

There and back again – Traveling during PhD



View from Letna park in Prague towards the city center. Photo credits:

In May last year I went to Prague for the fourth time during my PhD. Even though I really enjoyed my time there and met some great people, I hoped this had been my last visit (for PhD purposes).

My first visit was almost three years ago just after the beginning of my PhD and as you might remember still during pandemic peak times. I was supposed to finish the experiments that the PhD student before me (some might still remember Brennen) had started. I got funding from the international program of Charles University and some from the equal opportunities office at the University of Münster. So I planned to go there for a month, do the experiment and go back so we could finish the manuscript. Nice and easy, right? We are talking about experiments, though, and nothing went according to plan. The setup of the experiment was not ready when I got to Prague, and I ended up doing some other things. Still useful, but not what we wanted. Then after one month of doing preliminary experiments and living in a tiny Airbnb with no windows, I went back to Münster feeling not very successful.

And so we started planning my second trip to Prague, to really finish the experiment this time. For this, I received funding from the DAAD and went for two months this time. But again, I did some other experiments because the setup was not ready. Still, I had a very nice time in Prague, this time actually living in a nice flat with my colleagues from the lab.

For the third time, we thought we had learned from before, so we planned with more extra time, and I actually managed to do a test run of our long-planned experiment. This time was funded by Erasmus, which I didn't know was possible for PhD students. I then even extended my stay to be able to finish the whole first round of experiments. Of course, I still needed to go back to repeat the experiment with replicates and all. The problem was that I was really out of ideas of where to get

funding for the visit this time. I tried all possibilities I knew of and also applied unsuccessfully a few times. But luckily I read an email from the University about funding opportunities and found out about the Santander mobility fund. So the fourth visit was safe, and I was able to do multiple rounds of the experiment I have been planning for years. Finally, we were able to finish the paper and it got accepted just now.

I would encourage everyone to go visit another lab during their PhD. Even though my first visit to Prague wasn't the best, I still enjoyed it and learned a lot. You have the opportunity to get to know different groups and people, learn new methods and just have fun in a different city. It is also an excellent opportunity to network and maybe check out groups where you might want to go after your PhD.

Links to funding:

Equal opportunities office from the University of Münster: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Gleichstellung/en/Einzelprojekte.html>

DAAD: <https://www2.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-scholarship-database/?detail=50015434>

(The scholarships change a bit every year, but usually there is some short-term funding)

Erasmus internship: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/CareerService/infos/praktika/finanzierung/erasmus.html>

Santander mobility fund: https://www.uni-muenster.de/Safir/foerderformate/santander_mobiltaetsfonds.html