

## UK Sports Volunteering Research Network

- Seminar on 19<sup>th</sup> 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> or contact the secretary at Fiona.Reid@gcu.ac.uk.

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

material is presently being reviewed as a journal submission

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A. J. Veal



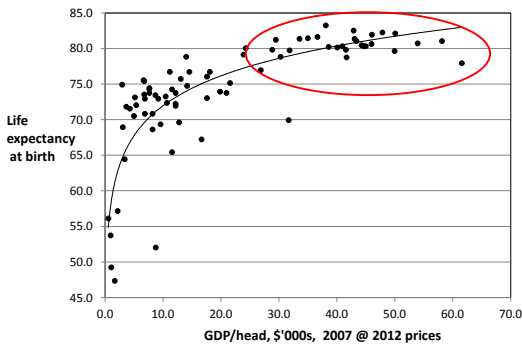
Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009 & 2010



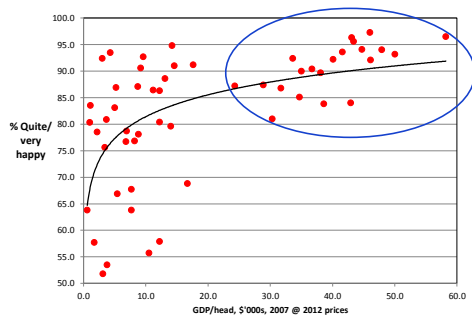
### The Spirit Level thesis

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

Life expectancy by GDP/head: cross-national



Happiness by GDP/head: cross-national

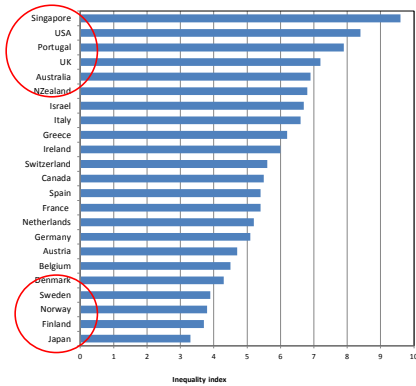


The Spirit Level thesis

- 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.



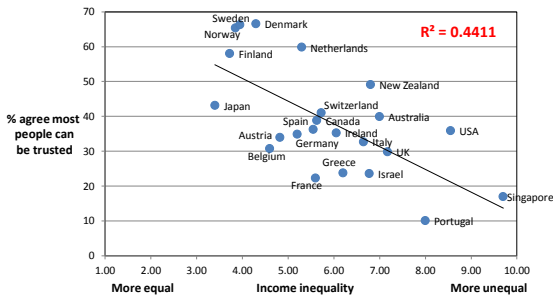
Source: Spirit Level, 2009, p. 17

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



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](http://www.policyexchange.org.uk).
  - Christopher Snowden, *The Spirit Level Delusion* at: Democracy Institute/[www.spiritleveldelusion.com](http://www.spiritleveldelusion.com)

### Critics of *The Spirit Level*

- Challenge to **theory/explanation:**
  - John Goldthorpe (*European Soc. Rev.*, 2010): W&P confused re class/status
- W & P’s response in Postscript to 2010 edn; and at: [www.equalitytrust.org.uk](http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk)
- Snowden & others challenge their response

### 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

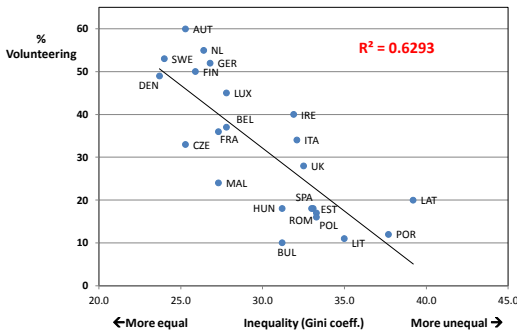
### Volunteering and Sports Participation – why this is important

**Clubs led by volunteers: important for sports participation**

In England:

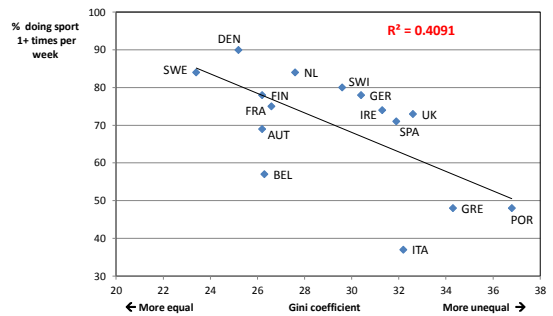
- 100,000+ clubs led by volunteers, 2009
- Clubs are small :
  - average club: 104 adult, 90 junior members- highly variable
  - 68 play sport
- Almost entirely dependent on volunteers :
  - average club: 20 volunteers
- But - “health and fitness” clubs is larger than in sports clubs
- 20% or volunteers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

### Volunteering & Income inequality: Europe 2007



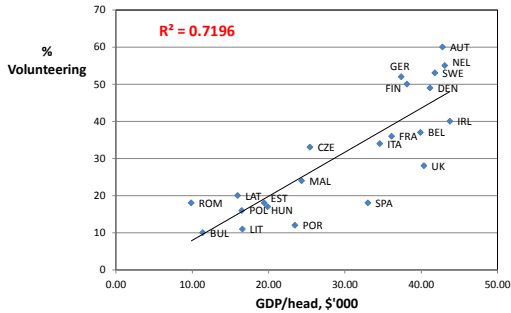
Source: Eurobarometer survey 2007

### Sports participation & Income inequality: Europe 2009



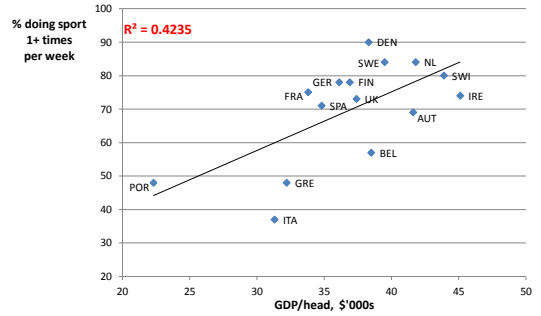
Source: sport data: Eurobarometer 72.3, 2009; Gini: Eurostat

But also: Volunteering by GDP/head (Excl. Lux)



Source: Eurobarometer survey 2007

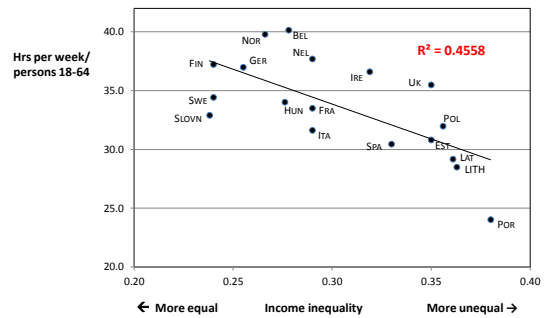
But: Sports participation by GDP/head



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

Leisure time and inequality: Europe



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?