

## **A Student's Experience (COSOPO 2012 – 2014)**

When informing about the COSOPO Programme I had some questions in my mind. Now I want to share with you the answers I discovered so far.

### **What will I learn in this programme?**

You can look up the exact curriculum on the website with every course and ects. I just want to give you a brief overview of how I experienced the four semesters of the Masters programme. In the first semester I had lectures of the three different universities on the national social security systems. The Finnish lecturers held for example lectures on the system in Finland in comparison to the other Nordic countries. This part of the programme was for me something really unique, because you hear from three different countries how their social systems work. Because the lecturers live in the country they can give you insights you hardly ever find in articles or books. Besides the first semester contains some basic theoretical classes on social policy and methodologies to bring all students on the same level. In the second term we had a more theoretical and methodological focus and had classes on qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Furthermore we had courses on how to compare different welfare states and an extended theoretical input on social policy issues. In the third semester most of the students do their compulsory internship. I am working at a research institution dealing with social policy issues; others are for example in international institutions abroad. In this semester you can choose between different research areas, I'm enrolled in a class on family policy and one on gender. Nevertheless it is useful to choose a class that is related to your master thesis topic. Beside the research areas I take a course on the European level of social policy. The fourth semester is then dedicated to the Master thesis. During all semesters, beside this professional input you can use the different backgrounds of your colleagues and ask how it is to live in their home countries. At the moment we are in total around 30 students coming from over ten different countries. This "informal" intercultural learning is extremely enriching and broadened my horizons.

### **How does it work to study in three different universities?**

I had the first Intensive Programme in Vilnius in September 2012, the second one in Tampere in February 2013 and the third one in Linz in September 2013. Each one of them lasted for two weeks and was a great and unforgettable experience. Most of the days we had all day lectures and in the evenings the local students organised some social events. Additionally we had so called field trips to institutions related to the study subject (for example the Lithuanian Parliament, the Finnish centre for Pensions in Helsinki and the Federal Chamber of Labour in Vienna). For me the stay in the countries supplemented the

theoretical input about the social systems perfectly. Due to the contact to local students I saw so many places I wouldn't have seen as a tourist and you can get a real insight into the social security systems you are studying. Naturally the coordination between the universities sometimes lacks, but all responsible contact person of the three universities try their best to solve upcoming difficulties. During the rest of the semester all courses are taught via distance learning. For me this was great, because I didn't have to move to Linz and stayed in Vienna (per each semester I had to go between two and three times to Linz). The distance learning is organised through online platforms – Every course starts with lectures at the Intensive programmes and then the further process is explained. One lecture was directly broadcasted via video streaming, another one used intensively discussions in online forums and at the moment I have a class with regular online chat sessions. So nearly every course is organised differently, but most of them are based on assignments or essays. Only for two courses I had to do exams in Linz. However this should just give you an impression about the variety of distance learning and the exact mode may change in the future depending on the lecturers.

### **How is it to study in English?**

My biggest concern where my English skills. English is not my mother tongue and I considered myself never at the level of a native speaker. Nevertheless my English improved from one essay to the next assignment. So don't be scared if you are really interested in social policy, you will manage the first language difficulties and you will benefit enormous in your future career. Besides nearly all the other students and lecturers are also not native speakers.

In conclusion, I consider myself really happy to get the opportunity to study in this unique programme. The international setting (students and lecturers) offers in my opinion a perfect environment to study comparative social policy. Due to the low number of students you have a really good relation to your lecturers and benefit from the different cultural and also professional background. If I would have to decide for a master's programme again my choice would definitely be COSOPO.