

Polish–British Collaboration

Two scholars describe their experiences under the British Academy–Polish Academy of Sciences Agreement.

Dr Jerzy Zdanowski is an Associate Professor in Middle East Studies and the Director of the Centre for Studies on Non-European Countries in the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw. He has visited Britain under the terms of the Agreement with the Polish Academy eight times since 1989.

In 1989, when I got the possibility of visiting Great Britain under the Agreement between the British Academy and the Polish Academy of Sciences, I did not expect that my stay would be so fruitful and exciting. My aim was to complete a book, and as the project concerned some aspects of the policy of the United Kingdom in the Middle East I spent two busy weeks looking through records at the India Office Library, the Public Record Office and the Oriental Collections of the British Library. This first visit was hard work but very productive with several new contacts being made at British universities. Especially strong links were established at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Mutual interests in particular aspects of the study of the Middle East provided the ground for interesting talks and ideas for further co-operation. Some topics proved to be really challenging; in particular the idea of bringing light travel literature to confront the concepts of ‘other’ and ‘stranger’ among the Christians and Muslims. This idea finally became the topic of a conference held at Al Akhawan University in Ifrane, Morocco, to which I was kindly invited by SOAS colleagues.

As a result of the contacts made during my visit, my project expanded and covered the area of social history of the Muslim societies and in the following years I was fortunate to visit new centres specialising in the study of the Middle East in Birmingham, Exeter, Oxford, Cambridge and Durham. At these centers I had the chance to evaluate an enormous wealth of Middle Eastern materials housed in the widest possible variety of British archives and libraries. I also was fortunate to meet several distinguished British Orientalists, including the late Professor R. B. Serjeant, who provided me with unique materials on British travellers to the Arabian Peninsula. I would also like to mention Professor H.T. Norris from SOAS. His knowledge and approach to crucial problems of the history of Muslim societies impressed me very much and his personal contacts greatly helped my research in Britain. There were several memorable moments in my collaboration with

Professor Norris, such as searching for Arabic manuscripts at Cambridge University Library and trips to the Tatars’ settlements in North-Eastern Poland. Professor Norris’s visits to Poland took place in 1992, 1996 and 1997, and were also possible thanks to the British Academy. Trips to Polish Muslim settlements as well as the study of Tatar manuscripts kept at libraries in Bałystok, Poznań and Cracow resulted in publications essential for understanding the history of Muslim societies in Eastern Europe. Professor Norris has reviewed many publications by Polish Orientalists. These reviews have appeared in leading Western journals and have helped to promote awareness of Polish scholars working on Middle Eastern studies.

Two visits to Poland by Dr Derek Hopwood from St. Antony’s College, Oxford in 1995 and 1999 were very fruitful. As a result of these visits to the Polish Academy’s Centre for Studies on Non-European Countries, the Department of History at Lodz University and the Faculty of Oriental Philology at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, new links between British and Polish scholars have been established. While President of the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies, Dr Hopwood supported applications to this organisation by Polish Orientalists and in 1996 the first group of our researchers participated in the EURAMES conference in Aix-en-Provence.

My first visit to Britain in 1989 resulted in the establishment of a very broad network of working contacts with British institutions and friendly links with British scholars. In some cases the collaboration reached the stage of a potential joint project, and so I discussed several times with my British colleagues the advantages and disadvantages of giving the collaboration a more formal character, but each time the idea of informal links promoting the exchange of ideas, with visits under the Agreement to discuss particular aspects of mutual interests, seemed more attractive to us because of the greater flexibility and simplicity.

I had first met Professor Marek Kłodziński in the 1980s when he visited Reading University but it was our meeting in Devon in October 1996 that laid the foundation for our subsequent collaboration under the auspices of the British Academy. I had recently moved from Reading to take up the University of Plymouth's newly-established Research Chair in Rural Development. This was the first chair in the UK to focus on rural development in a UK/EU context, previous chairs being concerned mainly with the Developing Countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Marek was soon to become Director of the Institute for Rural and Agricultural Development (IRAD) at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. Both of us had originally trained as agricultural economists and as we discussed mutual research interests in Devon that autumn we recognised that our respective careers had led us to a similar destination. We were both interested in the implications of the significant structural changes taking place in European agriculture; we both recognised the increasing importance of a more diversified rural economy to farmers and non-farmers alike; we were both keen to extend the boundaries of rural socio-economic research beyond the agricultural sector; and we both saw the value of multidisciplinary approaches to this research. We also recognised the similarities between our own research groups in our respective institutions. Both of us were working with a multidisciplinary mix of economists, sociologists, geographers and others who together have the necessary skills and interests to tackle the emerging agenda of rural development research.

Rural development has subsequently become an increasingly important theme in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In the *Agenda 2000* proposals it was established as the 'second pillar' of the CAP to stand alongside the long-established mechanisms of market support and it is likely to attract an increasing proportion of the agriculture budget in the future. The *Agenda 2000* document also brought forward proposals for EU enlargement to include countries such as Poland whose accession has significant implications not only for their own rural areas but for rural Europe as a whole.

The 1998 Agreement between the Polish and the British Academy of Sciences provided us with the

opportunity to take forward these mutual research interests into concrete collaboration on policy-related research. We were both aware of Keith Howe's work at Exeter University on economic transition and structural adjustment of the agriculture and food sectors in Eastern and Central Europe and so developed proposals for a three-way collaboration between the Universities of Plymouth and Exeter and IRAD.

Our first period of collaboration (1999–2001) included four types of activity: visits, joint seminars, publications and research projects. It has proved to be productive. Keith and I have both presented papers at conferences which IRAD has been involved in organising, including the triennial conference of the European Association of Agricultural Economists which took place in Warsaw in 1999 close to IRAD's base in Nowy Świat. One of my papers on the rationale for public interventions to foster rural development has been translated into Polish and published in the Institute's journal *Wieś I Rolnictwo* (Village and Agriculture) and Keith and I are currently working on chapters for a book on rural entrepreneurship in Poland and the EU. Most recently (September 2001), my research group has won a research contract under the EU's Fifth Framework Programme in which IRAD will be a partner. The MARKETOWNS project will investigate the role of small and medium-sized towns in rural development. It will use techniques which we have developed at Plymouth to trace the 'economic footprint' of the towns, measuring the local, national and global economic linkages of firms and households in and around six case study towns in each partner country – UK, France, Portugal, the Netherlands and Poland. The British Academy scheme played an important facilitating role here, enabling us to develop our working relationships with IRAD to the point where we could collaborate in this joint bid.

Where next? Our initial collaboration concentrated mainly on the three individuals who prepared the original proposal but our visits have enabled us to identify mutual research interests among younger colleagues in our three institutions. An important role of the next phase of our collaboration will therefore be to facilitate interaction between some of these colleagues, so developing the capacity for rural development research at each of our three institutions.

Professor Andrew Errington holds the Research Chair in Rural Development in the Faculty of Land, Food and Leisure at the Seale-Hayne Campus of the University of Plymouth.

The joint project between Professor Errington, Dr Howe and Professor Kłodziński on Rural development strategy in Poland and Great Britain will be supported for a further three years, until 2004.