



Career Development Observatory & Research Management Seminar

The Collective Action of Data Collection: Innovations in Gathering Political Data

Holger Döring (Ph.D., University of Konstanz)
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Friday 13th of March, 2009

Morning Session

The collective action of data collection: Improving empirical information on political institutions

Hour: 11:00 – 13:00

Aula A, Via Pace 10

A new way to collect empirical data in political science: ParlGov the online database on parliamentary and governmental composition

Afternoon Session:

'Hands on' session introducing some of the software tools that facilitate working with heterogeneous data sources.

Hour: 14:30 – 17:30

Aula d'Informatica

Dipartimento di Studi Politici e Sociali, Via Passione, 13

Additional Information

Systematic and constantly updated data sources are a prerequisite for empirical studies of political science. However, the gathering of empirical data in political science is pursued rather differently. Students of political behaviour and political economy hold well maintained and systematic data sources. The former rely mostly on surveys which are collected through national data archives (e.g. ICPSR). The latter can draw on systematic data gathering by international organizations such as the OECD or the World Bank.

In the field of comparative politics, however, similar institutional foundations to collect information about political institutions are lacking. Shortcomings start with basic information such as electoral results or government compositions among other fundamental empirical information on institutions. It is not so much a lack of this information but rather a lack of systematic ways to combine and update the scattered information. As a consequence, most

quantitative studies rely on different empirical sources that are collected from heterogeneous paper and online sources. Hence, there is no coherent digital data basis for studying political institutions and there has been no systematic effort to overcome this shortcoming.

In this seminar, Holger Döring will propose a new way to collect empirical data in political science and present an online database on parliamentary and governmental composition named "ParlGov". He takes most of his inspiration as well as his software tools from modern approaches to software development and collective intelligence. ParlGov encourages active user contribution and enables the user to update, correct and extend empirical information. To achieve this, the database features modern online tools such as wikis, issue trackers, and open licenses. Hence, ParlGov provides a platform for a more systematic approach on collaborative data collection in political science.

To clarify the innovative potential of this approach, Holger Döring will present an application of ParlGov to the study of coalition building. Drawing the empirical data from ParlGov, he will discuss the historical evolution of studies of cabinet formation in political science and improvements over the last five decades. His presentation focuses on the evolution of theoretical approaches, data collection efforts and recent methodological innovations.