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Editor Address:

Polish Academy of Sciences:

Office of Scientific

Information and Publications

PKiN, Pl. Defilad 1, 00-901 Warsaw, Poland

e-mail: academia@pan.pl

www.pan.pl/academia

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e-Society

Information society, global village, e-society, and knowledge-based economy – these concepts are being used ever more prevalently to describe the mechanisms that drive the modern world. And they are by no means terms exclusively used by sociologists, computer scientists, or economists. The rapid rise of techniques for processing and transmitting information is affecting all facets of people's lives. In this third issue of ACADEMIA: The Magazine of the Polish Academy of Sciences, we have tried to portray a few such examples.

*Let's begin with infrastructure, without which the easy and fast flow of data wouldn't be possible. PIONIER, **Poland's optical Internet** (p. 7), is already enabling our scientists to take part in large, international research projects in particle physics and astronomy. But the changes stemming from widespread access to modern IT technologies among "ordinary users" might in fact be more important, as they transform people's daily lives. This starts in the earliest years: in many countries, computers are already widely present in schools. Much remains to be done in this regard in Poland - feels the author of the article **Technology in the Classroom** (p. 26). Investing in IT education is thus a worthwhile endeavor, especially since Internet users have been shown to be more well-adapted in certain senses than society at large (**Thriving in the Internet** on p. 4).*

*While building a knowledge-based society is a high-priority topic for researchers, teachers and social organizations alike, it is above all the duty of the government. The attention of the Polish Minister of Science, who authors this issue's **Short Circuit** essay (p. 50), is indeed focused on this objective.*

*Of course, the rise of IT does not entail just positive changes. For example, amidst the information noise and the gigabytes being transmitted, we frequently lack the time to reflect for a moment and to look at human civilization from a certain distance. Such reflection might be inspired by a view from space, such as the extraordinary satellite photo on this issue's **Gallery** page (p. 51), or by phenomena on the micro-scale, such as the ant world portrayed in the article: **Earth: Planet of the Ants** (p. 10). Does it not come as a shock to learn that the largest information-based societies on Earth have been formed by species other than Homo sapiens? And that ants were building extensive colonies hundreds of thousands of years prior to the advent of mankind?*

*Now, however, they also have to cope with the consequences of human activity. Climatologists are, of course, still arguing over whether we humans really do have an influence on global warming, but the results of their studies do not fill one with optimism. According to forecasts prepared in part by Polish researchers (p. 20), **tornadoes and floods** could become commonplace events in the future...*

"Money makes the world go round" – said the song from the film "Cabaret." But this no longer seems to be the most apt description. Nowadays it is information that keeps the world spinning.

ACADEMIA staff

The largest information-based
societies are not human ones



Marek W. Kozłowski