

Karine Van der Straeten

Caps off to political science!

Karine Van der Straeten, CNRS research director at Toulouse School of Economics, is in charge of the IAST's programme in political science. Karine talks to us about the creation of CAPS, a new research centre aiming to bring together political scientists and political economists.

What is the link between political and economic science?

KVds: The two sciences are almost inseparable: for policy recommendations by economists to positively impact decision-making, it's important to understand the political constraints and oppositions that may arise to these recommendations. There is hence a long tradition of integrating political science into economics. Here at TSE for example we have a "public and political economics" group, and a "development" group which combine both approaches. In terms of methodology, a group of political scientists realised around 30 years ago that a number of economic science tools could also be applied to political science: game theory, mathematical modelling, econometrics, experimental and empirical approaches... in contrast with the traditional case study or monographic approach used in political science. So today, a certain number of political scientists and economists have come closer, thanks to these thematic and methodological links.

So, what is CAPS, and why did you create it?

KVds: Because today, while in the USA and the UK this interdisciplinary approach is well established, notably via groups at Rochester, NYU, Caltech, and LSE (to name but a few), there are very few groups in continental Europe dedicated to bringing together political and economic scientists for analytical and quantitative research. Our aim, via CAPS, is to bridge this gap, hopefully becoming within 5 years one of the leading centres in Europe.

Who do you have on-board?

KVds: To start with, I must mention the Meyer family who very generously gifted a donation allowing us to bring this project to life. Then, in terms of research teams, we are lucky to have a solid base at TSE to start from, including my colleagues Michel Le Breton, Philippe De Donder and Jean Tirole, who have all contributed to the field of political economy and the design of political institutions for a number of years. I have myself worked extensively on public opinion and electoral institutions, notably through mathematical modelling and experiments.

To this base we are delighted to add a great team of IAST research fellows with PhDs from leading centres in political science, including Patrick Le Bihan (NYU), Jonathan Klinger (Rochester), Dominik Dül (NYU) and Charlotte Cavallé (Harvard). Finally, the strength of the IAST is its pluridisciplinarity, and we plan to interact via CAPS with the IAST's international network of colleagues in law, psychology, sociology, history, and geopolitics.

What is the CAPS research agenda?

KVds: Of course we do not plan to cover all fields in political science. Building on our strengths here, our research agenda, at least in the short run, will focus on the general themes of institution design and public opinion analysis. A few more specific examples include the analysis of incentives under alternative political institutions (impact of referendums...), the impact of new media on electoral campaign strategies, the analysis of new voting systems, and the role of preferences and incentives in shaping economic policy (pension design...).

What activities have you planned?

KVds: We began with a kick-off conference in April 2014, at which Gary Cox of Stanford gave a keynote speech on electoral rules, mobilisation and turnout. The next edition of the conference, on 26-27 March 2015, on election behaviours, institutions and reforms, will include a keynote by James Snyder of Harvard. Both speakers are exemplary in their fields and an inspiration for what we hope to achieve at CAPS. We interact via a monthly seminar inviting international scholars, and a bi-monthly informal work group. We also organise regular collaborations with the Institut d'Etudes Politiques (IEP) and are currently developing new collaborations with the CERTOP lab here in Toulouse. We also have



CAPS

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a very active visitor programme, and have been happy to welcome over the past two years top researchers such as John Romer (Yale), Thomas Romer (Princeton), Howard Rosenthal and Rebecca Morton (NYU). Last but not least, this year's IAST Distinguished lecture series on Political Motivations has a clear link to our themes. (Editor's note: see pages 8-9)

This all sounds very impressive. What are your long-term ambitions?

KVds: As I mentioned before, we hope within 5 years to establish CAPS as one of the leading centres in Europe, with a solid team of around 15 researchers trained in quantitative research here in Toulouse, alongside an extensive international network. We hope to offer tenure track positions and senior chairs and foster exchange links with peer groups at Warwick, LSE and Mannheim. This is made possible by on-going support from the Meyer family and our institutional partners in France, the UT1, CNRS and EHESS. So a big thanks to them.

So, you must be very busy – back to work...

KVds: Indeed!

A WORD FROM

Rebecca B. Morton, NYU

"I am extremely impressed by CAPS. Karine Van Der Straeten has done an excellent job of putting together a fantastic team of researchers from political economics and political science for pathbreaking research in questions of interest to both. I expect that the work produced through this new enterprise will be both exciting and noteworthy."

Rebecca visited the IAST from October 20 to October 24, and gave on 24 October a CAPS seminar on "What Motivates Bandwagon Voting Behaviour: Altruism or a Desire to Win?"

