

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 26		
Title of case study: Understanding Poland: informing and engaging individuals and institutions in Poland and abroad		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Stanley Bill	Senior Lecturer in Polish Studies	October 2014 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research conducted by Stanley Bill at the University of Cambridge has informed and shaped international public understanding of Poland and its recent populist political shift against the background of twentieth-century history. Through a news and analysis website (with approximately 1,000,000 users) filling a gap in international media coverage, a newly-created NGO, public events, YouTube videos, and [text removed for publication], Dr Bill's research agenda has reached an extremely wide audience, shaping public debate on Poland. Over 500 testimonials demonstrate impact on individuals and institutions as the projects flowing from the research have changed their understanding of and engagement with Polish issues. Key beneficiaries include diplomats, policymakers, journalists, and migrants living in Poland.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Conducted at the University of Cambridge, the research underpinning the impact explains the deep and ongoing cultural and political processes unleashed by Poland's traumatic twentieth-century historical experience. This work includes a peer-reviewed article on postcolonial theory in the Polish historical context [R1]; a scholarly book chapter on the legacies of Romantic ideology in Poland from 1918 until today [R2]; [text removed for publication] [R3 and R4]; a peer-reviewed article on the discourse of Poland's ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS) [R5]; and a peer-reviewed article on PiS's "counter-elite populism" and strategies of "elite replacement" in civil society [R6]. The research uses a range of methodologies, including discourse analysis and qualitative approaches from political science, history of ideas and postcolonial theory.</p> <p>Dr Bill has explained the use of postcolonial discourse by various right-wing conservative intellectuals and political actors in Poland, including the leaders of PiS [R1]. In these terms, he has laid out the historical foundations of the key political conflict presented in the ruling party's discourse as a clash between an inauthentic, cosmopolitan "elite" and the authentic masses of "the nation." The current government and its allies claim to speak for "the nation" against the "elites" supposedly in league with foreign powers who have "colonised" Poland in a pattern familiar from its history. Together with Dr Ben Stanley (SWPS University, Warsaw), Dr Bill has used this background to explain PiS's radically "monistic" response to what it presents as an earlier lack of "pluralism" in Poland's post-1989 liberal consensus [R5].</p> <p>Building on his earlier work, [text removed for publication] [R3 and R4] [text removed for publication] laid out some of the practical consequences of the ideology outlined in his peer-reviewed articles [Text removed for publication].</p> <p>Dr Bill has also explored the continuing political uses of the nineteenth-century Romantic paradigm of national martyrdom in Poland through the twentieth century up to the present day [R2]. His interpretation distinguishes several different threads within Romantic ideology and shows how they have been exploited by diverse political projects. The research includes a discussion of the redeployment of Romantic ideology after the 2010 air disaster in which the PiS-affiliated Polish president and almost 100 other state officials died near Smolensk,</p>		

Russia. The accident reinvigorated certain aspects of Poland's "national messianism," offering a powerful narrative for the right-wing political forces that came to power in 2015.

Finally, Dr Bill has published a peer-reviewed article on PiS's attempts to apply its general strategy of "elite replacement" in a modified way to civil society [R6]. The article shows how civil society organisations perceived as hostile to the party and its values have been subject to the withdrawal of state support, public media smear campaigns, and police raids. By contrast, organisations that are politically or ideologically linked to the party have found support in the form of new public funds and other institutional assistance. The article shows how this dual strategy has reinforced PiS's political narratives by amplifying the broader right-wing cultural narratives that underpin them. Through analysis of the ruling party's complementary methods of pressure and promotion in the sphere of civil society, the article reveals the intertwining of political and cultural narratives and goals within a right-wing populist framework.

In sum, Dr Bill's research constitutes a coherent body of work explaining both the historical underpinnings and current development of Poland's turn towards nativist or populist politics.

3. References to the research

All references are peer-reviewed [text removed for publication]

[R1] **Stanley Bill**, "Seeking the Authentic: Polish Culture and the Nature of Postcolonial Theory." *nonsite.org* (Online Journal in the Humanities) 12 (August 2014):

<https://nonsite.org/article/seeking-the-authentic-polish-culture-and-the-nature-of-postcolonial-theory>

[R2] **Stanley Bill**, "The Splintering of a Myth: Polish Romantic Ideology in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries." *Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918*, eds. Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska, and Przemysław Czapliński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018). ISBN: 1442650184

[R3] [text removed for publication]

[R4] [text removed for publication]

[R5] **Stanley Bill** and Ben Stanley, "Whose Poland Is It To Be? PiS and the Struggle Between Monism and Pluralism," *East European Politics* 36.3 (July 2020): 378-394.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2020.1787161>

[R6] **Stanley Bill**, "Counter-Elite Populism and Civil Society in Poland: PiS's Strategies of Elite Replacement." *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* (September 2020):

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325420950800>

4. Details of the impact

The underpinning research conducted at Cambridge has achieved impact of notable reach (over 1,000,000 beneficiaries) and significance through multiple separate, though interrelated channels, each of them involving extensive collaboration with external stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Notes from Poland: a news website and NGO enhancing international understanding of Poland

The underpinning research motivated, informed and shaped the creation of a website, social media hub, and NGO entitled Notes from Poland (<https://notesfrompoland.com/>), delivering news and analysis on Poland in English, with some items also in Polish, to a large international audience (1,695,381 unique page views over eight months 29.10.19 - 28.07.20)

[E1] p2.-3. What began as a personal blog for Dr Bill's research in 2014 has expanded to include multiple stakeholders and contributors – including several Polish academics, the Editor-in-Chief of *New Eastern Europe* magazine, and the Head of the Jewish Community Centre in Kraków – who all joined him to create the non-profit Notes from Poland Foundation, a legal NGO. Dr Bill is Chair of the Board of the Foundation. The Foundation aims to enhance public understanding of Poland, guided and informed by Dr Bill's research vision. In January 2020, the Foundation attracted USD50,000 funding and partnership from

the National Endowment for Democracy, an American NGO, to expand its coverage of issues in Poland and to work alongside other NGOs in countries within Central and Eastern Europe that face similar challenges to democracy.

Under Dr Bill's leadership, the Foundation ran a successful fundraising campaign, allowing for the launch of a new website and the hiring of three part-time journalists from October 2019. The Foundation formed an advisory board composed of prominent figures, including Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk. In the first nine months, the new website saw almost 3,000,000 page views (over 1,700,000 unique page views). The Facebook and Twitter accounts combined have over 70,000 followers (as of August 2020) [E1] p.32-33.

Notes from Poland fills a gap left by insufficient and often superficial international media coverage of Poland, presenting the latest news against the background of Poland's political, cultural and social history. This research-driven perspective on current events has had a demonstrable impact on the work and lives of – among others – three distinct groups of beneficiaries: foreign diplomats, international journalists, and foreigners living in Poland. The evidence of specific impact is presented in the form of testimonials from three ambassadors and two foreign correspondents based in Poland, in over 500 individual reviews from users of the Notes from Poland Facebook site [E7], and in a reader survey completed by over 600 users of the website [E1] p.36-57, revealing a diverse readership and worldwide reach.

Providing ambassadors and embassies with research to facilitate decision-making and meet strategic objectives

Notes from Poland provides a crucial service to foreign ambassadors and embassies in Poland, providing research-driven background to current events that helps them to make decisions and to deliver on embassy objectives. As British Ambassador Jonathan Knott observes: "This [historical context] is vital in a country in which history matters . . . and where current developments and attitudes often have direct links to Poland's past. Notes from Poland is unique in setting out those connections." Ambassador Knott says that the British Embassy regularly uses the resource of Notes from Poland. He gives the specific example of the annual nationalist Independence March in Warsaw, in which Notes from Poland analysis – which included Dr Bill's in-depth article on the march – "help[ed] my team to understand nuances." [E2] Canadian Ambassador Leslie Scanlon describes the direct impact of Notes from Poland analysis on her work: "By referring myself to Notes from Poland I can find concise descriptions of what led us to where we are today and this helps me not only understand the situation (without Polish) but also to explain to my headquarters, high level visitors, etc., to help Canada best deliver on our objectives in this country and region." [E3] Irish Ambassador Emer O'Connell also describes the specific usefulness of Notes from Poland for her and the Embassy: "Notes from Poland provides a depth and breadth of analysis in English that does not exist in such an easily accessible format elsewhere." [E4]

Providing information for foreign correspondents to improve international understanding of Poland

Foreign correspondents for leading international media organisations are another key audience for Notes from Poland. Financial Times Warsaw correspondent James Shotter refers to the "comprehensive and balanced coverage" offered by Notes from Poland, while noting the direct impact of Dr Bill's work: "It is a measure of Notes from Poland's reach, and the seriousness with which it is taken, that Poland's deputy prime minister, Jaroslaw Gowin, felt compelled to respond to Mr Bill [regarding public media attacks on Polish historians doing work on the Holocaust]. Mr Bill's intervention unquestionably meant that the pressures on academic freedom in Poland were revealed to a broader audience than they would otherwise have been." [E5] Associated Press Warsaw correspondent Vanessa Gera describes Notes from Poland as an "important resource" for her own work, and refers to contacts among "diplomats, business people, and officials with international organizations" for whom Notes from Poland is a primary source of information about the country. [E6] Marc Santora, East and Central Europe Bureau Chief for *The New York Times*, writes of Notes from Poland: "An essential resource for anyone interested in Poland." [E7] p.2.

Informing and engaging foreigners living in Poland, Polish communities outside Poland, and Polish readers in Poland

Over 500 Facebook reviews of Notes from Poland reflect several kinds of impacts on different groups of beneficiaries. Various social media users emphasise the importance of the site's independence in the context of the political agenda presented by Polish state-sponsored news sites in English: "Notes From Poland has become essential for anyone looking to follow current events in the country." Beneficiaries repeatedly emphasise the objective nature of Notes from Poland, and its importance in combating populist propaganda: "Clarity of political issues in Poland to combat the ruling party's continued dissemination of false narratives." [E7] p.7, p.34, p.36.

Foreigners in Poland describe the importance of information in English, which allows them to feel better integrated and to participate in discussions of Polish affairs. One beneficiary writes: "Thanks to this page I have an idea what's going on in the country I'm living [in]." [E7] p.10, p.158. Another captures the underlying research-driven rationale of the project: "[The site] allows you to quickly grasp an understanding of what is happening in Poland and why." [E7] p.8, p.89. Multiple beneficiaries emphasise the unique and indispensable nature of the resource: "As a foreigner who is still not fluent in this (difficult) Polish language, I rely on this project to be able to follow the news and reality of this country." [E7] p.7, p.31.

Another set of beneficiaries say that Notes from Poland has changed their capacity to share information about Poland with non-Polish colleagues and friends, thus facilitating wider discussions of Polish issues: "They're always accurate and help me share news stories and information with my non-Polish-speaking community." [E7] p.8, p.86. Another subset of beneficiaries includes members of Polish communities abroad, mostly in the US and the UK, who say Notes from Poland has transformed their ability to stay up to date with developments in Poland: "i am an american woman born to 2 polish parents. i have always wanted to better understand my mother country's politics but prior attempts have been too daunting. im so glad i found NFP, it's easy to understand ... so im not overwhelmed." [E7] p.9, p.152

To summarise, Notes from Poland sprang out of Dr Bill's published research agenda to explain ongoing cultural and political processes in the country in the context of history. This project has achieved significant and wide impact by attracting a team of collaborators and funders who have contributed to its expansion into a multimedia project that affects over 100,000 beneficiaries per month. Notes from Poland gives beneficiaries the capacity (which they otherwise would not have, as ambassadors, journalists, and multiple Facebook reviewers testify) to understand and participate in discussions of Polish affairs, in both professional and personal contexts. Dr Bill continues to oversee the project's development and to publish his own research perspectives in multiple articles and social media posts. In November 2019, in response to requests from beneficiaries, he launched the Notes from Poland podcast, which directly delivers his research agenda through another medium. It has attracted over 20,000 downloads over its first 14 episodes [E1] p.34.

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Enhancing understanding through public outreach at the University of Cambridge

Dr Bill has also channelled his research findings and approach into an extensive public education programme in Polish Studies at Cambridge. Since 2015, he has organised over 30 events, including conferences, lectures, film screenings, and debates. Over 3,000 people have attended the events, and recordings of them have been viewed close to 100,000 times by a wide international audience on the Cambridge Polish Studies YouTube channel [E1]. The underpinning research has directly shaped these events. For example, Dr Bill moderated a debate on foreign policy between a former Polish foreign minister, now in opposition, and a prominent advocate of Poland's conservative government. Dr Bill's research on the Smolensk catastrophe and the spectres of Polish history framed the

direction of the debate, which has been viewed over 28,000 times on YouTube and was discussed in the Polish media [E1] p.60. The event also shaped a report in *The New Yorker* magazine on whether Poland is “retreating from democracy” [E9] p.1-13. The author contacted Dr Bill to draw on his research perspectives, and directly cited the Cambridge debate in the article.

Engaging civil society leaders and parliamentarians with research on Poland

As a result of his highly visible, research-driven public education agenda, Dr Bill was invited by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to join the founding steering committee of the Belvedere Polish-British Forum, which aims to deepen people-to-people links between the two countries. The latest edition took place at Chatham House in London in March 2020, bringing together over 300 civil society leaders from the UK and Poland including academics, think tankers, NGOs, business people, MPs, activists and journalists. Over 50 online survey responses from the 2019 Warsaw edition testify to the specific impact of the Forum on participants, who describe their increased understanding of key issues and opportunities to create connections with new partners [E9]. As a follow-up to the 2018 edition, Dr Bill was invited to present his related research on multiculturalism and migration in Poland and Britain to a Parliamentary Roundtable at the Palace of Westminster, attended by cross-party representatives of both Houses. Dr Bill’s research conclusions were then cited in a report on the Roundtable produced by the British Council [E10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [E1] Online quantitative data & resources: web analytics, website homepage, advisory board, articles, social media, podcast, reader survey, & Cambridge Polish Studies YouTube.
- [E2] Testimonial from British Ambassador to Poland, January 2020.
- [E3] Testimonial from Canadian Ambassador to Poland, January 2020.
- [E4] Testimonial from Irish Ambassador, February 2020.
- [E5] Testimonial from Financial Times correspondent, May 2020.
- [E6] Testimonial from Associated Press correspondent, January 2020.
- [E7] Twitter extracts and Facebook data and report containing 538 individual reviews.
- [E8] Collated news reports relating to Poland and democracy.
- [E9] Belvedere Forum 2019 online survey results (56 responses).
- [E10] UK-Poland Roundtable – Final Note (Parliamentary Roundtable, 21.11.2018, Crossing Points: UK-Poland). Bill, “Multiculturalism and Identity in Britain and Poland.” *Crossing Points: UK-Poland. Common Interests, Shared Concerns* (British Council: 2018) [link](#)