

Volunteering: Improving Society through civil society

Thomas P. Boje, professor

Roskilde University, Denmark

Plenary lecture at the International Conference on

Volunteering: Improving Society, Develop Human Values

Moscow the 23rd of May 2019

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About myself

Thomas P. Boje

Professor in sociology

Scientific subjects: Civil society, Citizenship, Volunteering, Comparative analyses, Family & Work life conflicts.

Part of the team who has done population surveys on volunteering in Denmark – and Scandinavia

Developed a Danish Satellite National Account System

Preparing a manuscript on 'Civil Society, Citizenship and Activism' for an English Publishing House

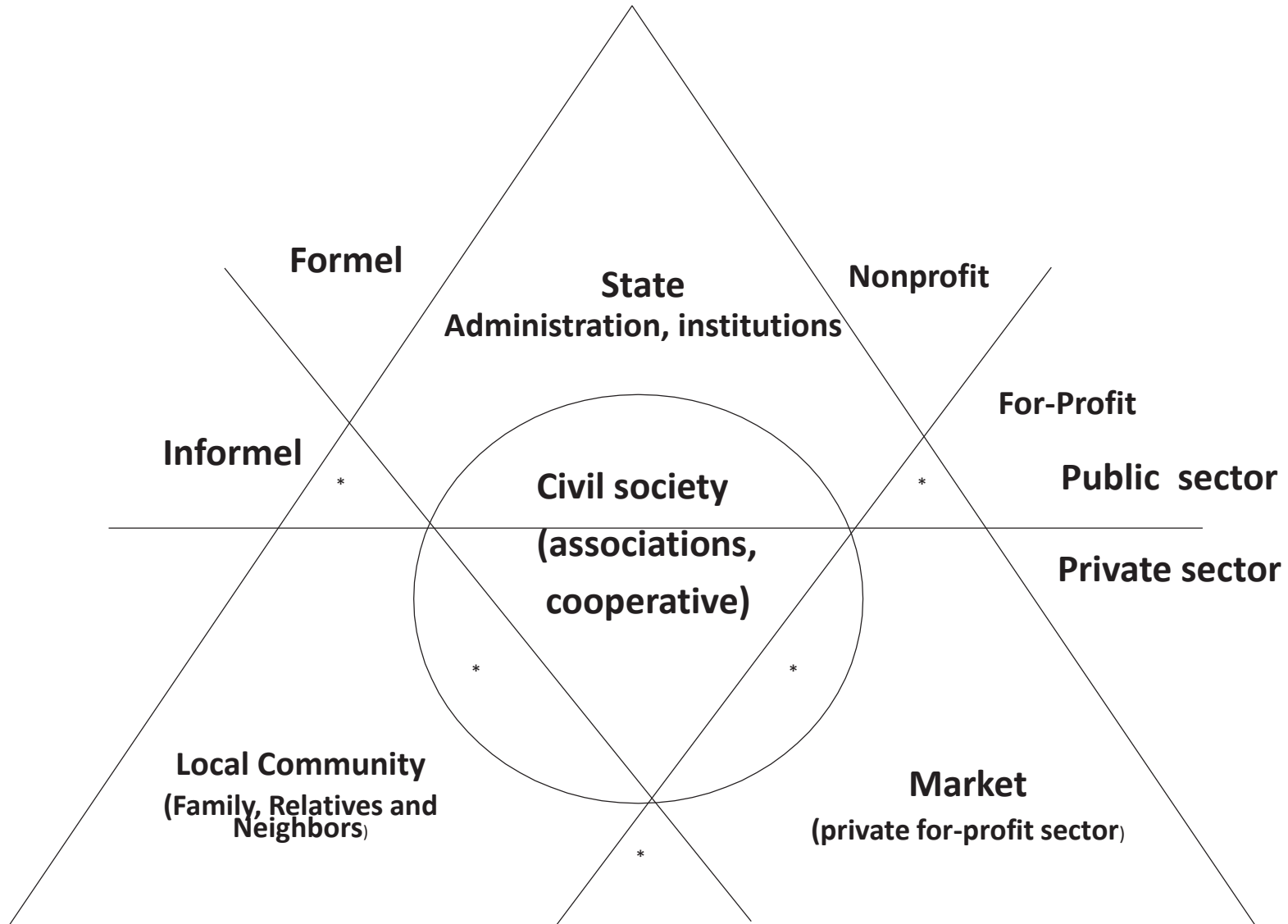
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An active and participatory democracy implies the existence of **civil society** as an independent sector, separate from both the political and economic system.

The **civic engagement** takes many different forms – it might be formal volunteering in organizations, informal network in neighbors, spontaneous actions, activities mediated through social media etc.

Civil society and engaged citizens are one of several preconditions for a functioning democracy. Volunteering is part of the **'participatory democracy'**. Here **all** citizens have equal possibilities for economic, social and political involvement.

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What characterize a civil society?

- *Pluralism* in the form of various types of organisations and social networks, involving face-to-face contact in formal and informal groups.
- *Openness*, understood as the inclusion of people with different social backgrounds and identities – people are represented by social groups organised in democratic institutions.
- *Private sphere*, in which self-expression and individual choice are free from interference from authorities and institutional power.

In order to act independently, individuals must have the legal right to personal freedom, and be able to practice it autonomously, without being dependent on others.

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Civic activities – formal or informal - are *collective actions*, – in associations, across society and through the public sphere – and as such they provide an essential counterweight to individualism;

creative actions, civic organisations provide a much-needed antidote to the cynicism that infects so much of contemporary politics; and

values-based actions, civic activities are needed to balance the influence of state authority and the temptations and incentives of the market.

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Three main trends in empirical research on civil society and its relation to democracy and citizenship:

- **NPO** – organisation, membership, **economy**, **volunteering** – Johns Hopkins
- **Social Capital** – participation in organisations, political activities, trust – Putnam
- **Active participation** / participatory democracy – democratic values, activism, community work

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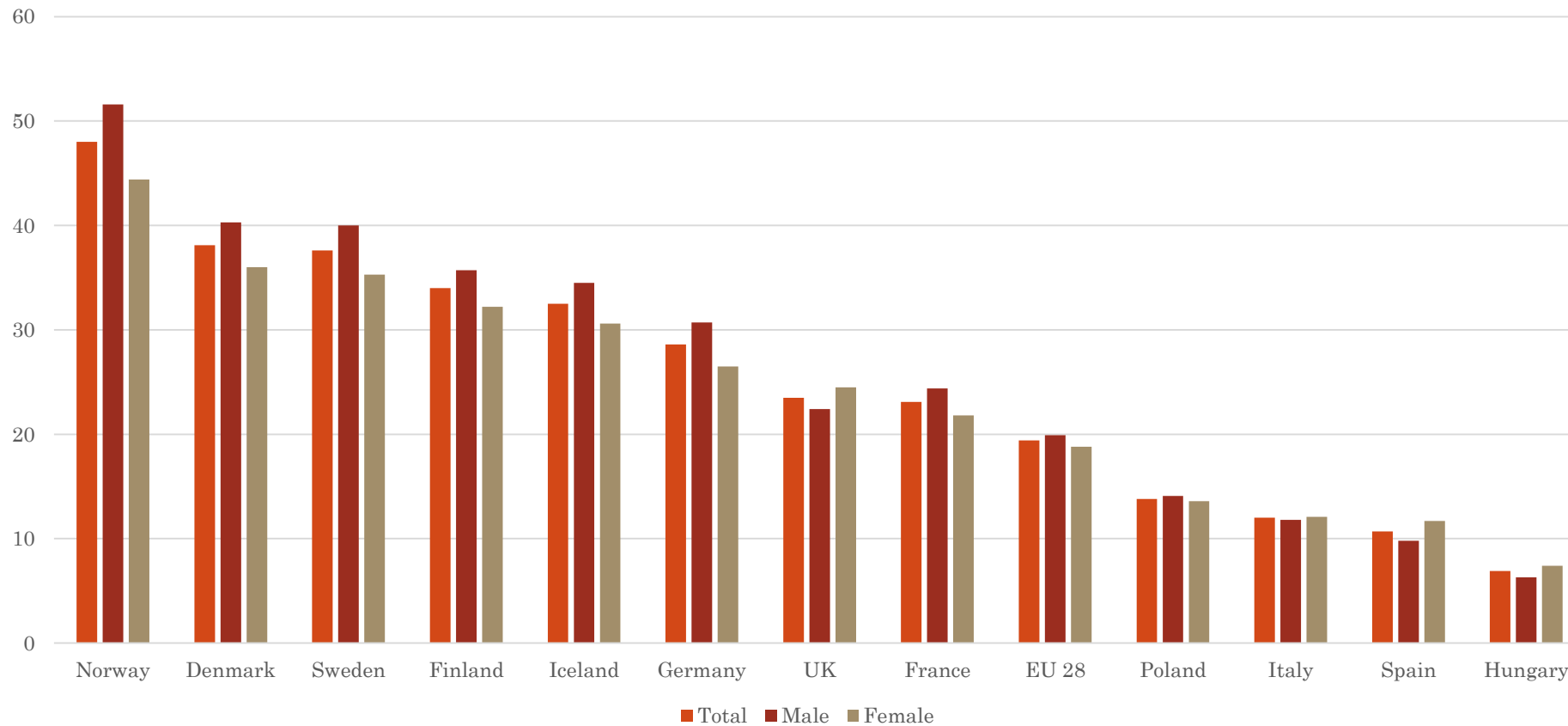
Types of volunteer activities

	Formal	Informal
To give time	Formal volunteering	Informal help / support
To give money	Donations / Charity	Economic support for friends, neighbors, and relatives

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Proportion of the population doing formal voluntary work in 2015

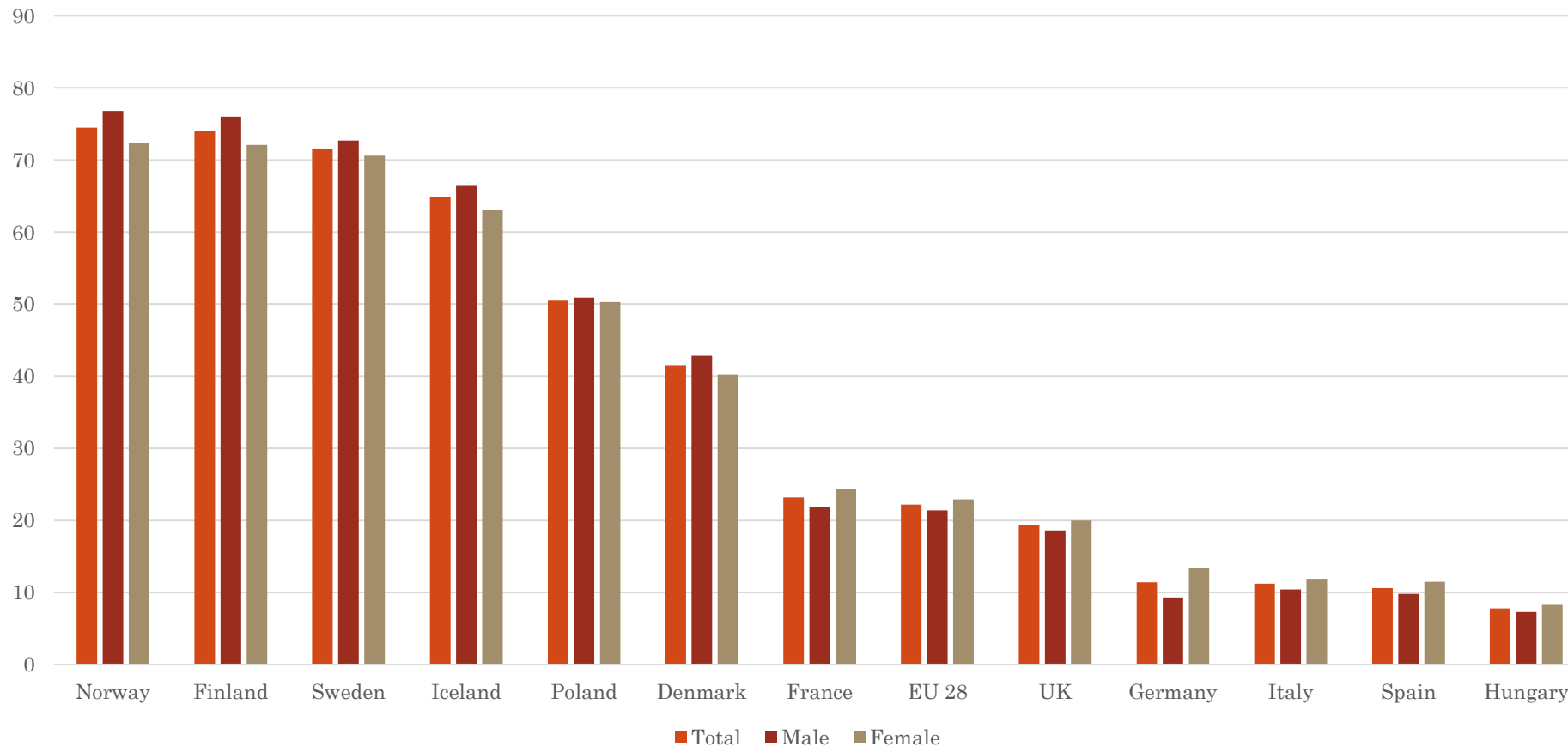
'Thinking about the last twelve months, did you do any unpaid noncompulsory work (or provide services) for or through an organization or a formal group'



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Informal volunteering in 2015

Thinking about the last twelve months, did you give some time to any informal unpaid activities (e.g. helping other people, helping animals etc.), that were not arranged by any organization?



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Some important observations

Who are volunteers?

Men in majority in Northern Europe, Women in Southern Europe.
Older people (65 -). Higher education. Family tradition.

Trust in the society and its institutions

Both formal and informal volunteering are strongly related to trust in the political system, in other citizens, and in the legal system

Inequality in living conditions

There are in all forms of civic engagement a strong correlation between high level of economic and social equality and the level of civic participation (formal and informal)

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	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Revenue in billions	124	112	235
Added value in billions	50	57	135
NPO - GNP in % of total GNP	2.7	2.1	3.1
NPO Paid labour in % of total	5,1	3.3	4.2
NPO Unpaid Labour in % of total	4.8	NA	2,8
Value of Volunteering in % of GNP	2.3	2.8	3.2

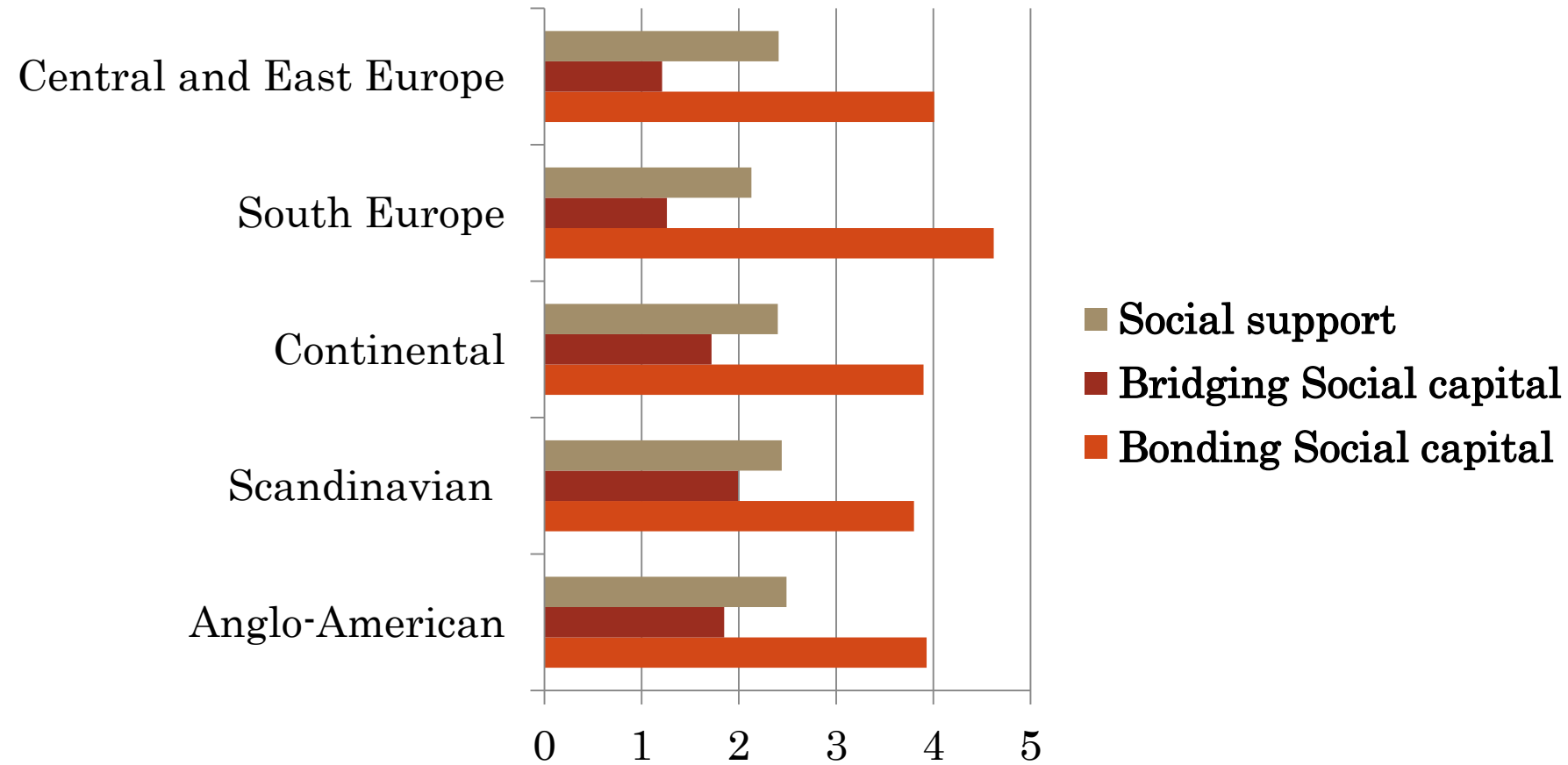
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Social capital – another value of volunteering

Social capital in it different forms

- ❑ **Bonding** social capital – contact to close relatives and friends.
- ❑ **Bridging** social capital – participation in activities in associations and organisations.
- ❑ **Social support** – informal help, economic support, socializing.

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How social capital and citizenship differ?

Social capital refers to being involved in networks, sharing norms and social trusts which facilitate social relations between citizens and groups of people.

Active citizenship refers to the manner in which community development takes place: active, democratic and belonging.

Social capital has no preconditions to ensure that the resources are used towards the **common good** of the society, no **value towards democracy and human rights**, the resources might be used to exclude others – **'dark side of social capital'**

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Citizenship is not merely a legal status conferring certain rights and obligations. It also involves a whole series of practices of the citizens – it might be social, political, and cultural.

Citizenship has to be practised. Only through 'acts of citizenship' do people achieve the status of a citizen with the rights and duties it implies.

Citizenship is practised in all forms of social behaviour and in relationships with other people in the public sphere.

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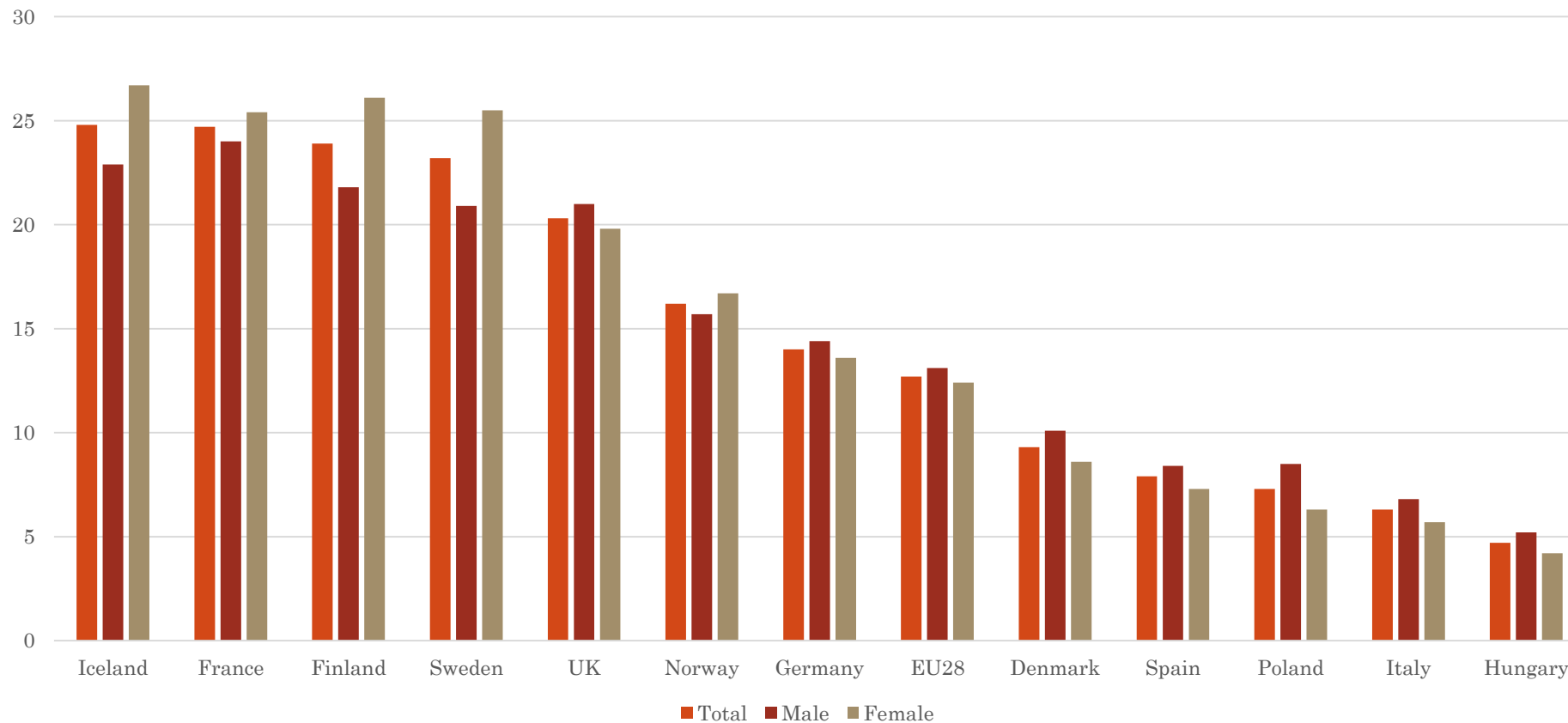
Forms of citizenship

- **Ordinary everyday citizenship** is practiced discreetly through daily routines and lived life, where one takes care of her family, her neighbors and the local community.
- **Active citizenship** is characterized by participating in activities, like voting in elections, taking active part in public life and being involved in volunteer activities. Citizens help actively shaping their daily living conditions.
- **Activist citizenship** is citizen opposing to everyday-citizenship in reformulating the economic, social and political conditions that define the framework for social life. The activist citizen is a person who requires justice, breaks the usual customs and acts in a way that changes the already defined rules, practices and hierarchies in society.

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Active Citizenship

Thinking about the last twelve months, did you participate actively in the activities of a political party or local interest group, in a public consultation, in a demonstration, in a peaceful protest including signing a petition, writing a letter to a politician or to the media, etc.?



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In her theory of social justice, Nancy Fraser argues that recognition of social and cultural needs and economic redistribution of resources are **not sufficient** conditions for justice. Civil society must also guarantee citizens equal participation in decision-making.

All three aspects – *recognition* of different identities and cultures, *redistribution* of economic resources and *representation* in political and civic institutions – are important to ensure inclusion and social cohesion.

Social justice requires social arrangements enabling everyone to participate on equal terms in social life - a key premise for participatory democracy. It is in this respect volunteering is essential for coherence in the society.