



UNFORGETTABLE WIKO
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I was very enthusiastic in anticipation of my year’s stay at the Wiko. After 17 years of living, raising children, and taking part in North American academic and civic life, I would finally get a chance to spend a whole year in Germany again, maybe even to recover connections to my past as a graduate student in Frankfurt, but also to give my children the opportunity of trying out the European way of life under ideal conditions. The only downside seemed that I wouldn’t return to the Frankfurt region (the place I lived for many years and where my partner is from) but to an unfamiliar place called

Berlin. On the other hand, the different lines of research I had been following in previous years were starting to converge on an encompassing research project. Getting the opportunity to concentrate all my energies on this project without distractions in a secluded environment looked like a dream at the time. Needless to say, I did not have the faintest idea of the degree to which both Berlin and the Wiko are quite exceptional places.

The city was the first to overturn my initial doubts and take me in. I knew that coming back to Europe after so many years would be somewhat cathartic, but I did not expect to find myself right from the beginning in such a vibrant, intellectually exciting, culturally exuberant, but also warm and welcoming place as Berlin. For a European who has always been politically interested in knowing about European history like myself, it was almost breathtaking to note that, with every new day and every place I went to, some Berlin detail would appear to illustrate some important historical phase, event, or action. No matter whether it was the horror and infinite sadness at Gleis 17 or the paving stones tracing the former Berlin Wall on the ground when hurrying through some street, there is no place where Berlin does not remind you that you are walking through a looking glass of European and world history.

Since I arrived early to take care of the integration of my family into Berlin life, the realization of what being at the Wiko would mean was slow in the beginning. To be sure, the degree to which the staff helped us settle in and resolved problems with a snip of their magic fingers, all the time with a friendly smile or a laugh to spare, was astounding from the start. Nothing seemed easier than getting the kids into a school that had no spots, getting a work permit for my partner in the middle of an immigration torment let loose by the German authorities, or of seeing our Fellow friends getting equipped with exactly the kind of car they needed. From my past experience of how difficult it can be to manage such things in Germany on my own, I could only gasp at the ease exuding from staff and personnel. But it was really when the other Fellows arrived and life at the Institute began as laid out in its routines that the extent to which Wiko reality would completely outdo my initial dreams, too, became crystal clear. “Seclusion” – a main feature of my initial dream – is probably about the last word that comes to mind to anyone familiar with this wonderful institution. This is true not only because it is situated in an exciting metropolis, but mainly because one constantly interacts with others academically in a welcoming environment that is populated by a mixture of a thoughtfully selected diverse group of outstanding minds from all over the world. Backed by the perfect infrastructure of helpers, the Fellows begin to seem to move more like spoiled ethereal figures in the realm

of thought than as humans having to deal with the small and large adversities of everyday life. But there is more. In fact, the Wiko proved to be different from my dreams in almost every respect, always for the better. In contrast to my fantasies of seclusion, the systematic use of what Thorsten Wilhelmy called “interruptions” – the frequent lunches and dinners, meeting Fellows at the numerous colloquia, workshops, and reading groups, on the street, in the residence – offered something incredibly valuable: the pulsating and energetic curiosity, intellectual excitement, and courage to try out new things and thoughts that I only remembered from the days as a graduate student. The invigorating effects of the constantly inspiring and interesting presence of so many high-octane researchers who are excited to find out about one another’s projects, thoughts, ideas, and interests turned out to crucially depend on these recurrent “interruptions”. Affixing desks to lunch and dinner tables proved to be a surprisingly efficient but very discreet steering instrument to bring about, as if by magic, the effect of having the Fellows get to know one another, stay on the ball in their begun conversations, and to spin further ideas issued at the last dinner. As in the movies, the flight from my dreams to Wiko reality got better the longer it lasted – and had a tough ending when it was over. The toughness of leaving the Wiko, however, had mostly to do with something I had not even imagined in my dreams: that I would meet and forge (hopefully long-lasting) friendships with so many wonderful human beings. This is the most unexpected and dearest gift of the Wiko.

Although it should be clear by now that I am not writing this report as a celebration of having exactly executed my initial plans, the year at Wiko was and keeps being enormously stimulating and productive. The merit for this goes clearly to the combination of savviness and luck on the part of the selection committee. It was luck that wonderful new friendships emerged; although this is not really part of a research center’s job description, it still happened. The main satisfactions concerning the Fellows’ research agendas, however, were not serendipitous. They came from the interdisciplinary fertility and the availability of relevant research expertise by other Fellows for everyone’s agendas. The former has to do with the factor of intellectual stimulation that no other institution than an Institute of Advanced Study like the Wiko can offer. It is the opportunity to get to know on a professional but not specialist-targeted level the point of all the other Fellows’ research activities. The interdisciplinary showcasing of top-notch intellectual approaches to next to any phenomenon, from musical expression through quantum biology to Indonesian history, opens up so many unexpected avenues of thought, but also so many worked-out perspectives on parts of the world, that being present at the Tuesday talks alone already stirs up

one's mind more than anywhere else. One is inevitably seduced to leave the security of and comfortable float along one's own professional trajectory and to make one's own for a while the problems and questions in other areas. The additional constant flow of events, offerings, and tempting activities made the sense inescapable that one had not yet taken full advantage of everything interesting offered in this germinating ground.

In terms of finding perfect matches of expertise and interest, I received so many impulses, questions, and proposals for my research in the lively reading groups and workshops in political science, political philosophy, and law that we organized at the Wiko that it will take a while until I can totally exploit all the effects of the year in my work. As the year progressed, many of the relationships that began with common interests got closer and developed into professional friendships that I hope will last for a long time and enrich each of our future academic lives. This, again, as far as I can tell, was not an isolated but a general phenomenon. There were reading groups in biology and evolution, art theory and history that had analogous effects on those participating in them. The surprising thing was that such deepened disciplinary cooperation did not at all result in segmentations of the whole group of Fellows, but rather nurtured a common sense of everyone getting what they needed – a sense that was greatly enhanced by the brilliantly staffed and professionally run library service that left no wishes unfulfilled and even covered some that had not been dreamed of.

What the Wiko contributed to my project specifically emerged from the intensive contacts and exchanges I was able to entertain with the political scientists, legal scholars, and social scientists – but also members of other disciplines – of this year's Fellow group who participated in reading groups and workshops I was part of. These contacts helped me greatly in pushing forward my concern for ways of rethinking and shaping the global political space in more democratic ways with special attention to the central role that human rights may play in such a change of landscape. I had already realized that this part of my project requires not only adopting a global perspective, but also, crucially, extra-philosophical expertise in political science and international law. I felt extremely lucky to find among the Fellows some who were not only interested in exactly these matters, but also, in some cases, actually kindred spirits as well. The intersection of specialized interests allowed me to use the interdisciplinary nature of the Wiko to quickly learn much I did not even know I needed to know. The presence of relevant expertise provided by the composition of the group and the institute's interdisciplinary nature thus ideally combined to advance an important conceptual part of my research project, with a lot of

fun as an extra goodie. For all the different parts of my overall project concerning deliberative democracy in the global arena and global justice, I could count on the conversations and discussion with political scientists and legal scholars to reshape and refine my views, as well as to develop them in directions that now look promising for the future. In this way it would be more accurate to say that I continued my project than that I finished it, and that I continued it by opening new areas of future investigation rather than accomplishing the closure of old ones. From my post-Wiko perspective, some of these areas now seem rather preliminary than proper parts of what I need to say.

However, it was not only the presence of the relevant specialists that did this, but also a clear trend or common perception among many Fellows this year. There was a shared background assumption shaping many of the research projects of my fellow Fellows. All of them articulated the need to adopt a global perspective that overcomes nationalistic, state-centric assumptions that have been dominant throughout the 20th century while it treats all regions and people of the world as of equal concern and thus avoids the pitfalls of an unreflected Western bias. Some of the Fellows were occupied with such a perspective change for systematic reasons (as specialists in international law, for example), others for choice of topic (colonial and postcolonial art, history, literature), others because they were keenly aware of the need to reconceive the political world in new terms in the course of their political or social and anthropological studies, and still others for the extra-European location of the focus of their studies. This dominant trend strengthened my sense that such a change of perspective is desirable into the conviction that it is well overdue at this historical juncture. The intellectual stimulation, life, and fun of the Wiko that helped me think these things through can hardly be overstated. Thanks to all of you for an unforgettable year!