

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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**MULTICULTURALISM AT THE START OF 21ST CENTURY
THE BRITISH-POLISH EXPERIENCE
AUSTRALIAN THEORY AND PRACTICE,
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: ŁÓDŹ, MAY 2005**

From 12 to 14 May The British and Commonwealth Studies Department, UŁ held the conference entitled *Multiculturalism at the Start of the 21st Century. The British-Polish Experience. Australian Theory and Practice*. The conference was opened with an opening session held in the Biderman Palace, with a number of eminent speakers, among others: the Ambassador of Australia in Poland, the Dean of the Faculty of International Studies, Rector of the University of Łódź, President of the British Council in Poland, Representative of the Voyevodship, and President of the Polish-British Chamber of Commerce.

The main objective of the conference was to generate an international and interdisciplinary discussion on the issue of multiculturalism based on the British, Polish and Australian experiences, as well as on the similarities and differences among the three societies concerned in the context of multiculturalism. The European Union is a relevant reference for the Polish and British aspects of multiculturalism, the more so that the United Kingdom has always been the 'reluctant' one in the EU, emphasizing the importance of keeping the bonds with the other nations of the Commonwealth as well as the USA, and Poland has just celebrated the first anniversary of her EU membership. Moreover, the United Kingdom offers a great deal to the discussion of multiculturalism as the issue of peaceful coexistence of cultures and minorities has been on the British agenda for decades. No less contribution came from the rich Australian experience of implementing multicultural policies. The city of Łódź with its significant history of four cultures-nations living together constituted an excellent background to and a relevant reference for the conference theme.

The conference participants represented various countries and academic disciplines. Guests came from the USA, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, Belgium, Japan, Latvia, the Ukraine, and Poland, and offered valuable contributions to the conference discussion by sharing their sociological, literary, philosophical, and anthropological perspectives. Among the participants there were also some eminent scholars like Prof. Catherine Alexander (University of Birmingham, UK), Prof. Sheila T. Cavanach (Emory University, Atlanta, USA) and Prof. Sylvia Lawson (University of Technology, Sydney, Australia) to mention just a few.

The plenary sessions as well as the theme seminars and panel discussions gave opportunity for an invigorating exchange of opinions, experiences and considerations with reference to the issue of multiculturalism in the modern world. The conference was accompanied by additional events like tours around Łódź, Łowicz, Nieborów, and social gatherings in the most attractive sites in Łódź with a chance to sample the traditional cuisine of the four Łódź cultures.

All in all, the conference turned out to be a very useful and gratifying event which not only allowed for a highly insightful and needed debate on multiculturalism on the Polish ground, but also deepened our knowledge on various aspects of the British, Australian and Polish cultures and their presence in the world consciousness.