

# My Swiss Life as a “Rigotnomist”

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When I moved to Geneva from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington DC in 2013, friends kindly warned me that Swiss life is very different from that in any other country: four official languages for only eight million people. When I joined academia, colleagues politely suggested that junior faculty don't have a life, especially during the first few challenging years when you need to balance research with teaching obligations. Four years later, how is my life in Switzerland so far? I am happy to share my wonderful experiences, and I am so grateful that I have been given the opportunity to be part of the Graduate Institute.

## Colleagues as Friends

I became a “Rigotnomist” right after my colleague, Prof. Ugo Panizza, invited me for a first meeting at Pavilion Rigot, the then landmark building next to the UN Plaza’s “big chair”. In Washington, everybody knew Pavilion Rigot as the Mecca of international finance with its excellent reputation for training world-class economists, including many outstanding economists at the IMF whom I knew very well. After a short stay at Rigot, the whole department moved to Maison de la paix, prompting more interactions with colleagues. The outcome has been more than four joint research papers with colleagues and students. Beside

the academic work, my colleagues have really looked after me, helping me integrate into my new life: housing, coping with the French language, Escalade, Geneva Marathon, ski trips, wine tasting, family gatherings, travelling, vacation... So far, I have been invited to work with leading scholars across Swiss universities and received the prestigious CICF Best Paper Award and a research grant from the Swiss government. Colleagues from other departments have also been essential in helping me pursue my academic career and growing into the profession.

## Cheese and Wine as Hobby

There was a magic moment when I started enjoying cheese. Growing up without high-quality dairy products, I was not used to eating cheese either as a starter or as a dessert. I still remember my first cheese fondue dinner – I was up the whole night trying to digest it! Yet the more cheese I ate, the more addicted to it I became, and suddenly I was a serious fan. I have now explored many of the myriad varieties of Swiss (and French) cheese. Two years ago, as a hobby, I started writing a book to teach my Chinese fellows how to taste various cheeses and wines, as well as matching them with different Chinese cuisines. As a foodie and chef, my cooking, especially the *brasato al barolo*, has led to memorable nights with friends, and it is the best way to relax after a long day of intensive work.

## Art as Dream

Art Basel inspired me when I was a student. Later, after spending days at the Phillips Collection in Washington, enjoying masterpieces from Switzerland, I was able to visit Swiss museums and galleries as well as private collections. Recently, I went to Verbier and Martigny and had a great time at the Fondation Pierre Gianadda. My next plan is to visit the contemporary Chinese Art Museum owned by Ambassador Uli Sigg, who has collected more than 2,000 works by over 350 Chinese artists. Art encourages me to taste the beauty of life. I enjoy it and have a long way to explore!

To sum up, my high-quality life as a Rigotnomist in Switzerland is full of happiness, surprise and joyful memories with my friendly colleagues, smart students and the lovely Swiss people. As Henri-Frédéric Amiel taught us: “*Chaque vie se fait son destin*”!