

The Professional Review Of The Italian Political Science Association



The Italian Political Science Association (Società Italiana di Scienza Politica): An evaluation of SISP activities 25 years after its foundation

by Stefania Panebianco | Published in issue0 / Political science community

The Italian Political Science Association – *SISP* was established in 1981 as a non-profit scholarly association. It is the leading professional organization for the study of political science in Italy.

SISP replaced the Italian Section of Political Science founded in 1973 by Norberto Bobbio and Giovanni Sartori within the Italian Association of Political and Social Sciences (AISPS). It was first chaired by Giovanni Sartori, then past-presidents of the section of Political Science of AISPS were Norberto Bobbio and Alberto Spreafico. The SISP presidents were Alberto Spreafico, Mario Stoppino, Luigi Bonanate, Giorgio Freddi, Leonardo Morlino and Maurizio Cotta. Since September 2004, Fulvio Attinà has been the President of the Association and Stefania Panebianco is in charge of the Secretariat. The three-year mandate will expire in 2007. At the Annual Conference to be held in Catania on 20-22 September 2007, the SISP President will be elected.

Today SISP counts 300 individual members from Italy and other countries. Any political scientist based in Italy or abroad may apply for full membership. Applications are evaluated by the Executive Board and approved by the General Assembly. All members benefit from a free subscription to *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, free participation in the annual conference, the monthly electronic newsletter and reduced subscription to other scientific journals. Association fees are differentiated by academic categories ('professors', 'researchers and other professions', 'members without a permanent position'). The Association provides its members with several services and information via the SISP website.

A brief analysis of the SISP membership

Since its foundation the association has changed both in terms of membership dimension and affiliation. In the last 5 years, the Association passed from 185 members (in 2001) to 300 members (in 2006) [see Figure 1].

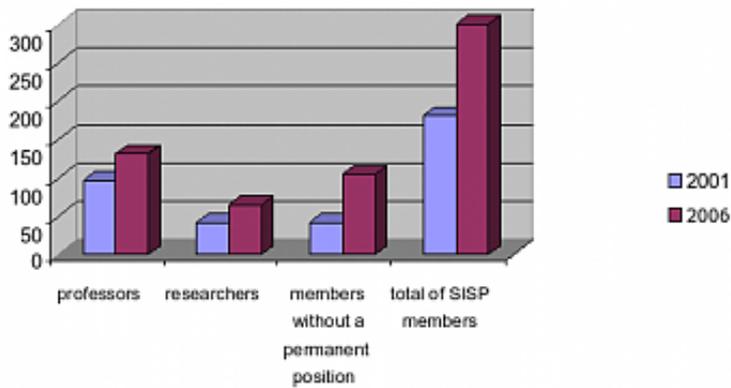


Figure 1: The growth of SISP membership from 2001 to 2006 (click to enlarge)

Most of the new members are young political scientists [see Figure 2]. The percentage of professors has diminished from more than half of the membership in 2001 to a little more than 40% in 2006; the percentage of researchers has remained stable (a bit more than 20%); 35% of SISP members today are political scientists who have not a permanent position, they are mostly PhD students, research fellows and grant-holders. SISP has a pretty good gender balance: almost 40% of the association is composed by female members.

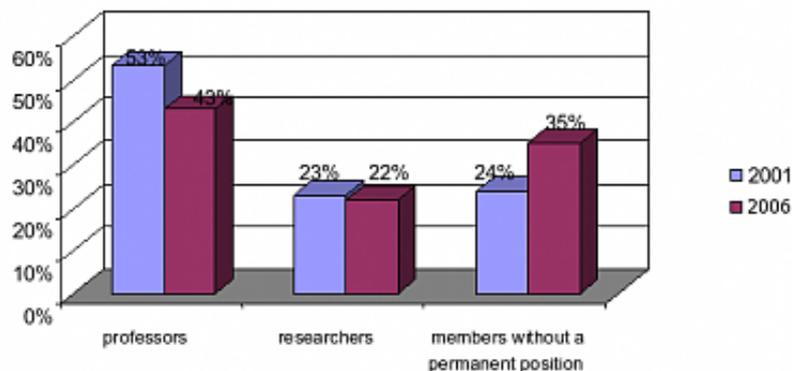


Figure 2: SISP membership divided per categories (2001-2006) - Click to enlarge

The current SISP membership and the active participation of young political scientists to SISP activities (particularly at the annual conference) shows that the Association has become younger and friendly to the new generations. This might indicate that political science as a discipline has become more mature and is attracting more and more those who want to expand awareness and understanding of politics.

As far as affiliation is concerned, some universities are traditionally well-represented in the Association. 65% of the SISP membership belongs to the Universities of Bologna (12%), Firenze (11%), Pavia (8%), Milano Statale (7%), Torino (6%), Padova (5%), Catania, Roma La Sapienza, Siena and Trento (all 4%). The high number of affiliations to these universities is not surprising, this is justified by the coexistence of both a high number of permanent positions and PhD students or grant-holders. However, the SISP membership is recently spreading to many other universities. The Universities of Trieste, Roma Tre, Urbino, Calabria, Pisa, Palermo, Macerata, Cagliari, Molise, are expanding both in terms of SISP members and in terms of permanent positions (Figure 3 shows the number of SISP members grouped per affiliation as in 2006). This proves that political science as a discipline is quickly spreading to younger universities where research groups are being created.

is sent to the members. An **on-line Directory** provides contact details, academic institutional information and research interests of the SISP members.

Since 2003 **SISP Standing Groups** (SGs) are created to provide a means of collaboration between scholars specializing in the same research area. SGs organise seminars, have web-pages, and publish reports and newsletters. Currently, 10 Standing groups are active on: European Union; International relations; Italian political parties transformation: the comparative perspective; Local governments and the European 'space'; Parliament, representation and legislative processes; Politics and rationality; Public opinion and political behaviour; Quality of democracy; Regionalism and federalism; Social movements and political participation.

In 2004 two SISP awards have been established. The biannual **SISP Prize** is awarded to the 'best political science book' published by a member under 40 years old. The **Carlo M. Santoro Prize** to the best paper delivered at the SISP annual conference is awarded to a young political scientist who does not have a permanent position.

The first **Italian Graduate Conference** will take place in June 2007 in Florence. It is aimed at creating a graduate network and at enhancing political science knowledge and research skills for graduate students.

The SISP Journal: RISP

The Italian Review of Political Science (RISP) is the journal of the Association. It was founded in 1971 and directed by Giovanni Sartori for more than 30 years. RISP has contributed to introducing and consolidating political science in Italy. For more than thirty years, RISP has covered the main fields of political science: political parties and electoral studies, the state and its institutions, public policies, international politics, etc. In 2004 thanks to the donation by Giovanni Sartori RISP has become the official journal of the Association. The Journal is currently directed by Sergio Fabbrini (university of Trento). RISP abstracts are regularly published in International Political Science Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Historical Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, The IBSS, Worldwide Political Science Abstracts.

To foster a direct link between the SISP Annual Conference and the SISP Journal, the *lectio magistralis* which opens the annual conference is published in the first RISP issue after the conference.

Some figures on the SISP Annual Conference

The SISP Annual Conference is the most important event of the Association. It allows most members to gather together to exchange views on their on-going researches. Moreover, it is during the General Assembly which usually takes place during the conference that new members are admitted to the association.

Originally, the SISP Conference took place every two years; since Torino 1989 it has become an annual conference attracting an increasing number of participants. The format of the conference has also changed from a thematic event to a conference with parallel workshops. The most recurrent topics of the opening session have been the Italian political system, political parties and political institutions. The growth of Political Science as a discipline was the theme of the first Round table which was organised at the 1991 Annual Conference in Rome. European Union politics spread into the SISP Conferences in many ways; in 1999 the Trieste Annual Conference hosted a Round Table on the future of the European Union; at the Napoli Annual Conference in 2000 two round tables were organised respectively on EU Studies in Italy and on International relations; the number of papers dealing with EU politics which are delivered at the Annual Conference is constantly increasing.

The SISP Annual conference is currently structured in thematic sections, which include panels and papers. Panels can be proposed also out of thematic sections. Italian is the working language, but panels can occasionally work in English and other foreign languages. Participation in the annual conference is tends to be very high.

The 2006 Annual Conference took place in Bologna on 12-14 September. The 25th Anniversary of the SISP foundation was celebrated by more than 270 participants, who presented (or discussed) more than 160 papers, divided into 11 thematic sections (structured into 37 panels) and 5 extra panels (not part of the thematic section). The highest number of papers was presented within the thematic section on International Relations (24 papers), Italian Political System (21 papers), Political Communication (20 papers) and Social movements and political participation (18 papers). Participants were mostly young political scientists, in fact 50% of the paper-givers do not have a permanent position in the Italian academia. More than half of the participants were non-members of the Association; they were either researchers majoring in international political history, political sociology or political theory, or political scientists based in universities abroad. The Bologna Conference then offered a unique opportunity to link political scientists with researchers, teachers and scholars from other disciplines. The 25th SISP Anniversary celebrated the diversity and potential of political science in a young and interdisciplinary environment.

The 2007 Annual Conference will be held at the University of Catania on September 20-22. Many things have changed since the 'Study congress' on *Reformism and reforms* which took place in Catania on 8/11 December 1983. A high number of participants are expected to participate in the 12 thematic sections (which include at least 3 panels each) and in the extra 6 panels (not part of the thematic sections). The *Lectio Magistralis* on *Promotion and transformation of democracy* will be delivered by Prof. Luigi Bonanate (Torino University) on Thursday 20 September at 5 p.m.; on Friday 21 September at 5 p.m. Prof. Michael Cox (Chairman of the ECPR) will lecture on *America and the world after Bush*.