participation in civil society. But does donating to an organisation mean a more active commitment? What degree of participation is necessary to foster well-being? And in what associations does participation matter the most? Despite these limitations, the number of associations in a given society or the number of participants is usually taken as a crude measure of the expansion of civil society more generally (Anheier 2004).

Robert Putnam has been one of the most influential proponents of the idea of participation leading to a better democracy and a better society (Putnam 2000). Yet, he includes in this definition participation in choirs, bowling clubs and even dinner parties. He claims that this has an indirect influence on democracy as people learn to be citizens and engage in face-to-face interaction with others. This perspective dismisses the effect of virtual communities and virtual participation through the internet and therefore misses an important element of modern democratic participation. Further to this, it is not clear whether participation in *any* type of association can really enhance democratic rules and promotes a better society or whether participation in some types is more important than in others. Therefore, it is not clear what constitutes civil society, but participation in public life through civic associations is usually seen as a key indicator.

The many debates generally assume that civil society is necessary for a good society to thrive. However, the mechanisms through which this takes place are left vague and unformulated. Why should participation in associational life bring with it a better society as a whole? Is it really the case that this kind of individual level activity would lead to aggregate improvements in the quality of society? When looking at Europe in a cross-national perspective we also have to take into account that associational life and participation in it can take very different forms in different regions. In some parts of Europe, for example, trade unions or churches play a particular role, which leads some social theorists to leave out these kinds of associations when carrying out cross-national research. We have kept them in the analysis in order to explore what sorts of people participate in these organisations in different countries. We also have to take into account that both the number of associations as well as the level of participation in associational life is weak in Southern and Eastern Europe where former authoritarian regimes have crushed civil society and it has only recently been reviving once more (Howard 2003). In these countries, other forms of social cohesion, such as those of family or friends are preferred (Pichler and Wallace 2007). Interestingly, the size of civil society and the spread of civic participation are also the consequence of political decisions to some extent. For instance, the European Union seizes upon the idea of active participation in civil society as a new form of citizenship (e.g. Fuller et al. 2008) to foster democratic governance (Hoskins and Mascherini 2008). Different countries could then differently respond to these new policies and thus 'implement' civil society in various ways and to different degrees. We are therefore concerned to look at whether participation leads to greater satisfaction and personal fulfilment everywhere or whether there are differences across countries. However, first we need to look at what is meant by quality of life and quality of society.

3 Does Quality of Society Matter?

Quality of life has become a major research field in sociology, political science, economics and psychology (Fahey et al. 2004; Phillips 2006). Since the concept derives originally from psychology, it has been operationalised mainly in terms of individual subjective well-being

which is measured by questions about happiness or life satisfaction (Diener and Suh 1997; Veenhoven 2000, 2005). For economists, this is measured in terms of individual well-being extrapolated to the society as a whole (Oswald 1997). Sociologists have tried to develop measures of more societal aspects of well-being by looking at satisfaction in a range of social domains such as work, housing, social relationships and so on or by combining subjective and objective measures (Alber et al. 2008; Noll 2002). Hence, well-being usually refers to individual indicators and quality of life is a rather more encompassing term referring to a range of aggregate and objective indicators trying to measure society as a whole.

Arguably, levels of satisfaction and happiness are not the only way to assess quality of life. Since Durkheim's (1897/1951) study on the causes of suicide, sociology is committed to understanding what represents a 'good society' in more objective terms. A number of commentators have presented such alternatives, which often encapsulate the societal dimension of quality of life. This is captured by the attempts to objectively describe societies according to the degree to which they provide a necessary framework for individual development (for instance, Berger-Schmitt 2000; Delhey et al. 2002). In this respect, the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) has become an often cited indicator, which compares countries and assesses them according to their 'performance' in the economy, health and education. Other approaches attempt to integrate subjective and objective, individual and societal concepts of the quality of life and create a broader approach of human needs (e.g. Doyal and Gough 1991) or social quality (Beck et al. 2001). Similarly, Nussbaum and Sen's (1993) capabilities approach is concerned with the interrelations between what people do just to survive (functioning) and what they might be able to do (capabilities) if they had the choice.

We would expect a 'good society' to be one where citizens have faith in public life and public institutions. Hence, we would expect them to rate the government as well as public institutions such as the education system and health systems, rather highly. Finally, it is possible that they would have faith in the economy and democracy more generally. Therefore, satisfaction with these and other institutions might be an indicator of a good society. In addition, we can look at the general levels of satisfaction with life and/or happiness in a given society and we might expect that high levels of participation might be associated with the 'good society' if this is one way of affecting change to reflect the needs and desires of citizens. On the other hand, good societies might be ones where people feel able to participate because their other more urgent needs in terms of subsistence are taken care of (Maslow 1954). Hence, needs such as belonging and love, esteem and self-actualisation become more important once immediate physiological and safety needs are met—that is, in more affluent societies (Hagerty 1999). Others have argued that it is the level of modernisation more generally that might influence the extent to which the society is perceived as good (Bulmahn 2000).

Nevertheless, we have to differentiate between various levels at which civil society and the quality of society work. First, we can take into account the relationship between participation in civil society and subjective satisfaction. Does helping out in society or taking part in civic associations make us happier? There are a number of arguments to suggest that it should. At an individual level, Durkheim's theories suggest that anomie results from a lack of connection between the individual and their society. Participation in civil society is one possible way in which anomie could be avoided by offering social connection. It provides one form of social inclusion in the society more generally and therefore ways of avoiding social exclusion. Second, social capital theorists have argued that participation in civil society provides bridging social capital, which can offer help with problems in life such as finding a job, through offering access to social networks which link

different levels of society and different networks of people (Granovetter 1973; Lin 2001). In addition to these instrumentally useful connections, participation in civil society can offer the possibility of friendship and more affective ties, something which is arguably increasingly important in our atomised modern world (Pahl 2000). Moreover, many people participate in civil society because they follow a particular enthusiasm which is important for them (for example a sport) or because they feel they want to contribute to society and perhaps improve the world around them (for example by participating in a charity or social movement). These kinds of enthusiasms and commitments are aspects of life that can lead to self-actualisation in a Maslowian sense. Finally, another reason for participating in civil society at an individual level could be the importance of the 'gift relationship' or the act of altruistic giving (of time, money, enthusiasm) which is in itself rewarding and which, as Titmuss (1997) has argued, is the basis of the solidarity of the welfare state. This could also be seen as a form of personal fulfilment.

Alternatively, satisfaction could be measured at a more global or societal level. Does the level of participation in aggregate lead to happier societies in aggregate and greater satisfaction with the way in which society works? On this note, the level of engagement in voluntary associations could be related to measures of the good society more generally. Whilst participation in society at an individual level could be seen as an aspect of social integration, i.e. a way of integrating the individual into their society through a range of social and associational bonds (Lookwood 1964), participation at an aggregate level, that is, the number of people participating in a society in general, could be regarded as an aspect of system integration since it is a way of linking the individual with political and social forces that regulate society or lead to social change (Hoskins and Mascherini 2008; Putnam 2000). This understanding of system integration would rely on an infrastructure for civil society associations found in particular national environments. We would indeed expect social integration and system integration to be linked to one another (Archer 1996). This is in line with current efforts to strengthen civic activism in various forms as a means to improve, for instance, democratic governance, system integration, and the quality of society. Following from that, it becomes evident that civil society and quality of society could relate to each other and we examine this link in the following sections empirically. Furthermore, we try to disentangle the associations between levels of civic society participation and the quality of life/society by including other factors, such as economic standing (GDP) or the type of welfare regime. We therefore test two hypotheses and examine a number of potential causes behind them.

1. That participation in civic life leads to greater personal happiness and satisfaction at an individual level.
2. That the aggregate level of participation in the society leads to greater satisfaction in the society in general.

4 Data and Methods

This study uses data from the first round of the European Social Survey (Jowell and the Central Coordinating Team 2004). The European Social Survey is an academically-driven social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. It involves strict random probability samples, a minimum target response rate of 70 per cent as well as rigorous translation protocols. The first round of the ESS was fielded in 22

European countries. Because of missing data on some of the indicators in some countries, this analysis will be restricted to 19 countries.[1]

4.1 Measures of Civic Participation

One module in the one-hour-long questionnaire incorporated a large number of questions about activities within 12 different types of voluntary associations. These are: (1) sports club or club for out-door activities; (2) an organisation for cultural or hobby activities; (3) a trade union; (4) a business, professional, or farmers' organisation; (5) a consumer or automobile organisation; (6) an organisation for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, or immigrants; (7) an organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights; (8) a religious or church organisation; (9) a political party; (10) an organisation for science, education or teachers and parents; (11) a social club, club for the young, the retired/elderly, women, or friendly societies; and (12) any other voluntary organisation such as the ones just mentioned. The respondents, approximately 2,000 per country, were asked whether they are members of, participated in, donated money to or voluntarily worked for these types of organisations.

Previous research has shown that levels of participation in voluntary associations are generally low (Pichler and Wallace 2007). Here we propose to look at all the types of participation that we have available in order to better understand what effect the inclusion/exclusion of different kinds of association might have. In the following, we will distinguish between people not participating, simple members and those people who are 'more than a member'. As for the latter, being 'more than a member' could refer to a higher level of commitment (e.g. being a voluntary worker) or to a more extensive form of engagement (e.g. being a participating donor). In most of the cases, this three-fold distinction yields sufficiently high case numbers for further analysis. Respondents who do not participate in the type of association score 0, those who are only a member score 1 and those who are 'more than a member' score 2.

In order to arrive at an 'overall' measure of civic participation in voluntary associations we propose to count the number of involvements in 12 types of associations. That is, for each individual we add up the form of participation within 12 types of voluntary associations. This yields an overall count index of civic participation ranging from 0 (no participation at all) to 24 ('more than a member' in every of the 12 types of voluntary organisations). Counting participation in any type of voluntary association comes closest to a Putnamian understanding of associational life and its benefits for society and democracy. However, on a more cautious note, we also run separate analyses for single types of voluntary associations and compare the results in order to comment on potential differences in how levels of participation are affected by our controls and in turn affect quality of life.[2]

[1] These countries are: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), United Kingdom (UK), Greece (EL), Hungary (HU), Israel (IL), Italy (IT), Luxembourg (LU), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Sweden (SE) and Slovenia (SI). Switzerland and Czech Republic are excluded because of missing data on measures of participation in voluntary associations. Ireland is excluded because of missing data on indicators on levels of satisfaction with the government.

[2] The results of these more detailed analyses are available from the authors upon request. For the analyses of participation in single types of voluntary associations we use hierarchical logistic regression models. Though our single variables principally distinguish between weaker and stronger forms of engagement, we have re-categorised our dependent single variables. This yields binary variables in the case of single types of voluntary associations which differentiate between 'no participation' on the one hand and 'any form of participation' on the other. Generally speaking, results are robust with the notable exceptions concerning participation in some types of voluntary associations (see text).

4.2 Measures of Quality of Life

Quality of life in survey research is usually captured by indicators of general subjective well-being. The ESS I includes a number of measures of subjective well-being which are (1) overall life satisfaction and (2) overall happiness. We argue that these indicators capture the individual component of the 'good society', where citizens are supposed to be satisfied and happy with their own lives. In addition, the ESS comprises a number of satisfaction scales on (3) the present state of the economy in the country, (4) the way the national government is doing the job, and (5) the way democracy works in the country. Furthermore, respondents have been asked about their evaluation of (6) the state of education in the country, and (7) the state of health services in the country. Arguably, this is an evaluation of system integration and illustrates whether people are content with the way it works. A 'good society' is then characterised by high levels of satisfaction with its institutions and how they work.

Questions on 1–5 can be answered using a scale of 0–10, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 extremely satisfied. Evaluations of the state of education and health services also have an 11-point response scale, ranging from 0 'extremely bad' to 10 'extremely good'. These indicators can be taken separately or jointly as measures of the quality of life in both individual and societal perspectives (see below).

4.3 Methods

First, we examine the links between participation in voluntary associations and their individual-level determinants. The dependent variable, that is, the count index of civic participation, is a composite variable which records in how many types of voluntary associations our respondents engage. Stronger forms of participation ('being more than a member') have a stronger weight in this count variable. Because of this nature of the data, we use Poisson regression models instead of referring to a normally distributed linear regression model.[3] We explain participation in voluntary associations by gender, age, education, work status, occupational status and domicile using multilevel models. Multilevel models generally help separate determinants of civic participation (and other dependent variables) and the sources of variation at various levels. In our analysis, we are therefore able to separate individual-level determinants of participation from country-level effects on it. This initial step helps us to reveal the individual-level mechanisms in civic participation but it also allows us to clearly separate the effects of socio-demographics on participation in civil society from country-level sources of variation in participation rates.

We then look at how participation in civic associations affects quality of life at an individual level. Using multilevel models again, we examine whether and to what extent participation impacts on various measures of the good life. The latter include levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and a number of scales on satisfaction with state institutions. We also briefly address the possibility of common measures of the quality of life

[3] We have also considered zero-inflated and zero-modified Poisson regression models. Whilst the former model takes into account the larger number of zeros in the dependent variable, the latter model differentiates between two dependent variables: (a) a dichotomous variable differentiating between those people who do not participate at all and those who do participate (at least to a very small extent) in civil society and (b) a count variable which examines how much participants actually participate in voluntary associations. Because the results of all three models are very similar, we do not present them here. However, we briefly comment on the most interesting differences when interpreting the results of our Poisson regression models later on.

comprising various levels of satisfaction and combining subjective quality of life and satisfaction with institutions. This analysis will conclude the individual-level link between participation and quality of life.

In addition to the individual-level analyses, we also examine the relationship between participation in civic organizations and quality of life/society at the country level. Returning to the aforementioned multilevel models, we consider levels of civic participation at the country level. Note that multilevel models helped establish the degree of civil society participation due to country properties. In further analyses we use so-called country differentials, that is, country differentials stem from differences in the level (score) of participation in voluntary organizations between the raw scores (observed scores aggregated to the country level) and the country-level scores net of individual-level influences as estimated by multilevel analysis. In other words, country differentials take account of structural or composite effects of our samples on the dependent variables. For instance, it could be the case that country differences in the level of participation arise because of different characteristics of the samples in each country. By taking into account this possibility, we only assign the correct share of variation in civic participation to the country level, that is, the proportion of variance which really occurs between countries and which is not due to individual determinants of levels of participation. Put in more practical terms, we aggregate individual-level scores of the indicators of quality of life/society net of the effects of gender, age, educational, work and occupational status. This gives us a merely societal picture of what civic participation looks like in a given country once we have controlled for individual-level effects. Eventually, we can speak of a participation 'premium' in case we observe higher levels of participation than we would expect from individual determinants in a given country. In a similar vein, we can speak of participation 'penalties' if we observe lower levels of participation than we would expect from our analyses.

We then relate these country differentials to measures of the quality of life/society. In other words, we proceed with the examination of the link between civic participation and quality of life/society at the country level whilst we have controlled for covariates at the individual level. The question then is whether participation in civil society (which cannot be assigned to individual characteristics) correlates in specific patterns with aggregated measures of the quality of life/society at the country level. Whilst we show this by bivariate correlations, we will also use structural indicators to explain some of these relationships.

5 Results

5.1 Civic Participation and its Determinants

Table 1 addresses the various involvement patterns in 12 different types of voluntary associations across 19 European countries included in the ESS I. Clearly, sports clubs are most attractive to people though the vast majority (72 per cent) does still not participate. The rest, or 28 per cent of the respondents are at least members in a sports club and 18 per cent engage in a more intensive or extensive form. Respondents also join cultural and hobby clubs in larger numbers. Business or professional associations, political parties and educational organisations are among the ones with the lowest participation rates. Only five per cent join parties or engage more actively. Approximately nine per cent are enrolled in business or professional organisations as well as associations in the educational sector.

χ^2 statistics show where country differences are largest concerning involvement patterns in different types of voluntary associations. Engagement in civil society is highest in

Table 1 Three kinds of activity in 12 types of voluntary associations ($N = 36{,}017$)

Type	Involvement (%)			χ^2
	None	Member	More than a member	
Sports club or club for out-door activities	72	10	18	4282
An organisation for cultural or hobby activities	80	7	14	2083
A trade union	82	14	5	6158
A business, professional, or farmers' organisation	91	5	4	898
A consumer or automobile organisation	84	14	2	5468
An organisation for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, or immigrants	85	2	13	2643
An organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights	89	3	8	3252
A religious or church organisation	84	6	11	3786
A political party	95	3	3	1051
An organisation for science, education or teachers and parents	91	3	6	911
A social club, club for the young, the retired/elderly, women, or friendly societies	86	5	8	2039
Any other voluntary organisation such as the ones just mentioned	92	3	5	1071

Notes: χ^2 statistics refer to the bivariate associations between involvement patterns and country

Source: The ESS I (2002/2003), rounded percentages. Weighted data (design and population size); for χ^2 statistics only the design weight has been used

Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Austria and Denmark. It is lowest in Greece and Portugal. These findings result from higher participation rates in all types of organisations. That is, higher participation rates in particular types of associations such as trade unions or churches are not responsible for higher scores on the index. On the contrary, we observe the trend that participation rates are generally high in some countries and low in others. However, participation rates in some associations vary to a greater extent across European countries than participation in other types. Most cross-national variation is observed for trade union involvement, consumer or automobile associations and sport clubs as indicated by the largest χ^2 values in Table 1. This is also a sign that civil society is differently composed in different countries and that single types of voluntary associations are not the only cause for different levels of participation. The most likely reasons for this variation across countries can be found in a different number of voluntary associations operating in different countries. For instance, the number of registered NGOs could vary substantially between countries. This offers opportunities to participate to varying degrees. Second, national history and culture promotes civic participation to a greater or lesser extent. It was shown that the welfare state and actual policies also impact on the spread of civic participation as contemporary national policies promote active participation in society to different degrees (Delhey and Newton 2005; Pichler and Wallace 2007). Another reason could also be found in the different affluence of a country, as people in richer society are more likely to have the means to engage with broader issues in society instead of being occupied with the satisfaction of their more basic needs. We return to these issues in more detail in another section of this article.

Next we turn to individual characteristics and their effects on participation in civil society. The composite index of civic participation has a mean of 2.67. Table 2

Table 2 Individual-level predictors of civic participation: results from Poisson multilevel regression

Indicator	Involvement	
	12 types	
	C	SE
Intercept	1.090	0.095***
Gender (male)	−0.066	0.007***
Age (44)	0.002	0.000***
Education (upper secondary)		
Not completed primary	−0.677	0.029***
Primary or first stage of basic	−0.260	0.013***
Lower secondary or second stage of basic	−0.162	0.010***
Post-secondary, non-tertiary	0.081	0.016***
First stage of tertiary	0.233	0.010***
Second stage of tertiary	0.308	0.015***
Paid work (yes)	−0.155	0.008***
Social Class EGP (IIIb Routine nonmanual employees, lower grade)		
I Professionals and managers (high)	0.270	0.015***
II Professional and managers, lower grade	0.202	0.013***
IIIa Routine nonmanual employees (high)	0.106	0.016***
IVac Small employers and proprietors (including farmers)	0.179	0.026***
IVb Self-employed workers	0.023	0.270
V Technicians and supervisors of manual workers	0.107	0.020***
VI Skilled manual workers	−0.076	0.017***
VII Nonskilled manual workers	−0.088	0.015***
Other, not classified	0.249	0.032***
Domicile (small city)		
Big city	−0.109	0.010***
Suburbs/outskirts	−0.026	0.011**
Country village	0.058	0.009***
Countryside	0.115	0.015***
Random part (country level)		
Empty model	0.207	0.067***
Intercept model	0.166	0.054***

Notes: Dependent variable: Index of participation in 12 types of voluntary associations (Civil Society)

Log coefficients (C) and standard errors (SE) from multilevel (hierarchical) Poisson regression models

Social Class EGP (Erikson and Goldthorphe 1992) according to the classification of Erikson (E), Goldthorphe (G) and Protocalero (P)

Nineteen countries in the analysis; reference categories of independent predictor variables in parenthesis

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Source: ESS I (2002/2003), data not weighted

addresses the effects of gender, age, education, work status, occupational class and domicile on civic participation. Clearly, these individual characteristics affect levels of participation. When looking at our Putnamian conceptualisation of civil society, i.e. participation in *any* type of association, we find a considerable gender gap (effect of

−0.07 on the logged mean) and age gap (0.002). Hence, women and younger people participate less often in associational life. Higher education stimulates participation whereas people outside the labour market are less likely to participate in voluntary associations (effect of −0.155). Higher social classes are more likely to engage in civil society. The Erikson–Goldthorphe–Protacolero scheme (Erikson and Goldthorphe 1992) of occupations distinguishes between nine different occupational classes where higher classes are usually considered enjoying higher status. That higher classes are generally more active could further be related to the argument that participation in voluntary associations presumes a certain level of socio-economic security. Finally, the area of living also plays an important role. In rural areas, people are more involved in civic associations than it is the case in big cities and suburbs.[4]

Yet, lumping together participation patterns in various types of associations could disguise important variation in socio-demographic determinants of participation. Therefore, we also run this kind of analysis for each type of voluntary association separately.[5] When comparing participation in different types of voluntary associations, the most interesting patterns are as follows. Women participate more often in peace, humanitarian aid, churches and educational organizations, though they participate less in sport clubs, business associations and political parties. Older people participate less often in sport clubs, peace and educational associations, whereas they participate more often in every other type of voluntary association. Educational differences are most pronounced in hobby clubs, business, peace, humanitarian aid and educational associations and hardly play a role in churches and social clubs. Being excluded from the labour market affects activities in trade unions, professional and consumer associations in a negative way whereas it has a more positive impact on participation in religious associations and social clubs. Higher social classes participate more often in professional associations, political parties, humanitarian aid and educational associations but class differences are less important in trade union activities, churches and social clubs. Finally, stronger urban–rural cleavages can be found in participation in hobby clubs, professional associations, political parties and social clubs, but to a lesser extent in peace, humanitarian aid and educational organizations.

In the next step, we comment on the relationship between civic participation and quality of life at the individual level. Factor analyses of individual-level data show that both the private indicators (subjective well-being) and the public indicators (satisfaction with state institutions) are highly correlated and thus compose a common measure of the quality of society.[6] Therefore, we can calculate several 'quality of life/society' indices comprising a)

[4] These results are highly stable as shown in our zero-modified models. The only noteworthy additions to be mentioned are: (1) The gender gap is mainly due to the lower probability of women to participate in civil society associations. However, there are hardly any gender differences among people who participate. (2) Social class differences are slightly less pronounced concerning participation (yes/no) than the extensivity/intensivity of participation. Hence, whilst different social classes show more similar levels of general involvement on the dichotomous measure, members of different social classes are involved to varying extents. Generally speaking, these findings present further details rather than a challenge to the findings from the less complex Poisson regression models.

[5] More detailed results are available from the authors upon request (see note 2).

[6] The initial factor analysis at the individual level displays a KMO of 0.797 which indicates the appropriateness of factor analysing the satisfaction indicators. Based on Eigenvalues, the analyses extracts two factors, of which the first one (satisfaction with society) explains approximately 41 per cent and the second factor (subjective quality of life) explains another 12 per cent. Alternatively, we have extracted only one factor in order to assess the 'quality of life/society' dimension. In this model, no single factor loading is smaller than 0.5. We conclude that, for our purposes, we can stick to the one-dimensional measure because

Table 3 The effect of civic participation on various measures of quality of life/society

Dependent variables	Participation in voluntary associations (12 types)	
	C	SE
Life satisfaction	0.039	0.004***
Happiness	0.041	0.004***
Satisfaction with economy	0.023	0.004***
Satisfaction with government	0.005	0.004
Satisfaction with democracy	0.030	0.004***
Satisfaction with education	0.003	0.004
Satisfaction with health services	0.010	0.004**
Subjective quality of life	0.040	0.003***
Satisfaction with institutions	0.014	0.003***
Satisfaction with life/society	0.021	0.003***

Notes: Non-standardized coefficients (C) and standard errors (SE) from multilevel linear regression models controlling for gender, age, education, work status, occupational class and domicile

Dependent variables (in separate models): measures of quality of life and society

Subjective quality of life is a weighted sum index of two variables (life satisfaction, happiness) of a scale of 0–10 where high values indicate high subjective quality of life

Satisfaction with institutions is a weighted sum index of five variables (satisfaction with the economy, government, democracy, educational system, and health services) of a scale of 0–10 where high values indicate high levels of satisfaction with state institutions

Quality of life/society is a weighted sum index of seven variables (happiness, life satisfaction, and satisfaction with the economy, government, democracy, educational system, and health services) of a scale of 0–10 where high values indicate high quality of life/society

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Source: The ESS I (2002/2003)

subjective evaluations of one's own life ('subjective quality of life'), levels of satisfaction with state institutions ('satisfaction with institutions') and all seven satisfaction (and happiness) measures ('quality of life/society'). In multilevel regression, these indices are then dependent variables and we control for other factors in the realm of the social: gender, age, education, work status, occupational class and domicile (see Table 2) to assess the impact of civic participation on quality of life/society. Eventually, Table 3 presents the effects of participation on all single indicators of quality of life/society and our three composite indices.

It can be clearly seen that participation impacts on various quality of life/society indicators. Coefficients are statistically significant in most of the cases with the notable exceptions of levels of satisfaction with the government and the educational system in a given country. These findings confirm a positive relationship between participation in civil society and quality of life, though their additional explanatory power is rather weak (approximately one per cent in most of the cases). When we compare the effect of civic

Footnote 6 continued
the loss of information is compensated for by a clearer interpretation of quality of society. At the country level, scores on satisfaction scales are even more strongly correlated. KMO is equal to 0.821, 75 per cent of the variation is explained by the one-factor solution where no loading is smaller than 0.77. To conclude, factor analysis shows that a 'good society' is established by people who are satisfied and happy with both their own lives and the state institutions and the way they operate.

participation on combined measures of subjective quality of life and satisfaction with various state institutions we can clearly see that the effect is stronger on the subjective measures. Combining both into one overall measure of quality of life/society, however, still yields a statistically significant coefficients and confirms our hypotheses that participation in civil society matters to a considerable extent. Hence, we can argue that people who participate more intensively in civil society associations also report higher levels of satisfaction. When comparing the effects of this overall measure of participation to the effects of participation in single types of voluntary associations, we observe that the effects of the latter on quality of life/society vary to a considerable extent (analysis not presented because of reasons of limited space). In other words, it makes a difference in which associations one participates when talking about the relationship between civil society and quality of life/society. Arguably, participation in some associations contributes more to quality of life than in others.

5.2 A Cross-National Analysis of Civic Participation and the Quality of Life/Society

So far, we have dealt with explanations of civic participation, quality of life as well as the relationship between both concepts at the individual level. Now we turn to the macro level or country level. The first observation is that individual-level determinants have already contributed to partially explaining away cross-national variation in participation in civic associations as well as quality of life/society indicators. For instance, the change in the random part, i.e. the variation occurring at the country level (Table 2), declines from 0.207 in the empty model, i.e. a model without explanatory variables, to 0.166 in the intercept model, i.e. a model with only individual-level explanatory variables. This shows that composition of our samples already accounts for approximately 20 per cent of the country-level variation. The individual-level analysis is thus useful to isolate these compositional effects and guarantees that we only treat the correct part of the total variation as cross-national variation. In Fig. 1, we graphically present this finding. The observed levels of civic participation are represented by black bars and those estimated from our multilevel models are represented by grey bars.

First, we learn that participation in voluntary associations is highest in Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria and Denmark. Civil Society is weakest in Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Poland and Greece. Hence, civil society is generally strongest in Scandinavia and weakest in Southern and Eastern European countries (black bars). Second, it can also be clearly seen that estimations based on individual characteristics alone (grey bars) would lead towards more similar levels of civil society in all 19 countries. Furthermore, variation in the estimates is much smaller than in the observed ones, which means that individual-level determinants cannot fully account for the observed variation across countries. Put differently, something other than individual characteristics has a great influence on national participation rates. Hence, we would argue that the country plays an important role in determining the level of participation in civil society associations. There have to be additional strong country-level determinants of civil society, which cannot be traced back to a different composition in socio-demographic terms. This is evidenced in Fig. 1 by the differences between observed and estimated levels of civic participation in the figure. Recall that we have called this a 'country premium' in case we observe higher levels of participation and 'country penalties' on civic participation otherwise.

In the remainder of this article, we are interested in the question whether the level of civic participation (net of individual-level effects) is associated with the quality of life/society (net of individual effects). According to contemporary political agendas (e.g.

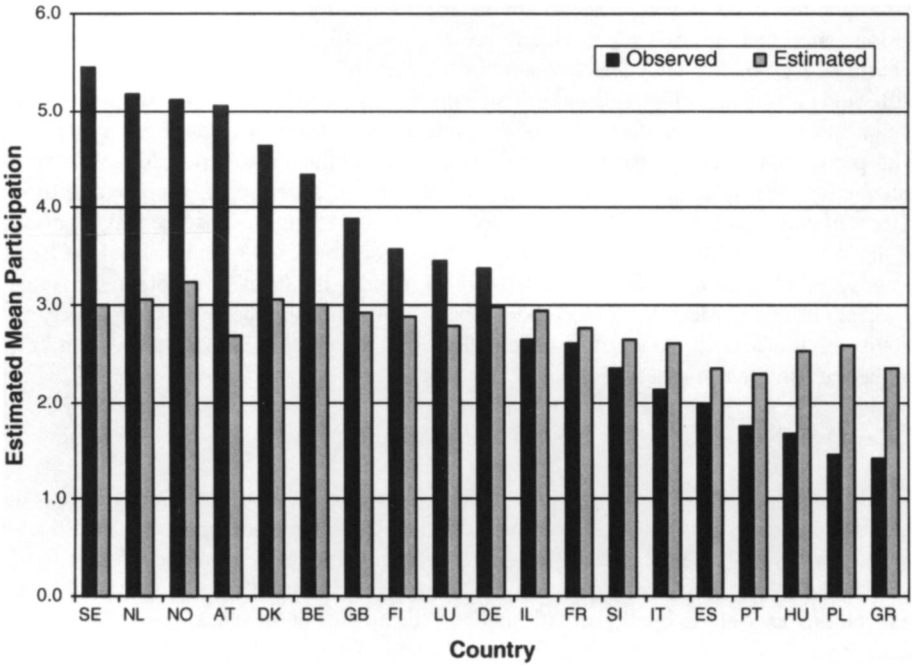

Fig. 1 Observed and estimated levels of civic participation. *Notes*: Observed and estimated country means of participation in civil society on a scale of 0–24. Estimated levels are based on the results of multilevel Poisson regression models and represent country averages according to individual-level predictions. The difference between observed and estimated values can be interpreted as the country-specific contribution (country differential) to the level of participation in civil society (voluntary associations). SE (Sweden), NL (Netherlands), NO (Norway), AT (Austria), DK (Denmark), BE (Belgium), GB (Great Britain), FI (Finland), LU (Luxembourg), DE (Germany), IL (Israel), FR (France), SI (Slovenia), IT (Italy), ES (Spain), PT (Portugal), HU (Hungary), PL (Poland), GR (Greece). *Source*: ESS I (2002/2003). Data not weighted

according to Hoskins and Mascherini 2008), one would expect that a better society also has a larger civil society with people participating more intensively, not just by being members, as an expression of a more vibrant associational life. Although the causality between civil society and quality of society could be blurred by other factors, finding a significant relationship between quality of life on the one hand and participation patterns on the other could lead to important insights. In order to explore this country-level relationship between civic participation and quality of life/society, we first aggregate levels of satisfaction with life, happiness, and satisfaction with state institutions (economy, government, democracy, education and health services) after we have controlled for individual-level predictors of these indicators. Afterwards we examine the associations between the level of civic participation and the level of satisfaction with various aspects of life (private and public) net of individual-level properties and controlling for spurious associations between both aspects.

Similar to the analysis of civic participation, we first compute country differentials in order to estimate levels of satisfaction and quality of society net of individual-level effects. The levels of quality of life, be it subjective quality of life such as life satisfaction or happiness, or satisfaction with various state institutions, are most often highest in Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg. This also corresponds to the observed levels of the

Table 4 Correlations between country differentials of civic participation and quality of life/society after multilevel analysis

	Indicators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Participation	1										
2	Life satisfaction	**0.78**	1									
3	Happy	**0.78**	0.83	1								
4	Economy	**0.68**	0.87	0.79	1							
5	Government	**0.39**	0.67	0.67	0.83	1						
6	Democracy	**0.59**	0.85	0.80	0.86	0.80	1					
7	Education	**0.59**	0.77	0.68	0.78	0.66	0.64	1				
8	Health services	**0.64**	0.79	0.77	0.63	0.55	0.60	0.72	1			
9	Subjective QoL	**0.80**	0.92	0.91	0.91	0.70	0.85	0.73	0.69	1		
10	Institutions	**0.67**	0.91	0.85	0.94	0.87	0.88	0.87	0.81	0.89	1	
11	Quality of society	**0.71**	0.93	0.89	0.94	0.84	0.89	0.86	0.82	0.92	1.00	1

Notes: All correlations >0.40 are statistically significant at the five per cent level ($p < 0.05$)

Coefficients in bold-print highlight the correlations between country differentials of civic participation and indicators of quality of life/society

Source: the ESS I (2002/2003). Data not weighted

combined measures of quality of life/society (not presented because of reasons of limited space). In Germany, Poland and Portugal, quality of life/society measures are rather low. Germany ranks close to the bottom because of a devastating evaluation of the country's economy in 2002/2003.[7]

To see whether civic participation corresponds to the levels of quality of life/society at the country level, bivariate correlations are presented in Table 4. All but two correlations are substantial and statistically significant at the five per cent level. Here, correlations larger than 0.60 clearly show a strong link between the size of civil society (in terms of participation in voluntary associations) and the quality of life in a given society.

But why is that so? Whilst it is an interesting finding that national rates of civic participation go hand-in-hand with aggregated scores of quality of life/society, how can we explain this association? Therefore, and in a last step, we look at potential explanations of these rather high correlations between civic participation and quality of life at the country level. Throughout this contribution we have argued that explanations for this could be manifold. We have made references to the level of affluence or economic standing (GDP), the welfare regime, historical, cultural and political idiosyncrasies of a given country, modernisation and other factors as they were made responsible for variation in civic participation in previous studies. Whilst we cannot test all of these potential and most likely competing explanations in just one article, we nevertheless juxtapose civic participation and levels of quality of life with (a) GDP as an indicator for economic standing and affluence and (b) the welfare state. In other words, we examine whether the strong associations between civic participation levels and quality of life at the country level remain once we take into consideration these possible correlates.

Table 5 shows correlation coefficients between measures of civic participation and the quality of life/society at the country level. The first column repeats zero-order correlations

[7] More detailed results on country level data concerning quality of life/society are available from the authors upon request.

Table 5 Full and partial correlations between country differentials of civic participation and quality of life/society controlling for welfare regime type and economic standing (GDP)

Indicators	Full	Partial				
		Welfare regimes				
	Overall	Western-central	Nordic	South	Eastern	GDP
Life satisfaction	**0.78**	0.70	−0.26	0.21	0.90	**0.66**
Happy	**0.78**	0.35	−0.42	0.51	0.97	**0.66**
Economy	**0.68**	0.50	−0.60	0.50	0.78	**0.49**
Government	0.39	−0.08	−0.52	0.02	0.50	0.07
Democracy	**0.59**	0.27	−0.31	−0.37	0.30	0.33
Education	**0.59**	0.70	−0.94	0.20	0.97	**0.51**
Health Services	**0.64**	0.43	−0.90	0.51	0.92	**0.50**
Subjective QoL	**0.80**	0.61	−0.33	0.61	0.93	**0.73**
Institutions	**0.67**	0.41	−0.78	0.26	0.81	0.47
Quality of society	**0.71**	0.44	−0.73	0.35	0.91	**0.54**
N	**19**	6	4	4	3	**18**

Notes: All correlations in bold print are statistically significant at the five per cent level ($p < 0.05$)

Some of the countries (UK, IL) are not included in the welfare regime typology as they are the only representatives of the particular welfare regime type in the sample. Hence, correlation analysis does not make sense (see text)

Source: The ESS I (2002/2003). Data not weighted

from Table 4 whereas all other columns include partial correlations controlling first for the welfare regime type and second for GDP. The most interesting findings are that correlations between civic participation and quality of life/society are completely different in different welfare regime types. However, we have to consider that sample sizes within welfare regime types are very small (six countries or fewer) and we have to exclude Great Britain and Israel as they are the only one representatives of some welfare regime types, making correlation analysis within these types unfeasible. Furthermore, we should only speak about trends here instead of hard statistical evidence. Nevertheless, these findings show that the welfare regime type interacts with the association between civic participation and quality of life/society. The correlation between civic participation and happiness is overall significant and positive (0.78), however, the partial correlation coefficients vary between −0.42 in the Nordic countries and 0.97 in Eastern Europe. Similarly, while the overall correlation between civic participation and satisfaction with democracy is significant and positive (0.59), we find negative associations within the Nordic (−0.31) and Southern (−0.37) countries whereas we find positive correlations in Western-Central (0.27) and Eastern (0.30) Europe. This indicates that civic participation does not go hand-in-hand with quality of life/society once we limit our analysis to a subset of countries sharing some commonalities such as a common welfare regime.

GDP also partially accounts for the correlations between civic participation and quality of life/society. Generally speaking, all bivariate correlations decrease once we control for economic standing. In two cases partial correlations are not significant anymore lending some support to the idea that GDP accounts for the observed associations. This applies to the links between civic participation on the one hand and satisfaction with democracy and the composite index measuring satisfaction with institutions on the other hand. Arguably,

economic standing explains away much of the bivariate associations between these concepts.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

Both of our hypotheses were generally bourn out. At the individual level, participation does indeed make you happier, even once a variety of demographic factors have been controlled for. At a societal level, higher levels of participation go hand-in-hand with a higher aggregate score of subjective well-being and positive assessment of various aspects of public life.

We examined the link between civic participation and quality of life. Our results show that participation in voluntary associations is low in general but varies a lot across Europe, which corresponds to earlier analysis from a variety of sources (Pichler and Wallace 2007). We have presented empirical evidence that gender, age, education, work status, occupational class and area of living affect whether one participates in civil society and how. The extent that men or women, rural or urban people engage in civil society (as measured by associational life) depends upon which associations are included and how they are grouped. Women are more active in some and men are more active in others.

As for the link to quality of life, our statistical analysis suggests that there is a weak but significant individual-level relationship between participation in civil society and quality of life using multiple measures, for instance, happiness, life-satisfaction or satisfaction with a range of public institutions. We argue that participation can bring a variety of indirect social rewards (access to friends, networks, jobs, resources) as well as direct personal rewards (such as personal fulfilment through giving to others, esteem from holding office, fulfilling passions and commitments to a variety of causes) that can help integrate a person into the society. Hence, participation could make you happier—personally. However, this causality assumption is not unproblematic. We cannot be sure whether the link between civic participation and quality of life is based on a self-selection process (i.e. happier people participate more often in the first place) or whether participation in associational life really contributes directly to a better subjective quality of life. Given that we control for a variety of factors, we would not expect to find more happy people *a priori* in one country than in another, and we would expect that it is their social conditions that are explaining at least some of the variation in happiness, so this suggests that it is participation that leads to higher levels of subjective well-being rather than the other way round. Eventually, to clarify this issue we would need panel data in order to track active citizens over time and examine whether their participatory practices—other things held constant—impact on their subjective quality of life.

At the country level, we observe huge differences in the rates of civic participation. A surprising factor is that some societies have much higher levels of participation than we would predict once we have taken into account compositional effects and other societies have much lower levels. There is thus a participation 'premium' in some societies and a 'penalty' in others. In the former group we find the Nordic countries and in the latter group the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe. Why should this be? What is it about some societies that encourage participation beyond what we might expect to see and therefore are able to increase individual and collective measures of well-being? Studies on civic participation have put forward explanations in the welfare state (Van Oorshott and Arts 2005), perhaps because life risks smoothed away by a welfare state free more emotional and temporal resources for participation in public life. Another argument is that

modernisation (that is, affluence together with improvements in education, health, democracy and so on) encourages greater levels of participation (Bulmahn 2000; Zapf 1984). When we consider which countries suffer from the participation penalty we can also see that not having had an authoritarian past in the recent times could help in enjoying a thriving civil society. This is reflected both in the absence of associations in those countries and the general mistrust of institutions of this kind, although their numbers are increasing partly on account of international pressures.

Here, we tried to apply some of these explanations to the relationship between civic participation and the quality of life. Our findings confirm the explanatory power of the welfare regime type and GDP concerning the associations between civic participation and quality of life/society. When we control for welfare regime, these associations are completely different across the continent and range from negative in the Nordic countries to positive in Eastern Europe. In the case of civic participation and satisfaction with democracy, they seem to be explained away. Why is that? It shows that the welfare regime impacts on both concepts to a considerable degree. It determines the level of participation and the quality of life/society across all types of welfare regimes. However, what occurs between different types does not necessarily occur within the same type. That is, once we take the welfare system into account we have to consider alternative and contradictory explanations for the link between civic participation and quality of life since there are different ways that participatory practices and quality of life relate to each other within welfare regimes as well. We propose to disentangle the welfare state here and rather speak about the relationship between social integration and system integration. This is connected to the welfare system where in, for instance, the Nordic type, social and system integration are both rather high whilst in Southern and Eastern European countries social integration is considerably stronger than system integration. Applying this differentiation to our findings would suggest that the relationship between civic participation and quality of life/society is non-existent or negative across highly socially and systemically integrated countries, whereas there is a positive relationship between civic participation and quality of life/society in countries which are only socially integrated but less so in systemic terms. Based on these considerations, we wonder whether civic participation compensates for shortcomings of other mechanisms of system integration in these regions.

GDP has proven to explain the links between civic participation and quality of life/society to some degree; however, it cannot provide a fully satisfactory explanation. Hence, economic standing or good living conditions might be crucial to explain these relationships. Whilst the correlation between civic participation and satisfaction with democracy declines from 0.59 to 0.33, i.e. a 50 per cent reduction, after controlling for GDP, there is literally no impact of GDP on the relationship between civic participation and subjective quality of life at the country level. Therefore, there is no single explanation of these relationships to be found in GDP. Whilst economic standing explains some of these associations, its contribution to the explanation of others is rather weak. Future research should thus challenge the explanatory power of various structural indicators as far as civic participation and quality of life/society are concerned.

Finally, a word of caution is in order with respect to the measures used in studies like ours. Associational participation is only a very crude and sometimes an inadequate measure of civil society. It always shows that participation in society is very low because many forms of participation do not take place through associations and this is particularly the case in some countries (for example, in France organisational membership is low but activity, including political mobilisation, is high). Taking associational membership as the key measure of participation also means that we miss the many new forms of mobilisation

and participation that take place through electronic media such as the internet or cellular phones. Finally, the nature of participation depends upon which associations are included, since, as we have shown, they encourage participation from different groups of the population. Humanitarian associations show high rates of participation by women, sports associations show high rates of participation by men and trade unions high rates of participation by the employed. Including or excluding any of these or grouping them together can change the patterns of participation. Since the list of associations is different in every survey, this can lead to some inconsistent results (although the general results shown here are congruent with studies carried out using other surveys). Some have argued that subjective well-being is also a weak and inconsistent measure of quality of life, reflecting more individual than social quality (Beck et al. 2001). However, the data for life satisfaction are quite consistent across different surveys, reflecting more cognitive aspects of well-being (although happiness is less consistent reflecting more emotional aspects of well-being). Since these softer measures do correlate quite well with factors that we would predict would lead to better quality of life such as levels of participation, integration in the labour market, social class etc. we would argue that there is something here that is worth trying to analyse in more detail in the years to come.

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