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A moving story

In the winter of 2001, it was Peter Schlögelhofer's turn to face the 'postdoc dilemma'. At the time, he was a graduate student in plant molecular biology at the University of Vienna and was seeking a postdoc position in the United States. He wanted to find the best scientific fit for his background — but he also needed the post to offer him a good quality of life on the limited income he was set to receive. Schlögelhofer was fortunate enough to receive several offers, which he had to weigh carefully.

The first position was at a prestigious West Coast university. It was tempting scientifically, but the housing costs were far too high. A second offer came from an East Coast institution, which allowed for reasonable housing, but the project wasn't a terribly good fit. The third offer was from a state university, which lacked a 'designer' name but which offered a project that Schlögelhofer was enthusiastic about, as well as housing that wouldn't stretch his stipend.

Schlögelhofer's reasoning shows how house prices can affect a postdoc's decision process — perhaps more than many realize or care to admit. Many institutions in expensive cities are recognizing how much of a burden housing can place on prospective fellows, and they are beginning to address the problem. But as yet there is no uniform approach (see page 766).

Just as Schlögelhofer was about to settle on his third option — he thought the project's quality, the adviser's reputation and the reasonable rent trumped the institutional cachet of the first two — he changed his mind. He decided to trade his scientific prospects abroad for a romantic one at home. Fortunately, it all worked out in the end. He landed a temporary position at the University of Vienna, complete with his own lab and grant-writing responsibilities. And he doesn't have to worry about housing — unless he decides to leave Vienna for a permanent position when his present contract ends in two years' time.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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