



IMAGINE FREEDOM
BETTINA SCHWAB

Bettina Schwab works in the field of neuroscience at the intersection of medicine and technology. With a background in physics, she studies network dynamics in the human brain and how these dynamics can be influenced by electrical brain stimulation. She is particularly interested in the motor system, involving cortical areas and some deeper brain structures, the basal ganglia. To investigate the physiology of this system, pathological alterations of it, and possible perturbation methods, she uses both computational simulations and experiments involving healthy participants, as well as patients with Parkinson's disease or stroke. – Address: Biomedical Signals and Systems, University of Twente, Drienerlolaan 5, 7522NB Enschede, The Netherlands.
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The Covid-19 pandemic has been cruel to many people. It has so far killed millions, led to lingering health deficits in even more, and affected the social and financial security of billions. Also, many scientists were affected by lab closures, financial cuts, and personal trouble. During this challenging time, Wiko was the place to be. It enabled a Fellow year in presence with all possible comfort, starting with a hygiene concept in September that still allowed us many activities. Within a few weeks, I got to know the majority of Fellows and partners, making me feel at home. I loved the gleam in everyone's eyes when they talked about their work, their unconditionally positive attitude towards their Co-Fellows, and their relief to spend a sabbatical away from administrative duties.

The first two months at Wiko were dominated by trips around Grunewald and Berlin, common lunches and dinners, barbecues in the backyard of Villa Walther. Thanks to

wonderful Ulrike, I got the opportunity to connect to several groups in my field at the Charité, which was great, in particular at my current stage as a senior postdoc. I had the time to finish an article on computational modeling of bifocal transcranial brain stimulation, in part while sitting in the huge Wiko garden, interrupted only by pleasant chats and a few foxes. A local soccer club in Schöneberg, FC Internationale, adopted me, giving me the chance to practice with them.

With the Covid restrictions and increasingly cold weather in November, things were changing. Still, lunches in pairs were possible and my partner took the chance of the lockdown to fully move in to Villa Walther and to enjoy the peacefulness there. Although of course our social activities were restricted, it was also good to have time for uninterrupted work: I submitted a DFG (German Research Foundation) grant proposal on multi-modal brain stimulation that I had prepared for a long time. I also had a lot of time to think about my future, to explore what I want to do in the next years, and to apply for positions. That also included a contact to industry, which I incredibly appreciate and which would have been my Plan A if there were no science.

A special highlight for me, actually coming with this time, was our little running club, which Shamil called the Wicked Wiko Runners. We met every Sunday morning and sometimes in between, to get lost for hours in the woods of Grunewald. It was the time for us to talk about science and life, to complain about whatsoever, to feel like a group. Madeleine ran with me even during the coldest Berlin winter days, watching other people bathing in Krumme Lanke after knocking holes in the thick ice layer. I am so proud of the Wicked Wiko Runners shirt that you guys gave me on the farewell run!

I loved our life science discussions, both in person and virtually. After a bit of time to get to know how the other disciplines think, we soon had engaging discussions with the philosophers about Peter Singer's concept of speciesism. It was amazing to feel how Hakan and I were supported by more senior life scientists, sharing not only their views on biology, but also on how to grow up in science and to build up a lab. The general colloquia were extremely pleasant, with an open atmosphere encouraging discussions across the sciences and humanities. It was a new experience to me to present to such a wide variety of people with different expertises, showing me aspects of my work that I often neglected before.

With my own field being rather dominated by men, it was thrilling to see so many bright women every day, and to watch how they succeed in many different ways despite struggles of all kinds. Pretty much all of the Fellows, independent of gender, had this infectious passion for their own field and quickly became my role models, including close

friends who went with me through the good and bad times of my stay and beyond. It was so good to have you guys, and to see all of you during this awesome last week of June, when I visited Wiko again. We then made up for a lot of the group activities that we missed in winter and had a terrific farewell. I hope to see you soon again.

I will miss the walks with Katya, table tennis matches with Corinna, Marcelo playing the guitar for me, Shamil's enthusiastic running plans and the great time that we devoted to them and to swimming in Schlachtensee, Hakan's ever-smiling face (even after the initial 14 km through Grunewald), the discussions with Andreas about his work and Peter Singer, Madeleine's fantastic cake, which I regularly got on Sundays, Ben's passion for bees and epigenetics, speed training with Yossi overtaking me, Johannes raving about his twins, the variety of languages spoken by the kids of Villa Walther, Jan dancing, Merve's straight questions, Alex' sense of humor, Anna's constructive approach to any kind of problem, Hans Michael's initiative to unite us with a bike tour, Sonja showing Berlin's parks to us, Michel's and Nadine's warm-hearted nature, Angela's and Michael's trust and support, Ève's and Sophie's views on capitalism, Magdalena's and Konrad's cultural heritage that they brought to Wiko for us, Barbara's welcoming character, Daniel's incredible empathy saving every situation, Luca depicting Carl Schmitt, Dunia's delicious *Zwiebelkuchen*, Vera's wonderful care, and so much more. I am still touched by the video that you guys made for me before I left.

But, life will go on. I was awarded an internal UKE grant together with Fanny Quandt, a clinician scientist at UKE, on the neurophysiology of motor learning in stroke patients, and the individual DFG grant I applied for during my Wiko time. I accepted a tenure track position at the University of Twente in the Netherlands and will start there in October as an assistant professor. Keeping a tight collaboration with UKE based on the two grants, I can combine clinical neuroscience with technology and computational modeling, which is ideal for me. The stay at Wiko has helped me in this critical time of becoming senior. It gave me the chance to reflect on what is important to me, to exchange with others and to learn from people who have made this step a long or short time ago, and to plan practical things. Most of all, it gave me the confidence that I am doing the right thing, that science is my passion. Wiko, I will never forget.