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TANJA STADLER

Tanja was born in 1981 in Stuttgart, Germany. She obtained a Masters in Applied Mathematics from the TU München in 2006 and did a Ph.D. from 2006–08 in Biomathematics at the TU München and the University of Canterbury, New Zealand (supervised by Anusch Taraz and Mike Steel). Tanja was then a postdoc with Sebastian Bonhoeffer at the Institute of Integrative Biology at ETH Zürich. In 2011, she started her own group in Computational Evolution, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, at the same institute. She was awarded an ERC starting grant in 2013. In 2014 she took up a position as an assistant professor at ETH Zurich. In general, her work aims to develop computational phylogenetic tools in order to understand past evolutionary and epidemiological processes by looking at genetic sequencing data. In particular, Tanja developed methodology to quantify the severity of spread of an emerging pathogen – an important issue for epidemiologists and public health officials. Her macroevolutionary work led to a widely used method reliably estimating major shifts in past speciation and extinction rates – shedding light on major processes creating and maintaining biodiversity. – Address: Department of Biosystems Science & Engineering, ETH Zürich, Mattenstrasse 26, 4058 Basel, Switzerland. E-mail: tanja.stadler@bsse.eth.ch

I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg in October 2012. Being a bit worried about everybody already knowing each other from the German class, I attended the first lunch. But everybody welcomed me so warmly – my only challenge was to catch up learning 40+ names while everybody else only had to remember me as the newcomer. After a hectic summer with too many things to do, I enjoyed the daily routine at the Wiko – getting up and making a coffee in the downstairs kitchen of Villa Jaffé, working on finishing manuscripts and job/grant

applications, having a long chat over lunch, going for a run in the Grunewald, and having early nights as well as many late nights with a glass or bottle of wine along with long discussions of topics ranging from the '68 generation in London (where the young ones among us became jealous because we had not been part of it!), the differences in the definition of a socialist in Europe and the US, how democracy can be maintained in times when voting choices are between bad and worse, and what an honor it is to live in Berlin for a while.

In fact, being from South Germany, I did not expect that the fact of living in Berlin would be anything exceptional (I really only came because I thought the Wiko will be fantastic itself), and I would have wished the Wiko would be in a more exotic place. However, already after my first few days in Berlin I began to realize that only living there actually made me really understand my country's past from different angles. On numerous strolls around the city, I spotted the various corners that were witnesses to the past Berlin Wall. I only remembered the German reunification as a day when the national anthem was played over and over in the radio (actually I never heard the anthem as often between then and the Soccer World Cup in Germany in 2006!), and actually for us kids the main highlight of October 3, 1990 was not having to go to elementary school. But visiting the little museums and memorials allowed me to actually realize what it meant for the people on both sides of the Wall. Beyond the historic component, I enjoyed Prenzlauer Berg for brunches on weekends with friends who came to visit from all over Europe, Kreuzberg for a beer and some dancing, followed by a döner, and the Olympic Stadium to witness a match where Germany managed to turn a 4:0 lead into a 4:4 ...

Running in Grunewald forest and around the lakes was a regular (though I should not say daily) routine during my stay. I had the pleasure to see the forest change from beautifully colored, with people swimming in the lakes, into a white snow-covered area. These hours in the remote forest nearby allowed me to reflect on the daily tasks and new impressions. Only once was this peaceful mood disturbed, when several wild boar crossed my path just in front of me!

Through lunch and Thursday dinner conversations at the Wiko, particularities of Germans vs. non-Germans, as well as of humanity scholars vs. scientists, became apparent – particularities that were not as obvious to me beforehand. I already mentioned that my challenge was to learn names quickly because I had arrived late – this name learning was made more challenging, as I had to remember quickly both first and last names: when speaking in German, the Wiko language switched to the formal German, something very typical in the German language. Our non-German-speaking Fellow friends were

surprised, though, to find out that we addressed each other with last names. Here, furthermore, the “cultural” differences between scholars of the humanities and scientists became apparent: while I had to adapt to switching to the formal language in German (we would not do so in the lab) and I never knew who to address with “Du” and who with “Sie”, for people from the humanities this was the most normal thing to be exposed to. Furthermore, while as a scientist we were trained to always speak English in a talk so that everybody could at least roughly understand, I learned that for a scholar in the humanities it is important to express their thoughts in the language in which they are most confident, in order to avoid misinterpretation. Prior to my Wiko time, I had a strong opinion on using “Du” and “first name” as well as English in a talk if there was at least one non-German speaker; in fact I never experienced a different setting during my science work. My Wiko time allowed me to put that view into perspective and actually to understand the different views and why there are such big differences between humanities and sciences.

The hours I spent in my beautiful downstairs apartment at Villa Jaffé were full of writing. I had to finish my ERC starting grant application – and while having plenty of time thinking about the proposed projects, the joint lunches helped me to reflect on the ideas and put them into a more general picture. After the ERC deadline, I devoted my time to polishing my first review article. The John Maynard Smith Prize is what brought me my Wiko stay and the invitation to write a review article, so it seemed logical to write the review at the Wiko. I thought for hours about speciations, extinctions, and what factors might determine these processes. More importantly, I thought about how to statistically test whether these processes actually happened, to come up with a unified macroevolutionary theory. As a result, my Wiko stay led to a meanwhile published review in *Journal of Evolutionary Biology*, an ERC starting grant, and my first job offers (for which I wrote the applications in Villa Jaffé). Being far away from daily tasks and interruptions immensely helped me to successfully finish these tasks.

Work-intense days deserve fun evenings; the highlight of my social Wiko time was the Villa Walther pub crawl, where different flats each offered a special cocktail. It still has to be decided whether “Bourbon Bodega”, “Vodka Villa”, or “Gin Gallery” was the winner of the best cocktail award! My wonderful time at the Wiko ended with a Weißwurstfrühstück that Lena enthusiastically co-organized with me, after several Fellows were very curious to try out this Bavarian specialty with a Weizenbier! Thank you, Lena, for making this brunch possible, and thanks to all the staff of the Wiko for making such a wonderful experience possible!