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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 two-day applied methods workshop at LUISS University in Rome on May 14-15, 2020 with the title “*The end of (political science) theory? Between explanation and prediction*”.

The workshop will gather applied researchers from Milan, Luiss Rome, Turin, Essex, Oxford, Lucerne, and Michigan. The speakers will address the problems and challenges arising from the increasing availability of computational, machine-learning tools, and the possibilities of integrating such tools in a theory-rich political science perspective.

The workshop is specially catered for PhD students, who will be given opportunities to discuss their research projects and network with the speakers and other MetRiSP members. Moreover, two slots of the workshop will be reserved for the public presentation and discussion of the Ph.D. research projects selected by the admission panel.

For the event, the MetRiSP Standing Group in collaboration with Luiss is pleased to offer **Ph.D. students up to 4 scholarships** to cover travel and accommodation expenses up to 400 euros. Candidates can be at any stage of the PhD; the admission panel will 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 both the MetRiSP Chair (Luigi Curini, luigi.curini@unimi.it) and Co-Chair (Vincenzo Memoli, memoli@unict.it). 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 16, 2019.

The workshop has been generously founded by the Italian Political Science Association, by the Department of Political Science at LUISS and by the CISE – Centro Italiano di Studi Elettorali.

Milan, 28 January 2020
Luigi Curini, Chair MetRiSP

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3rd Workshop in Political Science Methods

The end of (political science) theory? Between explanation and prediction

Organized by the SISP Standing Group MetRiSP

14-15 May 2020

LUISS University

Room TBD

Department of Political Science, Viale Romania 32, Rome

Thursday, May 14:

14:00 *Welcome Greetings*

14:15 *Introduction to the workshop*

14.30 *Roundtable: "SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science & International Relations"* (Eds: Luigi Curini and Robert J. Franzese), London: Sage, 2020. Speakers: Luigi Curini (Università di Milano), Lorenzo De Sio (Luiss Guido Carli), Robert J. Franzese (Michigan University), Federica Genovese (Essex University), Ezequiel Gonzales Ocantos (Oxford University), Andrea Ruggeri (Oxford University)

15.30 *Back to the roots. Why good predictions cannot do without explanation -- and we all are better off when both are couched in theory.*

Alessia Damonte, Fedra Negri (Università di Milano)

Supported by the literature in the philosophy of science and policy studies, the contribution makes the following two points. First: predictions are inferences to the next instance from a particular reference class, and are good when they warrant these inferences with as little error as possible. This means good predictions embody a sound model of the reference class and of the factors that keep the instances in or push them out of it. But such a sound model is an explanation: therefore, good predictions cannot do without explanation (and the reverse does not hold on pain of mistaking the barometer for the storm). Second: the test bench of a good prediction is counterfactual and experimental - meaning that, ideally, we should be able to induce the dependent by

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manipulating the independent. Now, we can undoubtedly get this grasp if our inquiry takes a theory about "dispositions" as its point of departure and criterion to select our factors. If the theory comes at the end of some unsupervised induction, instead, we are faced with a problem of ambiguity in the causal interpretation of findings -- hence, the resulting knowledge is as reliable as the standard guesswork, although guesswork is far less expensive. Of course, unless we are interested in gambling, or in pursuing adaptive lines of action. Both, however, seldom qualify as desirable policy strategies.

16.15 *Coffee break*

16.45 *Presentation and discussion of two research projects by PhD students*

18.00 *End of day 1*

Friday, May 15:

9.00 *Three (or four) views of a secret. Theoretical content and predictive power of different approaches for predicting (and understanding) assembly sizes*

Davide Angelucci, Alessandro Chessa, Lorenzo De Sio, Vincenzo Emanuele (Luiss Guido Carli)

We compare and assess different models of the relationship – across political systems – between population size and assembly size. Models correspond to different traditions and approaches, including: a) a plain OLS regression model; b) a non-linear, theory-based, logical-quantitative model (see Taagepera 2008); c) a non-linear model with an algorithm-detected functional form; d) a deep learning algorithm based on neural networks. Models are compared across two dimensions: sheer predictive ability (goodness of fit) and theoretical content, which translates into the model's ability to teach scholars, students and practitioners about features of the underlying social and political processes. By comparing these models, we offer a critical account of machine-learning computational methods and of their ability to provide predictions that are useful for constructing theoretically grounded and empirically meaningful theory in political science.

9.45 *Presentation and discussion of two research projects by PhD students*

11.00 *Coffee break*

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11.30: *Will you ever vote for me? Electoral availability and dimensions of political conflict using propensities to vote measures*

Andrea De Angelis (Universität Luzern), Federico Vegetti (Università di Torino)

Propensities to Vote (PTVs) have long been proposed as a dependent variable in political behavior research. A key advantage of PTVs is that they allow to tap into the potential openness of the voters towards each political parties by asking the respondents whether they "will ever vote" for each party. However, the inherent analytical switch from the individual to the individual*party level practically hinders the adoption of PTV measures. Nevertheless, if compared to classic voting decision items, PTVs can gauge the competitiveness of political parties that did not receive electoral support, allowing to map the underlying patterns of electoral competition. In particular, by applying latent variable and scaling methods, this paper shows that is possible to extract pure measures of electoral openness (availability) of the voters, as well as to learn about the main lines of conflict in the party system. We test this intuition relying on a comprehensive framework of Monte Carlo simulations and offer a comparative application using data from the European Election Survey.

12.15: *Recent developments in addressing selection bias: the copula approach and the duration of the European Union's excessive deficit procedure*

Fabio Franchino (Università di Milano)

Many phenomena studied in political science have to deal with endogeneity problems and with the risk that unobserved variables confound causal relations. For example, it is unlikely that the sample of observed governments employed in government survival studies is a random sample of the population of potential governments. In this presentation, I introduce the copula approach proposed in recent works (Chiba, Martin and Stevenson, 2015; Braumoeller et al., 2018) and discuss a possible application to the duration of the excessive deficit procedure of the European Union.

13.00: *Conclusions. End of the workshop*

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