

Ljubljana, 9. July 2013

Dear Vishanthie and colleagues,

Thank you for your work on the global definition of social work. I write to you in the name of several colleagues with whom I have consulted about the proposed definition during the global consultation process. We send you few suggestions for changes and are kindly asking you to consider them. We strongly hope that you will find them worth to include into the global definition. We refer to the latest version of social work definition with commentary.¹

1.) The definition needs to address that social work is a profession and a discipline. This proposed change was discussed and gained support during the following events:

-This justification was discussed at the 3rd ENSACT Conference (Istanbul April 2013), and at the General Assembly of the EASSW. At the assembly, more than 40 signatures were collected by the members of the EASSW, ICSWE, TASW and EEsrASSW including the signature of the former president of the EASSW Prof. Annamaria Campanini and president of the ENSACT Prof. Nol Reverda (signatures are kept by Darja).

-the annual meeting of the EEsrASSW (University of Ljubljana, June 2013).

-the annual Academic Board members of the International Doctoral Studies in Social Work and Social policy- IINDOSOW (University of Applied Social Studies St. Poelten, June, 2013).

The sentence is read as:

SOCIAL WORK AS DISCIPLINE AND A PROFESSION facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people

Justification:

The understanding that **social work is a profession and a discipline** comes from the following sources:

a.) Since the last years of the 19. Century and the early years of the 20. Century social work has gradually developed from courses-level-education, to the 2-years vocational trainings, 3-years studies and 4 years university programmes. **Social work is today taught at the universities and at the universities for applied sciences almost across the world.**

¹ The definition below may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.

The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

b.) The majority of the educational institutions in the countries with social work education prior than 1990s have today apart of the bachelor/undergraduate studies also **master/postgraduate studies**. This is the case also for almost all post-socialist countries. Universities and universities of applied sciences which have not yet achieved to develop master studies, work intensively to achieve the right and the financial resources to have the postgraduate studies in social work, too.

c.) Since 1990s most of the universities in the developed world achieved to establish /or started to develop the **doctoral studies in social work** (/social work and social policy or social work and neighbouring discipline). The justification for it was the idea that social work can only become a respected social science discipline if it develops all three cycles of higher education (bachelor/master/doctoral).
For this development in Europe see:

Darja Zaviršek (2009), »Can Development of the Doctoral Studies in Social Work Resist the Neo-liberalism Within Academia? Some Comparisons«. In : Shula Ramon and Darja Zaviršek eds.: *Critical Edge Issues in Social Work and Social Policy. Comparative Research Perspective*. Faculty of Social Work, Ljubljana. pp. 219-237. © IN ATTACHMENT

d.) The development of the doctoral studies in social work brought a new era of social work discipline, as social work **started to focus on research, the history of social work ideas, theoretical development, its own methodology and the academic emancipation from other social science disciplines**. Research in social work has become one of the major aim of the discipline.

e.) Today, social work has developed its **own theory, methods and methodology body of knowledge**. This is the major reasons that the new proposed definition speak about “social work theories”, and not only about theories of human behaviour which was the case within the 2004 definition. If a profession has its own “theories” then it becomes an academic discipline.

f.) In the countries where either political, or social and economic obstacles prevent the development of the doctoral studies in social work, **social workers strive to change the existing conditions in order to be granted a doctorate. Social work academics are today united in a struggle** for becoming a discipline in many countries of the world. In the last 20 years new doctoral schools in social work, networks, international programmes and research bodies were established.

2.) Social work profession and discipline needs to be interested in the knowledge of all vulnerable people whom social workers support and empower and into their experiences and strategies to lead a good life. Therefore, we suggest changing **the term »indigenous knowledges« into »KNOWLEDGES OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE«**.

This proposed change was discussed and gained support during the following events:

-the annual Academic Board members of the International Doctoral Studies in Social Work and Social policy- IINDOSOW (University of Applied Social Studies St. Poelten, June, 2013.

The sentence is read as:

Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and **KNOWLEDGES OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE**, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Justification:

The term "indigenous knowledge" draws the attention towards the power-knowledge and the structural dominance of the knowledge but does not addresses the power inequalities within its own context.

- a.) The term "indigenous knowledge" is connected to a static understanding of culture, instead of seeing the culture as a dynamic force in which "indigenous culture" is also involved. How to differentiate among those who are signified as "indigenous" and those who are not any longer indigenous? When somebody crosses the line?
- b.) The term does not acknowledge that once "indigenous culture" is observed and instrumentalized it is not any longer "original" but already also constructed.
- c.) Indigenous knowledge is not free from power inequalities and abuses, and the term indigenous is often used to suppress, discipline, punish and violate the most vulnerable people in the communities.
- d.) Why to differentiate between indigenous people and all the others?
- e.) Who defines what is indigenous and what is not indigenous/or not anymore?

Sincerely,

Prof. Darja Zaviršek,
President of the EEsrASSW;

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