

# Cuckoo clocks and color chalk

Having just edited a book on «High-Tech Policy» that includes a detailed chapter on Switzerland, I had an abstract notion of the country and its achievements before I arrived. With three universities in the 2011-2012 Times Higher Education World University Rankings (the University of Zurich among them), Switzerland can boast the global top spot measured on a per-capita basis. Clearly, policy-makers and the private sector have realized that, as a small and open economy, Switzerland needs a highly educated work force to succeed in global competition. Not only does the country source patents and technical know-how abroad, it brings in highly qualified international professionals.

But I have to admit that my mental image of Switzerland was also colored by a quote from the 1949 Orson Welles' thriller «The Third Man», in which Switzerland gets a bad rap. Set in postwar Vienna, black market racketeer Harry Lime, in a futile defense of his dealings in diluted penicillin, explains to his friend that «in Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock».

World leader versus sleepy stability: it was going to be an interesting time. After nearly four months at the IPMZ and in Zurich, I feel that I have a more realistic picture of this beautiful country. Being surrounded by images of watches from the first touching of ground at Zurich airport, I quickly learned that, of course, Harry Lime was wrong. The cuckoo clock is a German invention (and the Swiss were a strong military force when the Borgias ruled parts of Italy). And the IPMZ is certainly no sleepy but a dynamic place dedicated to researching one of the most exciting transforming forces of modern society. An international faculty, a strong international outlook of research and teaching, and a diverse student body all contribute to a vibrant environment of scholarship and learning.

Having worked for more than two decades in the American university system, I notice several differences and similarities. First, compared to U.S. universities, the IPMZ is a resource-rich place. Spacious offices, support facilities, technical staff in seminar rooms and lecture halls, and clerical support are coveted but scarce in the U.S. system. Second, the relation between professors and students, at least as I experienced it, seems to be more formal and distant than at American universities. I enjoyed working with the Swiss students but I think it took them a while (and a few servings of chocolate and pretzels) to get used to a less formal and more involved teaching approach. Third, I found that researchers put in long hours, but it seems to happen in more structured ways: working at the office (instead of at the coffee house or at home), templates for presentations and letters, and office excursions.

And then there are the small peculiarities of life that make a place odd and enjoyable, but also a challenge. I am still working on memorizing names of colleagues so that I can greet them appropriately in the hallway. Every time I taught at Uni Irchel, I was floored by the five different colors of chalk that were available (the last time I had seen that was in elementary school). More than once, coming to the office in the morning, I thought people were evacuating to the street only to realize it was just the «smoker welcome brigade» going strong.

I am grateful for the invitation to spend time at the IPMZ and am thoroughly enjoying my affiliation. Interacting with the many wonderful students and faculty has invigorated my own thinking and will leave a mark on future research. I look forward to continued exchange and interaction.

Johannes M. Bauer