

AMBASSADORS FOR POLISH AFFAIRS

Polish Studies was launched at the universities of Columbia and Cambridge in 2014, thanks to many years of effort by the Foundation for Polish Science to overcome both numerous financial and organizational difficulties and a simple lack of understanding. In today's world anyone can study wherever they like, even in Poland, yet Polish studies at prestigious universities seemed to be an expensive luxury. Experience shows, however, that there is no more desirable investment in the dissemination of reliable knowledge about Poland.

The year 2014 was a breakthrough for this investment. For the word "success" not to sound trite or exaggerated, we must recall the winding road of challenging experiences that led to it.

The idea of establishing Polish Studies as a subject first emerged when Polish themes were becoming less attractive in the West and universities at which Polish language and literature were taught were beginning to reduce their budgets and staff. This was possible because despite years of teaching these subjects in various universities – even with such outstanding teachers as Manfred Kridl or Czesław Miłosz – there were no autonomous, financially sustainable research units whose main area of interest was Poland. For example Prof. Manfred Kridl, a prominent Polish literary theorist who came to the USA after fleeing Vilnius in 1940 when it was occupied by the Red Army, taught Polish history and culture at the Russian Institute's Centre for Central and Eastern Europe. The importance of research topics was determined by geopolitics, and from this perspective the Soviet Union was of interest at that time; the countries within its sphere of influence, and issues related to the humanities, their state of social

development, the mentality of their people, and the history, economy, culture and significance of the region – were of secondary importance. The situation for Polish language and Polish literature was no different; although present at many major universities, it was part of Soviet or Slavonic studies. Then came 1989, a year of dramatic historical change: the Berlin Wall fell, successive countries freed themselves from Soviet domination, and Soviet studies began to seem obsolete. When the countries of Central and Eastern Europe integrated with the structures of the European Union, and Russia, more or less happily, recovered from the collapse of its empire, the world's interest was directed elsewhere, and research with it. Student numbers in these subject areas plummeted and, as a result, so did the budgets for Slavonic and Soviet studies and the Polish studies attached to them.

A free Poland did not immediately produce institutions capable of saving the study of Polish history and language at foreign universities. So when the Kościuszko Foundation, one of the most important Polish community institutions in the USA, started to hear from a series of departments of Polish literature at American universities that were threatened with closure, its president Witold Sulimirski decided to present the issue to the Foundation for Polish Science. The first talks with the then president of the FNP, Prof. Maciej W. Grabski, were held as early as 1995. This was a new challenge for the FNP: the team had neither knowledge nor experience of the creation of research centres outside Poland. The breakthrough only came in 2003, when the Kościuszko Foundation proposed that the Foundation for Polish Science financially support the creation of a Chair of Polish Studies at the Faculty of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

The eight years which elapsed between these events were, though, far from fruitless – in the FNP, they strengthened the concept of creating Polish Studies at foreign universities. It was found that, firstly, autonomous research units were needed, and not “literature and language” type courses. This meant scrapping the previous practice of conducting Polish studies in the context of Slavonic or Russian studies. According to the FNP concept, Polish Studies should be an integral and stable part of the university structure, in which research and teaching should be carried out regardless of academic fluctuations and political conjunctures.

Secondly, they should not only include Polish philology studies, but should be interdisciplinary. As Prof. Włodzimierz Bolecki, deputy president of the Foundation for Polish Science, puts it: ‘Creating traditional philological Polish studies *de novo* would not be longer justified. Regardless of the fact that it is not the FNP’s task and that such studies are available in most departments of Slavonic studies, we wanted Polish Studies to include activity and research in various fields – culture, anthropology, economics, history, social sciences, media, political science, etc. – in order to give the students the

opportunity to learn about as many of the issues our country faces as possible. In short, they should not be Polish philology studies but in-depth Polish studies. Today’s students of Poland do not only need mastery of the Polish language (even perfectly) and knowledge of selected aspects of contemporary culture, but above all, a thorough and specialized knowledge of Poland. Few of them will become translators, and the majority will work in the media, tourism, business, administration, diplomacy or research. Even if they do not deal with Poland directly in their work, Polish studies can ensure that they become ambassadors for Polish affairs.’

Thirdly, Polish Studies should be established at the best institutions, where research of global significance is conducted. The choice of Columbia University in New York as the place in which to realize this aim for Polish Studies should therefore come as no surprise. Such a high aim has its price, however. At Columbia University the minimum endowment that must be collected to create a new Chair is 3 million dollars.

In 2005, the Foundation for Polish Science signed an agreement with Columbia University for the creation of

We wanted Polish Studies to include activity and research in various fields – culture, anthropology, economics, history, social sciences, media, political science etc. – in order to give the students the opportunity to learn about as many of the issues our country faces as possible. In short, they should not be Polish philology studies but in-depth Polish studies.



DR MAŁGORZATA MAZUREK AT THE INAUGURATION OF POLISH STUDIES AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN SEPTEMBER 2014.

the Polish Chair, for the purpose of which the FNP was to pay a total of 250 thousand dollars. This was quite a large amount of seed capital, from which a substantial chair endowment could grow. Yet the FNP did not have any experience in fundraising from individual donors. The other partners therefore took up this challenge: The Kościuszko Foundation, the Polish & Slavic Federal Credit Union in New York and the Polish Army Veterans Association of America, optimistically assuming that most of the capital would be collected in the USA from the Polish community and Polish-American companies. The coordinator of activities in the USA was Prof. John Micgiel, a political scientist and expert in modern history associated with Columbia University and the University of Warsaw, and an associate of the Kościuszko Foundation. Quite soon it became clear that the 'begging' procedure, based on knocking on door after door, did not work – by November 2007, only 700 thousand dollars had been acquired. In order to realize the dream, an entirely new approach was needed.

A group of determined enthusiasts

The Foundation for Polish Science proposed a new formula: it believed that the initiative for establishing Polish Studies at western universities was a matter of national interest and should become one of the most important instruments of state cultural diplomacy. The time was right for the Foundation – the idea of supporting Polish studies had previously been of interest to the Ministry of Science, and had been investigated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the initiation of Rafał Wiśniewski. Professors Włodzimierz Bolecki and John Micgiel shared the conviction that great projects can be implemented if there are people who identify with them and devote their time to them. Their specific objective was to raise the missing funds in Poland to establish an endowment fund for a Chair of Polish Studies at Columbia University.

The promotional campaign for financial support for Polish Studies was conducted by FNP, starting in spring 2007, and culminated in the *Polish Studies Abroad* conference organized at the Belvedere Palace by the FNP in October 2007, under the patronage of the Speaker of the Polish Parliament. Besides the scientific community, the conference was also attended by representatives of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Ministry of the Treasury and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These important state institutions' support for the idea of creating chairs of Polish at foreign universities caught the media's atten-

tion and enabled conversations with prospective sponsors to begin.

The conference did not hide the fact that Polish departments had faced difficulties for many years. Professor Jan Dowgiałło, the first Polish Ambassador to Israel after 1989, described the thorny path to creating the Chair of Polish History and Culture at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which took six years. The Chair is active, but it is not an independent institution – it is under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to another participant in the conference, Prof. Norman Davies, organizing Polish studies requires overcoming the barriers of a difficult language, hermetic codes in literature, and stereotypes, in an atmosphere of ignorance or even misinformation about Poland. Western universities lack the teachers and infrastructure necessary to implement Polish studies, and their libraries do not have the works of Polish humanists or Polish journals translated into foreign languages. The existing institutions that are involved in teaching Polish history or language still operate in the shadow of better known cultures: Russian or German. Polish studies are not treated as scientifically independent, or even as relevant for anyone who wants to understand the problems of this part of the world, which was called Mitteleuropa in the nineteenth century. If one recalls – with Prof. Davies – that modern universities are run by bookkeepers who monitor courses' economic viability, the idea of establishing Polish Studies at a university like Columbia may seem crazy.

Yet the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' ideological support for the Foundation's initiative smoothly transformed into practical action. In November 2007 the campaign to collect funds for the creation of a Chair in Polish Studies at Columbia University was joined by the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in New York, and more specifically by consul Dr Ewa Ger, a psychologist, president of a human resources company, and lecturer at several universities, who had been working in New York since September 2007. A few months before taking up the post of consul, she had already declared that taking the initiative to collect for the endowment fund would be a priority in her diplomatic work. During her visits to Poland, she made contact with the FNP, and it was decided that the campaign to establish the Chair of Polish Studies would continue in two ways: through frequent contact with the media and by seeking support from representatives of Polish financial institutions and state-owned companies. Within two years they had held dozens of meetings with business and the media, and the

effort paid off: at the end of 2008, the Foundation for Polish Science was able to declare that the funds needed to create an endowment fund for a Chair of Polish Studies had been raised. This would not have been possible without the selfless commitment of many individuals and representatives of various institutions who made this idea their own.

Ewa Ger remembers this period: 'It was an enormous task! I did it of my own free will, when I realized that the importance of this idea was not evident to everybody, and I could only convince potential donors by meeting them myself. Fortunately the Consul General in New York, Krzysztof W. Kasprzyk, accepted this. The project would not have been realized without his support or the selfless dedication of Ms Mirosława Nykiel. She was one of the reasons that my interlocutors in Poland were aware of the significance of the project. You had only to explain to them that raising – in Polish conditions! – three million US dollars to endow the Chair of Polish Studies at Columbia University makes sense, even though the benefits of this will be felt in the long term.'

Undoubtedly, business patriotism worked – in business a generation of people came forward for whom the word

“prestige” was not only associated with material status¹. In January 2009 – at a special press conference in the presence of the ministers of culture and national heritage, science, treasury and foreign affairs, and a representative of the US embassy – the Foundation for Polish Science announced that it had achieved the goal and was ready to transfer the collected funds to Columbia University. The successful cooperation of so many different parties – NGOs, ministries, businesses, parliamentarians and individuals – also demonstrated how it could be achieved, for others interested in establishing Polish studies.

An idea finds followers

After the funds were transferred to the University of Columbia in March 2009, and the university created the endowment for the Polish Chair, the Foundation for Polish Science oversaw the selection of the future Chair of Polish Studies. According to the agreement approved at

¹ The donors who made the endowment of the Chair of Polish Studies at Columbia University possible are: the Warsaw Stock Exchange, the National Depository for Securities, Enea, PGE Polish Energy Group, the Bogdan Fiszer Silesia Capital Fund, the Katowice Special Economic Zone, the Warmia-Mazury Special Economic Zone, the Pomeranian Special Economic Zone, the Kostrzyn-Slubice Special Economic Zone, the Małopolska Regional Development Agency, the Foundation for Capital Market Education, and, mentioned in the text: the Polish & Slavic Federal Credit Union in New York, the Polish Army Veterans Association of America, and the Foundation for Polish Science. There were also many anonymous and individual donors.



DR STANLEY BILL
AT AN EVENT ENTITLED "NEXT STEP: POLAND" HELD
IN POLISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

a meeting of the presidents of the FNP and Columbia in September 2009, the university launched an international competition for scholars in all fields of the social sciences engaged in Polish affairs. Two bodies worked together on the selection procedure: a Search Committee composed of Columbia professors, whose task was to select a person fulfilling the conditions of the contract, and an Advisory Board (made up of representatives of Columbia, the FNP and the Kościuszko Foundation) to give opinions on the candidates who applied for the position.

The first stage of the competition, announced in December 2009, was entered by more than 40 people from the USA, Europe and Australia, but was not concluded. None of the Columbia departments where the Polish Chair could be established could find a suitable candidate among the applicants. In this situation, the then Dean of the Faculty of History, Professor Mark A. Mazower, suggested that the Polish Chair be established in his department. Since the competition was still ongoing, the next call was made for candidates specialized in the history of Poland and Central Europe; this second stage of the competition resulted in the selection of Dr Natalia Nowakowska, a researcher from Oxford University, who, however, resigned from the chair after a few months for family reasons. Since the position would then have remained vacant, Columbia – according to the agreement – had the right to terminate the position and use the endowment fund for another purpose which was thematically close to the original one. Over the following months, the FNP and Columbia University came to an agreement, however, to reopen the competition to new applications, and this time not only from experienced scholars, but also from *junior researchers*. The idea was a success: in this third stage of the competition, the Department of History offered the Polish Chair to a young Polish scholar, Dr Małgorzata Mazurek, a history and sociology graduate from the University of Warsaw who had completed numerous internships and given lectures at research units in Germany, France and the USA. Małgorzata Mazurek is a beneficiary of the Foundation for Polish Science and a Marie-Curie Fellowship, and the author of several original books and numerous articles in international research journals.

While the competition in Columbia was still in progress, the FNP declared that it would launch similar Polish Studies initiatives in Germany and the UK. The idea was initially well received in Germany, where for some time it had been observed that traditional Polish philological studies were not attracting much interest – as had been the case in the USA in the early 1990s – despite the pres-

ence of many distinguished Polish specialists in universities. The inspiration to act was found at a conference organized by the Polish-German Science Foundation in October 2007, at which the need for establishing Polish Studies in Germany and the FNP's experience in establishing the Polish Chair at Columbia were presented. Professor Rita Süßmuth, president of the Polish-German Science Foundation and former leader of the CDU in the Bundestag, and Dr Albrecht Lempp, an excellent translator and prominent promoter of Polish literature in Germany (who died in 2012), quickly initiated further meetings with all interested parties from Germany and Poland. As a result, a competition was launched between German universities interested in establishing a Polish Chair, and two universities were selected to join forces to launch Polish Studies: Halle and Jena. The studies are to be funded for five years by the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation and the Polish-German Aid Foundation (with the support of both countries' governments). Later on, funds will need to be raised independently.

That is not all. The Foundation for Polish Science took the idea of supporting Polish Studies in the UK to the authorities of St Anthony's College, Oxford. Since the FNP was still committed to the creation of the Chair at Columbia, it could not undertake to implement this project itself, but it was nevertheless possible to bring it to fruition thanks to the initiative of Professor Norman Davies, who persuaded one of the richest Polish entrepreneurs to support Polish Studies at St. Anthony's College (the institution received one million pounds).

The idea of the creation of Polish Studies in the UK was however still not abandoned by the FNP, not least since three more universities – in Aberdeen, Cambridge and London – had also approached the Foundation about such an initiative. With the joint financial support of two British institutes – the Grabowski and Zdanowicz foundations – the School of Arts and Humanities (Cambridge University), with the backing of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, produced the document *Polish Studies in the 21st Century*, which outlines the basis for Polish Studies to function at the University of Cambridge in the years 2014–2018. The FNP's financial support (amounting to 110 thousand pounds) enabled this project to be launched on time, and the international competition for the post of Head of Polish Studies in Cambridge was won by Dr Stanley Bill – a comparative researcher whose research interests focus on the Polish language, and who defended his doctoral thesis in 2013 at Northwestern University in the USA, on the crisis in Christian dialectics, Czesław Miłosz

and his reading of William Blake and Fyodor Dostoyevsky in a secularized world.

Columbia: Polish affairs in a new light

'I'm going to create the Polish Chair first and foremost as a thought laboratory' – declared Dr Małgorzata Mazurek in an interview for the monthly "Znak" (No. 9, September 2014). She took up the Chair on the first of July 2014. 'The Columbia Chair is a good place to ask the question: what is Poland today? How do students from different parts of the world see our country or its historical complexities? For example, in Central Asia [...] Poland is seen as a country on the far western border of the former Communist bloc. [...] I'll try not to restrict the study programme to Polish-American exchange. It is possible to understand Polish history far better if it is depicted in the wider Central European context.'

The experience Małgorzata Mazurek has gained during her first months of work has confirmed these intentions. Her collaborations with Dr Anna Frajlich-Zajęc, a poet and prose writer who has led the Polish language and literature courses at Columbia for many years, and Dr Agnieszka Legutko, who lectures in Yiddish language and culture, are as important as they are obvious. Similarly, it makes sense to look for partners within Columbia, such as the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, the European Institute, the History and Slavic Studies departments, and in Russian, Eurasian and East European studies.

Another aspect of her work is co-organizing guest lectures or conferences, for example with the East Asian Institute. A joint conference will be organized at the beginning of 2016 on knowledge flow between the former Eastern bloc, China and the so-called Third World. The export of communism as an ideology and expertise (one example is the theme of development) will be considered from both Eastern European and Asian perspectives. Old affairs in a new light?... At a global and intellectually demanding university like Columbia, daring moves receive the greatest recognition – and turnout. They also bring in money, to put it bluntly – the budget for the Polish Chair is much less generous than that which other research entities in Columbia have at their disposal. Joining forces gives the Polish Chair the ability to spread its wings – both in terms of the scale of themes addressed and in reaching an

audience. And what a new Chair needs most is a solid, loyal following.

Dr Małgorzata Mazurek tells us: 'In May 2015 I held the first workshop in a cycle entitled *Global Dynamics of Cultural Production* which I have scheduled for the next two years. The theme of each of the four planned workshops is Poland and its culture in an Eastern or Central European context. In May we considered how Polish or Polish-related art is created and how it functions in a globalized world, how the work of, for example, Paweł Althamer or Wilhelm Sasnal reached its contemporary audience and market, and the significance for Poland of institutions such as New York's Museum of Modern Art. We invited curators from around the world who are engaged in Central European art. One of the guests was the owner of a gallery in Prague, Czech Republic, which displays art not only from Poland, but also from the Middle East. This atypical combination is not unique in the

planned workshops. Alongside researchers – art historians or literature experts – practitioners will also participate in the workshops: gallery owners, curators, and literary translators. But above all, I hope the audience at our mini-conference will be people from the city.'

The themes of the other workshops are: planning space in post-war Central and Eastern Europe; financing culture – the state as patron and censor; and the commercialization of historical narratives.

In the academic year 2015/2016 Małgorzata Mazurek will lead courses with a Polish background, including a general university lecture entitled *Society and political thought in Eastern Europe* and a seminar on culture in the Polish lands from the baroque to modern times, addressed to humanities students at master's and doctoral levels. The seminar will address themes from literature, art history, social and political history, architecture, and popular culture. A visit to Greenpoint is planned, as is a conversation with curators at MoMA, who can explain, for example, the current exhibition of art by Magdalena Abakanowicz in a multicultural context.

The Polish Chair also runs activities outside Columbia, and long-term collaboration with the Adam Mickiewicz Institute has made it possible to invite guests from Poland. In 2015–2016 a series of screenings of the best Polish films and discussions about them is being organized together

Dr Mazurek: The Columbia Chair is a good place to ask the question: what is Poland today? How do students from different parts of the world see our country or its historical complexities?

with the NYC Polish Filmmakers. Viewers had a taste of things to come in November 2014, when nearly two hundred people attended a screening of the film *Ida* directed by Paweł Pawlikowski, with a discussion led by Michał Oleszczyk, Artistic Director of the Gdynia Film Festival.

Nor is this all the activity outside the university walls: the Polish Chair is also co-creating a joint initiative, which could be called *Polish studies in the English-speaking world*. This includes a Polish-Jewish Initiative, implemented in collaboration with Princeton University, Ohio State University and the University of Illinois at Chicago, which coordinates syllabuses and new educational opportunities in Polish-Jewish studies. In Philadelphia in November 2015, the Polish Chair and the University of Maryland will co-organize a discussion panel *Poland Goes Global* on the theme of new historical narratives about Poland in the world. This debate is part of the programme of the Congress of the Association of Eastern European and Eurasian Studies. Polish Chair funds have also enabled a co-financed international conference on social sciences in Central and Eastern Europe in the years 1890–1945 to be held in May 2015, jointly organized by the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in Regensburg. For its other undertakings, the Polish Chair is seeking sponsors at Columbia and beyond.

More and more proposals and plans are taking shape every week. This appears all the more impressive when you realize that this is an institution with no nameplate, team of staff or group of secretaries behind it. The Polish Chair is one woman – Małgorzata Mazurek is its director, the organizer of its activities and the secretary, all at once. She also ensures that there is no lack of interest in Polish matters among the nearly thirty thousand students at the 261-year-old Columbia University. As the Polish Chair sits in the History Department, she has been involved in the recruitment of doctoral students who wish to specialize in the history of Europe (and recruitment is very competitive: 7% of all applicants are accepted to the college, and for doctoral studies this figure is less than 5%; the applicants also included students interested in Polish issues). Dr Mazurek also supervises undergraduate and master's theses on subjects related to Poland.

Dr Mazurek wants Polish Studies to be much more than just one more place in New York to “talk about Poland”. Her intention is to create a space where it is possible to argue about Poland, to present bold ideas, innovative

approaches to familiar topics, and also to reveal unnoticed combinations and subcutaneous connections, linking Polish topics to the global village.

Cambridge: From poetry to geopolitics

In October 2014, Dr Stanley Bill, lecturer in Polish Studies at the University of Cambridge, inaugurated the Polish Studies centre's year-long course, which introduces students to the Polish language, literature and culture. It considers historical issues, the effects of changing borders and the loss of statehood and independence, and also discusses the importance of Poland's complex relationship with its Eastern neighbours, fraught with misunderstandings and complications, but where a strong will to maintain proper relations remains.

The course begins with the symbolic year 966, in which Mieszko I and his court were baptized and a new state was born, and continues through all the twists and turns of Polish history up to the present day. This is an opportunity to present the history of Polish culture honestly, and thus to help students understand, for example, Ukrainian perspectives, Polish attachment to Vilnius or Lviv, or social sensitivities in Polish relations with Russia. There are good reasons for looking at the Central European or even pan-European context, considering that Polish has recently been one of the most frequently heard languages in many cities in the UK, and the war in Eastern Ukraine has long since ceased to be a local conflict.

Dr Stanley Bill does not conceal his satisfaction at working with the group of more than thirty students who attend the course or Polish language classes: ‘The departmental authorities were positively surprised by the high level of attendance. This is definitely the largest course of its kind. Most of my students have not had anything to do with Slavonic languages before – they study Romance or Germanic languages and culture. For them, however, the Polish language is not an exotic language from the eastern border of the European Union. They see getting to know the language and thereby understanding Poland as an investment in the future. After all, Poland is one of the larger countries of the European Union and will remain strategically important as the easternmost EU state for a long time, so for this reason alone, demand for knowledge of the language and country will increase. This is not irrelevant for Poland itself and its affairs: graduates of our faculty – Modern and Medieval Languages – often find work in high-level positions in government institutions, diplomacy and public administration, finance, and business.’

The course's ambitious intellectual level is demonstrated by the students' essay topics: the songs of Kochanowski in the context of his translation of the psalms, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the First Republic, Chopin's music in its contemporary context, Witkacy and the problem of "pure forms", and the poetry of the Warsaw Uprising.

Knowledge of Polish culture, language and history will help students understand Poland's position on the continent as a large country in the heart of Europe with increasingly significant economic and mobility potential and not without social aspirations. Plans for Polish studies go beyond the lecture halls in Cambridge – they include regular events for representatives of both the academic community and the wider public, with the aim of raising the general level of knowledge about the country of origin of what is currently the largest minority in the British Isles.

This is precisely why Polish Studies has initiated collaboration with Ukrainian Studies, and this promises to be very fruitful. The two centres, in part due to the growing Western interest in the conflict in Ukraine, are jointly organizing a conference from 30 June to 1 July 2015 on the future of Polish-Ukrainian relations, with the participation of historians, political scientists and intellectuals in other fields from Poland, the Ukraine, the USA and the UK.

The new centre's plans are indeed so extensive that the greatest problem is fitting them into the calendar. To name but a few: Discussions with "Kinoteka" around Polish film premières, Between Russia and Germany: Poland and the evolving European order (a meeting with Edward Lucas of "The Economist" and Peter Hitchens of "The Mail on Sunday"), Life on the margins: Bruno Schulz and Hasidic Kabbalah (a discussion with Prof. Agata Bielik-Robson).

There is no reason to complain about turnout, either. Before the first event in January 2015, on the subject of Jewish memory in contemporary Poland (a virtual tour of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews with its programme director, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett), all the seats in the hall had been reserved. Interest in the event was so great that news of the museum curator's appearance was featured on the home page of the main Univer-

sity website. In the spring, Polish Studies held a meeting with poet Adam Zagajewski, who is also a juror in a competition for the best translation of Polish poems by Dr Bill's students.

The personality of the Head of Polish Studies in Cambridge is not irrelevant here. Stanley Bill was born in the UK, and grew up in Australia. He found himself in Poland as a young man, driven by a desire to learn about Central Europe. At that time he was most interested in Romania, but settled in Poland, in Bielsko-Biała. While teaching English there, he learned perfect Polish himself, and in 2005 he defended his master's thesis in European studies at the Jagiellonian University. Throughout this period he was true to his philosophy: culture is language; to get to know the culture, you need to learn the language, that is, to live among the people who use it. An awareness of Polish history convinces one of the fact that the forms of the state, like borders, are subject to change. Yet culture and social capital mean more than geopolitical indicators.

So the other British universities – in Aberdeen and London – will surely not lose their appeal by declaring their willingness to establish Polish Studies. To keep British academic life supplied with outstanding specialists in various Polish topics, the Foundation for Polish Science has suggested to its Cambridge partners that after the first period of operation (2014–2018), Polish Studies should continue in the form of an inter-university network – Aberdeen-Cambridge-London – and be based on a solid endowment, which would ensure its stability. Difficult? Certainly. But the experience gained so far shows that it is quite possible.

Anna Mateja

'This is definitely the largest course of its kind. Most of my students have not had anything to do with Slavic languages before. For them, however, the Polish language is not an exotic language from the eastern border of the European Union. They see getting to know the language and thereby understanding Poland as an investment in the future.'
says Dr Stanley Bill.
