

## A Guide to Socio-Economics at Sciences Po

*With a student body of 10,000 and a permanent faculty of 216, Sciences Po has become a major player in the French and European higher educational landscape. Among its sociologists, political scientists and historians, socio-economics has become a core field of research. This article aims to help SASE members navigate the intricacies of this French institution and find out about the variety of research projects there that address socio-economic issues.*

Sciences Po, also known as the *Institut d'études politiques de Paris*, is a semi-public university founded in 1872<sup>1</sup>. With a student body of 10,000 and a permanent faculty of 216, this institution has become a major player in the French and European higher educational landscape. Like the London School of Economics, it specializes in the social and human sciences, with a focus on political science, sociology, economics, history, and law. Over the past two decades, socio-economics has become a core field of research among Sciences Po's sociologists, historians, and political scientists. At least a dozen of the 41 members comprising Sciences Po's Sociology department (Sciences Po 2016) have an interest in economic sociology, an increasing number (mainly in Political Science) work in the field of political economy, and some members of the History faculty also address capitalism and changes in economic life.

In this piece, I will present the origins and the main features of socio-economics at Sciences Po. Two points are paramount: First, this field of research is a new development and partly an outcome of Sciences Po's recent efforts to gain an international reputation in social and human sciences. Second, Sciences Po faculty who work in socio-economics are still a very diverse breed. Due to the diversity of their background,

departmental, and research center affiliation, their work covers different subfields of socio-economics.

The structure of this piece is partly historical and partly analytical. The first section is devoted to Sciences Po's history. Following this, I present several institutional features of Sciences Po (the importance of research centers rather than departments and professor status), which are mainly intended for readers who are not familiar with French academia. Finally, describing four research centers one-by-one (CSO, MaxPo, OSC, and CEE), I present the different research programs in socio-economics that exist at Sciences Po.

### ***Sciences Po's Profile: Better Education for Better Elites***

Sciences Po was founded in 1872 by Emile Boutmy, a Protestant social reformer and an intellectual trained in law, history, and philosophy. Until 1945, the institution was referred to as the *Ecole libre des sciences politiques*, which could be roughly translated as the "Independent School of Political Sciences". The plural in *sciences politiques* matters: The founders did not intend to focus on political science as an academic discipline. Rather, they brought together various academic fields, such as history and law, to train the ruling classes' future civil servants, decision makers, and powerbrokers in the art of government. France had just lost the 1870 war against Prussia, a national tragedy that Boutmy blamed on the flaws of its educational system (Scot 2013). His aim was to reform the training of elites in order to reform the French power structure, especially its bureaucracy.

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<sup>1</sup>From a legal standpoint, Sciences Po is not part of the publicly funded French university system, yet most of its funding is public and its degrees have the same legal standing as those granted by actual *Universités*.

The emphasis was placed on practical training rather than academic research. Until the 1970s, few teachers at Sciences Po were formally trained in a specific academic discipline. From 1872 until the 1970s, up to half of the university's faculty was composed of high civil servants (Scot 2013). Yet, in a way, socio-economics was already on Science Po's agenda. Back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of Sciences Po's teachers were influenced by the work of Frédéric Le Play. Trained as an engineer, Le Play developed what he called *Economie sociale* ("social economy"), a new discipline that combined ethnography and statistics to better understand social problems caused by industrialization. The goal, however, was normative rather than scientific: Le Play was mainly concerned with preventing social unrest and making sure traditional social hierarchy was perpetuated.

The institution's focus on academic research and the creation of a large permanent faculty are fairly new developments. As of 2015, Sciences Po's permanent faculty was made up of 216 academics. Yet the permanent faculty coexists with about 3,000 external instructors. The latter, which are referred to as *vacataires*, are civil servants, business leaders, and academics who hold positions at other universities. In most cases, sociologists and political scientists who are permanently employed by Sciences Po teach at the undergraduate level<sup>2</sup>. At the masters' level, where emphasis is placed on professional training, especially for those preparing for the entrance exams (*concours*) to prestigious civil service

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<sup>2</sup> Sciences Po grants a general bachelor's degree with no academic specialization. Each student follows mandatory and elective courses in Sociology, Political Science, Economics, History, and Law.

positions<sup>3</sup>, teaching is mainly conducted by *vacataires*.

### ***Navigating Sciences Po's Research Centers***

As I will show below, research in socio-economics at Sciences Po is very diverse. This is primarily an outcome of the coexistence of different research centers. In French academia, disciplinary departments (such as the Sociology department at Sciences Po) focus on teaching. Recruitment, the training of graduate students, and the day-to-day management of research take place within research centers, which the French refer to as *laboratoires*. CSO (*Centre de sociologie des organisations*: "center for the sociology of organizations"), OSC (*Observatoire sociologique du changement*: "observatory of social change") and CEE (*Centre d'études européennes*: "Center for European studies") are the three main research centers in sociology at Sciences Po. Yet, these centers are not only for sociologists—political scientists, historians, and economists also work in them.

Other research centers at Sciences Po serve a different purpose. For instance, both MaxPo (see below) and LIEPP (Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policy) were established in recent years thanks to grant money received by Sciences Po. Because their financing is subject to change, they have no permanent faculty. Even their "directors" must be affiliated to one of Sciences Po's permanent research centers. Nevertheless, their financial resources allow them to attract a high number of doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, and visiting researchers.

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<sup>3</sup> The most prestigious *concours* is the one that leads to *Ecole nationale d'administration* (ENA). Many French politicians and business leaders are alumni of both Sciences Po and ENA.

### ***A Diversity of Statuses***

Within Sciences Po's permanent faculty, careers and statuses vary widely. Some faculty members are *Professeurs d'université*. Technically, their careers are managed directly by the state rather than by Sciences Po. Sciences Po also employs professors on a private basis. Some have permanent contracts, while others are waiting for tenure review. The third status is that of CNRS research fellow. Most research centers at Sciences Po have a dual affiliation; they are affiliated both to Sciences Po and the CNRS, the French national institute for scientific research. Each year, the CNRS recruits a few researchers through a national *concours* and then allocates them to research centers that are co-affiliated with universities. CNRS research positions are very popular and very selective, as the CNRS offers lifelong positions with no teaching requirements.

Doctoral students at Sciences Po are recruited after their master's degree. Procedures for recruiting new cohorts vary depending on discipline, research center, and funding type. Typically, doctoral students are former Sciences Po students who attended the *Master recherche* (2-year research track MA). The most common form of funding is the *contrat doctoral* ("doctoral contract") that is signed for three years. Most of these contracts involve a teaching duty of up to three (semester-long) seminars a year. However, it takes an average of five years for doctoral students to complete their dissertation and graduate. This means that after their three-year contract, doctoral students must find alternative sources of funding. Students apply then to *ATER*<sup>4</sup> positions offered by Sciences Po and other French universities. *ATER* are one-year renewable teaching positions that provide

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<sup>4</sup> *ATER* stands for *Assistant temporaire d'enseignement et de recherche* ("temporary assistant for teaching and research")

both enough income and free time to finish one's dissertation.

### ***From Bureaucracy to Economic Life: Economic Sociology at the CSO***

The CSO is arguably the most important research center in socio-economics at Sciences Po. Among its 24 current members, at least 10 produce or have produced research related to economic sociology. This is an outcome of both the CSO's history and the rise of economic topics in French sociology at large.

The CSO was founded in 1964 by Michel Crozier. Crozier played a leading role in introducing and expanding organizational theory in France. At first, research conducted at the CSO was primarily concerned with public bureaucracy. The *Bureaucratic Phenomenon*, Crozier's masterpiece, was a study of SEITA, the French state-owned tobacco manufacturer (Crozier, 1964). However, in the 1980s, the CSO began paying attention to private business. As shown elsewhere (Segrestin 2014), CSO researchers saw privately-owned firms as more innovative organizational actors. Organizational phenomena such as R&D and "lean management" were hailed as models for a less bureaucratic society. Starting in the late 2000s, this interest in firms led to an interest in economic life in general. Some researchers, such as Pierre François and Claire Lemerrier, took up the study of firms' ownership structures and interlocks to understand broader transformations in French capitalism.

The rise of new economic sociology in French sociology at large is another factor that drew the CSO to socio-economics. In the past 10 years, the CSO expanded significantly and hired many young scholars from the different schools that make up French economic sociology. Sophie Dubuisson, who was trained at the CSI (*Centre de sociologie de l'innovation*) by Michel Callon, studies valuation

processes and market devices. Other examples include Olivier Pilmis, who earned his PhD at EHESS with Pierre-Michel Menger, a specialist of uncertain markets, and Jeanne Lazarus, whose dissertation on banking and personal finances was supervised by Luc Boltanski. These newly hired academics have pursued their own strands of research, and some of them are now supervising doctoral students. Contrary to socio-economic research at MaxPo, which is covered in the following section, most of the research projects carried out at the CSO are micro-sociological and focus on processes rather than social structures and institutions.

### ***MaxPo: An Atypical Franco-German Venture***

Sciences Po has made a huge effort to become more international in recent years. The rationale behind this was that maintaining its domestic reputation and its ability to train the French administrative elites required broadening the scope of the institution and turning it into an academic powerhouse (see Descoings, 2007). Starting in the mid-2000s, Sciences Po launched an ambitious plan to increase the size of its permanent faculty and to make it more international.

Five years ago, in line with the plan described above, Sciences Po opened the Max Planck-Sciences Po Center on Coping with Instability in Market Societies, usually shortened as “MaxPo”. This original project was the outcome of a decades-long collaboration between the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (in Cologne, Germany) and Sciences Po. Marion Fourcade and Cornelia Woll were the first to serve as directors of MaxPo. Fourcade returned to Berkeley one year after being appointed; Woll, who earned her PhD at Sciences Po and the University of Cologne, replaced her for a short while before she became head of education at Sciences Po. The two current directors of MaxPo are Olivier

Godechot and Jenny Andersson. Godechot is a French sociologist who specializes in networks, careers, and finance, while Andersson is a historian trained in Sweden who, among other topics, works on economic forecasting and social-democracy.

MaxPo has become central in Sciences Po’s academic environment. It has achieved this status by inviting many visiting professors from prestigious institutions and by organizing exciting seminar series. It has been the home away from home for many of Sciences Po’s visiting scholars. In the last two years, for example, Jens Beckert, Heather Haveman, Neil Fligstein, and David Stark stayed at MaxPo for extensive periods of time. It also boasts a lively doctoral program, with two new doctoral students every year. Compared to the CSO, MaxPo is smaller but more international. While most seminars and activities at the CSO are conducted in French, people at MaxPo use English in their daily activities and doctoral fellowships tend to be awarded to international students. The nature of research projects at MaxPo also differs from those pursued at the CSO: While some projects use ethnography, many are comparative, with a strong emphasis on the financialization, economicization, and marketization of Western societies (see Godechot, 2016).

### ***Addressing Inequalities in European Societies and Global Cities: OSC & CEE***

Together with the CSO, the OSC is the other main research center in sociology at Sciences Po. It was founded in 1988 by Henri Mendras, a specialist of modernization and French rural communities. Most researchers at the OSC work on social inequalities. In so doing, some of its members address issues pertaining to political economy, such as Emanuele Ferragina, who is interested in welfare regimes, social participation, and social capital.

The CEE is also an important research center at Sciences Po and is mostly composed of political scientists. Political economy is very strong there, with a focus on the comparative study of social policies. Bruno Palier and Colin Hay are particularly active in this research program.

CEE and OSC members share a common interest in global cities, especially Sukriti Issar, from the OSC, and Tommaso Vitale, from the CEE. This interest in urban phenomena has to do with the fact that Sciences Po offers reputable master degrees in Urban Affairs.

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