

I decided to share a portion of my experience with the COSOPO programme. Please do not regard this as a promotional campaign leaflet, I'm doing this as my own initiative.

Looking back at the previous 1,5 years of study, I view the Comparative Social Policy Master programme as quite a unique one. You may think it is not a real „door-opener“ for your successful career in business, and you're probably right on that, yet most certainly it is an „eyes-opener“ and a whole load of knowledge and experience.

If you regard education as something not only strictly related to skills but rather as a formation of moral code, behavior and opinion, COSOPO will suit you well. It is a programme where you deal with complex topics, you learn how to analyze them in detail and what consequences do interventions in complex social systems have.

As a business/economics bachelor, I came to Linz armed with knowledge about incentives, firm and unshakeable belief in the power of markets and, from today's perspective a great deal of naivety about economic and social relations in Europe.

Throughout the first semester, I was trying to view the European societies through the optic of a liberal economist and matters of citizenship, civil society and social responsibility seemed largely irrelevant to me. Besides, I had neither theoretical nor practical apparatus to operate with these concepts and therefore they seemed void of meaning to me. Through time, as we discussed the origins of social Europe and contrasted it with other social arrangements around the world, I started to realise how important these concepts were and even found ways how to treat them in a objective, empirical way. This may seem like a heartbreaking story, yet much of it lasts. The programme has taught me that complex things are not easily cut-through by a strong point and a convincing argument. Instead, you need to evaluate the impact on all different kinds of participants, look a bit forward to the future and still remain realistic.

The courses that we took were a nicely balanced selection of expert views, research methodology and alternative approaches to economics and social science. By the end, you have a choice among six electives which allow you to concentrate on what interests you most. Then there's the time reserved for the internship which to me personally was very valuable in terms of skill and the ability to get things done in a proper way.

At the present moment, without too-much overconfidence I claim to be able to handle an empirical research project, quantitative or qualitative analysis of data with a software package and operationalization of abstract concepts like job security, inclusion and integration. Apart from that, the ability to look at complex systems from different angles is something that will become extremely valuable. Although this is very relative, also my english writing has improved from the initial shallow and diverging texts to a decent scientific production.

Well, now let's turn the page. As you may know, the COSOPO is structured a bit differently from what I expect you may remember from your bachelor studies. Firstly, there are the intensive programmes. Ever been to a student exchange ? Well, with COSOPO, you're in fact doing two. You'll have an opportunity to spend two weeks both in Vilnius, Lithuania and Tampere, Finland. Above all, this means the professors and your fellow students come from different places, did different studies in the past and you can learn much from them. Spending two weeks in a foreign country gives you just enough time to find out what you wanted to know, wander around and observe. There's socializing of course, cultural events, fun and such. In addition to that I reckon there's a familiar atmosphere. You're not spending your time in a packed auditorium with 200 other folks whose names you can't remember. Instead, your fellow students are people you have a chance to get to know well.

The programme leaves much freedom in some periods, allowing you to pursue your job, spend time with your friends and family or travel. In other periods, you may need to fully concentrate on the workload. Therefore, I would recommend to study full-time present in the first one or two semesters. You may take other courses you feel you need (quantitative, language classes or a minor in physics if that's what you're into) and when you're a foreigner to Austria, you will have enough time to look around.

I'll leave you with this and if you have any questions you think I know the answer to, feel free to contact me (in english or german). My email address can be obtained from the programme coordinator.

Jan Fait, Czech Republic
COSOPO 2010-2012