

**Public service-oriented work motives across Europe –**

**A cross-country, multi-level investigation**

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**Abstract**

This paper disentangles the country-specific institutional system at the macro-level from individual-level attraction and socialisation in measuring public service-oriented work motives

across European countries through public-private sector comparisons. We argue that country-specific institutions shape the *level* of public service-oriented work motives of each country and thereby generate *level* differences across countries. In contrast, public-private sector differences, i.e. *gaps*, in public service-oriented work motives within a country reflect aspects of individual level attraction and socialisation. We use the 2005 and 2010 waves of the European Working Conditions Survey and demonstrate that the *levels* and *gaps* are empirically distinct phenomena contrary to current treatment in the literature. We conclude that the distinction between levels and gaps can advance the understanding of antecedents of public service-oriented work motives and support the institutional theory of public service-oriented work motives.

**Keywords:** public service oriented work motives, administrative traditions, European Working Conditions survey, institutional systems.

## **Introduction**

Public service motivation is frequently considered a main driver for individuals in public sector careers because it is “a particular form of altruism or pro-social motivation that is animated by specific dispositions and values arising from public institutions and missions” (Perry, Hondeghem and Wise, 2010, 682). Such individual motivational dispositions are not universal but shaped by country-specific institutional systems (Bellé and Ongaro 2014; Kuhlmann 2010; Painter and Peters 2010). These systems may support the development of selected public service-oriented work motives in the society resulting in variations in public service-oriented work motives across countries (Vandenabeele 2008; 2011; Houston 2011).

The available empirical evidence on private-public sector differences in public service-oriented work motives displays huge variations ranging from largely positive to insignificant and negative effects (among others Bullock, Stritch and Rainey 2015; Kjeldsen and Andersen 2013; Westover and Taylor 2010). We argue that such inconsistent results are partly caused by contextual differences, in particular the configuration of the country-specific institutional systems. Hence, disentangling the country-specific institutional system at the macro-level from individual-level attraction and socialisation in measuring public service-oriented work motives can improve the understanding of institutional roots of public service-oriented work motives. We build on Perry’s (2015) assessment that country-specific institutional systems shape public service-oriented work motives and argue that these inconsistencies require researchers to disentangle two overlapping processes.

Each country has a unique set of historically developed institutions that affects the development of societal values of *all* citizens within a country through the transmission of public values (Vandenabeele, 2011). Institutions are country-specific and hence reflect different configurations of values across countries. Consequently, the average of public service-oriented work motives might vary strongly across countries. We label this the '*level*' of work motives oriented towards public service. For example, one might observe a large proportion of individuals with a high *level* of public service-oriented work motives in one country, but a very low proportion in another one. A high *level* in a specific country demonstrates that country-specific institutional systems foster public service-oriented work motives for all citizens.

Within one single country, research consistently finds public service-oriented work motives are more dominant in the public sector than in the private sector (Perry et al. 2010; Bullock et al. 2015). We label this the work motives '*gap*'. *Gaps* describe the public-private sector differences in public service-oriented work motives within a country. Such *gaps* between sectors contain important information regarding the validation of theories on altruistic work motives and the variation of other-oriented work motives inside a given country.

We argue that country levels and sector gaps of public service-oriented work motives are distinct phenomena, independent of one another. Levels are more likely to capture macro-level institutional differences and gaps reflect aspects of individual level attraction and socialisation. In other words, knowing there is a gap in public service-oriented work motives between private and public sector workers, does not offer any information on whether this difference does exist at already elevated levels or at low levels of public service oriented work motives. The management and policy implications in either situation might be different. Thus, differentiating between levels and gaps enhances the understanding of macro-level institutional

antecedents and empirically disentangle them from individual-level antecedents of public service-oriented work motives.

Previous comparative cross-country studies have either exclusively considered *gaps* (see, for example, Van de Walle, Steijn and Jilke 2015) or *levels* (e.g., Ritz and Brewer 2013), but do not elaborate on the differences between *gap* and *levels* of public service-oriented work motives (Bullock et al. 2015; Houston 2011; 2014; Kjeldsen and Andersen 2013; Van de Walle et al. 2015; Vandenabeele and Van de Walle 2008). Hence, disentangling levels and gaps can advance the theoretical foundations of public service-oriented work motives.

Thus, we empirically investigate whether country-specific institutional systems, i.e. macro-country-level configurations of institutions, shape diverging country *levels* and whether *levels* and *gaps* in public service-oriented work motives are distinct empirical phenomena. To disentangle both we use the 2005 and 2010 waves of the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). The data are particularly appropriate to analyze country differences in public service-oriented work motives while ruling out potentially confounding effects at the individual, job and organizational levels. We also test whether administrative traditions (Painter and Peters 2010) can help to explain the country variations in *levels* and *gaps*.

We make three contributions to the literature. First, we introduce the distinction between *levels* and *gaps* of public service-oriented work motives that allows to empirically disentangle macro and micro-level antecedents of public service-oriented work motives. While these two aspects have, to date, been treated interchangeably, it is our argument that they are genuinely different. We provide empirical evidence showing that they are even *negatively* related to each other. Hence, this paper aims to establish the relevance and empirical identification of *levels* and *gaps*.

Second, considered jointly an analysis of levels and gaps has theoretical relevance for the design of public sector recruitment campaigns, for the design of policies and for public

sector performance management. More specifically, we advance the literature on recruitment messages as depending on whether a public sector organization operates in a country with high levels of public service orientations. Similarly, managerial interventions to increase performance vary depending on whether levels of public service-oriented work values are already at elevated or lower levels.

Third, we take a macro-level perspective by focusing on the different administrative traditions present in Europe. An analysis of country specific levels generates insights as to what extent country specific institutions are able to create, nurture and maintain public service orientations in their citizens. Thus, it provides insights for the configuration of administrative systems whereas an analysis of sectoral differences (i.e. gaps) is a test of the hypothesis that public service work motives are more prevalent in the public and non-profit sectors than in the private sector (i.e. one of the foundational hypotheses in PSM theory). Hence, we provide unique empirical evidence on how such traditions shape public service-oriented work motives. This approach contributes to building the institutional theory of public service-oriented work motivation (Vandenabeele 2007).

However, we have to declare one caveat related to the use of representative datasets. While the EWCS is particularly appropriate for comparative research, it does not contain a detailed dimensional PSM measure such as the ones developed by Perry (1996). Past research, using representative large-scale datasets (e.g., Bullock et al. 2015; Georgellis, Iossa and Tabvuma 2010; Houston 2011; 2014; Kjeldsen and Andersen 2013; Vogel and Kroll 2016) has circumvented this problem by identifying items that tap into other-oriented work motives resembling PSM dimensions. We employ a similar approach here as the EWCS contains such items. We refer to them as public service-oriented work motives. Further, one should bear in mind that we are not talking about specific single institutions but about aggregate institutional systems, i.e. combinations of institutions that materialize at the country level.

## **Public service-oriented work motives**

Public service-oriented motives refer to a set of other-oriented individual *level* dispositions, which can be nurtured by institutions (Bullock et al. 2015; Perry and Wise, 1990). Since they operate on the individual-*level*, constructs like for example PSM can be found in all sectors (Liu, Zhang, Du and Hu 2015; Homberg & Costello 2019) but are assumed to be more pronounced in public sector settings (Perry 2014). Consequently, such motives play a significant role in the attraction (Fischer & Schott 2020) and socialization processes and shape the nature of public sector work in general. A difference between the sectors or gap in work motives reflects the strength of attraction to public sector work.

The individual level of public service-oriented work motives can be formed by combinations of societal values rooted in country-specific historical development of law, government and public institutions (i.e. aggregates of institutional antecedents). Hence, such aggregate institutional antecedents can shape the overall *level* of public service-oriented work motives within a country. Consequently, it may matter for sector attraction (that is related to the within-country *gap*) if one country has a comparatively high baseline *level* or low baseline *level* of work motives oriented towards public service (i.e. the country average of public service-oriented work motives). For example, in a well-designed study on sectoral attraction and socialization effects comparing the influence of PSM before and after taking up employment of students of physiotherapy in Denmark, Kjeldsen and Jacobsen (2013, 916) do not observe any effects of PSM on sector attraction, a finding which may be driven by the high average country *level* of PSM-oriented work motives present in Denmark. Hence, comparative cross-country analysis might allow us to account for country-*level* differences induced by the aggregated configuration of a country-specific institutional-system to understand the variation in *gaps* across countries.

Another important factor is related to publicness. There is a longstanding debate about differences between the public and the private sector and what constitutes the publicness of organizations (Antonsen & Jorgensen 1997; Jorgensen) with decisive contributions made by Bozeman and Bretschneider (1994) and Bozeman (2004). Traditionally, “core publicness” is understood as the distinction between “public” organizations owned by government and “private” organizations owned by private investors. But this dichotomy only reflects “poles at the end of the dimensions of publicness” (Rainey 2011, p. i338), i.e. a more nuanced understanding of publicness recognizes that all organizations reflect elements that make them public (Bozeman 2013).

Building on these ideas Anderson (2012) disentangles core publicness, dimensional publicness and normative publicness where normative publicness refers to how well public service values are embedded in the organization. In this sense, Antonsen and Jorgensen (1997, p. 337) “define ‘publicness’ as organizational attachment to public sector values: for example, due process, accountability, and welfare provision.” Hence, sector attraction can be conceptualized as an indicator to what extent public values are shared by the individuals self-selecting into the public or private sector. While sector attraction studies can only identify the sector *gap* of public service-oriented work motives within a single country, comparative cross-country analyses also allow to account for the *levels* of such motives. Cross-country comparisons can help to detect the influence of aggregate combinations of institutional antecedents for public service-oriented work motives. One approach is to study such aggregate institutional systems by clustering countries according to their administrative traditions. Hence, we use the administrative traditions as an analytic tool to identify country groups with similar institutional configurations.



## **Administrative traditions**

Administrative traditions are defined as “a historically based set of values, structures and relationships with other institutions that define the nature of appropriate public administration within society” (Peters 2008, 118). Such value sets also shape the expectations towards public administration and define the work motives of those working in public sector organizations. In other words, configurations of such sets of values, structures and relationships give rise to unique administrative traditions that in turn form the *levels* of public service-oriented work motives. We follow Painter and Peters (2010) who distinguish between the Anglo-Saxon, Napoleonic, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Post-Communist (former Soviet) administrative traditions within Europe. We will briefly describe these traditions.

The *Anglo-Saxon administrative tradition* is often referred to as one that puts the least emphasis on the state and the most emphasis on public interest (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014). As Painter and Peters (2010, 21) attest “the profession of public administration, (...), has mostly been about management and policy, not the law.” This emphasizes the management, policy implementation and public interest orientation in these countries.

The *Napoleonic tradition* is “characterized by a functionally weak local self-government and a predominant centralist administration of the state, with the prefect as core actor” (Kuhlmann, 2010, 1119). Some authors associate this tradition with an inherent scepticism towards managerialist-type reforms (Peters 2008). As a result, ‘the state’ continues to develop and grow reinforcing the centralistic nature of the Napoleonic tradition.

The *Germanic (or Weberian) tradition* emphasises a ‘rule of law culture’ (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014, 17) which binds public servants to be ‘Weberian’ style legal rule followers (Meyer and Hammerschmid 2010). For example, in Germany, the activities of public servants are regulated by special laws and the career-based public service system relies on special loyalty requirements between the public servant and the state.

The *Scandinavian administrative tradition* is essentially a variation of the Germanic administrative tradition. However, it puts stronger emphasis on the openness of the public service career system, the accessibility of public services by citizens (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014), and a stronger welfare-state orientation (Kjeldsen and Andersen 2013).

Ultimately, after the collapse of communism, the *Eastern European and South Eastern European* states began to re-establish their public administrations. With the benchmark of the Germanic tradition; the Eastern and South-Eastern European states replicated its emphasis on legal regulation (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014), de-politicization and a professional public service.

### **Cross-country empirical studies on public service-oriented work motives**

A few studies offer international comparisons of public service-oriented work motives, but most studies focus either on the *level* or the *gap*. Van de Walle et al. (2015) use a multi-level model to study sector attraction but only identify one global gap. Houston (2011) focusses on gaps in public service-oriented work motives for Continental, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian regimes and Houston (2014) presents a similar analysis for East European countries, with an exclusive discussion on gaps. Bullock, Stritch and Rainey (2015) estimate the *gap* between the public and private sectors for 30 countries separately. Finally, Kjeldsen and Andersen (2013) examine the relationship between public service motivation and job satisfaction using the *gap* between public and private sector employees for 14 countries.

While the aforementioned studies focus on *gaps*, a few others have investigated *levels*. Vandenberghe and Van de Walle (2008) plot the levels of PSM across 38 countries and show *level* differences in mean public service motivation scores across countries and world regions. Westover and Taylor (2010) compare unconditional PSM *levels* for a selected set of countries. Ritz and Brewer (2013) find higher PSM *levels* for German-speaking Swiss public servants

compared to French-speaking ones; a finding they attribute to varying cultural contexts that are present inside Switzerland.

It is also noteworthy that the majority of the previous cross-country studies on public service-oriented work motives rely on the same data source, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). Hence, we generate additional value in our complementary empirical insight from another suitable data source: the EWCS.

## **Data, Variables and Methods**

### *Data*

We use the 2005 and 2010 waves of the EWCS, a survey about working conditions in European countries commissioned by the European Union (EU) and conducted every five years by Eurofund. The EWCS is a large-scale survey covering, among others, issues of job context, cognitive and psychosocial factors. (Eurofound, 2015). The EWCS is representative at the country level and conducted as a repeated cross-section. We restrict the data to employed individuals between 15 and 65 who are not in any form of education and training. Deleting further observations with missing information in key variables leaves us with an estimation sample of 44,904 individuals across 35 countries.

### *Dependent Variables*

While the EWCS does not contain a dimensional PSM scale, it is nonetheless particularly suitable for our purpose because it contains single-item questions reflecting public service-oriented work motives. For example, a dummy variable that equals one if the individual volunteered at least once a year, and zero otherwise taps into public service orientations related to contributing to society. Volunteering involves a sacrifice of ones' own time and thus aligns with the element of self-sacrifice used in dimensional measures of public service motivation.

Volunteering is understood as an activity designed to support individuals in need without receiving a payment, which aligns with the concept of public service-oriented work motivation. In this spirit, Houston (2006, 71) concludes that a charitable act such as volunteering “embodies the essence of the public service motive in terms of public interest, service to others, and self-sacrifice”. Thus, it can be interpreted as a behavioural proxy measure for public service-oriented work motives. In the following we refer to it as our measure of “self-sacrifice” in order to emphasize the element of donating time and effort to broader societal cause.

Similarly, the answer to the statement “You have the feeling of doing useful work” taps into the individual’s perception of whether their own job generates added societal value and thus can be interpreted as a proxy for commitment to the public interest. We generate a dummy variable that equals one if the individual has almost always had the feeling of doing useful work, and zero otherwise. These measures are comparable to the ones employed by Houston (2011; 2014) and Van de Walle et al. (2015) using ISSP 2005. Proxy measures are appropriate as long as they tap into the desired dimensions even if they do not reflect all facets of a given construct. Similar proxies for public service-oriented work motives have been used in previous large-sample studies on PSM (for example, Georgellis et al. 2010; Taylor and Taylor 2011). Thus, we maintain that the size and the comparative nature of the dataset counterbalance these limitations and make the use of proxy measures worthwhile.

### *Independent Variables*

The first key independent variable is public sector employment, a dummy variable if the participant works in the public or non-profit sector and zero otherwise. This variable identifies the public-private sector *gap* for each country. Please note that the EWCS data does not allow for a detailed dimensional assessment of publicness.

The second key set of variables identifies the country-specific *level* of public service-oriented work motives; in multilevel estimation terminology, these are the random intercepts of each country. Additionally, we group countries according to their administrative tradition (Painter and Peters 2010). Countries rooted in the Anglo-Saxon administrative tradition are the UK, Ireland and Malta. The Germanic tradition underpins Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The Napoleonic tradition is in place in France, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. The Scandinavian tradition comprises Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and the Post-Communist tradition is rooted in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Czech Republic, Romania and Poland. We do not categorize the remaining countries but display their coefficients where appropriate. Hence, the analysis using administrative traditions entails fewer observations.

### *Control Variables*

We control for several individual, workplace and employer characteristics. Individual characteristics are gender, age, education level, and tenure. Workplace characteristics include variables such as being in a managerial position, several work tasks, and working time. Employer characteristics entail organization size and industry dummies. Since we pool two waves of the EWCS data, we control for the wave. Appendix A1 summarizes all variables and their measurement.

### *Estimation Strategy*

We run multi-level regressions on pooled cross-section data in order to disentangle country *levels* and sector *gaps* from individual characteristics influencing public service-oriented work motives whereby each individual is nested within one country. In our multi-level framework, random intercepts reflect the country *levels*, and random slopes of the public sector dummy represent the sector *gaps* within each country. Our main argument is that *levels* and *gaps* should

not be used interchangeably. Hence, we also investigate whether higher levels go along with higher gaps, or vice versa, based on the multi-level regression results. To illustrate the magnitudes of country *levels* and sector *gaps* within a country, we predict and plot the cross-country *levels* (random intercepts) against the within-country public-private *gaps* in work motives related to public service (random slopes). For all models, we cluster standard errors on the country to account for country-specific heteroscedasticity. Additionally, we scrutinize variation between administrative traditions. in a multi-level framework with both random intercepts and random slopes and the moderation of the public-private *gap* by administrative traditions. We conducted several robustness checks adding GDP and the WorldBank government effectiveness index. Results do not materially change when adding these additional variables.

## Results

**Descriptive findings.** Table 1 presents the unconditional *levels* and *gaps* for self-sacrifice for each country. On average, the *level* of self-sacrifice is at 0.28 across Europe<sup>1</sup> with a statistically significant average *gap* of 0.14. Further interesting patterns emerge in self-sacrifice *levels* across European countries. For example, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland belong to the countries with the highest *levels* of self-sacrifice while Spain, Portugal and Italy rank at the lower end. The difference between these countries is more than 30 percentage points.

The public-private *gap* in self-sacrifice is highest in some former Eastern European countries such as Albania, Estonia, and the Czech Republic but lowest in some Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Countries with a high level of self-sacrifice

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<sup>1</sup> A self-sacrifice level of 0.28 can be interpreted as 28% of the respondents in our sample indicate that they are volunteering.

such as Norway or Sweden tend to be countries with a low gap. These findings provide initial insight to support our claim that *gaps* and *levels* need to be considered as distinct phenomena.

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**Insert Table 1 about here**  
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The European average in the *level* of commitment to public interest is 0.54 with an average public-private sector *gap* of 0.14. Countries with a high level such as the Netherlands or Denmark tend to have a small gap while countries with a smaller level such as Montenegro and Lithuania tend to have a larger gap. But the pattern is less clear for this dimension.

**Estimation results.** Since unconditional country *levels and gaps* could be confounded by individual, job and firm characteristics, we run a multi-level model to clean the self-sacrifice and commitment to public interest *levels and gaps* (details in Appendix Table A3). To scrutinize whether the estimated *levels* are distinct from *gaps*, we predict the adjusted country *levels* and country *gaps* and plot both in Figure 1 (self-sacrifice) and Figure 2 (commitment to public interest)<sup>2</sup>. In Figures 1 and 2, the x-axes display the predicted *level* effect and the y-axes display the predicted *gap* effect; each country dot is labelled.

For Figure 1, we illustrate the reading using the example of Norway, located in the right bottom corner (label *Nor*). After controlling for individual, job and firm characteristics, the Norwegian institutions account for a *level* of self-sacrifice among private sector employees of

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<sup>2</sup> The correlation between predicted coefficients may have a different sign than the related coefficients displayed in the Appendix Table A3. For example, the table shows whether public sector employees score higher/lower than private sector employees on public service-oriented work motives (*gap*). In contrast, the figure shows how such higher gaps correlate with the country-specific level of public service-oriented work motives.

around 0.32 (x-axis). The public-private gap in Norway is -0.01 (y-axis)<sup>3</sup>. Now consider the UK. The *level* of self-sacrifice of British private sector employees that cannot be assigned to individual, job or firm characteristics and, hence, is likely to depict the country-specific institutions is around 0.1 and the public-private sector *gap* is around 0.05.

Figure 1 broadly confirms the ranking of countries presented in Table 1 regarding the *level* of self-sacrifice and the private-public sector *gap* with Estonia, Hungary and the Czech Republic having the highest public-private *gaps* (all above 0.1 on y-axis) and Norway, Sweden and Denmark with the lowest (below zero). Norway and Sweden have the highest *level* of self-sacrifice (around 0.3 on the x-axis) and Spain and Lithuania have the lowest (below zero). Moreover, Figure 1 also displays countries with a comparable public-private *gap* in self-sacrifice (i.e. those which are on a horizontal line such as Lithuania, Malta and Switzerland at around 0.06) but with different *levels* of self-sacrifice (Lithuania around zero and Switzerland around 0.25).

Finally, we test whether *gap* and *level* can be used interchangeably. The fitted line in Figure 1 shows the correlation between each country's *level* and *gap* of self-sacrifice. The fitted line has a significant negative slope (-0.18) demonstrating that a higher *level* of self-sacrifice in a country is associated with a lower *gap* between public and private sector employees. The negative correlation between *levels* and *gaps* highlights that both effects should not be interpreted in the same way. Using *levels* and *gaps* interchangeably requires a strong positive correlation between both variables, while we find a negative correlation.

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**Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here**

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<sup>3</sup> While the unconditional numbers presented in the previous section show the average country level, estimations require a reference group. The reference group is the private sector. Hence the gap represents the difference between the public sector and the reference group.



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Figure 2 displays country-specific *level* and *gap* effects after the commitment to public interest regression. The countries are more widely dispersed but hold similar ranks as indicated in Table 1. The Czech Republic and Lithuania exhibit the lowest *levels* of commitment to public interest (close to 0.3) whereas Macedonia and Malta display the highest *levels* (around 0.57). Norway and Denmark display the lowest *gaps* (below zero) and Croatia, Turkey and Greece the highest *gaps* (above 0.08). We also find countries with roughly the same *level* (i.e. located on a vertical line such as the Netherlands and France at 0.35) but with different private-public sector *gaps* (e.g., the Netherlands around zero and France around seven percentage points).

Finally, investigating the correlation between country *level* and country *gap* shows a similar result to that from the self-sacrifice dimension. The fitted line between the *level* of commitment to public interest and the public-private *gap* shows a significantly negative slope (-0.16). This finding highlights again that *levels* and *gaps* are empirically distinct concepts and thus should be treated as such by researchers.

**Administrative traditions.** We now turn to the administrative traditions. We summarize the unconditional *levels* and *gaps* of self-sacrifice and commitment to public interest in Appendix Table A4 for each administrative tradition. Table 2 shows the results of the multi-level estimations and supports the idea that administrative traditions explain variation in the dependent variable.

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**Insert Table 2 about here**

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The administrative traditions differ significantly in the *level* of self-sacrifice. We have chosen Anglo-Saxon countries as the reference group (*level* 26.2 per cent). Countries classified in the Germanic and Scandinavian administrative traditions have a significantly higher *level* of self-sacrifice while Post-Communist and Napoleonic countries have a lower *level* of self-sacrifice than Anglo-Saxon countries have. The private-public *gap* is 6.3 percentage points for Anglo-Saxon countries but significantly higher for Germanic and Post-Communist countries, but lower for Scandinavian and Napoleonic countries.

The results for commitment to public interest show some remarkable differences compared to the self-sacrifice measure. Anglo-Saxon countries have a commitment to public interest *level* of 0.53. Napoleonic countries have a significantly higher *level* than Anglo-Saxon countries while Germanic, Scandinavian and Post-Communist countries have a lower *level* of commitment to public interest. While we find no public-private sector *gap* in commitment to public interest in Anglo-Saxon countries, Post-Communist and Napoleonic countries have a higher public-private *gap*. Ultimately, Germanic and Scandinavian countries have a lower public-private *gap* than Anglo-Saxon countries.

## **Discussion**

We analyse the impact of institutional system differences on public service-oriented work motives across Europe. Our main argument is that cross-country-*level* differences and within-country *gaps* between public and private sector employees concerning those work motives need to be considered and analysed as distinct phenomena occurring simultaneously whereas past research treated them interchangeably or focussed on one only. Country- levels are more likely to measure the impact of country-specific combinations of institutional systems on public

service-oriented work motives and within country gaps are more likely to measure individual attraction and socialisation. Our analyses data from the EWCS strongly support this claim.

We find a systematic negative correlation between the country-level of public service-oriented work motives and the corresponding size of the country *gap* between public and private sector employees. For example, countries of the Scandinavian tradition display minimal public-private sector *gaps* but high *levels* in public service-oriented work motives. On the contrary, Post- Communist countries have a comparably large *gap* but a comparably low *level* of public service-oriented work motives. We conclude that *levels* of work motives oriented towards public service that are visible in a cross-country comparison should not be confused with the *gap* of such work motives inside one country.

This distinction is important because interventions targeting high-public service motivated individuals may only be effective if a large *gap* favours the public sector for public service-oriented work motives in a country. Such *gaps* can in principle exist under both high and low country *levels* of public service-oriented work motives, but our analyses demonstrate that a larger *gap* is more likely if the *level* is comparably low. Hence, a nuanced consideration of both elements is necessary in cross-country studies of public service-oriented work motives. According to our results, generating sector attraction through public service-oriented work motives is a very useful strategy for countries characterized by low *levels* and high *gaps* between the public and private sectors, i.e. countries where the institutional configuration only weakly induces public service-oriented work motives. In such instances, a ‘pull-effect’ arising from public-service oriented work motives tends to be stronger than in situations where the average institutionally induced level of public sector work motives is high and gaps are small.

On the theoretical level, our results lend support to the institutional arguments related to PSM (Vandenabeele 2007) because we see clear associations between our variables across countries and administrative traditions. Clustering countries based on their administrative

tradition provides a novel theoretical insight into the *levels* and *gaps*. Our findings imply that generalizations of findings across countries are only likely to hold within countries of the same administrative tradition. Notwithstanding these cluster differences, the results support the idea that country-specific institutional systems do matter for the shaping of public service-oriented work motives. The latter is an important building block for an institutional theory of public service related work motives and our analyses show first empirical support.

Overall, a closer consideration of *gaps* and *levels* may help public sector managers to ensure focus when designing interventions for their workforce. In countries where *gaps* between the sectors are almost non-existent and *levels* are generally high (i.e. the Scandinavian countries), interventions geared towards public service-oriented work motives are less likely to be effective.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The results of this study have to be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, our results display associations and not causal effects. Nonetheless, the results display unique country patterns at the aggregated country *level*. Additionally, our focus on institutionally engrained traditions provides theoretical guidance for the possible direction of the effect from the institutional-system to individual-level motives. Second, we exploit measures reflecting two different aspects of public service-oriented work motives, which may be considered not ideal. Nonetheless, the proxies used in our work tap closely into two facets of public service-oriented work motives. Related to this point is the fact that we are taking a specific perspective to address institutional effects, i.e. we study institutional systems at the macro country level. Others are similarly legitimate and different classifications of institutions can be found in the literature. Third, cross-country datasets may have problems with keeping up validity of

measures (e.g. volunteering can take different meaning depending on the country, useful work may be interpreted differently – see for example Dur & Van Lent 2019). But this is a phenomenon common to all cross-country datasets. Fourth, a common problem for multi-level estimations is the number of observations at the country level. The EWCS is advantageous in this regard as it contains a comparatively high number of countries with a high number of observations inside each country. Ultimately, a common concern arising with self-report data is social desirability bias. Our data source is a professionally collected dataset displaying several features suitable to adequately limit social desirability bias. Thus, we consider this to be a minor issue in the data.

**Supplementary material:** to be found at <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ras>.

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**Table 1:** Unconditional *levels* and *gaps* in self-sacrifice and commitment to public interest.

Country	Self-sacrifice			Commitment to public interest		
	<i>Level</i>	<i>Gap</i>	p-value	<i>Level</i>	<i>Gap</i>	p-value
Albania	0.28	0.24	0.00	0.54	0.19	0.00
Austria	0.30	0.16	0.00	0.51	0.17	0.00
Belgium	0.27	0.11	0.00	0.51	0.09	0.00
Bulgaria	0.18	0.16	0.00	0.62	0.18	0.00
Croatia	0.24	0.13	0.00	0.51	0.22	0.00
Cyprus	0.27	0.18	0.00	0.66	0.12	0.00
Czech Republic	0.24	0.19	0.00	0.37	0.17	0.00
Denmark	0.35	-0.01	0.82	0.63	0.05	0.05
Estonia	0.30	0.22	0.00	0.56	0.15	0.00
<b>Europe</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.00</b>
Finland	0.38	0.09	0.00	0.46	0.14	0.00
France	0.18	0.09	0.00	0.55	0.15	0.00
FYROM	0.23	0.18	0.00	0.65	0.14	0.00
Germany	0.28	0.14	0.00	0.45	0.11	0.00
Greece	0.18	0.16	0.00	0.52	0.23	0.00
Hungary	0.26	0.19	0.00	0.59	0.12	0.00
Ireland	0.31	0.13	0.00	0.57	0.12	0.00
Italy	0.18	0.13	0.00	0.50	0.19	0.00
Kosovo	0.47	0.17	0.00	0.67	0.23	0.00
Latvia	0.33	0.14	0.00	0.63	0.09	0.00
Lithuania	0.15	0.15	0.00	0.43	0.21	0.00
Luxembourg	0.28	0.14	0.00	0.60	0.06	0.06
Malta	0.21	0.12	0.00	0.69	0.08	0.00
Montenegro	0.42	0.10	0.02	0.43	0.19	0.00
Netherlands	0.43	0.09	0.00	0.60	0.04	0.21
Norway	0.51	0.05	0.05	0.52	0.04	0.13
Poland	0.25	0.17	0.00	0.56	0.22	0.00
Portugal	0.12	0.08	0.00	0.61	0.14	0.00
Romania	0.17	0.11	0.00	0.62	0.15	0.00
Slovakia	0.22	0.15	0.00	0.46	0.18	0.00
Slovenia	0.43	0.12	0.00	0.62	0.05	0.05
Spain	0.08	0.10	0.00	0.53	0.14	0.00
Sweden	0.47	-0.02	0.52	0.58	0.13	0.00
Switzerland	0.45	0.14	0.00	0.65	0.10	0.01
Turkey	0.24	0.19	0.00	0.35	0.22	0.00
United Kingdom	0.26	0.11	0.00	0.45	0.16	0.00

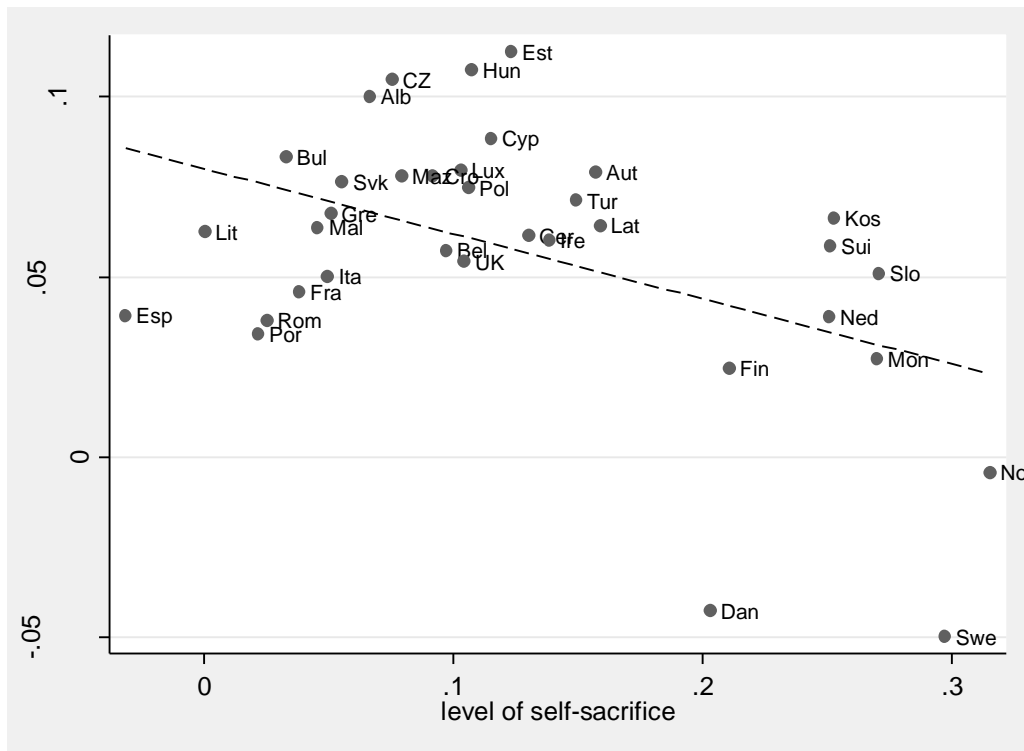
N= 45,137 observations; *level* is the average self-sacrifice (commitment to public interest), *gap* is the difference between public and private sector employees with the p-values showing the significance of each country's gap. Source EWCS 2005-2010.

**Table 2:** Impact of administrative traditions and public sector employees on public-service oriented work motives.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Self-sacrifice		Commitment to public interest	
Public sector employee ( <i>gap</i> )	0.049*** (3.32)	0.063*** (4.00)	0.029 (1.44)	0.016 (0.92)
<i>Reference group: Anglo-Saxon</i>				
Germanic tradition ( <i>level</i> )	0.085*** (25.53)	0.077*** (26.02)	-0.048*** (15.81)	-0.050*** (17.19)
Napoleonic tradition ( <i>level</i> )	-0.077*** (20.42)	-0.070** (16.36)	0.033*** (13.45)	0.017*** (6.42)
Scandinavian tradition ( <i>level</i> )	0.133*** (23.34)	0.165*** (29.28)	-0.031*** (7.31)	-0.020*** (4.57)
Post-Communist tradition ( <i>level</i> )	-0.008 (1.12)	-0.015* (1.84)	0.003 (1.63)	-0.010*** (6.82)
Moderation: Public sector employee x ...				
... Germanic tradition ( <i>gap</i> )		0.025** (10.42)		-0.007*** (3.24)
... Napoleonic tradition ( <i>gap</i> )		-0.020*** (9.27)		0.049*** (14.20)
... Scandinavian tradition ( <i>gap</i> )		-0.092*** (18.59)		-0.028*** (7.06)
... Post-Communist tradition ( <i>gap</i> )		0.019*** (5.51)		0.038*** (10.68)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Log Likelihood	-16899	-16890	-20688	-20681
Number of observations	30,106	30,106	30,106	30,106
Reference group-level effect: private sector employee	0.262*** (51.57)	0.262*** (43.25)	0.532*** (75.25)	0.531*** (92.72)

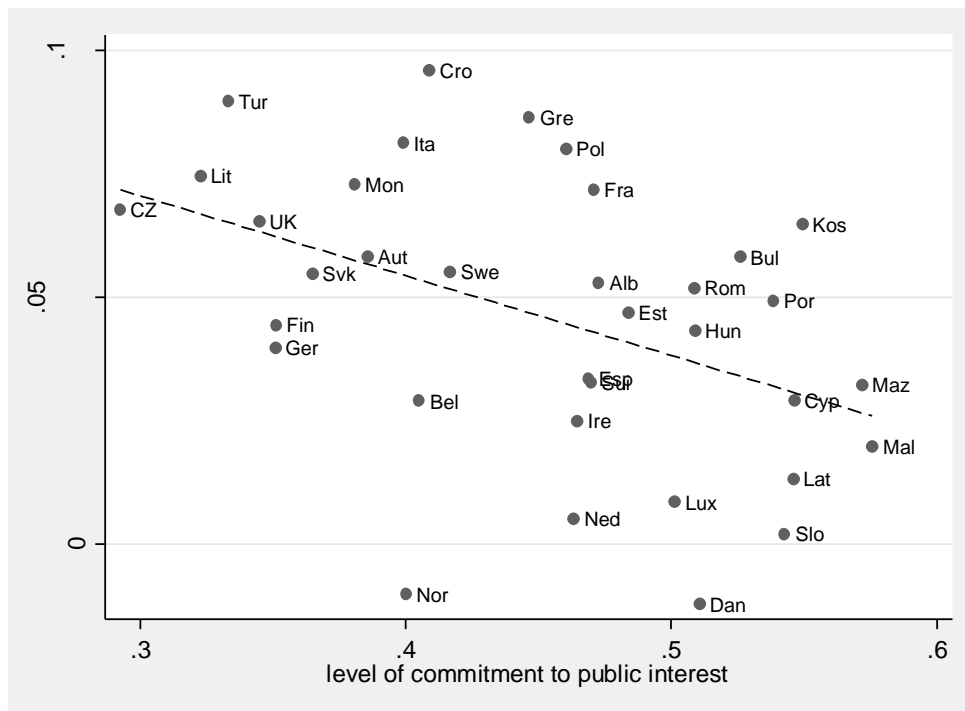
Dependent variable: dummy for self-sacrifice (Models 1 and 2) and dummy for commitment to public interest (Models 3 and 4), method: multi-level model with random intercept and random slope for public sector employee; t-values in parentheses, standard errors clustered on 35 countries, regressions control for weekly hours worked, out-of-work demand, monotone tasks, well-paid job permanent contract, two education levels, male, managerial position, age, tenure, three firm-size categories, a year fixed effect and ten industry dummies; reference group-level effect is the predicted probability for private sector employees; \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01; Raw data source EWCS 2005-2010.

**Figure 1:** Self-sacrifice *levels* and *gaps* after Multi-Level Estimation



Predicted values after the self-sacrifice multi-level estimation (Table A2, column 2); *level* is the country-specific random intercept; *gap* is the country-specific random slope of the public sector employee, fitted line has a coefficient of -0.181 with p-value < 0.01; Raw data source EWCS 2005-2010.

**Figure 2:** Commitment to Public Interest *levels* and *gaps* after Multi-Level Estimation



Predicted values after the commitment to public interest multi-level estimation (Table A2, column 4); *level* is country-specific random intercept; *gap* is the country-specific random slope of the public sector employee, fitted line has a coefficient of -0.161 with p-value < 0.01; Raw data source EWCS 2005-2010.