

ACADEMIA Polish Institute of Advanced Studies

# IN STEP WITH THE WORLD'S BEST

The Polish Institute of Advanced Studies (PIASt) began functioning within the structure of the Polish Academy of Sciences on 2 January 2017. We caught up with its director, **Prof. Przemysław Urbańczyk**, to discuss the Institute's objectives.



## Prof. Przemysław Urbańczyk

is an archeologist and a medievalist, employed at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, and at the Institute of Archaeology, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University. He has published nearly 400 texts, including 12 books devoted to the Early Middle Ages in Central and Northern Europe.

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### ACADEMIA: Is the Polish Institute of Advanced Studies modeled on similar institutions in Europe?

PRZEMYSŁAW URBAŃCZYK: The first such institute was the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, in the United States. Its history is quite interesting. It was founded in 1930 and continues to operate today. Similar institutes modeled on the one in Princeton have been established in various countries in Europe since the end of WWII, especially over the past 20 years. Most of them, over 20, are members of the NetIAS, or the Network of European Institutes for Advanced Study. It has ambitions to expand and cover the whole of the world by merging with similar organizations in Asia and America. The idea has significant growth potential. Two years ago, I spent 10 months in a similar institute in Lyon. France has four such institutes – not only in Lyon but also in Paris, Nantes, and Marseille. I very much like the way how that establishment operates. The purpose is to provide a new environment for scholars, free them from their day-to-day duties, and create conditions for them to write. Over those 10 months I spent in Lyon, I finished one book, wrote a second one, and started a third one. I realized that such a creative stay could be very effective, when there is nothing else to do aside from research work. Shortly after I returned from France, I started writing letters to the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education and to the governing bodies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, proposing the establishment of a similar institute here in Poland.

#### How long did it take to set up the PIASt?

From concept to launch, slightly over two years. Everyone showed a lot of goodwill. The PAS governing bodies helped me very much. The Ministry also approved: not only was the idea good and simple, but it had been already tested as well – such institutes had been present in other countries for a long time. We didn't need to reinvent the wheel, much as we tend to do that in Poland. We only had to adjust the concept slightly to the conditions in Poland. We had to write separate regulations and draft precisely formulated contracts, but the general rule remains the same – the member institutes of the NetIAS concentrate on social sciences and humanities. They include such distinguished institutions as the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna and the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin. These institutes, which are already members of the Consortium, are practically institutions in their own right. Their representatives meet once a year to share their experiences and admit new members. Becoming a member is not easy. You need to meet many requirements, for example offer at least 120 researcher-months to the fellows, in addition to having a permanent head office in the city center, uninterrupted funding, and a relevant infrastructure. The institutes

The Polish Institute of Advanced Studies (PIASt) aims to support the development of knowledge and innovation and promote scientific advances in Poland.

The Institute will focus in particular on a wide variety of research projects in humanities and social sciences, while remaining open to cross-cutting, interdisciplinary projects, thus creating a multidisciplinary international platform for collaboration between scholars in these disciplines.

The objective of the PIASt is to promote scientific and intellectual exchange and create an international and multidisciplinary community of researchers who gather for an academic year, to reflect on and exchange ideas. Fellows, released from their day-to-day teaching and administrative duties, will pursue their research projects in an international environment that stimulates reflection and innovation.

The Institute supports the freedom of scientific research, but it will focus its invitation policy on individual scholars who need free time to concentrate on their research. It offers fellowships mainly in social sciences and humanities, without disciplinary or geographic priorities or specific scientific targets.

The PIASt wants to increase science outreach by promoting various events, such as guest lectures and open seminars, to ensure that the Institute's research accomplishments will influence not only the academic milieu but also the public and private sector, social organizations (such as cultural centers), and media.

are English-speaking communities. We attempt to operate on the same basis as the institutes in the West – in Cambridge, Uppsala, Budapest, and Madrid. Of course, we are not their equals yet, but we have ambitions to achieve this goal in the future.

#### How will the PIASt recruit fellows?

The fellows are selected in an open call for applications. The candidates must submit their CVs along with a list of publications and the description of a research project they would like to pursue in the Institute. Fellowships are offered for a period of 5 or 10 months. We prefer 10-month research fellowships. The successful applicants must take unpaid or sabbatical leave at the higher education establishments where they are employed. Depending on their financial situation, they are offered suitable stipends on a par with those granted elsewhere in Europe.

#### How much will the fellows receive in stipends?

The maximum amount is 3,000 euros a month for a professor who has taken unpaid leave and therefore has no other sources of income. For fellows on sabbatical leave, which is paid leave, we pay a sum that corresponds to delegation costs, which means 1,000 euros a month, to cover the costs of a longer stay abroad. We also provide accommodation and, needless to say, modern work facilities. Our task is to facilitate creative work, put the fellows in touch with our universities

and the PAS institutes, and organize seminars and lectures. We started working on 2 January 2017, so there was not time to organize a call for applications, which takes several months. We therefore decided to invite the first guests by name.

#### What countries do the first fellows come from?

These are four scholars, from England, France, Italy, and Germany. They've been offered 5-month fellowships, covering the period from March to July. I hope that we will be able to announce a call for applications before the end of May and recruit another 12 fellows, who will arrive in October and stay in Poland until July 2018. Four fellowships are for young postdoctoral scholars, while the remaining eight are for scholars with an established scientific position and considerable accomplishments.

#### Is the Polish Institute of Advanced Studies as large as the institute in Lyon?

Yes, the institute in Lyon also hosted 12 fellows each year, who worked on their respective projects. It is financed by a consortium of three universities and the city of Lyon as well as the French Ministry of Higher Education. One floor has 12 rooms, a conference room, and a lounge. The Institute in Vienna, in turn, hosts simultaneously 35 fellows. Some of the institutes are major undertakings such as the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem, not to mention the Institute in Princeton, which hosts 190 scholars ev-

ery year. Our institute is starting small, but its future depends on foreign scholars' interest in applying for our fellowships. We surely don't expect a spectacular success yet, because such projects take time. First, we need to enter the market, establish our visibility, and show that we have stable funding. We have received such funding from the PAS. After several years, the idea will be evaluated to see if it works – whether the Institute's activity brings benefits to science in Poland and is worth continuing. However, all the institutes across the world have only one problem – there are too many applicants applying for fellowships.

#### Will the PIASt introduce age limits for the applicants?

Like the institutes abroad, we impose no restrictions other than the quality of research work. Prof. Wood from England has just retired. Two professors from the first group of fellows want to write books during their stay in Warsaw. Once they are published, they must include the information that they were written in the PIASt. This is yet another way for the Institute to establish its presence in the world of science. We hope that our fellows will get in touch with Polish researchers and encourage young Polish scholars to apply for foreign fellowships, and their arrival will result in long-term collaboration.

#### Is research innovation one of the criteria in the selection of projects?

## THE FIRST PIAST FELLOWS:



### PD Dr Michael G. Esch

He studied modern and medieval history and German philology in Düsseldorf in 1981–1990. After extended study visits to Kraków and Warsaw, he received his PhD in history at Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf. He received his post-doctoral degree (habilitation) in 2011.

Since 2005, he has worked as a freelance historian and translator. In 2001–2004 and 2011–2013, he was a research associate in the Centre Marc Bloch. Since April 2013, he has been a research associate at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) in the project "*Ostmitteleuropa transnational*." Since 2014, he has lectured on the comparative history of culture at Leipzig University.

He has taught lectures and other classes at Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf (1991–2010), the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (2003), Charles University in Prague (2014), and since winter 2015/2016 at Leipzig University. He was a visiting scholar at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris and at GWZO in 2012/2013. He has authored numerous monographs, anthologies, and essays.



### Prof. Riccardo Pozzo

He graduated in philosophy from the University of Milan in 1983 and received his PhD from Saarland University in 1988. He earned his post-doctoral degree (habilitation) at Trier University in 1995. In 1996, he went to the United States

to teach German philosophy at the School of Philosophy of the Catholic University of America. He returned to Italy in 2003 to take up the Chair of the History of Philosophy at the University of Verona.

In the years 2009–2012, he served as Director of the Institute for the European Intellectual Lexicon and History of Ideas (ILIESI) of the National Research Council of Italy (CNR). From 21 December 2012 to 28 February 2017, he served as Director of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Cultural Heritage of CNR.

He was awarded the Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. He was elected full member of the International Institute of Philosophy (IIP) and chair of the Programme Committee of the World Congress of Philosophy (Beijing 2018). He was appointed member of the H2020 Programme Committee Configuration Research Infrastructures. He has authored numerous monographs, book chapters, conference proceedings, and articles in national and international journals.

## HOSTING TOP RESEARCHERS IN POLAND

It's difficult to define innovation in humanities. The projects must meet the standards that are currently set. They will be selected by the international body, the Scientific Advisory Board, which has been already established by the president of the Academy. It consists of six foreign and four Polish scholars, and it will have the exclusive discretion over the selection of fellows. A member of the Board involved in any conflict of interest that pertains to a specific application must be excluded from discussions on that application. Such standards are applied worldwide, and we intend to follow them, too. Otherwise, we will not be admitted to such elite groups as the NetIAS.

#### Will research projects that pertain to Poland be treated in a preferential way?

No, there will be no preferential treatment of specific topics. They must be interesting, modern, and feasible to accomplish in 5 or 10 months. Of course, we will be very pleased if the research projects are linked to what is done in Poland, because this will facilitate collaboration between our guests and Polish researchers.

#### How will the PIASt influence the scholarly community and public life?

This fall, we will start organizing seminars and conferences and we will offer lectures to scientific institutions and associations. We will attempt to attract media attention to what the fellows are doing. One of our fellows, Prof. Esch from Germany, wrote a book

about the way informal groups, especially soccer fans, mark their territory with the use of graffiti in Polish cities. This is very interesting. I had had no idea about that myself, and found out from a foreign scholar. He will now address the problem of migrations in the Polish People's Republic. So far, we have imposed no requirements as to research topics, unlike some other institutes. They allocate a certain number of fellowships to those who decide to address specifically targeted research questions. These usually pertain to an issue currently in the spotlight in some sense. However, such a decision would have to be made by our Scientific Board.

#### During your stay in Lyon, did you come across any customs that you would like to introduce here in Warsaw?

We were obliged to meet over lunch at least twice a week. It was a great idea, so we had lunches together every day, usually in the lounge, sometimes somewhere in the city. Each time, we held great discussions on various topics approached from various perspectives. I also learned a lot from lectures. All fellows had to first present their projects and then report on what they accomplished.

The PIASt will soon fill with our guests. I hope they will quickly start feeling at home here.

INTERVIEW BY ANNA KILIAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAKUB OSTAŁOWSKI



#### Prof. Victor Rosenthal

He works at the Marcel Mauss Institute at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) and EHESS. He studied psychology, mathematics, and philosophy at Tel Aviv University

and later psychology and neuropsychology in Paris (MA in experimental psychology and PhD in cognitive psychology), where he also received his post-doctoral degree, or habilitation (Paris Descartes University – "Paris V"). He has conducted studies in the field of neurolinguistics, neuropsychology, cognitive psychology, and cognitive modeling. His current research interests focus on cultural psychology, semiotic anthropology (the semiotic dimension of shaping human experience), theoretical biology, philosophy, and epistemological psychology. He is especially interested in expressivity in perception, the concept of "inner voice" as a vector and regulator of inner and social life as well as synaesthesia and intermodality. He has authored numerous articles and chapters in monographs devoted to such topics as cognitive modeling, cognitive neuropsychology, neurolinguistics, and a book on Wolfgang Köhler, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology.



#### Prof. Ian Wood

He received his PhD at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He held a research fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research in 1974–1976. His thesis was devoted to Avitus of Vienne, a bishop and writer who lived in the late fifth and early sixth century, author of

letters and poems which are crucial for understanding the culture of the post Roman West in the years 470–530. He started lecturing at the University of Leeds in 1976 and remained there (as senior lecturer in 1989–1995 and as Professor of Early Medieval History since 1995). He is currently a retired Professor of Early Medieval History. He was a coordinator of the European Science Foundation's scientific program on the Transformation of the Roman World (1992–1998). He has held numerous guest lectures at the universities in Vienna (1994–1995, 2000) and Aarhus (1997). He held fellowships at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences – NIAS (1995–1996), the British School at Rome (2006), and the Collegium Budapest (2009) as well as a British Academy Research Readership in 2005–2006 and a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council – AHRC (2009). He was one of three investigators on the project "Cultural memory and the resources of the past," funded by the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA). He is an expert on the history of the Early Middle Ages, in particular the Merovingian period.