

Transdisciplinary Data Workshop "StateParl": Working Together to Better Understand and Analyze Politics in the Federal System

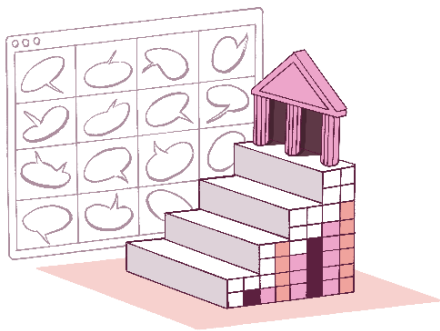
Transdisziplinärer Datenworkshop „StateParl“: Gemeinsam Politik im föderalen System besser verstehen und analysieren

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Illustration: Stefanie Leinhos



What was the initial situation?

The project “StateParl” was developed in response to a significant gap in publicly accessible data on parliamentary debates in the German *Länder*. While political research has increasingly focused on legislative behavior at the national level, subnational legislatures – despite their considerable political influence in Germany’s federal system – have received less attention. This is problematic because the

Länder parliaments are important arenas of political competition, government oversight, and law-making. Their actions thus affect the everyday lives of citizens. However, meaningful access to their proceedings is limited by scattered data availability and technical barriers.

The guiding idea behind StateParl was to provide a comprehensive, machine-readable database of parliamentary debates in all 16 *Länder* parliaments that enables scientific research while allowing stakeholders beyond academia, especially citizens, policymakers, journalists, NGOs, and educators, to engage with the data without requiring technical or methodological expertise. This two-folded approach was designed to strengthen transparency and facilitate informed political participation by enabling different stakeholders to better understand the dynamics in these parliaments.

The project also addressed a societal challenge: how to make scientific data not only more accessible but also more relevant across disciplinary and professional boundaries. It aimed to pilot new forms of transdisciplinary collaboration and validation in the context of collecting and presenting political data. To this end, a key component of the project was the organization of a transdisciplinary data workshop, bringing together scholars, policymakers, journalists, and civil society representatives to jointly explore and evaluate the StateParl database.

What has happened in the project?

The centerpiece of the project was the transdisciplinary data workshop, designed to explore how StateParl can contribute to both academic research and broader engagement in Germany's federal democracy. The workshop brought together experts from political science, legal studies, and data science with practitioners from parliaments, public administration, journalism, and civil society. The latter included representatives from the European Union Affairs Ministry of Schleswig-Holstein, the State Parliament as well as the State Representation of Schleswig-Holstein, the Bundesrat (Germany's second chamber of parliament at the federal level), journalists from Tagesspiegel, SWR, Stuttgarter Nachrichten, and Verfassungsblog, as well as a representative from the Young European Federalists. The workshop took place at the State Representation of Schleswig-Holstein in Berlin, a venue that was deliberately chosen to underscore the idea of going beyond the boundaries of academia and university.

The workshop followed a design-thinking approach to foster inter- and transdisciplinary exchange. Participants were divided into small, transdisciplinary groups and engaged in exercises intended to build mutual understanding and develop shared research questions. Persona sheets helped participants reflect on their professional perspectives and expectations, while various moderation techniques, such as brainstorming and live graphic recording, supported collaborative idea generation and documentation. Thematically, the workshop addressed two main questions:

- How can we better analyze and understand federal politics using the StateParl database?
- How can we motivate different stakeholders to collaborate in a transdisciplinary setting?

The practical goal was to test how accessible and usable the database is across user groups and to gather feedback for future development.

The format allowed for a low-threshold yet meaningful engagement with the data. It also created space for practical insights to inform academic perspectives and vice versa. The participants critically reflected on data structures, classification, and usability, contributing to a participatory form of data validation that is rare in political science (and in academia in general).

While no major changes were needed to the original project plan, the richness of feedback exceeded expectations. The workshop not only tested participatory and collaborative methods that are rare to the discipline of political science but also laid the foundation for a network of researchers and practitioners working on federalism and parliamentary politics.

What has been achieved?

The project successfully piloted an innovative model of participatory data validation in political science. By involving practitioners in the evaluation of the StateParl database, the project expanded the conventional, discipline-specific approach to data quality. It highlighted how practical perspectives on usability, labeling, and interpretability can improve scientific data products and inform new research questions.

The workshop served not only as a test case for the StateParl database but also as a broader demonstration of how transdisciplinary cooperation can be organized around shared empirical material. It facilitated structured dialogue between academia, public administration, media, and civil society, helping to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and practical needs.

From a scientific perspective, the workshop introduced a new template for integrating non-academic voices into data production and presentation. In the context of the workshop, researchers were not only data providers but also facilitators of dialogue and members of an emerging network. This expanded role may foster more socially responsive and publicly accountable research. Journalists and public officials, on the other hand, gained hands-on experience with scientific data, developed a better understanding of data collection and data quality standards, and learned how data-driven analysis can be used in federal political reporting and decision-making. The workshop helped raise awareness of the *Länder* parliaments as key democratic institutions. It also fostered connections between actors with shared interests in federalism and parliamentary politics – connections that may lead to future cooperation. The project thus encouraged collaborative rather than parallel work in the fields of policy analysis, journalism, and academia.

More specifically, the workshop served as a practical test case for identifying the technical requirements of the platform, including necessary server capacities for broader user access. In response to participant feedback, the project enabled the hiring of a professional web designer who has enhanced the usability of the website (<https://stateparl.de>), incorporating feedback from the workshop and improving the overall user experience. The new design of the website will be implemented soon.

What could happen next?

On the scientific side, insights from the workshop will directly feed into an ongoing research project funded by the VolkswagenStiftung, in which we examine data reuse in political science. The experience gained in the context of the transdisciplinary collaboration will help us reflect on the potential and limitations of participatory processes as a credible and valuable method for ensuring data quality and relevance in the discipline.

Beyond academia, we aim to continue improving the accessibility and visibility of the StateParl dataset. Following the positive feedback of the workshop participants, we seek funding to enhance its reach among non-academic audiences. A key objective is to institutionalize StateParl as a user-friendly, freely available resource for citizens as well as journalists, policymakers, NGOs, and educators interested in federal politics. The project also demonstrated that there is demand for further exchange formats that bring together stakeholders working on similar issues across sectors. Future workshops or collaborative research projects could build on this foundation. Ideally, this would lead to a more sustained network in which journalists, policymakers, and researchers continue to learn from each other and jointly contribute to more transparent and informed discourse on federalism and parliamentary democracy.

Looking further ahead, sustaining StateParl will require institutional support. Regularly validating and updating the data would cost approximately 10,000 Euro per year – an amount that is modest given the societal relevance of the resource, but that is still difficult to secure through conventional research funding. Ideally, universities and research alliances would recognize the value of such data infrastructures and provide long-term support. StateParl exemplifies how academic work can generate public goods with tangible impact far beyond academia, yet its continued development unfortunately lacks a stable funding base.

Further information

- <https://stateparl.de>
- Beltermann, Eric, Souris, Antonios, Nguyen, Christoph, & Kropp, Sabine (2025). StateParl. GESIS, Köln. Datenfile Version 2.0.0, <https://doi.org/10.7802/2854>.
- Report on the website of the chair: <https://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/systeme/polsystem/Aktuelles/Mit-StateParl-Politik-besser-verstehen-transdisziplinaerer-Workshop-eroeffnet-neue-Perspektiven.html>
- Report of FU Berlin ("campus.leben"): <https://www.fu-berlin.de/campusleben/forschen/2025/250708-StateParl/index.html>