



GENEROSITY AND RECIPROCITY
AT THE WISSENSCHAFTSKOLLEG
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I study cooperation: cooperation among cells, cooperation among people, cooperation among groups. And so when I am asked to reflect on my experience being a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I can't help but see it through the lens of my work. When I arrived at Wiko, I was intensely working on a grant proposal and paper about human generosity and sharing. What I found at Wiko was the most generous intellectual environment I had ever experienced.

When you ask a present or past Fellow to describe their experience at the Wissenschaftskolleg, chances are they will tell you that it is a very special place, a place where things happen and people come together in ways they otherwise never could. It is a place of transformation of people, ideas, and even disciplines. But it is also a place of intense sociality and cooperation: a place that, by virtue of its physical existence, provides a

framework for sharing ideas, images, sounds, and sentiments. Its transformative nature is inextricably bound to the sharing that takes place within it.

Wiko is also an intensely personal place. We share our lives, our meals, our families. We come to have a stake in each other's well-being. This leads to a level of trust and connection that is rare and precious. I know I am not the only one who will count my Wiko friends among my lifelong friends, turning to them with questions or being there to support each other in tough times.

My year at Wiko was filled with important events: writing and winning a grant proposal to work on human generosity, beginning work on a book about evolution and cancer, defining my research program more clearly than it has ever been defined. But most transformative were the discussions and collaborations with other Fellows. Many of these were centered on the working group on Cancer Evolution convened by Michael Hochberg. Through many weeks of discussion, literature reviews, and discussion of the theoretical foundations of cancer evolution, we developed and wrote several papers, some of which are complete and some of which are in preparation.

In the Spring, I gave a polarizing colloquium on cooperation across systems and also a public lecture on cancer as a problem of failed cooperation among cells. Most importantly, in the Spring I realized that cancer cells cheat the system of the multicellular body in many of the same ways that humans can cheat resource distribution systems that are regulated through economic, social, and political systems. This led me to rethink my research program and restructure my long-term goals and effort to focus on the question of how cooperation and cheater suppression operate across systems and scales.

At Wiko, I spent a lot of my time thinking about the nature of cooperation. One question that I worked on was whether sharing without the expectation of return is a viable strategy. In other words, can there be generosity without strict reciprocity? In my agent-based models, I found that giving without expectation of return is a viable strategy and, through a literature review, I discovered that in many small-scale societies, individuals cooperate and share without keeping track of credit and debt. What I found at Wiko was another example of a small-scale society where individuals give without expectation of return. Wiko was itself an exemplar of the generosity that I was studying.

Being at Wiko opened me up to new ways of thinking about the nature of cooperation and the shared (and not shared) meanings of these words. I realized that many times we may use a term like cooperation in evolutionary biology, but it means something entirely different to someone from another discipline. This seems especially to be the case with

terms relating to cooperation and sociality. In fact, several of us Wiko Fellows convened an informal and multidisciplinary group on this very topic. Felix Breden, Simon Teuscher, several other Fellows, and I met at breakfast to discuss the challenges and opportunities for establishing a more productive interdisciplinary dialogue about human cooperation. We discussed notions of kinship, cooperation, reciprocity, and cheating across the biological and social sciences. I learned so much from this group, especially from Simon Teuscher, who studies kinship in the Middle Ages. As an evolutionary biologist, I used to think about kinship as genetic relatedness. Simon opened my mind to an entirely new way of thinking of kinship: that kinship is about shared interests and inheritance, not limited simply to the domain of genetics but defined much more broadly.

But another thing happened at Wiko that changed my thinking about cooperation and reciprocity in particular. In talking with Paul Robertson and his friend and colleague Hugh Pidgeon, I learned that the word reciprocity has much broader (and more interesting) meaning in the social sciences and arts than it does within evolutionary biology. In evolutionary biology, the term has typically been used to refer to back-and-forth exchange, and a kind of exchange that involves account keeping and notions of debt and credit. What I learned from Paul and Hugh is that reciprocity can refer to a completely different kind of give-and-take: the mutual engagement that happens during connection and communication. This kind of reciprocity is not about keeping track of the exchange history, but instead about a kind of openness to interacting and establishing a relationship. Reciprocity, as I came to understand it from Paul and Hugh, is an openness to giving and openness to change. It is receptivity to signals from others and receptivity to accepting things from others, whether ideas or other gifts. Hugh taught me about these semantics of reciprocity over coffee at the Wiener Café, and Paul taught me about the rest over many Wiko breakfasts and trips to the farmer's market at Karl-August-Platz.

Wiko is a place that fosters connection and mutual engagement. Not only is it a generous place in the way it supports its Fellows, it is also a generous place in that it invests in creating an environment that cultivates generosity (both intellectual and personal) in its Fellows and the broader community. At Wiko, I learned that generosity follows from connection and mutual engagement. Or in the language that I came to understand during my year (and I'm not talking about German): generosity follows from reciprocity. I have benefited greatly from the generosity of Wiko. That creates a relationship, a connection, a sense of mutual engagement that I hope will continue throughout my life. I am very grateful for the generosity and kindness of the Wiko staff as a whole and especially my

dear friends Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus and Giovanni Frazzetto. I will also always remember and appreciate the many Fellows who supported me and the rest of the Wiko community with their generosity of spirit, including (but certainly not limited to) Jenna Gibbs, Wendy Espeland, Kathleen Coleman, and Pippa Skotnes.

In my work on human generosity, one recurring theme is that being part of a sharing network enhances the resilience of the whole system to negative events and helps individuals survive in challenging circumstances and marginal environments. Human generosity in networks of trusted partners might therefore have been a critical factor in enhancing survival as humans expanded into marginal environments around the globe. In other words, generosity may have enabled humans to live in places they never otherwise could have lived in and to take risks that might otherwise never have been taken.

Wiko may be the intellectual case study of exactly this. The generosity of Wiko creates a community that motivates its members to take intellectual risks they might not otherwise take and explore territory that would be impossible to navigate without the help and support of the larger community. In my mind, this is what makes Wiko the institution that it is. It allows otherwise impossible things to happen. It pushes the frontiers out further by providing forums for interdisciplinary interaction and debate. It continually encourages its Fellows to be even more intellectually adventuresome in the environment of academic exploration that it cultivates within its walls.