UK Sports Volunteering Research Network

- Seminar on 19th March 2015
- Presentation from Geoff Nichols, University of Sheffield.
- All material in these slides belongs to the authors.
- For more information about the SVRN please see the website [http://svrn.group.shef.ac.uk](http://svrn.group.shef.ac.uk) or contact the secretary at Fiona.Reid@gcu.ac.uk.

### Explaining the negative relationship between income inequality, volunteering and sports participation in Europe

Material is presently being reviewed as a journal submission

**Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009 & 2010**

#### The *Spirit Level* thesis

- Well-being vs income/GDP
- Indicators:
  - Life expectancy
  - Happiness

#### Life expectancy by GDP/head: cross-national

![Life expectancy graph](#)

#### Happiness by GDP/head: cross-national

![Happiness graph](#)
The Spirit Level thesis

- Not absolute income but distribution: equality/inequality
- Long-standing discussion in health
- Widen to other measures of human well-being/social problems
- NB. Wilkinson & Pickett epidemiologists

Data/measures

- Measure of Inequality
  - Ratio of the household income of the top 20% : bottom 20%
    - Net of income tax/transfers
    - Adjusted for household size
- Data:
  - UN Human Development Index etc.

Spirit Level analysis:
14 well-being indicators in 23 richest countries –

- Indicators - all negatively related to inequality:
  - Trust, Women’s status, Spending on foreign aid, Mental health, Use of illegal drugs, Life expectancy, Infant mortality, Obesity, Literacy/numeracy, Teenage pregnancy, Childhood family conflict, Homicide/crime, Social mobility, Innovation/creativity
- The consistent pattern of relationships provide a compelling view that more equal societies ‘do better’.
- No data on volunteering, sports participation or leisure time.

Example: Trust

Source: Spirit Level, 2009, p. 17

Spirit Level Conclusions:

- More equal income distribution
  - improved welfare outcomes
  - better for all groups, not just the poor
- Explanation: In unequal societies:
  - high level of status anxiety/stress
  - negative psycho/social outcomes
Critics of The Spirit Level

- Challenge to data validity + consensus, lack of:
  - Peter Saunders, Beware False Prophets at: www.policyexchange.org.uk
  - Christopher Snowdon, The Spirit Level Delusion at: Democracy Institute/www.spiritleveldelusion.com

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Volunteering and Sports Participation

- Data sources:
  - Eurobarometer (EU) survey
  - European/World Values Surveys - volunteering
- Measure of inequality: Gini coefficient:
  - 100 = maximum inequality
  - 0 = total equality

Volunteering and Sports Participation – why this is important

Clubs led by volunteers: important for sports participation
In England:
- 100,000+ clubs led by volunteers, 2009
- Clubs are small:
  - average club: 104 adult, 90 junior members= highly variable
  - 68 play sport
- Almost entirely dependent on volunteers:
  - average club: 20 volunteers
- But - “health and fitness” clubs is larger than in sports clubs
- 20% or volunteers do 80% of the work – hard to replace

Volunteering & Income inequality: Europe 2007

Sports participation & Income inequality: Europe 2009

Source: Eurobarometer survey 2007
Source: sport data Eurobarometer 72.3, 2009; Gini: Eurostat
But also: Volunteering by GDP/head (Excl. Lux)

Source: Eurobarometer survey 2007

But: Sports participation by GDP/head

What of Leisure Time?

• Could this be the linking variable?

• Data sources: national time-use surveys

• Measure of inequality: Gini coefficient:
  – 100 = maximum inequality
  – 0 = total equality

Conclusions re volunteering from data:

• Evidence of (negative) relationship of; volunteering, sports participation and leisure time; with income inequality
  – as strong as W & P relationships

• However - Stronger (positive) relationship with GDP/head

Explanations

• Social status-related (as W & P)
  – More unequal societies
    → status competition/ anxiety
    → Result: stress-related health outcomes, envy-related crime

• Resource-related/materialistic
  – More equal societies
    → redistribute income (via taxation)
    → more access to services
    →improved health, welfare for all

• Values/culture/politics
  – Egalitarian values flow through to income distribution and social service provision

• Time
  – More unequal societies leave less time for volunteering & sport
Discussion

– Could social capital be a linking concept?
  • More inequality = more ‘bowling alone’. Or are we measuring inter-related characteristics of different types of society – such as inequality and social capital have a symbiotic relationship in an organic conception of society?

– How do societies respond to increasing inequality?
  • Is it the change that matters as much as the level?

– Do policies to increase volunteering or sport participation have limited effectiveness unless inequality is reduced?