



Internationalization in francophone Switzerland

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Like many other universities in Switzerland, the University of Lausanne has traditionally had a strong international recruitment policy. Nowadays, in Swiss academia, a large proportion of professors are foreign citizens recruited through international calls for top positions. At the same time, the University of Lausanne prioritizes teaching in French, although in some faculties (e.g., economic sciences), English is also adopted, particularly in master's courses. At the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, where I work, teaching in French is compulsory at the bachelor's and master's levels. The French-teaching policy reflects the necessity to defend cultural diversity in the humanities and social sciences as an add-value of a French-speaking university within a multilingual country. As a consequence, new professors who have not mastered French at the time of their recruitment still have to adapt and teach in French.

Some changes have occurred since the 2000s. Until some years ago, it was possible to distinguish between two main profiles in academic recruitment: the first one characterized by full professors with renowned international careers, and the second one made by (mainly) French-oriented scholars who had received their Ph.D. from the University of Lausanne or another Swiss university. Today, the situation is more fluid, but it seems increasingly clear that all successful careers require an international curriculum based upon scientific publications in English-speaking peer-review journals and book publishers, as well as significant experiences abroad.

Competition is increasing, and for many aspiring academics, precarious conditions remain the norm for many years after they have completed their studies. At the same time, because new generations of Swiss scholars are more internationally oriented, they find more opportunities in the academic market both in Switzerland and abroad. In this context, despite the difficulties with the EU and European funding (Switzerland is not part of the EU or Horizon 2020), the University of Lausanne has developed a long-term institutional strategy to boost

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transnational networks with several universities worldwide and support abroad experiences for Ph.D. students. This strategy stresses local commitments and international collaborations with both French-language and English-speaking universities.

However, it is important to note that these transformations have had a significant impact on academic careers and practices. For instance, at the Institute of Political Studies where I work, the internationalization of research has taken an ever-greater role, especially among new generations of scholars. Nowadays, achieving an international résumé is more important than in the past, and the pressure on young scholars is getting stronger. Although not formally required, an international résumé is crucial for recruitment and promotion. However, the impact of internationalization is not homogenous.

Within the institute, it is possible to observe some differences between English-oriented scholars and those who are more linked to French academia and less prone to English-speaking research and publications; and between “old” and “new” generations, as the younger ones are more English-speaking-oriented. As this diversity is not always clear-cut, when supervising my Ph.D. students, I try to explain the issue by highlighting the implications in terms of opportunities and constraints. As a consequence, a welcoming attitude toward cultural and academic diversity is favored, along with the inclusion of scholars from other disciplines (e.g., contemporary history), which fits also with my personal trajectory.

I grew up in the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland, where I also learned French and German at school. After college, I moved to Lausanne, where I obtained a degree in sociology and anthropology. Then, I went to Turin, where I prepared my Ph.D. thesis in contemporary Italian history, which I defended at the University of Lausanne. In the mid-2000s, I wrote my research both in French and Italian, with a focus on national and regional Swiss politics. At that time, I was based at a research center in the Italian part of Switzerland and worked as a lecturer in political science at the universities in Geneva and Lausanne. Around 2004, a colleague of mine at the European University Institute of Florence asked me to participate in a workshop and to collaborate on a collective book in English. It was my first experience in the English-speaking academic world. Since then, I have been increasingly involved in international networks, both in French-speaking and non-francophone countries such as France, Canada, and Belgium, but also the U.S. and Latin America. Today, I am currently the chair of the ECPR “Political sociology” Standing group and a member of the board of the Political Sociology research group of the European Sociological Association. At the same time, as director of a research unity, the Research Observatory for Regional Politics, I also continue to work on Swiss subnational politics.

I am aware of the difficulties in reconciling a teaching strategy based on French-speaking academic culture and a research strategy that is increasingly integrated with the English-speaking academic world. Different languages mean different academic legacies. If on one hand this duality creates new and exciting opportunities, on the other, it can cause some misunderstandings. Personally, I’m trying to encourage a kind of “glocal” dialectic, for instance, by publishing research on local and regional issues in international journals. Although



the diversity is enriching the academic environment, this approach is also a consequence of financial constraints, as successful applications for Swiss research funding imply publications in English-speaking peer-review journals.

In BA or MA courses, students are expected to read both French and English academic texts, enabling the connection between different academic traditions and fostering critical dialogue among them. Of course, this does not mean it is always easy to manage such variety. Unfortunately, as I am currently prioritizing English-speaking international journals and book publishers, I have been forced to reduce my academic contributions in French in recent years. The transnational network I am involved with is also a consequence of my interest in comparative perspectives and research topics that are increasingly connected with international debates and literature: nationalism and populism. The priority given to English-speaking publications is an outcome of scientific interests but also a consequence of the difficulties to master academic writing in a plurality of languages.

Along with the rising interest in the internationalization of research and teaching, there are new procedures trying to compensate for the environmental impact, especially with regard to the use of public transportation and flights. Although debates about the uneven accessibility of the international collaboration were more heated in the past, the English-speaking form of internationalization has many consequences, and one of them relates to research grant applications, as I previously mentioned. Professors unable to master academic English are implicitly pushed to concentrate on teaching duties, as they tend to be excluded from national and international research funding. Access to competitive research grants is essential as in Switzerland we do not have a system of permanent research scholarship outside the university system. Since the mid-2010s, in contrast with its previous policy, the main national funding agency, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), has been compelled to submit any research projects in political science exclusively in English. This choice is rather selective and adds pressure regarding the academic traditions that scholars can adopt. There are some advantages to this choice (such as the possibility of a more consistent international peer-review system), but I think any reduction in diversity poses a risk to original and innovative advances in social and political sciences.

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