

Memo for the APSA Short Course
EU Agendas Project (Health and Environment)

Principal investigator

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No project website is available yet, but some documents are available through Frank Baumgartner's webpage giving an overview of current agendas projects.

Aim and scope of the project

The project seeks to reconstruct the EU's policy agenda in two policy areas over the past three decades:

- Health policy
- Environmental policy

In terms of Baumgartner and Jones' topics codebook, this includes all topics under major topic code 3 (Health) and 7 (Environment), plus subtopic 403 (Food Safety).

Status of the project

Around 5,000 documents have been coded by two student-assistants between January 2005 and January 2006. This completes data collection for the current project. Data analysis will take place during the academic year 2006/2007.

List of indicators

I have coded two data sources:

- Written questions from European Parliament (EP). I have coded one year every five years, starting in 2003 and going backwards to 1973.
- Preparatory documents from the European Commission (so-called 'COM'-documents). These documents include legislative proposals, but also reports and discussion documents. I have coded every year between the mid-1970s and 2005.

In the coming academic year, I will focus on completing my study of the two policy areas mentioned above. In the future, I would like to develop this project into a fully-fledged coding exercise along the lines of the US and Danish agendas projects. This implies:

- Coding all topics
- Coding a wider range of documents (e.g. also including conclusions from the Council of Ministers, Commission work plans, and other types of EP documents)
- Coding all years

The feasibility of these plans depends on the availability of funding and organizational capacity. I would be very interested in collaborating with others who are interested in setting up a full EU agendas database. Collaboration can be easily organized by dividing work according to types of documents.

Revisions/adjustments to the US coding scheme

Frank Baumgartner's website with documents from various agendas projects includes a paper I wrote on applying the topic coding scheme in an EU context. In brief, these are the main points:

- In terms of major topic codes, the US coding scheme can be applied to the EU as well. The main problems I see are with the 'public lands' major topic. In the context of the EU, some parts of this topic are irrelevant (since the EU does not have any public lands of its own) while other parts would logically fit into the 'environment' category.
- In the EU literature, some policy areas are discerned that have no direct equivalent in the US topic codes scheme. The most important of these is 'internal market policies'. I have chosen, however, not to include a separate 'internal market' topic code but to code internal market measures under other, existing codes. The full argument for doing this can be found in the background paper available through Frank Baumgartner's website.
- In terms of subtopic codes, a number of specific problems may arise:
 - Some issues merit a specific subtopic. As a result, I have split the US code 709 ('species and forest protection') into four distinct subtopics:
 - A code for the environmental aspects of construction projects.
 - A code for animal welfare.
 - A code for the environmental aspects of fisheries.
 - A more limited code for species and forest protection in a stricter sense.
 - In the context of health policy, the existing subtopic codes proved useful but two points should be made:
 - Some subtopic codes are rarely used (e.g. 302: health insurance). This, however, is not a problem with the coding scheme, but an empirical outcome.
 - Some subtopics acquire a slightly different meaning in the context of the EU. For instance, subtopic code 323 ('provider and insurer payment and regulation') is mainly used for documents dealing with cross-border treatment of patients. These documents fit the 323 category because the issue at stake is who will pay for those treatments. Likewise, subtopic 325 ('health manpower and training') is used primarily for documents relating to the mutual recognition of medical qualifications between member states. Hence, the meaning of these subtopics in an EU-context becomes somewhat different (and more limited) when compared to the US context.

These points merit further attention when comparing the outcomes of my database with those of other agendas projects. In general, however, the US coding scheme provides a useful framework for coding EU policy documents.

Funding and funding sources

Coding was carried out by two student-assistants, each working one day a week for a year. This was paid out of revenues from an (unrelated) external research project. Further funding will have to be found for a comprehensive EU agendas project.