

Evolution of Economics Professors' Recruitment since 2000 in France The End of Pluralism¹

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1. Introduction

Since November 2009, the FAPE/AFEP has been alerting economics professors, policy-makers and the media about the extinction of pluralism in universities' economics departments. This warning is based on the view, shared by the 600 members of the association, that there are increasingly severe deficiencies in the renewal of the professors³ in the academic field. These flaws are the direct result of major institutional “locks” found in three areas that the FAPE has been analysing since its creation: the criteria for assessing research; the competitive examinations of the higher education *Agregation*⁴; and the functioning of the National Council of Universities⁵, in particular regarding the recruitment of professors. The FAPE has looked into the first two topics, and has found that the modalities and criteria for the evaluation of professors are central factors in the smothering of pluralism in economics. These modalities and criteria are almost mechanically centred on bibliometrics, biased towards self-referencing, thus leading to an impoverishment of economic thought⁶.

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³ In French universities, professors and assistant professors are engaged in both teaching and research functions.

⁴ The higher education “*Agrégation*” is a civil service competitive examination in the public education system. There are two different types of *Agrégations*: an *Agrégation* for secondary education, and an *Agrégation* for professorships in specific disciplines of higher education (economics, political science, management, and law).

⁵ The National Council of Universities is the French National Authority in charge of recruiting academics and managing their careers. The section in charge of economics is section 05.

⁶ See the report coordinated by G. Colletis and T. Lamarche, which converges with many other international studies.

Demographic projections based on realistic hypotheses predict an exhaustion of university professors whose approaches differ from the *mainstream* approach, within 5 to 8 years. Professors are in charge of Masters' programmes; they supervise Doctoral Schools and research centres, they preside over doctoral thesis juries and "Authorisation to Supervise Research"⁷ juries. It is unacceptable that economics departments are only pluralists at the assistant professor level, while economics professors are (almost) exclusively *mainstream* ones.

This initial observation requires strong evidence showing that the conditions of heterodox recruitment have worsened over time, particularly amongst university professors. This note aims to shed light on this blind spot.

2. Methodology

This study is built on a database consisting of data-matching between two sources: data on the recruitment of professors (still) "second class"⁸ in 2011, provided by a league table known as the "coconut tree table"; and data regarding the results of the bi-annual competitive examination for higher education *Agregation*. These data were collected from the website of the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research for the years 1999 and 2001; and directly obtained from the Ministry for the years 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009. The Ministry also provided the results of an internal examination for the *Agregation*⁹ in 2007 and 2010. One type of profile is missing from this otherwise quite exhaustive dataset: professors who have been promoted (either into "first class" or "exceptional class")¹⁰ under article 46-3 or article 46-4. We call these two types of recruitment "long-path" recruitment¹¹.

As the purpose was to identify and classify professors according to their research posture (methodologies, research subjects and epistemology), we analysed each professor individually. The classification based on the research posture (methodology, subject) is

⁷ The "*habilitation à diriger des recherches*" (HDR) or Authorisation to Supervise Research (ASR) in English, is the highest diploma in French universities. It provides an estimate of assistant professors' capacities to supervise research.

⁸ In the French system, professors have regular promotions based on both seniority and merit: they start in the "second class", and can be promoted into the "first class" and potentially the "exceptional class."

⁹ From time to time there are "internal *Agregations*", based on a specific competition: candidates have greater seniority, and the examination's content is different from what is required through the "external *Agregation*".

¹⁰ See footnote 8

¹¹ Only 1/9th of the candidates can be recruited under article 46-3; and 2/9th of the candidates under article 46-4 (see *infra*). For these individuals, the "coconut tree table" gives their entry date for that class, but not their entry date in the 'corps'. These cases are too few to construct a solid database.

derived from the study of individual CVs, generally available online. In the CVs, we have prioritized criteria available through the analysis of the content of the research, the type of Journals in which they publish their research, their co-authors, and their thesis supervisors.

By cross-checking these different criteria we obtain a strong signal on the type of epistemology prioritised by the professors. There can still be, here and there, possible discussions on individual researchers, because the boundaries are not always watertight, and researchers can evolve in one way or another. However, the classification seems quite stable. The “heterodox” are defined here as institutional economists whose methodologies are derived from the social sciences, and/or who are affiliated with the school of regulation, institutionalism, Economics of conventions, socio-economics, or researchers in epistemology. Post-Keynesian macroeconomists who generally grant significant importance to history are also part of the economic heterodoxy. One is of course inclined to add historians of economic thought (HET) to this list. However, we notice a growing tendency, on the part of historians of economic thought, to work on neoclassical thought to the detriment of thinking that could be qualified as heterodox. Historians of economic thought are thus, where necessary, presented as an isolated category.

Amongst *mainstream* economists, we have identified a priori two categories: “pure” *mainstream*; and what we have called the “eclectic with a tendency towards *mainstream*”. The latter only represent 12% of the total of mainstream economists. They are often econometricians working on more marginal subjects within economics.

3. Main results

i- About 200 new professors in a decade

In France, between 2000 and 2011, there were, according to the database we have built, 209 new university professors, e.g. an average of 1.75 recruitments per year¹². This number of “new” professors needs to be weighed against an existing stock of 558 professors in 2011¹³. Recruitments are not regular, as every two years the competitive examination for the higher education *Agregation* provides most of the enrolment. It is worth reminding that legally, only

¹² The competitive examination for the *Agregation* gives between 30 and 33 new professors every second year, in the period 1994-2000; and between 15 and 23 new professors every second year in the period 2004-2012 (see Annex). “Long-path” recruitments give an average of 4.5 new professors each year (see infra).

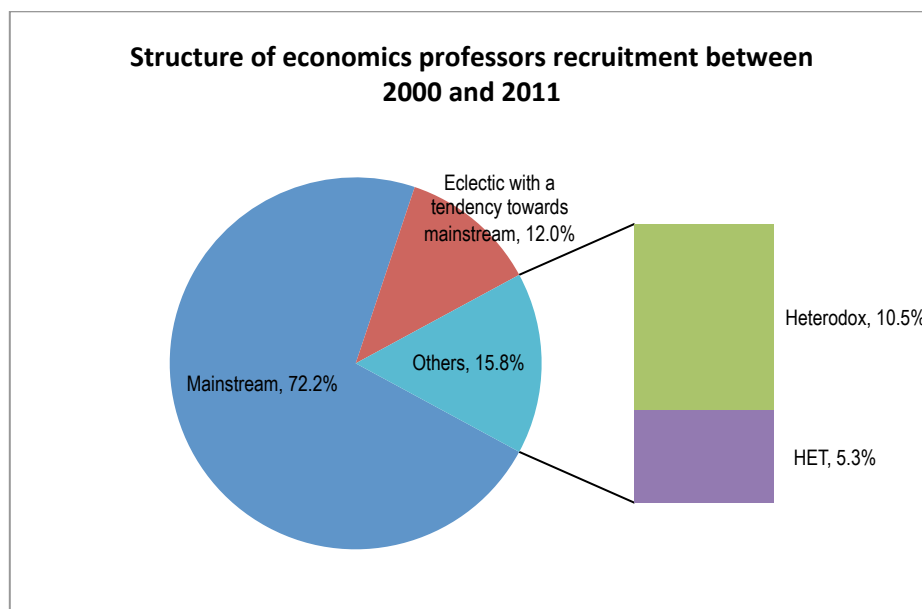
¹³ According to the “coconut tree table”.

1/9th of the candidates can be recruited under article 46-3; and 2/9th of the candidates under article 46-4.

ii- A very small minority of heterodox

Overall, evolution over the last decade shows stability in the recruitment of professors, and a domination of mainstream professors: out of the 209 professors recruited in the period¹⁴, 84.2% dedicate their research to the *dominant* stream of economics. 5.3% are considered historians of economic thought; and the remaining 10.5% are heterodox (see graph 1).

Graph 1.

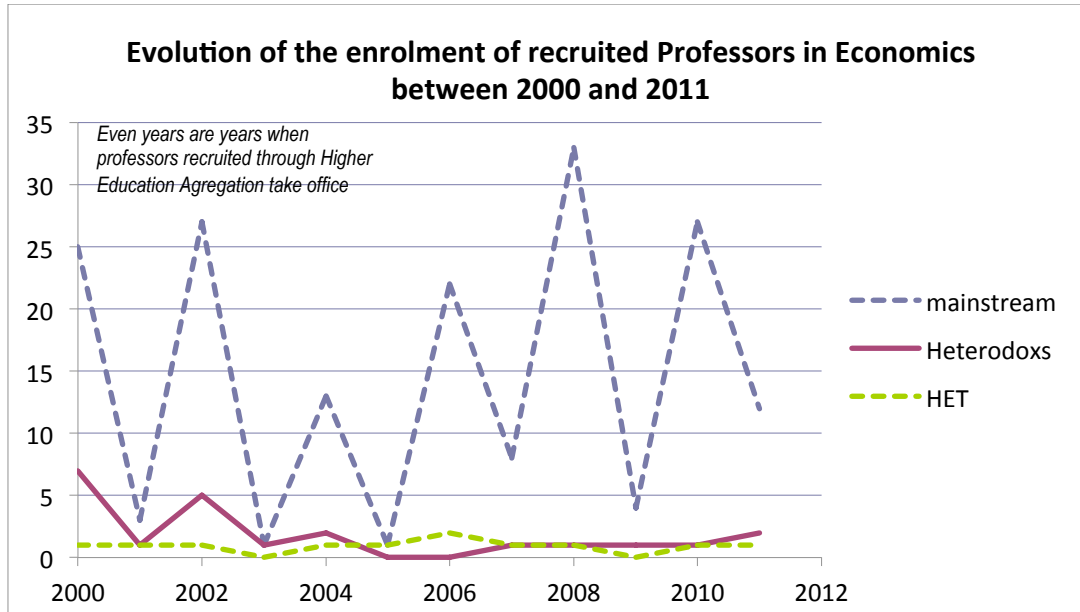


The dominance of mainstream economics¹⁵ is maintained throughout the decade observed, as shown in graph 2.

¹⁴ Some professors of the higher education *Agregation* 1999 and 2001 are no longer in the “coconut tree table” 2011. When CVs were found online, we have included them in the database. When this was not the case (this occurred for only two individuals) we removed them from the database.

¹⁵ This is almost tautological...

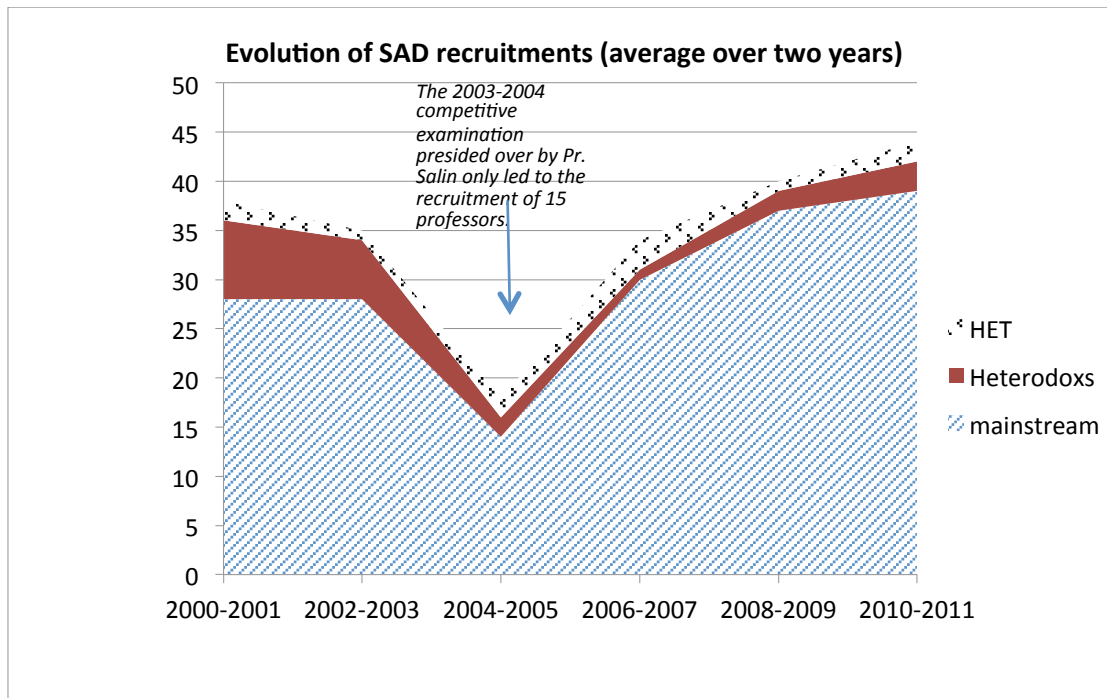
Graph 2.



When variations are smoothed out¹⁶, we can see the extent to which heterodox are marginal in the whole recruitment of professors (see graph 3), thus creating imbalances in the stock of professors active in universities. Moreover, long-path recruitment (46-3 and 46-4) fails to compensate for the bias in the outcome of the *Agregation* examination, as explained below.

¹⁶ The bi-annual variations are linked to the higher education *Agregation* examination that takes places every two years.

Graph 3.



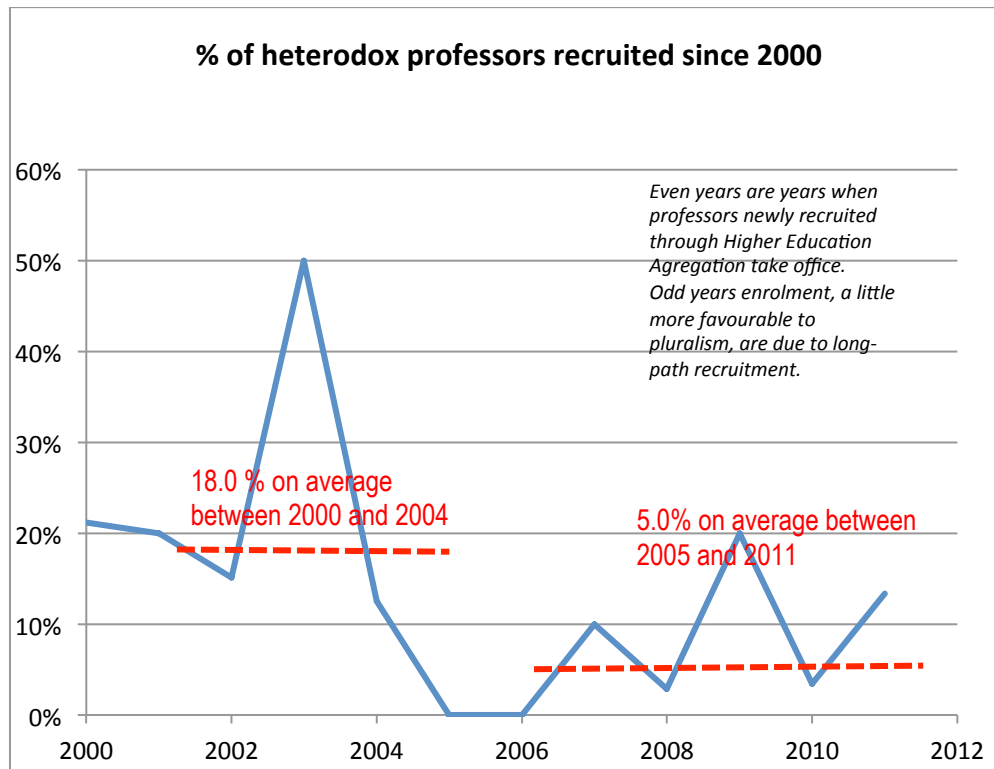
SAD = seasonally adjusted data

iii- A trend worsening since 2005-2006

This average hides disparities within the period. We can distinguish two periods, before and after the year 2006, which was a pivotal year that marked more durably still the weakening of pluralism in the recruitment of professors (see graph 4).

The 10.5% of heterodox professors recruited during the decade are distributed as follows: 18.0% between 2000 and 2005, and 5.0% between 2006 and 2011. The rate was thus divided by more than three in one decade.

Graph 4.



Nb: This is the heterodox category, excluding historians of economic thought. The average for the period 2000-2004 is 20.1% when historians of economic thought are included, and falls to 10.8% in the period 2005-2011.

For the record, the jury for 2005-2006 was presided over by professor Rodolphe Dos Santos Ferreira¹⁷, who was the first to set up a system of “points” to evaluate candidates to the *Agregation*. In the box below, professor Louis Levy-Garboua, president of the subsequent jury, presents these evaluation practices as “quasi-objectives” and “modern” –although they in fact sound the death knell of pluralism in economics (see box 1). Obviously, the plummeting of heterodox recruitment cannot be solely attributed to these new types of ratings and benchmarking practices, but the concomitance is worth noting.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that each president chooses the members of the jury. There is thus inevitably a strong epistemological consanguinity.

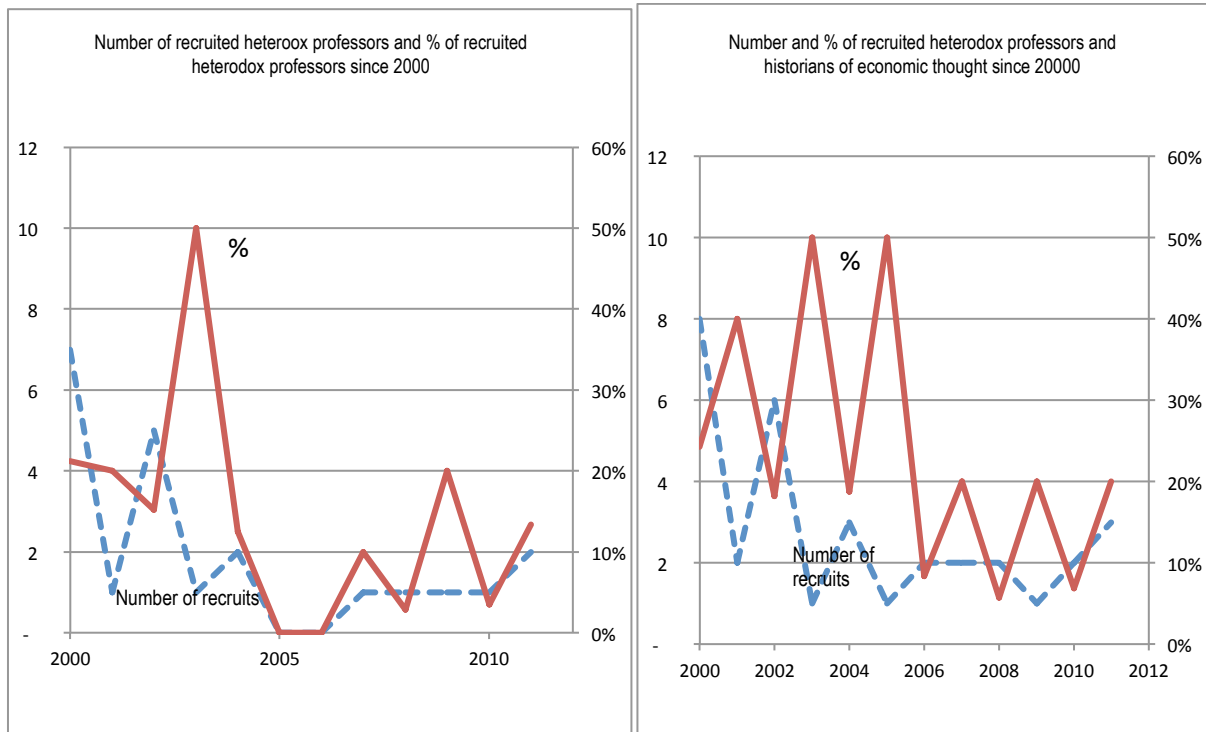
Box 1. Metric practices used by the jury of the higher education *Agregation*

« We have reiterated the practice initiated by the previous jury under the presidency of de Rodolphe Dos Santos Ferreira, whom I would like to thank for having opened up the way for us, and have given all candidates a publication score based on the public rankings of French and international journals. This score represents a quasi-objective judgment of the scientific quality of published work, and has the advantage of being exogenous and as impartial as can be. Before turning to explaining how this score was obtained, we need to add that the jury fully played its part by complementing this first score with two other marks aimed at accounting for unpublished work (thus excluded from the first score), such as other qualities and commitment of the candidates in their academic environment. In total, work assessment consisted of three marks: (i) one publication score (0 to 30) calculated from the rating ; (2) a complementary mark (0 to 10) based on jury members' reports and on the first part of the oral examination; (iii) a *séminaire* mark (0 to 20) attributed by the jury at the end of a seminar that makes up the second part of the oral examination, on a topic chosen in advance by the candidate. All members of the jury were extensively told that these three marks were based on relatively independent parts of the hearing or aspects of the dossier».

Source : Louis Levy-Garboua, 2008, « Rapport sur le premier concours national d'Agrégation de l'enseignement supérieur pour le recrutement de professeurs des universités en sciences économiques (années 2007-2008) », Revue d'économie politique, 2008/5, vol. 118, pages 603-623.

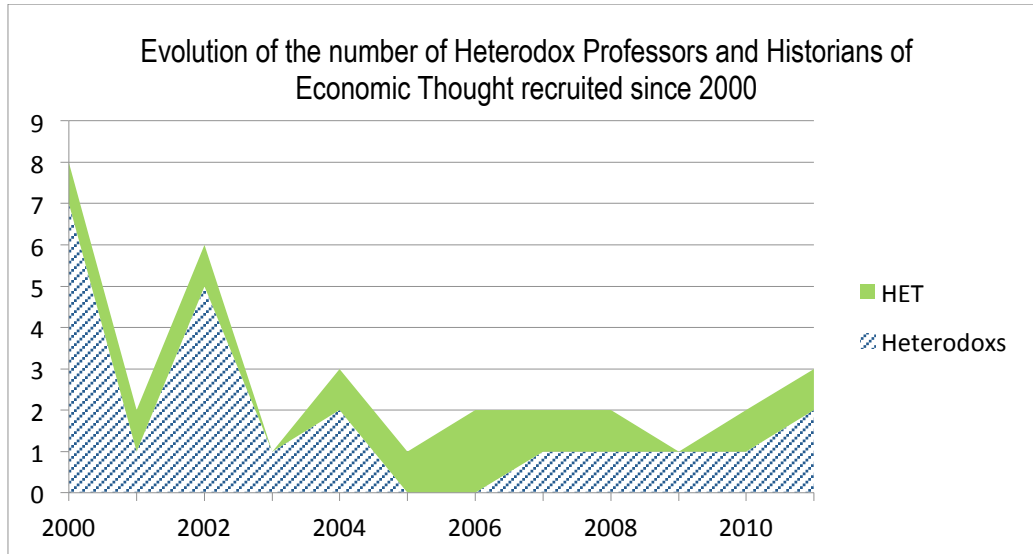
A rapid reading of graph 4 can be misleading, because the most prosperous years in terms of heterodoxy are years when there is, on average, little recruitment. 2003 may for instance appear as a particularly “generous” year (50% of the new professors were heterodox ones), but it corresponds to the recruitment of solely two professors through the long-path ...among whom one heterodox. In the following graphs (graphs 5 and 6), we account simultaneously for the data in percentage and in effective numbers. In total, there are between 0 and 7 heterodox professors recruited each year...

Graphs 5 et 6.

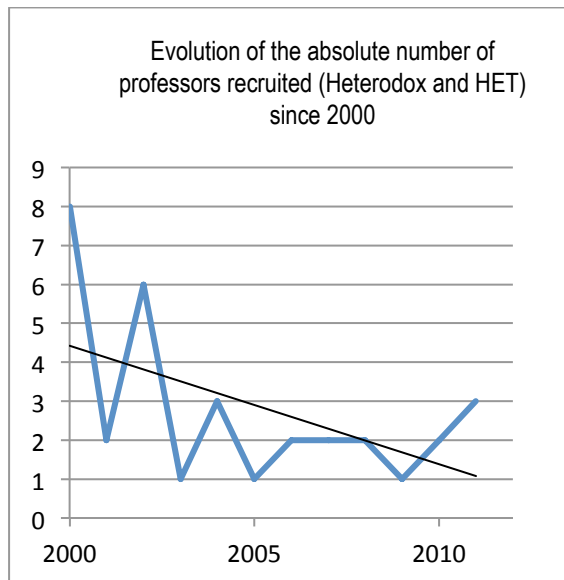
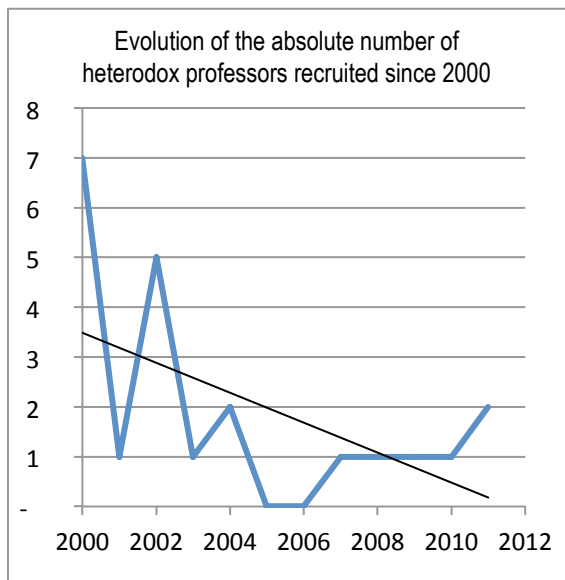


When we add to these heterodox professors the historians of economic thought, whose share in the recruitment fluctuates over the years, we see *a regular deterioration of the annual recruitment of heterodox (+ historians of economic thought) in the professorial body*. This can be seen in the next three graphs.

Graph 7.



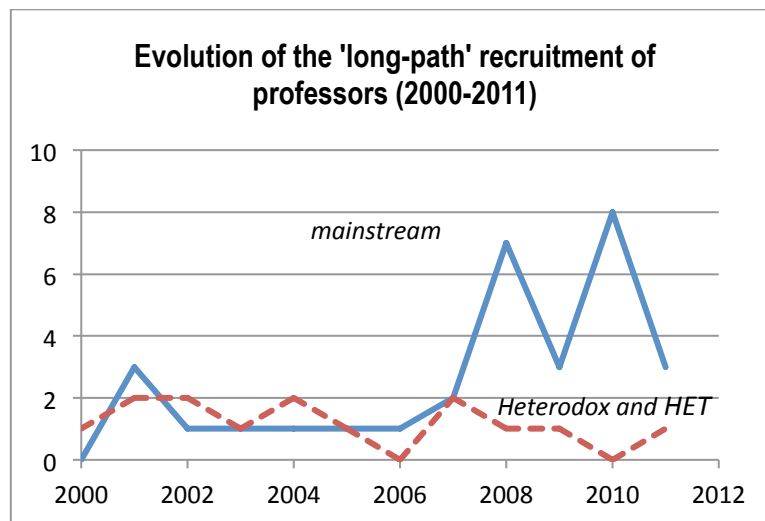
Graph 8 and 9.



iv- *Long-path recruitment does not offset (anymore ?) the effects of the Agregation*

Does long-path recruitment¹⁸ compensate - if only partially - for the effects of the *Agregation*? When we isolate long-path recruitment, we find that this alternative to the *Agregation* recruitment accounts for 22% of the total recruitment¹⁹. We can thus imagine that long-path recruitment could partially offset the distortion caused by the competitive examination.

Graph 10.



The evolution of long-path recruitment (46-3 and 46-4) *clearly shows a deterioration of pluralism*. Until the mid-2000s the share of heterodox professors and historians of economic thought represented close to 55% of professors hired through long-path recruitment. Since 2006, this number has fallen to less than 18%²⁰.

¹⁸ Long-path recruitment, as mentioned earlier, is composed of both 46-3 and 46-4 recruitment processes.

¹⁹ According to our database (incomplete on this sub-population), long-path recruitment represents 45 recruitments out of the 211 recruitments in the period 2000-2011. It is worth reminding that in total long-path recruitment can account for 3/9th of the professorships, that is, 33% of the recruitments. Variation from this number can be linked to the fact that the cap of 3/9th (the maximum defined by law) is not necessarily reached every year; it can also be attributed to a bias linked to data deficits (incompleteness of the database).

²⁰ The graph however suggests that part of the evolution of this share is more linked to the progression of the number of (mainstream) recruits.

Conclusion

The announced death of pluralism in economics is not just a mere illusion.

In light of the fact that the heterodoxy accounts for just about 5% of the recruitment since 2005 (in other words, there have been 6 new heterodox professors since 2005, out of a total of 120 recruited professors), the concerns raised by the FAPE since its creation are entirely justified.

The competitive examination for the higher education *Agregation* certainly has an adverse effect in the renewal of economic thought. However, through the evolution of evaluation strategies used in long-path recruitment, Section 05 (economics) of the National Council of Universities also contributes to the death of pluralism.