

When I arrived here in June, I was totally overwhelmed by CERN's sheer dimensions. I was used to the small campus of my hometown in Germany and the first days seemed a continuous probing of my orientation.

After my official registration I stood on the road, holding a map of CERN in my hands to guide me to my office and my future working place at ISOLDE. Usually, I only make use of maps when I travel new countries or cities, but not when I go to work.

But indeed CERN seems to be its own city with a long tradition. Following the map you pass by the glittering buildings of the new and most famous experiments located at the LHC, but you will also find older areas including historically rooted experiments such as ISOLDE. Since six decades this city of science has combined professionals of various fields and from many different countries with one shared aim: finding answers to the most fundamental questions of our world.

21 member states and thousands of scientific users join in the world's largest lab for particle physics to discover whatever holds the world together in its innermost core.

The universal language of science is the key to bridge cultural and political differences and allows cutting-edge research.

But what are the driving forces in this cultural and scientific melting-pot and who guarantees the proper and successful coordination of this city of science? To understand the mechanisms behind CERN, you must look into its administrative structure. And let me tell you, for a newcomer it appears just as complicated as its physical infrastructure.

Within my first three weeks I already took the chance to look behind the scenes of CERN's government and joined the open council session in June.

When I arrived at the Council Chamber in my casual everyday cloths, I felt completely underdressed. All the Council members showed up perfectly suited as you would expect from politicians on the television. And to intensify this impression, I was provided a headset to follow the simultaneous translation of the complete meeting. Feeling a bit uncomfortable I took my seat in the back of the Council Chamber and followed the official 4-hour-procedure.

As my time of speech is limited and I don't want to bore you, I will spare you the hard facts and only summarize my observations.

One part of the strict agenda was dedicated to the annual financial statement of 2013 and the council appreciated the correct and good usage of CERN's budget. An elaborate report on CERN's Medium Term Plan explained the future use of the budget and those experiments which will be pursued. Two talks informed the Council on the latest status of the LHC and the huge amount of data, which still has to be analyzed.

With time passing by you could see the attention of the attendees drift towards other things and the number of screens showing Facebook on it increased. One has to keep in mind, that they have heard it all before in the Closed Session. So it shows that besides the serious and tough work, the Council members are just normal human beings.

But when it came to the Pension Fund, all the attention was on the discussion again. From the general atmosphere you could tell, that this topic has already been subject to many heated debates during the Closed Session. Although the member states chose their words very carefully, the dissatisfaction with the situation was obvious.

After this tough agenda item, the presentation of the Human Resources Department on CERN's diversity program lifted the spirits again. This special program was created to foster equal job opportunities independent of gender, age and profession. The presentation showed that CERN's engagement in this matter outreaches the legal obligations by far and a healthy work-life balance of the employees is not only valued but actively supported.

Although the Council Session dealt with a lot of more topics, it was this subject area which stuck to my mind and I tried to reflect, what made me going to CERN.

To begin with, the public perception of this organization is excellent combining the scientific impact and the good reputation among the scientific community. In my case it was word-of-mouth propaganda from a friend who works for CERN. When I told him that I wanted to go abroad for a PhD he pointed out that CERN is THE place to be – not only for particle physicists.

Imagine CERN as a city of science, how would a tourist guide convince ambitious people to move there?

The extraordinary location between the old chain of the Jura and the majestic mountainside of the Alps and the Mont Blanc is one of the most obvious benefits of this city. Surrounded by monuments of geology CERN offers subterranean cathedrals of science and it still needs hands-on experts to run, refurbish and upgrade the existing experiments. But if you are more attracted to brain work, the city of science has a highly specialized quarter for this as well and offers you high capacity computers or grid computing to analyze and simulate almost anything you want. And if you experience any problems you can be sure to find the respective expert somewhere in CERN's labyrinth of infrastructure. In this case it might be a good idea to have your map at hand.

However, CERN is more than a peerless place to work. It effectively encourages people on their early career levels to join its scientific community. This starts with project days in primary schools, special programs to train high-school teachers and the recently created project called "beamline for schools". Those actions take advantage of the curious and open minds of children to awake their interest in science and research.

Various scholarships and special programs, such as the doctoral student program target at young scientists and provide them with the necessary subsistence to work and stay in the Geneva region. Those scholarships enable the beneficiary to focus on research and career development at one of the scientific hot-spots of the world. And this is not all.

For more than 40 years CERN has been running its own Kindergarten and even pays part of the costs for staff members. This outstanding institution has always been a great help and people were frequently asking for an extension for younger children as well. Since 2011 an additional daycare facility offers 40 places for children between the age of 4 months and 4 years.

During my preparation for this talk I got in contact with other young scientists and their personal experiences at CERN. The parents among them greatly appreciated the development of the crèche and made a small suggestion that would make it even better:

As work at CERN sometimes requires high flexibility, it would be a great deal to guarantee the child care also during the summer break which spans 8 weeks. Most young scientists at CERN can't rely on relatives living in close proximity. Bypassing this gap would make it easier to combine successful career development and responsible parenthood.

Altogether, my personal impressions and the experiences of other young scientists showed that CERN and its Council are aware of the needs of young scientists. They always seek to be in the vanguard – not only in science, but also in creating a worthwhile place to work.

In the end I would like to thank the Council for all the great achievements which I can also benefit from and I would like to encourage them to continue their passionate engagement for the future scientists, engineers and group leaders.

Thank you very much and congratulations!