

Final State Examination

Master's Degree Programme in Public and Social Policy

Introducing the Final State Examination

The following topics and thematic areas cover the problematics of the field of public and social policy at the Master's degree level. The examination aims at verifying that the student masters a due level of orientation in the problematics with regard to both the different topics and thematic areas, and the more general theoretical and practical contexts of the field as such.

The examination consists of two parts:

1. Thesis Defence
2. Answering oral questions on the thematic area selected

Thematic areas for the oral questions

A. PUBLIC POLICY

1. Public Interests and Public Policy

- Conflicts between public and private interests
- Public policy as a scientific discipline and as social practice
- Characterizing public interests
- Polity, policy, politics
- Key concepts of public policy and related authors

2. Values in Public Policy

- The value background of public policies
- The role of political ideologies
- Criteria and indicators in public policy
- Value conflicts faced by policy actors

3. Governance

- Multi-level governance
- The market, government, the civic sector, and the media as regulators
- Actors' networks
- Pathological forms of regulation
- Capacities of governance in a globalizing world

4. Actors and Institutions

- Individual and composite actors
- Institutions as implicit and explicit regulators
- Formalized and non-formalized policy actors and institutions – an overview
- Government as an institution and an actor
- Policy arenas/venues and agendas

5. Public Policy Process

- Policy making as an interactive process in a broader social context
- Strengths and weaknesses of stage models of the policy cycle
- Theories of the process of policy analysis and policy formulation – a critical review
- Theories of the process of policy analysis and policy formulation – specifics and possible applications

6. Policy Formulation, Decision Making

- Possibilities of policy change
- Rationalistic and incrementalist models of decision making
- Actors and structure of decision making
- Decision making in policy subsystems
- Strategic decision making

7. Policy Implementation

- Theories of implementation
- Critical factors and difficulties of implementation
- The implementation process
- The concept of mechanism in the social sciences and in public policy
- Politico-administrative relations in implementation

8. Theories in Public Policy

- The origins of policy studies
- The multiparadigmatic character of social sciences
- Contributions of sociology, political sciences and public administration
- Inspiration by other disciplines
- Theory choice and plausibility in examining policies
- Sources of knowledge in public policy

9. Policy Analysis

- Defining policy analysis
- Basic steps in policy analysis and policy formulation
- What makes a good policy analysis?
- Ethical considerations in policy analysis

10. Styles of Policy Work (One or Multiple Policy Analyses?)

- Different clients of policy analysis
- Different aims and products of policy analysis

11. Public Policy Instruments

- Different authors' classifications of public policy instruments
- Policy goals versus instruments
- Strengths and weaknesses of different types of policy instruments
- Methods of identifying policy options (existing experience, past solutions; theoretical knowledge on public policy instruments; solutions to similar problems abroad; creativity and invention)
- Key principles of good practice

12. Types of Policy Documents; Argument in Policy Analysis

- Types of policy documents
- Policy brief and other documents for policy practice
- Arguments and argumentation in public policy
- The “argumentative power” of different data sources

B. SOCIAL POLICY

13. Social Policy

- Social policy as a practical discipline
- Goals and functions of social policy
- Institutions and instruments of social policy
- Social policy as a scientific discipline

14. The Origins of Social Policy

- The roots and a (short) history of social policy
- The influence of Bismarck, Beveridge and other personalities on social policy
- The European Union and its impact on social policy

15. The Welfare State

- The welfare state as an object of theoretical inquiry in social policy
- Welfare state typologies (traditional and recent)
- History and stages of the welfare state
- Welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe

16. Poverty and Social Exclusion

- Defining and measuring poverty
- Defining social exclusion
- Systems of social assistance and social services

17. Unemployment and the Employment Policy

- Labour market trends and their social/individual effects; chronic, recurrent and long-term unemployment, flexibilization and precarization
- Employment policy (in an international context)
- Institutional solutions to problems of individual transitions from school to work and from economic activity to inactivity
- Job opportunities and employment policies for people with disabilities

18. Family and the Family Policy

- Changes in family and demographic behaviour, and their social/individual effects
- Family policy (in an international context)
- Institutional solutions to individual problems of childhood, parenthood and the transition from childhood to adulthood

19. Old Age, Ageing in Modern Societies, and the Pension Policy

- Demographic ageing and its social/individual effects; ageism
- Pension systems and their reforms
- Transition to retirement; the active ageing perspective

20. Old Age, Ageing, and the Long-Term Care Policy

- Long-term care as a response to social change and demographic ageing
- The long-term care system (in an international context)
- Formal and informal care, their mutual relations, and the main issues of the long-term care system

21. Health Policy

- The object and goals of health policy
- The health care system and its functions; evaluating health outcomes
- The relevance of health promotion and public health in a 21st century health policy

22. Educational Policy

- Different definitions and conceptualizations of educational policy
- Tools and effects
- Governance: structure, actors and management of the education system
- Educational reforms