Web Scraping

Introduction to Big Data for Social Science

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Web Scraping

Web Scraping is a computer software technique of extracting information from websites.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org

Web scraping

- Extracting/ coverting (text)data from (HTML) websites into tables/ datasets
  - Process of utilizing structure of page code to grab data pieces
- Static HTML
  - Basic websites, data directly accessible
- Dynamic HTML
  - Interactive websites, scrolling and clicking needed to access data
- APIs
  - Data access is provided via an interface

HTML

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Page Title</title>
    <style>
      table, td {border: 1px solid black;}
    </style>
  </head>

  <body>
    <h1>Table: Name and Age</h1>
    <a href='https://wikipedia.org/'>Click</a>
    <table>
      <tr>
        <td>Andrew Smith</td>
        <td>50</td>
      </tr>
      <tr>
        <td>Thomas Jackson</td>
        <td>94</td>
      </tr>
    </table>

  </body>
</html>
```

Start-Tag < >

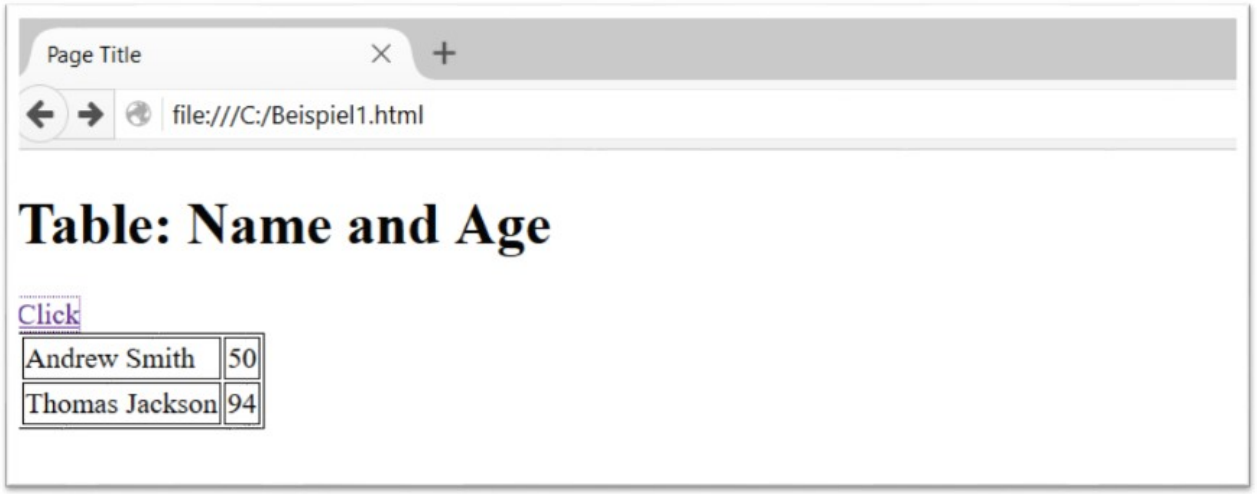
End-Tag </ >

Type of document: HTML

Metadata

Body: Visible content of the website

HTML page as displayed in a web browser



Read source code with R

```
install.packages( xml2 )
install.packages( rvest )
library( xml2 )
library( rvest )
src <- read_html( "C:/Beispiel1.html" )
```

Install `xml2` and `rvest`

Load `xml2` and `rvest`

Load the source code in `src`

Navigate a HTML document

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Page Title</title>
    <style>
      table, td {border: 1px solid black;}
    </style>
  </head>

  <body>
    <h1>Table: Name and Age</h1>
    <a href='https://wikipedia.org/'>Click</a>
    <table>
      <tr>
        <td>Andrew Smith</td>
        <td>50</td>
      </tr>
      <tr>
        <td>Thomas Jackson</td>
        <td>94</td>
      </tr>
    </table>

  </body>
</html>
```

XPath

Used to address elements in a HTML document

Usage of absolute paths

```
nds <- html_nodes( src,
xpath =
"/html/body/table/tr/td")

  {xml_nodeset (4)}
  [1] <td>Andrew Smith</td>
  [2] <td>50</td>
  [3] <td>Thomas Jackson</td>
  [4] <td>94</td>
```

```
html_text( nds )
  [1] "Andrew Smith" "50"
  "Thomas Jackson" "94"
```

`html_text` selects the text between the start- <> and the end-tag < / >

Navigate a HTML document

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Page Title</title>
    <style>
      table, td {border: 1px solid black;}
    </style>
  </head>

  <body>
    <h1>Table: Name and Age</h1>
    <a href='https://wikipedia.org/'>Click</a>
    <table>
      <tr>
        <td>Andrew Smith</td>
        <td>50</td>
      </tr>
      <tr>
        <td>Thomas Jackson</td>
        <td>94</td>
      </tr>
    </table>

  </body>
</html>
```

XPath

Used to address elements in a HTML document

Usage of relative paths

```
nds <- html_nodes( src,
xpath = "//a")
```

The //-operator indicates that all `a-Tags` are searched

```
html_text( nds )
  [1] "Click"
```

```
html_attr( nds, "href" )
  [1] "https://wikipedia.org/"
```

`html_attr` selects the text of an attribute

Navigate a HTML document

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head>
    <title>Page Title</title>
    <style>
      table, td {border: 1px solid black;}
    </style>
  </head>

  <body>
    <h1>Table: Name and Age</h1>
    <a href='https://wikipedia.org/'>Click</a>
    <table>
      <tr>
        <td>Andrew Smith</td>
        <td>50</td>
      </tr>
      <tr>
        <td>Thomas Jackson</td>
        <td>94</td>
      </tr>
    </table>

  </body>
</html>
```

XPath

Used to address elements in a HTML document

Read a table

```
html_table( src )

  [[1]]
                X1 X2
  1   Andrew Smith 50
  2 Thomas Jackson 94
```

`html_table` automatically selects all tables in the HTML document and represents them in a tabular format in R

Simple example with HTML

Wikipedia: List of the german Nobel prize winners

Name	Jahr	Kategorie	
Gustav Stresemann	1926	Friedensnobelpreis	Annäherung an Frankreich zur Sicherun
Ludwig Quidde	1927	Friedensnobelpreis	Organisation von Friedenskonferenzen
Carl von Ossietzky	1935	Friedensnobelpreis	Einsatz gegen den deutschen Militarism
Albert Schweitzer*	1952	Friedensnobelpreis	Einsatz gegen die atomare Aufrüstung
Willy Brandt	1971	Friedensnobelpreis	Ostpolitik
Henry Kissinger*	1973	Friedensnobelpreis	Verhandlung einer Waffenruhe im Vietna
Theodor Mommsen	1902	Nobelpreis für Literatur	Römische Geschichte
			„auf Grund des ernsten Suchens nach W

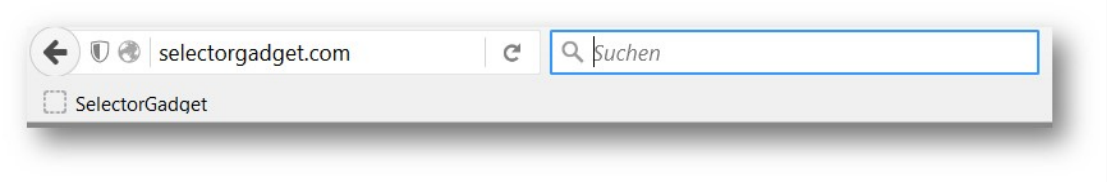
Read the HTML table

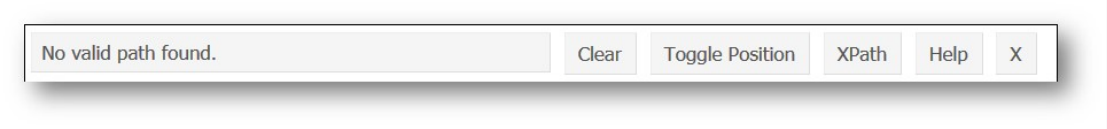
```
src <- read_html(
   "https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_der_deutschen_Nobelpre
   istr%C3%A4ger" )
nobel <- html_table( src )
nobel[[1]][,1:3]
```

```
                          Name       Jahr
1 Stresemann! Gustav Stresemann 1926!1926 Fried
2          Quidde!Ludwig Quidde 1927!1927 Fried
3  Ossietzky!Carl von Ossietzky 1935!1935 Fried
4 Schweitzer!Albert Schweitzer* 1952!1952 Fried
5           Brandt!Willy Brandt 1971!1971 Fried
```

SelectorGadget

1. `http://selectorgadget.com/`
2. 

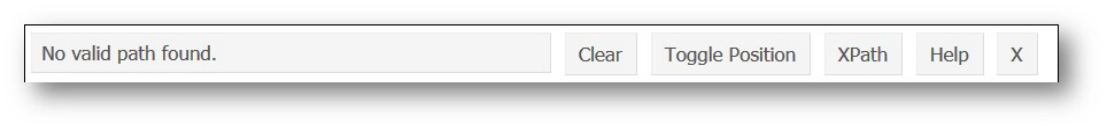
3. 

4. 

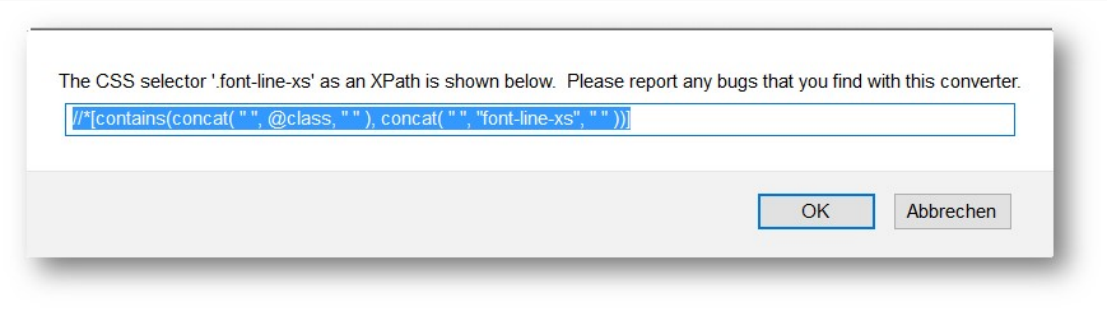
5. Click the element that should be read, everything highlighted in yellow is read out

SelectorGadget

6. Click XPath



7. Copy the path from the Pop-Up (`Strg+C`)



8. Use copied path in the `html_nodes` command as xpath-path

XML

While HTML is used to build Web sites, Web data are often stored in a separate data format

HTML

```
<!DOCTYPE html>
<html>
  <head> … </head>

 <body>
    <table>
      <tr>
        <td>Andrew Smith</td>
        <td>50</td>
      </tr>
      <tr>
        <td>Thomas Jackson</td>
        <td>94</td>
      </tr>
    </table>
  </body>
</html>
```

XML

```
<?xml version="1.0"
encoding="windows-1252"
standalone="no"?>

<persons>
  <person>
    <name>Smith</name>
    <first>Andrew</first>
    <age type="Years">50</age>
  </person>
  <person>
    <name>Jackson</name>
    <first>Thomas</first>
    <age type="Years">94</age>
   </person>
</persons>
```

XML

HTML

- Used to build Web sites
- Tags are used to structure the code
- Predefined tags (e.g.)
- HTML is often less structured than XML and thus more difficult to read

XML

- Describes the structure of Web data
- XML resembles HTML because it also uses tags
- Tags are not predefined and can be defined as required
- Usually XML has a simple structure and is thus easier to read

HTML and XML

```
<?xml version="1.0"
encoding="windows-1252"
standalone="no"?>

<persons>
  <person>
    <name>Smith</name>
    <first>Andrew</first>
    <age type="Years"> 50
    </age>
  </person>

  <person>
    <name>Jackson</name>
    <first>Thomas</first>
    <age type="Years"> 94
    </age>
   </person>
</persons>
```

How to access XML content

```
src <- read_html(
   "C:/Beispiel2.xml" )
nds_name <- html_nodes( src,
   xpath = "//name")
html_text( nds_name )
   [1] "Smith" "Jackson"
```

- Because XML is similar to HTML, the same commands can be used
- Because the structure is simpler, the content is easier to access
- XPath knowledge is necessary because SelectorGadget cannot be used

JSON

Another frequently used data format is JSON

XML

```
<?xml version="1.0"
encoding="windows-1252"
standalone="no"?>

<persons>
  <person>
    <name>Smith</name>
    <first>Andrew</first>
    <age type="Years">
       50</age>
  </person>

  <person>
    <name>Jackson</name>
    <first>Thomas</first>
    <age type="Years">
       94</age>
   </person>
</persons>
```

JSON

```
{
 "note": "UTF-8 Codierung",


  "persons": [
    {
       "name": "Smith",
       "first": "Andrew",
       "age": {"type": "Years",
               "value" : 50}
    },

    {
       "name": "Jackson",
       "first": "Thomas",
       "age": {"type": "Years",
               "value" : 94}
    }
  ]
}
```

JSON

```
{
  "note": "UTF-8 Codierung",


  "persons": [
    {
       "name": "Smith",
       "first": "Andrew",
       "age": {"type": "Years",
               "value" : 50}
    },

    {
       "name": "Jackson",
       "first": "Thomas",
       "age": {"type": "Years",
               "value" : 94}
    }
  ]
}
```

How to access JSON content

```
library(jsonlite)
src <-
   fromJSON("C:/Beispiel3.json")
str(src)
List of 2
 $ note : chr "UTF-8 Codierung"
 $ persons:'data.frame': 2 obs. of
   ..$ name : chr [1:2] "Smith" "Jackson"
src$persons$name
[1] "Smith" "Jackson"
```

- When JSON data are loaded, R converts them into a nested list
- With the “str”-command the structure of the loaded data can be displayed

JSON and XML

JSON

- Format for online data exchange
- Small file size for faster online transmission
- Valid JavaScript, a script language used to display interactive Web sites
- Xpath is not available to access elements, possibly more effort needed for programming

XML

- Language to describe arbitrary data structures
- Files are larger due to start- and end-tags
- Document type definitions (DTD) allow to define what makes an XML-file valid
- Xpath allows easy access to the desired elements

APIs

Application Programming Interfaces (APIs)

- RESTful APIs allow transferring data using web protocols
- Enables programmatic access to data

API Endpoint: root URL + data query

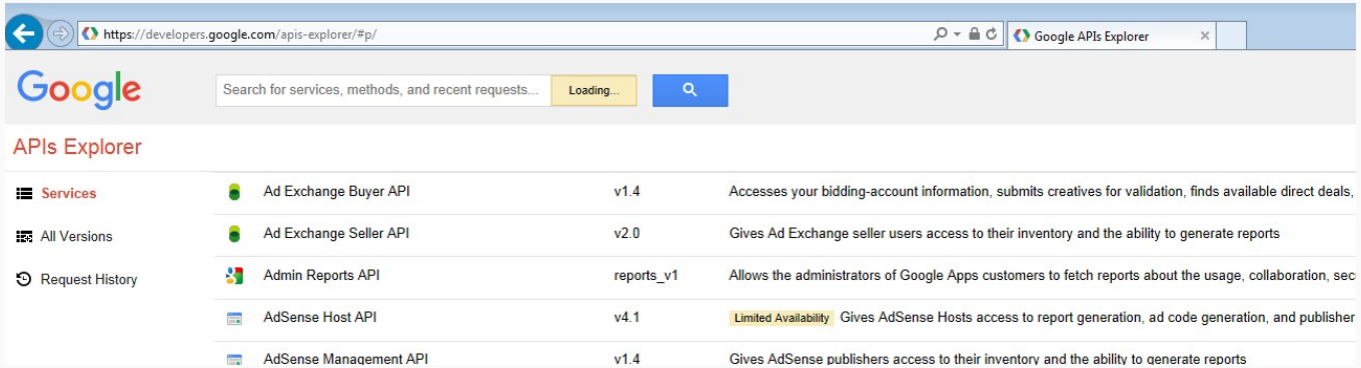
- A unique URL that requests a data piece
- Allows HTTP client to interact with data resources
- Response/ data are often in JSON or XML format

APIs

Many online services offer interfaces (APIs) to make selected data available

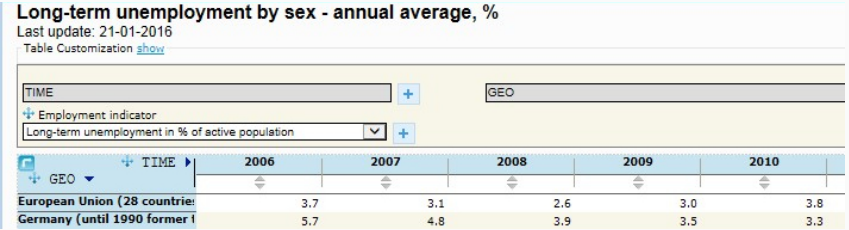
- Target group are mostly programmers and app developers
- Access to resources may be limited
- Consent of the respective user may be necessary (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Fees may be required

Google example



APIs: Eurostat example

How to access the Eurostat API



1. Create an URL through the web interface to read the desired data

Result: `http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/wdds/rest/data/v2.1/json/en/une_ltu_a?sex=F&sex=M&sex=T&geo=DE&geo=EU28&precision=1&sinceTimePeriod=2012&unit=PC_ACT&indic_em=LTU&age=Y20-64`

2. Open file with R

```
library(jsonlite)
data <- fromJSON("path_to_file/une_ltu_a.json", flatten = FALSE)
```

Regular Expressions

Regular Expressions

Scraped text is often formatted poorly.

```
<cl title="Kategorie:Arbeitsmarkt" ns="14"/>
<cl title="Kategorie:Forschungsinstitut in Nürnberg" ns="14"/>
<cl title="Kategorie:Gegründet 1967" ns="14"/>
<cl title="Kategorie:Ressortforschungseinrichtung" ns="14"/>
```

```
                                Name       Jahr
1 Stresemann! Gustav Stresemann 1926!1926 Fried
2          Quidde!Ludwig Quidde 1927!1927 Fried
3  Ossietzky!Carl von Ossietzky 1935!1935 Fried
4 Schweitzer!Albert Schweitzer* 1952!1952 Fried
5            Brandt!Willy Brandt 1971!1971 Fried
```

Solution: Search and replace using Regular Expressions

```
txt <- c("Kategorie:Arbeitsmarkt",
    "Kategorie:Forschungsinstitut",
    "Kategorie:Gegründet 1967")

## Search for „Kategorie:“ and
## only keep what is
gsub("Kategorie:(.*)", "\\1", txt)
"Arbeitsmarkt"
"Forschungsinstitut"
"Gegründet 1967"
```

```
txt <- c("Quidde!Ludwig Quidde",
  "Ossietzky!Carl von Ossietzky")


## Only keep the text following !

gsub(".*?!(.*?)", "\\1", txt)
"Ludwig Quidde"
"Carl von Ossietzky"
```

Summary

Summary

Web sites are not designed for Web scraping

- It can be difficult to find the desired contents/tags automatically
- Some Web sites prohibit web scraping in their terms and conditions
- Providers can take technical measures to make Web scraping more difficult

Web sites can collapse if they receive too many requests

Stay polite!

Summary

- Lots of data available are available online that can be useful for analyses
- HTML, XML and JSON are particulary common web-formats, that can be used with little effort
- Some Web sites prohibit scraping, others explicitly allow it through APIs
- Text can be formatted using Regular Expressions
- Further challenges often exist for particular Web sites, e.g.
  - password protection, cookies
  - Sequential scraping of many sites
- Web Scraping can be chaotic and other options might be preferable

Resources

Open Data

- https://github.com/ropensci/opendata
- https://www.opendatanetwork.com/
- https://www.data.gov/
- http://dataportals.org/
- https://toolbox.google.com/datasetsearch

Software Resources

- Tools and tutorials
  - https://selectorgadget.com/
  - https://www.regular-expressions.info/
  - http://www.txt2re.com/
  - https://regexr.com/
- Resources for R
  - https://cran.r-project.org/web/views/WebTechnologies.html
  - https://ropensci.org/packages/
  - https://www.datacamp.com/community/tutorials/r-web-scraping-rvest

References

Munzert, S., Rubba, C. , Meiner, P., and Nyhuis, D. (2015). Automated data collection with R: A practical guide to web scraping and text mining. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.