

Field Report

My trip abroad to Austria was one of the most unique and transformative experiences I've had in my academic career. This initiative to formulate and complete a major component of my thesis work at a relatively early stage has been of great benefit. Also, it provided an excellent opportunity to expand my network and social circles outside of my home country, something I did not expect to accomplish when I entered my current master's program. As a geographer, this fellowship absolutely widened my worldview and my knowledge of cultural, regional, and political aspects of Austria and the EU. I learned many valuable lessons through my travels, interactions with local people, and engagement with my colleagues at my host university, the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences (CUAS).

CUAS was an important support mechanism and resource for me over the course of my time spent abroad. I was provided everything in terms of hardware, software, and literature required to conduct my work. A workstation in the graduate student office was allocated exclusively for my use and a student identification card that allowed flexible access to both the campus and the office. The workstation was able to perform all of the computational tasks I required and allowed me to store the project data. The bicycle leasing program offered at CUAS granted me a primary means of transportation for commuting from my various lodging accommodations to school. This turned out to be an invaluable resource over the course of my time in Villach. The cafeteria was affordable, offered a variety of excellent options, and enabled me to not have to transport my lunch effects on a daily basis. CUAS made the entire process of getting settled very enjoyable and stress-free.

My primary contacts at CUAS, Dr. Gernot Paulus and Dr. Karl-Heinrich Anders, were instrumental in helping me throughout the project. They met with me on a regular basis to discuss the project, in order to provide feedback and direction to complete the project goals. Although critical in regards to the project, Dr. Paulus and Dr. Anders were also very informative and accommodating in ensuring I had a positive experience throughout my trip. We shared several meals together and also with the other fellowship awardee staying at CUAS, Jesse Sprague. I attended several academic workshops and research presentations that were offered at CUAS, exposing me to different research that both students and international academics had conducted. Another important contact was Fabian Kowatsch, a Marshall Plan fellowship awardee from CUAS who I had met at my home university of San Diego State. Over the past eight months, we have had a mutually beneficial friendship of helping each other conceptualize some components of our research, advise each other on cultural norms, and to make some locally-informed recommendations. Despite the ending of our trips abroad, we still stay in contact and I am fortunate to have had this opportunity to expand my social and academic contacts to a greater international extent. Additionally, I was invited to a geographic information science conference the "GI-Forum" in Salzburg that many graduating CUAS students, academics, and business professionals attended; however, I could not attend due to a scheduling conflict.

I have a few recommendations and considerations that may benefit future Marshall Plan students. Although I did not experience the student housing option first-hand, it seemed like a viable option. It is unparalleled in terms of cost, but the location is not walking distance from the city center. I utilized several different Airbnb rentals throughout my time abroad. This is something that I would not recommend to everyone, but it was interesting to get to live in different parts of Villach and to not have

the same commute week in and week out. If a future student were going to utilize a short-term lease or rental option such as Airbnb, they should absolutely start to look to secure their accommodation(s) as early as possible. I waited until just weeks prior to my consulate visa appointment and was not able to find a single accommodation for my entire stay, so it had to be split up into several accommodations. Additionally, one must re-register with the local authorities every time a new residence is utilized. Because I did not have a car, it made moving between accommodations a tricky endeavor. I would definitely recommend taking advantage of CUAS's bicycle leasing program, this was a wonderful way to get around Villach, which is very well connected via bicycle paths. Another important consideration is that the title of the research should not be changed unless there is some sort of major inconsistency between the research proposed and what is conducted. It is critical to approach this fellowship with a detailed vision in mind, it can take a lot of time to not only conduct the research but to write the project report. Any preliminary research, data collection, data preprocessing, and other aspects that can be handled prior to the official start date, should be performed or at the very least considered. The cost of travel can be expensive, but it can be minimized by determining travel dates ahead of the final application process. This way one can be flexible with travel dates which reduces cost. Public transportation is probably the best way to get from the international airports to the cities of the host institution. One must also be aware of local laws and ordinances that require registration within a certain amount of days of arrival. Knowledge and some fluency in the local language would also be a huge benefit, but it is not required to have a successful experience.