Becoming an economist: the evolution of the Ph.D. in France

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**Proposal**

We study the internationalisation of economics in France through the evolution of Ph.D. theses. In the postwar era, French economics increasingly became influenced by U.S. economics. The process of internationalisation that took place over the second half of the 20th century was not without opposition from French traditions of economic thought (Fourcade 2006; Benest 2019; Goutsmedt, Renault, and Sergi 2021). For academics, one important point of contention is the training of the future generation of scholars in order to ensure the continuity and development of their traditions of research.

Ph.D. students learn and adopt the standards of the profession. They are incited to select what is considered valuable and promising research topics by the profession, but also to commit to particular norms of scientific productions such as writing theses structured by published articles. Hence, the Ph.D. constitutes a good proxy to observe the tensions and transformations of the discipline in France over the period.

We exploit a large and novel database of Ph.D. defended in France that combines information we have extracted from these.fr and the sudoc since 1946. It lists information on Ph.D. authors, the contents of the dissertation (title, keywords, abstract, and in the best case, full dissertation), the supervisors and the examinators, as well as the university of the Ph.D. defence.

Our analysis focuses on three types of measures of internationalisation, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

First, we use various basic proxies for measuring internationalisation: the evolution of the language of the Ph.D., the presence of a supervisor or of a member of the committee not based in France, the format of the dissertation (set of articles or monography), etc. The aim is to identify the emergence of Anglo-Saxon standards in the French Ph.D.

Second, we look at the “French Ph.D. networks”: using thesis supervisors and committees, we build different “supervising networks” over time. It allows us to identify, for each period, the main communities of Ph.D. producers. Looking at the most recurrent supervisors and institutions of these communities and taking care of the institutional history of French economics, we identify the most “international” communities and trace the evolution of their centrality over time. Using this analysis, we investigate important issues related to the French context: the role played by the *grandes écoles* in the imports of the standards of US postwar economics in France, the contrasting practices of Parisian and provincial institutions, or the importance of influential actors that did their Ph.D. outside France and that imported foreign traditions.

Third, we will measure internationalisation through the content of Ph.D. theses. Using bibliometric methods to identify “innovation” (Hofstra et al. 2020), we will trace back the arrival of certain concepts in France like “human capital”, and “rational expectations” or “efficient markets”. Using topic modelling, we will observe how the structure of research topics has transformed and what are the main research programs in France in different periods. We will qualitatively assess how it is linked to the evolution of research topics in the US.

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