

International Sociology

<http://iss.sagepub.com/>

A shift from public to private environmental behavior: Findings from Hadler and Haller (2011) revisited and extended

Markus Hadler and Max Haller
International Sociology 2013 28: 484
DOI: 10.1177/0268580913494661

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://iss.sagepub.com/content/28/4/484>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



International Sociological Association

Additional services and information for *International Sociology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://iss.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://iss.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> **Version of Record** - Jul 5, 2013

What is This?



A shift from public to private environmental behavior: Findings from Hadler and Haller (2011) revisited and extended

International Sociology

28(4) 484–489

© The Author(s) 2013

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0268580913494661

iss.sagepub.com



Markus Hadler

Macquarie University, Australia

Max Haller

University of Graz, Austria

Introduction

In 2011, we published the article ‘Global activism and nationally driven recycling: The influence of world society and national contexts on public and private environmental behavior’ in *International Sociology*. We considered the effects of national affluence, political opportunity structures, and global ties on these two environmental behaviors. This initial analysis showed that public behavior is quite similar across countries, while private behavior is more strongly influenced by the national context. Furthermore, a higher level of development, permissive political opportunities, and more ties to world society showed positive effects on both public and private behaviors.

The 2011 analysis and conclusions were based on survey data from 23 countries collected by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) in 2000/2001. This cross-sectional design did not allow for any insights in changes over time. Meanwhile, ISSP has collected another wave of data on environmental behaviors and attitudes in 2010/2011. Together with the older ISSP data from 1993/1994, this research note utilizes a three-wave design that allows more complex insights.

The present time-comparative analysis extends and qualifies some of the initial observations. Private and public behaviors are becoming more similar across countries over time, and, therefore, homogenization processes are present in both dimensions. The underlying trends, however, are contrarian. Activism has decreased and private behavior

Corresponding author:

Markus Hadler, Department of Sociology, Macquarie University, North Ryde NSW 2109, Australia.

Email: markus.hadler@mq.edu.au

increased. Even more, the decline in activism is the strongest in open democracies and affluent societies, questioning the positive effects of increasing affluence and democratization over time.

Research design and analyses

The data used in this analysis were collected by ISSP (www.ISSP.org), a research consortium that conducts annual surveys on various topics, currently with 48 member countries. The modules on environmental behavior and attitudes were fielded in 1993/1994, 2000/2001, and 2010/2011. In total, 16 countries have participated in all three waves. This analysis is based on these countries. When limiting this study to the second wave only – the wave used in Hadler and Haller (2011) – results obtained from the 16-country sample are comparable to the cross-sectional study with 23 countries.

The present analysis considers – in the same way as the initial analysis – six environmental behavior items. *Public behavior* is measured by ‘being a member of an environmental organization’ and having ‘signed a petition’, ‘donated money’, or ‘attended a demonstration’ during the last five years. The ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers of each respondent were summed, divided by the number of valid responses, and rescaled with 0 indicating no public behavior and 100 the maximum activity. *Private behavior* is measured by ‘foregoing car driving for environmental reasons’ and ‘separating waste’. Answer categories are ‘always’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘never’, and ‘no car or driver’s license’ and ‘no recycling available’ as additional options. Again, the valid responses were summed and divided by the total number of responses. The private behavior scale also ranges from 0 to 100 with 0 indicating no private behavior and 100 the maximum activity.

The following section includes only descriptive overviews of the magnitudes and changes in environmental behaviors. Advanced analyses were conducted as well, but are not shown in this research note. Nonetheless, they inform the interpretations and remarks in the results section.

Results

Figure 1 shows the magnitude and changes of private behavior in 16 countries since 1993. The countries are sorted according to the prevalence of private behavior in 2010. In accordance with Hadler and Haller (2011), private behavior is the most common in the corporatist welfare states Austria and Germany and the least common in the two former socialist countries Russia and Bulgaria. When considering changes over time, however, we can see that private behavior has increased the most in countries where it was less common in 1993 and 2000, while it has stagnated at a higher level in more affluent countries and seasoned democracies. We, therefore, need to add a qualification to the initial conclusion of affluence having a positive influence on private behavior. Its effect is limited and ceiling effects are observable. Over time, the population in countries with initially less favorable structures has caught up with those of countries with more favorable structures.

Figure 2 shows the pattern for public behavior. Again, in accordance with Hadler and Haller (2011), public behavior is more common in liberal states and less common in

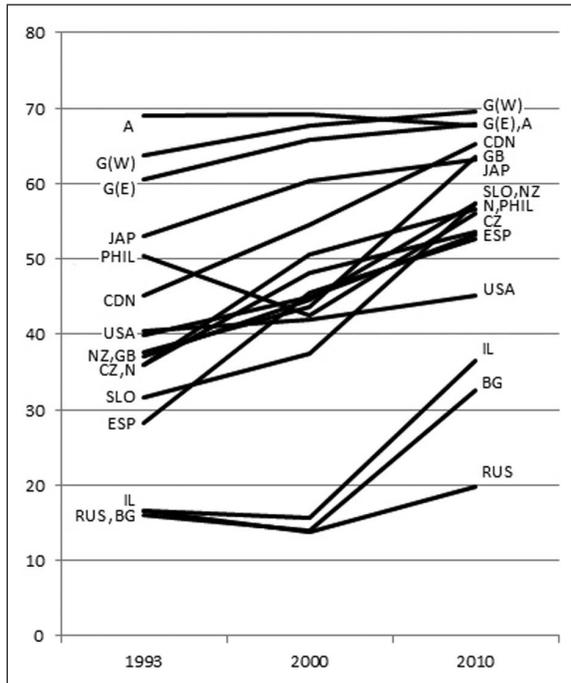


Figure 1. Private behavior and its change since 1993 in 16 countries.

Source: ISSP 1993, 2000, and 2010. Total sample size 57,874 respondents. Data points reflect national averages with higher values indicating stronger pro-environmental behavior (see research design section). Countries are sorted according to the magnitude of private behavior in 2010. Country abbreviations: A: Austria, BG: Bulgaria, CDN: Canada, CZ: Czech Republic, ESP: Spain, GB: Great Britain, G(W): Germany West, G(E): Germany East, IL: Israel, JAP: Japan, N: Norway, NZ: New Zealand, PHIL: Philippines, RUS: Russia, SLO: Slovenia, USA: United States of America.

former socialist countries. The changes over time, however, are in stark contrast to the changes in private behavior. Public behavior has become less common in countries with permissive contexts such as affluent societies and seasoned democracies. In countries with less permissive contexts, public behavior has mostly remained at the original lower level. The initial conclusion that permissive circumstances have positive effects on activism, therefore, needs to be qualified by the observation that public behavior has decreased substantially in these countries.

Table 1 summarizes the changes in private and public behavior in terms of magnitude (overall mean value) and homogeneity across countries (standard deviation of national mean values). As discussed above, the two behaviors are drifting apart over time with private behavior converging at an overall higher level and public behavior at an overall lower level. Interestingly, however, the differences across countries within each behavior have decreased over time. Therefore, the initial conclusion that public behavior is quite homogeneous cross-nationally, while private behavior is more strongly influenced by the national context (Hadler and Haller, 2011), needs to be qualified by the observation that homogenization processes are visible in both dimensions.

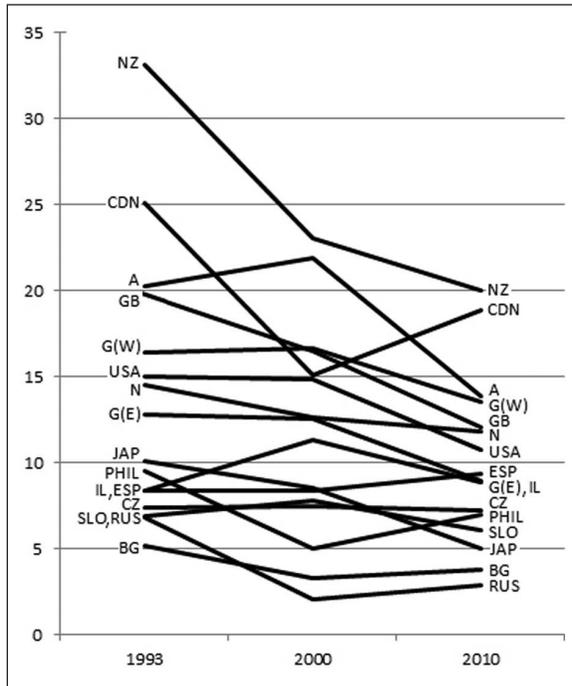


Figure 2. Public behavior and its change since 1993 in 16 countries.

Source: ISSP 1993, 2000, and 2010. Total sample size 57,874 respondents. Data points reflect national averages with higher values indicating stronger pro-environmental behavior (see research design section). Countries are sorted according to the magnitude of public behavior in 2010. Country abbreviations: see Figure 1.

Table 1. Magnitude and homogeneity of public and private behavior over time.

		1993	2000	2010
Public behavior	Mean value	13.70	11.66	9.97
	SD	7.72	6.15	4.93
Private behavior	Mean	39.96	44.86	53.17
	SD	16.47	17.84	14.09

Source: ISSP 1993, 2000, and 2010. Total sample size 57,874 respondents. Mean value and standard deviation are based on the national averages as displayed in Figures 1 and 2.

Connections to other research and conclusions

How do these contrarian trends in environmental behaviors relate to other research? The increase and/or overall high level of private behavior is in line with other cross-cultural comparisons such as that of Dunlap and York (2008), who discovered increasing environmental concerns, and Franzen and Meyer (2010), who found stable concerns. The decrease and/or overall lower level of public behavior (and support for environmental

organizations), however, is quite surprising when considering research such as Longhofer and Schofer (2010) that points to increasing numbers of environmental organizations at a global scale. Therefore, a gap between the organizational professionalization of environmental protection and individual support seems to emerge.

These new findings also have some implications for different theories and conclusions presented in Hadler and Haller (2011). Regarding world society theory, the current analysis shows that increasing diversity and increasing homogenization can occur at the same time. Global forces, therefore, may lead to both more differences – as seen in the increasing split between private and public behavior – and more similarities – as seen in the diminishing cross-country differences in each behavioral dimension. Regarding political opportunity structures, the present analysis confirms their importance considering the difference between countries with and without a socialist legacy. However, the conclusion in Hadler and Haller (2011) that governments which have established strong environmental protections also face strong activism applies only when ignoring the time comparative aspect – given that Figure 2 shows that the drop in activism is the highest in countries with long-established environmental protections. A similar qualification applies to available resources. They do matter, but the reduction in public behavior is more common in resourceful societies.

In sum, the observed trend of diverging public and private behaviors, mixed with a general homogenization across countries within each behavior add substantially to the conclusions of the initial cross-national study of 2011. First, homogenization occurs in both dimensions. Second, indicators such as increasing prosperity, increasing international ties, and better political opportunity structures can have negative effects. Increases and decreases in contextual characteristics, therefore, must not be equated with their effects at a single time point. Finally, the growing gap between the two behaviors also points towards a shift from public to private environmental behaviors. In this regard, they confirm arguments and studies showing that membership and participation in large formal associations (e.g., political parties, trade unions, churches) is declining (Putnam, 2000; Thomson, 2005). This does not necessarily imply, however, a general decline of engagement for public affairs and of social capital; it may indicate only a shift toward other patterns of such engagement, that is, more self-selected, concrete, and time-limited forms of participation (Hilton and McKay, 2011; Hondrich and Koch-Arzberger 1992).

Funding

This research received support under Project Nr. P22575, 'Environmental behavior: Global and national influences', funded by the Austrian Science Fund, principal investigator: Markus Hadler.

References

- Dunlap RE and York R (2008) The globalization of environmental concern and the limits of the postmaterialist values explanation: Evidence from four multinational surveys. *The Sociological Quarterly* 49(3): 529–563.
- Franzen A and Meyer R (2010) Environmental attitudes in cross-national perspective: A multi-level analysis of the ISSP 1993 and 2000. *European Sociological Review* 26(2): 219–234.

- Hadler M and Haller M (2011) Global activism and nationally driven recycling: The influence of world society and national contexts on public and private environmental behavior. *International Sociology* 26(3): 315–345.
- Hilton M and McKay J (eds) (2011) *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got the Big Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hondrich KO and Koch-Arzberger C (1992) *Solidarität in der modernen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Longhofer W and Schofer E (2010) National and global origins of environmental association. *American Sociological Review* 75(4): 505–533.
- Putnam R (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Thomson IT (2005) The theory that won't die. From mass society to the decline of social capital. *Sociological Forum* 20(3): 421–448.

Author biographies

Markus Hadler is senior lecturer at the Department of Sociology, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia. and guest lecturer at the Department of Sociology, University of Graz (Austria).

Max Haller is a full professor of sociology at the University of Graz (Austria) and a member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.