

# On the Institutionalization of the “Human and Social Sciences” in France

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**W**e offer here a brief analysis of the “human and social sciences” in France (*sciences de l’homme et de la société* [SHS]), with an emphasis on changing patterns of institutionalization.<sup>1</sup> Although we refer to several of these sciences, we focus on developments in social anthropology and sociology. We do not pretend to carry out an overall evaluation of trends and accomplishments, but, rather, to underline certain structures that have shaped the institutional contours of the human and social sciences. We bring different backgrounds to the effort: one of us is an anthropologist with long-standing ties to French anthropology but who has primarily worked elsewhere; the other is a biologist who has worked both in government (at the National Center for Scientific Research and the Ministry of Education and Research) and in a social science research environment.<sup>2</sup> Both of us recently turned to an interest in French public policy: for one of us, French policy regarding Islam in public life; for the other, the organization of social science research in France.<sup>3</sup>

We begin with some observations about the intellectual organization of French research, turn to a sketch of the institutional contours, and then discuss the changes that are taking place in the 2000s with respect to the nature of research networks.

## The Sociogenesis of the French model

Although it is recent enough to be presented in guillemets and to require justification, the idea that the “human and social sciences” are the most appropriate category for organizing research grows out of the particular contours of twentieth-century French social science history. This phrase is relatively recent; the categories used most often in the past have been the “social and economic sciences” (the name given to the 6ème section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in 1947) or the “social sciences” (that used for the later renaming of that *École*). The phrase “human sciences” also has been of long use in France; this category has included some of the “social sciences” but not, for example, literary criticism, and is therefore not to be confused with the more general category of “les humanités.” The popular magazine *Sciences Humaines*, for example, covers topics in history, psychology, sociology, political science, management, education and linguistics.

French research institutions continue to differ among themselves as to how they group disciplines. The CNRS (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*, National Center for Scientific Research) brought the human and social sciences together in a single department in the 1980s at the suggestion of the anthropologist Maurice Godelier (who then became head of the new, broadly-defined department). At the Ministry of Education and Research, however, the two categories have remained distinct, with history, archeology, literature, linguistic, and psychology grouped under “human sciences,” and sociology, anthropology, economics, geography, political science, law and management under “social sciences.”

We focus on sociology and anthropology here because we find that these two disciplines, somewhat less applied than are political science and economics, and less well integrated with the “hard” sciences than is psychology, illustrate well the specific history of “human and social sciences.” Sociology and anthropology became full-fledged sections of French academic institutions much later than in North America or Britain, and this late arrival is an important key to understanding the contemporary pattern of social science institutions in France.

One observes a sharp disjuncture between disciplinary patterns at the higher and lower levels of French higher education. At its high end, the academic system has been both adventurous and particularistic in creating professorial chairs. Many of the chairs at the *Collège de France*, for example, have complex titles designed for the incumbent: Marc Fumaroli’s is in “rhetoric and society in Europe (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries);” Ian Hacking’s is in “philosophy and history of scientific concepts.” Each was tailored to the particular research interests of its

holder—as are, by and large, the subjects of seminars offered at the graduate research institutions.

However, when it comes to creating undergraduate degrees the French system has been markedly conservative and narrow. Historically this conservative character is due in great part to the tight linkage between university training and secondary school teaching. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a university graduate who intended to pursue a research career generally earned his or her living by teaching at a high school (*lycée*). This career path continues to enjoy much higher status in France than in North America. Indeed, one of the most prestigious place to pursue post-secondary education in France long has been the *École Normale Supérieure* (rue d'Ulm), which was created to train teachers but which also offered the best education in philosophy in the nation and graduated a very large portion of the best-known public intellectuals of France (Durkheim, Sartre, de Beauvoir). Because university graduates were trained to teach lycée subject matters, university degrees themselves were largely limited to those subjects: letters and sciences, and more specifically the traditional disciplines of history, French literature, mathematics, and so forth. Social sciences did not figure in these categories, and so universities did not find it logical to train social scientists. Indeed, it was only in 1958 that a student could obtain a first degree (a *licence*) in sociology.

But for all that, France's social scientists hardly have been marginal intellectual or academic players. France has produced many of the key figures in the social sciences, from Condorcet and Turgot, to Comte, Le Play, Durkheim, and Mauss, and on to Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu, and Dumont. The twentieth century notables enjoyed prestigious academic trajectories and achieved academic distinction. Durkheim's very success in constructing a cohesive and successful research team around the journal *Année sociologique* was due in part to the traditional, prestigious academic backgrounds of the researchers. Most had passed the *agrégation*, the highest degree for lycée teachers (or, in law, for university professors), and many came through the *École Normale Supérieure*. Most went on to hold university positions or the equivalent (Karady 1982). Although these and other major social scientists held academic positions, certainly (indeed, many held two or three at the same time), these chairs or other posts did not imply the availability of an academic trajectory in the discipline for students, nor the availability of teaching positions for those who made it all the way to the doctoral level. The number of such positions grew slowly or not at all until the 1960s. In 1910, sociologists occupied ten university positions in France, although most of these positions were not called sociology (Durkheim's

chairs and those of several other sociologists were in pedagogy). By 1952 there still were only eleven positions for sociologists (Ringer 1992:283).

If sociologists and anthropologists were not initially trained in those disciplines, in what fields were they educated? Until the 1960s, most often they were trained initially in philosophy. Such was true of most of those graduating from the *École Normale Supérieure* (either that on the rue d’Ulm, or subsequent schools of the same name), but also true of many of those who passed through universities. The generally “philosophical” character of much French social science writing, often noted in contrast to the more empirical (or, some would say, empiricist) bent of North Americans, can be partially explained by this contrast in undergraduate degree structure.

Although some have faulted French social science for this philosophical character (e.g., Karady 1982), philosophical training (together with the shared political and intellectual discourses of the Latin Quarter, or “tout Paris” [Lemert 1981]) has provided a common background that facilitated cooperative work across disciplines, indeed, across “divisions” in the North American sense, bringing together “humanities” and “social sciences.” Marcel Mauss, who fashioned a distinctively anthropological branch out of the *Année sociologique* network, did so in part by bringing the work of philologists and historians of the ancient world together with ethnographic research. Much later, in the 1970s, French anthropologists and historians engaged in cross-disciplinary exchanges that inspired similar (and, *nota bene* subsequent) cross-disciplinary discussions in Britain and the U.S.

### **The Institutions of social science research**

The conservative character of French university training meant that over the course of the twentieth century, social science developed on the academic margins, in schools and institutions created to give it a place. The unit of social science research has been the research team or laboratory, funded by the central government, housed in larger entities, themselves usually characterized by a mixture of research and teaching. (Indeed, to varying degrees this description holds for scientific research in general.) These larger institutions include the *Collège de France*, the *Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques* (“Science Po”), the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, and the *Maison des Sciences de l’Homme* (along with other research “houses”), and the universities. Looming over all these activities is the National Center for Scientific Research (*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, CNRS*). The CNRS is a large and (in-

creasingly) dominant state structure for providing individual researchers with salaries and research teams with research funds; it is not itself a “house” for research. (We discuss the CNRS in the next section.)

Chairs in the social sciences have existed at the Collège de France since 1831, but the first chair in sociology was that held by Mauss beginning in 1931, and the first in social anthropology was that held by Lévi-Strauss beginning in 1959. Chairs may end with the retirement of their holder, or be continued and renamed to fit the new occupant. Thus, Lévi-Strauss’s chair was simply “Social Anthropology,” but as currently occupied by Philippe Descola, it is in the “Anthropology of Nature,” his research specialty.

“Sciences Po” (the usual way of referring to the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques) has a long and quite particular history: it began as a private foundation, with strongly Protestant support. It has become well integrated into the state system, but continues to enjoy a relatively complex organizational structure that gives it greater resources and more independence than the universities or the École. CÉRI, the Centre d’Études et de Recherches Internationales, functions within Sciences Po as a research structure or *laboratoire*, associated with the CNRS (it is a “*unité mixte Sciences Po- CNRS*”), with sociologists and anthropologists as well as political scientists.

For social science, the best known of the non-university research institutions is the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, henceforth “the École” (to adepts it is the [quickly pronounced] “EHESS”). The school derives from the “6ème section” of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, created in 1868 with four divisions or sections in order to give the material support to scientific and historical studies that the universities had failed to provide. The École’s reach was extended somewhat into the social sciences in 1886, when a new section for the study of religious sciences was created. This new fifth section provided a teaching outlet for the ideas about religion developed by students of Emile Durkheim. Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert took up positions there in 1901, followed by Marcel Granet and Maurice Leenhardt; in 1951, Claude Lévi-Strauss took up the position first held by Mauss.

Only after World War II, in 1947, were the economic and social sciences added as the sixth section. The new section grew swiftly, had 28 researchers on the faculty by 1951, and hundreds by the 1970s. Eventually it became an independent entity, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and moved into three buildings on the boulevard Raspail. As it grew, it developed its own intellectual character, combining the approach to social and cultural history associated with the journal *Annales* with social anthropology, sociology, and area

studies. Today these disciplines continue to enjoy a degree of flow back and forth across their boundaries (in some years the term "anthropology" is used more often for courses given by historians than by anthropologists). Much of the intellectual life of the École is organized into research teams, and these are very often interdisciplinary.

As with most French academic institutions, the École has a complex status with respect to other institutions. It has its own independent existence, and beyond its three locations on boulevard Raspail in Paris it has branches elsewhere in France. Internally, it consists of research teams, each with a director. The researchers associated with each team might draw their salaries from the École itself or from the CNRS, which created a sociology section in 1937. The École also offers a DEA (*Diplôme d'études approfondies*), the first degree in a doctoral program, and thus formally is both a teaching and research institution. However, it is structured around research; the seminars offered by the researchers are quite specific, from an American perspective, corresponding to advanced graduate seminars in the U.S. and offering the opportunity for the director and his or her students to present their work.

Most of the École's researchers are housed in one building, 54 boulevard Raspail, which also houses the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme. The MSH, formally a foundation, supports its own research teams, and the infrastructure of the building, including its library. Conceived and initially directed by the Annales historian Fernand Braudel (with partial support from the Ford Foundation), it provides a framework for integrating teams and facilitating collaboration, whereas the École (in which Braudel also took a leading role) is a programmatic institution for offering seminars and degrees. The lines between the two are unclear even to most French researchers. One can walk the corridors of the building at 54 boulevard Raspail and pass from a research unit associated with the École (for example, CADIS (*Centre d'analyse et d'intervention sociologiques*), directed by the sociologist Michel Wieviorka), to one that is formally associated with the MSH and the CNRS (for example, LAIOS (*Laboratoire d'anthropologie des institutions et des organisations sociales*), directed by the anthropologist Marc Abélès), without perceiving any institutional difference between them.

This mixed character of research support holds generally in France. Today, social scientists working on the same research team might be salaried by a university, or hold an appointment at the CNRS, or at the École. Their obligations would differ markedly. The CNRS appointment in principle requires a certain level of productivity, but in practice one's salary is guaranteed; it is the availability of research funds that is subject to change. An École appointment carries

with it some teaching duties, but these are at a high level and can be on the subject of one's current work. A university appointment usually requires more undergraduate teaching.

Major figures in social sciences have held, and continue to hold, simultaneous appointments at two or more of these institutions—for example, at the *École*, the *École Normale Supérieure*, and at a university. Terry Clark (1973: 212-14, 232-33) observes that Marcel Mauss in effect carried out two distinct lines of training, continuing the Durkheimian school in sociology through his position at the *École Normale Supérieure*, and, together with Paul Rivet, teaching the next generation of anthropologists through his positions at the fifth section of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and the *Institut d'Ethnologie*, the latter created in 1925 with funds from the Ministry of Colonies. The *Institut* and the *Musée de l'Homme* provided the non-university home for ethnologists, including the Africanists Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Their initial education tended to be more eclectic (less often via the *École Normale*) than that of the sociologists.

Although non-university research institutions (the *Collège de France*, the *Écoles Normales Supérieures*, and the *École*) played a central role in the institutional development of social sciences in France, more recently the universities have become important sites for teaching and research in these subjects. This is particularly the case with sociology. During the 1970s, researchers in history, literature, and geography opened out their fields to more sociological perspectives, and this opening led to increased demand for sociology itself. Thus, while the total number of university teaching positions in the social and human sciences approximately doubled between 1986 and 2001, in sociology the number tripled.<sup>4</sup>

### **Networks and teams**

French intellectual life has been known for its patron system, the domination of each intellectual field by a few star researchers. In social anthropology, for example, during the 1960s and early 1970s the figure of Claude Lévi-Strauss dominated the field from his laboratory at the *Collège de France*. Other anthropologists who were well known abroad, such as Louis Dumont, taught a very small number of students and did not have a strong position within the academy. In other social science fields the structure was similar, if pluralized, with a number of distinct clusters of researchers, each with its own research team, and often with its own journal and special ties to publishing houses (Clark 1973).

Among contemporary research teams, that organized around the late Pierre Bourdieu most closely resembled the “star” model. Bourdieu’s group was known for the strict scrutiny paid to submissions to their journal, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, with an eye to preserving a homogeneity of orientation. The efforts of the director of a recent (2001) film, Pierre Carles, to portray the group as a collaboration among equals was undercut by the film’s focus on Bourdieu the star, rather than on ideas or social issues—and certainly not on sociology, which the title, “Sociology as a Combat Sport,” arguably implied might be represented through the film itself.

Bourdieu’s fame have led some observers to assume, erroneously, that social science in France continues to be based on the star system. In fact, among sociologists and political scientists, Bourdieu’s team stood out for the strength of its boundary-maintaining mechanisms. Other groups, for example those led by Michel Wieviorka, Alain Touraine, or Raymond Boudon, have had more open borders and less hierarchy, as well as more collegial relations among their respective groups.

The new face of French social science, which one began to see emerge in the late 1970s, is better characterized in terms of overlapping research teams, often centered around one person who holds a chair, or directorship of studies, but who does not necessarily occupy the star position that defined the older system. Anthropology currently does not have individuals who enjoy the same degree of public acknowledgement that once was given to Lévi-Strauss. The anthropologist most in the limelight would be Maurice Godelier, less for his academic position than for his roles in a series of government projects, including the position of scientific director for the new museum to be devoted to non-Western arts (and as yet without a satisfactory name) and his current role in developing a European-level research policy. Godelier’s academic activities include the directorship of an Oceanic ethnographic research team in Marseille.

Three additional examples provide an idea of the current structure of anthropological research. Philippe Descola occupies the chair at the Collège de France formerly held by Lévi-Strauss; his main impact has been through the Social Anthropology Laboratory, located at the Collège but also formally a part of the CNRS and the École. The Laboratory unites a number of research groups working on topics ranging from psychoanalysis to kinship. The anthropologists affiliated with these groups have posts at universities or with the CNRS. Marc Augé, a director of studies at (and at one time overall director of) the École, has come closer to claiming the role of public intellectual, with a series of short books and periodic newspaper articles on contemporary life, often about Paris

(2000). Both Augé and Marc Abélès began their careers with field research in Africa and then turned their attention to France, but Abélès, who directs a multidisciplinary research group at the MSH-Paris, continued to conduct ethnographic work, first on local politics in Burgundy, then the workings of the European Commission, daily life in the French General Assembly, and most recently (2002) the new American philanthropy.

Each of these four anthropologists directs a research team, in most cases with a formal tie to the CNRS. The teams have in common a set of research questions—cross-cultural evidence regarding human cognition, the relationships among New Guinea kinship systems, the nature of contemporary European political institutions—and it is these questions, rather than a grand theory, or grand master, that shapes the team's work. In many cases anthropologists work with colleagues in multidisciplinary research teams organized around area studies or around general social science themes. For example, the largest Southeast Asian research team in France is housed in a CNRS complex at Villejuif, south of Paris. It rotates leadership among senior colleagues and across disciplines—a sociologist, who succeeded a geographer, currently directs the group. The team contains many of the most respected French anthropologists working in Southeast Asia. No star, very open borders, and active collaborations in teaching with a university department (anthropology, at Nanterre) as well as collaborations in research and publication with another Southeast Asia research group. (Charles MacDonald created the latter in Marseille with the help of CNRS, as part of the efforts to decentralize research that we discuss below).

What led to this shift away from the focus on stars and toward the creation of more open-ended teams and networks? One cause is the increased importance of laboratories associated with the CNRS, defined around themes and problems. The number of CNRS researchers in all disciplines has sharply increased over the last twenty-five years (7300 researchers in 1976, 11,000 in 2000), and each year's recruits must find positions in preexisting laboratories (the natural science origins of the CNRS are evident in the use of "laboratory" for social science research units). Laboratories justify their budgets to the state in terms of collective research projects, no matter how individualistic the reality of research life. These categories of collective research have to be neutral with respect to grand theory or "schools". Thus, a Marxist anthropologist might well write books about theory, but his or her research team would be devoted to the study of organizations, or comparative economic life. The teams in the Social Anthropology Laboratory of the Collège de France are typical for their organi-

zation around traditional anthropological or geographic area categories, such as kinship, identity, or Muslim societies. Sociology, with its higher degree of potential “usefulness”, has been organized around problems of labor, employment, health, migration, and so forth, all part of the growing French state’s interrogation about its politics, economics, and society. In turn, these imperatives of organization shape preferences for kinds of theory, favoring “middle range theories” and collective work over “grand theory” and political positioning.

### **Problems and policy responses: centralization, isolation, and the separation of research from teaching.**

Current French (as well as external) observers of the social sciences often criticize the tendency of research teams to become isolated and parochial, a tendency usually attributed to the research structure itself. To understand this criticism, we must return to a basic feature of how research is funded, before presenting some recent proposals for change.

As we have discussed, the late entry of some of the social sciences into French academia meant that they developed to a great degree outside the universities, in a number of diverse institutions.<sup>5</sup> Anthropologists and sociologists in particular depended on the CNRS for support (Godelier 2002). Because the main role of the CNRS has been to support research rather than teaching, the CNRS’s dominant role tended to perpetuate the separation of research from teaching. However, as we noted above, this situation has changed over the years, and the universities increasingly employ sociologists and anthropologists to teach as well as to engage in research. Increasingly one finds laboratories attached both to the CNRS and to one or more institutions of higher learning, whether a university, the *École*, or Sciences Po. A laboratory often includes people recruited and paid by the CNRS for full-time research and, working by their side, people recruited and paid by universities where they are expected to work in the laboratory in addition to their work in teaching.

Although the budget of the CNRS devoted to the social and human sciences (SHS) is small compared to those for natural science fields, SHS employs the second largest number of researchers (after life sciences), with about 2000 researchers, or 20% of the overall number of CNRS researchers, working in 400 laboratories. Also included in the budget are salaries for about 1500 “technical personnel” (librarians, technicians, secretaries), and 5000 “teacher-researchers”, whose salaries come from teaching institutions but who are part of CNRS laboratories. In comparison, French universities employ over 23,000 “teacher-re-

searchers” in the fields of SHS. (The universities also have their own research laboratories, funded by the Ministry of Education and Research, but generally without the same level of personnel or funds enjoyed by the CNRS laboratories.) The strikingly high ratio of teacher-researchers to full-time researchers is unique to the SHS, and reflects the high percentage (60% in 2000) of undergraduates taking courses in these fields (Observatoire des sciences et des techniques 1998).

Within the CNRS, researchers chosen by their peers represent each discipline. As one would expect, these representatives try to increase, or at least to maintain, the portion of the overall budget allocated to their own discipline *and* to their own laboratory. Because the number of laboratories has not greatly increased—new researchers are recruited into long-standing laboratories—the system makes for a great deal of conservatism. It also pits laboratories against one another, discouraging collaboration and encouraging fragmentation. Local observers also complain of an increasing gap between the growing number of students engaged in doctoral research, many of whom receive scholarships to work in a laboratory, and the small number of new permanent positions, a gap which leads to a gradual aging of the laboratory itself.

One can add other characteristic features of French research life to this problem of reproduction and renewal: for example, the centralization of research life in Paris and the consequent intensity of rivalries, a fragmentation of control and supervision across institutions (the CNRS, ministries, universities), the slowness of some social sciences to “internationalize” their work through translation and international collaboration, and the wearing, constant battle for annual renewal of CNRS funding.

### **The dual response: decentralization, and the rapprochement of research and higher education**

The response of the state has been to promote two structural changes with respect to all research: requiring a closer tie between research laboratories and university departments, and encouraging the creation of new research “centers” in the provinces. The first objective would have been difficult to accomplish by itself, because there is little incentive for a researcher with a CNRS post to devote additional time to teaching for little or no additional reward. However, creating new positions and, of potentially even more importance, new research centers, under new terms of trade vis-à-vis the universities, has offered opportunities to induce more teaching.

We consider decentralization first. In the early 1990s, the CNRS (then directed by François Kourilsky) took the decision to build up research outside the Île de France (Paris plus suburbs). The decision followed from two major sets of considerations. On the one hand, the CNRS leadership wanted to raise the international visibility and improve the competitive position of French research. On the other hand, the overall governmental policy of decentralization would have made it difficult to extract additional government funds for a Paris-centered plan, but made it easier than ever before to attract funding for developing research in the provinces. For their part, regional governments, enjoying more funding and autonomy than before, were interested in attracting research institutions to their own cities in the hopes that such institutions would help attract industrial investments and other forms of economic growth.

The initial CNRS plan was to decrease the weight of research activity in the Paris basin from 51% of the total number of researchers in 1991, to 40% by the year 2000. At about the same time, President Mitterrand received a report documenting the dramatic increase in the population of Paris, and predicting a serious strain on public service, including education. To avoid such an eventuality, he and the Prime Minister of the day, Edith Cresson, ordered each ministry to plan to transfer at least 5% of its personnel in their central services to the provinces. (The same was required from all public entities under their supervision.)

This order added to the leverage available to the CNRS for its own plans for decentralization. In order to correctly understand the politics of what resulted we must emphasize that the CNRS did not so much respond to an overall government policy change, but took advantage of those new priorities in order to carry out its own plans. The CNRS used two instruments to reach its objectives. First, they ruled that for all future new positions, 2/3 would be outside the Paris region and 1/3 inside Paris. Secondly, they identified priority target areas in particular provinces, where local conditions would favor the development of a specific research team or teams. Each of these "scientific operations" had a project leader. The CNRS thus avoided forcing research teams to relocate, but provided incentives to teams that wished to do so. A number of incentives were offered: new positions, guaranteed project support over several years, funds to cover costs of moving, assistance to spouses or partners who were public agents in finding new positions.

As a result of these policies, between 1990 and 1998 the CNRS (together with the ministry, the universities, and regional and city governments) succeeded in creating over one hundred research teams in the provinces, including over thirty new research centers: for particle physics in Marseille, microelectronics in

Lille, molecular biology in Strasbourg, chemistry in Bordeaux, mathematics in Toulouse, and so on. An investment by the CNRS of 170 million euros succeeded in attracting over 140 million euros from regional governments and 60 million euros from the ministry of research. The result of the decentralization, together with a higher rate of retirement in Paris than in the provinces, led to a lowering of the Paris-region concentration of researchers to 44% in 2000—short of the initial goal for 2000, but a significant drop from the 51% figure of 1991.

The decentralization effort never has been easy, given the strong pull of Paris. One of us spent five months as a CNRS visiting researcher attached to a research laboratory in Marseille, and was able to observe the difficulties. The laboratory, organized around the study of Southeast Asia, was and is exemplary on several dimensions. The director and others had taken personal career risks in moving from Paris to the south. The director had been able to secure good physical facilities from a local university, and assistance in moving and in recruiting new personnel from the CNRS and the education ministry. He brought together researchers in several disciplines, and envisioned establishing a strong teaching relationship with the university, and providing documentary facilities to the city, for example, in the form of CD-ROMs of interest to the large and growing Asian population. The laboratory began a journal of Southeast Asian social sciences, and entered into a collaborative relationship with a sister Paris laboratory. The laboratory was paired with a research team specializing in the ethnography of Oceania to form a collectivity, the *Maison d'Asie-Pacifique* (Asia-Pacific House), which resembled in concept (2+ laboratories with shared library and technical support), although did not have the status of, a *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*.

Although successful, this endeavor, like most others, encountered predictable difficulties. Several researchers returned to Paris to take up positions with other laboratories there. The director found himself making frequent train trips to Paris to argue for funding, present reports, and so forth, all of which took time from the research mission of the laboratory. Efforts to expand the *Maison*, so as to be in a position to apply for status as a *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*, have run into the difficulty of finding new positions and the people to fill them in order to reach a size that would be viewed as a “critical mass” by the Ministry.

As other observers of the French political scene (Kastoryano and Crowley 2001) have noted, the older Jacobin model of a France directed from Paris must be reconceptualized today to include the devolution of powers to the regions and the efforts to promote local democracy, as well as an overall emphasis on the virtues of locally-generated “associative life”. The decentralization of research offers a case in point. One key element in the efforts to develop “poles of scientific

excellence" in the regions has been the negotiation of new partnerships between research teams and universities. Each side has its own priorities: the former, promoting excellence and effective of research; the latter, responding to the sharp increases in the number of students seeking higher education. These negotiations have taken place in a policy climate where local officials, including regional councils, municipalities, and heads of universities, have been able to exercise a greater influence over decisions take by national authorities. The negotiations over research-university partnerships began in 1991, but their way had been prepared by an earlier effort ("University 2000") to plan and develop new structures for teaching in order to deal with the actual and projected increases in the student population, an effort involving local officials and actors. Against the background of generally centralized policy these efforts to bring together local actors and the centralized state are worthy of note.<sup>6</sup>

The process also has involved developing a new "tripartite" working relationship among the CNRS, the Ministry of Research and Education, and the local universities. This relationship resulted in, for example, a much more flexible budgetary process, and more importantly, in the better integration of the universities into the world of scientific research. For the first point, recall that many laboratories receive funding both from the CNRS and from the universities to which they are attached. Prior to 1995, each laboratory associated with CNRS had received funds each year from the CNRS and from the Ministry. The two national bodies did not coordinate these budgets between them, and indeed they followed entirely different funding rhythms. The ministry had begun to decide allocations of funds for universities on a four-year basis, a process called "contractualization" (*contractualisation*) of funding. However, the decisions of the CNRS remained annual and very bureaucratic; laboratories were simply informed of the decision after the fact. In this dual system, most often the universities had no information on the CNRS funds attributed to their associated laboratories. Not only was the procedure poorly coordinated, it also kept the most relevant local institution in the dark.

After 1995 the funding process was brought together under a new procedure, also called *contractualisation*, which not only gives the laboratories a greater say in their budgets and assures them of a longer period of funding, but also creates a structure for communication between the two sources of funding, the CNRS and the Ministry. Under this new system, the president of the university develops a proposal together with all the laboratories associated with the university. The proposal sets out a four-year scientific policy for the university, and the role of each laboratory in that policy. The president then negotiates for the

appropriate amount of money with the CNRS and the Ministry. In reality, the decisions taken by the CNRS and the Ministry regarding funding are made with the relative merits of each laboratory in mind, and the funds are attributed laboratory by laboratory. However, the new procedure requires that the university's scientific and administrative councils approve of the overall plan, and that for the first time the universities have institutional knowledge of the scientific work they support.<sup>7</sup>

### **The role of the “Maisons des sciences de l’homme” and the “MSH network” in decentralization**

Along with decentralization of research have come efforts to consolidate SHS research teams into larger “houses”. The model for this policy has been the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris, created in the 1960s by Fernand Braudel to promote communication among researchers from different disciplines. In fact, Braudel only succeed in obtaining approval for his project by reassuring the committee on decentralization (one already had been created!) that similar institutions could be developed in Bordeaux and Strasbourg. In the end, however, no formal institutions were created in those cities, only outposts of the Paris MSH.

Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s other research institutions were created that were more specialized in their objectives. Some of these were in the provinces, such as the *Institut de la renaissance* in Tours and the *Maison de l’Orient méditerranéen* in Lyon. The Lyon case was critical in developing a national effort. A professor at Lyon, Jean Pouilloux, decided to try and coordinate research among the several research teams studying the eastern Mediterranean, all located at Lyon but separated either by discipline (archeology, geology) or by funding status (CNRS teams, associated researchers). After having created this institute, Pouilloux became director of human sciences at the CNRS, and lent his support to another Lyon professor, the historian Maurice Garden, to develop a second research center, one that would group together several disciplines, especially in the human and social sciences. Garden emphasized the importance of developing space to house research laboratories, and was able to put to this use a building given to the university by the city of Lyon.<sup>8</sup>

The problem of finding research space long has plagued French researchers (and not only in the human and social sciences). Garden described to one of us how “we lived in closets, either in the basements or up in the attics; it was scandalous.” Because no one—linguists, economists, literary scholars, psychologists, sociologists, historians—had adequate space, the project involved

everyone, including both Lyon universities, Lyon 2 and Lyon 3, "who at the beginning did not speak, but then began to think that it was possible." In 1981, 3000 m<sup>2</sup> of space was readied, and "it was planned to create a 'maison des sciences de l'homme'; that was the title chosen." The MSH was given the legal status of a "group in the public interest" (*groupement d'intérêt public, GIP*), which has the legal status of a *personnalité morale*, treated as subject in law, unlike a laboratory or other research centers. Baptised the Maison Rhône-Alpes des Sciences de l'Homme, MRASH. Although this structure brought research units in Grenoble and Saint Etienne together with those in Lyon, it dissolved in 1995, and gave birth to two distinct maisons: *l'Institut des sciences de l'homme* at Lyon and the *Maison des sciences de l'homme Alpes* at Grenoble.

The next experiment in a MSH was in Nantes, where early in the 1990s Alain Supiot created the Maison Ange Guépin, which was intended to develop multi-disciplinary research on one specific theme, that of social relations. In this case, and in contrast to the MRASH, there was a research idea behind the creation of the Maison. The Maison was formally created, again as a GIP, in 1993. The various research groups associated with it retained their own separate facilities, and used the Maison's space for meetings, library space, and to house invited researchers.

At this point, in the mid-1990s, the story of creating Maisons rejoins that of decentralizing research. At the same time that these initial ventures took place, other universities were seeking ways to bring together their researchers in the field of SHS. They had some success in obtaining promises of financing from their towns and regions, and approached the Research Ministry for further assistance. At this point the CNRS intervened, agreeing to assist in building these Maisons if they were created around a scientific project, to give greater coherence and visibility to each such effort, and to prevent them from becoming simply spaces for individual researchers with no connection among them. Several such projects were launched, among them new Maisons des Sciences de l'Homme at Caen, Poitiers, Toulouse, and Aix en Provence.

These new projects in the provinces were all the more important that the Ministry had decided to build new universities in the Île de France in order to reduce crowding in Paris proper. These new universities held the danger of reconcentrating research around the Paris region. Yet the CNRS also receives continual appeals from Parisian researchers for the "renewal" of research, and therefore has undertaken several projects together with municipal governments and the region. In 1990 it developed a new Maison Archéologique to the west of Paris at Nanterre, justified by the dispersion of archeologists around the Paris region, and in 1995 it brought together three social science laboratories

to be housed in a new building at the École Normale Supérieure at Cachan, and later developed new SHS groupings at Villejuif, both sites south of Paris. The CNRS also has promised to support the creation of a laboratory associated with the new museum for non-Western art on the quai Branly.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, Claude Allegre, the Ministry of Education and Research, developed a policy of regional planning that would build up SHS research potential in the provinces through expanding existing Maisons or creating new ones. An important criterion for the policy was creating linkages and equilibria in the spatial distribution of research. In order to determine where new Maisons should be created, the Ministry has looked for cities where there was a good deal of research, and thus high potential, but where collaboration was poorly structured. This policy led to new Maisons initiated by the Ministry at Lille, Montpellier, and Strasbourg, and in the northern suburbs of Paris, at Saint Denis. Nice and Dijon also created new Maisons on their own initiative.

In order to strengthen the structure of research carried out through the Maisons, the Ministry also decided to create a network to link their activities. The network makes possible exchanges between Maisons in order to allow each to benefit from the specific expertise of others and, in particular, to facilitate cooperative projects, allow for student exchanges, and welcome foreign researchers in a multi-sited research context. The CNRS, the Minister of Research, and the universities that house Maisons have signed an agreement pertaining to the network, based on a *Charte des Maisons des sciences de l'homme*, which specifies the network's objectives.

The challenge to the network—and indeed to future French research in the human and social sciences—will lie in the capacity of these new institutions to stimulate flexible collaborations among research teams, both those inside and those external to the Maisons, that can initiate new, innovative research projects and respond to changing research opportunities. Developing these flexible linkages across the space of French research implies two significant changes in the ways in which French social scientists carry out their work: creating a greater degree of autonomy for research, and ensuring that the new research network finds its place in the new European research space now in creation (Godelier 2002).

## **Conclusion**

This overview of the changing institutional framework for French research in the social and human sciences reveals a striking paradox. Research in these areas is of long date, of high quality, and enjoys a high level of international recog-

nition, and it is highly structured, with strong positions in the universities and in such institutions as the CNRS and the École. And yet, this very high degree of structural development has led to an overly centralized system, a separation of teaching and research (impoverishing both), and a sense of financial and intellectual self-sufficiency, which in turn leads some researchers to ignore the importance of international communication. These rigidities in scientific practice result, we argue, from the particular sociogenesis of French research institutions in the social and human sciences.

In response to these rigidities has emerged a new set of policies aiming to decentralize research, bring together research and higher education, internationalize research, and introduce a new flexibility into scientific practices. These policies depend on procedures designed to make possible horizontal communication among research teams and their local "partners". They also arise at a time when French policy makers seem newly willing to engage in social changes in many domains that may over time radically transform long-standing social institutions. Recent changes in divorce law and inheritance, and the creation of non-marital partnerships (PACS), have altered and expanded forms of family and kinship. The growth of France's Muslim population has forced some to rethink the institutions defined by *laïcité* and the taken for granted role of Catholicism as the "background" religion of France. Migration and the creation of European-level forms of citizenship are leading to new ideas about electoral participation, geographical mobility, and local government. Devolution of certain powers to regions (as well as to the Corsican assembly) and the granting of some degree of recognition to regional languages betoken a rethinking of the relative weight of centralized control and regional or local autonomy.

In parallel with this general change in public policy, French research in the human and social sciences finds itself at the crossroads between turning in on its archaic structures, and deliberately orienting itself towards a rapidly changing international social world. Although fully aware of the constraints and difficulties involved, these recent policy developments give us reason to share the optimism of our French social science colleagues.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In writing this paper we have benefited from information offered by several colleagues, whom we thank for their assistance: Philippe Casella, Jacques Commaille, Maurice Garden, and Maurice Godelier.

<sup>2</sup>The titles and responsibilities of the ministry have changed twice in the past two years: from a single ministry for Education and Research in the late 1990s, to separate ministries for each

in 2000-2001, to, as of May 2002, a combined ministry of Youth, Education, and Research. Depending on the legislative elections of May-June 2002 and the composition of the new government, the ministry may well change a third time. In any case, Martine Bentaboulet continues to be affiliated with the "recherche" portion of the government, wherever it is formally positioned.

<sup>3</sup>Although the paper was read and rewritten by each of us, much of the first half was written initially by Bowen, and the second by Bentaboulet, and these portions reflect our respective disciplinary interests.

<sup>4</sup>According to Philippe Casella (personal communication), there were more sociologists in CNRS than at universities up to about 1976, after which the numbers were similar until the late 1980s, when the number employed at universities became clearly greater. Perhaps because of its apparent social relevance, sociology has been more successful in establishing itself in the French provincial universities than has anthropology, which remains largely limited to Paris and Aix-Marseille.

<sup>5</sup>At this point it is worthwhile to reemphasize that "social sciences" has slightly different referents in France and the United States; in the former it includes law (which has a long history in the universities) but sometimes excludes psychology.

<sup>6</sup>We mention in this regard the discussions and reflections launched by the minister Claude Allegre around the "university of the third millennium".

<sup>7</sup>Every four years the CNRS evaluates the research activities of each laboratory by requiring a report from a visiting committee.

<sup>8</sup>Garden's own thesis supervisor, the historian Pierre Léon, had himself made this argument, and indeed had created the first CNRS laboratory in history.

<sup>9</sup>In any case the rule specifying that 2/3 of all new research positions be located outside the Paris basin was lifted in 1996.

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