Interview with Joost de Moor, Assistant Professor in Political Science at Sciences Po's Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics (CEE)

Can you present your background and your current research?

My name is Joost de Moor. I'm a political scientist with an interdisciplinary background.
I have a background in cultural sciences from Maastricht University where I did my bachelor.
And I did a Masters in anthropology at KU Leuven and after that I completed my PhD in political science at the University of Antwerp.

I work across the fields of sociology, urban studies, and environmental studies, so I tried to combine a lot of fields in my research that's largely focused on environmental activism. The main focus is activism in the way in which citizens get involved in politics, either as individuals or in groups. And one of the main interests that I have developed there, and that I contributed to in my PhD thesis, is the question of how political globalization shapes the way in which citizens become involved in activism. So, we can understand political globalization as this shift of political power away from the nation states to higher political levels, like for instance the World Trade Organization.
So that raises some important questions.

Historically, the state has been the main site for democracy and also for the way in which citizens become involved in democracy. Think, for instance, of national elections. But the state has also traditionally been the target of social movements.
However, in this context of political globalization, it's often not so clear anymore that the state is necessarily the actor that is best positioned to address people's problems.
Think for instance, of environmental problems that are often global in nature, but also on what citizens can do themselves and what they do in their everyday life?
For example, the green lifestyle choices to eat differently or to move around differently in a more environmentally friendly way.

Most recently I've worked as a postdoctoral researcher at Stockholm University and Leiden University, and in these positions I focused mainly on how environmental activists and climate activists in particular how they perceive the future of climate change and the future of climate politics, and in particular, how they see whether humanity still has a chance to keep climate change within safe levels.
So, that raises several questions for climate activists in terms of their goals and their strategies. For instance, there are people claiming that it is too late for humanity to do something about climate change and we should stop trying to prevent it, and we should therefore instead focus on how we might be able to deal with the consequences of climate change that we no longer can prevent. And I think that's a pretty fundamental question in climate politics that not just activists but also other actors are dealing with.

So, in these projects that I've been doing most recently, I've looked at how climate activists actually see this, whether they have a worry about this, worry about humanity's chance to still do something about climate change. Or how pessimistic sometimes are they about this? And how does it affect their strategies, or not?
What I actually found was that while many climate activists are actually very worried and very sceptical about the possibility to still keep climate change within safe boundaries, their strategies were actually not affected by this worry so much. So actually, despite having lost hope to a large extent, they managed to continue their activism to try and stop climate change as much as possible. They managed to surround themselves with people who are also willing to put everything on the line to try and keep climate change within safe boundaries. That is what gives them hope and allows them to keep going.

But at the same time, I also found that activists find it difficult to address new kinds of questions that might emerge out of their desperation.

Why did you choose Sciences Po and specifically the CEE as your laboratory?

Sciences Po, for me, is one of the most stimulating research environments to develop the research lines that I've been developing over the past couple of years, and also that I plan to develop in the coming years.
I think there's a lot of expertise and especially interdisciplinary expertise on questions of environmental politics and environment and society at the different centres, particularly at the Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics.
So, it seems to be a very stimulating environment to develop my research lines on environmental politics as well as on the role of citizens in shaping those policies.
Indeed, one of the specializations of the Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics has to do with democracy and the role of citizen participation in shaping democracy.
There are various other areas of specialization that also have been very important to my research in the past, such as the role of cities and the role of the urban context in shaping politics as well as questions that I want to deal with more in the future of my research, namely on the role of the state.
And the Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics has done a lot of work on developing a sociological perspective on those subjects.

Interview by Myriam Sefraoui