

## **Erfahrungsbericht**

After two years studying in Germany, last summer I could finally go home to visit my family and friends, and moreover, to do a meaningful internship in my home country with the help of STUBE Hessen.

Since the focus of my Master program in Germany is Institutional Economics, I supposed that it would be a great experience to do an internship in the public sector in my home country, partly because I have not done such an internship before but only in private companies. I believe that every young student from developing countries studying overseas wants to apply his obtained knowledge to contribute to his home country to some extent. However, after some years abroad, one's perspective can change a lot, and to have a trial attempt in the labor market home would be a good idea. Therefore I applied for some relevant internship positions, and fortunately was accepted by the State Budget Department within the Vietnam Ministry of Finance, which situates in the capital city Hanoi, also my beloved hometown. I happened to know about the bPSA program sponsored by STUBE Hessen from a weekend Seminar that I participated in. Since then, I had gradually prepared required documents. I have my flight ticket booked 2 months in advance, thanks to the help of STUBE Hessen and the recommendation from my Professor at the Philipps University of Marburg.

Lots of things have changed after just two years. New streets, bridges and apartments were constructed, though not all changes are positive. On the way from the airport to my house in Hanoi, I heard from the taxi driver that the driving distance would have been reduced to a half if the construction of the Nhat Tan Bridge in Hanoi was not delayed. It is a part of a major project to build a highway connecting downtown Hanoi with the Noi Bai International Airport. The project has been postponed by 27 months up to August 2013 due to slow site clearance, inducing its Japanese constructor to claim nearly VND200 billion (USD9.52 million) in compensation. Had the project been soon completed, the commuting time from the airport to Hanoi centre would have been remarkably decreased, which also means more economic values could have been created from time saving into labor working hours. However, inconsistent planning and irresponsibility of relevant agencies prevented this promising outcome, and in contrast, the state budget has to bear losses. Moreover, this incident can initiate a bad precedent for similar cases in the future. That sounds very shameful and questions me all the time when I think

about officially working in the public sector if I have a chance, especially in the Ministry of Finance.

The internship experience in the State Budget Department gave me a practical view on how things operate in such a huge organization. I supported the work in the "Provinces and Cities" sub-department, mainly in information requests and data input. This sub-department is always busy because nearly 20 officers here are responsible for consolidating budget information of 63 cities and provinces of Vietnam. The final numbers need to be available before the annual meeting of the National Assembly starting in the middle of October. During the time here, I was exposed to a great deal of relevant regulations to obtain a comprehensive view about the procedure of budgeting. In the end, my internship report on the topic "The process of forecasting state budget and the adjustment methods of state budget forecast in Vietnam" was reviewed by Head of the Department. Regarding the actual progress, as of July 2013, 23 out of 63 provinces already achieved local revenues of budget estimation, however, to ensure 2013 successful implementation of financial - budgetary task, the Ministry of Finance released numerous solutions aiming at mitigating difficulties for businesses, clearing bad debts, enhancing purchasing power, especially during the contemporary economic downturn. However, to what extent can these solutions improve the situation is not yet feasible to assess. Besides, I personally think that at the same time, there are two main issues that are necessary to be adjusted for better state budget management. First is to decrease the size of the organization's huge systems of bureaucracy, or at least, to enhance the co-operation between different sub-departments and departments to maintain good workflows. This concern has long existed, but is highly unlikely to be resolved under current circumstances. Second is to introduce more advanced management tools and software to automate some steps in the whole procedure. For example, I figured out that in the sub-department I assisted, people mainly use Excel to input data and compute, but no standardized financial models was created or applied, merely Excel tables with simple calculations. There is also presently no need for enhanced tools, probably because minor daily changes for improvement are rather resisted in such a large and complexly designed institution. Therefore, unfortunately I could not applied my business modeling skills that I had obtained in my previous internship in a German private company.

During my journey home, I was also lucky to meet my former Professor who taught me a Development course in Hanoi 4 years ago, and received his newly issued book 'It's a Living', an interesting work on the energy and struggle of the labor market in

Vietnam today. Written based on forthright and open interviews conducted by students, the book shows a thorough and true insight of the of Vietnam everyday working life in the midst of rapid and unsettling change. It's actually brought me surprising facts on a wide range of occupations, from a tourism company director to a farmer, a construction worker, a flower seller to even uncommon jobs such as a grey hair plucker or a mama-san. As a foreigner and an educator living in Hanoi for more than 10 years, but now has recently relocated, my former Professor also shared me his thoughts about Hanoi, his second hometown, especially on the negative impacts of its fast and frequent transformation these days on the society.

My earlier conversation with the appointed counselor in Hanoi also helped me gain an updated general view about the labor market in Vietnam. The unemployment rate in 2013 is increasing, mainly due to shrinking production activities. The reported unemployment rate of 2% is very misleading because it excludes the fact that half of them are young people, and that overall many labors are working in another field rather than the majors that they studied, or are receiving lowered salaries and bonus so that they are not laid off. As far as I know, many students returning home this year face difficulties in finding appropriate working places. Some of them had to open their own mini-business, for example, selling clothes, though it is not their first choice. On the whole, I was advised to keep my eyes opened and continuously look for opportunities, despite the current bad situation. Ideally, I wish to work in a financial institution at macro-level and dealing with international matters such as the World Bank Vietnam or the International Co-operation Department in the Vietnam Ministry of Finance. However, in order for to achieve that target, many conditions, both subjective and objective, need to be fulfilled at the same time. Certainly, I still have and need more time to improve myself, to learn more in Germany, and the experiences and know-how I gained through my internship at the Vietnam Ministry of Finance are definitely useful to determine which steps I should take in the near future to pursue my career goal.

In a nut shell, the valuable support from STUBE Hessen provided me with the chance to visit my home country after a quite long time and made it easier for me to organize a "test" employment to prepare for the real return next time. I am truthfully grateful to STUBE Hessen and hope that more and more students will be able to benefit from this inspiring and brilliant program.