

The famous IAESTE spirit meets the spirit of Davos

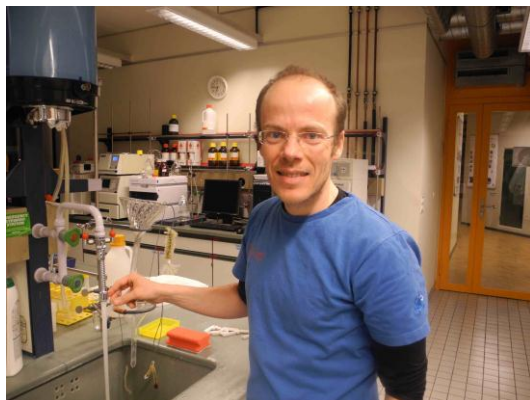
visiting AO Research Institute in Davos

*by Gaby Hilpertshauser, Incoming exchange coordinator
IAESTE Switzerland*



Davos - highest town in Europe (1560 m above sea level) - is my homebase for winter- and summersports but it is also the home of a range of research stations such as the very special AO Research Institute. Therefore I took the chance to visit this employer during my skivacation last week. The previous IAESTE trainee from Finland already finished his internship before Christmas and started his master studies just now at ETH in Zurich. A new potential IAESTE candidate from Poland will be selected within the next month.

The AO Research Institute was created in 1959 as a laboratory for experimental surgery. As a privately financed research institute, it is part of the global AO Foundation (started in 1958). The research done at the institute aims to solve practical surgical problems dealing with fractures and degenerative conditions and to develop new implants and procedures. It carries out fundamental and practical research work in the fields of mechanics, biology, materials science, biochemistry and molecular biology.



David Eglin (originally from France, winner of Jean Leray award 2011), leader of the Polymers and Surfaces team at the AO Research Institute, welcomed me just after the sun set behind the beautiful snowy mountains of Davos. I first got introduced to his very international team of interns, PhD and Postdoc students. They were all still at work while the rest of Davos was in après-ski mood.

Along the hallways and stairs, the history of the institute was explained with professional displays, sometimes it also felt like a medicine-museum with many devices and bones in exhibition. Passing by different laboratories, x-ray rooms ... we ended up in his lab of macromolecular chemistry and material science, where David Eglin focuses on polymers for medical devices, tissue engineering and regenerative medicine. He showed me a hydrogel which is liquid when cold and gets stiff when it reaches body temperature. There are still question marks about how this



gel will interact with cells and tissues in the human body, how it can be used in the orthopedic field. It was not an easy task for David to explain to me, a non-scientist, the different research fields and its experiments. But he was excellent in giving me an insight into this fascinating field.



On our way through the different floors, I was astonished by the long rack of crosscountry skis and shoes on the ground floor. It is how some of the staff come to work in winter or exercise during lunch time. And a winter can be long in Davos! No wonder, Davos is also the selected homebase of this year's world champion Dario Cologna! David also pointed out, that new fellow employees get introduced to crosscountry skiing in their leisure time as well as they do a lot of sport activities together.

One other important field is the AO Education Institute, which offers events, congresses and courses worldwide. They develop a wide variety of learning resources, from e-learning, videos, books, journals and apps for surgery reference. My question to David, if I asked an african orthopedic surgeon if he knew AO Foundation:- he would most probably answer with YES (98% chance)! I was once more impressed!

We finished our tour looking at the staff picturewall (around 70 smiling faces from all over the world). The AO Research Director, Prof. R. Geoff Richard (UK) has been an IAESTE intern in the past and so have been two other researchers from the UK and China. They all came back after their internship here to do their PHD and Post Doc studies at the AO Research Institute and now are a part of a highly motivated team!

On the edge of Davos, where the fox and rabbit say goodnight, the lights were still on when I left the institute. Once more I felt this famous „spirit of Davos“ – it is not only present thanks to the World Economic Forum, the HC Davos, the Spengler Cup, the Kirchner Museum, the freestyle scene on the Jakobshorn,it is right here at the AO Research Institute. And it feels great that IAESTE interns can be a part of it!

*Read more about AO Research institute here : www.aofoundation.org
and for your next holiday check: www.davos.ch*