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Attitudes Towards the Welfare State and Associational Involvement in Europe. Comparative Analysis

Abstract: This paper examines a hypothesis that there is a negative correlation between the activity in social organizations and the support for the welfare state. The hypothesis was inspired by the study showing a reinforcing effect of welfare spending on social capital indicators and a negative substitution effect on informal solidarity (van Oorschot, Arts and Halman 2005). The analysis was performed using data from the 2008/2016 European Social Survey, taking into consideration additional sociodemographic variables. The results revealed a lack of correlation between the associational activity and the support for the welfare state, and a relatively coherent pattern of impact of the control variables on associational activity.

Keywords: associational activity, crowding out, social capital, governance, social state

Introduction

This article is based on data taken from the European Social Surveys of 2008 and 2016. The opinions of respondents from eighteen European countries who participated in both surveys were analyzed. The main analytical goal was to verify the assumption that people active in social organizations more often express negative opinions about the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy implemented within the welfare state compared to people not involved in such associational activity.

The above assumption is based on the findings of civil society theorists about the normative autonomy of the third sector (Keane 1988; Perez-Diaz 1993; Schmitter 1997). In the face of government failures and market failures in the provision of public goods and services, the third sector is becoming a remedy for the crisis in the welfare state (Anheier and Seibel 1990; Weisbrod 1998; Smith 2001). From the perspective of maintaining or losing this autonomy, the nature of reforms implemented in European welfare states is also important. Most of the countries included in the European Social Survey have a policy based on the concept of governance (European Commission 2001). The recommendations arising from the governance concept result in putting non-governmental organizations in the position of co-producers who contribute to the implementation of state policy objectives. Their activity is based on both private resources and public subsidies transferred to them as part of commissioning public tasks. NGOs are also guaranteed the right to participate in

civic dialogue, which serves to transfer, programme and evaluate social policy objectives implemented by state authorities (Osborne 2010; Brevir 2011; Levi-Faur 2012).

Implementing the concept of governance is accompanied by the hope of improving and socializing the state's activities, but also the fear of over-nationalizing society (Rodger 2000). This fear is related to the subordination of non-governmental organizations to external state control, i.e. imposed statutory requirements and the corrupting effects of public subsidies (Hudock 1999). Under *governance*, state interventionism is evolving. Rulers are giving up direct production of public goods and creating quasi-markets for their co-operators (Le Grand 1998). Critics of governance policy believe that it does not lead to strengthening the social functions of family and civil society which eroded in the earlier stages of social state development (Boje 1996). Instead, governance policy strengthens the role of non-governmental organizations in government systems (Hoggett 1991; Peters 2009), reduces generalized trust (Goodin 1996; Taylor-Gooby 1998) and promotes self-interest-oriented behavior (Le Grand 1998).

A significant part of the literature describing government and market failure attributes social organizations with mainly positive features such as grassroots solidarity, social mobilization, altruism, empathy and social bonds free from greed and lust for power (Himmelfarb 1999). It is known, however, that solidarity does not have to occur among activists of social organizations, and even if it occurs, it does not always translate into an improvement in the quality of public life (Warren 2001). This is evidenced by phenomena such as the NIMBY syndrome (O'Hare 1977), mafia groups (Gambetta 1993) and the professionalization of the non-governmental sector, in which the organizational style of operation is similar to the functioning of commercial companies or government agencies (Salamon 1987; Frumkin 1998).

Analysis of the social effects related to increased public spending on social purposes, carried out by van Oorschot, Arts and Halman (2005), showed that state spending on social purposes strengthens aggregate social capital, but weakens the informal tendency of individuals to help those classified as disadvantaged. Social capital was identified here as participation in voluntary organizations and clubs, spending time with friends, as well as trusting institutions and other people. In other studies, van Oorschot and Arts (2005) showed that public spending on social goals does not weaken social capital, although it slightly reduces interpersonal trust and trust in institutions. In later analyzes, van Oorschot and Finsveen (2010) proved that the amount of state spending on social purposes does not affect inequalities in the distribution of social capital. People involved in the activities of social organizations contribute to the improvement of aggregate indicators of social capital, although the scale of this involvement varies among representatives of various social categories. Nevertheless, the correlation of state spending on social purposes with aggregated social capital (cf. van Oorschot, Arts and Halman 2005) can be seen as a positive effect of social policy, even in the form of a high degree of involvement in voluntary organizations (Rothstein 2001). By mediating the redistribution of resources, the welfare state reduces social inequalities and increases the overall quality of life (Hagfors and Kajanoja 2007) as well as indirectly affecting the level of citizen participation and involvement in organizations and associations (van Ingen and van der Meer 2011).

In light of these findings, an interesting issue remains: who are the people actively involved in association activities in various European countries, and what attitudes do they

have towards the welfare state? These attitudes can be shaped by the impact of opposing social and political forces. First, the essence of the third sector's activity is based on maintaining a kind of independence from the state, i.e. legal regulations and the social belief that civic organizations and their activities should constitute an independent alternative to state operations. In fact, the state and social organizations often work together to solve specific social problems. What's more, the existence of some organizations is indirectly conditioned by the existence of this cooperation or direct support in the form of state budget subsidies. For these organizations, withdrawal of the state from social activities would endanger their existence (Brinkerhoff 2002). Secondly, selfless activity for the benefit of others requires a certain amount of altruism and social sensitivity which should be expected from people working in voluntary organizations. However, social support provided to the needy by the state may give the people engaged in associations the feeling of inadequacy and uselessness of their own efforts for the common good, since the state becomes the guarantor and accomplice of social goals. Thirdly, the relatively higher social status of organizational activists (which will be discussed in greater detail below) means that income redistribution implemented within the welfare state more often puts these people on the side of donors than beneficiaries of social policy. In this sense, they may treat social solutions as contrary to their personal interests. On the other hand, however, it is the welfare state's impact in educational, professional, healthcare and other spheres that can be seen as key to shaping one's social position.

These intersecting forces may give rise to many conflicting interpretations among association members about the role of the welfare state. The purpose of this article was not to determine which intersecting forces have a real impact on shaping attitudes towards the welfare state, but only to determine the nature of these attitudes. An attempt to achieve this goal also allowed to answer two supplementary questions: were attitudes towards the welfare state universal or specific for individual European countries, and whether in individual countries they were characterized by volatility or stability over the period analyzed: 2008–2016?

With regard to these issues, a hypothesis was formulated which assumed that likelihood of organizational (association) participation increases with decreasing support for the welfare state. Attitudes negating the legitimacy of social and interventionist solutions implemented by the state will be stronger among those who are active in associations as compared to those who do not undertake such activities.

Methods

The purpose of this analysis was to verify the hypothesis that likelihood of organizational (association) participation increases with decreasing support for the welfare state. Attitudes negating the legitimacy of social and interventionist solutions implemented by the state will be stronger among those who are active in associations as compared to those who do not undertake such activities.

This hypothesis was verified on the basis of data from the European Social Survey 2008 (ESS Round 4) and 2016 (ESS Round 8). In both rounds of research, the same ques-

tion modules were used regarding attitudes toward the broadly understood social policy of the state (*welfare state policies*). This allowed the above hypothesis to be tested at both time points, as well as to capture changes over time concerning two key variables (support for social policy and the scale of association involvement). It should be emphasized that these changes in the ESS surveys are recorded at the population level (tracking) and not within the same group of respondents (panel). Nevertheless, the representative nature of the surveys made it possible to measure and interpret the changes observed within and between each country. The analysis covered eighteen European countries that took part in both surveys: Belgium, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Sweden and Slovenia. Two adequate logistic regression models were constructed for each of these countries, based on data from 2008 and 2016. Their goal was to estimate the likelihood of associational involvement on the basis of strength of support for solutions implemented within the welfare state.

The dependent variable used in the analysis was the binary coded answer to the question: ‘Has the respondent worked in an organization or association in the last 12 months?’ (0—has not worked, 1—has worked).

The selection of independent variables that are indicators of attitudes toward the welfare state and their initial classification were made on the basis of the model proposed by the authors of the study (see *ESS 2016*). They assumed that the broad institutional, social, political, economic and cultural context in a given country conditions social risk factors and determines the size of resources owned by the individual. These, in turn, shape individual predispositions (e.g. trust, social values and beliefs) and influence how the legitimacy of implementing social interventions is assessed. As a consequence, under the influence of these factors, individuals adopt specific attitudes towards the welfare state as the entity co-responsible for the quality of their lives. Based on these assumptions, the analysis refers to assessments and opinions on: 1. social risk, 2. social inequality (egalitarianism), 3. economic, moral and social consequences of social policy, 4. the scope and responsibilities of the welfare state.

All dimensions except the first one, i.e. ‘How likely is it that there will be some periods when the respondent doesn’t have enough money to cover his or her household necessities during the next 12 months?’¹, were represented by several variables, which is why in the search for empirical confirmation of the accuracy of the classification made (assigning individual indicators to different dimensions), principal components analysis with Varimax rotation was performed (See *table 1*).

The principal components analysis carried out on data from selected European countries confirmed the previous findings both for 2008 and 2016, indicating the existence of separate support dimensions for social solutions. Additionally, the internal consistency of the dimensions distinguished has been confirmed by a decently high reliability (Cronbach’s alpha). The first dimension identified: ‘welfare state scope and responsibilities’ was related to the assessment of the extent to which the state and public authorities should decide on the redistribution of resources and protection against threats of specific social categories.

¹ When assessing the social risk of the respondents, they were also asked ‘How likely is it that during the next 12 months respondent will be unemployed and looking for work for at least four consecutive weeks?’. Due to the fact that the sample included many unemployed respondents, this question was abandoned in further analysis.

Table 1

Attitude towards the welfare state: dimensions identified on the basis of factor loadings (2008/2016)

	Variables	Welfare state scope and responsibilities	Social inequalities	Moral consequences	Social consequences	Economic consequences
Government should	ensure a reasonable standard of living for the old	0.797/0.793				
	ensure sufficient child care services for working parents	0.790/0.755				
	ensure a reasonable standard of living for the unemployed	0.736/0.701				
The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels			0.774/0.752			
For a society to be fair, differences in people's standard of living should be small			0.722/0.758			
Large differences in people's incomes are acceptable to properly reward differences in talents and effort			0.687/0.694			
Social benefits and services	make people less willing to care for one another			0.884/0.853		
	make people lazy			0.833/0.827		
	lead to more equal society				0.860/0.873	
	prevent widespread poverty				0.857/0.870	
	cost businesses too much in taxes and charges					0.829/0.839
	place too great a strain on the economy					0.806/0.796
% of Variance		22.5/24.2	15.0/14.1	12.5/12.8	10.2/10.5	7.2/7.2
Cronbach's alpha		0.70/0.69	0.60/0.60	0.74/0.77	0.66/0.70	0.60/0.64

Note: factor loadings < 0,35 were omitted. The total explained variance was 67,4% (2008), 68,8% (2016).

Source: own study based on [ESS 2008](#) and [ESS 2016](#).

The second dimension of 'social inequalities' defined the degree of acceptance for principles of egalitarianism with the active role of the state in implementing them. The third, fourth and fifth dimensions were identified on the basis of opinions on three aspects of social policy consequences implemented in the form of social benefits and services. The moral dimension was connected with the assessment of the impact of social protection in the sphere of morality and work ethics of social benefit recipients. The social dimension was related to assessment of the role of the welfare state as a guarantor of an increase in citizens' well-being. The economic dimension concerned the impact of social policy on the functioning of the economic sector. Based on the distinguished dimensions, independent variables were created with values that are *factor scores* and which were then entered into a regression model in this form. They took the form of destimulants—growing values indicated a decrease in support for social solutions or a strengthening belief in the negative consequences they cause.

In addition to indicators of support for state social policy and assessment of social risk, control variables were introduced into the model, which—as assumed—may affect the chance of undertaking associational involvement. These variables were: sex, age, education, income, place of residence, religiousness, as well as generalized trust and a sense of political effectiveness (2016) or understanding of politics (2008).

Many studies on civic participation show that active citizenship is not a representative category for a given society (Verba and Nie 1972; Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996), because joining voluntary organizations is selective and is conditioned by many demographic and social characteristics (Wilson 2000). At the micro level, these participatory inequalities result from differences in individual structural resources, such as: education (Denny 2003; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Knack and Keefer 1997), gender (Moore 1990), place of residence (Firdmuc and Gerxhani 2005; Alesina and La Ferrara 2000), declaring belonging to church organizations (Greeley 1997; Halman 2003; Smidt 2003), level of political competence and acceptance of democratic principles (Almond and Verba 1989; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Hooghe 2003), generalized trust (Paxton 1999; Lin 2004; Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti 1993; Inglehart 1997; Woolcock 1998), economic status, cognitive skills and social skills (Wilson and Musick 1998; Schlozman, Verba and Brady 1999; Hooghe 2003; Salamon and Sokolowski 2003; van Ingen and van der Meer 2011).

In the constructed model, the ‘education’ variable was introduced in the form of school years attended, while the variable ‘income’ was determined by the monthly household income of the respondent expressed on a decile scale. The population of the place of residence was determined in the model by means of *dummy variables* ‘big city’ and ‘medium city,’ for which the reference category was ‘village.’ The proposed model uses a variable degree of religiousness measured on a 10-point scale (0—not religious at all, 10—very religious). In the ESS research, trust in its generalized form was measured on the basis of the question: ‘Would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?’ (0—you can’t be too careful, 10—most people can be trusted).

Without deciding which way the arrow of causation points, variables that are indicators of understanding politics and a feeling of political efficacy have been included in the model. In this case it was assumed that the decision to undertake organizational or associational activities may be conditioned by the extent to which people believe that the political system gives the opportunity to participate in the civil co-decision process. Not only legal solutions adopted in a given country are important for these decisions, but also subjective dispositions for action based on an understanding of political mechanisms and a sense of agency.

The 2008 model uses two questions: ‘How often does politics seem so complicated that you can’t really understand what’s going on?’ and ‘How difficult or easy do you find it to make your mind up about political issues?’ In the 2016 survey the set of questions related to a sense of political effectiveness was more extensive. Therefore, more questions were used in the analysis. They concerned whether the ‘political system allows people to have a say in what government does [and] allows people to have an influence on politics’ and whether ‘the respondent is able to take an active role in a group involved in political issues’ and whether ‘he is convinced of his own abilities to participate in politics.’ Both in the first case ($\alpha = 0.580$) and in the second ($\alpha = 0.779$), indices were created which were the

sum of values obtained on individual variables, and in this form they were introduced into the model.

The verification of the assumption about the dominance of negative attitudes towards the welfare state among people involved in association activities was preceded by an analysis of these two key aspects—association involvement and welfare state attitudes at an aggregate level. The level of association involvement at the national level was measured by the percentage of people declaring activity in these types of organization. The indicator of support for the welfare state was the average percentage of people who, with either ‘consent’ or ‘strong consent,’ supported pro-social solutions (in the area of the influence and responsibility of state and social inequalities) or expressed ‘disagreement’ or ‘strong disagreement’ with the negative impact of social benefits and services in the moral, social and economic spheres. In other words, the scale of support for the welfare state was estimated as the average percentage of respondents who were positive about social solutions in relation to twelve analysed issues.

Results

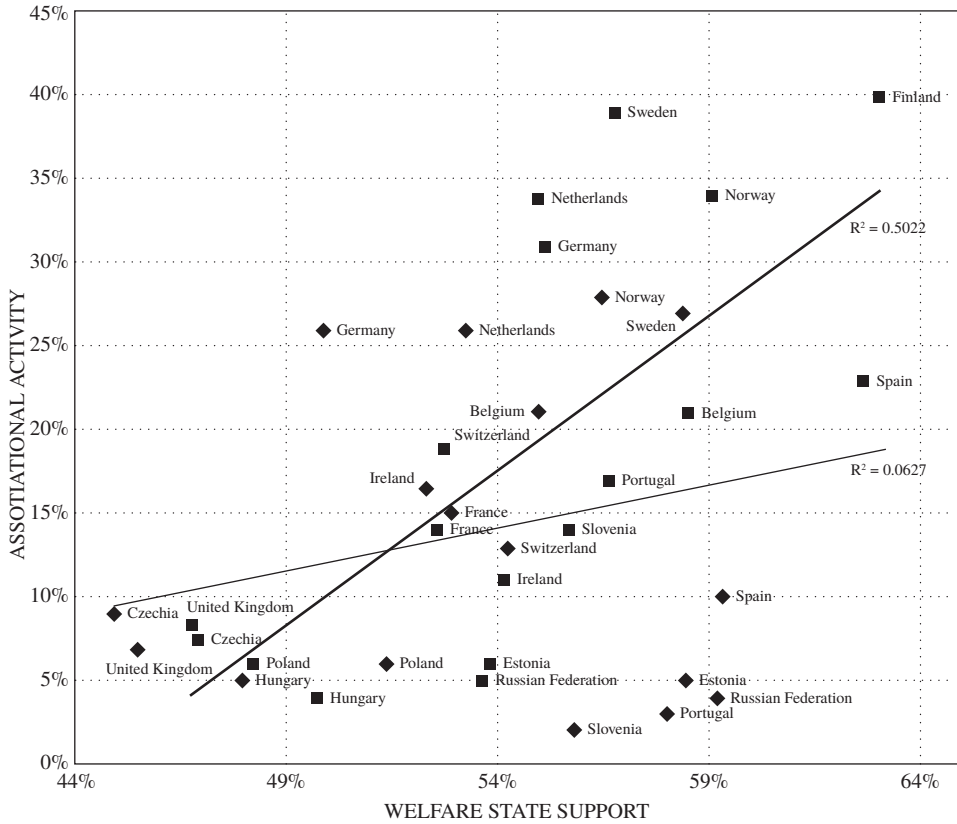
In the countries surveyed, both in 2008 and 2016, the difference in the level of association participation was significant. The highest percentage of active people was recorded in Finland (respectively 34% in 2008 and 40% in 2016), Norway (28% and 34%), Sweden (27% and 39%), the Netherlands (26% and 34%) and Germany (26% and 31%). While in countries with a relatively high level of participation, the share of people involved between 2008 and 2016 was quite stable, in some countries with the lowest percentage of people who were involved in organizational activities in 2008, there was a significant increase in the next eight years: in Slovenia from 2% to 14% and Portugal from 3% to 17%. On the other hand, relatively low and stable levels of participation were registered in Russia (4% and 5%), Hungary (5% and 4%) as well as Estonia (5% and 4%) and Poland (6% and 6%). Overall, in the eighteen countries studied, between 2008 and 2016 the percentage of people who were active in an organization or association increased by 76%.

Support for the welfare state in the countries surveyed was relatively high. In 2008 the average percentage of supporters of individual solutions ranged from 44.9% in the Czech Republic to 63.1% in Finland. In 2016, the lowest support was given to the welfare state by Britain (46.7%), and the highest, the same as eight years earlier—by Finland (63%). In general, changes in the percentage support for the welfare state in individual countries were relatively small. The largest decrease in support was recorded in Russia (5.6%), while the largest increase was in Germany (5.3%). Support for the welfare state increased by 4.5% in all analyzed countries.

In 2008, at the aggregate level, there was no significant correlation between the percentage of people operating in associations of a given country and the percentage of people supporting the welfare state, while in 2016 such a relationship (positive) occurred ($r = 0.706$ for $p < 0.01$). It was a result of two overlapping effects. In some countries, an increase in the share of people active in associations had been recorded, while maintaining a similar level of support for the welfare state (Finland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden), while in

some, the level of support for the welfare state had decreased with little or no change in the percentage of those involved (Poland, Estonia and Russia). **Graph 1** provides an illustration of these changes and dependencies.

Graph 1
Correlation between association participation level and support for the welfare state in European countries



Source: own study based on **ESS 2008** and **ESS 2016**.

The observed changes and relationships between the scale of organizational and associational involvement and support for the welfare state at the nation-state level do not resolve the question of whether at the individual level people with greater or less ‘social sensitivity’ show a higher disposition to associate. To solve this problem analysis was carried out based on a logistic regression model, which was used to estimate the probability of occurrence of an event (here: associational involvement) based on a combination of independent (including control) variables. This analysis was performed for each country separately for both 2008 and 2016, and its results are presented in **Table 2**.

Education was the most universal and stable indicator of associational involvement within the socio-demographic variables. The probability of participating in associational

Table 2
Connection between welfare state support and belonging to an organization or association (logistic regression model estimation results)

	Country																SE	SI
	BE	CH	CZ	DE	EE	ES	FI	FR	GB	HU	IE	NL	NO	PL	PT	RU		
Gender (ref. woman)	1.298*	1.468*	1.503*	1.565**	1.047	1.103	1.099	1.287	1.194	1.554	1.802**	1.894**	1.295*	1.222	1.754	1.257	2.683	
	1.181	1.153	0.992	1.271*	1.210	1.098	1.116	1.427*	0.651*	0.868	1.244	1.363*	1.417**	1.854*	2.115**	0.802	1.390**	
Age	1.006	1.002	1.012	0.996	0.980*	1.010	1.010**	1.011**	1.013*	0.993	1.011*	1.008	1.009*	1.018*	1.010	0.996	1.004	
	1.014*	1.008	1.025**	1.006*	0.986*	1.008	1.011**	1.012**	1.024**	1.022	1.011*	1.011**	1.009*	1.005	0.988	1.011	1.018**	
Education	1.072**	1.010	1.124**	1.089**	1.240**	1.096**	1.070**	1.065**	1.105**	1.187**	1.084**	1.063**	1.050**	1.177**	1.241**	1.173**	1.057**	
	1.065**	1.088**	1.074*	1.010	1.153**	1.063**	1.048**	1.112**	1.144**	1.308**	1.121**	1.022	1.066**	1.201**	1.085**	1.150**	1.038*	
Income	1.077*	1.081*	1.232**	1.088**	1.022	1.159**	1.044*	1.028	1.061	1.041	1.129**	1.086**	1.001	1.092	1.068	0.927	1.054	
	1.034	1.016	1.070	1.026	0.937	1.015	1.072**	0.992	0.983	1.051	1.013	1.033	1.026	1.008	1.222**	0.987	1.048*	
Place of residence (ref. village)	0.496	1.318	1.128	0.603**	0.826	0.446**	0.897	1.370	0.714	0.616	0.619*	0.806	0.785	0.893	1.273	0.695	0.744	
	0.732	1.272	0.938	0.561**	0.526*	0.809	0.713*	0.695	1.037	1.784	0.391**	0.810	0.566**	1.275	0.479**	0.677	0.681*	
Average or small town	0.694*	0.943	1.188	0.730**	1.525	0.883	1.096	1.404**	0.884	0.588	0.751	0.729	0.819	0.749	0.451	0.865	0.877	
	0.744	1.078	0.905	0.695**	0.900	0.870	0.848	0.761	0.745	0.294*	0.689*	0.827	0.743*	1.560	0.655*	1.042	0.892	
Interest in politics / feeling of political efficacy	1.036	1.170**	1.153*	1.072*	1.241*	1.174**	1.111**	1.111*	1.143*	1.063	1.038	1.057	1.166**	1.240**	1.078	1.405**	1.087**	
	1.213**	1.229**	1.275**	1.207**	1.289**	1.276**	1.164**	1.184**	1.338**	1.334**	1.154**	1.135**	1.163**	1.278**	1.164**	1.330**	1.163**	
Trust	1.231**	1.128**	1.049	1.061*	1.024	1.015	1.047	1.063	1.088	1.031	1.038	1.102**	1.070*	1.001	1.074	1.062	1.048	
	1.123**	1.105*	1.003	1.043	1.202**	1.140**	1.076*	1.084*	1.016	1.085	1.001	1.087*	0.949	1.013	1.031	0.919	0.996	
Religiosity	1.004	1.018	1.105**	1.044*	1.046	0.976	1.036	1.027	1.037	1.105*	1.071*	1.035	1.070**	0.970	0.905	0.973	1.060**	
	1.003	1.064*	1.104**	1.063**	1.014	0.988	1.069**	1.087**	1.033	0.951	1.030	1.041*	1.074**	0.990	1.000	0.946	1.020	
Social risk (ref. threatened)	1.139	0.661	1.139	1.279	1.703	0.537**	0.901	1.012	0.969	1.206	0.833	0.906	1.606	0.840	1.312	0.648	1.138	
	1.636*	1.110	0.850	1.170	1.276	1.108	1.109	0.738	1.454	0.410*	1.521*	1.677*	1.091	1.340	1.436	1.446	0.858	
Welfare state scope and responsibilities	0.866	1.229*	1.056	1.007	1.178	0.830	1.166*	0.996	0.913	1.031	1.069	0.940	1.001	1.409**	0.626	0.880	1.179*	
	1.056	1.023	0.992	1.189**	0.928	0.845*	1.042	1.026	1.028	1.184	1.111	1.005	0.946	0.847	1.143	1.223*	0.977	
Social inequality	0.947	1.071	0.982	0.936	1.265	0.790*	0.953	0.857*	0.826*	0.775	0.898	1.041	0.937	1.194	0.815	0.972	1.094	
	0.966	0.875	1.347**	0.962	0.791	0.829	0.947	0.964	0.730**	1.926**	0.974	0.975	0.960	0.742*	0.952	0.982	1.129	
Moral consequences	0.925	0.835	1.083	0.954	1.641**	1.094	0.928	0.913	1.092	1.106	0.996	0.967	0.888	1.005	2.045**	1.326**	0.817**	
	0.893	1.140	0.813	1.021	0.885	0.829*	1.042	0.830*	1.005	1.049	1.241*	1.020	1.054	0.927	0.936	1.194	1.063	
Social consequences	0.905	0.950	0.828*	0.939	0.971	1.006	0.982	0.939	1.043	1.168	0.933	1.118	0.998	0.990	1.120	0.891	0.937	
	0.989	1.195	1.018	1.146*	1.193	1.159**	0.975	1.051	1.192	1.398	0.854	0.992	1.080	1.106	1.253**	0.980	1.152	
Economic consequences	0.974	1.052	0.923	0.857**	0.925	0.723**	0.968	0.810	0.777*	1.053	0.805**	0.870	0.929	0.878	0.764	1.228	0.935	
	0.787**	0.865	0.880	0.769*	0.992	0.929	1.005	0.890	0.758**	0.825	1.047	1.019	0.863*	1.003	0.944	0.840	1.013	
R ² Nagelkerke's	0.121	0.087	0.121	0.110	0.198	0.151	0.064	0.087	0.088	0.116	0.088	0.114	0.073	0.195	0.234	0.097	0.073	
	0.172	0.158	0.163	0.143	0.179	0.196	0.113	0.139	0.232	0.319	0.129	0.100	0.112	0.181	0.221	0.159	0.104	

* for p < 0.05
 ** for p < 0.01

Source: own study based on **ESS 2008** and **ESS 2016**.

involvement increased in line with education. Education was a significant predictor of organizational participation in sixteen countries in 2008 (all except Switzerland and Slovenia) and in sixteen countries in 2016 (all except Germany and the Netherlands). The second factor—income—proved to be a significant predictor in a smaller number of countries: eight in 2008 (Belgium, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland and Norway) and in only three countries in 2016 (Finland, Portugal and Sweden). Nevertheless, where a significant dependence was recorded, the nature of the relationship was positive in each case. With increasing household income, the chance of association participation increased.

A similar situation was observed in relation to age. In countries where age was a significant predictor of voluntary activity (Finland, France, Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, Norway and Poland in 2008; and Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, France, Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Slovenia in 2016), the observed dependence, with one exception, was positive. With age, the likelihood of involvement in an organization or association increased. Estonia was an exception. In this country, both in 2008 and 2016, the chance decreased with age.

In some of the analyzed countries (Belgium, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Germany, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway in 2008; and Germany, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and Slovenia in 2016), gender was also a significant predictor of organizational involvement. In these countries, the relationship between sex and association was the same—men were more likely to participate. The exception was Great Britain in 2016, when women were more likely to engage in organizational involvement.

The last of the socio-demographic variables included in the model was the place of residence. In 2008 it was an important predictor of associational involvement in five countries, while in 2016 in seven countries. Generally, in 2008 people living in large cities (in Germany, Spain and the Republic of Ireland) or in medium or small cities (in Belgium and Germany) were characterized by a lower probability of undertaking associational involvement in comparison with rural residents. Only in France was such a probability higher among inhabitants of small or medium-sized cities. In 2016, the same nature of dependence was observed. The residents of large cities (in Germany, Estonia, Finland, the Republic of Ireland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden) and medium-sized cities (in Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, Norway and Portugal) had a lower chance of being active in an association.

In the case of cultural variables, religiousness was a significant predictor of involvement in organizational involvement in the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, Norway and Sweden in 2008; and in Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Norway in 2016. In each of these countries, along with the increase in declared religiousness, the probability of associational involvement increased.

Generalized trust in some countries (Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway in 2008; and Belgium, Switzerland, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France and the Netherlands in 2016) was an important and ‘positive’ predictor of associational involvement. The higher the declared level of generalized trust, the more probable it became to take this type of action.

The most universal and stable factor shaping the likelihood of associational involvement was interest in politics (2008) or a sense of political effectiveness (2016). In 2008,

increased interest in politics significantly improved the likelihood of associational involvement in all countries except Belgium, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal. In 2016, along with an increase in a sense of political agency, the probability of associational involvement in all the countries analyzed increased.

An attempt to verify the hypothesis about the negative impact of pro-social attitudes on the probability of associational involvement was made using six indicators. 'Social' variables at the European level did not form such clear and universal dependency patterns as in the case of other independent variables, therefore the obtained results cannot determine the accuracy of the tested hypothesis about stronger anti-social attitudes of people involved in organizational activities. Firstly, in some countries a specific lack of consistency or unidirectionality of the impact of these variables has been observed. In several countries (both in 2008 and 2016) opponents of one social solution and supporters of another simultaneously had a higher chance of organizational participation. Secondly, in many countries significant predictors of associational involvement were individual variables, which is why it is difficult to talk about an unambiguous, easily interpreted formula of dependence. Thirdly, in many countries the nature of the observed dependencies changed between 2008 and 2016. Only in a few cases were the same variables significant predictors in both 2008 and 2016.

Considering these observations, in order to facilitate interpretation of the results, they were discussed separately for 2008 and 2016, with emphasis on coherent (both positive and negative) and inconsistent relationships within the analyzed countries.

In 2008, a significant relationship between at least one social variable and associational involvement was observed in thirteen countries. In six of them, the relationships were negative, i.e. stronger support for social solutions (including the threat of social risk) reduced the likelihood of associational activities (in Switzerland, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Portugal and Russia). In six countries this relationship was positive (the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland), and in Sweden inconsistent. In Sweden the probability of organizational involvement grew along with the support of one solution and the questioning of another.

Analyzing individual variables for 2008, it can be stated that social risk (predicted reduction in living standards) was a significant predictor of organizational activity only in Estonia. In this country, people exposed to the risk of a decrease in living standards were more likely to undertake organizational activities. Opponents of the state assuming responsibility for people in need of support had higher probability in associations in Switzerland, Finland, Poland and Sweden. On the other hand, members of associations in Spain, France and Great Britain were significantly more in favor of eliminating social inequalities thanks to income redistribution mechanisms. Recognizing negative consequence of social benefits and services in the moral dimension increased the likelihood of associational involvement in Estonia, Portugal and Russia, but reduced it in Sweden. Negative assessment of social consequences as a result of the implementation of social services and benefits reduced the chances of organizational participation in the Czech Republic, and in the economic dimension reduced it in Germany, Spain, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

In 2016 a significant relationship between at least one 'social' variable and associational involvement was recorded in thirteen countries. In five countries this relationship was negative (the Czech Republic, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and

Russia), in four positive (France, Great Britain, Norway and Poland), and in four 'inconsistent' relationships were registered (Belgium, Germany, Spain and Hungary).

Those at social risk were less likely to get involved in organizational activities in Belgium, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands, while in Hungary the probability increased for people at social risk.

Opponents of the state's responsibility for the excluded and needy were more likely to be found in organizations in Germany and Russia, while they were significantly less likely to undertake organizational activities in Spain. People reluctant about egalitarian solutions were characterized by a higher probability of undertaking association activities in the Czech Republic and Hungary, but a lower probability in Great Britain and Poland. People who point to the negative impact of social benefits and services in the moral dimension were more likely to be involved in association activities in the Republic of Ireland, while less likely in Spain and France. The residents of Germany, Spain and Portugal who were active in associations emphasized the negative impact of social benefits and services in the social dimension. People who emphasized the negative economic consequences of social services and benefits were less likely to undertake association activities in Belgium, Germany, Great Britain and Norway.

Discussion

The results of the conducted analysis did not confirm the hypothesis about a higher probability of undertaking association activities by people with negative attitudes towards the welfare state. This applies to all analyzed countries in which two characteristic trends can be seen: 1) the lack of a coherent (unidirectional impact of variables), universal (covering all or most of the countries) and stable (unchanged between 2008 and 2016) formula linking social variables with association activities; and 2) a relatively coherent, universal and stable pattern of the impact of socio-demographic and cultural variables.

The first observation leads to a conclusion that in the analyzed countries associational involvement is not the domain of people who are negative about the state's social policy or about the values accompanying the idea of a welfare state. The differences in support for the welfare state in individual European countries, recorded at an aggregate level, were not reflected in the attitudes of people involved in associations. Of course, neither did these attitudes reflect differences in the fundamental assumptions about the implementation of national social policies, which form the basis of the welfare state typology in capitalist world order (see [Esping-Andersen 1990](#); [Ferrera 1996](#); [Saint-Arnaud and Bernard 2003](#); [Nugroho 2018](#)). The countries included in the analysis represented the liberal type (the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain), corporate (Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland), social democratic (Finland, Norway and Sweden), southern European (Spain and Portugal) and post-communist (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Russia and Slovenia). It is not out of the question that the observed lack of differences between the active representatives of these countries towards the welfare state is to some extent a consequence of the blurring of borders between individual types of welfare states and their evolution towards hybrid forms, seen in recent decades ([Goodin and Rein 2001](#)). From the

individual point of view, this lack of differences can be explained by the widespread acceptance of social solutions. In almost all the countries analyzed, more than half of the respondents positively related (or negated the adverse impact) to all issues assessed.

On the other hand, the analysis confirmed the assumption about the specific socio-demographic profile of people involved in associational involvement. Admittedly, the observed dependencies are not without exception in relation to all the countries studied, but on their basis accurate, generalized conclusions can be drawn. With few exceptions, among the active people more often you can find people with better education, higher income, the elderly and men.

A key variable for associational involvement is a sense of subjectivity or political efficiency (but also interest in politics), which distinguishes those involved from those who are not involved. It cannot be unequivocally decided what the direction of this relationship is (whether people with a stronger sense of effectiveness become the members of organizations, or whether the activity itself shapes this sense), but one can formulate a general conclusion that in all countries it is a feature that distinguishes organizationally active people from passive people. Generalized trust also plays an important role in association activities, although in this case a significant relationship has only been observed in some countries. Depending on the theoretical assumptions made, various sources of generalized trust are indicated. They can be treated as an effect of socialization during childhood, or as a result of personal experiences and individual characteristics, or as a feature of social relations maintained by culture, communities or institutions (Delhey and Newton 2004). This multitude of approaches leaves open the question of what the direction of relationship between trust and associational involvement is. In the conducted analysis it was assumed that the level of trust predicated the likelihood of undertaking organizational action. In those countries where a significant relationship was observed in this respect, it was positive. People who more strongly trust others are more likely to get involved in association activities. The relationship between religiousness and organizational activity was of a similar nature. In countries where there was a significant dependency, people with higher levels of religiousness were more likely to get involved in association activities. It should be noted that in the case of the last two variables, significant dependencies concerned countries representing different welfare state orders.

The analysis showed that NGO activists do not differ in a statistically significant way with the general community of respondents on the assessment of the welfare state. However it is worth to add that the NGO sector is internally diverse, and the transfer of results obtained at a high level of generality to specific organizations and subsectors may cause an ecological fallacy.

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