

People for Science, Science for the People

The title of this issue of *Academia* magazine – “Science for Science” – might at first come across as excessively introspective, too deliberately inward-focused. And yet, what we discuss here are not only the broader values that underpin science and stem from it, but also the people who serve science and indeed the importance of science for the people – all delivered in an accessible form. The latter aspect is especially important in today’s world, of course, where the flood of information makes it difficult to find reliable sources and verified knowledge.

In this era of ignorance, disinformation, and populism, the role of science and scientists as guardians of what is true is described in this issue by as many as four authors, including Prof. Andrzej Szahaj, who raises some especially acute problems. Where does the aversion to getting vaccinated come from? Why do people generally no longer trust science? These are questions not only about interpersonal communication in the Internet era, but also about science itself and its proper role in the twenty-first century. Dr. Piotr Karwowski touches upon similar topics, showing how fake news spreads like a virus in social media and how the Polish Academy of Sciences strives hard to promote knowledge about the problems facing today’s world.

In 2022, the Polish Academy of Sciences celebrates its 70th anniversary. This offers an opportunity for some more profound reflection on the definition of science and the reasons why science and scientists need academies. Herein we propose answers to this question from different perspectives – as historians, lawyers, media scholars, neurobiologists, etc.

We examine what an “academy” once was, and what it is now, in the macro-perspective, including how it relates to the nationwide, Europe-wide, or indeed worldwide scholarly community (“academia” in modern English parlance). Prof. Antonio Loprieno, the President of European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA), discusses in an interview how global processes – climate change and digital transformation – affect the goals of academies of sciences and their growing interdisciplinarity. In turn, Dr. Anna Plater-Zyberk overviews various aspects of the internationalization of the Polish Academy of Sciences. This issue thus highlights the social dimension of science and its ability to constantly transcend frameworks. At the same time, we remember that the goals and tasks of academies of sciences and those of university centers do not always converge.

In addition, we take a closer look at academies. Prof. Iwona Hofman stresses such concepts as community, identity, reputation, and the autonomy of science institutions in the context of the Polish Academy of Sciences. In turn, Dr. Alicja Puścian, a member of the Women in Science at Nencki initiative, draws attention to the social changes that have resulted in the growing number of women in academic centers and the impact that this fact has on the scientific research conducted there. In this polyphonic account, we strive to pinpoint what science is, and what it can be, in the globalized world.

In the broadest sense, what we do in this issue is to take a long, hard, critical look at ourselves. We also encourage people outside the PAS to reflect on this situation and to try to move beyond the walls of this complex institution called “the academy.”

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