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# A COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS

Who and what makes the Polish Academy of Sciences the autonomous institution that it is? The answer: people, institutions, and ideals.

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The Academy's community-based character, understood as one of its core values, is determined by the following parameters: a distinctive scientific identity, the compatibility of the Academy's vision with the expectations of internal and external stakeholders, the continuation of the traditions of a social scientific movement open to the challenges of the era, acceptance for polyphonicity in science, and its styles of management.

## Historical legacy

The project of establishing a Polish Academy of Sciences was given official form as a result of the discussions of scholars at the 1st Congress of Polish Science, held from 29 June to 2 July 1951 in Warsaw. Its purpose was primarily to work out a model for the functioning of various science institutions in Poland in the context of the tasks resulting from the needs of a country recovering from World War II. In relation to science, those needs were modern, enlightened, and positivistic in tone as they combined research, development, education, and dissemination of knowledge. The Polish Academy of Sciences as an institution was expected to integrate the activities of research institutes, universities, and scientific societies within the state's scientific policy appropriately to the political and social conditions of the time, and to be the first to initiate and conduct scientific research.

The intentions of the authorities and scholars were well reflected in the Act on the Polish Academy of Sciences enacted on 30 October 1951. This law stressed the importance of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (which had emerged as a result of the transformation of the Kraków Scientific Society in 1872, and started to operate under the name “Polish Academy of Sciences” in 1918) and the Warsaw Scientific Society (founded in 1907 as a continuation of the Society of Friends of Science) in cultivating attitudes of civic responsibility for science and towards science, which came to symbolize the model of PAS activity. This is reflected the tradition of the scientific movement in Poland, which dated back to the 18th century, if we include the mature, institutional forms of knowledge dissemination, or even earlier, if we consider the origins of Renaissance academies and libraries, which fostered the pursuit of knowledge. The history of these processes is well-documented in the chronicles of universities, but it is worth considering the importance of shared excitement with new discoveries for the status of modern science.

Scientific societies, or strictly speaking the social scientific movement that developed in Poland especially in the period of the country's partitions, played a fundamental role in upholding intellectual and moral attitudes in society. Despite operating for the benefit of a nation deprived of its statehood in what were very difficult conditions, these societies did not differ from European ones in terms of their work ethos, structure, and situation within the landscape of cities in the era of industrialization. Likewise, they responded to the intellectual aspirations of the bourgeoisie. If there was any difference, it lay in the determination of their founders and the commitment of their participants, brought together by the patriotic need to work for their future, independent country. Polish literature is filled with images of idealism and



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pragmatism on the part of those who pursued and popularized knowledge, for example in the novels of Eliza Orzeszkowa and Bolesław Prus and the journalistic writings of Aleksander Świętochowski. Participation in popular lectures helped shape consumers of science and progressive romantics.

As a social movement, scientific societies in Poland and all over the world offered modern and relatively accessible ways to gain knowledge and shape civic attitudes for at least two centuries, and the organizations that used the word “society” in their names (in keeping with the Western European tradition) were institutions of prestige for scholars. The Polish Academy of Sciences merged those traditions.

## The associative aspect of identity

If we assume that the identity of an individual or an institution means self-definition and distinctive positioning, and that an association is characterized by voluntary participation, self-governance, and durability, we can say that PAS identity has an associative aspect.

An institution’s identity is built based on its mission, understood as long-term goals accepted by its members and actions taken within the legal order and relevant for the institution’s culture. Acceptance and pursuit of the mission determine the effectiveness of community activities, the institution’s stronger position as a subject of the state’s policy, and the independence of decision-making processes. At the top of the hierarchy of identity components is the autonomy of goals and community relations resulting from the democratic principles of action.

The Academy declares that its mission is “to work comprehensively to further the advancement of sci-

ence, in the service of society and for the enrichment of Poland’s national culture, while adhering to the highest standards of research quality and ethical norms.” These generally defined prerogatives are described in detail at the functional level of the Academy’s divisions, scientific and task-force committees, territorial branches, the Polish Young Academy, and the science ethics commission. The structure of scientific and task-force committees is essentially consistent with the classification of scientific fields and disciplines, but it also takes into account sub-disciplines, major research areas that are representative of disciplines but are not themselves disciplines, and the distinctive characteristics of interdisciplinary research.

The Academy’s mission should be interpreted through the prism of its statutory and regulatory tasks, which include conducting advanced research of strategic importance for the development of science and the economy, forging networks of national and international research teams (including multidisciplinary ones), supporting the development of young researchers, producing expert studies taking a stance on important issues, and disseminating science. These are all long-term tasks, independent of the political and socioeconomic situation. In their essence, they come close to constituting the strategy of an autonomous institution shaping state scientific policy, in the sense that they define the framework for the permanent presence of the Academy as an institution that initiates and conducts socially useful research.

The associative aspect of identity is expressed in voluntary participation in the activity of the Academy as a body of distinguished scholars convinced of the value of its mission and tasks, but this participation is nonetheless preceded by elections that are held among members of the scholarly community and reflect the evaluation of the scholarly reputation of the candidates and their impact. This fosters the development

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of a community of scholars that enjoys public trust and guarantees the self-governance of the Academy in defining its goals and building its organizational structure in keeping with democratic principles.

### The articulation of the Academy's identity – the election of members

The multi-level management of the Academy may be seen as complementary to the associative aspect of its identity: the election of Academy members and internal structures at each level is guided by the principle of responsibility for the Academy's brand as a science institution, created by the bond-forming message encapsulated in its mission, as well as its system of values, appropriate to the scientific discourse, efficient organizational culture, and criteria of membership and cooperation.

The Academy consists of domestic and foreign members elected by its supreme governing body called the General Assembly. The responsibility involved in the election of national members is all the greater as they have the right to vote in the Assembly. By the same token, they influence the directions of the Academy's operations, the quality of its work, and its relations with the social and economic environment. The scientific achievements of candidates for members of the Academy are subject to verification, starting from the first stage of recommendations at the level of committees and then divisions. Those voting in the elections for new members of the Academy can therefore be certain that they are casting their votes for scholars whose achievements and attitudes deserve respect. Choosing the best of the best is a criterion that also applies at the level of scientific and task-force committees, which are therefore true representatives of research communities within specific disciplines or research areas.

The PAS General Assembly is chaired by the elected President, who heads the Presidium, an executive body that takes all strategic decisions in the intervals between the meetings of the General Assembly. The participation in the Presidium of representatives of the divisions, the chairs of the Councils of Provosts of the divisions, the heads of the branches, and directors of the PAS scientific units ensures observance of democratic standards in the management of the elected body of scholars. Such participation also provides an opportunity for a proportional division of tasks and responsibility for strengthening the institution's brand. The planned enlargement of the Presidium to include a representative of the chairs of the scientific committees is an expected decision, motivated unambiguously by the need to better appreciate the

importance of the committees as the Academy's vanguard among researchers who may be disappointed with the institutionalization of science in Poland. It should be stated that the scientific and task-force committees, which operate in affiliation with the PAS Presidium (some of them are also called councils) or with a specific division, as well as the Polish Young Academy and the science ethics commission, are units that are especially recognizable and particularly subject to public scrutiny for reasons related to the forms of their actions, addressed to socially involved and sensitive recipients outside the interest groups. These forms include popular science lectures, training programs, workshops, book promotions, popular science publications encouraging searches for information outside "filter bubbles," lessons at schools, presentations at science festivals, and so on. In today's world, such actions determine the recognizability and credibility of a science institution in the media and among consumers. In the case of the Academy, their purpose is to disseminate knowledge and experience that impact directly on the well-being of society.

In this context, the Academy's communication strategy should focus to a greater extent on efforts to emphasize the social usefulness of the Academy's scientific activities in the public sphere, for example by publicizing in the media inventions, discoveries, patents, and solutions to demographic and health problems that are results of the work of scholars and research teams affiliated with PAS. Science communication campaigns and strategies translate into a sense of identity and community among members of the institution, as they increase public understanding and acceptance of the tasks, needs, and challenges facing the Academy as an initiator of research and a coordinator of the transfer of knowledge.

Despite being the last link that can be included in scientific communication processes, in the sense of the stimulation of public interest in the activity of the corporation of scholars, the elections of members of the Academy provide the basis for the democratic management of science in Poland according to the Humboldtian model, which is difficult to achieve and involves the independence of universities from the state.

### The democratic culture of self-determination

The culture of self-determination, like any form of "cultivation of the soul" in keeping with Cicero's concept (*cultura animi*), must be organized at three levels: normative, symbolic, and material. These can be attributed to the legal acts and the regulations of the institution's status and functioning, the values defined by the institution's mission and evident in practice,

and the products of scholarly work. These things have already been discussed here, but it is worth highlighting those aspects of the Academy's activity that are attributed to the democratic culture of self-determination. These are: the procedure for electing members of the Academy and members of the Academy's units who are not PAS members within the wording of the Act (members of committees and councils elected by the university community), the structure of management and internal control, collegiality as a principle observed in determining the institution's tasks and assessing their implementation, research autonomy, and freedom of science and education. It appears that the consistent application of the culture of self-determination has shaped the Academy's image as a leader and partner for other autonomous institutions of state scientific policy (academic leadership), one that provides good conditions for research (entrepreneurial culture, the freedom to choose working conditions) and safeguards the balance between rivalry and cooperation.

## Space for integration

The legal basis for the Academy's operations is provided by the Act on the Polish Academy of Sciences of 30 April 2010 (*Journal of Laws* 2010, No. 96, item 619) and the Statutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which regulate in detail the activities and responsibilities of the Academy's units and bodies. The Act guarantees the autonomy, self-governance, and freedom of science as the universal founding values of the corporation. Article 2 of the Act sets forth the list of the Academy's tasks, which can be summed up as: conducting scientific research and R&D work, educating young researchers, issuing opinions on projects and programs related to science, pursuing national and international scientific cooperation and collaborating with the socioeconomic environment, formulating the principles of ethics in science, and conducting expert activities. Performing these tasks would not be possible without an alliance of generations, talents, and communities, without a sense of identity defined in terms of utilitarian uniqueness and a durable community referring to traditions, authorities, and values.

In late October 2021, the PAS Research Station in Paris hosted a prestigious international conference (attended by such scholars as Prof. Norman Davies, Prof. Daniel Beauvois, and Prof. Maria Delaperrière) devoted to the legacy of Jerzy Giedroyc and the Paris-based emigration monthly *Kultura*, which made me realize that this alliance is a characteristic feature of the Academy and it comes in many variants, which are responsible for the institution's dynamic nature. Despite having different scientific interests, the young researchers at the station were not only excellent co-organizers of the event, but also the most faithful participants in the discussions and friendly

guides for the large group of scholars of various ages who arrived from various European countries and had various attitudes towards hybrid conferences. Interest in science and respect for science provided the basis for an intergenerational exchange of experiences and ideas about the future of research, reinforcing the conviction that it is worth trying to understand different points of view and learning more about specific areas and methods. The station has recently hosted teachers, art historians, and physicists. All were welcomed by the announcement of the Polish Academy of Sciences' Individual Fellowship: Innovation and Creativity (PASIFIC) program, launched in 2020. It would be difficult to find more timely and compelling evidence of the possibility of integration.

At the Academy, this alliance of generations manifests itself in collaboration between scholars of various levels of seniority within divisions and committees and through the Polish Young Academy. Intergenerational relations often reveal the natural tendency to look for authorities and masters along with a synergy of experiences and the enthusiasm of explorers. Discussions held at the meetings of the committees are very informative in this regard. The Academy's governing bodies recognized in time the potential of young researchers, and members of the scientific community selected those among them who were pursuing bold projects, taking into account the achievements of the past and understanding the requirement of the continuity of research as processes immersed in time and space, as the essayist Jerzy Stempowski wrote. Great importance is attached to the education of PhD students and young scholars (called independent research staff members) at the PAS research institutes and to the expert involvement of young researchers in scientific activities that are in a sense endorsed by the Polish Academy of Sciences, for example in scientific societies.

The establishment of interdisciplinary research teams, successful applications for external funds in grant competitions, benefits from the exchanging of experience and the transfer of know-how in teams that bring together representatives of scientific disciplines all have a very favorable impact on integration, which is turning into an essential element of creative work in today's world.

On the eve of its 70th anniversary, the Academy is faced with challenges generated by the era of rapid electronic communication, which minimizes accountability for the merit of the messaging being communicated (the "post-truth" era). The quality of research and the verification of its results by teams of experts constitute the Academy's response to this challenge in science. As for the challenges arising from social disintegration, the Academy's response involves strengthening its autonomy and the associative aspect of its identity. ■