

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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ARTHUR PISZCZATOWSKI

*Interviewed by: Tom Selinger
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Tom Selinger for ADST on May 8th, 2025. We're here on behalf of the Fulbright Association to interview Arthur Piszczatowski. Arthur, can you just start by saying your name and spelling it for us?

PISZCZATOWSKI: Yes. Hello. Thank you for this opportunity to share a little bit about Fulbright because, I mean, we don't get to do it every day, right? So, it's a chance to do that.

My name is Arthur, A-R-T-H-U-R, Piszczatowski, P-I-S-Z-C-Z-A-T-O-W-S-K-I, and I'm an institutional sociologist, which means I'm on a trek through life to try to understand what exactly we live in and how do we define and redefine the institutions of our society and planet together as citizens and as human beings.

Q: Excellent. Can you tell us just a little bit about where you grew up and what brought you to this career?

PISZCZATOWSKI: It's kind of weird because I grew up in Chicago. I also grew up in a rural town in Indiana. But I also—then, as I evolved, I grew up exploring my Polish heritage in Poland, going to university. Then I grew up a little bit in Belarus, where I met my wife and other family. And then I realized that my family goes back and forth between the United States and Europe for a very long time. So long time Americans since 1890, but we just kind of juggled the places a little bit.

Q: Excellent. How did you find your way to Fulbright? And then what did you do under Fulbright?

PISZCZATOWSKI: Finding the way to Fulbright is elusive in some ways. I know my friend Jennifer, when I was an undergraduate, received a Fulbright and everybody was like, "This is wow, right? Jennifer's really special for this." And she was like the most brilliant girl in the class in the university. But for me, it happened a little bit later. I was a sociology professor at Georgetown University. And on Saturday mornings, I would show up with my wife and my little son in the office. And my colleague, Bill Daddio—William

Daddio—would show up, and he's like, “Art, how are you doing? What are you doing?” And I’m like, “Oh, I like sociology, I like theory, I like discussing it and working on projects with students, but where's the practical application of it? What's my question?” He's like, “Oh, Art, you know what you have to do is you have to get a Fulbright. Because if you get a Fulbright, then you have access to USAID, you have access to the State Department, and you actually get away from what is just teaching. That's also very important, but you actually engage in scenarios where you see people, the different problems that they have, and you apply your theoretical knowledge to the evolution of those things.” So, I think that's what motivated me. I proposed what I was doing with students as a Fulbright project. And then I was surprised I actually received the Fulbright.

Q: And then what—what did you do then on your Fulbright?

PISZCZATOWSKI: The Fulbright was supposed to be connecting different groups online on a shared project—because I was teaching network society. And before COVID, this was innovative. It would be like Skype. And I would do interventions with different groups, like a microfinance center. And we would analyze the problem with students? So, we would use the dimension of the university to actually do something practical as opposed to just standing in a theoretical perspective. So, a group reached out to me, and they actually had a problem with microfinance in Tajikistan and they didn't understand why increased loans meant increased suicide rates for people, right? It's a sad story, but I had all these students, and we were able to engage with those people. And it meant that we had to have increased training for people to understand what money is, how you use money within that process. So, I learned these unexpected different places where it becomes very practical how you apply sociology in—almost in a business strategic way—in terms of the evolution of different things.

Q: Okay. What do you think the best thing was that Fulbright gave you?

PISZCZATOWSKI: The best thing that Fulbright gave me? You know how you see the outside, but here, you see the inside? I saw the inside. So, it wasn't only you're in—because as you're going through life, you're trying to figure out who you are, what you are, what you do. And for some people, it's business. For some of us, it's religion. For some of us, it's you're on the track just to understand what's going on. And for me, like theory and students, theory and students dealing with social issues continuously, I saw the people who actually make the choices. And I see I'm actually a tangible part of this. And there's people who actually want to listen to this in how we interrelate in trying to develop a strategy for trying to deal with things which seem unsolvable. And I think Fulbright gave me this type of—maybe confidence in a way, maybe this type of network in a way, maybe this type of deep gratitude and appreciation for partnership that everybody is an expert in what they do. And do not try to impose your expertise. Just respect each other's expertise. And through that, you develop something possibly wonderful if you work together.

Q: Can you think about, in current terms, about making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous? Is there something about your Fulbright experience that you think did

that?

PISZCZATOWSKI: Yes, and it was by mistake. Because I thought it was a network. I'm going to teach a class on network society and bring people into the same network as I did with the students in Georgetown trying to solve a problem. But during the first week, I realized that the university doesn't have internet infrastructure and there's no way we're going to do that, which means we have to work together with the administration, with people who are in this design and partnership. And somehow, instead of bringing a class into the network, we met the minister of education, we met the minister of culture, we met different embassies, we had students question their institutions for the very first time—*increase the quality of education for students in Macedonia—and people who realized, all of a sudden, they're not in these institutional tracks where they have to follow what's been expected of them in atrophy, but we can actually start reverberating through the system. And it's through discussion, through discourse, through communication. That's what changes things. And to have the State Department behind you, to have all of these really, really smart people behind you creates a type of space where we're able to solve things where it would seem they were unsolvable before. And I think this is the power of security, because the military doesn't have to do its work. We do our work. People start trusting the United States. People were very curious about the United States. But because of what happened in Serbia with the bombing, there was apprehension among people in the United States. And here, all of a sudden, we could cooperate. We could work together. And these people don't really want anything from us. They just want to have future projects, and we could maybe participate in it. I think that increases security. To see doctors who want to come to America to study to then open clinics in Macedonia—I mean, that's security, health security, but also economic development for America—American pharmaceutical firms—for American expertise to go there. And to make it short, kind of, the true power of what happened—not because of anything I did, but because of what we did, because it was our Fulbright. It was the professionals, the students, the people in governmental institutions that wanted to do something. What evolved from it was a dialogue in Macedonian society and also a conference—an innovation conference. Where now—every year since that time period, that interaction is modelled for about six, seven years now. People show up, experts throughout the world. Think of all the airplane tickets. Think of all the economic development, right? Participation in Macedonian society, coming back to America, that shapes itself. And this is all just people who care, right!*

Q: Right. Anything else you'd like to add about the importance of Fulbright or your hope for Fulbright's future?

PISZCZATOWSKI: When I was thinking of coming here earlier today, I was thinking that I would usually talk about trust. I would usually talk about this ability to partner. I would usually talk about all these things which I understand as a sociologist. But I also have to think like a business person, for a moment, because our culture is changing in America a little bit, where we want to hear the business angle, the business perspective. I think of AI—things shaping itself—we have a little of these little, like nanostructures, trying to figure out who we are, what we do. I see that as Fulbright, essentially. Fulbright

has already been doing that practically. We've been the nano structure, the artificial intelligence that engages throughout the entire world, bringing people together all over the place, trying to figure out unsolvable dilemmas, and doing it. And I think that is the power of Fulbright. That is how I see Fulbright. Fulbright in modern terms is like a hackathon, right? It's an innovation. It's being investors in human consciousness, especially at a moment in time when human consciousness is what's important to understand. Because people are worried. Everything's changing. How are we going to change it? It's not the business mindset that changes it. It's the power of society, trust, all these instruments that give stability for business, that give stability for innovation, that give stability for strategy. I think this is what Fulbright gives for a world which needs that right now.

Q: Thank you. Thank you.

PISZCZATOWSKI: Thank you.

End of interview