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# Personal Experience Report

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**Intern at Paul Scherrer Institute**

**September 2019 – June 2020**

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I arrived alone in Switzerland in September 2019 to do my first ever 5-month engineering internship and to tell you the truth I had no expectations. My experience is a unique one and I never thought that it was going to pave the way for my future life and career.

Coming in Switzerland I was really nervous about all the little things that I had to face and the arrangements I had to do, together with my non-existent knowledge of German. Before my arrival, I had done a lot of research on various things in Switzerland, like issuing a permit in the Kreisbüro, deciding on health insurance, bank and telecom company, which surely helped me a lot for a smooth transition. However, people from IAESTE helped me with every small detail whenever I needed.

For the first two months I was staying at the guesthouse of the Paul Scherrer Institute where I was working. The accommodation provided by the guesthouse was very good with all the required facilities and it was really clean. Moreover, waking up to the calmness of Swiss countryside, with the flock of sheep that were feeding next to the guesthouse was an unprecedented experience for me. Crossing the river Aare from the West to the East every morning to go to work was the best part, providing me with the energy to focus on what is important without any distractions.



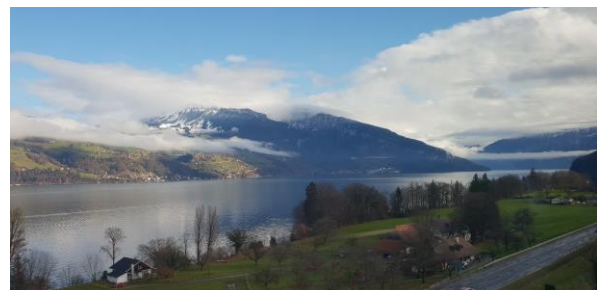
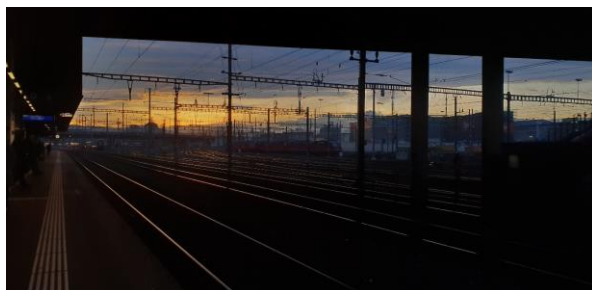


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My roommate was a girl from Greece who was also working in the same lab as me. We did almost everything together and bonded even from the first week. I would say that up to now she is one of my best friends and I feel really lucky that I met her. Hanging out with her made the transition from Greece easier. However, she is not the only friend that I made. I used to go to the kitchen to cook all my meals with my roommate every day and there I met with some wonderful people from around the world, Israel, India, Holland, Romania, Portugal, Argentina, Taiwan, Thailand and many more. We organised birthday parties and excursions around Switzerland. They are all really great people that we still keep in touch who I wouldn't have had the opportunity to meet if it wasn't for IAESTE.



I was sad to leave the guesthouse after the first two months but I had to move. So I moved to Zurich. If you are looking to find an apartment in Zurich there are a lot of sites that you can look up, especially for interns. Most people with low remuneration, as interns, are sharing an apartment with other people. I was lucky to find a place in Hardbrücke. One of the most hipster areas full of young people and a lot of places to go. I could take the S12 train from the train station at Hardbrücke and in 45 min I was in Brugg (the closest town to Villigen) where I could take the express bus to PSI. One of the most interesting experiences and sometimes painful was to be an everyday commuter to work. Before coming to Switzerland, I was used to the 15 min bus route to the University in Athens, Greece and before that 5 minute walking to go to school in my hometown in Cyprus. However, commuting to work is a common thing in Switzerland. At the end, I made up my mind and ending up preferring the commute as I had plenty of time to read the news in the morning or a book, also waking up slowly, and then, reaching an area that is located in the countryside opens your mind. At the end of the day, I can chat with friends and family in the train back to Zurich, recharge and relax before reaching home.



During one of the IAESTE weekends (Cheese & Choc Weekend) I had the opportunity to visit Cailler Chocolate Factory at Broc, a traditional Swiss cheese factory in Moleson-sur-Gruyeres,





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try an alpine coaster, hike for the first time in Moleson mountain and stay in a wooden hostel. The visit brought me closer to the Swiss culture and it was also the first time I tried the Cheese Fondue. It was one of the best experiences of the internship that I still remember with great excitement. Everything was so well organized by IAESTE people and they also knew a lot of information about the area.



My internship had everything, setbacks, unexpected projects, results that will be published, innovative experiments, contract extensions, etc.... As I mentioned in the beginning, my internship was for 5 months. I was working in the Fuel Cell and Diagnostic Group of the Electrochemistry Laboratory and my initial goal was to work on Polymer Electrolyte Water Electrolysis and the characterization of the porous transport layers that are stacked today in the water electrolysis cell. The work was set to be exclusively experimental and I was supposed to work on a test bench. Unfortunately, a lot of equipment problems delayed the start of the project, but, the PhD student that I was working with, Tobias Schuler, gave me sufficient work to do which was more computational and co-operation with other PhD students in several other projects. Until the middle of November I was waiting for my initial project to start, but unfortunately, I was so unlucky that when one issue was fixed, constantly another one popped up. At that time, we had to send an equipment for maintenance to the factory with a waiting time of 1 month. I was a bit devastated with this outcome and I remember requesting from the Line Manager to come up with a different project. And they came up with a new project, very different from the initial one but I was happy that I got to have a project on my own. I worked on that project for more than two months. Then I got an extension until May 2020, as all the parts of the test bench were back, I could start my initial project and also, I was already involved in several other projects. From the middle of February I was supporting some colleagues on the preparation of a beam time experiment but after that, Covid-19 stroke and then the lockdown. All the experiments had to cease for one more time, everything was done remotely, and thus, I worked on a computational project

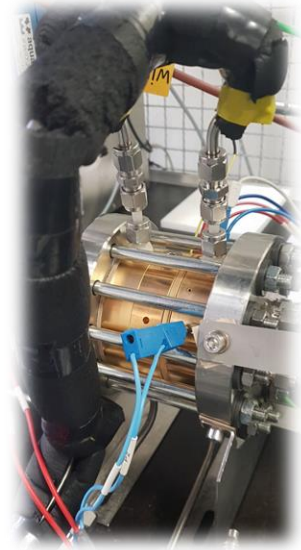




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and later on a literature review. I am so lucky for the people that I worked with as everyone was very friendly and helpful. In the difficult times of Corona they even extended my contract once more until July 2020 and then further on they offered me an Engineering job in an ongoing industrial project concerning Fuel cells. Generally, the most important thing of all is that I had a lot of exposure to the ongoing research in my field.

All the experiences I gained at a professional and personal level throughout my internship and further on with the engineering position would have never been possible if everything worked perfectly in the first place. I got to work with almost all members of the group I was part in, in both water electrolysis and fuel cells, I participated in two beam time experiments for water electrolysis and I made two presentations. All of this experience opened my horizons and changed my perspective in life and work. I got some valuable tips concerning work ethics and where to give my focus according to the project, and most importantly my soft skills were developed tremendously as I got to work with a lot of different people under various circumstances.



After this experience I got to know myself a little bit better. Working in research, facing all those problems and building up tolerance changed my perception towards research and made me realize what I wanted to do in my life. So I decided to try to apply for a PhD position at ETH in a subject that I like, ending up getting an offer.

Overall, the internship was one of the best experiences in my life so far. I recommend to everyone to find an interesting position through IAESTE internships that they like. The internships are all paid and the IAESTE Switzerland team provides great support. It will be worth to do your internship in Switzerland as all the industries and research institutes are in close cooperation here. So if you are looking for an opportunity that will bring you closer to your career goals search for IAESTE internships in Switzerland. Life is unpredictable so you have to always be open to new opportunities and try things out (you never know what awaits you). It might not turn out to be what suits you but at the end you will gain so much from the journey. IAESTE offers incredible “journeys” for everyone.