

Here we go, Switzerland



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Company introduction

SMA offers independent consultancy and software products for railway system planning. With 70 members of staff at present, including 65 with university qualifications, we are active in 30 countries world-wide. Our portfolio of products and services consists of railway system planning, process consulting and operations optimisation as well as IT services and the software products Viriato and the ZLR running time calculator.

When developing specific concepts, processes and software, as a matter of principle we always consider the whole railway system. As the number of people and components involved grows, and political leadership and decision-making structures become increasingly intangible, the complexity of this system grows rapidly. It is our role to co-ordinate the interests of all participants, to initiate dialogue and by so doing to open up fresh potential. Together with our clients we are making preparations for the railway systems of tomorrow.¹

Foreword

Before I left Switzerland, one inevitable question would be asked is ‘will you come back Switzerland again’ ? Actually I have no accurate answer in my mind but a kind of feeling would overflow from my heart which is the people, the memories, and the growth I got from here will accompany along my twenties, no matter how will be like but this experience indeed changes my life track a bit, at least the way I view this world.

¹ Source from <http://www.sma-partner.com/en/about-sma/portrait>

Work

During the three-month internship, I assisted my project leaders to finish each project by using software Viriato which was innovated by IT team of my company. At the same time, I did a research by myself and I could get some help from my research mentor when I met some problems. Plus, they assigned me one presentation about Shanghai metro system so I got a chance to present it in front of all of my colleagues.

I mainly participated three projects during my internship, one belongs to German region, and rest of projects are Swiss region. One stereotype is most of Chinese are always confused about the difference between Switzerland and Sweden, let alone the geographic conception of European countries. Hopefully, I had a schematic definition about the geography of Europe but it was hard for me to quickly start my tasks and tens of questions came into me, maybe some of them should be the common sense of railway engineer. At least most of my colleagues are quite familiar with the Swiss railway timetable in details but I cannot. Even lots of colleagues are from FH²/ETH³/University, but when I cooperated with them I found they were more focus on how to help you make progress. My project mentor encouraged me to bring up my question if I do not know how to fix it, stopping feel shame about domains you do not know.

November is the busiest month during my internship, I gradually knew some basic principles so my leader tried to give me more work and meantime as a student from China, the development of Shanghai traffic also attracted my colleagues. Spontaneously, it was my duty to introduce how about the traffic system in Shanghai. To be honest, I made lots of efforts about this presentation and my leader gave me many suggestions as well, for instance, we did a pre-presentation before. I have to say, the process is also impressive. Everyone was more critical than I thought, my British colleague sent me to email to remind me using appropriate terminology after the presentation. But I appreciate that! Maybe I already witnessed the live lecture in ETH so I was

² University of Applied Sciences, Germany

³ Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Switzerland

kind of enjoying people kept skeptical about my statement. Actually, I do not feel shame because I know of which is what I lack.



Figure 1 Shanghai metro presentation slide

I needed to finish a research by myself, which was totally a challenge for me, especially I do not use google often. I was stuck at the beginning until I asked some colleagues who did similar research last year. When my research was going to an end I got some doubts about some technical questions, then I had a chance to talk with employees of SBB⁴ by my research leader' arrangement. The scale of the conference was larger than my expectation, but it was more like a seminar.

⁴ Swiss Federal Railways

Analyse Halteprozess / Optimierung
Haltezeiten

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Figure 2 Content page of my research

Every week quickly passed. Working with a group of railway experts is my great pleasure. I can feel their affections about railway and this ambition also inspired me to explore the field of mine. “Have you ever know what it is”? I asked myself sometimes.

I got used to following up the tendency of the society but I seldom ask myself why I want to become an engineer, only because the people around you told you studying engineering is easier to find a job. Sometimes I really tired of my major because I never really know it, even I could get not bad grades because I spent a few weeks to immerse in the library before the final exam, which is not I want. When I took to participate in a speech that holds by ETH transport department, I realized it still has a long way to go to become a real engineer.

Life ▪ accommodation

I got used to living with girls in the dormitory in China when my tutor found a flat for me where I need to share a flat with a man, so I refused.

Interestingly, at the end, my flatmate is still a boy, and we got along well with each other. Since my tutor started to find accommodation for me, I realized something culture differences between western and eastern.

Cooking is not very smooth at the beginning, given that we do not bake so often. I was surviving sometimes, luckily I got some cooking guidance from my roomie, and from my friends. The cake which was cooked by a Lithuanian girl and meatball which was from Swedish guy and some hotpot parties organized by Chinese friends let me miss a lot. And the typical Swiss food is Fondue, which is melting cheese in a pot, taking a piece of bread to dip some cheese.

In my case there indeed exists some differences about living hobbies, but it is not hard to adapt it. Any questions I would ask my roomie or negotiate with my landlady.



Figure 3 The place I lived in Switzerland

Life ▪ travel

I went to three countries during my internship, which respectively is France, Italy, and Germany. I went to France twice with different people. Actually even I went to the same country you still feel each part of this country deserving to explore that is why I went to twice.

I visited my cousin in Italy, it was very impressive travel. She also just moved to Rome for a few weeks, so we decided to do something special instead of normal travel routes. This journey really happened something weird thing. We met a man who is a bit lame and do not speak Italian or English, only mandarin with some accent, so he asked us for help because he lost contact with the person who was supposed to pick up him on the train station. I was suspicious until he showed us the train ticket and ID of him, so we talked to train inspector helping the man find right train to go home. When I looked back these series things I felt a bit scared because if he is not a poor guy, what will happen to us. Learning to take care of myself is important than everything.

Visiting my German friend before I came to Switzerland already put on my agenda. I am very happy for this reunion because it was not supposed to how soon we could meet again. She had been to China before I came to Europe so she could understand my cultural shocks here. The reason for which I tried to pick up more Swiss German is that I also wanted to learn about this country and I was tired of keeping superficial social connection with the people around me, so myself should take some actions instead of waiting someone took the first step.



Figure 4 Art exhibition in Rome

Life • IAESTE Switzerland activities

The activities of IAESTE Switzerland are two types, one is weekly meeting and another one is the weekly activity⁵.

Most of time I tried not to miss the weekly meeting, some of my Chinese friends asked me how to handle the conversation with people from other countries. Actually, I also had the same worry at the beginning, but when you were immersed in your talking instead of the 100 percent correction of English, then some interesting thing will happen. I met some new friends, we both were interested in some political questions, common hobbies or anything else. Get rid of the worry about language because here it provides you to make friends rather than your English speaking test!

Weekly activities presented me breath-taking landscape around Switzerland, I even do not need to take pictures because it can deeply print in my mind. The top of mountain covered a thick piece of snow looks like a nut with white chocolate. Each activity is one-off activity for this year, so do not miss it.

⁵ You can browse all activities by their official website. <http://www.iaeste.ch/en/>

Sometimes we would go to bar after one-day travel, party spirit here came out. I think it is another very important culture in western but we do not really get their points in China.



Figure 5 Mountain in November of Zurich



Figure 6 My first snow in Zurich

Summary

Only your attitude will decide the influence of the things happening to you. Sometimes I also felt frustrated when I got into some troubles, but I told myself to be proactive to face the problems which could be more helpful for the real situation.

My parents love me so much but when I grew up we have had more and more arguments. While I found my European friend he could get well with his parents I started to try to tell my parents about my feeling and my problems. Now I felt we get closer than before.

I do appreciate lots of people who I met during my internship, my colleagues, my friends, my teachers and dear IAESTE team. I also appreciate myself took the first step to go abroad without hesitation when I was sophomore.

Growth always takes some time, you cannot say you were a baby yesterday and tomorrow you will become an adult.