RegensburgEconNews

Newsletter 2018-20

CALENDAR:

IOS Seminar

Matthias Meyer-Schwarzenberger
(Bundesverband Deutscher *Volks- und Betriebswirte [bdvb] and Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences [BIGSSS]):*
So Much in Common and Yet so Different: The Linguistic Boundaries of Modern Europe

Tuesday, July 24
13:30–15:00
WiOS 109 (Landshuter Str.4)

Departmental Seminar

Benjamin Elsner (University College Dublin):
The Distributional Treatment Problem in the Estimation of Peer Effects

Special Time and Room

Monday, July 30
12:00–13:30
VG 2.35

ABSTRACTS:

IOS Seminar

Matthias Meyer-Schwarzenberger

So Much in Common and Yet so Different: The Linguistc Boundaries of Modern Europe

Abstract: Based on my doctoral thesis and subsequent unpublished research, I argue that the boundaries of Modern Europe (across space and time) must be drawn primarily in terms of language. Just prior to the period usually associated with Renaissance humanism, the evolution of many European languages resulted in a unique, unprecedented kind of grammar in which every sentence is organised around an actor-like topic (the so-called subject of a so-called phrase). Interestingly, this arbitrary grammar has no semantic meaning or function in language. According to my analysis, however, it has been vested with a socio-cultural disciplining function instead. Children acquiring a Modern European language implicitly acquire certain beliefs, habits, and rules of conduct with it. This explains why modern social institutions - including both the best and the worst regimes ever known in human history - have been so incredibly efficient in North-Western Europe over the past 300 years. With regard to Eastern Europe and Southern Europe, my analysis raises the question which languages (to what degree) qualify as Modern European and how cultures 'with' and 'without' modern grammar can be integrated within a common structure such as the European Union.

Departmental Seminar

Benjamin Elsner

The Distributional Treatment Problem in the Estimation of Peer Effects

Abstract: This paper points to a fundamental identification problem in the estimation of ability peer effects. Even when peer groups are randomly assigned, obtaining a consistent, unbiased peer effect estimate is difficult because every person in the sample is "treated" with a distribution of peer characteristics rather than a single binary or continuous treatment. Most peer effects regressions include one or several statistics of this distribution --- often the mean or variance of peer ability --- but inevitably omit many other statistics that are mechanically correlated with those included, such as higher moments or statistics describing a person's position within the group. In Monte Carlo simulations, we show that the direction of the omitted variable bias is ambiguous, and that commonly found non-linear effects can be the result of fundamentally different data-generating processes. Moreover, using data from five widely cited experimental studies, we demonstrate a strong sensitivity of peer effects estimates to omitting distributional features from the regression. These results raise doubts whether research designs that exploit natural variation in peer composition are suitable for obtaining unbiased causal peer effects estimates.

MISCELLANEOUS:

The next regular issue of RegensburgEconNews will be published at the beginning of the winter term; editorial deadline: **October 10, 2018**.

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Editorial deadline for Newsletter No. 2018-21:
Wednesday, October 10 – 11 am

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