

PhD life at CORE

by Paolo Piacquadio

It is no news that the period of PhD is crucial for those engaging in this experience: research aspirations, topic selection, networking contacts, supervisor's advice, slide presentations and harsh criticisms. Every day the PhD student sits on the office chair, eyes focused on the screen, working without distractions, knowing that this period of life is going to be determinant for the future.

The PhD transition is one's "intellectual puberty". Like physical puberty, it is rather confusing and brings about astonishing changes: it transforms childish hopes to change the world through economic research into (more-or-less) mature publishing-oriented researchers. Advanced courses, seminars and conferences, endless bibliographical research and paper readings are the necessary hormones that accelerate the brain training process. Moreover, in clear contrast to the physical one, during intellectual puberty we learn how to avoid reproduction activity... in favor of possibly original contributions.

Nevertheless, there are other aspects of PhD life (in particular at CORE) that remain in a sealed corner of long term memory. These relate to stories of social life that quickly become difficult to confess. By the way, if you think that I am wrong, you probably managed to well hide them behind the veil of your academic success. However, what I am allowed to reveal here are only some backgrounds for these stories.



The art of living at CORE ...

The most relevant location is clearly the CORE lounge. I am sure you are all used to the classical "tea" configuration; maybe also to the "seminar" configuration (with sandwiches, wines and desserts). What you probably did not experience is the "cinema" version: rows of couches, projector, and powerful speakers. Our movie evenings are the perfect occasion to taste food specialties arriving from all over the world: watching "Le Dîner de cons", tasting red caviar delicately posed on a slightly buttered slice of baguette, and sipping white Italian wine. What can you imagine better to release the tension of PhD life? Luckily, when the movies were over, we could also enjoy a guitar duo accompanying a soprano singer (among many other off-key voices, including mine).

Less often (officially to keep the secret, but mainly due to the rainy weather) we enjoy our "Siberian terrace": it dominates CORE offices on the opposite side of the main entrance. Apart from walking there to refresh ideas during tiring proof-making marathons, we take advantage of the Tuesday market to have a rooftop lunch with chicken chest and roasted potatoes.

As you all know, Belgium is world famous for chocolate, frites and beer. Of course we take most advantage of the last one when we periodically organize a "doctoral drinkshop" together with our IRES cousins. (I keep frequency as private information... I can just tell you that it started as a one-to-one relation with the doctoral workshop, but was quickly far more successful). This usually starts at Guinness world record bar for the amount of different beers served, the "Delirium" pub in Brussels. The final location is unpredictable, and sometimes random (especially if one forgets the name of the street one lives in).

But whatever happens, the day after we again crush into our office chair, we keep eyes wide open, focused on the screen, mentally fighting against distractions, knowing that this period of our lives is going to be determinant for our future...



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