



LAT (LIVING APART TOGETHER)
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LAT: Living Apart Together

LAT is a term typically used in demography to refer to couples who maintain separate households, but could well be used to portray the very special Wiko community. Academically, we were both apart – coming from a broad range of fields and working on our own projects – and together – talking to and learning from each other on a daily basis. This sense of togetherness grew stronger meal after meal, colloquium after colloquium, walk after walk. Before long, we realized that, despite real and imagined distances in thematic interests, disciplinary traditions, and work styles, we all shared similar enthusiasm for sharing, debating, living fully, and playing.

Residentially, we also lived apart – more than a room of our own – but at the same time together, or in very close proximity. I enjoyed greatly the day-to-day companionship

of my Villa Walther neighbors. This type of co-living arrangement transported me back to my graduate school years in Madison, when I lived with fifteen other international students at Rochdale Co-op. Like then, coming back home at night, I found myself looking at the window lights to see who was still up. Potlucks, after-colloquium night gatherings over wine, and beer evenings at Floh, Landhaus Grunewald, or Villa Walther's courtyard were rejuvenating. I never felt lonely. I am going to miss terribly this kind of co-living with cool neighbors, amusing kids, and a large variety of pets – including a praying mantis – when I go back to my dull apartment building of quasi-anonymous neighbors in Madrid.

Socially, I would say that we were more together than apart. The week's agenda rapidly filled up, with plenty of cultural and social activities organized by Wiko and by Co-Fellows: wine tasting parties, Fassbinder movie nights at Villa Jaffé, restaurant outings, museum visits, concerts, beer gardens, street markets... No time to be idle. Mohammad Al Attar's premiere of *Damaskus 2045* at Freiburg, Liza Lim's concerts, Guy Tillim's photo exhibitions, the train trip to the Bauhaus in Dessau, and watching *Metropolis* with live orchestral accompaniment at Kino Babylon were among the highlights of this inspiring year.

The intermingling of work and play made it relatively effortless – even for a shy person like me – to engage in both deep and light conversations. Laughter was always present. I truly admire the talent and erudition of my fellow Fellows, but what I treasure most is their sharp sense of humor and subtle irony. The line between serious and fun talks was quite thin. In fact, Hegel was a regular guest not in our serious talks, but in our follow-the-vodka parties and surprise birthday celebrations.

Cohort: Group of persons who experienced a common event in a specific time period that leaves an imprint on them

Cohort is another key concept in demographic analysis. There are birth cohorts, graduation cohorts, marriage cohorts... and there are Wiko Fellow cohorts: an eclectic group of people with different backgrounds, expertise, national origins, ages, family stages, and life trajectories from all over the world, who spend an academic year (or part of it) together in a stress-free environment, cared for by the incredibly helpful and kind Wiko staff, and granted the most precious gifts: time and freedom. What else can you dream of? No doubt this unique experience will leave a long-lasting imprint on us and a sense of belonging.

Possibly all Wiko cohorts have the same feeling, but I cannot help thinking that our cohort of Fellows and partners was truly special regarding the level of camaraderie and

friendship we developed. Why so special? Perhaps because for most of us, Wiko and Berlin meant the first trip abroad, the first in-person seminars, the first social meals or the first outing to a theater, after nearly two long years of remote work, virtual meetings, and limited social life imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many of us arrived at Grunewald a bit like *Zoombies* – having been forced to move our professional and social lives largely to the virtual world – and eager for face-to-face interaction. Wiko provided the ideal setting to heal from isolation fatigue and to return to collective life.

Grunewald felt at first like an elitist and depopulated suburb; however, its forests, lakes, and wildlife – the first time I've seen foxes on a city street! – had a therapeutic effect on me after a long period of home office in a dense and greenless neighborhood in Madrid. I really welcomed the singing birds, the noisy swans, and even the weird insects I found on the balcony.

Thanks to the Tuesday Colloquia, we regularly learned about each other's fields, interests, ongoing projects... Exposure to such a varied range of knowledge from the life sciences, humanities, social sciences, and arts made me feel increasingly humble, but also curious, so I rapidly switched to a learning mode.

Thanks to the daily meals, we gradually got to know each other and enjoy time together. I remember how the initial Thursday dinners ended after only two hours, while later on, they lingered on well past midnight. Animated conversations and contagious laughs became commonplace. No wonder nobody wanted to leave the dinner table (and the accompanying wine) on Thursdays.

Serendipity: Making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident

Serendipity is one of the mottos at Wiko, but I would not say that discoveries happen by accident at Wiko. Instead, the Kolleg's leadership and the wonderful staff have carefully designed a perfect environment for formal and informal cross-disciplinary encounters that inspire new ideas and enhance creativity. Broadening your mind – and your research questions – in such an environment requires no effort, it just comes naturally. I cannot think of a better setting where you can engage in lively and fruitful conversations bridging disciplinary, linguistic, national, and cultural divides. The wide diversity – in all dimensions – of my Fellow cohort was a real treasure.

Both planned and chance encounters and both serious and playful discussions were equally valuable to me. Conversations did not develop only in structured contexts, such as the Tuesday Colloquium, the Three Cultures Forum, or lunchtime, but also in many

casual encounters typical of close neighbors, like grocery shopping, doing laundry, hanging out in Villa Walther's courtyard, or taking the M19. The myriad possibilities to approach colleagues, in both their professional and domestic spheres, made it easier to venture into other scholarly fields, ask naïve questions without fear of embarrassment, and understand each other's views without getting lost in specialized jargon. Sometimes, the conscious awareness of how little I knew about so many things would be overwhelming, but at the same time, surrounded by so many gifted but incredibly modest scholars and artists, the learning opportunities were endless.

Work-in-progress syndrome: Difficulty to consider a work "finished"

The first months in Berlin were an in-between period – half here, half there – because I still had to revise some unfinished papers – on child maintenance after separation in Spain and on social norms related to fatherhood in Europe. I was impatient to move on and start working on my Wiko project on the interplay between family change and social inequality in the Latin American region. As Nuno Ramos stated in his introduction to my colloquium, "In Latin America, inequality is at the center of any and all social life, making itself noticed in absolutely everything, from the baker's 'good morning,' to the children's games, the shadows on the floor, the sunlight, the night watchman's whistle, some couple's discussion at the next table, some baby crying, neighbors' music, dogs barking. Everything, everything is absolutely unequal." It could not be expressed better. I truly admire my fellow writers and artists for their talent in communicating not only ideas, but also feelings and emotions.

Before I initiated my project's data analysis and writing, I engaged in a kind of "slow science." It had been a very long time since I could devote time to just reading and thinking, without the pressure to be constantly productive or the stress of imminent deadlines. Thanks to the rare luxury of time, Fellows' recommendations, and the great Wiko library, I had the opportunity to read widely: studies that had long been on my to-do list and many others that were outside my radar. I am not sure this broad reading gave me more answers, but it surely left me with many more questions and broader narratives of social and family change, as well as a joyful sense of moving beyond my field's comfort zone.

Despite – or perhaps because of – the blurred boundaries between work and play, I am happy with what I accomplished in my Wiko year, particularly with a co-authored article, "Families in Latin America: Trends, Singularities, and Contextual Factors," published in the *Annual Review of Sociology* 48 (2022), which explores the causes of the growing social

class divide in family patterns. But I am even more happy to have met and befriended amazing people, to have discovered never-boring Berlin on random long walks, and to have engaged in so many enriching conversations about politics, life challenges, family stories, and endless topics.

When you are happy, you are more productive. Even so, my work rhythm was largely seasonal. It peaked during the long dark winter days – though I confess I was disappointed that it only snowed a few days – and relaxed during a spring that was too beautiful to be indoors. Quite a few half-written papers remain “in progress,” perhaps waiting for the next dark winter.

Gratefulness: Deep appreciation of the kindness received

I am truly thankful to Wiko for giving me the opportunity to be part of this unique intellectual community and to spend such an enriching, magical, and happy year in Berlin; to the exceptionally caring Wiko staff, for nurturing me and making me feel at home; and to my dear Fellows and partners, for their wit, humor, and warmth. It really felt like an extended family. Gracias mil!