

# Professionalization and Institutionalization of Political Science as an Academic Discipline

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## Introduction

The name of ProSEPS - "Professionalization and Social Impact of European Political Science" – indicates a connection to a long and clearly identified theory tradition within sociology and political science: that of professions and professionalization. This paper discusses in what way the concept of professions and the theory tradition on which it builds, may be helpful to the ProSEPS project.

## Theories of professions

The concept of professions and professionalization, as it is used in modern social science, is contested. The literature traces its roots to Parsonian *structural-functionalism*. Within this tradition, a profession is basically considered as an occupational group with certain specific characteristics such as: a full time occupation based on a long education or training in university level institutions, an occupational association, a monopoly of access to and control over the occupation, and the fact that the occupational group defines itself in a service relationship to a specific group of clients and develops a code of ethics about how clients should be served or treated (Wilensky 1964).

One of the main concerns within structural-functionalist theory is modernization, often understood as a process by which structural arrangements are transformed from relatively undifferentiated pre-modern to more differentiated modern forms. The professionalization of occupational groups is an aspect of this modernization process by which occupations

gradually become more specialized and eventually professionalized (Parsons 1939). The classical functionalist formulation of professionalization was given by Harold Wilensky (1964) in his famous article, "The Professionalization of Everyone?" Professionalization can be defined as the process by which an occupational group historically has acquired or struggles to acquire the above-mentioned traits that define a profession.

According to this literature, 'profession' is a term reserved for specific occupational groups such as medical doctors, lawyers, priests, engineers and others, that are educated in university faculties of professional education as opposed to "free" faculties within science, and arts and humanities where the members of the educational group do not have privileged access to a specific occupation. The term semi-profession also grew out of this tradition, used about (at the time female) occupational groups that only partially fulfilled the criteria to be called a profession implied by the prevailing definition (during the 1960s and 1970s), often because they were lacking university level education such as e.g. social workers and nurses. The tradition offered little if any attention to the link between education and occupational roles of those who were educated at the "free faculties" of arts, humanities and sciences. One obvious reason is that these groups, apart from being university educated, did not share several of the defining characteristics of professions, be it occupational associations, monopoly of a specific occupation, a service relationship to specific social groups or a code of ethics. One may, based on Weber's notion of science as an occupation (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*), define researchers or university faculty as a profession. The idea that university professors should be defined as one profession is, as we will discuss later, controversial, particularly if one applies the functionalist definition above to Continental European academics (Neave and Rhoades 1988: 220-221).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the structural-functionalist theory of professions was increasingly attacked from various perspectives. Some of the criticism was directed at the basic functionalist idea that an occupation or a profession exists because it fulfills a societal need, and that hierarchical relationships among occupations such as doctors and nurses is a product of how social needs are manifested. Thus the theory was not just accused of basing itself on assumptions that were almost impossible to test, if one did not accept the very existence of a specific profession or occupational arrangement as proof of a social need and

therefore (by normative implication) a legitimate social arrangement. It was also accused of legitimizing existing social structures, social differences and hierarchical arrangements among occupations by implicitly assuming that they are functional and therefore desirable from a normative point of view.

One of the criticisms was therefore that the struggle for social and political power based on different social interests and social change were completely ignored. Terrence Johnson (1972) developed a conceptual approach to the phenomenon of the dynamic power relationship that might characterize a profession like medicine. While the dominant actors in such relationships once used to be aristocratic patients, it shifted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century during the advent of modern science based medicine, to the doctors. Later, with the emergence of modern welfare states and massive health care systems, power has shifted to a third party: the owners or managers of the massive health care systems, usually the state in countries with public health care systems (c.f. Paul Starr, 1982).

Further contributions (Jamous and Peloille 1970) argued against the idea that the power of professions is based on modern science and the great achievements and advances in modern medicine and its ability to satisfy the needs of its patients. They emphasized instead that it was rather the idea that decisions on how and what services should be provided, were based on the rather untestable premise that only members of the professions have the holistic knowledge of their field that enables them to make good decisions on behalf of their clients. Indeed, it could be argued that while medicine was transformed from being perceived as an “art” to being perceived as a “science” it became more easily vulnerable to attempts at control by outsiders, such as the state or corporate managers (e.g. Sadler 1978).

Andrew Abbott’s contribution (Abbott 1988) emphasizes how control of an occupational field tends to be contested with competing professions within a wider ‘system of professions’ struggling for *jurisdiction* defined as the relationship between an occupation and its work. The concept of jurisdiction is directly linked to an analysis of professions as part of a system where jurisdiction may have different forms and degrees. Since one profession can preempt another's work, the histories of professions are inevitably interdependent. Again, one can see how modern and dynamic health care systems may lend themselves to

this kind of analysis, while its usefulness beyond the realm of health care professions is less obvious.

A key component in the study of professions has been the issue of autonomy and relations between the profession and the state. While the classical view treated these relations in zero-sum terms, modern treatments emphasize the indeterminacy of these relations (Johnson 1991). State led-professionalization (autonomy through the state) has emerged as an alternative route to profession-led professionalization (autonomy from the state), depending on state traditions (Johnson 1991). This has provided the basis for a broad comparative and historical research agenda where professionalization of various groups under various state and societal conditions, have been investigated. Of particular relevance is Marion Fourcade's treatise, *Economists and Societies* (Fourcade 2009), which systematically compares the profession of economics in the United States, Britain, and France. Far from being a uniform science, economics differs in important ways among these three countries, where distinct political, cultural, and institutional contexts gave rise to distinct professional and disciplinary configurations. As the substance of political life varied from country to country, people's experience and understanding of the economy, and their political and intellectual battles over it, crystallized in different ways--through scientific and mercantile professionalism in the United States, public-minded elitism in Britain, and statist divisions in France (Ibid). This treatise has provided a fresh and interesting outlook on the relationship between culture and institutions in the production of expert knowledge, which should be clearly relevant for the PROSEPS project.

Nordegraaf and collaborators (2008, 2014) have recently studied what they call 'organizational professionals', i.e. workers responsible for organizing (Nordegraaf 2014) and demonstrated how these professionals (managers) represent a distinct form of professionalism compared to classical professions like medical doctors or lawyers. Over time, they have acquired a number of characteristics typical of professions such as a professional association, educational conferences, professional journals and an ethical code of conduct. Yet, the occupation is not recruited from one specific education or scientific field, their control over the occupations is weaker and their authority contested. How this emerging

professional field is best conceptualized, may still be unclear, but it represents a phenomenon that is relevant for the study of political science as it further opens up the concepts of profession and professionalization to ambiguous configurations where weak loyalties to the professional field are combined with a variety of organizational contexts and identities.

## **Political science as a profession**

It is far from obvious how one might fit political science into any of these definitions, let alone the scientific discipline of doing teaching and research within political science.

First of all, political science do not qualify as a profession in the classical functionalist sense because there is no clear relationship between what a political scientist may do in occupational life and the specific training she or he receives in the university. Whether they become bureaucrats, political advisers or journalists, political scientists usually share these occupations with other educational groups: such as jurists, economists, sociologists etc. Assuming that most political scientists find work as bureaucrats in public civil service, they might be considered 'organizational professionals' (Nordegraaf et al 2014). Conceptually the idea of 'organizational professionals' breaks down the traditional assumption of a sharp difference between 'bureaucracy' and 'profession'. The former implies that bureaucratic employees are loyal to the organization by which they are employed and act according to the rules and instructions that define their position in the organizational hierarchy. Professionals on the other hand, supposedly owe their loyalty to their clients and their discipline and use professional discretion in the best interest of their clients or society at large. For that reason, it is often assumed that professionals do not fit well within bureaucratic organizations. The approach of Nordegraaf et al. (2014) challenges this assumption and opens up for a number of different ways in which loyalties to the professional field and the organizational context may be combined. Political scientists as members of an academic discipline may fit well into this picture, because their identity academically speaking is rather vague. The assumption is therefore that they are more

malleable, adapting to whatever organizational context they may work in, than members of other disciplines such as economists or sociologists (ref).

If one focuses on the concept of 'the academic profession' this would define political scientists as one of several sub-groups of teachers and researchers within higher education institutions. This directs the attention to the general characteristics of academics in various higher education systems. Although it is not uncommon to assume that faculty in higher education institutions may be considered one academic profession, Neave and Rhoades (1988) argued that particularly in Continental Europe, the concept does not grasp the reality of university employment very well. The deep divisions within university faculties along disciplinary divisions, their location within different institutions and the fault line between junior and senior faculty suggest that it is problematic to consider them as one profession. It might be argued that higher education has changed radically since this was written during the 1980s. One obvious argument is that higher education as national systems has become more integrated and standardized. Yet at the same time, the systems also have become more hierarchical, strengthening fault lines between different institutions, disciplines and senior and junior faculty. Thus, there are arguments both in favor of and against the idea that the concept is generally fruitful today. The idea of modern universities as hybrid organizations also represents an attempt to grasp theoretically how academics who traditionally operated in collegial organizations with rudimentary bureaucratic structures now work in organizations with considerably stronger bureaucratic administrative structures that circumscribe weaker academic collegial structures. This does not necessarily mean that academics have lost power, but rather that academic communities develop hierarchies that fit into more bureaucratically organized institutions (Bleiklie et al. 2015). Given the cross-national variation as to the extent to which and how European universities have changed we can safely leave the idea of one 'academic profession' aside while at the same being conscious of the organizational and academic contexts within which political scientists work.

However, if we consider the development of the concept of professions, from a quite fixed and narrow definition of certain characteristics, via a focus on power relationships and later on occupational groups in highly organized settings, the literature (or at least parts of it) has opened up in two directions. The first is represented by literature that focuses on power and

how it interacts with knowledge. The second is the opening up of the focus to include a wider variety of occupational groups and how these groups operate in and are exposed to a variety of highly organized settings. Thus, there are ample reasons to be relaxed about the concept in a definitional sense. This makes the concept both interesting to political science and at the same time, it makes it more apt for the study of political scientists as an occupational group, inside as well as outside of academia.

## **Institutionalization of Political Science as an Academic Discipline**

Given these limitations, we suggest that we clearly define what we mean by professionalization of political science in our context, and also to clarify how this use of the concept depart from other and more common uses of the concept. Within ProSEPS the focus is on political science as an academic discipline. Following previous studies of the political science discipline (Anckar and Berndtson 1987, Ricci 1984) we suggest that we want to clarify *how the discipline is institutionalized* in the participating countries. Some of the variation we will find is very likely attributable to general characteristics of national academic institutions and systems at the national level as well as the academic labor market. Yet other sources of variation are as likely attributable to specific ways in which political science has been institutionalized in each country with specific educational profiles and occupying specific labor market niches. Thus, it makes sense to delimit our object of study clearly to characteristics of the discipline, its institutional and organizational settings and how it is practiced in ProSEPS countries, focusing partly on the discipline and its characteristics as it is practiced within educational and research institutions (WG 1 and 2) and partly as it relates to society through the social impact of political science researcher and teaching in the public sphere (WG 3) and partly through the advisory role of political scientists in politics and policy making (WG 4).

As we understand it, our focus on the institutionalization of political science as a scientific discipline means that we want to study how this is manifested in specific research and teaching profiles that are typical of the specific academic discipline of political science, as

well as those characteristics that are typical of academics within different national academic institutions as well in specific advisory roles and perceptions of its social impact. Thus, professionalization of political science is a concept that shall guide our study of similarities and differences with regard to how political science has been institutionalized in the ProSEPS countries. Our data collected so far is about the present status of the profession, i.e. how it has been institutionalized rather than the process of institutionalization itself.

### ***Dimensions and indicators***

We suggest accordingly a five dimensions that may guide the study, based on the data that we already possess, and perhaps anticipating data, we will collect at a later stage. The notion of institutionalization directs our attention to four settings that repeatedly are pointed out in the literature about scientific disciplines and political science in particular: a) the discipline in its national manifestations and with ties to the international community, b) the academic institutions where members of the disciplinary communities reside, c) the external role of academics, and d) the relevant characteristics of (national) labor markets. The two former has been pointed out by other students of the discipline. In his book, *The Tragedy of Political Science* Ricci (1984) argues in the chapter "Political Science as a Profession" that political science is shaped partly by the disciplinary community and partly by the bureaucratic institutional settings in which its members are employed. The latter are important to know because it constitutes (together with the academic institutions) the conditions under which the discipline operates. Furthermore, it would be useful to get an idea (depending on availability of data) on the general labor market for political scientists. However, before we turn to the three settings that shape the process of institutionalization, we need to know the demographic characteristics the political scientists who make up the group whose institutionalization we want to study. The archive of political scientists in the 33 participating countries is a crucial (but not the only) data set we need as a basis our analyses.

### ***Demography***

First, we need to know who the political scientists are in terms of demographic characteristics such as age, gender. We have collected these data already. (Given the increasing diversity of the European population and Europeanization of national academic labor markets, it might also be useful to know a bit about country/region of origin as well.)

One might assume that political science is a relatively new academic discipline, established and expanding from 1950s onward, with periods of rapid expansion during the 1960s, and later. Although we do not have time series that allow us to study demographic processes directly, we can use indirect measures based on the data we have, to make reasonably well informed assumptions about the changes in size, sub-disciplinary composition, institutional affiliation and gender distribution of political science discipline.

Demographic indicators:

- age/year of birth
- gender
- country/region
- institution
- position

### *Discipline*

Second, the institutionalization of political science as an academic discipline requires us to identify a series of disciplinary characteristics. One set of characteristics is related to the different institutional and/or national origins of political science discipline. Historically the discipline is has been established in different ways e.g. by having their point of departure from various other disciplinary settings such as law, history, economy or sociology. An apparently more idiosyncratic point of departure may be its establishment by or around an individual founder or academic entrepreneur, whose academic profile in turn defined the discipline. The historical roots of the discipline and inclinations of individual founders may then have given directions locally not just to the preferences for certain theories and approaches, but to the themes or sub-disciplinary emphasis of the discipline, such as comparative politics, public policy and administration or political theory (Adcock and Bevir 2005). The discipline may also be organized in different ways at the national level and with different ties to the international disciplinary community. At the national we need to know how the members of the discipline are organized e.g. in a national association, as members of other disciplinary or cross-disciplinary association and/or members of national sub-field associations. Furthermore, in order to get a grasp on the significance of disciplinary associations we need to know about their activities in terms of publications and

national/regional conferences and furthermore. We may also ask whether political scientists primarily go to academic conferences or conferences organized by practitioners outside academia. Similarly, we need data on the international integration of national disciplines: to what extent do members of the disciplines join international associations (IPSA, ECPR, APSA), go to international conferences and publish internationally. The availability of comparable data here depends on the extent to which these categories have been standardized across all participating countries during the collection of data for our archive of political scientists.

Discipline indicators:

- where and when first established,
- historical links to other disciplines (law, economics, history, sociology)
- history of growth
- theory-traditions (e.g. rational choice, institutionalism)
- sub-fields/disciplinary orientation (comparative politics/political behavior, public policy and administration, international relations, political theory)
- national integration: associations, membership, journals, conference attendance (researchers/practitioners)
- international integration: association memberships, publications, conference attendance

### *Academic institutional context*

Members of the academic discipline of political science spend their occupational life within academic institutions. Although professors traditionally have been considered as autonomous and mainly guided by disciplinary considerations in their work excepting certain routines related to giving classes, grading papers and examining students, academic institutions have changed radically the last decades, subjecting professors to working conditions that are more similar to other bureaucracies (Bleiklie et al. 2015, 2017). However, the degree to which such changes have taken place as well as their timing and emphasis vary considerably across nations (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013, Paradeise et al. 2009). In addition higher education systems are also organized differently resulting in pretty standardized working conditions in some countries while other more differentiated and hierarchical systems offer a wider variety of conditions, e.g. in terms of emphasis on teaching versus

research. Similarly higher education institutions may be organized very differently and the disciplinary department is but one of possible way in which the basic units of academic institutions are organized. In many universities, the basic units are quite large cross-disciplinary units, and political scientists may contribute modules to larger cross-disciplinary educational programs. At the other extreme, in Universities of Applied Sciences political scientists may be employed within different professional schools (e.g. teacher education, social work) again contributing specific modules that fit into the agendas of these professional programs. Political science may also in some countries be divided between university departments in which political scientists dedicated to comparative politics, international relations and political theory work, while students of public policy and administration work in separate professionally oriented schools of public administration. The organization of research is no less varied, and political scientists may work in a wide variety of settings from the individual researcher working on philosophical problems in political theory, via national or international groups of political scientists who study aspects of political behavior in externally funded projects, to cross-disciplinary externally funded groups of researchers from various disciplines (e.g. political scientists, historians, economists and sociologists) who study thematically defined issues based on external grants with an applied aim. Thus, the academic setting and the organization of teaching and research that comes with it, may be crucial if one wants to understand how the discipline and its work is organized, what sub-disciplines are emphasized, what approaches are favored and the extent to which political scientists (individually or collectively) can make autonomous decisions or are integrated in settings in which bureaucratic demands limit their space of autonomy.

Academic institutions and higher education systems indicators:

- institutions (universities, colleges, specialized schools e.g. in PA),
- location within institutions in terms of disciplinary fields (Social science, Law, Humanities) and type of basic unit (disciplinary department, cross-disciplinary department, research center)
- intra-disciplinary emphasis (political behavior, public policy and administration, international politics, political theory)
- emphasis (teaching, research, third mission)

- career structures/opportunities
- academic orientation (turns on emphasis on academic achievement: degrees, positions, publications, rewards, funding acquisition)
- vocational orientation (teaching and role expectations regarding strength and content of vocational orientation)

### *Boundary roles/third mission*

Finally, there is also the question the extent to which and how academic institutions emphasize the “third mission” of contributing to society, among which we may find political advice as one important part. In this paper the focus on the external (or third mission) roles of political scientists is on policy advice. Nevertheless, we are painfully aware that the topic of social impact, media visibility and participation is highly relevant in this context. Here, however, we ask about the extent to which political scientists in academia are directly involved in giving policy advice. If we look across Europe, the general picture as regards how policy advice is provided varies considerably (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013, McGann 2009). Historically the civil service was the main provider of policy advice to elected politicians. The growth of the career bureaucracy was based on the argument that the modern state could not function effectively without it (Skowronek 1982). However, the organization of the state provides different access structures for political scientists. In Westminster systems (England) with its high level of partisan politics and winner takes all system, there has traditionally been a strong focus on the state’s central analytic capacities. In decentralized or federalist political systems, like Germany, much policymaking authority devolves to the regional level, which provides inlets for political scientists at that level. Furthermore, such countries also tend to have relatively more consensus-oriented policy advice because of strong associational and corporatist institutional arrangements, and parliamentary systems that often produce coalition governments, while in France, policy thinking has been the domain of opinion-makers and governmental institutes (Fourcade 2009).

Established providers of policy advice has come under pressure from various external sources, most notably external challenges such as internationalization, Europeanization, and multi-level policy-making processes, and the monopoly once held by the civil service has gradually been broken. We have seen a considerable increase in the number and prominence within government of political advisers appointed outside the civil service framework. Additional policy advice is also being provided by a variety of policy and planning units as well as special advisers and various forms of experts, consultants and (politically affiliated) think tanks. Based on McGann (2009:13) variations regarding the prevalence of think-tanks is considerable and structures and processes of policy advice seem to vary across nation states, between highly competitive, adversarial, and politically partisan (UK), and more consensual and non-partisan (Germany and Switzerland), as well as technocratic ones (France). These differences seem to have affinity to differences in politico-administrative

systems and the nature of policy advice seem to mirror the nature of the system. Thus, there is little evidence to support the standard proposition that the wider the range of sources of advice, the more likely it is that new ideas might be adopted by policy makers (Peters and Pierre 1998). German think tanks tend to be molded by the university tradition. Germany relies heavily upon professors to deliver influential reports, and its think tanks also train and support researchers and aspiring politicians. UK think tanks tend to follow Washington's method of close interaction with policymaking, although they have far fewer resources, and for the most part few permanent staff. French think tanks are relatively new, with a few exceptions. French civil service culture does not provide many opportunities for research units in civil society to participate in policymaking. Indeed, most policy makers turn rarely to these units for expertise and advice because they already have their own in-house sources of experts in various disciplines within the civil service. What this literature suggests is that the nature of policy advice in terms of organization and content expose academically employed political scientists to a highly varied environment in which demand, opportunities and expectations of contributions vary. It may also be of interest to investigate to what extent there is any connection between the demand for policy advice, engagement of political scientists and characteristics of the discipline in terms of emphasis on sub-disciplines and dominant approaches.

As for social impact, media visibility and impact we assume that we a) most likely will find considerable variation cross-nationally, b) that disciplinary and academic organization may contribute significantly to our understanding of this variation.

Third mission indicators:

- policy advisory role of political scientists – importance of third mission
- providers of policy advice (civil service, think tanks, consultancy, voluntary sector, business organizations, trade unions etc)
- content of policy advice (adversarial, consensual)
- media visibility (high/low e.g. according to expert judgement)
- nature of visibility and participation (partisan/expert)

#### *Labor market*

Political scientists find employment in a variety of organizations, occupying a number of roles in highly different organizations. The importance and attractiveness of academic employment is thus likely to vary considerably depending on their relative position compared to political scientists employed outside academia, as measured by the

organization of academic careers, relative size of academic salaries, general social prestige and degree of autonomy in their work situation. We would thus be interested in the employment profile of political scientists and the major types of occupational positions they occupy in public civil service/administration, journalism, diplomacy, politics, consultancy etc.

Labor market indicators:

- major types of employment for political scientists
- relative attractiveness of academic careers to alternative careers for political scientists in terms of salaries and social prestige
- labor market mobility of political scientists
- additional non-academic employment for political scientists in academic jobs

## **Conclusion**

We have presented and analyzed some major contributions to the social science literature on professions, and suggested that professionalization of political science fruitfully can be analyzed as a process of institutionalization that is shaped by at least four dimensions: a) the national and international political science discipline, b) the academic institutions where members of the disciplinary communities reside, c) the external role of academics, and d) the relevant characteristics of (national) labor markets. We have specified a number of indicators that can be used to analyze how and to what extent academic political scientists as a specific species of social group are shaped by these dimensions. These dimensions should be discussed and developed further, and assessed in terms of the possibility of collecting the data needed to shed light on them. The discussion in Sarajevo might address three issues: 1) the fruitfulness of the concept of professionalization as institutionalization of an academic discipline, 2) the extent to which the suggested indicators are valid measures of the process outcome in a cross-national comparison, and 3) the availability of data to document the suggested indicators.

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