

Cui Bono Scientia Politica? A Multi-Dimensional Concept of Relevance and the Case of Political Science in Austria

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Abstract

Political scientists in many parts of the world have resumed the debate about the discipline's societal relevance in view of manifold political and social challenges. Unlike their international peers, political scientists in Austria have so far not undertaken a thorough reflection of the relevance that their work has beyond academia. Our special issue seeks to fill this gap in the self-reflection of political science in Austria by opening a debate about the conceptual, empirical, normative, and praxeological dimensions of (societal) relevance. This introductory article prepares the ground for the subsequent contributions to the special issue by giving a brief overview of the current debate about the relevance of political science, formulating the research questions that guide the special issue, and introducing a multi-dimensional concept of societal relevance. Building on the work of Van Aalsvoort (2004) and Stuckey et al. (2013), the article distinguishes between civic, professional, and political relevance of political science and discusses the discipline's historical development in Austria against the background of this conceptual framework.

Keywords

political science, relevance, concept, impact, society, Austria

Cui Bono Scientia Politica? Ein multi-dimensionales Konzept von Relevanz und der Fall der Politikwissenschaft in Österreich

Zusammenfassung

Angesichts einer Reihe von gesellschaftlichen und politischen Herausforderungen haben PolitikwissenschaftlerInnen in vielen Teil der Welt wieder die Debatte über die gesellschaftliche Relevanz der Disziplin aufgenommen. Im Gegensatz zu ihren internationalen KollegInnen, haben sich PolitikwissenschaftlerInnen in Österreich bis dato noch nicht systematisch und umfassend mit der Relevanz ihres Schaffens jenseits der Academia auseinandergesetzt. Unser Schwerpunktheft möchte durch die Beschäftigung mit den konzeptionellen, empirischen, normativen und praxeologischen Dimensionen von (gesellschaftlicher) Relevanz einen Beitrag zur Schließung dieser Lücke in der Selbstreflexion der Disziplin in Österreich leisten. Der Einleitungsartikel zu diesem Heft stellt einen Rahmen für die nachfolgenden Beiträge her, indem es kurz die aktuelle Debatte zur gesellschaftlichen Relevanz der Politikwissenschaft vorstellt, die erkenntnisleitenden Fragen des Heftes formuliert und ein multi-dimensionales Konzept gesellschaftlicher Relevanz entwickelt. Aufbauend auf den Arbeiten von Van Aalsvoort (2004) and Stuckey et al. (2013) unterscheidet der Einleitungsartikel zwischen staatsbürgerlicher, professioneller und politischer Relevanz der Politikwissenschaft und zeichnet die historische Entwicklung der Disziplin in Österreich vor dem Hintergrund dieser drei Dimensionen gesellschaftlicher Relevanz nach.

Schlüsselwörter

Politikwissenschaft, Relevanz, Konzept, gesellschaftlicher Einfluss, Österreich

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1. Introduction

Relentless criticism is worthy of free science alone, and every scientist must welcome it, even when it is directed at themselves.

Friedrich Engels

[E]specially in times like these, in which liberal democracy is challenged, we need political science not only in the ivory tower but also as a strong voice in the democratic public sphere.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier (2018)

Moments of crisis and transformation in societies and politics are important impulses for the advancement of the social sciences. They lead scholars to address new puzzles, to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, and to probe new methods of scientific inquiry. At the same time, these moments of uncertainty and change often raise questions within and beyond academia about the extent to which societies actually benefit from the output of social scientists. In other terms, these moments foster reflections about the societal relevance of the social sciences.

In political science, manifold and far-reaching developments such as the rise of populist and alternative-right movements, the European migration crisis, or the vote for Brexit have recently revived a process of (self-)reflection on the discipline's relevance beyond the ivory tower¹. This process has resulted in a remarkable number of books, articles and special issues which examine the discipline's societal (ir)relevance from two perspectives. In the first, *disciplinary perspective*, scholars inquire into factors that have led to an alienation between the discipline of political science and its sub-disciplines, on the one hand, and society and politics, on the other. In addition, these scholars also discuss a range of measures for overcoming the split between scholars, practitioners, and citizens (e.g. Byman/Kroenig 2016; Brooks 2013; Desch 2015 and the symposium in *Perspectives on Politics*; Flinders 2013 and the symposium in the *Political Studies Review*; Mead 2010; Nye 2009 Stoker et al. 2015b; Trent 2011 and the debate in *European Political Science*; Zambernardi 2016). In the second, *national perspective*, scholars zoom in on the relevance of political science within different national contexts such as the United States (Smith 2015), Great Britain (Donovan/Larkin 2006; Wood 2014 and the special forum in *Politics*), Australia (Cherney et al. 2013), Italy (Capano/Verzichelli 2016), and Germany (Decker/Jesse 2016 and the debate in the *FAZ*², Fröhlich

et al. 2017 and the forum in the *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*; Probst 2016, Kielmannsegg 2016³).

While political scientist in these and other countries have turned a critical eye on the societal relevance of their doing, and have, at times, entered into heated public debates, their peers in Austria have remained surprisingly silent on this matter. This absence of a thorough and systematic engagement with the impact of political science in Austria is all the more astonishing given the comparatively large number of publications that take stock of the discipline's history and current state (Bartenberger 2012; Brand/Kramer 2011; Ehs 2010a; Karlhofer/Plasser 2012; König 2011; König/Ehs 2012; Sauer 2016; Sickinger 2004; Hummer 2015)⁴. Our special issue takes a first step towards closing this gap in the self-reflection of political science in Austria and thus seeks to contribute to both the contextual and the disciplinary perspective in the debate about the relevance of political science.

A thorough reflection on the societal relevance of political science in Austria should unfold within and beyond the discipline and it should address four key questions. The first, conceptual question is *what we mean by the societal relevance of political science?* A critical engagement with the relevance of political science in Austria presupposes a concise and shared understanding of "relevance", that is, a sound conceptual foundation that provides an overarching framework for the debate. As Giovanni Sartori emphasizes in his work on concepts in political science: "long before having data which can speak for themselves the fundamental articulation of language and of thinking is obtained logically—by cumulative conceptual refinement and chains of coordinated definitions—not by measurement. Measurement of what? We cannot measure unless we know first what it is that we are measuring" (Sartori 1970, 1038).

The second, normative question is *whether political science in Austria ought to be societally relevant?* The case for the societal relevance of the discipline is far from obvious or uncontroversial, and the debate about societal relevance "is ultimately about the identity of the profession" (Stoker et al. 2015a, 4), about whether political scientists see themselves as disengaged observers or engaged actors in politics and society. Contributions that address this normative question should inquire into (contemporary) needs for an outreaching discipline as well as into the obligations and responsibilities that scholars of politics have vis-à-vis society.

¹ For earlier debates see, for example, George (1993), Flyvbjerg (2001), Lepgold/Nincic (2001), and Putnam (2003).

² See Bethke (2016) and Huhnholz (2016).

³ See also the broader debate on policy advice/counseling in Germany in Falk et al. (2007), Koppo/Schlölzel (2009), and Siefken (2010).

⁴ This is not to suggest, however, that an awareness for the necessity of societal relevance has been entirely absent from the debate about political science in Austria. See, for example, Brand/Kramer (2011) and Pelinka (2004).

The third, empirical question is *whether political science in Austria is societally relevant?* In their engagement with this question, contributions to the debate should not only take stock of the discipline's current relevance but also identify factors that build or burn bridges between academia and society. Finally, the fourth, praxeological question is *how political science in Austria can enhance its societal relevance?* Building on the results of the conceptual and empirical analysis, contributions should also discuss a number of measures through which the discipline can increase its visibility and impact beyond academia. The articles in this special issue address all of these questions and thus provide a theoretical, empirical, and methodological point of departure for a thorough debate on the societal relevance of the political science in Austria.

This debate about the discipline's societal relevance is necessary and long overdue in view of numerous and profound changes and challenges that (will) affect Austrian politics and society. In global politics, we are witnessing the retreat of the United States as the guardian of international order and the gradual erosion of traditional alliance structures which, once again, raise questions about the respective roles and capabilities of the European Union and its member states. In European politics, the vote for Brexit, the issue of transnational migration, and the rise of populist and autocratic tendencies throughout Europe are challenging the vision and process of European integration. These populist tendencies are interlinked with a growing skepticism of knowledge production in academia or even outright anti-intellectualism. In Austrian politics, the political culture appears to transform towards a more confrontational style of politics and the party system is fragmenting. So Ulrich Brand and Helmut Kramer were right in emphasizing on the pages of this journal in 2011 that "in view of the deep crisis of democracy and politics in Austria and the international system [political science has] a considerable scholarly and political responsibility [translation by the authors]" (Brand/Kramer 2011, 321). Analyzing whether the discipline is living up to this responsibility and outlining measures to overcome respective deficiencies is the subject of this special issue. We hope that our set of articles will encourage political scientists, scholars in other disciplines, practitioners of politics as well as media and business representatives, graduates of political science, and citizens to contribute an open and frank exchange on this matter.

Our introductory article addresses the first, conceptual question and thus provides a conceptual point of reference for the subsequent articles in this special issue. It unfolds in five steps. First, we build on Gary Goertz (2005) and his framework of three-level concepts to develop a multi-dimensional concept of relevance that systematically proceeds from a very general and

abstract level to the level of empirical indicators. In this context, we also include a brief sketch of normative arguments for the societal relevance of political science. Second, we discuss the development and current state of political science in Austria against the background of this conceptual framework, that is, we recount the discipline's history as a struggle over and for different types of relevance. Third, we introduce the articles of our special issue against the background of our conceptual framework. Fourth and finally, we conclude this introductory article by reviewing our arguments, pointing to avenues for further research, and sketching a number of measures for promoting the image and value of political science beyond the ivory tower.

2. The Concept of Relevance

In our development of a concept of relevance we build on the work of Goertz (2005) and his distinction between three conceptual levels. The *basic level* of a concept includes a term that gives the concept its name and a very abstract understanding of the phenomenon that the concept seeks to capture. In addition, the basic level also introduces the concept's negative pole or opposite and the relationship between the positive and negative poles, that is, whether the relationship is dichotomous or continuous (Goertz 2005, 30). The *secondary level* of a concept features assumptions about the constitutive elements of a phenomenon and how they are related to one another⁵. The third level or *data level* establishes the link between a theoretical concept and the empirical manifestations of a phenomenon by translating the constitutive elements into a set of indicators (Goertz 2005, 6-7). In addition to this three-level framework, our engagement with the concept of relevance also follows the premise that concepts in the social sciences should not make normative judgments, that they "should be *as non-normative as possible*" (Dowding 2016, 194; see also Carter 2015)⁶. Although we seek to develop a non-normative concept of relevance on the basis of Goertz' three conceptual levels, we also deem it important to touch on the normative dimension of relevance, that is, the question of why societal relevance ought to be a part of the discipline's identity and why scholars should bother thinking about their relevance beyond academia. So we will briefly introduce a set of normative arguments towards the end of this section.

⁵ See also Felix Berenskoetter's (2016, 4) understanding that "a concept catches and bundles multiple elements, aspects or experiences and relates them to each other".

⁶ This premise is, of course, not uncontested. As Carter (2015, 283) notes in this context, scholars following an alternative understanding of concepts "deny that any political concept can be value neutral in this way. The point of political concepts like freedom, power and justice, they say, is to make ethical evaluations".

As a point of departure for our basic-level conceptualization, we use definitions of “relevance” or “being relevant” in standard dictionaries. The German *Duden* defines relevance very broadly as “significance or importance in a particular context” (Duden 2018) as does the *Oxford English Dictionary* with its definition as “[t]he quality or state of being closely connected or appropriate” (Oxford 2018). The *Cambridge Dictionary* is more specific by defining relevance as “the degree to which something is related or useful to what is happening or being talked about” (Cambridge 2018).

These definitions include three useful elements for a basic-level concept of relevance. First, relevance is about being related or connected to something, although this criterion of relatedness is by itself not sufficient for a basic understanding of relevance. For instance, a scholar who connects her work to a larger debate but does not affect the debate in the sense of being noticed and reacted to by other participants cannot plausibly claim to have made a relevant contribution. So, second, and as the *Duden* and *Cambridge Dictionary* definitions suggest, relevance is not only about being related to something but also about making a difference in something. Third, as the *Cambridge Dictionary's* definition also suggests, relevance is a continuous concept as there are different degrees to which someone or something can make a difference.

Combining these three fundamental aspects, we propose the following basic-level concept of relevance: *relevance means that two or more factors are interrelated in the sense that a factor (X) influences the state of at least one other factor (Y) to various degrees.* In other terms, Y would be different without X. This abstract concept of relevance includes both causal and constitutive relationships between factors. Broadly speaking, a causal relationship exists if X as a cause (partially) accounts for the existence of Y as an effect⁷ such as in the case of a shifting balance of power between two states (X) that leads to a war between them (Y). In a constitutive relationship, X is a feature of Y, it contributes to the nature of Y. For example, “sustained and coordinated violence” (Levy/Thompson 2010, 5) or a formal declaration of a state of war are relevant features of war but, unlike shifts in the balance of power, they are not causes of it.

Developing this abstract basic-level concept further into a secondary-level concept and thus making it usable for empirical work requires us to flesh out the nature of the involved factors as well as to clarify the (causal or constitutive) nature of the relationship between these factors. Given the overall goal of this special issue, the first factor is the academic discipline of political science in the national context of Austria. We define the disci-

pline of political science as *the systematic, self-reflexive, and institutionalized engagement with politics*⁸. The key element of this definition is “politics” as the research object or distinct research interest that establishes and delimits the discipline as a distinct field within the larger field of science. So what fundamentally makes a political scientist is her interest in politics as the process of organizing human groups on the basis of collectively binding rules, and the interacting of such groups⁹.

While this preoccupation with politics distinguishes political science from other disciplines, the mode of engaging with this subject is what distinguishes political scientists from practitioners of politics and non-scholarly observers of politics such as journalists or interested citizens. As our definition suggests, this mode of political science has three elements. First, it is systematic in the sense that the members of the discipline identify political phenomena and use a continuously evolving set of methodologies and methods to develop a body of (empirical and normative) theories and empirical data on these phenomena. This is not to suggest, however, that political science has developed in isolation. On the contrary, it has integrated the insights of a variety of disciplines such as history, law, psychology, philosophy, economics or sociology throughout its history¹⁰.

Second, the discipline is self-reflexive on both its status as a distinct branch of science (i.e., its identity) and its systematic engagement with political phenomena (i.e., the production of knowledge). So a discipline consists of scholars who not only share an interest in the same research object but who also perceive and identify themselves as members of a distinct community and make efforts to agree on procedures and criteria for assuring and assessing the quality of knowledge production. Although the debate about quality standards is far from over in political science (e.g., Hix 2004; Donovan 2009; Garand et al. 2009; Johnston 2009; McLean et al. 2009; Russell 2009; Weale 2009; Garand/Giles 2011; Allen/Heath 2013; Esarey 2017) and other social sciences, we argue that high-quality scholarship follows at least four fundamental standards: it critically engages with existing work within and (ideally) beyond a discipline and makes an original contribution to our knowledge; it presents its research design, process and findings in a comprehensive and comprehensible way; it makes its data available; and it undergoes rigorous peer-review.

Third, and finally, the discipline of political science is an institutionalized way of thinking about politics. Political scientists have built departments within universi-

7 See Brady (2011) for a detailed discussion of causality in the social sciences.

8 This understanding of an academic discipline builds on the work of Stichweh (1994, 16-20).

9 This definition builds on Keohane (2009, 359). See also Patzelt (2013, 22). For an overview of alternative definitions see Meyer (2000, 16-17).

10 See also the article by Decker et al. (2018) in this issue.

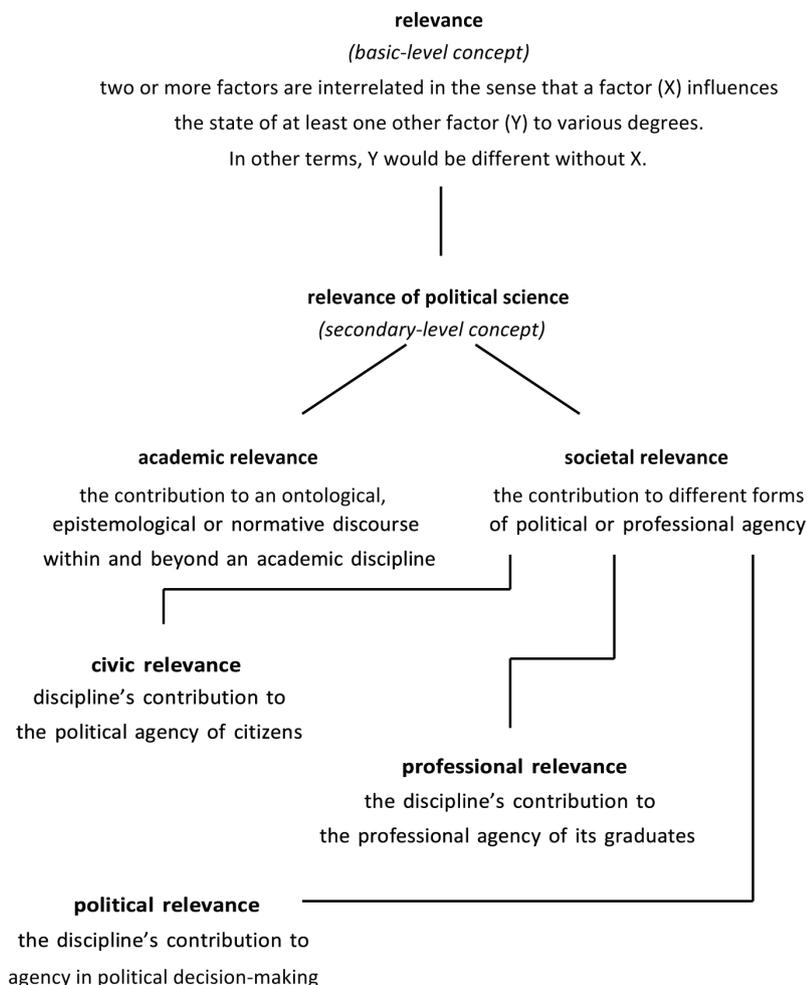
ties and extramural research institutions, they have developed curricula on political science, and have founded professional associations as well as professional journals.

To be considered relevant, the discipline of political science would have to have a causal influence on the state of two other factors: 1) the broader transnational discipline of political science and other academic disciplines, and 2) society and politics in Austria and beyond. So we can distinguish between *academic relevance* as the contribution to an ontological, epistemological or normative discourse within and beyond an academic discipline¹¹, and *societal relevance* as the contribution to public sense-making and action (Flinders 2015, 73; Peters 2015, 171). In other terms, we can understand societal relevance as a contribution to different forms of political and professional agency. Although academic and societal relevance are analytically distinct, they are by no means separated or mutually exclusive. As Ennser-Jedenastik et al. (2018)

argue in this issue, high-quality research that seeks to answer the big and burning questions of politics and society is a strong foundation for achieving relevance beyond academia.

A detailed inquiry into the constitutive elements of academic relevance and into the respective performance of political science in Austria is beyond the purpose and scope of our article. We therefore continue our conceptual discussion by focusing on societal relevance and by introducing three types of societal relevance (see figure 1 below) that build on the work of Van Aalsvoort (2004) and Stuckey et al. (2013). In our engagement with these three types of societal relevance, we 1) offer a definition of the respective type, 2) identify indicators for its empirical analysis, 3) point to different causal mechanism through which political scientists can achieve this type of societal relevance, and 4) list a number of methods for generating data on the different indicators.

Figure 1: The relevance of political science – concept and definitions



¹¹ This definition of academic relevance builds on Lehnert et al. (2011, 23).

The first type of societal relevance is *civic relevance*, which we understand as the discipline's contribution to the political agency of citizens. Indicators for civic relevance would be that political scientists raise the awareness of citizens for political phenomena and help them in making sense of these phenomena – in other terms that political scientists enhance the “political literacy” (Flinders 2015, 73) of citizens. A further indicator would be that political scientists succeed in encouraging citizens to “become subjects, rather than objects, of the world and society they live in” (Stuckey et al. 2013, 10; see also Flinders 2015, 73), that is, to take different forms of political action such as using the right to vote, appealing to their member of parliament, supporting civic initiatives, or hitting the streets in protest. Political scientists have a number of mechanisms for achieving this type of relevance at their disposal. These include, for example, contributions in traditional media (interviews, op-ed pieces), new media formats such as podcasts or Twitter, participation in public debates or lectures, or (web-based) courses and material in political education.

To generate data on these indicators of civic relevance, future studies could use a broad range of methods. As first step, and to take stock of the mechanism through which political scientists disseminate their findings to the public, studies could use the database of the Austrian Press Agency (APA 2018) for articles and mentions in print media as well a survey among political scientists on their presence in TV and radio broadcasts. In addition, studies could track the activity of political scientists on new-media platforms such as Twitter¹². As a second step and to move towards the analysis of the actual relevance, studies could use web-based services such as *Altmetric* to track the mentions of academic work in tweets, blogs, Wikipedia entries, and other media formats¹³. To get a better picture of the extent to which the input of political scientist actually affects the thinking and acting of citizens, studies could use questionnaires or interviews to ask citizens about whether and how they have been exposed to input from political scientists and to what effect, i.e., whether the input that they have received contributed to their understanding of political phenomena or motivated them to take different forms of political action¹⁴.

The second type is *professional relevance*, which we define as the contribution of political science to the professional agency of its graduates¹⁵. Contributing to a professional career means that the discipline equips students with knowledge and skills that enable them to

be self-employed or make them attractive for employees in the realm of politics (e.g., in parties, diplomacy, or NGOs) and beyond (e.g., in the media or the economic sector). Like civic relevance, we conceive professional relevance as a spectrum with different degrees of impact on the professional life of students and thus different indicators for this type of relevance. To the lowest degree, political science is relevant if holding an academic title helps graduates in their transition into the job market. Another indicator for relevance is that graduates can profit from formal and informal networks that they built or joined during their time at university. Political science is more relevant if its graduates can successfully apply generic skills such as researching and systematizing material or preparing and implementing presentations and most relevant if graduates can use a set of discipline-specific skills, theories and methods in their professional life. Mechanisms for achieving professional relevance include career events and excursions to potential employers, programs or curricular elements on “applied politics” (Bacon 2018, 100-101) and “applied political research” as well as activities at the level of individual courses such the writing of policy-oriented texts (Pennock 2011; Smith 2016) and simulation games (Bridge/Radford 2014; Raiser et al. 2015).

In the case of professional relevance, a process of data generation would have to distinguish between employers and political-science students as employees. For the employer side, scholars would have to work with questionnaires or interviews to uncover which images of and experiences with political science graduates employers are holding and whether a degree in political science increases or decreases the chances of graduates to get hired. For the employee side, and as the contribution by Gatt et al. (2018) in this issue demonstrates, scholars would have to collect and evaluate statistical data on income, rate and duration of unemployment, and rates of employment in different job sectors to get a handle on the overall situation of graduates in the job market. In addition, they would have to use questionnaires or interviews to analyze how graduates experience the added value of their academic degree, networks, skills, and knowledge.

The third and final type of *political relevance* has received by far the most attention in the debate about the discipline's relevance. While existing definitions of this type focus on the impact that scholarship in political science has on political decision-makers (e.g., Siefken 2010; Byman/Kroenig 2016, 293), we propose a broader understanding of political relevance as a contribution to the process of political decision-making, that is, different degrees of impact on those actors who are entitled to make decisions (i.e., direct policy relevance) and those that seek to influence decision-making such as lobbying groups or non-governmental organizations (i.e.,

12 See the recent work by Costas et al. (2017) for different research designs in the analysis of scholarly activity on Twitter.

13 The Austrian Science Fund (FWF) is currently testing the applicability of *Altmetric*. See Reimann (2017).

14 See, for example, the recent study by Coppock et al. (2018) on the impact of op-eds on elites and the mass public in the United States.

15 See also the contribution by Gatt et al. (2018) in this issue.

Table 1: Types of Societal Relevance

Type	Definition	Indicators (political science ...)	Data Generation
Civic relevance	Contribution to political agency of citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ raises citizens' awareness of political phenomena ▪ helps citizens making sense of political phenomena ▪ encourages citizens to take political action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ descriptive statistics (APA database, survey among political scientists, activity on new media platforms, Altmetric) ▪ questionnaires or interviews with citizens (on exposure to work of political scientists, influence of ideas on thinking and acting)
Professional Relevance	Contribution to professional agency of graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ provides graduates with an academic degree that facilitates transition into job market ▪ supports graduates in building (in)formal networks ▪ provides graduates with applicable generic skills (e.g., researching and systematizing material) ▪ provides graduates with applicable discipline-specific skills and knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ questionnaire or interviews with employers (on image of and experience with graduates) ▪ descriptive statistics (on income and employment of graduates) ▪ questionnaire and interviews with graduates (on added value of degree, networks, skills and knowledge)
Political Relevance	Contribution to agency in political decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ catches the attention of relevant actors but is discarded ▪ becomes part of deliberation but is discarded ▪ influences outcomes of decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ survey among political scientists (on invitations for political counseling) ▪ content analysis of policy documents (on input from political scientists) ▪ descriptive statistics (from <i>Altmetric</i> on input from political scientists) ▪ surveys among actors in political decision-making (on extent to which they draw on input from political scientists)

indirect policy relevance). As far as the indicators for political relevance are concerned, we draw on the work of Byman/Kroenig (2016, 294) who argue that scholarship can be ignored, it can come to the attention of relevant actors but be discarded for a number of reasons (too abstract, impractical, etc.), it can be part of the political deliberation but be discarded in its course, or it can influence actual policy as the outcome of the political process¹⁶. Byman/Kroenig (2016) also note that the mechanisms for achieving political relevance are manifold. They may include direct counseling of actors (i.e., politicians as well as pressure-groups and NGOs), writing policy briefs and op-ed pieces, including passages on practical relevance or policy recommendations into journal articles, or exposing actors to scholarship during their time as students.

Methods for generating data on the indicators of political relevance include surveys among political scientists on invitations they received to directly advise political actors or to participate in parliamentary hearings. In this context, future studies could also use protocols as well as drafts and final versions of policy documents to analyze the extent to which the input of political scientist shaped the policy-making process and its outcome. As in the case of civic relevance, studies could also draw on *Altmetric* or natural language processing to measure whether the research of political scientists is included in policy-related documents (Bornmann et al. 2016). Finally, studies could also include surveys of political actors to gain insights on whether and how they have drawn on the knowledge of political scientists.

In this context, it is also necessary to reflect upon and implement measures for the professionalization of the above-mentioned outreach mechanisms. We can-

¹⁶ For a similar scale see Cherney et al. (2013, 784).

not discuss these measures in detail within the confines of this article, but we want to emphasize that they will have to operate at the level of individual scholars (e.g., through training in science communication or media relations) but also, if not more importantly, at the level of academic institutions. To achieve sustained professionalization, outreach efforts would have to be more of an asset than an embellishment for evaluations and decisions about tenure. In addition, academic institutions would have to think about a division of labor in outreach. The ideal scholar manages to be a cutting-edge researcher, inspiring teacher, deft administrator *and* an articulate communicator. Yet, of course, the real world is often quite different from this ideal. Moreover, scholars may not want to devote too much of their precious time to keeping up with the latest trends in science communication or mastering the newest technologies in this field. So it would make sense for academic institutions to invest into trained and skilled personnel that is in charge of different outreach mechanisms and supports scholars in their respective activities.

We conclude this section on the concept of relevance with a brief overview of normative arguments for why political science ought to be relevant for politics and society, that is, why societal relevance ought to be a constitutive element of the discipline of political science and why political scientists ought to reflect on the relevance of their work. In our view, the case for the societal relevance of political science rests in three arguments. A first, “contract” (Hessels et al. 2009) argument for societal relevance is that scholars working at publicly-funded research institutions or receiving taxpayers’ money through research grants or scholarships have an obligation to make the results of their work available to the benefit of those who make it possible in the first place. A second, “responsibility” argument is that individuals with the skills and expertise to decipher complex political phenomena ought to apply them to the benefit of their environment.¹⁷ A third and final argument for the societal relevance of political science is “demand”. The challenges of post-factualism¹⁸, anti-academism¹⁹, (nationalist) populism, and anti-democratism require political scientist to contribute to the public debate about politics as authoritative and reasonable voices. After all, contributing to the strengthening of democratic governance should be in the self-interest of the discipline, as

Anton Pelinka emphatically warns us in his contribution to this special issue: “The freedom of political science will always be among the first victims of authoritarian tendencies” (Pelinka 2018, 84).

3. Political Science in Austria and its Quest for Relevance

The history of political science in Austria is closely linked to the discussion of and quest for its relevance. As we will outline in this section, all types of relevance (i.e., academic relevance as well as civic, professional and political relevance as the three types that constitute societal relevance) have shaped the evolution of the discipline and its institutionalization in many different ways. Most authors date the birth of political science in Austria to the 1960s and early 1970s (Sickinger 2004; Sauer 2016) and hence describe the establishment of the discipline as delayed compared to the United States, France or even Germany (Pelinka, 2004 99). Others, however, conceive various attempts of legal, economic and sociological scholars to address matters of state affairs in the 1920s (Heinisch 2004) or even before (Ehs 2010a) as predecessors of (modern) political science.

We argue that evolution and development of political science in Austria has evolved in five distinct phases²⁰: 1) a *pre-disciplinary phase* with a focus on the political relevance of the study of state affairs, 2) a *phase of the social-scientification* of the study of political and societal phenomena with a focus on civic and political relevance, 3) a *phase of conservative backlash* with a rejection of modern social sciences and an advocacy of a reactionary and status-quo oriented interpretation of political relevance, 4) a *phase of institutionalization* with a nascent self-perception of scholars as political scientists, the founding of political-science departments and study programs, and a focus on civic, professional, and academic relevance, and finally 5) a *phase of (re)integration and self-reflection*, in which political scientists in Austria broaden and deepen their ties to the transnational discipline and start to engage in a debate on their academic relevance, but, as we noted at the beginning of this article, still hesitate to systematically inquire into the societal relevance of their work.

The protohistory of political science in Austria starts with the establishment of a chair for police and camera-ism – “Polizey und Kameralwissenschaften” (Ehs 2010a, 226) – at the law school of the University of Vienna in 1763. The purpose of this chair was to educate efficient

17 Scholars of responsibility in science have labeled this the “external responsibility” of scientists, whereas the label of “internal responsibility” refers to rightful, ethical conduct in the process of research or research ethic. See, for example, Forge (2008, 3).

18 For a discussion of the nexus between post-factualism and politics see, for example, Hendriks/Vestergaard (2017) and the other contributions to the issue on “Wahrheit” in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*.

19 For a discussion of anti-academism see, for example Engelmeier/Fesch (2017) and the other contributions in the issue on “Antiakademismus” in *Mittelweg* 36.

20 By distinguishing five phases in the development of political science in Austria, we offer a more fine-grained account than the existing literature, which distinguishes between the three broad stages of “legitimization”, “institutionalization”, and “accommodation”(see, for example König 2015).

civil servants and citizens that would obey to the policies of the state. So, in this *pre-disciplinary phase*, the state promoted academic research on state affairs and a respective institution with both political and civic relevance. In subsequent years, societal and political changes such as the industrial revolution and the expansion of suffrage further increased calls for adequate, science-based engagement with society and politics. However, it was not until 1919 that the Social Democratic dominated government of Austria's First Republic enabled the study of the science of the state ("Staatswissenschaften") at law schools alongside the traditional study of law (Ehs 2010a, 228) and thereby initiated the *phase of the social-scientification* of the study of political and societal phenomena in Austria. Unlike students of law, students of the newly established science of the state focused more on political and economic issues and were introduced to the ideas of Austrian national economists, Austria's first social scientists in the modern sense. The proponents of this school pursued a progressive agenda and called for the civic and political relevance of their doings. They sought to contribute to a better understanding of societal, political and economic processes in nation states and to give advice to political decision-makers.

In the early 1920s, these progressive developments were halted and even reversed with the ouster and replacement of the Social Democratic Worker's Party by a new government dominated by the Christian Social Party. In this *phase of conservative backlash*, the new political decision-makers and their conservative followers were opposed to the nascent empirical social sciences and their claim for civic relevance. In a fierce ideological struggle between "hegemonic, conservative "blacks"" and "socialist and progressive "reds"" (Wasserman 2014, 3), the reactionary forces succeeded and thus successfully marginalized the proponents of the pulsating Austrian national economics. Conservative professors who rejected social scientific approaches then dominated the study of the science of the state. Although this (conservative) science of the state was still striving for political relevance, it understood political relevance not in terms of a critique of current power relations but rather in terms of their legitimization. As a consequence, social sciences in the empirical and critical tradition had to develop outside universities ("extramural") in private societies and homes, and were only supported by the city of Vienna, which was then governed by the Social Democratic Worker's Party (Ehs 2010a, 229-231).

The rejection of the idea of the civic relevance for a science of the state and the repudiation of an empirical social science contributed to the development of an anti-intellectual environment that gradually forced then and future academic giants to leave their homes in Austria (as well as other Central European countries) and to seek asylum in the United Kingdom or the United States.

Scholars like Joseph Schumpeter or Paul Lazarsfeld, who engaged in ground-breaking research on democracy and elections, left Austria, as did the representatives of the Austrian School of Economics like Friedrich August von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, one of the "founders" of game and decision theory, Oscar Morgenstern (Heinisch 2004, 72-73), as well as the legal and political philosopher Hans Kelsen (Appelt/Pollak 2007; Ehs 2010b). So the counterfactual thought experiment that, absent the reactionary environment and policies, Austria could have become the home of a vibrant and progressive academic scene, in which political science would have developed into a discipline longing not only for civic and political but also for academic relevance, is not entirely illusory. However, at least since the beginning of Austro-fascist rule, the development of a modern political science was rendered impossible.

With the end of Nazi terror in Europe in 1945, Austria did not seek to re-attract its former academic elite or to reinvigorate the establishment of a modern political science. In contrast to Germany, where the allied occupation (at least in the British, the French and, in particular, in the American sectors) established political science for re-education purposes and as a science of democracy (placing their hope on the civic and political relevance of the discipline), Austria portrayed itself as the first victim of Nazi aggression and therefore saw no need for the political accounting of the past (Pelinka 2004, 99). Instead, political decision-makers seamlessly continued with blocking the establishment of modern social sciences. The Austrian People's Party, the party in charge of the department of education that was also responsible for universities, understood science as a form of cultural policy and hence propagated the traditional christian law of nature (König 2010, 227). These conservatives were still skeptical of modern social sciences and their claims for civic and political relevance (Sickinger 2004, 30), some even voiced anti-Semitic sentiments and criticized the social sciences for having a revolutionary agenda (Heinisch 2004, 73).

The alleged subversive character of modern political science led some law professors to call on universities to bar the discipline from its studies (König/Ehs 2012, 212). It is therefore not surprising that Lazarsfeld criticized the poor state of political science in Austria in a report to the Ford Foundation in 1960 (Heinisch 2004, 74). Political science as a discipline was essentially non-existent in Austria and those trying to portray themselves as scholars in this field were not academically relevant. Despite, or maybe because of this lack of academic relevance, the Ford-Foundation pushed for the institutionalization of competitive social sciences and especially political science in Austria. But because of a failure to draft a proper proposal to get the required money from the foundation and because of the resistance from conservative circles

at the University of Vienna, the institutionalization of political science was further delayed until 1963.²¹

The founding of the Institute for Advanced Studies (the Institut für Höhere Studien – IHS) was a milestone for the discipline of political science in Austria because it triggered the *phase of institutionalization* of political science as a distinct discipline in Austria. It is not surprising that the institute was established outside universities (Sickinger 2004, 32–36). To tame the new institute and to prevent it from becoming a hotbed of revolutionary ideas, both the Austrian People's Party and the Social Democratic Party agreed on a proportional power-sharing within the directorate. No single party should be able to dominate the agenda of this think tank and to misuse it for its own political purposes. However, both parties could agree on what they saw as the political relevance of the institute: it should mainly focus in its research on Austrian corporatism and hence be of use for political decision-makers.

With the parliamentary elections of 1970 and the beginning of the Social Democratic era, political science in Austria clearly benefited from a new and progressive political and intellectual environment. The Social Democratic minority government desperately needed expertise for its reforms and therefore eagerly sought the advice of political scientists. Eventually, this engendered the institutionalization of political science at Austrian universities where new chairs and departments were founded in Vienna (1971), Salzburg (1971/75), and Innsbruck (1975) (Sickinger 2004, 47–54).

In Vienna, the establishment of political science at the university caused a reaction from conservative circles. To counter the claim of the new department to solely represent political science at the University of Vienna and to ensure the training of students in line with the legal tradition, the law school established its own department of government (Institut für Staatswissenschaften) as an explicit antipole to the department of political science (Institut für Politikwissenschaft – IPW). Yet the newly established department of government used the opportunity provided by the reform of the university act in 1975 and left the law school to join the school of business, economics and social sciences. As a consequence, the University of Vienna is still home to two political-science departments with different orientations to this day. While the department of political science has predominantly focused on critical political science and gender studies (Sauer 2016) and has thus sought to advance the civic relevance of the discipline, the department of government has traditionally focused on empirical social science and the academic relevance of political science (Sickinger 2004, 54–65).

The 1970s were crucial for the institutionalization of the discipline in an additional way. In 1970, the Austrian Society for Political Science (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politikwissenschaft, the ÖGPW) was founded. From the very beginning, the ÖGPW took up the cause of the civic and professional relevance of the discipline: political science and the ÖGPW as its professional society had to foster the democratization of Austrian society and its political system (Welan 1992, 446) and to support graduates of political science to find adequate jobs with their education (Sickinger 2004, 42–47). By the 1980s, political science in Austria was firmly established at three universities with four departments and distinct study programs. Nevertheless, critical voices from the ministry of science questioned the professional relevance of the discipline and threatened to cut budgets or at least prevent any future increase. The discipline was not seen fit enough to “produce” well trained graduates for the labor market. But despite these fears, the number of political science students in Austria has permanently increased until today (König 2011, 82–83).

In the fifth and final *phase of (re)integration and self-reflection*, scholars in Austria have started to foster their ties to the transnational discipline of political science as well as to critically reflect on the academic and societal relevance of their work. According to Pelinka (2004, 100), the delayed institutionalization of political science in Austria resulted in a predominant focus on Austrian politics and a certain reluctance of political scientists in Austria to engage with their international peers. As Ennser-Jedenastik et al. (2018) note in their article, this situation has changed profoundly with a growing number of international publications and an influx of international scholars, through which political science in Austria has become increasingly integrated and visible in the transnational discipline. At the same time, the institutionalized discipline has engaged in a process of self-reflection in which a number of scholars have inquired into the history of the discipline and have debated its scholarly achievements, potentials, and limitations (Bartenberger 2012; Brand/Kramer 2011; Ehs 2010a; Karlhofer/Plasser 2012; König 2011; König/Ehs 2012; Sauer 2016; Sickinger 2004; Hummer 2015). In this process of self-reflection, a few scholars have pointed to the importance of the discipline's relevance beyond academia (Heinisch 2004; Brand/Kramer 2011; Pelinka 2004) but a systematic and thorough engagement with this important issue is still pending.

To sum up, the development and institutionalization of political science in Austria has been intertwined with the quest for relevance. Throughout its history, it was somewhat torn between reacting to political demands, seeing its main task in civic education and support of a democratic society, fighting for professional relevance, and trying hard to boost its academic relevance. Balanc-

21 See Fleck (2000) for a detailed description of the establishment of the IHS.

ing these at times contradictory forces will be a major challenge for the discipline in Austria in the coming years.

4. Contributions to the Special Issue

Our special issue features two sections which address the issue of relevance from an inside and an outside perspective as well as a third section with concluding remarks. The first section, in which political scientists engage with the relevance of their discipline, opens with a contribution by Philipp Decker, David F. J. Campbell and Jürgen Braunstein. The three authors focus on the interplay between the interdisciplinarity of political science and its relevance. By tracing the historical development of political science in Austria, they argue that the discipline has boosted its relevance whenever it addressed the big questions of politics and society. According to Decker et al., the successful engagement with these questions in turn hinges on the innovative incorporation of theoretical and methodological input from neighboring disciplines into the research projects of political scientists. A lack of interdisciplinary research therefore undermines the capacity of political scientists to do problem-oriented research and thus has a negative effect on the political, professional and civic relevance of the discipline. As a consequence, Decker et al. recommend political science in Austria to focus more on research in interdisciplinary clusters that scrutinize major problems of politics and societies from different angles but with one overarching research interest.

The importance of focusing on big questions is also at the center of the contribution by Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik, Thomas M. Meyer and Markus Wagner. The authors proceed from the finding that political science in Austria has become more internationally oriented (i.e., increasingly participating in international debates by publishing in SSCI-ranked journals) and more open (i.e., integrating more academics from abroad in its universities and research institutions) but they critically note that these trends do not automatically increase the discipline's relevance. Instead, the authors argue, the discipline's overall relevance increases through a dynamic interplay between academic and societal relevance. In this context, Ennser-Jedenastik et al. identify four factors through which political science can enhance its relevance. First, political scientists should focus on big questions and the importance of problems. Second, they should seek to generalize their findings and make them applicable to several other cases. Third, they should design and implement rigorous research designs that not only describe political phenomena but also seek to explain them and uncover causal linkages. Finally, the authors call on political scientists to make findings

available not only to their peers in high-quality journals but also to policy-makers and the broader public via the so-called "third-mission".

In the third and final contribution from an inside perspective, Sabine Gatt, Lore Hayek and Christian Huemer shift the focus on the professional and civic relevance of the discipline. In their pilot study, the authors draw on data from the IHS graduate monitoring as well as on semi-structured interviews with graduates, and present a number of interesting findings on the professional and civic qualities of graduates in political science. By and large, students of political science are highly integrated into the job market even before graduation and a high number of graduates finds a job soon after their graduation. Nevertheless, the share of unemployed and marginally employed graduates is still high. Furthermore, graduates from political science only earn a low average annual income (compared to other disciplines) and graduates from Vienna more easily find employment in typical jobs for political scientists (i.e., media, NGOs, etc.) than graduates from the rest of Austria. The interviews suggest that graduates are highly satisfied with their education and perceive themselves as political scientists and/or are convinced that they profit from their education in their daily lives.

The second section addresses the question of relevance from an outside perspective and includes contributions from representatives of the media (Anneliese Rohrer), public administration (Christoph Konrath), politics (Eva Lichtenberger) and business (Manuela Leitner). Anneliese Rohrer regards political science as an important compass for society and criticizes that scholars in the Austrian context hesitate to take over this important function of their discipline. For a number of reasons, Rohrer argues, political scientists are reluctant to engage with the public, shy away from providing urgently needed expertise in the current era of multiple crises, and hide themselves behind sophisticated theoretical and methodological models. Christoph Konrath expresses similar concerns when he argues that within the public administration and policy-making, the expertise of political scientists does not equal the expertise of legal scholars or economists. According to him, this has to do with the prevalent decoupling between political-science research and the big questions of politics and society. Building on this observation, Konrad argues that the discipline and its representatives should focus more on those questions that are relevant for Austrian decision-makers and citizens and should learn how to better communicate research findings to non-academic audiences.

Similar to Rohrer and Konrad, Eva Lichtenberger sees the true value of political science in its capacity to provide advice for political decision-makers and society in times of fundamental challenges to democracy

and international order. She also identifies a growing chasm between political practice and political science and argues that the high sophistication of research designs and methods makes the findings of the discipline in many cases impenetrable for non-experts. To remedy this problem, Lichtenberger calls for efforts on both sides to find common ground and a common language. Manuela Leitner closes this section with a positive note. She argues that companies appreciate graduates in political science for at least four reasons. First, students choose the subject of political science out of curiosity and interest, and so graduates are interested in the world around them and are able to listen and react to other people's opinions. This attitude contributes to lasting and beneficial results for companies in achieving their overall goals. Second, political scientists learn to think systematically and to deal with complex and multi-layered problems, which makes them valuable for companies operating complex economic environment. Third, the economy "needs people who question motivations", which is an ability that political science students acquire naturally by analyzing politics and concepts such as power and interests. Finally, graduates of political science have a broad knowledge basis, and they work and think in flexible and interdependent contexts. They know how to think outside the box, which is a skill that companies are eagerly looking for.

The third and final section is devoted to the concluding reflection on the nature of the discipline and its societal relevance. In his contribution, Reinhard Heinisch shifts the focus on the relationship between political science in Austria and the broader trends within the transnational discipline. He argues that, after a long period of disconnect, Austrian political science has aligned itself more with the "mainstream" of the broader discipline. According to Heinisch, this realignment entails a number of advantages but also the risk of going with fads rather than addressing the big and burning questions of society and politics. In the final contribution to the special issue, Anton Pelinka argues that the successful legitimization and institutionalization of political science should not give rise to complacency. On the contrary, political scientists have to persistently grapple with the identity of their discipline as well as with justifications for its prolonged existence. In his engagement with the discipline's identity, Pelinka foregrounds three constitutive elements. First, he argues that political science has to strike a delicate balance between scholarly objectivity and political engagement. He thus reinforces the position that political scientists should not be mere observers of political phenomena but should also use their skills and knowledge to the benefits of society. Second, Pelinka notes that the discipline should maintain a single corporate identity in view of the differentiation of its sub-disciplines but should, at the same time, also

build bridges to neighboring disciplines such as history or law. Third, he ends his article with a forceful reminder that "[p]olitical science's political business is political enlightenment" and thus reinforces our argument that it is past time for a critical and thorough assessment of whether the discipline is up to this task.

5. Conclusion

This introductory article set out from the observation that political scientists in Austria have not engaged in a thorough process of reflecting about the societal relevance of their work. In order to stimulate and advance the debate on this important but neglected dimension of disciplinary self-reflection, the article introduced the four (conceptual, normative, empirical, and praxeological) research questions that should guide the debate about the societal relevance of political science in Austria. Focusing on the first, conceptual question of what we mean by the societal relevance of political science, the article introduced a three-level concept of societal relevance. It defined relevance as interrelation between two or more factors in the sense that a *factor (causally or constitutionally) affects the state of least one other factor* to different degrees. Building on this basic-level definition of relevance, the article identified and defined three types of societal relevance at the secondary level of the concept: *civic relevance* as a contribution to the political agency of citizens, *professional relevance* as a contribution to the professional agency of its graduates, and *political relevance* as contribution to the political agency of actors who are or seek to be involved in the process of political decision-making. The article then recounted the history of political science in Austria as a struggle for and over the discipline's academic and societal relevance, and introduced the subsequent contributions to this special issue within the context of our typology of societal relevance.

As we outlined in the conceptual section of our article, there are a number of avenues for further research. In our view, two directions of research would be especially worthwhile for the relevance-related self-reflection of the discipline. First, future research should focus on the experiences and expectations that political actors have regarding the input from political scientists. This research could differentiate between types of actors such as members of government, members of parliament, members of the bureaucracy, and members of non-governmental organizations to tease out the extent to which expectations and experiences vary between these actors. Second, future research should take a closer look at the career paths of students and graduates of political science in Austria. It would be interesting to learn more about the motivations of students for choosing a uni-

versity education in political science, to measure levels of (dis)satisfaction with political-science curricula and trace their causes, and to analyze their transition into the job market and the extent to which their training in political science had an impact on this transition. Political scientists could use these insights to dispel possible myths about the discipline and its teaching at Austrian universities as well as to adapt the curricula to the needs of its students and the job market.

Parallel to this critical reflection of its societal relevance, the discipline should intensify its thinking about measures for ensuring that its voices are heard outside the walls of the ivory tower and that its graduates are wanted on the non-academic job market. In our view, the training of our students plays a key role in that regard and could be improved in a number of ways with an eye towards academic and societal relevance. As the availability, management, and analysis of large amounts of data is a key challenge for society and politics, graduates in political science would profit from an expanded and deepened training in both quantitative and qualitative methods, and, in particular, from an intensified engagement of the discipline with data science²².

To improve the career chances of graduates in political science, curricula at Austrian universities should include more practice-relevant elements that focus on both the practice of politics (e.g., by inviting former decision-makers or diplomats) and applied political research, that is, using theories, methods, and data to address problems of public policy. Yet these efforts should not be limited to BA and MA programs because also many graduates of PhD programs will have to compete on the non-academic job market. To address this challenge, the German Volkswagen Stiftung has initiated an interesting funding program that supports practice-oriented modules in PhD programs and thus seeks to connect PhD students to different fields of practice (Krull/Soetbeer 2016).

Last but not least, it is also the responsibility of the individual scholar to make her work more relevant for society. In their teaching, political scientists should be aware that they are not only training young scholars but mainly young people who will not stay in academia. This means that we should not exclusively assign them with academic tasks but also with practical assignments such as the writing of policy briefs, position papers, and political speeches or simulation games. In their research, political scientists should broaden their understanding of what it means to *publish* findings. As Flinders (2015) argues in this context, publishing should be a three-stage process and scholars should “master the art of *triple-writing*” (Flinders 2015, 76). That is, they should

not only publish their findings in specialized academic journals and books (*single-writing*) but also as more accessible research notes (*double-writing*) and as trenchant contributions to newspapers (*triple-writing*). Beyond writing, scholars could also look into the possibilities of podcasting and webcasting, although we are of course aware that these formats put an additional strain on the time resources of scholars. Whatever the method, it is important that political scientists in Austria reach out to political decision-makers and society and effectively communicate the fascinating and important insights that their research is producing.

As we noted at the very beginning of this article, we hope that this special issue is the opening move in a broad and thorough debate about the societal relevance of political science in Austria. We therefore encourage scholars, representatives of political parties, of public administration and of the media as well current and former students of the discipline to speak up on the pages of this journal and beyond. It is high time that we engage in an open and frank exchange on the conceptual, normative, empirical and praxeological dimensions of societal relevance – *pro bono publico et scientia politica*.

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²² See also contributions of Ennser-Jedenastik et al. (2018) and Lichtenberger (2018) in this issue.

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