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Column by Visiting Professor Ulrike Klinger: Hello again, Zurich



What's it like to return to Zurich and the IKMZ after a six-year hiatus? Mike Schäfer and a few others nudged me with this question back in February, and now, after careful contemplation, I'm ready to spill the beans.

At first glance, it's like stepping into a well-preserved time capsule. Zurich's lake still glimmers under the sun, trams run with Swiss precision, and the Sprüngli Truffles du Jour remain delightful. The local headlines in 20 Minuten continue to oscillate between the absurdly luxurious ("Coke in Zurich is becoming purer and purer") and the melodramatic Germany-bashing ("The incident on Sylt is a consequence of the failed asylum policy").

Now, about the institute. Although the whole Jarren division I worked with is now gone, I find it much unchanged. Even the sofas from our offices found new homes in the kitchens. The institute may have undergone a rebranding from IPMZ to IKMZ – with Frank Esser as the captain, even donning a uniform, but the machinery hums as efficiently as ever. It continues to be a haven of productivity, everything running smoothly and swiftly. So many thanks to the fantastic administrative team and Olga Tartakovski and Stefanie Hangartner for their support with OLAT, exams, and all things teaching! As Christian Steininger, who was a guest professor in 2009, put it in his farewell speech, and I couldn't agree more:

"The IPMZ is an impertinence to anyone who does research in other contexts or countries. It is (to put it mildly) devastating to place visiting professors in such a well-managed and organized, well-resourced, committed, and competent environment, only to send them home again after a semester".¹

¹ https://www.ikmz.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:e7ada2f9-41e1-4c07-8d22-cc60cc2d092e/christian_steininger.pdf

Many familiar faces around the institute haven't changed, which is proof of the IKMZ's charm and loyalty. This is quite rare, especially from a German perspective, where this would not be possible due to things like the infamous "Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz." There are also lots of fresh faces, and the return of brilliant colleagues like Meg Jing Zeng only adds to the mix.

However, time has indeed marched on since 2018. Gone are the old 10 Franc notes (a discovery I made quite embarrassingly at the ETH coffee stand), and the roast beef sandwiches at Globus are only a memory in the archive of guilty pleasures. The coffee stand on Andreasstrasse has upped the game, and Oerlikon overall has undergone a chic transformation with a new Tibits, the closure of the notorious porn cinema, and a Sprüngli outlet – gentrification, finally!

In conclusion, my return to Zurich and the IKMZ has been a delightful blend of nostalgia and novelty. When I accepted a position in Berlin in 2018, I was happy to move on after eight long years, suffering from a Zurich overdose. The past semester has cured me; all of you were a much-appreciated part of this therapy. Now, once more, I can cherish Zurich as a city full of contradictions, as German journalist Heinz Liepmann pointed out in 1965:

"I am in love with this city of contradictions, the city of eccentrics and philistines, with its hectic modernity and, at the same time, its leisurely old-fashioned bustle. Zurich can be repulsively arrogant and at the same time extremely cozy; here, sophisticated international elegance mixes with a dash of rough folklore; it is xenophobic and at the same time hospitable; arrogant and at the same time solid and honest. Zurich's soul, just like the city's outward appearance, is both outrageously modern and unbearably bourgeois. I believe that you can find everything that interests and moves a lively, open-minded person in Zurich; it is a city that speaks my language".²

Thank you!

² Fierz, J. (1969). *So ist Zürich: Was Nichtzüricher über Zürich und seine Bewohner sagten*. Diogenes.