



# The Current Scenario: Mapping Fragmentation and Transformation in European Political Science

## 1 PREMISE

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the state of European political science. Unlike previous selective analyses of the varieties of political science across Europe (for instance, Klingemann, 2007), or recent studies of the evolution of sub-disciplinary domains in Europe (de Sousa et al., 2010), we offer an account of the present scenario by investigating different sources of data including surveys, official documents and qualitative interviews. These facts and figures, indeed, allow us to offer a robust and precise description of the complexity of European political science. In particular, we rely on three types of sources: the 2018–2019 Proseps Survey of European political scientists' attitudes towards political science; other datasets developed by the same project via flash surveys and initiatives from its internal working groups; and finally, the main findings from more than twenty open-ended interviews with knowledge holders—both young and senior experts in the discipline.

Exploring such a wealth of data will enable us to map the attitudes of European political scientists and their capacity both to achieve the discipline's collective goals and to impact the public sphere with continuity and credibility. This will allow us, in the fourth and final chapter, to offer a more tangible analysis of the challenges, together with further observations regarding the concrete likelihood of avoiding the *syndrome of Sisyphus* we presented in the previous chapter, and also to consolidate a number of new professional models.

In order to do so, the chapter includes an initial section dealing with the current structure of the community, its internal pluralism and its external perimeter. These dimensions will be explored by looking at different indicators obtained from the abovementioned sources. This is consistent with the core theme of the book, namely that of assessing the key aspects of the disciplinary sphere based on the views of the “experts”, the assessment emerging from a broader set of respondents and the outside world’s image of the discipline as per the most visible findings of our research.

The following section will focus on the main aspects of the redefinition of political science’s potential impact on the public sphere. The Proseps Survey data will help us to reconstruct the opportunities and ideas that may help scholars find a visible, productive role beyond their usual *comfort zone* within academia. Once again, we shall complement the data-driven reconstruction based on our surveys (see Appendix 1), with an assessment of the statements set out in our political science testimonials (see Appendix 2), in order to account for the gap between European political scientists’ perceived potential in terms of their visibility, social impact and relationship with the policy-making sphere and the effective outcomes they can actually achieve in these difficult times.

A third section will focus on the evidence emerging from our data concerning the transformation and perceptions of political scientists’ “everyday business”. It will also give account of the criticisms and self-criticisms of the three generations of political scientists we interviewed. After reviewing trends and figures, we raise the question of what European political scientists are currently lacking in order to achieve a satisfactory level of *professionalization*. This will immediately lead us to another question about the main measures to be taken—both at the systemic level and in terms of the individual actions of each single political scientist—to positively adapt the political scientist’s work as a researcher, teacher and disseminator of knowledge. The ideas we are going to explore can be encapsulated by certain terms we have either invented or taken from the literature, namely those of the *traveller* (Tronconi & Engeli, 2022), the *commuter* and the *fixer*.

We shall return to the theme of adaptation in the fourth and final section of the chapter, where we shall deal with the changes expected and/or determined by two decades of crises, from the impact of 9/11 in 2001 to the aggression of Ukraine and the return of warfare in Europe. Political scientists are supposed to be more familiar than other scholars with notions such as *crisis resolution* and *institutional performance*. Some of them are

professional knowledge holders in the field of policy analysis. Most of them teach courses about global challenges. The possible effects of the global crises witnessed in the first two decades of the twenty-first century thus constitute a sort of “unavoidable topic of interest” for their research agenda.

Here, we shall specifically focus on the response to COVID-19 and on the subsequent phase of reflection. In fact, the said health crisis has been seen as a fundamental critical juncture or “policy punctuation” to be carefully analysed (Hogan et al., 2022), and not only for its obvious effects on health policy, welfare systems and public policy in general. Educational systems, inter-generational relations and even psychological behaviour are also at stake. That is why we have chosen to use selected data taken from the final period of the Proseps project, to discuss the perceptions and expectations of European political scientists in regard to the post-pandemic era.

## 2 WINNERS, LOSERS, STRANGERS: RE-THINKING THE SHAPE OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL SCIENCE COMMUNITY

Let us start with a basic outline of the current European political science community. In our attempt to map the variance, fragmentation and uniformity of the discipline, we shall be paying particular attention to the following aspects thereof.

1. The effective consolidation of a multitude of sufficiently *autonomous and methodologically recognizable “sub-disciplines”*. We have already described the issue of the discipline’s fragmentation. Here we shall use the answers to some of the questions in the Proseps 2018–2019 survey, to better understand the autonomy of selected sub-sets of political scientists in Europe. Also, the internal fragmentation of the discipline will be reconstructed on the basis of the definitions provided by the respondents to our qualitative survey.
2. The *pluralism of theoretical approaches*, which can be in some way measured by the “self-positioning” of political scientists in an open-space realm of potential knowledge, which is generally defined here as the space of European political science, or by an ex-post overall assessment of their outcomes.

3. The *effective variance in the use of specific methods* and professional tools from one setting to another, whose assortment points to both the richness and the complexity of our scientific community. In particular, we want to clarify the effective degree of uniformity (or, on the contrary, the risk of inconsistency) in the set of methodological requirements that political scientists consider as unquestionable “working tools” for the discipline as a whole.

### 2.1 *The External and Internal Borders of European Political Science*

Who exactly are today’s European political scientists? The comparative analysis of the density and complexity of the discipline is particularly difficult, not only due to the different levels of information pertaining to academic subjects and personnel, from one country to another (or even across universities). Indeed, the description of academics’ areas of interest and publication records, taken from all of the CVs read by our Proseps country experts on the web page of each single European political scientist, reveals an extreme range of variation, since we have counted more than 400 “labels” spontaneously added by the respondents to the short set of sub-disciplines we had suggested to them.

Here we have to consider how this variety of information may also be impacted by other structural factors, such as the procedural and legal constraints on the visibility of academics at national or local level, which do not really affect the five general dimensions of political science institutionalization (stability, identity, autonomy, reproduction and legitimacy) (Ilonszki & Roux, 2022, 34), but render the individual representatives of the discipline clearly distinguishable. Such factors also include: the adoption (or otherwise) of an official line governing the hiring of political science academics; the presence (or otherwise) of an official “political science” subject area in the university curricula; and the compulsory presence of a certain number of credits linked to this discipline by national and local regulations.

Even if we limit our analysis to the Western-European scenario, where the aggregate degrees of institutionalization remain relatively homogeneous (see Chap. 2), there remains a great deal of variability as things stand. In those countries where an official academic definition of the discipline is ensured by the legal obligation to recruit within a set of *scientific*

*disciplinary sectors*,<sup>1</sup> the external visibility of political scientists can be established relatively easily. Conversely, in countries like the United Kingdom or Ireland, the recruitment system does not contemplate any clear disciplinary distinction, which makes the definition of the political science community much more uncertain. Similarly, the number of political science credits in the study plans of BA or MA programmes is clearer in more strictly regulated higher educational systems, although a further element of variance may be that of sub-national regulation. In Germany, for instance, formal accreditation of the disciplinary subjects depends on federal states' regulations, whereas national legislation is extremely binding in France. Once again, flexibility resulting from de-regulation emerges in the English-speaking countries' academic systems.

All in all, the picture varies enormously, since neither the external borders of political science nor its internal ones can be pinpointed through comprehensive quantitative analysis. This is certainly a limit, but also a first important piece of information confirming the vagueness of the official definition of the discipline of political science. This vagueness is currently in danger of becoming increasingly pronounced given the proliferation of new programmes and courses inspired by catchy, original denominations and by a variety of inter-disciplinary subjects (i.e. *gender studies*, *big-data* and *artificial intelligence*, *sustainability* etc.).

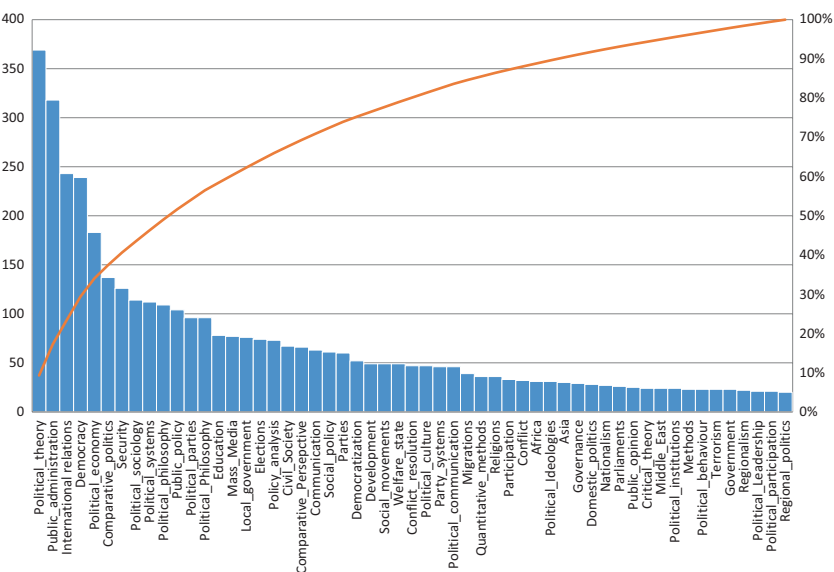
## 2.2 *The European Political Science “Tectonic Plate”: An Analysis of the Proseps Survey Data*

The aforementioned difficulties may be partially overcome by utilizing an important original source of information to begin describing the complexity of European political science. That source of information is the 2018–2019 Proseps Survey. We started by describing the panel of about 11,000 scholars included in the contact file, elaborated by the Proseps country experts, covering 35 different countries. Unfortunately, the contact file could only be compiled with complete information on each

<sup>1</sup>For instance, political science in Italy is one of the fourteen sectors of Scientific Area number 14 (*Political and Social Sciences*). Adopting a broader definition of political science, we can find practicing political scientists operating in at least other two sectors: *Political Philosophy*, which in fact is considered by Italian regulations to be a related disciplinary sector (meaning that a professor of political philosophy can be a member of a board appointed to hire a political science researcher), and *Political Sociology*.

scholar's areas of interest in the case of less than half of the entire population (5005 individuals).

Notwithstanding these limitations, the Proseps dataset offers some pointers through its over 10,000 entries (national coders could observe up to three areas of interest for each individual included in the contact file). This collection of keywords is rather indicative since it reveals a significant number of repetitions. More specifically, the most commonly found 273 keywords (those indicated by at least 2 political scientists) were mentioned 4983 times. The 55 keywords shown in Fig. 3.1, in the form of a Pareto chart, are mentioned by at least 20 political scientists, but the tail of the chart will be much longer: even after the recoding of very similar couples of keywords, and after excluding from the list any indication of the countries the respondents come from, we still have 330 different entries.



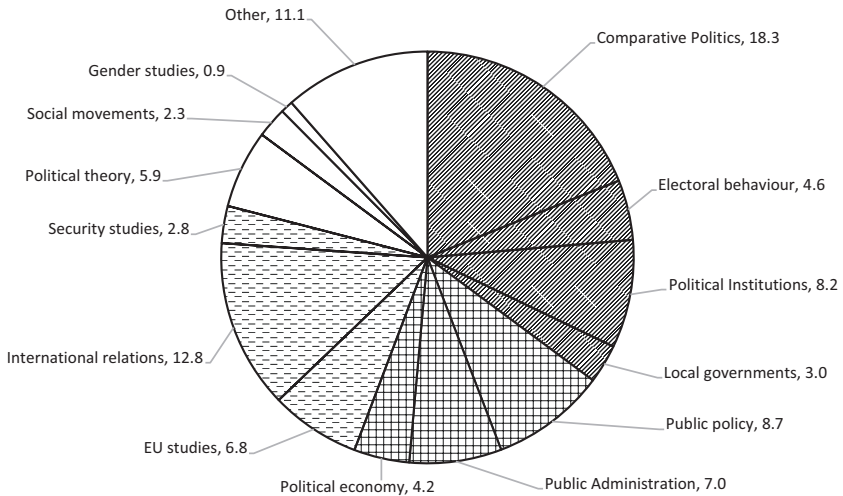
**Fig. 3.1** The most recurrent interests of European political scientists. (Note: the Pareto chart has been created on the bases of the most recurrent selections of 5005 European political scientists whose profiles have been compiled in the Proseps contact file)

As one can see, some of the typical “areas” often indicated by previous studies (e.g. Klingemann, 2007) as cornerstones of the discipline are present here. However, even such a partial and experimental cataloguing process shows how people’s perceptions of the objects of the discipline vary. Indeed, several of the objects identified by our country experts reflect typical sub-disciplinary areas, such as *Political Theory*, *Comparative Politics*, *International Relations*, *Public Administration* or *Public Policy*, while many others look more like points of contention among different disciplinary approaches. The latter include notions such as *Conflict* (or even *Conflict resolution*), *Welfare*, *Democracy*, *Elites*, *Ethnic Politics* and so on. In some cases, the keywords seem to point to other concepts which, by following a logic of disciplinary demarcation, should be indicated as competing “social sciences”. Indeed, our list of subjects includes the following key words: *Constitutional/Public Law*, *Economics*, *Political Sociology* (as well as other forms of sociology), *Anthropology* and *History*. In other cases, the respondents’ comments point to the specific methodological features of research (*qualitative* or *quantitative methods*, *QCA* etc.).

Finally, we may argue that the concepts representing the substantive objects of the disciplinary enquiries have changed significantly. This is simply an impression, given that we have no data with which to conduct a diachronic check. However, it is fairly clear that the use of relatively new keywords like *Climate*, *Diversity*, *Bioethics* and *Big Data*, and probably other rather common concepts such as *Soft Power* and *Migration*, is customary at present, and reflects the need for differently structured teaching programmes (see above) and ongoing changes in the world of research.

Although it remains an impression, the result of our exercise using the list of subjects provided by our country experts as their favoured “areas of interest”, would seem to confirm the variety of European political scientists’ research agendas; and at the same time, it seems to point to the clear porosity of the discipline’s borders. Indeed, several scholars believe that a political scientist has to share both the “object” and (to some extent) the “method” with other academic disciplines, which ought to be considered complementary rather than rival fields.

Further exploration of the internal borders of the current community of political scientists is provided in Fig. 3.2, which summarizes the answers to the question concerning their main research interests. Unlike in the analysis presented in Chap. 1, which is based on raw data regarding those categories most frequently chosen by respondents, here we run a



**Fig. 3.2** European political scientists' main areas of interest. (Note: the original question was: *What is the field of specialization of your highest university degree?* Source: Proseps Survey 2019)

subjective recoding of the residual categories, which returns a clearly balanced distribution among fifteen categories.

On the one hand, the complexity of the community is confirmed: our processing of the responses we received reveals a rather complex picture that is to some degree consistent with certain recent interpretations of the difficult processes of professionalization and institutionalization (Boncourt, 2020; Ilonszki & Roux, 2022). On the other hand, a consolidated division of labour among political scientists also emerges. We have re-coded our entries in four sub-disciplinary “families” which seem to be rather well established, albeit of very different sizes. While the “pure methodologists” (included in the residual category “other” in Fig. 3.2) account for no more than 3.2% of the population, and pure “political theorists” account for around 6%, the other three families remain of a substantial entity: experts in institutional analysis (comparative politics, electoral behaviour, local politics, political institutions and élites) make up more than 30% of the sample. The family of experts in international studies and European politics account for more than 20%, while the family of public policy and public administration scholars accounts for just below 20%.



**Table 3.1** European political scientists' backgrounds by geographical area

	<i>UK</i>	<i>Northern Europe</i>	<i>Western Europe</i>	<i>Central- Eastern Europe (EU)</i>	<i>Southern Europe (EU)</i>	<i>Central- Eastern Europe (non-EU)</i>	<i>Tot</i>
Politics	<i>N</i> 109	136	368	196	260	86	1155
	% 42.7	40.2	43.0	45.3	50.4	45.7	44.7
Policy &	<i>N</i> 54	122	249	91	135	29	680
administration	% 21.2	36.1	29.1	21.0	26.2	15.4	26.3
International	<i>N</i> 92	80	239	146	121	73	751
studies	% 36.1	23.7	27.9	33.7	23.4	38.8	29.0

Source: Proseps Survey 2019

Note: for the composition of geographical areas, see Table 2.3

The breakdown of the three main families of interest into six geographical areas (Table 3.1) offers further interesting pointers: first of all, there are no huge differences (and thus the idea of an ideal division of labour is confirmed). However, while the discipline of “politics” remains stronger in the Western/Southern areas, “policy studies” as a discipline is clearly more popular in the North, while the British system reveals a special interest in international studies. Even the breakdown regarding Central-Eastern Europe (which is sub-divided into EU and non-EU countries) reveals that none of the three macro-areas of interest attracts a massive number of scholars. It is likely that the other sub-disciplines, in particular the political-theory category, continue to account for a considerable number of political scientists.

The comparison between this distribution and the preferences expressed by the respondents regarding the future indicates a rather stable situation. Although with the evident cross-national dissimilarities, none of the traditional objects of political science seems to be neglected. As a matter of fact, the multiplicity of research interests (Deschouwer, 2020) remains a strength acknowledged by the majority of European political scientists. However, such complexity looks much more problematic than in the old days of the re-foundation of the empirical study of politics and, all things considered, also compared to just three decades ago. Indeed, about 15% of our respondents cannot be recoded in any of the abovementioned families of (recoded) areas of interest. In some cases, this recent tendency towards complexity can be accounted for by the growing importance of

the relatively new areas of study considered in our questionnaire. This is so in the case of gender studies (1% of our respondents declared that this was their only area of interest) and of social movements (2.1%). Another 10.9% of miscellaneous answers, labelled “other” since they were not explicitly considered in the Proseps questionnaire, include those scholars who indicate *political communication* or *media studies* as their only area of interest. This probably means that our taxonomies will have to be revised in the near future, since the distribution of political science “objects” is clearly still evolving. We will return to the idea of the increasing mobility of the internal borders of the discipline when we examine the need for professional flexibility as a response to the challenges of our time. For the time being we just wish to point out this slow, yet inexorable, movement: a sort of relentless shift along political science’s “tectonic plates”.

### 2.3 *The Perimeter of European Political Science According to the Experts*

The open-ended interviews conducted by a trans-generational group of experts (see above) constitute a second source we can employ to obtain a more accurate description of the complexity of European political science. In particular, the responses to the first part of our standard interview offer a number of anecdotal and historical views of that science. We shall try to answer two separate questions here:

- (a) what are the original “cognate disciplines” that political science ought to be associated with (and, to some extent, distinguished from)?
- (b) what are the prevailing views regarding the evolution of European political science?

The first thing that stands out when reading the interviewees’ responses is the vagueness of European political science’s epistemological origins. All of the emeritus professors we interviewed mentioned their specific, rather conflicting, ideas regarding political science as a mission and a discipline. In some cases, they argued that in recent times this complicated vision of the foundations of political science had re-emerged in the form of fragmentation. This point is made clear by two *emeritus professors* who observe the following:

I was really surprised to observe that the young generation was working on very specific topics. I remember a PhD dissertation dealing with the parents of pupils in a school... that's to say, you know, there is a council of parents in a school and the PhD was tackling with this ... this was very, very strict. It seems to me we are now moving only to micro politics ...

... as I go through the journals of political science in both Europe and in the United States, I do not see very many in-depth analyses of political action, but the gradual disappearance of theories dealing with the big problems.

However, another experienced scholar describes the fragmentation of today's political science as not necessarily being a problem. The risk of a loss of focus remains, but the wealth of an increasingly complex discipline is also evaluated:

[B]ut again, the division up until today has resulted in a situation where there is a different fragmentation, a different strong fragmentation in terms of subfields, such as, as you know very well, policy studies, democratic studies, studies of political parties or representation. Here, you have separate tables again but of a different kind from the separate tables Gabriel Almond had in mind, because Gabriel Almond had in mind separate tables in terms of approach, while here we are speaking of separate tables in terms of empirical research on topics, and then, of course, within the subfields we even have fragmentation in terms of the different ways of analyzing the same topic. Today the picture is a very complex one.

Quite obviously, other generations of scholars tend to underestimate such fragmentation. However, the *seniors* we interviewed also indicated the need to deal with the question of complexity. The point is that specialization is inherent in modern political science, and is necessary given the discipline's weak nature and complex subject matter. However, the political science community has a duty to temper differences and to connect different political scientists. The following excerpt from the views of a senior scholar illustrates this point:

I hadn't really thought in those generational terms, it just seemed to me that as political science becomes more mature and bigger, specialization is going to happen and that's a good thing, because specialized people can actually go deeper. ... What pluralism means is lots of different people doing lots of different things in different specialisms, and they can learn from each other, and they can talk to each other. I think it's important. I mean, I've always

believed that a department ought to have a kind of departmental research seminar which everyone's goes to ... you know, I really hate when you ask people: "Why don't you come to the seminar?" And somebody says "It is not my topic" or "I don't do normative stuff" or something like that ... you're a political scientist, you should be interested in all of these things.

Although generally more optimistic about the pros of a fragmented discipline, recent generations of political scientists do not underestimate the centrifugal dynamics that make some restricted sub-communities of scholars isolated and "outsiders". One of the youngest of our interviewees clearly points this out:

I think that the differences between subfields will increasingly widen. But I still think that political science will be as relevant as it is today. Subfields, as a result of this effect, tend to inter-communicate increasingly less. So I realized that, for example, just participating in your Cost Action, what you guys are talking about is something that I don't always understand, although our basic background is the same, it's just that our research interests took us in different directions. So I think that our subfields will communicate less than they currently do.

For example, I don't work with political scientists anymore. I mostly work geographers, anthropologists and historians. These are people I find much more interesting since my work is very critical and highly qualitative. And it's very hard for me to share a research interest with European political scientists, because they have different approaches. So I don't see any danger for the science as a whole, but I see less communication within the science per se.

## 2.4 *Increasing Methodological Complexity*

Disciplinary fragmentation and the spread of theoretical approaches are not the sole reasons for the complexity for political science. Indeed, the three generations covered by our set of interviews have certainly lived through a period in which the methodological tools of political scientists have significantly changed. We have collected a number of unusual impressions from the older scholars, pointing to the fatigue involved in such difficult methodological training. For example, they mention the difficulties experienced in finding adequate support (in terms of resources, statistical skills and data availability) for the purposes of certain specific research topics, or the slowness of the first generation of computers that they had

to use to complete their early work. Younger colleagues, on the other hand, while unanimously stressing the importance of methodological adequacy as a requisite in the process of political science institutionalization (Ilonzski and Roux 2022), sometimes seem surprised by these accounts, and in any case, they do not know the cost of this lengthy process of methodological development.

The data collected by Wagemann et al. (2022) confirm that regression analyses have gradually become the most common method adopted in articles published since the beginning of the new millennium, with their share rising from about 10% (of all European political science articles) at the end of the 1980s, to over 50% in the early years of the new millennium. However, no prevalent technique has emerged in the never-ending changes in adopted methods. Multivariate analyses are still used in around 50% of the articles published, while a recent shift towards *mixed methods* has been witnessed. Qualitative comparative analyses, process tracing and historical methods, ethnography and also grounded theories seem to display periodic phases of resilience, thus offering credible alternatives to a significant share of the political science community. The clear advance of quantitative methods can therefore be accounted for by the following specific factors: the emergence of specialized journals, the consolidation of certain sub-disciplines and the growth of identifiable segments of users.

Finally, there is the increasing variation in the ways that research is organized, due to the emergence of very different kinds of “environment”. The increase in co-authorship and international joint studies (Ghica, 2021; Carammia, 2022) is a rough, albeit significant, indicator of this kind of complexity, which nevertheless seems to be much less evident in continental Europe than in the USA and (to a lesser extent) the UK. Once again, the phenomenon of co-authorship is correlated to the specific use of multivariate analysis and to the greater network capability of male-based teams (Deschouwer, 2020; Verney & Bosco, 2021).

### 2.5 *No Winners, Inevitable Losers, Too Many “Strangers”?*

All in all, the idea of great complexity accompanies a rather optimistic, encouraging picture. Professional political scientists aim to cover diverse questions and to interpret political change by employing a multifaceted set of epistemological and methodological tools, since they are committed to a multitude of individual tasks, while not forgetting the collective goals of the discipline. The generally positive assessment of a plural, intrinsically

compound discipline leads us to believe that the predominant perception of recent developments is a constructive one. The majority of the Proseps Survey respondents, and all of our testimonials, confirmed that none of the traditional areas of the discipline had lost its appeal, despite the clearly differing views offered regarding the relevance of one or another field.

Therefore, we would argue that recent developments have not resulted in a paradigmatic change in the structure of the community: we do not see any “winner” in the battle for the predominance of the research agenda or of the range of academic subjects on offer. However, some of the traditional problems are still well evident. The first such problem is that the existing gaps are not easy to bridge. In particular, the difficulties that female scholars have in affirming themselves, and the obstacles to the full training of the new generation of scholars, especially in those small and/or poorer countries where pluralism struggles to be established, remain.

Moreover, the increasing complexity of the discipline entails a problem of incommunicability. Several of our respondents have stressed the lack of cooperation between specific groups (i.e. international relations experts and comparative politics experts) or even among generations and “schools” of political scientists. Of course, the hyper-specialization of the approaches together with the multidimensionality of methods tends to fuel such lack of cooperation, resulting in a kind of surrender by those scholars who *cannot understand* their colleagues (a problem well noted in the USA since the early seventies, when the spread of formal analysis was accompanied by an upsurge in rational choice). Even more problematic is the lack of communication determined by the attitude of the scholars who *do not want to understand* their colleagues. This would indeed be the prelude to a definitive fragmentation of the community into a number of weak and rather irrelevant groups of “ideologists” who tend to see other groups as strangers, if not rivals.

### 3 IVORY TOWERS VERSUS THE PUBLIC SPHERE? REDEFINING THE PUBLIC MISSION(S) OF POLITICAL SCIENTISTS

#### 3.1 *Different Aspects of Political Science’s Social Activism*

In a recent assessment of political scientists’ ability to deal with the difficult issues faced by several European democracies, Real-Dato and Verzichelli (2022) propose a framework built on three dimensions of

**Table 3.2** Three aspects of political scientists' public engagement

	<i>Lower level of engagement</i>	<i>Mid-level of engagement</i>	<i>Higher level of engagement</i>
<i>Partisanship</i>	Observer	Broker	Partisan
<i>Visibility in the public realm</i>	Invisible	Present	Mediatized
<i>Impact in the public sphere</i>	Inconsequential	Inspirer	Impactful

Source: Adapted from Real-Dato and Verzichelli (2022)

engagement (Table 3.2): partisanship, visibility in the public realm and impact in the public sphere. The basic idea is that of an empirical space where the different experiences of the communities of political scientists are located in specific political circumstances. The first aspect may be defined as a continuum between a purely *partisan role* and that of *neutral observer*, while the midpoint may be marked by a *brokering role*, where the participants maintain a neutral stance but do intervene in political debate by proposing solutions or alternatives.

The dimension of visibility can be conceived as the extent of the general public's familiarity with the work of political scientists. The lowest level of visibility corresponds to that of the *invisible scholar*, while the highest level to that of the *mediatized scholar*, with the latter familiar to newspapers readers, prime-time TV viewers and social media followers. The mid-point is that of the scholar who participates in the debate but is not immediately publicly recognizable.

The third aspect is that of impact, that is, the ability to influence policy-makers' decisions (John 2013). In this context, political scientists can be: *inconsequential* (when they have no impact at all); *inspirational* (when they feed policy-makers' ideas without being directly acknowledged for such); or *impactful* (when their contribution is effectively recognized).

The survey conducted in the study, edited by Real-Dato and Verzichelli, confirms the difficulties that many European political science communities have in coping with different types of challenges, ranging from domestic democratic crises (e.g. the crisis ensuing from claims for independence in Catalonia) to supranational crises (such as the bailout referendum in Greece) and to a multitude of policy-related crises. This obviously applies to public debate in "ordinary times", especially where political scientists represent a small, relatively marginal portion of the intellectual élite.

Here we are not dealing with the question of political scientists' partisanship, much debated from the advent of behaviouralism until the recent *perestroika* debate (Monroe, 2005). On the contrary, we are going to use the available data and the qualitative information we have gathered from our experts regarding the problems of visibility and policy advocacy.

### 3.2 *Media Presence and the Problem of Visibility*

With the aim of establishing the predominant models of the contemporary political scientist in Europe, we have identified a second dimension called "the individual propensity to impact the public sphere", which we define as the tendency to enhance the social and public sphere by becoming more vocal, visible and prestigious at an individual level. Actually, we know that such a general attitude may be the result of a number of different factors that are not necessarily correlated. Political scientists may be more or less inclined towards political activism and the role of *opinion maker*. Or they may aim to perform a specific advocacy function in one or more policy-making areas.

But what exactly makes political scientists inclined to perform one of these proactive roles in the public sphere? Political scientists are aware of their potentially important role. They know they have things to say, and their academic institutions tend to broadcast their views through a multitude of channels. Many of the official webpages of university departments and research centres include a "connect with me" page, linking people to the social media resources produced by academics. In some case, the presence of academics in broadcast reports, policy briefs and even local blogs is clearly a key aspect of their visibility (one typical example of such is the engagement of several political scientists from the *London School of Economics and Political Science*).

The Proseps Survey data show that participation in the public domain is not uncommon among political scientists: about 62% of our respondents affirmed that participation in public debate is part of their mission, and that they had appeared in the media over the course of the preceding three years. However, both the type and the intensity of their participation differed significantly. If we look at the type of media outlet concerned, a generational gap emerges. Indeed, in the traditional media, senior scholars (over 50 years old) tend to be more proactive than their younger colleagues, since they appear more often on TV (41% compared to 29%), on the radio (49%/39%) and in newspapers (56%/49%). On the other hand,



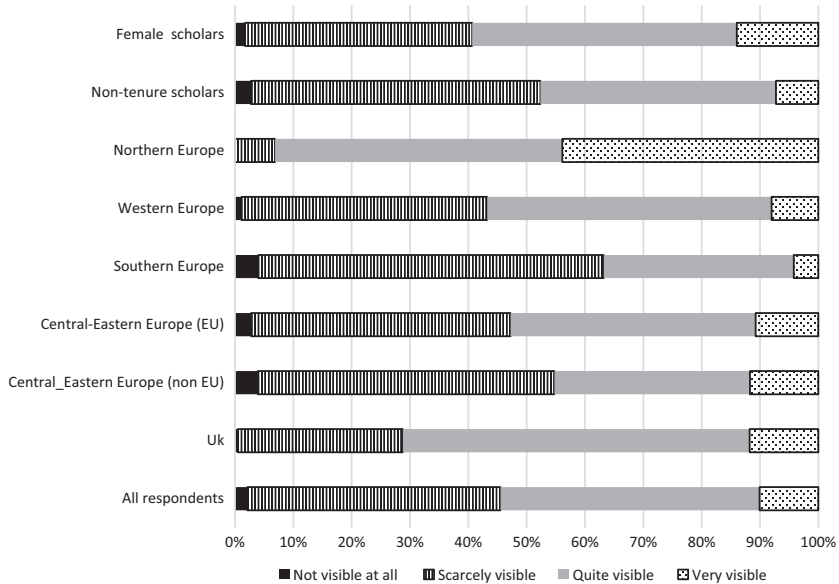
junior scholars use Twitter (60%/54%) and Facebook (60%/58%) more often than senior scholars do.

However, upon closer examination, the media activism of European political scientists appears relatively limited: only a small minority of respondents appear to be highly active in the media, since fewer than 15% of them stated that they had appeared on the radio at least once a month, while 20% had written in newspapers (local or national) and 22% had appeared on TV (local or national).

The difficulty of establishing themselves as opinion makers is particularly evident among female academics: overall, there is a clear gap, in terms of media visibility, between female and male political scientists: 55% of female political scientists stated that they had had some media experience over the course of the previous three years, while this value rises to 66% in the case of male scholars. Moreover, the gap increases if we consider the aforementioned indicator of continuity (presence in the media on at least a monthly basis). Here, the impact of female political scientists is significantly lower than that of their male colleagues in all three traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers), whereas there is no gender difference as far as Twitter and Facebook utilization is concerned. Evidently, female scholars are still structurally neglected by the media system, and consequently they look for a (relatively) broader presence in social media where there is no need to be “invited” by anyone.

Hence, speaking to society is considered part of an academic’s professional mission, and yet not all political scientists seem to be sufficiently predisposed to engaging in public debate. Individual preferences and priorities—for instance the need to devote most, if not all, of one’s time to what is considered a key professional duty (teaching or conducting research)—may account for this limited visibility. However, the gender gap that tends to exclude female scholars from being present in the media, and the clear generational divide in terms of the use of different media outlets, gives us to believe that structural factors are at work shaping political scientists’ attraction or aversion to traditional and new media. A clear, albeit rough picture of these factors is presented in Fig. 3.3 showing the distribution of the evaluations given by political scientists regarding their visibility in their countries (the questionnaire actually refers to “the country where you work”).

A partial satisfaction with the visibility of political science already emerges from the aggregate distribution, which shows a community almost divided in half: 55% of respondents consider political scientists very



**Fig. 3.3** Views of the visibility of political scientists in the public sphere. (Note: the original question was: *Overall, how do you evaluate the visibility of political scientists in ... [your country]?* For the composition of geographical areas, see Table 2.3. Source: Proseps Survey 2019)

or (much more often) quite visible, while the remaining 45% judge their colleagues to be scarcely visible.

Female scholars do not deviate from this pattern, thus confirming the structural problem of visibility also affecting women in academia: in other words, female scholars—who on average enjoy less well-consolidated careers compared to male scholars—think more about “usual business”, and in particular their teaching duties, which probably stops them thinking very much about the problem of visibility. On the other hand, junior scholars (i.e. those under the age of fifty) display rather negative views compared to the population of political scientists as a whole, since more than half of them deem their public visibility to be poor.

Negative views on the visibility of academics are even stronger in Central-Eastern Europe and (above all) in Southern Europe. Two separate contextual determinants may be identified here: the relative weakness of the discipline in Central-Eastern Europe and especially in non-EU

countries (see Chap. 2) and the negative vision of visibility in Southern Europe. This latter element may be explained by the political characteristics of the media system in this area (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995), where high level of media polarization (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) may negatively influence the media presence of political scientists, in comparison to lawyers, economists and hard scientists.

### 3.3 *Political Scientists' Attitudes Towards Policy-Making and the Problem of Advocacy*

The entity of political science's impact on policy-making has long been debated (Ricci, 1984; John 2013; Flinders, 2013). Undoubtedly, the increasingly broad scope of the public policy agenda and the important issues concerning the reform of democratic institutions and public administrations have made this debate even more interesting. Theoretical reflections on the future application of political science in the policy-making sphere have also influenced the way it is taught (Malici & Smith, 2018), and an increasingly important line of research (see, e.g., Bandola et al., 2021) now consists of exploring new patterns of the discipline's position within society.

Not surprisingly, the Proseps project has focused on the question of the applicability of political science, and in particular on the role of policy advisors. A detailed volume sets out the findings of a research team focusing specifically on this question (Brans & Timmermans, 2022), with robust evidence provided of the potential, and the (clear) weaknesses, of this perspective. This is a timely piece of research since, as clearly stated by Jean Blondel in his foreword (2022, viii), "the rise of behavioural approaches to political science and the further development of the discipline sparked a rapprochement between political scientists and policy-makers".

To translate this into the terminology mentioned in the typology introduced above, we could argue that several political scientists (even) in Europe seem to be no longer *inconsequential*, but now play the weak role of *inspirers* without having any truly effective role. Moreover, the degree of institutionalization of political science as an academic discipline, together with specific contextual factors like gender, the degree of democratic openness and administrative tradition, may slow this process down. Here we simply report a few findings regarding European social scientists' current advisory role, whereas Brans and Timmermans et al. (2022) and

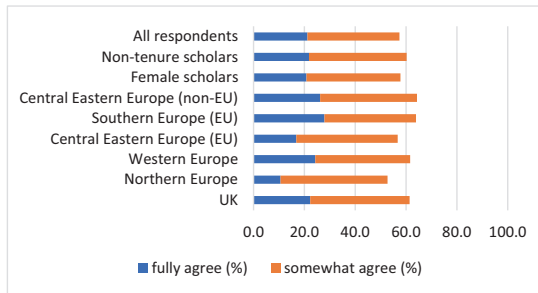
the twelve qualitative country studies included in the volume should be referred to for a more detailed reconstruction.

Figure 3.4 shows three clear findings, and several hints of fragmentation, regarding the attitudes of European political scientists towards their public engagement. 60% of them confirm that this kind of activity should be somehow subordinated to the scientific testing of any politically relevant idea, although full agreement with this assertion is rather weak (around 20%). The idea of the clear utility of public engagement to political scientist's career is one that is shared by only 42% of respondents, while fewer than 10% are in full agreement. Finally, a clear majority agree with the idea that public engagement is part of the profession of political scientist. It is worth pointing out, in any case, that the broad minority of those respondents who "somewhat agree" have doubts about the effective relevance of this activity to the overall development of the profession.

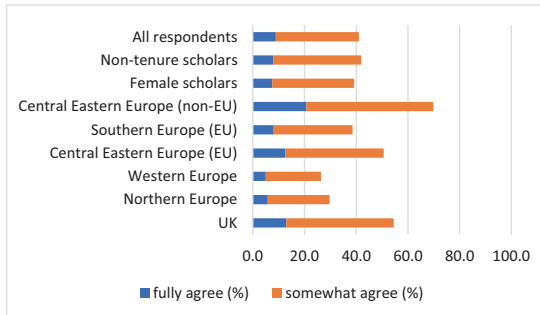
This latter observation is connected to a few, albeit significant, departures visible in Fig. 3.4. First of all, female political scientists appear more idealistic about the relevance of the profession's advisory role, but at the same time are pessimistic about its utility for career purposes. Moreover, scholars from Central and Eastern Europe appear (relatively) less convinced of the need for scientific testing as a requisite for public engagement, while they are clearly more likely than others to see this activity as a career incentive. On the contrary, the *Nordic model* emerges once again as offering opposing views: political scientists from Northern countries are convinced of the natural role of engagement but tend not to see this as a springboard for their careers.

Figure 3.5, built in the same way but concerning predispositions about the role of public engagement, confirms very similar lines of distribution. In particular, while no major differences emerge when introducing sociogeographical variables ("under 50" and "female" respondents), the geographical variable continues to throw up certain differences. Scholars from the North take it for granted that "political scientists should become more involved", and they also mostly reject the idea that political scientists "should refrain from direct engagement". Southern European academics, on the other hand, appear somewhat reluctant to stress the professional obligation to engage in public debate, and the necessity to provide the broad public with evidence-based knowledge.

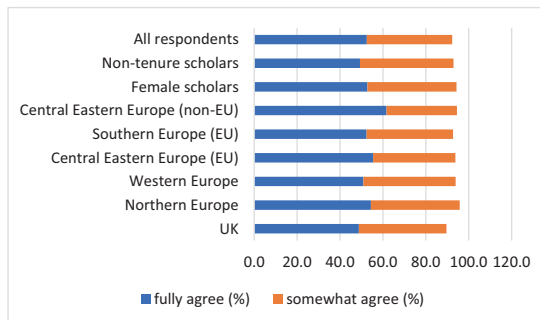
For reasons of space, we are not going to report details for the other areas, which follow quite clear trends. The UK and Western Europe tend to follow the Nordic pattern, while the respondents from the non-EU



They should engage in media or political advisory only after testing their ideas in academic outlets



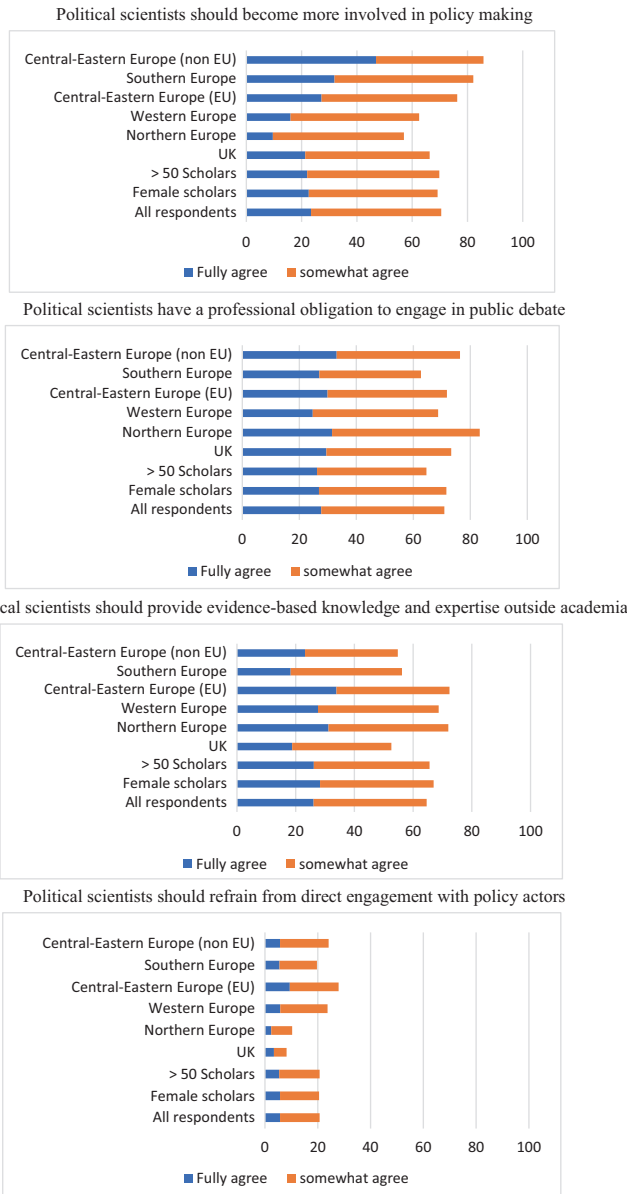
They should engage in media or political advisory because it helps them to expand their career options



They should engage in media or political advisory since this is part of their role as social scientists

**Fig. 3.4** The participation of political scientists in public debate. Selected questions. (Note: for the composition of geographical areas, see Table 2.3. Source: Proseps Survey 2019)

countries of the post-soviet area and the Balkans are even more likely than their EU colleagues to claim some role as opinion makers, data scientists and policy advocates. These are all clues to the existence of a clear cultural



**Fig. 3.5** Attitudes of European political scientists towards public engagement. Agreement with four assertions. (Note: for the composition of geographical areas, see Table 2.3. Source: Proseps Survey 2019)

gap between political scientists' perceptions of their roles across Europe; and in particular, it points to a divide between those from North-Western Europe and those from Eastern Europe.

These findings are corroborated by most of the qualitative interviews conducted with three generations of European scholars. Stimulated by a quotation from Arendt Lijphart about the importance of normative incentives for the profession,<sup>2</sup> several respondents strongly agree with the idea that empirical research should be somehow oriented towards prescriptive conclusions. They do not preclude the possibility of transforming such incentives into some sort of advocacy role. However, very few of them offer any precise “agenda” as policy advisors, or indeed act as “reform inspirers”. Obviously, this is more the case of those scholars dealing with public policies, who are in fact the most vocal in denouncing the difficulties involved. One of the “young lions” perfectly illustrates this need:

For sure, our capacity to be relevant to the policymakers is threatened, has always been threatened by the jurists and the experts in legal disciplines and also by the economists. I mean, I think that despite that we have, in my opinion, very good theories and quite interesting methodological instruments, we are not too sophisticated for the policymaker to understand us, and at the same time we are able to be scientific enough to be credible. But despite this, actually, we play a very marginal role in the relationship with policymakers, and we are not that present in the media.

### 3.4 *Advisory Roles Among Contemporary European Political Scientists*

The concerns we have just reported are certainly influenced to a degree by political scientists operating in a country (not the UK or a country from Northern Europe) where their professional role is a consolidated one, and includes their acting as policy advisors. There is further evidence of this, moreover. Following Timmermans et al. (2022), we may indeed conclude

<sup>2</sup>The quotation is the following: “I see my research as starting with a normatively important variable—something that can be described as good or bad, such as peace or violence. I then proceed to investigate what produces these different outcomes. Finally, I conclude by presenting prescriptions, that is, measures that would produce the desired outcome. I don’t see a tension between normative concerns and an aspiration to do science. In fact, I think a normative, prescriptive conclusion can be drawn from most empirical relationships” (Lijphart, quoted in in Munck & Snyder, 2007).

that the policy advisory role of European political scientists is currently highly differentiated.

We can justifiably argue that a large part of European political science academics tend to leave their “ivory towers” and engage in different kinds of policy advisory activities. Consequently, the share of “pure academics” accounts for just 20% or so of the political science population.

The “expert advisor” category reflects the potential of many political scientists to acquire the skills and attitude needed to offer advice, usually under specific conditions and following requests from a given recipient, that is to say, without having any strong, constant dedication to such a task. According to Timmermans et al., this category currently represents almost 27% of the population.

Another step towards the highly professionalized role of advisor is represented by the “opinionating scholar”. This category of scholar places the emphasis on an interpretative and normative role, and takes a number of personal initiatives and engages in the offering of advice and views, but constitutes a rather volatile presence in public debate. This category represents roughly one-half of the population of political scientists in Europe. This therefore reduces the space for a fourth category, that of the “public intellectual”, to only about 4% of the population. This would comprise those capable of combining *techné* and *phronesis* (i.e. evidence-based assertions and normative judgements).

As previously mentioned, this aggregate distribution reveals clear patterns of fragmentation primarily caused by structural factors such as legal tradition and administrative culture. The development of a specific field of specialization like public policy analysis is clearly correlated to the increase in academics’ external undertakings (and consequently, to the reduction in the number and importance of pure academics). This is truer in the North of Europe (with Norway considered the benchmark) and in the United Kingdom, while three large Continental European countries like France, Germany and Italy show how political science’s consolidation has been accompanied by the average academic’s relatively limited experience in the advisory field, which reflects the predominant role of traditional pure academics.

Besides geo-political position and substantive specialization, there are other determinants that are crucial in shaping the different roles of political scientists and the intensity of their functions. These include age, gender and type of employment contract (Timmermans et al., 2022), all of which have a clear, strongly predictive effect. Overall, we may summarize



the findings of the Proseps study as follows: older and more experienced academics with tenure tend to be more active in an advisory capacity than their younger colleagues, especially as far as general skills or specific sub-disciplinary skills (for instance, those of comparative politics or international relations) are concerned. It is even more evident that these factors interact with gender, which proves to be a crucial intervening element, since female scholars are somehow penalized in playing the role of advisor. This is the same phenomenon we indicated when discussing media visibility. Hence, female political scientists tend to abstain much more often than males; and when engaging with the public they take on the role of experts, remaining closer to evidence-based considerations while getting less involved in public debate. This gender gap is common across all spheres of professional affiliation, and constitutes, as conveniently remarked by the authors, the main concern for the future development of a serious advisory role for political scientists. Incidentally, this consideration would appear to be in line with other recent reflections (for instance Talbot & Talbot, 2015) on the ineffective use of advice in many policy domains, compared with other actors such as legal consultants, economists, IT experts and hard scientists.

## 4 TRAVELLERS, COMMUTERS, FIXERS: RE-DEFINING THE BUSINESS OF POLITICAL SCIENTISTS

### 4.1 *Tocqueville's Children? European Political Scientists and Their Internationalization*

So far we have described the contemporary scenario regarding European political scientists by illustrating the figures for the degree of homogeneity and solidity of the discipline (Sect. 1), and by analysing political scientists' own perceptions of their public mission and their capacity to impact society (Sect. 2). In order to complete the picture, we need to return to the propensity of political scientists to nurture their own "professional style" in order to enhance the solidity of the community, to produce a credible internal selection process and ultimately to achieve the discipline's collective goals.

Among the innumerable indicators to be found in the literature on institutionalization, and in historical accounts of the development of political science at national and supranational level (see Chaps. 1 and 2), we have selected a few dimensions that appear particularly relevant to any

comprehension of present changes. The first such dimension is that of internationalization, here conceived not just as the measurement of the impact that a given scholar's individual research may have, but also in more comprehensive terms. Thus "having an international impact" means creating several capabilities: that of participating in important academic events, of publishing in first-class outlets, of engaging with eminent scholars through long-term cooperative projects, and finally, of being well versed in innovative forms of teaching and learning.

Such a complex set of features is not easily assessed. Fortunately, the Proseps project has given rise to a rather good set of sources and studies. These include a recent article (Tronconi & Engeli, 2022) dealing with three fundamental facets of internationalization: building international networks, being involved in the activities of international publishing and carrying out research and academic exchanges in conjunction with foreign universities. After running an accurate data reduction analysis supported by qualitative evidence, the authors come to the conclusion that three separate, independent types of internationalized political scientists have emerged in contemporary Europe. These three types are the networked researcher, the international editorial manager and the traveller. The characteristics of the first type include the extensive use of English as a *lingua franca*, publications in good international journals, work with international co-authors and involvement in international research teams. The *international editorial manager* tends to operate as the editor of journals and books, and work as a reviewer, while preferring the production of international monographs to that of articles. The *traveller*, as the name suggests, is characterized mainly by his/her specific cross-border activities, involving long periods spent abroad, teaching, studying and working in teams.

Tronconi and Engeli's study controls several factors indicated by the literature as determinants of internationalization, producing a series of confirmations and disconfirmations as a result. Gender, for example, does not appear to have any great impact on internationalization, while the control by career stage seems to show that the *Erasmus generation* has had a positive impact on the travelling aspect of internationalization. However, the factor that captures the attention of the scholars most is that of the organizational and financial support provided by academic institutions. The development of both networked researchers and travellers seems to be impacted by the availability of research funding available for the purposes of the internationalization of the faculty.

This inference leads to a strategic issue for European political scientists: the need to facilitate comprehensive internationalization, with special attention having to be paid to the new cohorts of scholars. No matter what their core interests are, they should be trained as natural-born transnational *Tocqueville's children*, in order to avoid parochialism and overly narrow research agendas.

This, however, automatically leads to the question of resources. Indeed, two problems arise concerning the redistribution of resources: the first is the geographical divide, clearly marked in the study, between academic institutions in richer countries on the one hand and the universities located in other European areas (in particular, in Central-Eastern Europe and, to some extent, the Mediterranean countries).

In fact, the question of geographical patterns (among those questions concerning internationalization) has come to our attention: that is, the question of the opportunity to spend time conducting research and teaching abroad (Table 3.3).

In this case, we have changed the groups selected since we want to show how the British community (as a benchmark of internationalization) and the non-EU countries from Eastern Europe and Balkans (as a benchmark of isolationism) remain clearly polarized. Here it is easy to immediately consider cultural traditions (in particular, the established links between British and US academia) and financial constraints as the main reasons for the disharmony that unfortunately is putting an increasing distance between European academic communities.

A second potential factor underlying this phenomenon, albeit one that is impossible to control using the Proseps Survey data, is the difference between the centre and the periphery of all European universities. This factor appears to overlap to a certain degree with the divide between virtuous, research-oriented universities on the one hand and small teaching universities on the other hand. Both these problems need to be addressed by the professional associations concerned, but they also require substantive policy plans to be put in place at national and supranational levels. Massive investment and a constant focus on the mobility of younger generations of scholars are therefore the preconditions for a positive process of internationalization which avoids certain well-known phenomena (Norris, 2020), such as a one-way brain-drain or the inaccessibility of research networks to representatives of poorer countries.

Public funding and the need for “policy creativity” to ensure career incentives and quality standards are key elements of internationalization

Table 3.3 Working time spent abroad by European political scientists (%)

	All respondents	Female Scholars	< 50 Scholars	Uk	Northern Europe	Western Europe	Central Eastern Europe (EU)	Southern Europe	Central Eastern Europe (non EU)
I did not work abroad	32.4	32.3	32.3	20.2	29.9	35.1	28.9	29.1	40.5
Less than a month	27.0	27.3	26.2	25.8	25.8	21.9	32.9	26.9	27.9
Between 1 and 5 months	24.9	22.9	24.1	36.2	28.8	23.6	8.5	24.0	13.0
Between 6 and 12 months	8.9	10.0	8.5	7.5	7.6	9.9	21.9	7.9	8.7
More than 12 months	7.0	7.5	7.9	0	0	7.1	8.5	7.5	6.8

Source: Proseps Survey 2019

Note: the table reports the distribution of the answers to the question: *Over the last three years, how much time have you spent working in countries other than the one in which you reside (%)*. For the composition of geographical areas, see Table 2.3

also according to a more qualitative study, conducted once again using the Proseps data, by Kostova et al. (2022). This study identifies persistent geopolitical and cultural differences in four European countries: two of said countries have recently joined the EU and display a relative lack of public support for internationalization (Czech Republic and Bulgaria), while the other two are characterized by (culturally different) traditions of integration and of support for higher education policy (Finland and France).

Not surprisingly, several passages from the interviews we have collected emphasize the challenge of internationalization: the experts reveal genuine acknowledgement of the consolidated ranking among Western countries (with the US and UK communities still clearly predominant), but they also point to the risk of the increasing degree of geographic diversity that seems a feature of international cooperation. The European political science “market” appears capable of including “newcomer communities” (among others, Estonia, Poland and up to the 2022 crisis, the Russian community as well), but also features a persistent (and widening) gap between other countries (especially the Balkan states that are not protected by EU-related funding schemes) and the core of European political science.

Another observation made by some of our experts connects the question of the internationalization of academic life to the point we have already made of the difficulty that peripheral university environments, especially those of Eastern European countries, experience in advancing comprehensive strategies of development and cooperation. This actually confirms an inverse relationship, previously tested (Timmermans et al., 2022), between internationalization and the consolidation of a fundamental advisory function. Indeed, international mobility may reduce the capacity of scholars to maintain close relations with policy-makers who are usually members of local or domestic organizations. From this point of view, of the three types indicated by Tronconi and Engeli the figure of the *traveller* seems to be the one requiring the most urgent enhancement, since it can be somehow shaped by good policy plans at the domestic level, as well as by the individual strategies of political scientists. Networked scholars and editorial managers are also fundamental; however, these figures need to be strengthened through a bottom-up process of internationalization.

#### 4.2 *Eclecticism and Flexibility: What Are the Drivers of a European Standard?*

The latter reflection about the importance of travellers leads us to another crucial aspect of the discipline's development that was mentioned in several of the interviews: the quest for the capacity to adapt to different challenges.

This is actually an old dilemma, according to the classics of behaviouralist political science (in particular, Easton, 1953 and Roberts, 1967). Gabriel Almond also referred to theoretical and methodological eclecticism as the antidote to fragmentation (the famous *separate tables*) in his APSA presidential address (1988). Later, several appeals were launched for an open-minded eclecticism in more specific domains such as international relations (Katzenstein & Sil, 2008) and comparative politics (Przeworski, 2019). All these claims basically constitute an invitation to combine formal theories, different approaches and, where necessary, methodological instruments, in order to remedy the currently fragmented state of political science.

Here, we discuss a comprehensive notion of eclecticism relating to all dimensions of a political scientist's professional life: methodological adaptation is important not just to the production of research, but also to the divulgation thereof at the social level. New abilities in the fields of media dissemination and public engagement also entail a certain level of eclecticism, since it is often necessary to summarize findings from interdisciplinary research teams and help these complicated networks remain sufficiently unified in order to produce better quality research. Finally, as regards teaching, an extraordinary degree of complexity had already emerged during the period prior to the pandemic. In recent decades, scholars have posed new questions about the ideal mix of different techniques (i.e. frontal classes vs. collaborative or mixed methods), levels of analysis (i.e. modules vs. seminars), levels of interaction, levels of "gamification" and so forth. Even those who were reluctant to adapt have had to accept the use of distance-learning tools during the ongoing pandemic, and the result is a rather multifaceted world of teaching approaches. This need for eclecticism seems particularly pertinent if the discipline's different missions are to be interconnected. In a previous article regarding the Italian case (Capano & Verzichelli, 2016), we demonstrated the problematic emergence of certain forms of eclecticism, due to the excessive fragmentation and the internal struggles that preclude a significant public

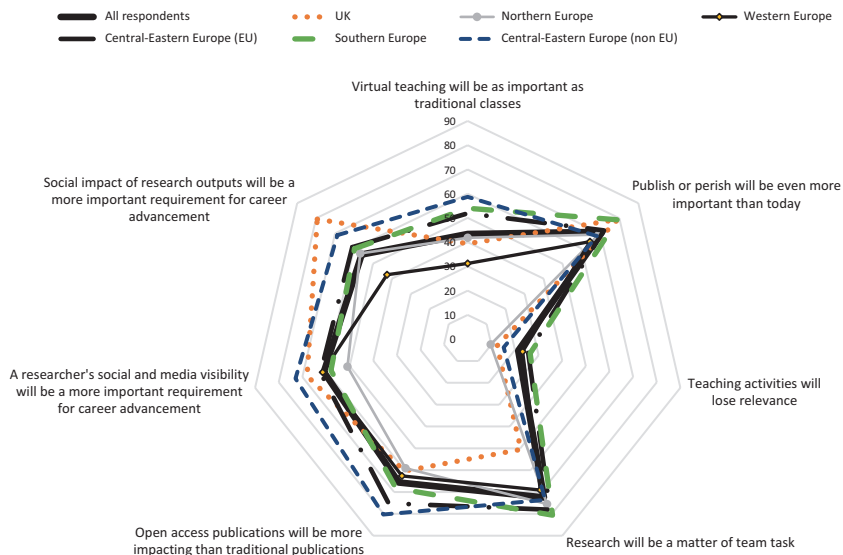
status for the discipline, despite its academic institutionalization and the quality of research.

Obviously, those who consider professional eclecticism as a vital investment for their future tend to be concentrated in the cohort of scholars that we have called the *young lions*. However, these are also scholars who fully realize that adaptation is at one and the same time a necessity but also a very risky form of investment of one's time. The trade-off between the two demands on new political scientists (the need to be highly specialized as professional researchers and also to be a relevant member of the community) appears rather clear in the mind of one of the *young lions* we interviewed:

I mean, this specialisation requires people to have better training in methods and to be better prepared to compete with other political scientists. And also, I think this specialization brings political science closer to other neighbouring disciplines. On the other hand, maybe this specialization forces political scientists further from the important issues, especially from the important normative issues, or makes it more difficult to connect these very specialized topics to working on important questions.

A reflection on the potential for innovation in the everyday business of political scientists had already got underway prior to the pandemic. A few weeks before COVID-19 first emerged (between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020), a Proseps flash survey asked the same target group of European political scientists a number of questions about the foreseen transformation of the discipline, their personal preferences concerning such a transformation and also their opinions regarding the role of national communities and professional associations. Here we report the distributions of the first set of questions (Fig. 3.6) concerning the transformation of professional life in ten years from now (i.e. in 2030). The radar graph shows the degree of agreement (very much agree or rather agree), controlling by geographical area.

As the figure clearly shows, almost all of the suggested scenarios seem to convince the respondents. Only the idea that "*teaching activities will lose relevance*" was not shared by many, with a minority of European political scientists agreeing with this prediction (21.4%). All the other options reflect a remarkable level of expectation, ranging from 43.4% (in the case of the prospective scenario "*virtual teaching will be as important as traditional classes*") to 72.5% (in the case of *research will be a team task*).



**Fig. 3.6** Views of future changes in the work of political scientists. (Note: the chart reports the rates of agreement to seven assertions following the question: for the composition of geographical areas, see Table 2.3. Source: Proseps Flash Survey January 2020. N: 1455)

We have excluded the control by gender from the chart since it does not show very relevant alterations, although in one category (*virtual teaching is as important as traditional classes*) female scholars are clearly more focussed, being the difference greater than 15 percentage points. A control by six communities from different European areas (meaning political scientists working in these countries, rather than actual citizens from such) returns a rather homogeneous pattern. The only distribution offering a substantial degree of difference is the scenario “*the social impact of research will be a more important requirement for career advancement*”. In this case, the scholars from the UK are twenty points ahead of their colleagues in their belief in said statement. This has probably to do with the unique long-term impact of research assessment in Britain compared to that witnessed in other European higher education systems.

Another aspect of the question of eclecticism to be taken into account is the increasing demand for flexibility in the specific mission of teaching. This argument has recently been at the centre of debate regarding the



intrinsically cross-sectional nature of political science subjects, especially in innovative graduate programmes (Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 2010). As a substantive response to this challenge, political scientists try to be flexible by offering both methodological and substantive courses at different levels. In other words, they alternate monographic modules (from each sub-discipline) to methodological and theoretical subjects, thus corroborating the idea of a fundamental core of professional instruments to be shared across the internal borders. Table 3.4, reporting the distribution of subjects offered by the respondents to the Proseps Survey (in the first column) and the subject taught by those who also teach methods (second column), offers clear evidence of this spirit of flexibility. The question posed in this case left the respondent free to choose between different sub-disciplines, while the period to be taken into consideration was that of the past three years. Unlike other categories of instructors who tend to pick related subjects (comparative politics and political institutions, international relations and security studies, public policy and political economy etc.), the sub-group of 578 respondents declaring that they had taught method is distributed across a universal range of other fields of expertise, said distribution being basically in keeping with said sub-group's share of the whole population. Indeed, only the *electoral behaviour* category tends

**Table 3.4** Fields of teaching of European political scientists (%)

	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Methodologists only</i>
Comparative politics	35.7	38.6
International relations	26.4	16.4
<i>Social science methods</i>	25.2	100
Public policy	23.4	16.8
Political institutions	19.6	13.3
Political theory	16.2	12.5
EU studies	18.9	9.3
Public administration	15.5	7.4
Electoral behaviour	11.7	19.6
Security studies	10.3	4.7
Local government	7.9	4.2
Political economy	7.6	6.2
Social movements	6.9	7.3
Gender studies	3.6	3.5
Other	14.4	14
N	2291	578

Source: Proseps Survey 2019

to be specifically associated with methodologists (which is to be expected given the common use of survey analysis and quantitative methods in the field); while on the other hand, international relations and EU studies are subjects infrequently offered by lecturers with experience in the teaching of methodology.

This evidence backs up the existing belief that methodological instruments are a crucial pillar of political science, and ultimately represent the element binding the entire discipline together. At the same time, further qualitative analyses are needed to establish whether this unity is evenly distributed throughout Europe, in all types of universities and across the various different generations of political science teacher. The inevitable suspicion of a strong imbalance across countries (in particular between Western European and Eastern area) is corroborated by the data presented in the previous chapters. Moreover, even in those academic realities where all the political scientists from every generation and subfield are brave enough to switch from one teaching level to another, from a course on social science methodology to a substantive course, and from an international interactive class to a traditional course offered in the local language, the problem of lasting quality emerges. This is why contemporary political scientists, in order to preserve their high standards, need to be not only travellers but also commuters: in other words, they need to be professional teachers constantly prepared to update and improve an assorted range of syllabi and seminars.

#### 4.3 *Extra-Academic Experience and University Management: Looking for “Political Science Fixers”*

Our political science testimonials describe a community that is very much alive, rather internationalized and eager to transform its mission by accepting new professional challenges and new methodological and epistemological tasks. All of them see the current situation as a glass half-full. However, the difficulties we have described and analysed, based on our data and qualitative accounts, should not be underestimated.

The old generation of *emeritus* scholars tends to stress the “artisan” nature of the founding period during the latter half of the twentieth century, by underlying the importance of isolated founders and of the academic and political *allies* of modern political science. However, they also realize that the problem of political science’s development in the new millennium cannot be faced by adopting the same pioneering approach. One

of our interviewees, when talking of the advantage that the wealthier European countries have had when it comes to organizing teams of political scientists since the old days, states the following:

The nations where this was done faster and better were the Netherlands and Scandinavia ... [there] you had the first examples of departments specialized in political science, meaning the analysis of political action in governmental organisations and in society as well. Then, this phenomenon began to be visible elsewhere. There are some British universities where there are departments of political science, there are some German universities that do this. But in the rest of Europe things are more difficult, so the clear definition of a research object is on-going but not yet complete. Take, for instance, [my country]: with few exceptions, there is one professor of political science in a university, with no opportunities for cooperative endeavour. Today, it is impossible to carry out competitive research in these conditions. [Emeritus]

Certain *young lions* added that in their view, a modern discipline today necessarily needs the right division of labour together with a cooperative approach. They stress the importance of internationalization starting from the initial training period (graduate students' network, summer schools and schools on social science methods, international co-authorship projects), since they know that the only way to truly master the discipline is to learn the art and craft of political science at the international level. However, many of the interviewees make the point of the importance of a good mix of high international standards and familiarity with the academic environment that a young political scientist is about to enter. In some cases, this requires an increasing, proactive disposition towards academic duties and institutional activities (as was true in the past). In other cases, there is a belief that familiarity with the (local) environment basically means being prepared to curb one's scientific ambitions in order to meet the expectations of academia. In such cases there is a clear trade-off between high standard training and short-term career achievements. In any case, it is evident that compared to the old days when competitiveness was very much more limited, a number of *political science fixers* are now required who can combine some of the characteristics already described (including those of the *traveller* and, above all, those of the *commuter*) with a proactive willingness to work for a given institution, and in doing so to pay specific attention to innovation in teaching and learning.

Our belief is that political scientists are nowadays much more inclined to operate as fixers. Of course, this is a deceptive issue given the lack of inter-disciplinary data. However, what we can offer is an “identikit” of the current profile of European political scientists by looking at their experience as academic managers and at other kinds of direct political and social involvement during (or prior to) their academic careers.

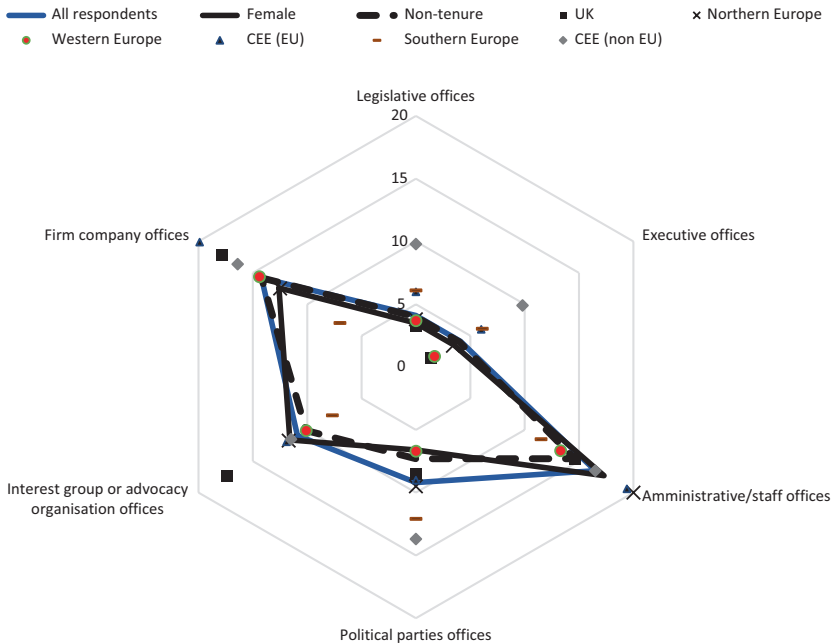
Let us start with some information regarding academic management. The Proseps Survey included the following question: *over the past three years have you held any academic administrative office.*<sup>3</sup> 38.6% of respondents answered positively. This fell to 34% among female scholars, to 15.6% among non-permanent (i.e. non-tenured) academics, and appeared rather homogenously distributed across the different geographical areas concerned. Overall, a significantly high number of political scientists hold formal office within their universities’ system of governance. This confirms the presence of a good number of *pure academics* who have little time for other commitments. However, in some countries (the UK and the Northern European nations) high academic commitment does not prevent political scientists from working in other, more political capacities or even acting as policy advisors.

What is relatively weak (compared to other academic categories such as that of lawyers, or even philosophers and historians) is political scientists’ direct involvement in the political arena. Figure 3.7 maps the political and social engagement of the Proseps Survey respondents, showing that none of the categories included in the questionnaire attains values of over 20%. Hence, the overall share of political scientists characterized by their direct political engagement is roughly half that of those who decide to invest their time in the field of academic governance.

It should be pointed out that several respondents declared more than one form of political engagement (e.g. party involvement plus legislative office) or social experience (for instance, involvement in interest groups and media). This actually means that there is a minority of “politically engaged” academics within a population dominated by non-engaged scholars. Indeed, those scholars who declared having held none of the aforementioned offices represent 58.8% of the entire sample.

The figure reveals two interesting findings across the control groups. First of all, the distribution of female scholars and of untenured academics

<sup>3</sup>The questionnaire specified the offices of: *Rector/Chancellor, Deputy Rector/Chancellor, Dean, Vice-Dean, Director of Department or Director of Research Centre.*



**Fig. 3.7** European political scientists with political and social experience (%). (Note: the table reports the distribution of the answers to the question: *have you held political or administrative offices outside academia before or during your academic appointment?* For the composition of geographical areas, see Table 2.3. Source: Proseps Survey 2019)

does not deviate significantly from the whole population. This basically confirms that direct political engagement cannot be considered a key factor in the establishment of a career within academic political science, but is rather a random effect of personal commitments.

Conversely, the markers corresponding to groups of scholars from given geographical areas deviate significantly. In particular, scholars from Central and Eastern Europe are on average more involved in such extra-academic activities (in particular, political-administrative offices and firms). This actually means that social scientists in these newer democracies from the former Communist bloc tend to display a significant degree of social (if not political) engagement. This calls to mind the classical passage from Pareto (1916) about the replacement of one élite cluster by another in

order to protect the system from the threat of any dramatic change in the nature of the ruling class.

Another partial deviation from a low number of office holders applies to the cluster of UK-based scholars, who show a more pronounced propensity to advocacy organizations and firms. On the other hand, Southern European scholars are more active as purely political office holders (executive, legislative and staff offices), thus confirming the more binding nature of politics with society (and therefore academia) in Mediterranean democracies compared to Northern ones.

## 5 THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE COMPLEXITY OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL SCIENCE

### 5.1 *Crisis, Opportunity: Not Necessarily a Turning Point*

All the critical dimensions we have analysed so far point to the uncertainty and transformation of European political science since the beginning of the twenty-first century. As shown above, the scope of political science research, as well as political scientists' attitudes towards visibility and public engagement, has constantly been the subject of controversy. As a matter of fact, some of the doubts and reservations expressed by our "founders" are reflected to a degree in the perplexities expressed by subsequent generations of scholars. The interviews we conducted constitute a good proxy of the current complexity of political science. However, we should not underestimate the positive message they contain concerning the level of professionalization and institutionalization, the average degree of internationalization and the common acknowledgement of an important core of methodological and epistemological elements.

Moreover, the debate regarding political science's internal and external borders seems to cover similar issues to those already discussed at the time of the first trans-Atlantic consolidation of the discipline. On the other hand, the complexity of the crises witnessed during the first two decades of this century has clearly increased the fragmented nature of academics' views on the discipline's nature and mission (Real-Dato & Verzichelli, 2022). Thus, European political scientists seem much more polarized in their views today, and despite the undeniable institutionalization of political science in Europe, concern over the possible decline or even annihilation of the discipline is fairly widespread.

The emergence of the pandemic during the course of 2020 certainly complicated matters, producing an unprecedented level of uncertainty among academic communities. Scholars were obliged to change their professional approach due to the direct factors of change (the lockdown rules and other legal restrictions on business travel and meetings), and even due to a number of indirect effects on their personal and psychological sphere. As a result, several aspects of daily academic life were transformed, including teaching techniques, administrative organization within departments and research centres, international mobility and the organization of conferences and workshops.

Some studies have already assessed this substantial process of change entailing short-term adjustments to, and even the permanent transformation of, the profession. The studies in question have focused on the changes in the lives of higher education institutions on the whole, particularly with regard to the effect of online/mixed teaching and to the desperate effort to assure the continuity of universities' fundamental mission (European Universities Association, 2020; International Association of Universities, 2020). Notwithstanding the considerable increase in political science research relating to the pandemic, there has yet to be any comprehensive assessment of its impact on the attitudes of our specific academic community. In fact, most studies of COVID-19's impact on the academic profession have focused on specific effects such as career postponement, the difficulties experienced by young scholars and the growing inequalities among generations and groups. For example, there is clear empirical evidence of a gender effect since female academics have been affected more negatively than their male counterparts (Gorska et al., 2021; Minello et al., 2020; Staniscuaski et al., 2020), particularly those female academics with children (Myers et al., 2020). We also know that several research groups have decided to change their research topics and designs due to the global impact of COVID-19 on politics and on policy-making processes. Everything seems to have been affected. It is not surprising, therefore, that calls for papers on the comprehensive effects of the pandemic have been met by such a massive response from European researchers (Maggetti, 2022).

In the meantime, from a more general perspective, the discussion about the cost of research and the involution of teaching seems replete with contradictions, with both those observers pointing to a process of disruption, and those supporting the "learning process", having a good case to make. Our task here is not to assess political scientists' capacity to

transform a crisis into an opportunity. Following a more pragmatic approach, we wish to understand to what extent the transformation of the attitudes and everyday work of European political scientists described in this chapter has been impacted by the pandemic. We believe that change is not necessarily a critical point, and that in any case all of the learning processes we witness should be assessed from a long-term perspective. The remaining part of this section will therefore analyse the available information on the impact that COVID-19 has had on European political scientists. Obviously, when we designed the structure of the Proseps Project, we could hardly have imagined the extent of the impending shock. Nevertheless, we managed to conduct a flash survey (in the autumn of 2020) specifically devoted to the reactions of European political scientists to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The three key concepts we use to answer our question are those of resilience, awareness and adaptation. The Proseps flash survey regarding the COVID-19 pandemic offers an initial picture of resilience (Table 3.5): more than two European scholars out of ten see COVID-19 as having a dramatically negative impact on their profession. This group is mainly composed of scholars from the first countries to be hit by the virus (Italy,

**Table 3.5** Post COVID-19 changes in the professional lives of European political scientists

	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Female Scholars</i>	<i>Post-Doc researchers</i>	<i>EU academics</i>
My professional life has not changed very much.	19.9%	15.4%	18.6%	19.2
Working online and alone has been difficult, but I have been able to fulfil most of my duties and achieve most of my plans.	56.7%	55.9%	58.0%	56.7
My professional life has been seriously affected by the lockdown.	18.9%	23.3%	19.5%	18.9
It has been virtually impossible to achieve an ordinary standard of professional life.	4.5%	5.4%	4.0%	4.5
<i>Total (N)</i>	<i>1400</i>	<i>519</i>	<i>528</i>	<i>220</i>

Source: Proseps COVID-19 Flash Survey 2020

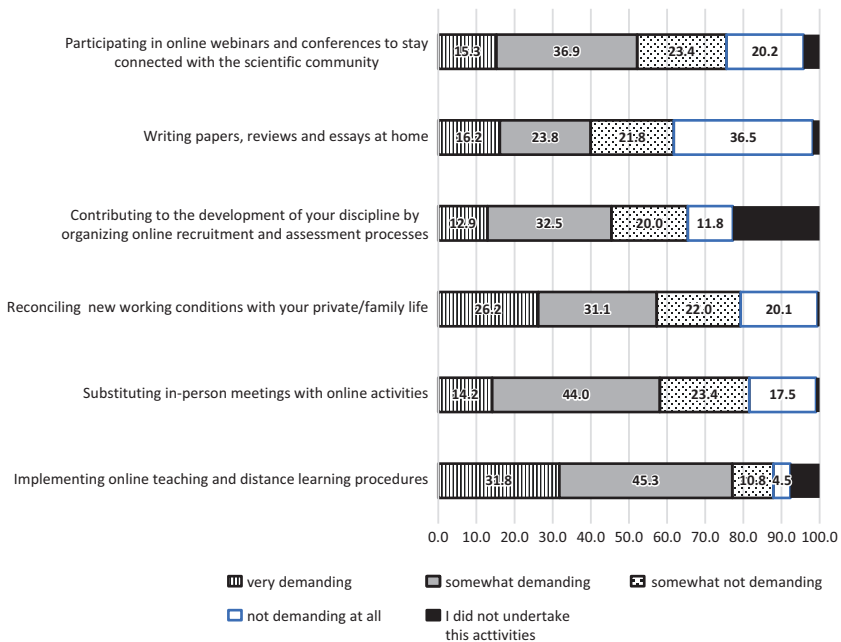
Note: the table reports the distribution of the answers to the question: *To what extent has your professional life changed during the pandemic?*



Belgium, but also Poland and other countries where the pandemic has had a serious impact on their national health systems), together with the three control groups included in the table: female scholars, untenured academics and junior professionals.

The awareness of such change also varies considerably from one community to another, and even between generations. However, only the implementation of a clearly defined system of distant teaching and learning can be considered a key aspect of such awareness (Fig. 3.8).

Therefore, we can argue that political scientists' burden, in terms of their research work, has been psychologically easier to bear than the changes in their everyday teaching tasks and methods. All the other aspects of an academic's life, including the transformation of faculty meetings and



**Fig. 3.8** Costs of professional adaptation in times of COVID-19. (Note: the chart summarizes the reactions to six assertions following the question: *To what extent has your professional life changed during the pandemic?* Source: Proseps Flash Survey 2020)

new modes of administration, seem rather simple compared to the problem of online and mixed teaching methods.

The third measure we consider is that of adaptation. Our 2020 Proseps flash survey gave a first hint of adaptation, when colleagues were asked whether they had reshaped their research and publication agenda in order to accommodate the analysis of Covid-related issues. Table 3.6 offers a breakdown of the distribution of the answers to that question.

The table shows that besides the obvious adaptation to mixed modes of teaching, to webinars and to online meetings, half of the population of European Political scientists do not perceive any substantial long-term impact of the pandemic on their research work. On the other hand, most of those who argue that an adaptation of the research agenda is necessary account for this in terms of the renewed (albeit partial) modification of research interests. There are no major signs of variance across our control groups, although expectations of a more radical modification of the research agenda come more from male, tenured and EU scholars, while female political scientists—perhaps due to their overall less autonomous position in European academia—do not seem particularly reactive in this regard.

A study we conducted using the same flash survey (Capano et al., 2023), based on data reduction and multivariate analyses, confirmed that the predisposition to adaptation of European political scientists has been remarkable, although extremely variegated as well. Three latent factors

**Table 3.6** The short-term post-Covid adaptation of European political scientists

	<i>All respondents</i>	<i>Female Scholars</i>	<i>Tenure academics</i>	<i>EU Academics</i>
I did not reshape my agenda	46.5	46.8	44.6	46.1
I partially reshaped my agenda since I was interested in knowing more about COVID-19	42.6	43.7	43.7	43.5
I reshaped my agenda since my institution decided to cover COVID-19-related issues	6.1	6.0	6.0	6.9
I drastically reshaped my agenda to cover COVID-19-related issues	4.9	3.5	5.7	5.2

Source: Proseps Flash Survey 2020

Note: the table reports the distributions of the answers to the question: *Did you reshape your research and dissemination agenda to investigate COVID-19-related issues?*

identified by this study correspond to three different attitudes that we have labelled passive, proactive and innovative adaptation. Basically, the first corresponds to the simple implementation of the changes needed to preserve a method and a mission considered non-negotiable. Proactive adaptation involves a new “spirit” concerning, for example, multidisciplinary work, a greater role as policy advisor and a diverse use of the media. Finally, adaptation becomes innovative when the acceleration in the process entails an ambitious plan: for instance, changing one’s research agenda, learning new teaching methods and means, sharing new research methods and employing artificial intelligence.

Matching two indexes of the perception of a scholar’s attitude to adaptation, the study explores the various aspects of the potential adaptation of Europe’s political scientists. It identifies certain factors associated with passive adaptation—such as tenure and professorial status—and others potentially associated with proactive adaptation—such as a belief in a future of applied and experimental political science, and a vision of a more competitive, policy-related distribution of research resources. However, the study concludes that given the relatively limited scope of passive and proactive adaptation, it will be interesting to conduct an in-depth analysis of the motivation of the bulk of respondents who can be classified as those offering *reactive adaptation*. In other words, a relative majority of European political scientists argue that adaptation, while necessary, is certainly not an easy task and should not necessarily be considered as revolutionizing the profession. This is basically in keeping with the message spelt out in the previous chapter of this volume: a changing attitude towards problem-solving and politically relevant issues is necessary for those who want to follow the route of Aeneas, that is, for those who continue in their willingness to impact the public sphere by means of their propensity to achieve political science’s collective goals. Changes are therefore necessary also in the research agenda, if and when they reflect the perceptions of the future challenges for political scientists.

If future studies confirm the existence of these distinctive approaches to change and adaptation, then a new interpretation will have to be offered regarding a more courageous and innovative transformation of the discipline. In this respect, some of the recommendations made by our interviewees—emeritus scholars, seniors and young lions—may help us provide a concrete description of the effective scenario of adaptation we can expect in the years to come. We will come back to these recommendations in the next chapter.

## 5.2 *New Attitudes: Fresher Energies*

Thus, we are not proposing any conclusive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on European political science. However, this preliminary discussion helps show the pragmatism displayed by political scientists in these trying circumstances. They have probably not been very proactive (at least not compared to hard scientists). They consider “pure research” less endangered than teaching and the publication of their research. However, they clearly perceive one painful aspect of the lockdown (and of the danger of further pandemics): the lost opportunities for conferences and research activities abroad. We call this kind of reaction “Tocqueville’s syndrome”.

Moreover, political scientists reveal rather rational attitudes, offering coherent and “scientific” points of view and a reasonable degree of trust in (hard) science. However, the data reveal their self-criticism with regard to the visibility of political science, its lack of eclecticism and the limited inter-disciplinary propensities of the political science community. Moreover, several signs of malaise and fragility emerge from the open-ended responses given, as shown below. A longer period of confinement may constitute a stress-test for the resilience of European political scientists.

Probably the changes seen have not been so remarkable. However, such changes require new energies, and these energies have to be found by political scientists by bridging the sub-disciplinary, geographical and inter-generational divides described in this chapter. One clear conclusion at least can be drawn here. The future of post-pandemic political science in Europe will only be bright if the discipline remains compact and well managed at both domestic and supranational levels. The war that Russia began with the Ukraine in February 2022, from this point of view, casts a substantial shadow over the possibility of any solid recovery of the discipline in the short term.

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