

EXPERIENCE REPORT VSB FONDS

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In March 2013 I wrote in my motivation letter for the VSB Fund that the Masters in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action at Sciences Po in Paris would give me many new insights into human rights, Victimology and minority issues and also improve my knowledge of the French language. Two years later, after successfully completing my studies, I can not only state that this master has given me many new insights and that my knowledge of the French language has improved a lot, but also that studying in an international environment and living in Paris itself has taught me a lot about the aforementioned topics and has given me a lot of valuable experience. Two and a half years ago, when preparing for this, I very enthusiastically started writing motivation letters and drawing up a budget for various scholarships. I already knew during this time that I was admitted to a Master's degree in Sciences Po and working on the registration forms made me more enthusiastic every day for this Master's in Human Rights & Humanitarian Action and living in Paris. To my great joy, I was eventually awarded two scholarships and I was able to move to Paris in August 2013. By thoroughly researching various matters for the preparation of my budget, I was well aware of the preparations I had to make for my stay in Paris: among other things, what administrative matters I had to arrange and what I had to do with my insurance policies.

Since I lived within the European Union, it wasn't necessary to change many things: I informed my Dutch health insurance company that I was going to live in Paris for two years and took out travel, household and liability insurance that would also be valid in Paris. In addition, by compiling my budget, information on the Sciences Po website and previous experience abroad, I already knew what to look for when searching for accommodation.

To find suitable accommodation, I registered at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris (CIUP), a large international student campus that is not linked to a specific university and is located in a park on the outskirts of the city. Through acquaintances who had studied in Paris, I also received the data from a mediator who helps international students find a room in Paris. After corresponding with her, eventually I was offered a room with two options, and chose the international campus, because I thought it would be nice to live on a campus and also because there would always be many activities on this campus. Upon arrival in Paris I only opened a bank account and applied for a student card for public transport when I arrived in Paris.

During the first week at Sciences Po, various bank representatives were present at the school to help us all open a bank account. Applying for a public transport card also turned out to be not too difficult, although it took a while before I received the card. One of the reasons why I wanted to go to Paris was the fact that I wanted to improve my French. Speaking good French before I arrived in Paris was not only very useful, but often also necessary when dealing with administrative matters in France itself. The reception at Sciences Po and the CIUP was very pleasant: both gave an overview of matters that an international student has to arrange. These overviews often turned out to be (more complete) in French, and employees were therefore more able to help in French than in English.

Living in the city

During the first year of my studies I lived at CIUP, where many activities took place and where I was able to have a lot of picnics and dinner with friends. Even outside the campus, it was a dream to live in Paris. After having completed the compulsory internship during my studies at the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights in Utrecht, I lived with an older Parisian couple. I found this room through the aforementioned intermediary and really enjoyed it. Because I didn't live here just with international students, but with a Parisian couple and another French student, I secretly had the feeling that I was experiencing the Paris the real Parisian experiences (if there is one). In the end, I really enjoyed having experienced living like this.

Once I moved to Paris and settled down a bit, my studies soon began. Sciences Po does not have a real introduction week for master's students and only offered a seven-day French course. However, this course turned out to be a very good way to meet fellow students, explore the city together, see the school and study facilities and arrange the latest administrative matters. Since society in France is not much different from the Dutch one, I did not experience a culture shock. I had never lived in a city as big as Paris before, however, I thought living in a big city was great. For young people under the age of twenty-six who come from an EU country, most museums and places of interest are free. Where they are not, they offer many discounts for students. I therefore made extensive use of this! Not only did I visit various museums in Paris, but I also attended various operas, plays and ballets. Now that I know what there is to see and do next to all the famous sights, I think I will return to the city often.

In addition to visiting these sights, one of the things that will stay with me most of my time in Paris is also the fact that after a long study day in the evening with friends I often go along the Seine or in front of the Eiffel Tower, or could have a nice drink somewhere.

Sciences Po and the Masters in Human Rights & Humanitarian Action

Over the past two years, I have had an average of eight subjects per semester, of which about one-third in French and two-thirds in English. The study itself really went really well and fully met

my expectations. The study pressure at Sciences Po is often quite high, but I certainly thought this was a very nice challenge.

The combination of choosing a main direction (Human Rights & Humanitarian Action) and two so-called concentrations (in my case Europe & Migrations) ensured that I could have both a general view of human rights as well as a specific focus on migration and the European Union. The international background of my professors, often known names in their field, who had a lot of practical experience, as well as the very diverse backgrounds of my fellow students, ensured that I received a lot of new insights and perspectives. In addition to many interesting and well-known professors, there have also been very interesting guest speakers during my studies at Sciences Po, including Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-Moon this year.

Although I could not always attend the speeches of these speakers myself, I was able to follow them online and the fact that they were still present at the university at that time was a very unique experience.

Finally, during my studies I also participated in a number of the many extracurricular activities that Sciences Po offers. These activities were not only an academic challenge but also taught me many new things in the artistic and sporting field. For example, I participated in a student project in which I worked with a group of students to come up with a fundraising strategy for Unis-Cité, a French organization that is involved in creating dialogue and cooperation between different population groups in different ways. In addition, I have for example followed a lesson on the history of opera. Sciences Po has no campus and the various university buildings are scattered in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés quartier, all within walking distance of each other.

The facilities that SciencesPo offers are generally very good. The university has an extensive collection of both English and French books and magazines in the field of political science and topics related to international relations. In the university library, there are often no free study places, especially during the exam periods. However, since there are very many other libraries and universities in Paris, and of course there are also many nice, quiet cafés, so I always found plenty of places to study. An advantage was of course that these other places are often located in cozy neighborhoods, are located in beautiful buildings, and in some cases even have beautiful views. The view of famous Parisian sights including the Louvre and the Palais Garnier will of course never bore me.

Future plans

I am currently writing cover letters and applications for work or internships.

As I wrote at the start of this report and in my letter of motivation for the VSB Fund, I am particularly interested in human rights and minorities in Western Europe. My studies in Paris

have not only given me many new insights in the scientific field and have improved my knowledge of the French language, but have also shown me a lot about these topics in everyday life. In addition to the fact that I think Paris is a very beautiful, fun and pleasant city, I certainly could not ignore the fact that, in view of my interest in human rights in Western Europe, many people live on the streets in Paris: both young and old, both families and single people, both people with disabilities and people without disabilities and both French and non-French. The subject of social exclusion of different groups, often minorities in society, was therefore not something I was only concerned with scientifically, but something that I often encountered every day.

I am now looking for internships or work at international or national organizations that are aimed at preventing exclusion (for work, education, social security, etc.) of certain population groups. Often these population groups do not get the chance to participate in society, to be able to contribute to society or to be socially involved. Ideals such as contributing to society and social involvement in society therefore still interest me and play an important role in the work that I would like