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# Is Altruism more effective where it is required more? Collectivity-Orientation and Involvement in Interest, Issue, and Religious Associations

*Heiner Meulemann*

Located in-between private and organized public life, the civil society serves as a bridge from one to the other. It contributes to the social integration of the society at large in two ways. First, it provides avenues from private life to organized social life. One learns how to articulate interests in the student association or in the tennis club in order to be able to act politically in a trade union or a political party. Second, it exonerates organized social life from the provision of social services not readily produced in the family. The larger the intermediate sphere of associations of a society, the better the prospects of its social integration. For these reasons, associations have been extensively studied in comparative perspective by social scientists (Anheier/Salamon 2001, Curtis/Baer/Grabb 2001, Schofer/Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001, Gabriel et al 2002, van Deth 2006).

In most of these studies, however, involvement in associations has been treated summarily, without regard of specific kinds of associations. The planetoids have been treated – so to speak – as a single planet. There is no objection against this as long as the first function of associations is considered only. To provide a learning arena for political action, a human rights movement is suited as well as the youth group of a political party. Yet a summary treatment becomes problematic as soon as the second function is considered. Some associations intend more strongly than others to serve needs beyond the immediate interests of their members. Therefore, associations can be classified according to whether they more strongly serve immediate aims of their members or general goals of a community, that is, according to their self- or collectivity-orientation (Parsons/Shils 1951). Self-orientation seeks to gratify the self more than others, collectivity-orientation seeks to gratify others more than the self. As everybody must look after oneself first, self-orientation can be less or more complemented by collectivity-orientation. Therefore, the polarity can be labelled by the pole not taken for granted: collectivity-orientation.

Yet collectivity-orientation is a dimension to classify not only associations, but people and societies as well. In the following, therefore, the classification of associations according to their collectivity-orientation will be developed analytically in order to empirically examine whether involvement in these kinds of associations depends differently on the collectivity-orientation of persons and of societies. In

section 1, the classification of associations is justified and hypotheses on the impact of persons and of countries on the involvement in associations are proposed. In section 2 the impact of persons will be tested, and in section 3 the impact of persons and countries.

## 1. Design of the research

### 1.1 Three kinds of associations and two forms of involvement

A first kind of association serves the needs of the members. They produce a good to be consumed by members, and by nobody else. Thus a tennis club provides facilities for its members. Accordingly, I become an active member if I want to play tennis and a passive member if I want to meet people. Involvement is motivated by the expectation of personal gratification. A second kind serves the needs of people who are not a member. These associations produce a good not to be consumed by the members but to the benefit of the society at large, even of humankind or nature. For example, people not in the labour force arrange visits to sick people in hospitals or retired teachers arrange supplementary afternoon teaching for weak students; or an association fights for the rights of unjustly imprisoned people abroad, the rights of animals or fights against environmental pollution. Involvement is motivated by the will to benefit others. As the first kind of association serves the interests of its members, and the second serves interests of others, that is, an issue its members identify with, I call them *interest* and *issue* association. As involvement in interest associations is motivated by the expectation to share their products, and involvement in issue association is motivated by the identification with the interest of others, involvement in issue associations is more collectivity-oriented than involvement in interest associations.

A third kind of association squares the distinction between self- and collectivity-orientation: *religious associations*. For, religion at the same time demands the service of issues and serves the interests of its believers. It responds to the limits of self-orientation by demanding collectivity-orientation, and it engenders its own form of self-orientation.

Self-orientation is basically self-determination, that is, the tendency to guide action more strongly by preferences of the person than the rules of institutions. Yet self-determination is limited by conditions of the human kind – illness and death, unexplainable mischief and unavoidable injustice – which every individual comes across sooner or later. These conditions pose the religious question of where man comes from and will go to. It is answered by religious dogma which cannot be

proven, but must be believed. Yet someone who believes the dogma must also accept the limits of self-determination. Religion justifies the metaphysical self-restraint of man's self-image before it demands the moral self-restraint of man's selfishness. Religion as such – independently of, yet possibly enforced by, the morale of brotherly love – justifies collectivity-orientation: Just as obvious as the limits of the self are the obligations of the self. For this reason, religious associations are similar to issue associations.

But religions also provide a good to be consumed by members only, namely the certainty of salvation, or – in secular language – meaning in life. And in order to pursue this goal, religions mission the public of non-members and take stakes in secular, that is, political, cultural, and value conflicts. In this respect, religious associations are similar to interest associations. Thus, religious associations are a hybrid kind which serves issues as well as interests. Involvement in them is more collectivity-oriented than involvement in interest associations, but less collectivity-oriented than involvement in issue associations.

Just as these three kinds of association, two forms of involvement can be analyzed with reference to self- or collectivity-orientation: *belonging* and *engagement*. *Belonging* means membership and participation. Because it provides what the association was formed to provide, it is self-oriented only in interest associations. Yet because it always has some side effects, as the enjoyment of social contacts and of inner satisfaction, it is self-oriented in interest *and in issue* associations. *Engagement* requires spending time or money. Because it costs more than belonging, it is collectivity-oriented in issue *and in interest* associations. Yet as it is geared towards more distant people in issue than in interest associations it is collectivity-oriented only in issue associations. Across the board, then, engagement is *more* collectivity-oriented than belonging.

If the civil society is charted according to the collectivity-orientation of its associations, then, interests and issues, and secular and religious interests and issues are the demarcation lines. They structure the civil society – just as status structures private life or power structures public life. Collectivity-orientation is an aim of associations, and a motive of persons. But it is also a norm of the social order of societies. In particular, collectivity-orientation will be required more or less strongly by different political regimes and by different religious traditions. Collectivity-orientation, therefore, affects involvement on the level of *persons* as well as on the level of *countries*.

## 1.2 Data and dependent variables

The data used here are taken from the European Social Survey 2002 (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>) which comprises 22 countries and 38959 respondents. Involvement in associations has been asked with the following question:

»For each of the voluntary associations I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and, if so, which. (Card) – A member of such an organisation. – Participated in an activity arranged by such an organisation. – Donated money to such an organisation. – Done voluntary (unpaid) work for such an organisation.«

These four forms of involvement were asked about in eleven kinds of associations so that 44 dummy variables resulted which then had to be reduced.

For each kind of association forms of involvement, membership and participation have been summarized as *belonging* (BELO), and donation of money and voluntary work summarized as *engagement* (ENGA). There were two justifications for this. Conceptually, members or participants *take* opportunities supplied by the association; donators and voluntary workers *give* to the association. Empirically, membership and participation as well as donation and volunteering correlate more strongly amongst each other than with the variables of the other pair, for each kind of association.

In terms of associations, seven were classified as *interest*, and two as *issue* associations, namely humanitarian and environmental/peace/animal associations. The seven interest associations, furthermore, were subdivided according to the interest they serve into two *professional* ones – trade unions and business/professional/farmers associations – and five *private* ones – sports clubs, consumer associations, scientific/educational/teachers' associations, social clubs, and cultural associations. Finally, *religious* associations were a single item. The percentages of both forms of involvement in each kind of organisation are given in table 1.

<i>Form</i>	<i>Kind</i>	<i>Interest</i>		<i>Issue</i>	<i>Religion</i>
		<i>Professional</i>	<i>Private</i>		
<i>Belonging</i>		28,4	50,8	12,3	15,1
<i>Engagement</i>		4,4	18,3	15,7	7,8

Table 1. *Forms of involvement according to kind of association in 21 European countries in 2002, in per cent*

In professional associations, belonging is more than six times as frequent as engagement, and in private associations almost three times as frequent. In issue associations, however, belonging is lower than engagement while in religious associations belonging is again higher than engagement – but to a much lower degree than in professional and private associations. For professional – and to a lower degree also private – associations, belonging is instrumental for gaining personal aims and it remains socially »virtual«. For issue – and to a lower degree also religious – associations, however, engagement serves as a gate to belonging. This fits in with the principle of our classification: Belonging and interest associations indicate the dominance of self-orientation. Engagement and issue as well as religious associations indicate the dominance of collectivity-orientation.

As professional associations show only a minimum level of engagement, they will be no more considered in the following analyses, so that engagement and belonging in private, issue and religious associations remain as dependent variables.

### 1.3 Hypotheses: Persons

#### *Attitudes: Collectivity-orientation*

Collectivity-orientation is a value, a cognitive standard to evaluate a broad range of actions. It demands to gratify others as well as the self. This leads to the *first* hypothesis: Involvement in associations should increase with collectivity-orientation – and this should be stronger for issue and religious associations, which mainly provide goods for others, than for interest associations, which mainly provide goods for their members. Collectivity-orientation will be considered here in three ways: directly as a value, as behaviour indicating the value, and as an attitude closely connected with the value.

*As a value*, collectivity-orientation was measured *directly* with reference to both poles: the self and the collectivity. Self-orientation seeks to gratify the self more than others, and can be split up into two types according to the gratification sought for: the fulfilment of subjective needs and the attainment of an objective standard. If gratifications of subjective needs are sought for, one may speak of hedonism. If gratifications through attainments are sought for, one may speak of achievement orientation. Hedonism has only one and immediate goal, the self. Achievement is a goal beyond the self whose attainment can be gratifying for the self. Collectivity-orientation seeks to gratify others more than the self and is labelled altruism in everyday language. Hedonism, achievement and altruism have been measured with the items of the Schwartz (2002: 253) inventory. Of the 18 bivariate correlations between hedonism, achievement and altruism with participation or engagement in

private, issue or religious associations eight were smaller than .03 absolute, and none was greater than .07 absolute. Therefore, value variables were not included in the following analyses.

*As behaviour indicating the value*, time used for television indicates self-orientation which implies a negative impact on involvement. It restricts activity and reduces life to the passive reception of other people's experiences. After subtracting the score of political use from the score of total use, a rough score of *TV entertainment use*, remains which was – as all further variables – used in the following analyses.

*As an attitude closely connected with the value*, religiosity is considered. Because religion implies the acceptance of the self-restriction of the person, religiosity – the identification of a person with religion – should further collectivity-orientation. Religiosity has been measured by church membership and by an *index of religiosity*, combining frequency of church attendance and of prayer, self-identification as a religious person and estimated importance of religion.

#### *Other Attitudes and Resources*

An attitude is the tendency to act with reference to an object. This tendency, in turn, may result from a norm to perform the action. As this norm refers to associations in general, it should further involvement in associations independently of their character. From this, the *second* hypothesis follows: Involvement in associations of each kind should increase equally with the strength of the norm to be involved in an association.

Someone who has had positive experiences with other people is more prone to sacrifice something for them. Over time, moreover, positive experiences with others are built up into trust in others. Trust, in turn, increases the propensity to do something for others. From this, the *third* hypothesis follows: Involvement in associations of each kind should increase equally with trust in other people.

The *fourth* hypothesis is: Involvement in associations may positively depend on the income of a person. The *fifth* hypothesis is: Involvement in associations may increase with the human and social capital of a person.

#### *Pattern*

As issue and religious associations are assumed to be more collectivity-orientated than interest associations, the first and second hypothesis predict that involvement in issue and religious associations is *more strongly* determined by collectivity-orientation than involvement in interest associations. However, as respective norms prescribe involvement in no matter what kind of organizations, moreover as trust facilitates pro-social action in general, and finally as the same amount of resources is

needed to become a member and to volunteer in each kind of association, the third to six hypotheses should affect involvement *similarly* in each kind of association. This will be called the *pattern hypothesis*.

#### 1.4 Hypotheses: Countries

The social order as well as the opportunity structure refers to three societal domains: politics, economics and culture. For each, accordingly, three hypotheses on the effects of country membership on individual action can be formulated.

##### *Social order*

The social order is represented, first, by four types of *political regime* which underscore collectivity-orientation with different strength. A *social democratic* and a *liberal* regime both encourage collectivity-orientation – the first one »top down« through political regulations, the second one »bottom up« through stimulating societal initiative. Social democratic regimes morally and politically propagate involvement and provide direct support for it. Liberal regimes foster, by giving leeway to civil society, an ethic of volunteering from within the civil society. However, *traditional corporatist* regimes appropriate the tasks potentially served by the civil society and, therefore, discourage collectivity-orientation. These three types refer to Western Europe. In the former *Eastern Bloc* the state dominated the society by morally and often legally enforcing membership in associations and controlled what remained of public life by supervision agencies. In these countries, then, people might still today show a lower level of involvement in associations than in Western European countries (Curtis/Baer/Grabb 2001: 792, 794, 798; Schofer/Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001: 809).

The social order is represented, second, by the *economic individualization* as measured by the Economic Freedom Rating (EFR, Gwartney/Lawson 2003: 11). The more a social order socializes economic action by regulations of the state or of large-scale socio-political organizations, the more people are relieved from the responsibility for their own fate; as everybody is taken care of, nobody needs to take care of the others. Therefore, the collectivity-orientation will have a weaker and less prominent position in the social order; the EFR should affect involvement positively.

The social order is represented, third, by the *Catholic* or *Protestant* tradition. Catholicism is organized »top down« in a hierarchical, centralized, and authoritarian bureaucracy; Protestantism organizes itself »bottom up« in egalitarian communities. Yet an authoritarian culture – just like a social order de-emphasizing economic indi-



vidualization – exonerates the believer from responsibilities, while an egalitarian culture – just like a social order emphasizing economic individualization – instigates everybody to work for the community. Therefore, Protestantism should more strongly encourage collectivity-orientation and, consequently, involvement than Catholicism (Curtis/Baer/Grabb 2001: 785, 796).

In each of the three domains, the measures are indicators for a broad consensus within a society which underscores collectivity-orientation and implies an obligation for involvement. They affect action in just the same manner as the collectivity-orientation of a single citizen, namely as a norm.

#### *Opportunity structure*

The opportunity structure is represented, first, by the *democratic stability*, as measured by the years a democracy has been established in a country. Democracy separates the sphere of politics from the spheres of economics, civic life, and culture. Yet the longer democratic rules have been established in politics, the more they have been implanted also in other spheres and the more associations therein will flourish. Thus, democratic stability enhances opportunities for involvement.

The opportunity structure is represented, second, by the level of *economic progress* of a country, as measured by the gross domestic product per capita. As development means professional and social differentiation it increases the number of associations within a country, that is, the opportunities for involvement (Curtis/Baer/Grabb 2001: 796; Schofer/Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001: 809). Democratic stability and economic progress are developmental variables: Their increment should increase the number and the forms of associations required for involvement.

The opportunity structure is represented, third, by the cultural pluralization of a country, as measured by the Herfindahl index of *denominational heterogeneity*; for this, the percentages of the responses to the question, to which church one feels to belong in the ESS 2002, including no church at all, were used. As each social sphere seeks to follow its specific imperative more efficiently, differentiation between spheres leads to differentiation within spheres; this, in turn, fosters the growth of the number and of kinds of associations. Thus, denominational heterogeneity enhances the supply of associations and the opportunities for involvement.

In each of these three domains, the measures are indicators for the *supply* of associations which for lack of reliable data (Salamon/Sokolowski/List 2003: 10) cannot be measured directly. In each of these three domains, moreover, the opportunity structure of associations is produced by the same societal development, namely social differentiation which is the core of modernization: Modernization implies differentiation which increases the supply of associations so that involvement is facilitated.

### *Pattern*

If involvement in issue and religious associations is more strongly determined by collectivity-orientation than involvement in interest associations, a social order which requests collectivity-orientation should have a stronger impact on involvement in issue and religious associations than in interest associations. However, the opportunity structure of a society provides the supply for each kind of association equally and should, therefore, have the same effect on each. This will again be called the *pattern hypothesis*.

## 2 Results: Person level

The logistic regressions of involvement in interest, issue and religious associations on attitudes, resources, and social-demographic variables show the following: Each of the five hypotheses is confirmed at least for some indicators. But the pattern hypothesis is clearly disconfirmed. Instead an unexpected pattern of effects emerges: Involvement in secular associations results from subjective norms, trust, and resources, but not from religiosity; but involvement in religious associations does not need norms, trust, and resources; it rests on the pre-commitment of religious membership and devotion. Religiosity is not transformed into secular involvement, and religious associations do not need secular means and incentives.

## 3 Results: Person and country level

The effects of the countries on the level of involvement, the regression intercepts, is estimated together with the effects of person variables in an *intercept model* of a *hierarchical regression*, which combines a regression on person variables with a regression of the intercepts on country variables. As the dependent person variables are dichotomous, logistic regressions *without an error term* are computed on the person level. As the dependent country variable, the intercept, is continuous, linear regressions *with an error term* are computed on the country level.

These regressions show the following: The effects of the social order and the opportunity structure are mostly as expected. Liberal and social democratic West European regimes and Protestant traditions form a normative framework which all citizens of a given country bear in mind and often follow. And social differentiation provides the opportunity structure for secular, yet not for religious organizations.

## 4 Conclusion

To test the empirical potential of the analytical distinction of associations according to their collectivity-orientation, it was examined whether involvement in issue, interest, and religious associations is determined differently by the collectivity-orientation of *people* as well as by the collectivity-orientation implied by the social order of *countries*.

As for *people*, interest, issue and religious associations could not be distinguished according to the effects of collectivity-orientation. Rather than interest from issue and religious associations, the border within civic society separates secular from religious associations. There is neither a religious nor a secular collectivity-oriented motive for involvement in secular, and specifically in issue, associations; but there is a religious motive for involvement in religious associations. Secular civic society does neither profit from secular values nor from religion; religion furthers involvement only in its own domain, where involvement reflects self-orientation as much as collectivity-orientation. In contrast to what has been shown in studies of involvement which did not distinguish between kinds of associations, religiosity does not transfer into public virtues.

Moreover, while involvement in interest and issue associations was equally strongly determined by norms, social experiences and resources, involvement in religious associations was not affected at all by these factors. Obviously, involvement in secular associations is a matter of feasibility, yet involvement in religious associations is a matter of conviction.

As for *countries*, interest associations could not be distinguished from issue and religious associations according to the effects of the social order. But interest and issue associations must be distinguished from religious associations according to the effects of the opportunity structure. The opportunity structure more strongly increased involvement in interest and issue associations than in religious associations. As for the effect of the opportunity structure, there is a border line between secular and religious associations. Just as on the person level involvement in secular associations is a matter of feasibility and involvement in religious associations a matter of conviction. On the country level involvement in secular associations is more a matter of the opportunity structure and involvement in religious associations more a matter of the social order.

If one looks at the determinants of involvement on the person as well as on the country level, then, the border runs not between interest and issue, but between secular and religious association. The pattern hypothesis was not verified – neither on the person nor on the country level. The variety of the civil society can be outlined analytically by the concept of collectivity-orientation, yet not empirically. If one restricts civil society to secular associations, their recruitment is very homo-

geneous; if one includes religious associations, one lumps together associations recruited in fairly different ways. And this holds within as well as between countries.

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