CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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1.1 THE MATTER OF RESEARCH

From time to time, international conferences bringing scholars together pose the existential question: ‘Does our research matter, do we make a difference to the world?’ (see Goss, 2017). Usually, the answers coming from the scholarly community are confirmative, or at least display mildly optimistic views. Few will make statements of self-denial; some may not care at all. If academics believe their work is relevant, it is one justification for ongoing knowledge production and proliferation.

But self-evaluations by scientists of their knowledge entering different spheres of society and policy-making arenas are not necessarily true. Estimations of knowledge ‘uptake’ may be too high and exaggerated, or sometimes too low and modest. Another factor is behavioral: do scholars actually engage in interaction, dialogue, or confrontation with stakeholders in politics and society? One view is that scholars should not engage. Or

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the experience may be that scholars do not know how to work on the boundary of research and politics and society. It also may be that disincentives pull them back. If it does not pay off in career advancement, or if scholars even are told not to drift away from their academic core business of publishing and teaching, why bother about external engagement? But another perspective is that, indeed, going into policy advising or public debate and opinionating is a professional obligation, does good to policy problem solving, augments the functioning of government, and as such, is rewarding, and helps developing academic competencies in new directions.

In all academic fields, those successfully completing a masters or a PhD program will enter the professional world, or be already employed during the time of their study. Some university based programs are even accredited and state protected as exclusive entry routes for a particular profession, such as in the fields of medicine, law, or engineering (Abbott, 1988). Scholars employed by universities also have such a professional environment and after some period of socialization most of them know all about the structure and culture setting the stage for their work. And anyone posing the question whether that work matters outside the university will need to take a better and more systematic look in order to find an answer.

In this book the team of authors takes such a systematic look. The focus is entirely on scholars in one academic discipline: political science. What advisory activities and roles do academic political scientists take? How do they see any work at the intersection of their university home basis and the social and political environment? How do they operate in the spheres where choices must be made about facts, evidence, normative beliefs, and advocacy? What are driving factors for such engagement, or conversely for abstention? And how do background variables such as gender, age, and status of employment affect the views and activities of political scientists? These are the central questions in this book. They are contained in a large scale cross-national project on the Professionalization and Social Impact of European Political Science (ProSEPS), with scholars from more than 30 countries involved and organized under auspices of the European COST Association in the period 2017–2020. The geography is Europe, from North to South, East to West and from traditional democracies to countries with more recent transitions towards it. This makes for diversity between countries. Also the label of political science as a discipline contains variation, including public administration and public policy analysis which in some countries have institutionalized in departments and teaching programs next to political science.

1.2 GENEALOGY AND DIFFUSION OF THE DISCIPLINE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE IN EUROPE

The still expanding scholarly community of political science in Europe has seen several waves of institutionalization that stretch from the early nineteenth century on to the recent past years (Ilonszki & Roux, 2021). A genealogy of university chair positions in political science in Europe, with some tolerance for what entails such a chair position when looking over a long time period, takes us back to the early seventeenth century (1613 in the Netherlands, 1622 in Sweden). We must distinguish these initiatives from much earlier treatises in political philosophy by Plato, Aristotle and others, but still political science scholarship can be seen in a long term evolutionary perspective.

Historically, the institutionalization of academic political science corresponds to democratization and development of national political systems. After the initial pioneering work in the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the first main wave of institutionalization came after World War II and lasted until the late 1960s (ProSEPS WG1 Report, 2019; Ilonszki & Roux, 2021). Countries of this first generation of establishing political science were not only in North-Western Europe, but also in the Mediterranean and the Eastern regions. The second wave came in the 1970s and 1980s and further into the 1990s with regime changes in Southern (transition away from authoritarianism) and Eastern Europe (transition away from communism). Earlier attempts in these regions were reinforced during this second wave. Institutionalization meant that political science became embedded in the formal higher education system, either incorporated in existing disciplines such as sociology, law etc., or by creating new university departments (ProSEPS WG 1 Report, 2019: 7; Ilonszki & Roux, 2021). Indicative of this staged expansion is that in no countries, large of small, political science after its investiture at the university was abolished later on. This however comes with a caveat: after the turn of the millennium and particularly in the 2010s, political science, and social sciences more generally have come under pressure in countries where a degeneration of democracy is visible and populist-authoritarian tendencies have forced their ways into the governance of academia. In Hungary, for example, the number of university students in political science went down in the 2010s, compared to steadily rising numbers in other countries (ProSEPS WG 1 Report, 2019: 11–12).

Another development important to the status and features of the political science community is internationalization. A majority of university based political scientists not only participates in international conferences, but also has experience with stays abroad for research or teaching purposes, and believes that knowledge exchange and creating a global community is highly valuable (ProSEPS WG 2 Report, 2019). By and large, political scientists working in EU member states make higher estimations of relevance and opportunities of cross-national academic traffic than those in other European countries (not least because of funding opportunities), but all testify that internationalization is important to their work and career advancement (ProSEPS WG 2 Report, 2019: 12).

These observations on ongoing internationalization may hide some differences between countries. And they do not include political science on other continents. In some countries, the degree and enthusiasm for internationalization may be more one-sided, in that political scientists as nationals ‘fly’ out much more often than that their foreign colleagues ‘fly in’. And the generational element in institutionalization also signifies variation to date in the state of the art between countries on the European continent. None the less, consolidation of political science as a state or a process in most countries, rising numbers of university students, and a widening perspective on developments and opportunities in the scholarly communities abroad make that political science knowledge production is increasing. Knowledge dissemination not only happens via expanding routes of *open access*, but also may serve policy makers and all kinds of other actors with stakes in the political representation and the policy process. Political science knowledge transfer beyond the academic sphere itself can come in different forms and content, and it can be solicited or happen at the initiative of political scientists themselves. ‘Serving’ policy makers thus not always means advising and speaking the truth that aids them, it also can come as enlightenment, alarm, contestation, or fervent advocacy. What makes political science knowledge and advice special, and often delicate at the same time, is that recipients, targets of this knowledge transfer are themselves also the objects of research. Knowledge *of* the policy process and knowledge *for* the policy process are the two sides of the same coin in political science.

1.3 A CONSOLIDATED ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE, A FOCUS ON EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

The point of departure of this book not only is the somewhat rhetorical conference question about the relevance of science posed at the opening paragraph of this chapter. The ‘does it matter’-question is essentially an evaluative question. But there are also other questions to be asked that can help us obtaining a better picture of the roles that political science scholars may play in the environment of their universities. Both viewpoints and actual behavior must be covered when considering the roles of political scientists in interaction with external stakeholders and the general public. The phrase ‘speaking truth to power’ (Wildavsky, 1979) is particularly relevant when that ‘truth’ relates to the organization of political power itself.

The orientation of political scientists teaching and investigating political phenomena, policy problems and the structures of government and administrative organization can vary from country to country, university to university, and also between scholars of different age, gender and status of their contract of employment. Some may be motivated intrinsically by normative viewpoints to engage, contributing to improvements on the objects of their research. Others may be called on for their expertise or stay at distance and speak *about* power rather than *to* or *with* it. National and international political science communities may organize themselves not only for scholarly events but also for addressing political and public issues in practice. They may set the discussion agenda, take a role as public intellectual, or become active backstage in delivering knowledge to policymakers. Goss (2017) for example describes how the Scholars Strategy Network (SSN) in the United States consisting of over 800 political scientists representing some 200 universities is reaching out to policymakers, civil society, and the media. This initiative reflects major concerns among the scholarly community in the U.S. about their role in contemporary debates. At one location, the European University Institute in Florence has an extensive calendar of activities for connecting to policy makers across Europe (<https://www.eui.eu/events?type=CONF,DGRP,ETS,EXTRA,FAD>), and the transatlantic Council for European Studies launched a policy forum to help bringing academic knowledge to practice. Likewise, in several European countries political scientists aim to reach out, such as the National Association for Applied Political Science in the Netherlands. In short, knowledge messages of political scientists may be delivered via the

outside or inside route, with emphasis on scientific evidence or more on the normative beliefs they hold. These messages not only come at their own initiative; often they will be solicited by actors in the political and social environment seeking policy-relevant information, strategic advice, or external help for depoliticizing complex issues.

1.4 ACADEMICS TAKING ADVISORY ROLES

There is a rich literature on policy advising. It stretches from the organization of in-house expertise within government to think tanks, and from institutional and cultural analysis of policy advisory systems to specific cases of boundary work between science and public policy. The institutional context in which views and advising or opinionating activities are developed by political scientists is the national or regional policy advisory system, usually defined as systems ‘of interlocking actors, with a unique configuration in each sector and jurisdiction, who provide information, knowledge and recommendations for action to policy makers’ (Craft & Howlett, 2012). Advice in such systems is seen as flowing from multiple sources, at times in intense competition with each other, with decision makers sitting in the middle of a complex horizontal web of advisory actors. Craft and Halligan (2020: 3) stress that such policy advisory systems are best seen as constellations with some coherence, but are not static and may vary within countries between sectors and jurisdictions.

If the policy advisory system is conceived as a spatial model containing the different domains or arenas of academia, government and public and media, scholars may sit somewhere in this model. Hence authors also refer to this as a locational model. The central perspective in the analysis in this book is the academic domain and the crossing of boundaries towards government and society. To be more complete, this locational model must also include the domain of business and commerce. In the literature, these domains also are referred to as ‘sectors’ or ‘spheres’ used for demarcation. In this book, we will speak of *arenas* to express that within them there is interaction and often also tension and conflict. Scientific fields may vary in proximity to these arenas of government, interest-groups, media, business and the general public, but also within one scholarly community variation will exist in the extent to which scholars move close to other arenas or stay at a distance. This possible variation within one scholarly community is precisely the empirical focus of this book. It builds on recent and more general work on the flow of knowledge done for example by Krick (2015)

in her analysis of advisory committees of mixed composition, Makkar et al. (2015) on the multiple uses of knowledge, Drezner (2017) who speaks of an ‘ideas industry’, and Stein and Daniels (2017) who address the challenges for social scientists of going public.

Systematic attention to a specific scientific field where scholars engage in matters external to their academic home basis is scarce. Lawyers and economists seem the most studied population. Miller calls lawyers the ‘high priests’ of American politics (1995), and Johnston has examined lawyers as advisors on the foundation of world order (2008). Likewise, Hamilton (1992) considers economists as policy advisers and Hirschman and Berman (2014), Christensen (2017) and Brunetti (2018) have analyzed how economists entered policymaking institutions and influenced public policy. But even in these studies, the focus is not exclusively on scholars based at universities. Comparatively, political scientists are still less investigated. At the same time, given the object of study, the knowledge of political scientists always is close to the border of actual processes of policymaking and institutional design. In some countries, as in Germany in the years after 1945, political science served for establishing a democratic watchdog function. More generally, monitoring the state of democracy is a role that political scientists are expected to perform.

1.5 ADVISORY ROLES AND EMPIRICAL DATA

The goal of this book is to empirically map the community of academic political scientists across European countries in their external activities related to the practice of policy process, the structures and functions of government, and the informed views and opinions of the general public. The empirical basis is a large scale survey conducted among some 2400 political scientists working at universities across countries in Europe. This is a representative sample of a total population of 12,500 academic political scientists in 39 countries. The survey designed and used for this empirical cross-country analysis is part of a more comprehensive survey research project on the Professionalization and Social Impact of European Political Science (ProSEPS) (COST Action CA15207), which also includes questions to academic political scientists on institutionalization of the discipline, their views and experiences with internationalization, and their activities and aims in media and public arenas. The basis of this book is a part of this broader survey project. The unique dataset constructed with

this survey provides information on the extent of advisory activities and the types of such activity.

The country analyzes presented in this volume may have a first time mirror function to the academic community of political scientists in Europe. For reasons of space and feasibility of a single book project, the number of countries is limited to twelve, with variation in geography and size, but including the two countries in Europe with the largest academic communities of political scientists: Germany and the United Kingdom. During the period of the survey, nine countries were EU member states and three were from outside the EU: Albania, Norway, and Turkey, while Brexit negotiations were going on. Some of the included countries have a small community of political scientists, as the country is small (Albania, Hungary) or as a proportion of the total population size (France, Italy, Turkey and to a lesser extent Spain). Other countries have a higher density of political scientists relative to the population size, such as in Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway.

The conceptual point of departure of this book is a distinction between types of advisory and engaging roles used to map patterns and characterize political scientists. These scholars may work as pure academics, be more or less active experts, give opinions and interpretation on demand or on their own initiative, or be genuine public intellectuals. These role types are based on the more general theory of boundary work between experts and policymakers, where the relationship and interaction can show differences in primacy and culture. In this book we present a conceptualization of distinct role types and also develop a simple model for measurement. By ‘simple’, we mean that we focus on a central dimension of advisory work that has analytical leverage and can help us in mapping the occurrence of role types within the academic community of political scientists, and compare countries with each other. Advice in reality is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and for this reason we also present and use additional dimensions of advising. These can help coloring the picture of engaging activities of political scientists within the policy advisory systems of countries. Thus in exploring the repertoire and encounters of advising political scientists we also look at channels of advice used, modes of communication, at recipients or targets, and at the topics of advice. These topics are not just about political representation or the functioning of policy-making institutions on which political scientists usually produce knowledge, but also on policy problems that feature on the political agenda—or for some reason are denied access. Advice and outreach towards public and media arenas may

also vary in the extent to which this involves ‘technical’ evidence and information, or is more normatively committed. On all these dimensions, we generate empirical data to obtain a better understanding of advisory orientations and activities of political scientists in Europe.

One expectation of the external roles of political scientists may be that they vary according to national or subnational institutional variables, types of incentives in academic career development and more personal views and convictions on what university based political scientists should and should not engage with their political, social, and economic environment. Election experts for example may differ in their advisory repertoire from experts on administrative organization or experts of substantive policies such as migration, climate change, or public budgeting. The collection of countries included in this book makes it possible to consider such variations and commonalities and place the patterns observed in an institutional and cultural context. In presenting the survey and methods in a following chapter, we also consider the representativeness of the groups of respondents across the studied countries. The chapters in the first part of the book present the conceptual framework and our joint strategy of data collection.

1.6 LOOKING INTO COUNTRIES: A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

Part II of the book consists of twelve country chapters, each applying the conceptual and analytical framework. The countries represent a broad geographical range in Europe, in alphabetical order beginning with Albania and ending with the United Kingdom. The country chapters all present the main findings, but also place emphasis on specific findings and factors that help understand the domestic views and behavior of political scientists on external advising and opinionating activities. Small countries have a different topography of political science compared to large ones—the number of respondents completing the survey in countries in this study varies from below 10 to some 300. Informal and not clearly demarcated boundaries between academic and policy-making institutions contrast with a formal culture of distance and academic autonomy. As we will see in this book, in some countries the community of political scientists at universities includes institutionalized variation with separate departments of public administration or public policy co-existing next to departments

that themselves are labeled political science. In order to provide the context of understanding the variation in roles in these parts of the discipline, each country chapter begins with a consideration of the domestic policy advisory system.

The final Part III of the book presents the overall pattern for all countries and a comparison of important features that help understand how and why countries vary, as well as how and why there are differences and similarities on factors such as age, gender and institutional incentives or disincentives for engagement by scholars. One point to address in the conclusive chapter is also how political scientists are placed in the overall domestic policy advisory system, and what this means for the state and direction of development of democracy and power. The boundary work between experts and policy makers is not just ‘out there’ but is inherently normative. The case of advisory roles of political scientists even underscores this normativity, given that power and the organization and allocation of it are their central object of study. If science more generally is used for problem solving and containment, or is exposed to politicization or even disqualification by populist tendencies, this certainly has implications for a social science like political science. Diagnoses of such developments will feed back to the perceptions and activities of political scientists, and impact on their orientation on professional career paths. Transversal themes of comparison, in turn, may inform routes for further research and education at universities. They may, and, as we will argue in this book, also should help in formulating the objectives of research and teaching programs in political science.

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