



OUTSIDE IN: A VIEW FROM THE
EXTENDED PRESENT
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Returning to Wiko after a period of more than twenty years elicits very special feelings – although I have to qualify from the beginning what “returning” means. As a Fellow of the first year 1981/82, an *Ur-Fellow*, if you wish, I have had the privilege over many years to witness Wiko’s growth and impressive maturation. It has kept the beauty of its optimal size, the grace of the impressive competence and unique friendliness of its staff and the wisdom of remaining with its “core business”, as management jargon would put it these days. As a former Permanent Fellow of Collegium Budapest, the sister institution founded through the initiative of Wolf Lepenies in 1992, I had become intimately familiar with the working of an Institute of Advanced Study. My involvement with Collegium Budapest in the initial five-year period and later as President of its Scientific Advisory Board was all the more exciting, since it took place in the creative turmoil of Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism. When the enlargement of the European Union to its present

twenty-five member states was celebrated in Berlin, as in other capitals of the EU on May 1st, I felt indeed that a historical circle had been closed.

Although every Institute of Advanced Study is different in its own way, bearing the imprint of the time of its creation and the circumstances that brought it about, Wiko is widely recognised as embodying in an exemplary way the spirit and soul, intellectual depth and scientific scope, the innovativeness and the dynamic evolution of an idea. While it is encouraging to see that similar institutions are presently proliferating, especially at hard-pressed universities that seek a space for reflection, Wiko, as a prime “breeding ground of ideas” can guide and inspire others while setting standards that are hard to match.

When I returned this year as a guest of the Rector, I had also been invited to come as a member of the project group “Science and the Public”, a theme that has been central to my research agenda for some years. In a sense, it felt like coming “home”, when home is represented by the lively and joyful atmosphere which Wiko offers, together with its legendary library services and other amenities that make the dream of any academic come true. Memories of the first year came back, which had been a pioneer year – and it was impressive to realise from the daily routine, the unwritten rules, the trust in the self-organising capacity of the Fellows, how Wiko had selectively extended its scientific scope and never ceased to reach ever higher levels of excellence.

Following what I had written in *Eigenzeit*, I was able to transform my short stay of three months into a kind of extended present. A two-weekly rhythm allowed me to spend as much time at Wiko as possible, while tending to my other obligations which I could not relinquish in the meantime, one at ETH Zurich building up “Society in Science: The Branco Weiss Fellowship” and the other as Chair of EURAB, the European Research Advisory Board to the European Commission. Of course, there was a price that had to be paid for such a temporally dense arrangement. I had to get accustomed to the feeling of constantly missing a Tuesday Colloquium and other exciting events that took place in my absence. But I was fortunate to be readily and graciously briefed by my co-Fellows over breakfast and during mealtime, all of whom turned out to be highly perceptive, sharp-witted and yet compassionate, constructive critics of each other. Why is it not possible, I kept thinking, for life at European universities to come closer to such a mutually encouraging atmosphere, instead of dissipating our intellectual energies in negative deprecation of others?

Three remarkable features stood out for me in this year. As every connoisseur of wine knows, the quality of the harvest, the mixture of flavours and colours, differs from year to year, due to factors which are as difficult to predict as to control, even if the wine producer

follows the best cultivating practices. The combination of soil and sunshine, of hard work, good timing and fortune, does not lend itself easily to replication. This *Jahrgang* at Wiko, I am happy to report, turned out to be a truly exceptional and splendid vintage! The mixture of Fellows just seemed to have the right kind of diversity – of age and reputation, of personalities and cultural background, of intellectual passion and human curiosity, combined with genuine intellectual respect for each other and the readiness to listen and learn. For a long time I had not attended such excellent presentations as the Tuesday Colloquia turned out to be, followed by equally intense and informed discussion. I was also pleasantly surprised to see many more women at Wiko (not to mention the first year), which was partly due to the policy of integrating spouses. Spontaneously, the idea arose to present the Wiko with a collectively compiled list of women candidates – who, I am sure, will not sink to the bottom in the selection process like the sediment of a good wine, but rather turn other vintages into such a product.

The remarkable intellectual curiosity and generosity of this *Jahrgang* was also shown to me personally, when I used my privilege of inviting as my guests four Branco Weiss Fellows. They were all young post-docs in the life sciences who had been awarded a fellowship of up to five years to pursue their scientific careers in much greater freedom than usual while experimenting in their personal way how to integrate a societal dimension into their scientific work. The visit turned out to be a great success, seen from their perspective. For these open-minded and talented young scientists who came straight out of their laboratories or fieldwork, even the brief experience of the intellectually exciting atmosphere at Wiko and the rewarding conversations with Wiko Fellows that I had been able to arrange proved to be overwhelming. I truly wish that Wiko will find ways in the future to tap into this reservoir of talent and openness in the natural sciences, by acquainting young researchers in this crucial stage of their scientific career with the mode of thought and knowledge of the humanities and social sciences – and vice versa – although, since as young scientists they cannot afford to stay away from their laboratory for a longer period, the length of time spent at Wiko will have to be a relatively brief one.

The second outstanding feature came as a complete surprise. Although I had been aware of the list of illustrious names of outstanding composers of modern music at Wiko, I was completely enchanted and moved by the place that had been accorded to music, and especially to modern music. To have Stefan Litwin and Jörg Widmann around made all the more of a difference, since it was not only their presence as first-class musicians, but also their communicative skills and overflowing enthusiasm that made it seem so easy to ex-

perience music as a way of life. Thank you Stefan, thank you Jörg, for this unexpected and cherished, long-lasting gift.

The third feature is related to the work that brought me to Wiko in the first place. The project group “Science and the Public” started to meet on a regular basis when I arrived. Together with Eberhard Schmidt-Assmann (another “returnee” to Wiko), Helmuth Schulze-Fielitz and Hans-Heinrich Trute, all of them coming from law, and Dominique Pestre as a historian of science, we started to explore the common ground we could find and build upon further. Our focus became the changing nature of public science, to which we could relate some of our common concerns and bring our distinctive approaches. In a panel discussion, moderated by Dieter Grimm, we presented preliminary findings to a wider public. What had started as a tentative exploration between law on one side and the history of science and STS (science and technology studies) on the other, evolved into a book project which will be published early next year under the title “The Public Nature of Science Under Assault: Markets, Politics, Science and the Law”. Unplanned in this form, it is more than serendipity. It shows the cunning of Wiko at work. Yet, there was another, personal side to this endeavour. Not since my early biographical beginnings, which were in law, have I enjoyed so much seeing the legal mind at work in its best, constructive form. And although the temporal distance remained what it was, it was yet another form of “return” for me.

Every stay at Wiko is filled with stories of productive distractions, of digressions and interruptions, of hidden or indirect pathways that nobody had intended to take. This holds true – once more – for my return to Wiko. Ripeness is all, as Shakespeare said, and the maturation of ideas and projects takes its time. My next project, on innovation and modes of thinking the future, received some unexpected inputs. My return to Wiko confirmed the vitality of an idea and of the institution that incorporates it for me – may it live on in the same spirit, for many more years to come.