

Rückmeldungen zweier belgischer IPO-Teilnehmer (Gent, Mai 2016)

[...] But later that evening I came in contact with the people from the other countries. Culture shock is an underestimation for what I felt at that moment. You met the most amazing persons and had the most amazing conversations in the blink of an eye. You said your name and nationality, your conversation partner did the same and before you knew it you were having a conversation about spirit-mind-and-body or the Übermensch in daily life or the concept of perfection.

Those days were some of the most amazing days I ever had in my life. [...] For four days I had the life I'd always dreamt of having and it was incredible.

The amount of stereo-types that I still had, although I had tried to destroy these, were debunked in an astonishing tempo. Russians talked with Americans while laughing. Japanese and Koreans were joking about pizzas. Germans and Belgians stood together on the graveyard of their fallen ancestors. These people were no countries, no labels, they were people, who loved the world and philosophy and each other. [...] I just thought why the world couldn't always be more like this. More peaceful and respectful towards others.

[...] For me IPO was a life-changing experience, which I can only recommend to people wanting to leave the borders of their cities.

Daan Van Cauwenberghe (Heilig Maagd College Dendermonde)

[...] The magic of the IPO is that at any moment one is to speak his mind, and knows he will be met with enthusiasm. My time there was an unintended rebellion against the normalcy of my everyday life, and I did not realize it until the very moment of goodbye. Now the bubble has been pricked through, my friends are scattered across countries and I am confined to a strange loneliness I did not know existed. But this experience has enriched me in so many ways; I would not have given up a single minute of it.

Rafaela Verhaeghe (H.-Hartcollege Tervuren)

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Daan Van Cauwenberghe – The aftermath

Books had been my teachers. Never in my life had I even taken one single class of philosophy. The only one who truly knew about my thoughts was I myself, not letting them become ideas. The only one who had truly read my writings was I myself, not letting them become essays. I'm from a small typically Flemish village, which is a part of a small typically Flemish city. Like those of you who live in such a place probably know, philosophy isn't the most practiced 'hobby' in this kind of environment. My city was one in which people were proud about every aspect of their culture and I couldn't find what to be proud about. But I did find something: philosophy. Although until the Olympiad I only spoke about it inside my head and wrote things in my little booklet behind dark corners.

So, yes, it was a pretty big shock for me when I passed on to the next road, being one of the winners of the national election. But still I must admit I was pretty skeptical, little did I suspect there to be other teenagers like me, finding their pride in philosophy and trying to think past the border of their little Flemish cities.

Something I will probably remember for the rest of my life was the first lesson at the university. Before entering the building some fear in the form of existential doubt if I was truly worthy to be there hit, and as a result of this moment I entered the classroom too late, while everyone was already there. I would be lying if I said that everyone looked completely normal, but who does?

From the first discussion we started that day those other Belgians, like people would know us later, became a second family to me. I even can't express what I feel thinking about these nine amazing people, gathered from around the country, proving me that I wasn't alone.

But this first meeting was nothing compared to the IPO itself. Almost by chance, or not, were the first people I met that day the people I would get to know the best. Marcos, an amazing artist who is brilliant at every art he practices and an amazing person in general who can make smile at any time, Viola, a brilliant and hilarious girl with whom you just crave to spend some time with and Daniel, who shared far more with me than just my first name, but show me in some of the first minutes we knew each other that we would become the best of friends. Only naming these three seems hard, but these were the first three people I met that day and stayed some of the best friends I made.

But later that evening I came in contact with the people from the other countries. Culture shock is an underestimation for what I felt at that moment. You met the most amazing persons and had the most amazing conversations in the blink of an eye. You said your name and nationality, your conversation partner did the same and before you knew it you were having a conversation about spirit-mind-and-body or the Übermensch in daily life or the concept of perfection.

Those days were some of the most amazing days I ever had in my life. Group conversations about the meaning of life were followed by rap battles, which were then again followed by singing competitions in people's respective native languages. But what I liked the most were the more private individual conversations you had with people, in which you could really go into detail. And every time I didn't think about the national differences or differences in opinion, but about everything I had in common with these people from all around the world. And I started to love everywhere in IPO in a way that is normally described, but skeptically never believed by me, in religious texts.

The days were filled with activities, the evenings were filled with laughter and the nights were filled with people. And, thanks to my roommate, my toilet was filled with vomit. But what I try to say, although not very poetical, is that I was always doing something I loved. For four days I had the life I'd always dreamt of having and it was incredible.

The amount of stereo-types that I still had, although I had tried to destroy these, were debunked in an astonishing tempo. Russians talked with Americans while laughing. Japanese and Koreans were joking about pizzas. Germans and Belgians stood together on the graveyard of their fallen ancestors. These people were no countries, no labels, they were people, who loved the world and philosophy and each other. They showed me the true meaning of the theme 'War and Peace', especially the last night when we all sang songs to each other in our native language. And while the Korean and Russian anthem could both be heard in the little room I just thought why the world couldn't always be more like this. More peaceful and respectful towards others.

Now the IPO is over and my friend Daniel earned his first place, together with Kim, an amazingly smart and kind girl who I haven't got to know as good as I had hoped to, but sadly time was limited, and Ihsan, who I unfortunately didn't get to know at all.

And now I'm back at home writing this text in my bed in a typically Flemish house and a typically Flemish village where the people still don't care about philosophy. And in some way I feel empty and sad, because this amazing experience is already over and I needed to say goodbye to people with whom I would like to spend so much extra time with. But when I think about my memories from my past experience and when I come online to read that people are already planning a reunion (the week after it happened), I am filled with joy.

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Rafaela Verhaeghe

Upon arriving in the hotel, I had no idea that I was about to fundamentally be changed over the course of just four days. I met my fellow participants who did not ask whether I read, but rather what I was into to get to know me better. This shows how we bonded over deep thinking, instead of over mutual interest as usually happens in "life outside the bubble". When the whole group was gathered together for the first time, what struck me were the pulsating atmosphere of excitement and the shared philosopher's mind-set I encountered at every twist of a sentence or turn of a conversation. Soon, I was not surprised anymore to seat myself at the breakfast table and join the highly interesting on-going discussion. Throughout the day at any given moment a debated could be sparked, or a line said with remarkable insight, or an intense wrestle witnessed wherein two youngsters fenced with words, defending their point of view. During the evening we would joke around, mess with each other in the way the youth is famous for. I remember going up to a hotel room to a small social gathering where I enrolled in a conversation that showed me the value of intellectual liberty. Everything was to be discussed with such openness and thoughtfulness that it made all my previous conversations pale in comparison. I have discovered, as someone put it, " a depth I could not even phantom" to every person. And so the evening darkened to the night and we went to bed. There I lay pondering, knowing I did not have to keep these thoughts to myself. The magic of the IPO is that at any moment one is to speak his mind, and knows he will be met with enthusiasm. My time there was an unintended rebellion against the normalcy of my everyday life, and I did not realize it until the very moment of goodbye. Now the bubble has been pricked through, my friends are scattered across countries and I am confined to a strange loneliness I did not know existed. But this experience has enriched me in so many ways; I would not have given up a single minute of it.

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