Methodological Education for the Social Sciences

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The overall goal of the project is to develop a high-quality, efficient, and modular virtual learning classroom that
introduces social scientists to basic methodological thinking. It is aimed primarily at first-semester social science students and provides introductory level knowledge. Other target audiences (e.g., teachers, practitioners in government offices and in the industry) can benefit from the virtual teaching offerings to support life-long learning in a form which consolidates and integrates basic methodological knowledge across disciplines and which provides information about new methodological developments (e.g., web-based surveys and web experiments).

In contrast to many current (traditional and electronically mediated) classes, the virtual learning environment is not
conceived as just another statistics course, but tries to integrate statistical knowledge with methodological principles.
Furthermore, it tries to overcome institutional and discipline-specific boundaries by bringing together partners (and thus students) from a broad spectrum of scientific disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, political science, the media sciences, philosophy, and education. The development of a sharable and reusable source of basic methodological knowledge will greatly benefit from synergy effects and should reduce current duplication of teaching efforts.

The major pedagogical and technological differences to other distance learning approaches and virtual classroom
projects are our attempts to

-> 	allow for a more flexible teacher and learner-oriented customizability and adaptability,
-> integrate methodological and theoretical issues with basic statistical and formal knowledge,
-> 	provide interactive elements to support the acquisition of deeper knowledge,
-> 	allow for quality-controlled, credit-earning learner evaluation and assessment, and
-> 	address the issue of different scientific backgrounds by providing specialized, "plug-able" guidelines, examples,
	and data.

While we are enthusiastic about the possibilities of integrating new media into our current curricula, we also strongly
believe that our project will primarily consist of an augmentation to other forms of teaching. The integration of individual
learner support based on teacher-supported coaching (in electronic and in traditional forms) is considered a crucial
component for the overall success of the envisioned electronic courseware. Furthermore, due to its modular and
transdisciplinary nature, the project's structure and content will also require some innovative changes in the way the
topics are taught at the university level.

The project situated at the University of Berne, Political Science will develop a module for the methodological education for the Political Science.

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