

## **RESEARCH INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HORIZONTAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND VOLUNTARY SERVICE IN THE EU**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this paper the authors present the ranking of the EU countries by building an aggregate measure in the study on the relationship between the level of economic development and the perception of voluntary service. The aggregate measure was constructed on the indicators from different areas in which voluntary service is considered very important. The data used for the measure construction was taken from the Eurobarometr EB75.2 of EB 2011 and 73.4 in 2010 as well as from Eurostat. Then the authors study the rate of the phenomenon evolution.

**Keywords:** voluntary, ranking of the EU, aggregate measure, synthetic vector measure

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the paper the authors make an attempt to answer the question related to the results of the publication (Nermend and Nermend, 2013) if there is a relationship between the Europeans' awareness of the role of voluntary work and the wealth or socio-economic development of a given country or is it a subsequent step of civilizational transformation associated with the country's growth. If such a relationship exists, we should find out how strong this conditioning is since it can motivate in some way the citizens in less developed economies to engage in voluntary work. This form of work is becoming increasingly popular not only in rich countries but also in the new EU member states in Central Europe. In our view voluntary work is not a temporary trend but it is an effect of the interaction of diverse cultural factors, the environment and attitudes. This kind of activities supports the launch of numerous foundations and associations in many countries. They have become an important driving force for the economy. It has attracted the attention of the European Union which has been promoting programmes supporting voluntary work. There are vast discrepancies among the EU member states in their engagement and perception of voluntary work. In this article the authors present the results of research into the relationship between the participation in voluntary services, its perception and the socio-economic growth of the EU countries.

In a broader perspective voluntary work is an answer and solution to key issues of social politics. It helps satisfy individual needs, social, generational and environmental problems (Moroń, 2009). Thanks to volunteers' engagement the quality of projects improves and new projects emerge, because it enables the communities to identify and solve social problems (Leś, 2003). It is vital for voluntary work to be popular in all the EU member countries, therefore its idea and the education of the youngest should be broadly promoted (Kroplewski, 2010). When young people are working for others, they can gain experience, acquire new competencies, develop their interests and skills. Voluntary practice teaches how to be responsible for assigned tasks and shapes their attitudes, all of which is of great importance for their future careers (Bejma, 2012).

In the European Union there are numerous programmes promoting voluntary work, such as Europe for Citizens, Grundvig or Youth in Action – European Voluntary Service

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In the opinion of the Europeans voluntary service plays a vital role in such areas as humanitarian aid, solidarity, social life, health, education and environment. They also appreciate its numerous benefits believing that volunteers serve the society in general by strengthening social cohesion and promoting the idea of solidarity in the European Union, as well as foster personal development, sense of achievement and career advancement of individuals (European Parliament Report, 2011).

As it has been mentioned before, voluntary service helps to improve professional qualification, which can lead to reduced unemployment rates (European Parliament Report, 2011). Due to altruistic actions communities can see positive changes, thus building civil society which is a powerful force driving the third sector (Bejma, 2012). In Poland, despite improved economic situation, voluntary service is said to be in crisis – in 2008 only 11.3%, i.e. 4 million of adults devoted their time to unpaid work for the benefit of others. It means a 10% decrease since 2006.

According to the European Parliament reports of 2010/2011, despite many initiatives social awareness in the European Union countries is still insufficient and it varies from country to country (European Parliament Report, 2011). Poland and Europe are facing many challenges that can be met by voluntary service. Being aware of the opportunities created by voluntary organizations the European Parliament announced the year 2011 a Year of Volunteering and 2012 a year of Solidarity Between Generations.

### **EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

Data used in the studies on voluntary service come from the European Parliament's Eurobarometer: EB 75.2 and was collected on April 13 - May 2, 2011 and EB 73.4 of May 2010. The research covered 10 areas where voluntary service was considered worth supporting. The authors took into consideration the following diagnostic features:

X1 – Solidarity and humanitarian aid; X2 – Health service; X3 – Education and training; X4 – Natural environment; X5 – Social exclusion of citizens in disadvantageous situation; X6 – Human rights protection; X7 – Active ageing; X8 – Employment; X9 – Sport; X10 – Culture. In the study all the variables were regarded as stimulants, because the larger the feature value, the more positively the society in a given country perceives voluntary service on their territory.

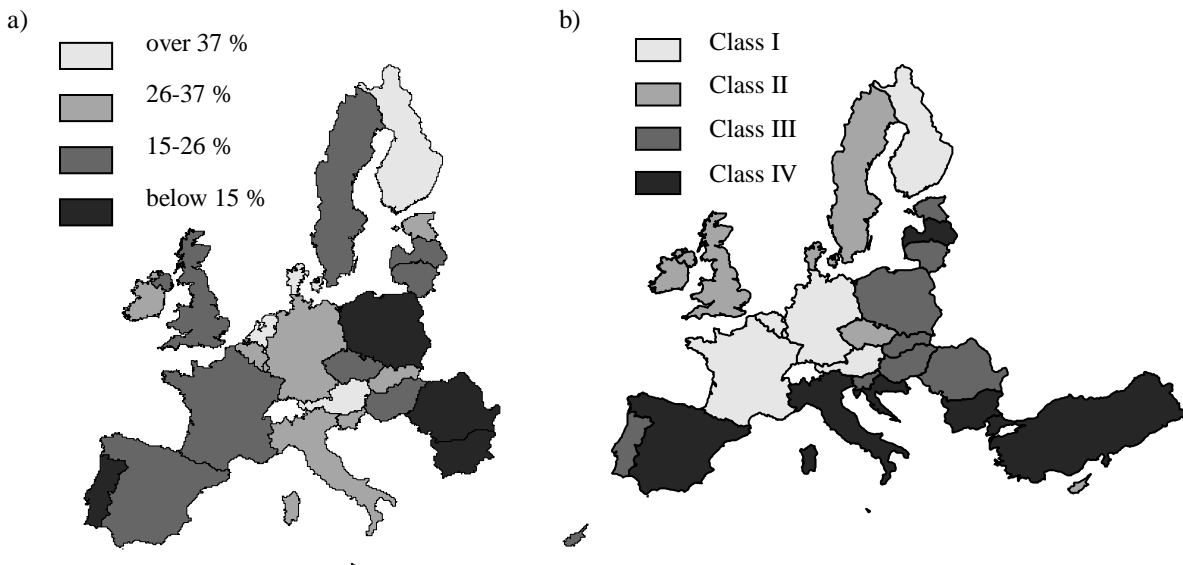
Socio-economic potential was studied basing on the Eurostat 2010-2011 data. The following diagnostic features were taken in consideration: X1 – Unemployment rate, X2 – Population density, X3 – High-tech exports, X4 – Natural population change, X5 – Infant mortality rates, X6 – Students per 100 population, X7 – Employment rate (20-64 year-olds), X8 – Hospital beds per 100 000 population. The variables of Unemployment rate and Infant mortality rate were considered as destimulants, the remaining ones were treated as stimulants.

In the EU countries' ranking the authors applied a method for constructing vector aggregate measures proposed in the works (Nermend, 2008; Nermend, 2009). The method belongs to the group of methods for linear ordering. The advantage of this approach is its large flexibility, especially of its version which employs only the scalar product. It gives the opportunity to use any scalar product for determining the vector aggregate measure for the purpose of studies on complex socio-economic phenomena (see: works (Nermend, 2006; Nermend, 2006; Nermend, 2008)). The year of reference was 2010. The values of all data were standardised with parameters calculated for 2010. The pattern was constructed for the 2010 data and used for both 2010 and 2011 ranking.

On the basis of the computed value of the aggregate measure the authors constructed two rankings. They ranked the European Union countries in terms of their perception of the role of voluntary service. The second ranking referred to their socio-economic capacity. The results of ranking are presented in Table 1. In order to illustrate the ranking results by means of maps, individual countries were divided into four classes. The maps are to be found in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

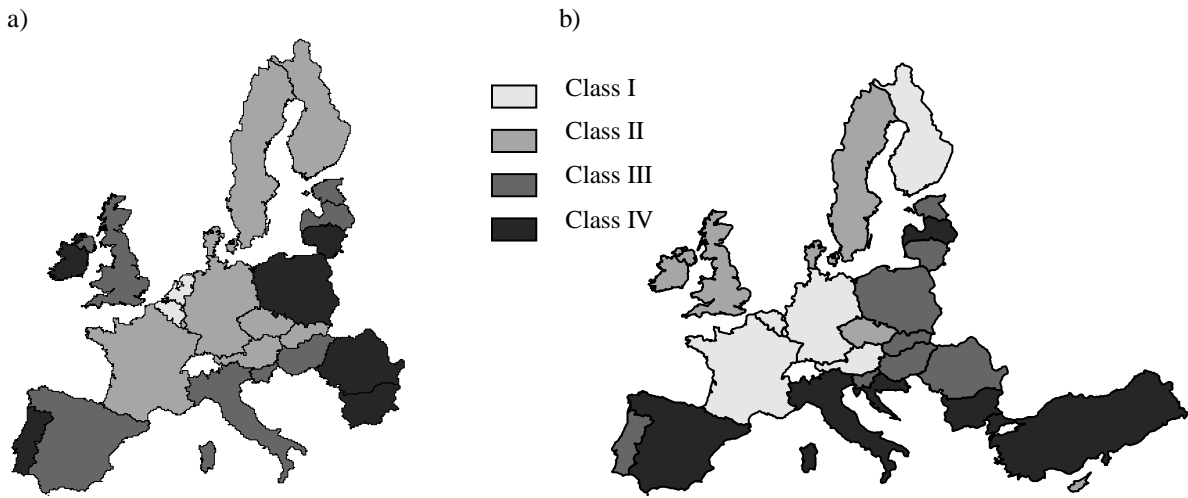
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Figure 1 shows the comparison of the number of people declaring their participation in voluntary service with socio-economic potential in 2010. We can see that there is little relation between this potential and the number of people claiming to be engaged in voluntary practice. In the majority of countries of high potential belonging to Class I at least 26% of population declares their participation in voluntary service, France being the exception. This number is well above the European average. On the other hand, in the countries with low potential and belonging to Class IV no more than 26% of people declare their participation in voluntary service. A conclusion can be drawn from these results that perhaps the poor living standards make people seek for extra employment and do themselves such things as house renovation or small repairs. It can eventually translate to less free time, hence less opportunities to participate in voluntary projects. In high potential countries it is high salaries that enable citizens to pay for services, thus having more time for other activities such as volunteering.



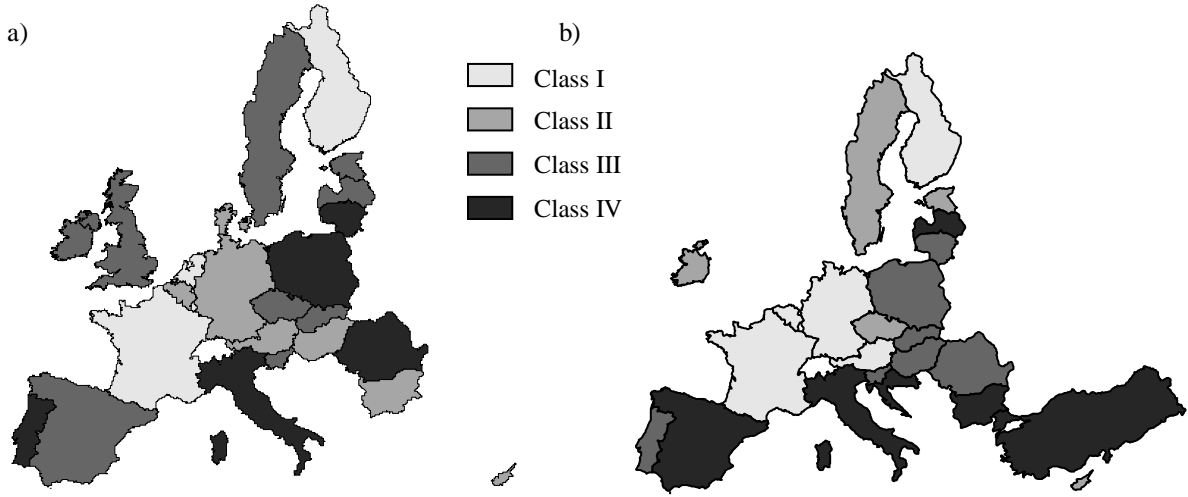
**Figure 1: Comparison of the number of people declaring their participation in voluntary service with the socio-economic potential: a) percentage of population declaring their participation in voluntary service on the basis of EB 75.2; b) classification of socio-economic potential in 2010 on the basis of Eurostat**

In figure 2 the classification of the perception of voluntary service relevance is compared with the classification of socio-economic potential in 2010. We can observe here a tendency which is similar to the comparison mentioned above. Citizens of the Class I countries with high socio-economic potential highly value voluntary service. In the second ranking these countries were included in Class I and II. To the contrary, the countries with low socio-economic potential from Class IV in the first ranking fell into Class III and IV in the second ranking. The reason for that can be found in tighter social bonds within local communities. Lower incomes make neighbourly help in small repairs, childcare or shopping for the elderly valuable. It certainly has some characteristics of voluntary service, but it is not perceived as such. Those who find satisfaction in helping neighbours do not need to seek other forms of self-fulfilment, which can result in limited awareness of the value of volunteering.



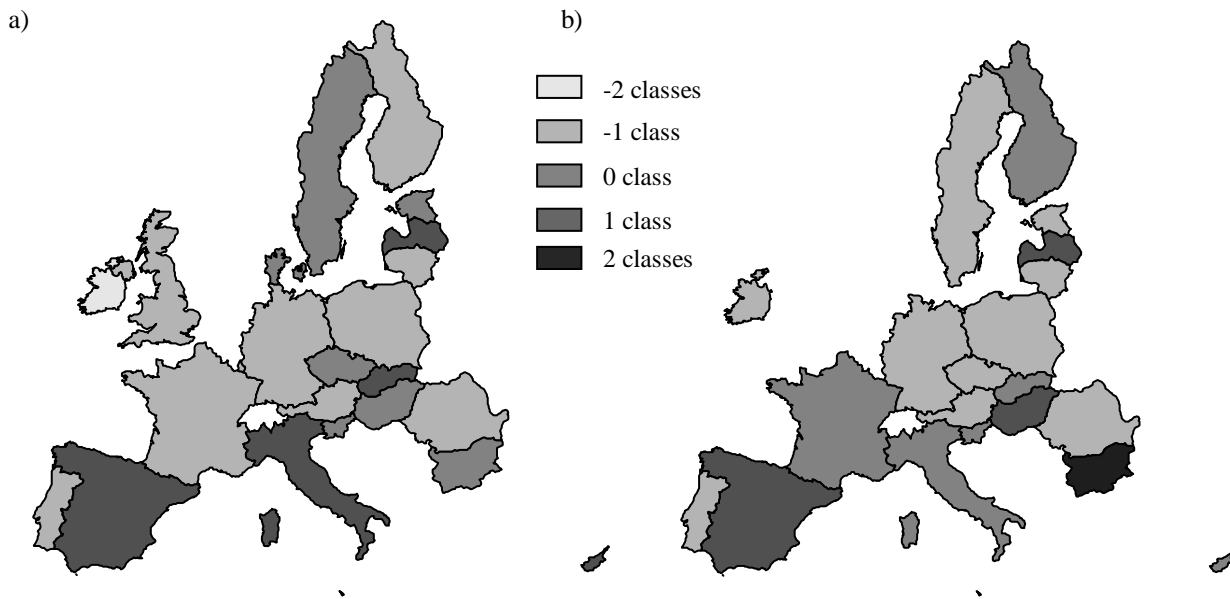
**Figure 2: Comparison of the classification of the perception of voluntary service relevance with the classification of socio-economic potential in 2010: a) classification defining the perception of voluntary service relevance in various aspects of life on the basis of EB 73.4; b) classification of socio-economic potential on the basis of Eurostat**

In figure 3 the classification of the perception of voluntary service relevance is compared with the classification of socio-economic potential in 2011. No important changes were observed in relation to 2010. The socio-economic potential of the analysed countries changed to an insignificant extent. What is noteworthy is the broader appreciation for voluntary service in the countries with high socio-economic potential.



**Fig. 1. Comparison of the classification of the perception of voluntary service relevance with the classification of socio-economic potential in 2011: a) classification defining the perception of voluntary service relevance in various aspects of life on the basis of EB 73.4; b) classification of socio-economic potential on the basis of Eurostat**

Figure 4 shows the differences between the classification of the perception of voluntary service relevance and the classification of socio-economic potential. They were calculated as the difference between the membership in the class of socio-economic potential and the membership in the classification of the perception of voluntary service relevance. In practice, for all the classified countries this difference is not bigger than one class. The exceptions are: Ireland in 2010 and Bulgaria in 2011. The mean absolute value of this difference was 0.75 in 2010 and 0.71 in 2011, which confirms the fact that there is a certain relationship between these two rankings.



**Figure 4: Differences between the classification of the perception of voluntary service relevance and the classification of socio-economic potential: a) in 2010, b) in 2011**

Table 1 shows in detail the results of the study. It contains the values of measures for all the analysed EU countries. In the case of several countries there were no data available, therefore the authors could not determine their measure values, so their boxes in the Table remain blank.

## CONCLUSION

The authors' research confirms that there is a relationship between the number of people declaring their involvement in voluntary work and the socio-economic potential. In the majority of countries with strong potential and belonging to Class I at least 26% of population declare their involvement in voluntary service. In the countries of poor potential belonging to Class IV the number of volunteering citizens is much lower and does not exceed 26%.

In 2010 higher than average number of citizens had high regard for voluntary service in countries with strong socio-economic potential, such as France, Luxemburg, Germany, Austria or Belgium. In 2011 this attitude improved in relation to other countries in France, Luxemburg and Finland, while in Austria and Germany it went down. And vice versa, in the countries with poor socio-economic potential people value voluntary service lower than the European average. This tendency changed insignificantly between 2010 and 2011. Apparently, socio-economic development has an effect on public participation in voluntary

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**Table 1: Values of the vector measure describing the perception of voluntary service relevance in various areas of life in the EU countries and their socio-economic potential**

Country	2010 data				2011 data			
	Voluntary service		Socio-economic potential		Voluntary service		Socio-economic potential	
	Measure value	Class	Measure value	Class	Measure value	Class	Measure value	Class
FR	0.18	2	0.91	1	0.25	1	0.88	1
LU	0.19	2	0.91	1	0.18	1		
FI	0.22	2	0.90	1	0.36	1	0.86	1
AT	0.20	2	0.89	1	0.14	2	0.89	1
BE			0.86	1			0.85	1
DE	0.22	2	0.86	1	0.11	2	0.88	1
CZ	0.12	2	0.81	2	0.00	3	0.80	2
SE	0.18	2	0.81	2	-0.03	3	0.83	2
CY	0.30	1	0.76	2	0.10	2	0.59	2
DK	0.13	2	0.72	2	0.06	2		
MT	0.24	1	0.69	2	0.10	2	0.64	2
IE	-0.28	4	0.66	2	-0.08	3	0.64	2
UK	-0.20	3	0.65	2	-0.15	3		
HU	-0.15	3	0.49	3	0.03	2		
PL	-0.30	4	0.49	3	-0.20	4	0.45	3
SI	-0.06	3	0.47	3	-0.05	3	0.39	3
LT	-0.30	4	0.33	3	-0.23	4	0.45	3
EE	-0.03	3	0.32	3	-0.01	3	0.56	2
SK	0.00	2	0.31	3	-0.04	3	0.31	3
RO	-0.38	4	0.29	3	-0.17	4	0.22	3
PT	-0.34	4	0.27	3	-0.23	4	0.17	3
IT	-0.21	3	0.07	4	-0.30	4	0.05	4
HR			0.05	4			-0.04	4
TR			0.01	4			0.14	4
BG	-0.25	4	-0.01	4	0.08	2	-0.08	4
LV	-0.23	3	-0.02	4	-0.12	3	0.10	4
ES	-0.04	3	-0.08	4	-0.15	3	-0.12	4
EL	0.15	2			0.03	2		
NL	0.35	1			0.24	1		

service as well as on public perception of this kind of activity. It is particularly evident in Italy where public appreciation for volunteering decreased along with the country’s economic potential.

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