Determinants of Volunteering beyond Gender and Education

Paul Rameder, Michaela Neumayr

WU Vienna University of Business and Administration, Vienna, Austria

Civil society consists of associations and networks offering opportunities for voluntary engagement in different fields and on different levels of involvement. Volunteering as one of these modes of engagement is supposedly inclusive, integrating, and open to the general public (WHO, 2002). However, volunteering is not only determined by an individual’s decision or willingness, but rather shaped by the individual’s resources (e.g. education, income, networks, time, etc.), by gender aspects and his/her specific life situation. According to the recent empirical literature on factors influencing volunteering, gender and the level of education are one of the most consistent predictors for volunteer engagement (Wilson 2000: 219). Thus, people with higher education are more likely to volunteer, and men are more likely to volunteer than women (Wilson 2000: 219; Tang 2008; Wahrenorf/Siegrist 2008:68; Kühnemund/Schupp 2008: 156). In order to disentangle the effect of gender, level of education and other factors (employment status, the marital status or the number of children), this paper aims to investigate the determinants of volunteering apart from these two distinguishing categories.

Therefore we refer to the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of praxis. He differentiated various conditions on micro level into mainly three categories of capital: economic (financial conditions), cultural (education, cultural assets) and social capital (networks, memberships). These different forms of capital can be accumulated and more or less transformed into each other. To participate in a specific field of the society, e.g. the field of volunteering, a certain amount and a special mixture of capitals is needed. So Bourdieu’s concept contributes a multidimensional perspective on participation and its preconditions, by combining economic with social determinants such as social origin and living conditions. (Bourdieu, 1982, 1983).

The first assumption is, that people from different educated classes pass through a different accumulation process of cultural capital (time spent within the educational system) which fosters social ties and networks conducive for voluntary engagement. Secondly, we know from several studies that the mechanisms working for men and women, despite the increasing participation of women in the labour market, still differ a lot (e.g. Taniguchi 2006, Tiehen 2000). Integration in the labour market and available resources of time have been found to determine the supply of female volunteer work. This makes it possible to find out whether family characteristics (the number of children, household members, marital status) are as important for highly educated as for lower educated people for their volunteer engagement. Similarly, we investigate whether the positive impact of the number of children is true for men and women.

The core research questions thus reads as follows:

- Which socio-economic and -demographic factors influence volunteering of women and men from different educated classes?
- How does the impact of family characteristics (the number of children and/or of household members, marital status) on volunteering differ between male and female of high and low educated classes?
- How does the impact of the employment status on volunteering differ between male and female volunteers of high and low educated classes?
In order to answer our research questions we analyze survey data generated by the Austrian Microcensus on Volunteering 2006 (sample size=11,661, volunteers= 4814, non-volunteers= 6847). Since the Austrian Microcensus contains a broad set of socio-economic and – demographic variables we are able to relate various determinants as well as further independent variables with volunteering behaviour through multivariate analysis.

First analyses of the data show that the employment status only seems to be a predictor for volunteering for persons with lower levels of education, but it does not impact the likelihood of volunteering of highly educated people – both men and women. This would support the theoretical aspect that a longer period within the educational system provides time and possibilities not only to accumulate cultural capital but also time to gain social capital outside the professional world, conducive for voluntary engagement.

References:


