

Ten Observations from a IPMZ-Gastprofessor

Being a visiting professor is one of the greatest pleasures of academic life: a new environment, new colleagues, new ideas, new experiences. But some locations are more rewarding to visit than others. My Fall 2007 semester at IPMZ has been a very enriching and satisfying experience. Below you will find 10 observations, big and small, in no prioritized order, about my time in Zürich:

1. Students: the IPMZ students I had the pleasure to meet and teach were engaged, critical, hard working and a pleasure to interact with. And perhaps a bit spoiled... they have good lecturers, good facilities and get most things served on a silver plate.
2. Staff: the IPMZ secretarial and administrative staff was wonderful. Helpful and efficient. On my first work day in August I found an office, desk, facilities, computers, everything to be ready and setup. This, I might add, is not the norm in many big organizations!
3. Colleagues: for someone interested in political communication, comparative research, media effects, journalism, campaigns and direct democracy, the faculty at IPMZ is a dream come true with excellent experts in most of these fields. I have enjoyed the interactions (about research and other things) and I look forward to seeing some of the plans made materialize in the future.
4. City: Zürich was pleasant surprise. Shame on me, I assumed it to be a bit dull (at least by comparison to Amsterdam...). But it is a fun and beautiful place. And the only city I have ever been in where a «Vignette» is needed to ride the velo!! (Again quite a contrast with Amsterdam)
5. University: UZH is a well-organized place. From the half-inside, half-outside position of a Gastprofessur, it is a lovely place with hardly any «politics» obfuscating your academic work. But of course, I do not really know it from the inside...
6. NCCR: a remarkable thing to be observed is the NCCR program. Not many countries can show an example of a multi-discipline, multi-year, multi-million project where Communication science is a serious partner. With some envy I congratulate IPMZ for that achievement.
7. Apple juice: excellent quality. But it comes with a sparkle! This observation, by the way, was made by my four year old son who was all excited when he noticed this fact about the Swiss apple juice.
8. Trains: it's a cliché but still. Being completely dependent upon public transportation (except my velo!) it is wonderful to be in a place with such good, efficient, frequent and on-time trains, trams etc.
9. Democracy: being from a country where politicians are afraid of direct democracy (why give away our power, they seem to say) it has been enriching to learn more about the Swiss democracy, e-voting, and the minimal say for the national level of governance. This seems like something that is such a common good in Switzerland that many forget to treasure it.
10. Heidi at the airport: like most visitors I was struck by the flat-screen images of Heidi and the sounds of yodelling and cow bells in the fast train between the E Gates and the main terminal in Flughafen Zürich. Having considered it a few times, I came to the conclusion that this is a great thing: showcasing a culture and tradition that you are proud of – and at the same time being able to laugh at it – that is a truly good quality.

Being a Dane, living in Amsterdam, visiting Zürich, I can fully say that the visit to this European, non-EU country, has been a delight. My prediction is that IPMZ will continue its growth and international visibility – and I look forward to following it from Amsterdam! Uf wiederluege!!

Claes de Vreese
ASCoR, University of Amsterdam
www.claesdevreese.com