

Paweł Baranowski, Anna Paluch

**REPORT: ECPR WINTER SCHOOL IN METHODS
AND TECHNIQUES (BAMBERG, 13-20 FEBRUARY 2015)**

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The key factors that matter in contemporary political science are not only broad knowledge and deep understanding of the political processes; to gather information, analyse it, and come up with excellent working models, a researcher has to be equipped with sharp and well-comprehended methods skills.

For young political scientists, in particular, one of the best ways of gaining comprehensive knowledge of either newly-developed or well-established methods and techniques in his or her specific field could be to attend a methods school organised by the European Consortium for Political Science.

The European Consortium for Political Science (ECPR) is one of the most prominent associations of leading universities and institutions dealing with political science. It organises a series of significant events each year, such as: the general conference, the graduate student conference, joint sessions, and research sessions. The University of Wrocław, along with four other Polish institutions, is a member of ECPR.

One of the most remarkable and renowned ECPR events are methods schools organised twice a year, in summer and winter. This year, two PhD students from the Institute of Political Science at the University of Wrocław, Anna Paluch and Paweł Baranowski, took part in the ECPR Winter School in Methods and Techniques at the University of Bamberg in Germany (13-20 February 2015).

The Winter School offered 11 preparatory courses during the first two days of the event and 27 main courses held later. ECPR made every effort to build the programme in a way that meets the expectations of scientists at different stages of their academic careers and representing many institutions from all around the world. The intensive training was accompanied by many quasi-scientific and social events. Participants had an occasion to join guided tours in the city of Bamberg, excursions to well-known historical monuments in Bavaria, and even an official pub crawl. They were also fully occupied by academic activities, such as “course taster sessions” and lunchtime sessions with presentations of the most discussed methodological topics, (e.g., “big data” or controversies linked to qualitative research). Finally, the young scholars had an opportunity to take part in a discussion dedicated to methodological skill building.

From the variety of courses and trainings, participants of the ECPR Winter School could choose from:

1) Research design/fundamentals courses, designed to help make the right choice on usage of specific methods and techniques (among others: “Introduction to Qualitative Interpretive Methods” and “Introduction to Statistics for Political and Social Scientists”);

2) Data collection/generation courses, with the main focus on methods for data collection and generation (among others: "Interpretative Interviewing" or "Focus Groups");

3) Data analysis courses (introductory and advanced), among others: "Quantitative Text Analysis", "Advanced Process Tracing Methods", and "Introduction to Bayesian Inference".

The level of the courses and trainings was also varied: some of the courses were introductory and brought participants up to a level of well-informed use, while others were addressed to professionals who wanted to raise their skills to expert level (such as "Advanced Multi-Method Research" and "Structural Equation Modelling with R"). The methods were taught by experienced lecturers from Germany, France, Spain, Slovenia, Austria, the United States, and many other countries (including Susumu Shikano, Levi Litvay, Markus Wagner, and Ingo Rohlfing, among others). There is no doubt that this kind of international, academic environment fosters the development of skills and improves participants' research designs.

As we face rapid changes in the diverse fields of political science research, the number of scholars that feel the need for mastering new analytical techniques and software tools is constantly growing. These specialised utilities are providing new opportunities in gathering and working with data as well as help during the research process. Contemporary political science has to be constantly improved and its development relies on technological progress and advancement in using computer-mediated techniques.

Both participants from the University of Wrocław took part in the preparatory course dedicated to programming in social sciences. The course was focused on presenting the possibilities of using the Python programming language and methods of taking advantage of it during the research process. The students learnt that the exhausting and time-consuming process of gathering data from the Internet can be much more efficient and effective with code written in Python. The things that used to be a mystery for most social scientists are now the future, and the IT abilities of a research team may prejudice the quality of their future analysis.

Anna Paluch, the PhD candidate from the University of Wrocław, attended a course devoted to applied social network analysis (SNA) taught by Dr Dimitris Christopoulos from MODUL University in Vienna. This was an introduction to both the theory and methodology of SNA. Even if the foundations of SNA are based in graph theory, mathematics, and statistics, in recent years political scientists, economists, sociologists, and media researches have found it interesting for their own scientific needs. The course consisted of lectures, seminars, and an introduction into the usage of software designed for social network analysis and the visualisation of its results. Due to specific algorithms, SNA gives social scientists a broader perspective; not one focusing on individual actors or macrostructures, but one which at the same time captures the relations between them. One should remember that in many cases in the social sciences, it is a relation that matters. In other words, there are many cases in which perspective focused on relations between actors is much more meaningful than one focused on their attributes.

Paweł Baranowski, the other participant representing the University of Wrocław, took part in a course on statistics. Today, we are surrounded by information; data is presented in the form of easily assimilated tables and graphs concerning almost every issue. It is

essential for political scientists to learn the principles of statistics. Constructing a logically coherent hypothesis and the ability to verify it in a scientific article is one of the domains of statistics. There are also another advantages of being fluent with numbers and logical functions. Scholars' work is based on operating with all sorts of data, which often has to be graphically displayed. Presentations must be comprehensible and cannot be distorted. Although the course was named "Introduction to Statistics for Political and Social Scientists", the instructor, Dr Florian Weiller from the University of Bamberg, covered much more than simple standard deviations and linear regressions.

The Winter School in Methods and Techniques was an intense and inspiring academic event. ECPR provided an excellent and fruitful way of spending the winter break. With an ambitious schedule, a great deal of day-to-day reading, and expanded social events programme, the Winter School was truly a wonderful experience.