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METODI DELLA RICERCA PER LA SCIENZA POLITICA

Dear colleagues,

The “Metodi della Ricerca per la Scienza Politica” ([MetRiSP](#)) standing group of the Italian Political Science Association ([SISP](#)) will hold a one-day applied methods workshop at the [University of Catania](#) on April 26, 2019 with the title “*Capturing causation: Research and model designs*”.

The workshop will gather applied researchers from EUI, Firenze, Milano and Siena. The speakers will address the state-of-the-art use of methods ranging from Qualitative Comparative Analysis and Matching to Survey-based Experiments and Regression Discontinuity Designs. The workshop is also catered for PhD students, who will be given opportunities to present their research projects and network with the speakers and other MetRiSP members.

For the event, the Standing Group in collaboration with University of Catania is pleased to offer up to 3 scholarships in order for PhD students to attend and participate in the workshop. Each scholarship will be up to 400 Euros to be spent in travel and accommodation. Candidates can be at any stage of the PhD; however, the assessment panel may select on the premise of project creativity, methodological diversity and other criteria (e.g. gender representation).

In order to apply for the workshop, as well as, if interested, for the scholarships, the candidates should send an email to the MetRiSP President (Luigi Curini, luigi.curini@unimi.it) and the Vice-President and workshop convenor (Vincenzo Memoli, memoliv@gmail.com). In the email please attach a cover letter with a brief description of the PhD project (no more than 500 words) and a short CV. Applications will be open until March 1, 2019.

The workshop has been generously founded by the Italian Political Science Association and by Dipartimento di Scienza Politica - Università degli Studi di Catania.

Milan, 11 January 2019
Luigi Curini, Chair MetRiSP



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*2nd Workshop in Political Science Methods
Capturing causation: Research and model designs*
Organized by the SISP Standing Group MetRiSP

6 April 2019

Università degli Studi di Catania
Aula Magna c/o Palazzo Pedagaggi
Dipartimento di Scienza Politica, Via Vittorio Emanuele II, 49, Catania

9:00 *Welcome Greetings* by Prof. Giuseppe Vecchio – Head of the Department of Political Science – and Prof. Francesca Longo – SISP President

9:20 *Introduction to the workshop*

9:30 *The Regression Discontinuity Design*
Speaker: *Elias Dinas (European University Institute)*

The seminar intends to provide a brief but concise introduction into one of the few designs available to retrieve experimental benchmarks with observational data. Through a series of examples from international relations, economic history, political economy and voting behavior, we will look at the intuition behind the design, the identification assumption, the estimation techniques, and the set of robustness checks and sensitivity analyses that tend to accompany regression discontinuity designs. We will use data from working and published papers to implement the method in Stata and R. Code in both software will be provided.

10:30 *Correlation is not causation. Yet... Better proof by preprocessing data with matching*
Speakers: *Stefano Costalli (Università degli Studi di Firenze) and Fedra Negri (Università degli Studi di Milano)*

Abstract: The main reasons why 'correlation does not imply causation' are selection bias (i.e. treatment and control groups composition follows a non-random selection) and parametric model dependence. Unfortunately, these problems tend to be forgotten when statistical results support pre-existing views or scenarios researchers wish to be true (i.e. confirmation bias). If selection into treatment is mainly due to observables characteristics and researchers are able to justify the plausibility of the selection on

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observables assumption, then matching techniques may reduce imbalance in the empirical distribution of pre-treatment covariates between the treatment and control groups, thus reducing the degree of model dependence in the statistical estimation of causal effects. The seminar is structured as follows. First, it warns against the negative consequences of overlooking selection bias and model dependence in observational studies. Then, it briefly reviews the available matching techniques. Lastly, it focuses on one of the most powerful matching techniques (i.e. Coarsened Exact Matching) showing how to perform it. Several examples in political science and policy evaluation will be provided.

11:30 *PhD students' presentations*

12:30 *Lunch break*

14:30 *A primer to experimental designs in political science*

Speaker: *Francesco Olmastroni (Università degli Studi di Siena)*

The seminar offers an overview of the use of experimental designs in political science. By relying on concrete examples taken from field and laboratory research, we will go through the main stages of designing, planning and implementing an experiment, with a special focus on population-based survey experiments (PBSE). During the seminar we will also discuss the implications for how political scientists think about causal relationships and eventually what future is there for experimental designs in political science.

15:30 *Modelling configurational explanations*

Speaker: *Alessia Damonte (Università degli Studi di Milano)*

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a technique that relies on set theory and Boolean algebra to find which factors maintain a relationship of logical sufficiency to an outcome, and how these factors relate to each other in the cases at hand. As such, QCA can neither forecast nor render processes properly. Instead, it can yield accounts of local differences in outcomes that are truer to cases than single predictors and less open to uncontrolled idiosyncrasies than in-depth portrayals. However, QCA can only ensure that findings meet selected logical requisites as true causes would do -- which does not mean the factors are causes. Configurational methodologists have tackled the issue as a matter of tests for errors in ascription. Less explored is the problem of the

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model design. Which criteria should we follow to include factors so that they render a credible hypothesis about configurational causation? And what exactly is configurational causation? In providing answers, the talk will show how to model configurational hypotheses that make sense of Standard QCA results in political studies, and that complement knowledge from case-oriented and variable-oriented studies.

16:30 *Looking for social capital. Are survey measures of trust reliable?*

Speaker: *Paola Bordandini (Università di Bologna)*

Despite the importance and wide application of social capital in social sciences, the reliability of its measures hinges on anecdotal evidence, and on correlations among survey variables. We perform a large scale test of the reliability of survey measures of social capital, and in particular of trust in others, by comparing survey and objective measures across countries, regions and over time. Our evidence suggests that survey measures reliably reflect objective measures of social capital.

17:30 *End of the workshop*

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