

Workshop
“Lab-in-the-field experiments, methods and examples”
(10 credits)
26-28 maggio 2014
Seminar Room 4, Badia Fiesolana

Organizer: Diego Gambetta
Speaker: Benedikt Hermann (EC-JRC)

*Measuring human behavior outside the university labs:
an introduction into experimental social sciences in the field.*

In the past social sciences relied mostly on introspection or field observation of social behavior as tools of revealing the nature of human behavior. Recently social sciences took inspiration from natural sciences and medical sciences, and adopted different kinds of experimental research, first of all lab experiments. In lab experiments usually students are invited to investigate under well controlled conditions the nature of human decision making. These lab experiments are very helpful to challenge established ideologies on the nature of human behavior. However, due to very artificial laboratory context and focus on university students only, findings from these experiments are often perceived of limited value for conclusions on the nature of human behavior in the “real world” outside the university labs.

In this course, I therefore would like to give an introduction into the growing experimental work of social scientists trying to get the experiments out of the university into the field, closer the “real life”. I will focus on the following two main approaches:

1. Lab experiments in the field

The human species did not evolve in Universities. Hence it might be risky to take human behavior as measured in the behavioral laboratories of Universities as the “real” human behavior and starting point of a discourse on how societies should be organized to fit best this “real” nature of humans.

The first step to test the validity of results of experiments in University labs is to take the lab experiment into the field that is into the natural context where people normally make decisions. Taking the lab experiments from the University into the different habitats of humans social environments allows for two important insights: Firstly these lab experiments in the field are an “robustness check” of the results previously produced in the University lab. Secondly one can learn from those lab experiments in the field about the “taxonomy” and “variety” of human behavior – depending on social class and structure measured behavior might be different from what has been measured in the University lab with students and rather artificial lab environments. To understand better the taxonomy and distribution of human behavior is fundamental for a better understanding of more realistic modeling of dynamism of complex social systems.

2. Field experiments.

In a field experiment behavior is measured under entirely natural “real life” conditions. In field experiments not only the context of decision making is natural, but also the decision situation itself. Sometimes participants are even not aware that they are part of an experiment in social sciences. Field experiments became recently, notwithstanding their complexity, very popular. For basic research in social sciences field experiments became the final test of external validity of lab experiments. Less concerned about basic science, applied social scientists use randomized field trials as a tool to test the efficiency of new policies and public interventions.

Monday 26 – Lab-experiments in the field

10:00 – 13:00	Measuring Social Preferences in the field
14:30 – 17:30	(i) Measuring Individual Preferences [time, risk] in the field; (ii) Collecting large scale data via surveys.

Tuesday 27 – Field-experiments

10:00 – 13:00	Randomised field trials for testing theories
14:30 – 17:30	Randomised field trials for testing policies and interventions

Wednesday 28

10:00 – 13:00	What are we really measuring? The specific problems in measuring human behaviour.
14:30 – 17:30	Presentations by participants, & discussion

NB Dr. Hermann will be available for appointments with individual scholars on Thursday and Friday

Bibliography:

- "The limits of self-governance when cooperators get punished: Experimental evidence from urban and rural Russia". S. Gaechter and B Herrmann, *European Economic Review* 55(2), February 2011, 193-210.
- "Trust, voluntary cooperation, and socio-economic background: Survey and experimental evidence", S. Gaechter, B. Herrmann and Ch. Thöni, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 55(4), 2004, 505-531.
- "Experimental subjects are not different", F.Exadaktylos, A.M. Espín, P. Brañas-Garza, *Scientific Reports* 3 (1213) 19, 2013.



- "Patient and impatient punishers of free-riders", A.M. Espín, P. Brañas-Garza, B. Herrmann, J.F. Gamella, Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences 279 (1749), 4923-4928.
- "Resource Scarcity, Spite and Cooperation", S. Prediger, B. Volland, B. Herrmann (2013), GIGA Working Paper, No. 227, June 2013, Hamburg: GIGA, http://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/system/files/publications/wp227_prediger-volland-herrmann_0.pdf
- "The separate effects of self-estimated and actual alcohol intoxication on risk taking: A field experiment.", A. Proestakis, A. Espín, F. Exadaktylos, A. Cortés, Alexandra; O. Oyediran, and L.A. Palacio, Journal of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Economics, Vol 6(2), Jun 2013, 115-135.
- "Lab Experiments Are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences", A. Falk and J. J. Heckman Science, 2009, 326(5952), 535-538.
- "An Experimentally Validated Preference Module", A. Falk, A. Becker, Th. Dohmen, D. Human, U. Sunde see <http://www.eea-esem.com/files/papers/eea-esem/2012/2688/FalkEtAl2012.pdf>
- "Social Comparison and Effort Provision" A. Cohn, E. Fehr, B. Herrmann and F. Schneider, forthcoming in Journal of the European Economic Association, current draft see <http://www.econ.uzh.ch/faculty/cohn/SocialComparisonEffortProvision.pdf>
- "The Behavioralist As Tax Collector: Using Natural Field Experiments to Enhance Tax Compliance", M. Hallsworth, J. A. List, R. D. Metcalfe, I. V., NBER Working Paper No. 20007, see <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20007>