

Twenty years of political science in French-speaking Belgium: teaching, research and service to the society

Min Reuchamps
Emilie van Haute
Jérémy Dodeigne
Audrey Vandeleene
Benjamin Biard
Jean Faniel
Sophie Devillers

French-speaking Belgium Political Science Association (ABSP)

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1. Introduction

For the last twenty years, political scientists in French-speaking Belgium have been federated by the French-speaking Belgium Political Science Association (ABSP) which is the IPSA representative for Belgium and heir of the once unitary Belgian Institute for Political Science. ABSP just celebrated its 20th anniversary and published a book in French that offers the state of the discipline in terms of teaching, research and service to the society: *L'ABSP : 20 ans de science politique en Belgique francophone* (Academia-L'Harmattan, series "Science politique", 2017). No fewer than 43 political scientists from all the universities and the different fields contributed to this edited volume. In this paper, we build on these insights to present the state of political science in French-speaking Belgium in regards with the digital (r)evolution. Based on longitudinal data and insights about teaching, research and service to the society, we seek to assess how political science will evolve in our – small – part of the world.

2. Teaching

2.1. Main trends

Four main trends can help describe the evolution of education in the field of political science. These are namely: growth, specialization, autonomization and internationalization. These trends can be observed in the evolution of the students' profiles, the evolution of the courses' programs (as well in bachelors as in master's programs) and the successive reforms that helped shaping the education system in Belgium. These three constitutive elements of the education system will help us illustrate the four main trends affecting the evolution of political science as a field of study.

The first trend describing the evolution of political science as a field of study these last 20 years is without doubt « growth ». This growth can be measured thanks to two distinct indicators. First, there is a great growth in the number of students enrolled in a political science curriculum. There is of course a similar trend affecting all university disciplines (there is globally a 50% rise of the total number of students studying at university). This can be explained by the so-called Bologna reform (in reference to the pan-European Bologna agreement), thanks to which a bachelor's program now lasts 3

years instead of 2 before the reform. But when it comes to political science, the rise is much more important: in the last 20 years, there was a growth of 84,3% in the total number of enrolled students. Also, the political science curriculum shows specificity: there is a high percentage of students enrolled in the master's curriculum. This rate is higher than the average percentage of students enrolled in the master's program compared to the bachelor's program. This specificity can be explained by the fact that many students are opting for a master in political science after having studied for their bachelor in another discipline. Secondly, there is a growing range of masters available. If there is still one and only bachelor in political science, there are now plenty of different masters available: European studies, public policy, democratic innovations and transformations, comparative politics, international relations, etc.

Moreover, this growing number of masters also testifies from another trend illustrating the evolution of political science as a field of study these last 20 years. It indeed almost perfectly mirrors the gradual specialization of the discipline, which is also shown when it comes to research in political science (eg a growing number of specific Working groups and publications in specialized journals, see below). Students are indeed asked earlier and earlier to choose a specific field of specialization, either a regional field or a more precise subject of research. This early orientation is made possible by the diversification of courses during the bachelor's years. There are indeed more and more different political science courses, and not only political theory as it was pretty much the case 20 years ago. Students can now benefit from a large spectrum of subjects like European studies, international relations or public policy already when studying for their bachelor's.

The third trend worth mentioning is the autonomization of the discipline. This trend can be measured thanks to two phenomena. First, 20 years ago, political science became a distinct discipline for the first time. It is indeed thanks to the « Grades » reform, issued in 1996-1997, that political science first became a distinct field of studies. Before the reform, political science was part of a broader program in social and economic sciences. Secondly, the courses' programs (mainly the bachelor's programs) are now getting more and more "politologized", that is with political science content. 20 years ago, the percentage of courses dedicated to political science was evolving around 10% of the total amount of courses. Now, it is around 30%. Also, teachers also seem to follow the path leading to a stronger specialization of the discipline by issuing a growing number of political science textbooks specifically designed for a teaching purpose.

The fourth and last trend describing the evolution of the curriculums in political science is their internationalization. As it is also the case when it comes to research (see below), the internationalization is already very much present in the early years of a political scientist education. This evolution is twofold. On the one hand, the bachelor's as well as the masters' programs are getting more and more internationalized in the way that they include courses in English and sometimes even the possibility to follow an entire curriculum in English. On the other hand, the internationalization of the curriculum in political science can simply be seen in the profile of the enrolled students. Indeed, approximately 25% of the total enrolled students do not have the Belgian nationality. Compared to the average number of international students in all university curriculums, this rate is quite higher. Among those international students, there are today more students coming from a EU member than 20 years ago. This is mainly due to the EU

enlargement of 2004. Besides, successive reforms helped to standardized the political science curriculums for all universities, thereby supporting the students' mobility between the different universities inside Belgium and inside the European Union.

2.2. Digitalization of education

For the last decade, Belgian universities gradually started to use the Internet, numerical and digital innovations as tools to help them reach their educational goals. These are namely "to stimulate the creation, the diffusion and the acquisition of knowledge". The so-called "tools" mentioned here are more commonly associated with the broader concept of e-learning devices. E-learning can be defined as "the use of new technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of the learning process by making the access to resources and services easier, and also by facilitating distance collaborations and exchanges" (E.U.). This broad definition usually encompasses a great range of tools. These are namely: online platforms, Podcasts, Video-conferences, MOOC's (Massive open online courses), SPOC's (Small private online course), Televoting and free online publications of scientific articles.

The first tool to be used by Belgian universities is the online platform. These are also sometimes called « online campuses », which pictures exactly what one can find on those platforms. It is broadly speaking a virtual desk where the student can find all the information regarding the courses he follows, the material he has to read, the homework he has to complete, the professor's contact information, etc. These platforms began to develop in the years 2000s and were shortly after followed by other innovations. Already in 2009, the Université de Liège (ULiège), for instance, recorded some courses in order to make them available even for students who were not able to attend class. These are basically podcasts, recordings of the courses, which are then available on the online platform. The Université de Mons (UMons), at approximately the same period, began to develop a system of videoconferences to let students take part in the class even if they couldn't make it to the class physically. The main advantage of such devices is to make teaching more flexible, more accessible to all students. More recently, the ULiège and the Université catholique de Louvain (UCL), mainly, are pressing to make not only the courses material but also scientific publications accessible to the greatest number people possible for free. Therefore, they are steadily developing tools to allow (or even compel) the authors to publish their articles and books on an online platform where these will be downloaded for free.

Some other innovations are also following this principle of greater accessibility, but also include other advantages. These are for instance the MOOC's and SPOC's. A MOOC, as its name indicates, is an online course open to everyone for free. Basically, these combine ex cathedra courses (basically a video of a teacher giving his course), interactive forums where students can ask questions to one another and to the teaching staff and discuss about the course, do practical exercises, tests, etc. At the end, students get a certificate but it doesn't have any juridical value. This is exactly what makes a SPOC different from a MOOC. These are only open to a small number of enrolled participants, who therefore get more attention and personalized follow-up by the teacher and, in the end, get a real diploma, that can be valued on a CV. UCL has developed such SPOC's in political science, more precisely in International Relations: a certificate in International Relations and conflict analysis, and a certificate in Geopolitical analysis of major powers. These are

curriculums embodying 4 different courses with a personalized follow-up, readings, power-point presentations, etc. These curriculums are leading to a certificate, that can be valued on the labor market and, more recently, can lead to a full online Master.

Since their launch in 2007, the MOOC's popularity hasn't stopped growing. In 2015, there were 35,000,000 subscribers (all courses and platforms taken together). Besides, to respond to the growing demand, more and more courses were developed (1,800 new courses only for the year 2015). These online courses are now covering practically the whole spectrum of research fields, from Computer science to Humanities.

In Belgium, the UCL was the first university to have integrated these online tools in 2014 to improve their teaching methods and adapt to the 21st century requirements. On the first year, UCL MOOC's already gathered a great success among UCL students and international subscribers (52,765 people enrolled). There are indeed two kinds of learners: the students following a course in which attendance to the MOOC's sessions are compulsory, and the other type is basically anyone who is interested in the subject of the course. The typical profile of such a person is someone in his thirties, holding a diploma and working full-time. Despite this great number of subscribers, there is a high dropout rate. Consequently, only approximately 7% of the initially enrolled people manage to get the final certificate at the end of the course. This low retention rate can be explained by the fact that a MOOC can only be completed in several weeks (from 4 to 10, usually). The high dropout rate could also be explained by the fact that most students enrolling in the course are motivated by an interest in the subject of the course, acquiring more knowledge. In a way, they don't care about getting the certificate (either because they are still students or already graduated people from outside campus).

When it comes to political science, only half of the French-speaking Belgian universities have integrated a MOOC in their political science curriculums. The UCL has developed a MOOC, "Discovering political science", dedicated especially to 1st year students, which have to complete the MOOC as part of one of their "traditional" courses. The ULiège has also developed its own MOOC about International migrations and their impact on the society. This MOOC is dedicated to master students who chose the "Population and development" option. The Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) also has its own MOOC ("Poll and survey methods"), which can be followed by all students in social sciences, because it is more about methods than content.

Another innovative tool that can be used by university teachers to make their courses more interactive is a televoting device. These can be either voting boxes in the auditorium or online platforms allowing vote and comments on a question asked to the assembly, using a computer, a smartphone or a tablet. The first is currently used in the UMONS, where some auditoriums are equipped with voting boxes to allow students to vote on some questions asked during class. In UCL, it is rather the second tool that is being used.

But what exactly are the main advantages of these MOOC's, and more generally of the use of digital tools in political science's teaching? First of all, it allows the teacher to be not only a mere information provider, but more a person with whom to exchange, discuss, debate and go deeper in the course material during class hours. This is made possible by the fact that the raw course material is made available to students online, so

that when they come to class, they can discuss about it with their teacher, whose role is thus transformed (if they take the opportunity of using a MOOC to organize a flipped class). A second advantage is the flexibility. With online podcasts and MOOC's, it is possible for the student (or the person enrolled in the course at the other side of the planet) to access the course material whenever he wants and wherever he wants. Also, this online availability makes it possible to watch the videos over and over again until the material is understood. Even if they demand a huge volume of work to the teachers in charge, MOOC's allow these same teachers to think about their course, change and improve them. Online courses also allow the knowledge produced in our universities to reach all regions of the world for free. Unfortunately, they often fail to penetrate in less developed African countries, for instance, because their Internet connection is often not good enough. The digital divide is therefore a crucial element that has to be worked on in order to help the MOOC's reach their goal of openness and spreading of knowledge all around the world. Another challenge faced by these digital tools is that some teachers and students have to make extra efforts to be able to use those technologies, it can sometimes take a lot of time and energy. Also, platforms and courses are often in English (75% of the available courses were in English in 2015).

3. Research

The main evolutions that can be noted in the field of research in political science are its autonomization from other research fields (social sciences, economic sciences, law, etc.) and the diversification of its objects. More specifically, some evolutions can be seen in number and nature of PhD researches, financing of the researches and their visibility, as well as the visibility of the researchers behind them.

3.1. PhD

Three main evolutions can be observed when it comes to PhD's training.

First, there is a growing number of PhD students and diplomas delivered between 1995 and 2016. These numbers didn't really fluctuate until the early 2000s and then rose drastically in the mid 2000s. The highest number of PhD students and diplomas delivered was reached in the years 2013-2014, and began to slightly lower. This trend is actually a more general trend that can also be observed in mostly all European countries and the United States or Japan.

Another evolution worth mentioning when it comes to the evolution of PhD's is their internationalization. This trend can be seen thanks to two indicators: the geographical origin of the students and the language in which the dissertation is published. The PhD students in the French-speaking Belgian community indeed show a more and more international profile, and therefore prefer to use English rather than French in their dissertation. Also, choosing English instead of French can illustrate the fact that the academic world is more and more dominated by English. It is indeed the language used when communicating results to international colleagues' network or when publishing them in an international journal.

The third trend affecting the evolution of PhD's in the French-speaking Belgian community is its feminization. It can indeed be seen that the rate as well as the absolute

number of dissertations written by women has grown steadily these last 10 years. Between 1995 and 2005, women wrote only 27% of the dissertations. Between 2006 and 2016, this rate reached 46%. This trend is of course not only affecting Belgian PhD's. At the European level and that of the United States, the number of female PhD students and the portion of the total students they represent is also growing at approximately the same speed.

3.2. Funding

Research in political science is mostly done inside universities and independent research centers. If most researchers and PhD students still maintain a tie with one or the other university, these are not the only sources of funding. In French-speaking Belgium, the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS (F.R.S.-FNRS) supports researchers and plays an important role in shaping the structure and the development of fundamental research. This is of course not the only source of funding available for researchers. Other structures also play an important role in supporting fundamental research. There is for instance the European Union, the Walloon Region, the Brussels Region or the universities themselves.

3.3. Visibility

When it comes to the visibility of French-speaking Belgian researchers, three indicators can be used: the number of papers published, the number of citations on Google scholar, the presence of the researchers in international conferences. Here, the data only relies on ABSP members, which can be considered as representing a representative sample of the whole Belgian political science research network.

3.3.1. Publications

The greater visibility of French-speaking Belgian political scientists can be measured by their publications in international journals. Three trends can illustrate the evolution in this field. First, the number of publications of the ABSP members per year has not stopped growing since 1995. The total number has shifted from around 20 publications a year in 1995 to 50 at the end of the 2000s and it now exceeds 100 publications a year. Secondly, even if it can sound surprising when considering the greater internationalization of the discipline, one can still notice an equal representation of French and English journals. Among the 32 journals in which there are at least 5 publications of ABSP members, 11 are in French and the others are in English, which clearly shows the francophone nature of the ABSP. Also, this pattern doesn't seem to change, even if there seems to be an internationalization of the discipline on many other aspects (dissertations more and more written in English, more and more international students, etc.). Finally, in addition with this greater number of publications, theses seem to be more and more diverse, thereby illustrating the diversity of fields covered by the researches of the members of the ABSP. Aside from some generalist journals, members of the ABSP also publish more and more in specific journals, dedicated to the sub-field they work in. This also reflects a broader pattern affecting political science in Belgium, which is its specialization. In other words, political science does now include several new fields of research, the topics it covers are getting more and more specific. The ABSP of course follows this trend by making the creation of new Working groups possible.

There are now 12 different Working groups: Democracy; Elections, Political parties and Public opinion; Europe; Federalism, Regionalism and Decentralization; Gender and Politics; Immigrant populations and politics in Belgium; International relations; Political theory; Public policy; REGIMEN; Research methodology; Social issues/Social conflicts.

3.3.2. *Google scholar citations*

Google scholar gives an overview of the visibility of the French-speaking Belgian political scientists. On average, ABSP members owning a Google scholar account have 440 citations. Nevertheless, there are strong fluctuations around this mean. 6 senior members do indeed have more than 1,000 citations, which is thereby distorting the final mean. The other more junior members do indeed have a dramatically lower amount of citations on Google scholar. This can be explained by the simple fact that the senior members and the junior members are at different stages of their career, and therefore do not have the same amount of works published and the same aura. Also, it can be noticed that there is a growing number of citations of ABSP members having an account on Google scholar between 1996 and 2015.

3.3.3. *International conferences*

The visibility of French-speaking Belgian researchers can finally be measured thanks to the number of ABSP members present at the ECPR international conferences. The number of ABSP members taking part in those conferences was quite small from 1995 until the mid 2000s. But since 2010, the situation has changed drastically. Indeed, in 2011, 47 members out of took part in the ECPR international conferences. Still, in 2014, this number lowered a bit because mainly of the fact that there were more conferences organized, and that therefore political scientists had to make a choice. There was for instance a strong competition between the ECPR international conference and the Conference of the International Political Science Association (IPSA) organized in Montreal during the summer 2014.

3.4. **Digitalization of the research**

These last 20 years, new technological tools have penetrated academic research as well as practically every other job. These are now more than ever affecting the work of scholars, in their way of publishing articles as well as in their interactions with their colleagues or their audience. The main goals behind building and using digital tools are the same as the ones lying behind the creations of journals in the 17th century. These tools indeed aim at making knowledge more easily available for a greater number of readers, inside and also more and more outside the academic world. Secondly, they aim at building a better and more effective science creation process. This pattern makes it increasingly important for researchers to develop new skills to be able to profit from the benefits of such devices. Also it reinforces the ongoing trend towards a more and more English-speaking community of scholars, where English is now more than ever the *lingua franca* of scientific research.

3.4.1. *Publication process and access*

The first aspect worth to be mentioned when it comes to the digitalization trend that now affects the scientific world is the transformation of the publication process and access.

The first major trend affecting scholars' professional life is clearly their growing presence on the Internet and increasing use of it to get access to resources and data as well as to publish articles. This trend is therefore threefold and encompasses an increasing use of Google and Google scholar to find publications or data, a growing availability of data online and an increasing availability of publications online. Firstly, scholars rely more and more on tools like Google or Google scholar to find resources and articles, even if they could use more "professional" tools instead. Secondly, data is more and more available online. Even if scholars are historically reluctant to share their data (because of competition or lack of time, for instance), some institutions are now compelling them to upload their findings online to make them available for other researchers. This is the case for statistical data as well as for official texts from Institutions (laws, statutes, etc.). Finally, publications are more and more published online (in addition to or as a substitute for printed journals). When it comes to political sciences, 1,403 journals are now available in the world, online and in their printed version. 193 are only available online. Among those, 179 are free journals, which testifies of the increasingly important movement towards open access. Open access indeed means that the articles are entirely available for free online. Open access publications can be classified in two different categories: the ones taking the "gold route" and the ones following the "green route". The "gold route" includes publications put online by institutions or publishers, for free (therefore, institutions or publishers have to cover those costs by themselves). The articles are available in their final version, which is not the case for publications following the "green route". This way of making articles available for free is used by scholars to put their publications (even if they were not yet peer reviewed or written as a final version) directly online. This can be a voluntary action or something compulsory: the institution the scholar belongs to can compel him or her to publish its research online. Nonetheless, political science still rests a lot on books and less on journal articles, compared to other disciplines. Therefore, political science's knowledge is less available online because a big rate of works produced is still made available through books and not through journal articles that could then be published online.

There are many advantages to the use of open access by scholars. Firstly, online publication allows having a faster progress in research. Indeed, more and more articles are first published online, in order not to have to wait for a long process of editing and printing to make their work available. Also, academics now work in teams via emails exchanges, which make it possible to edit a paper from the other side of the world without having to be physically in contact with it. Therefore, the writing process as well as the publishing process is both going much faster than before. Secondly, online publication makes the researchers and their work more visible inside and outside the academic community. Also, it opens the path for more interdisciplinary research: now, a scholar can indeed have access to data and publications outside its own field very easily. Moreover, online publication makes it possible to add extra content in addition to the article itself. Some publishers' websites or scholar blogs are now offering the possibility to add podcasts, for instance. These are short videos summarizing and commenting the article they refer to. Finally, abandoning the printing system also allows to get rid of

time and space constraints. Once a paper is published online, it can be read from every corner of the world, at any time and will be available “forever”, which is not the case for a book that once it is sold out has to be reprinted to be distributed again.

One distinctive feature of scientific publications is of course the process of peer review. This tradition doesn't seem to be likely to disappear any time soon, as scholars still seem very attached to this procedure. However, many critics claimed that online publication could threaten the quality of publications. This has been proven wrong: the quality of a paper is indeed medium-independent, because the peer review process is still used, even for online publications (but maybe not for the ones following the so-called “green route”). Also, the Internet, rather than hindering the quality and quality assessment of papers, allows new ways of rating and commenting to exist, which can therefore be used in addition to the classic peer review system to assess the quality of a paper. These are for instance comment areas where the readers can comment on the paper they just read, or rating system allowing the readers to give a note to the paper¹.

3.4.2. Socialization among researchers

Changes in the way science is produced today not only has to do with the changing production of publications. It has also a lot to do with how academics interact with each other and with their audience. A handful of new devices are now available to allow scholars to better communicate and exchange data, resources and papers as well as to increase their visibility.

There are for instance a growing number of academics using blogs to post their work and interact with their colleagues and readers about the work they produced.

Another tool serving the development of interactions and content sharing among scholars is of course the use of social networks by scientists. Aside from more mainstream social networks like Facebook or Twitter, there are now more and more specialized social networks serving professional purposes only (Academia.edu or ResearchGate for instance, which are often used by political scientists). Indeed, researchers sometimes neglect Facebook or Twitter because of their “socialization” aspects, and their “non-professional” character.

Another type of device used by scholars to share content and increase their communication with their colleagues is the social bookmarking. This system is basically a library of Internet bookmarks and scientific references a scholar can have to build a catalogue of references he or she can categorize thanks to “tags” and then share with his or her colleagues. This system allows a handful of scholars working on the same project to keep one single bibliography and offers them the possibility to discover new literature.

Finally, the use of wikis is more and more frequent inside the academic world. Even if websites like Wikipedia are commonly claimed not to be very scientific, some scholars use quick Wikipedia visits when they have to discover a brand new field or when they have to make a quick reference to an element of a field they are very familiar with. Aside

¹ For more reflections on MOOC's and political science, see the works by Nathalie Schiffino and colleagues in *evue internationale des technologies en pédagogie universitaire* and *European Political Science*.

from Wikipedia, every field of research now has its own wiki's, following the same spirit as the original Wikipedia: authors can add and remove content from the page freely. Nevertheless, some of these wiki's do have a restricted access policy, which means only some scholars are allowed to edit it.

Despite the proliferation of new digital tools in the academic world, scholars still seem reluctant to use them in their daily activities. This can mainly be explained by the lack of time and incentives for researchers to use these new devices. Scientists indeed do not see why spending time (which they already lack) to learn how to use tools that are good, but do not really exceed the goods offered by traditional systems they already know well. This pattern is reinforced by the fact that there are too many different options serving the same purpose: this creates a competition and a great dissemination of users. Also, it makes it difficult for future users to compare them to then choose among them (many scholars therefore do not bother to do so and simply do not use these tools). This lack of attraction and use of digital devices by academics could soon take a U-turn, because these new technologies are now only making their first steps. In a few years, open competition will make it possible to leave only the best platforms survive, and the goods associated with these devices will be more accurate, more perceivable when they will be more developed, improved, user-friendlier than they are now².

4. Service to the society

The third traditional mission of our universities, aside from education and research, is to deliver services to the society. In Belgium, this mission has gradually been put forward by public authorities. The idea is that the political scientists allow the broader to have access on the one hand to expert knowledge and on the other hand to the required tools to understand today's societal and political issues.

These so-called services to the society can mainly take three forms: interventions in the media, permanent education activities and north-south cooperation.

4.1. Media

For more than 40 years Belgian public has been used to seeing political scientists on television and hearing them on radio on election days, whereas, for instance, French media rather rely on editorialists on such occasions. For these last 20 years, the presence of the political scientists in the media has become more and more salient and extensive since they are called by traditional media to make interventions about current news subjects. Nevertheless, in all times, political scientists' interventions remain more solicited in times of elections or of political crisis. However, nowadays, political issues become more and more technical and difficult to understand for the public. That is why political scientists have been more and more solicited these last two decades in order to provide the necessary keys for people to understand what they read or see in the media.

² For more reflections, see the works by Michael Nentwich (political science on the web: prospects and challenges) Mauro Calisea, Rosanna de Rosaa and Xavier Fernandez i Marin (electronic publishing, knowledge sharing and open access: a new environment for political science), Iain Hrynaszkiewicz (open access journals: a sustainable and scalable solution in social and political sciences?), Mark Ware (Web 2.0 and Scholarly Communication).

4.1.1. *Reasons to appear in the media*

If there is no doubt that political scientists are increasingly solicited, what makes them accept these invitations? What motivations do they have to appear in the media?

First, they are conscious it is part of a main mission of the university: making the knowledge available for everyone outside the academic world where it is produced. They also see in these interventions a way to increase their personal popularity and stay in touch with the real world and people outside the academic sphere. Finally, sometimes universities urge their academic staff to make regular interventions in the media to increase their visibility and the one of its academic staff.

4.1.2. *Challenges of appearing in the media*

However, intervening in the media is not an easy and natural task for political scientists. In other words, this doesn't go without some challenges and fundamental interrogations on the role of a political scientist.

First, it is important that political scientists, when appearing in the media, pay attention not to overly simplify the issues they are writing or talking about. Sometimes, the vulgarization asked by the media format doesn't allow the necessary nuances to be made. Fortunately, some formats allow to display a greater scientific accuracy (chronicles, press dossiers, etc.).

Secondly, political science has to adapt to new channels of communication. The traditional electoral nights still exist and are still followed by a great deal of the population, but social networks are now becoming increasingly important as well. These social networks allow political scientists to publish their work and share their views, which is without doubt part of their mission of service to the society. Social networks, blogs and the Internet in general have their own codes, and political scientists have to adapt to these codes if they don't want to be absent of these increasingly important communication networks.

A third challenge, which can be linked to the development of Internet media, is that everyone can claim to be an expert on a subject and enter in a debate with academic experts about it. Sometimes, these self-proclaimed experts are giving the debates a more polemical style, which can undermine the critical and ethical aspects of deliberation in which political scientists are now taking part. In this case, political scientists become actors of the debate and step outside their role of information and analysis providers. Nevertheless, the question remains open: should political scientists be involved in debates or should they remain purely neutral? Moreover, it is increasingly difficult to draw the red line between clear analysis interventions and position statements.

To conclude, the objects of research become more and more complex and the media and their clients are changing. Also, more and more women and young researchers are entering the profession, which thereby becomes more and more diversified. To respond

to these changes, new networks are created³, new voices make themselves heard and gradually penetrate traditional media. Nevertheless, minorities and women are still underrepresented among political scientists regularly appearing in the media.

4.2. Permanent education

Permanent education is also an important part of the service to the society mission of political scientists. This can take the shape of articles of scientific vulgarization, or publications in the associative press, public conferences, training courses or debates. Consequently, political scientists, when they take part in such activities, are in contact with the associative world and the larger public.

More specifically, the Centre of socio-political research and information (CRISP) plays an important and particular role in this field. It was founded in 1958 outside the political cleavages that divided the Belgian society at the time. Now, it is still independent from the political world and also from the universities. Its general mission is to act as a research Centre and information provider for the larger public, in order to develop its critical spirit and the engagement of the citizens. Therefore, its members are present in the press (i.a. through electoral nights on television since the 1970s) and give conferences in Wallonia and Brussels. As it is the case for the education and the research missions, permanent education is subject to an increasing digitalization. Here, for instance, podcasts of the interviews performed by the CRISP are available (via its Facebook or Twitter accounts, created in 2013). Nevertheless, face-to-face contact remains important: people attending CRISP conferences enjoy benefitting from a direct contact with political scientists, especially if they have heard of them or read the articles they wrote in the press.

4.3. North-south cooperation

North-south cooperation can take two different shapes. On the one hand, Belgian political scientists create partnerships with their southern colleagues through projects that support education and research. These partnerships are of course inter-university contacts, but the goal is also to strengthen the societal impact of their colleagues from the South as actors of local development. It is not easy to evaluate the results or the extent to which Belgian political scientists' involvement in such projects is truly useful to strengthen the capabilities of their southern academic partners. What is certain, though, is that thanks to such cooperation, southern political scientists can benefit from research and education stays in Belgian universities (e.g. in the form of doctoral studies). Also, these partnerships allow them to publish and make their work on national issues known in Belgium.

On the other hand, they conduct research that could help define or execute the Belgian government's cooperation policies. The goal of these programs is to stimulate the interactions between researchers and political actors to enlighten the latter with expert knowledge on the orientations the government could take in the field of cooperation policy.

³ See *Expertalia*, <http://www.expertalia.be/>.

4.4. The political scientists in the society

With regard to these elements, it seems that political scientists hold a particular place, quite different from their fellow scientists working in other fields. Indeed, political science not only shed light upon political and societal choices on a technical aspect (like a scientific help with decision making). The main object of political science is indeed decision making itself. Therefore, interventions of political scientists in the media, the associative world or next to some decision makers make them adopt a critical stance on the decision-making process, and consequently on democratic challenges. Political scientists' mission of service to the society therefore offers critical elements on the democratic system, which is less often the case for their colleagues coming from other disciplines. This can partly explain the great amount of invitations political scientists receive to appear in the media or cooperate with associations.

5. Conclusion

In paper, we sought to emphasize the main aspects characterizing the evolution of political science in French-speaking Belgium over the last 20 years. More specifically, the first section of this paper addressed the main trends characterizing the evolution in teaching in the field of political science, while the second section highlighted the main evolutions affecting research. In both of these topics a special attention was given to "digitalization", in other words, the use of new technologies to improve the education and research functions in political science. The third and final section focused on the societal role many political scientists play for their university and more generally for the society.