

Dr. Jarosław Gowin  
Minister of Science and Higher Education  
ul. Hoża 20  
00-528 Warszawa  
Poland

Prague, December 17, 2018

Dear Mr. Minister,

As a president of the Czech Association for Social Anthropology I would like to express my deepest concern about the current institutional basis of Polish ethnology and anthropology. The members of our executive board including myself were very surprised when we learned that ethnology and anthropology disappeared from the list of officially recognized disciplines in Poland. Sometimes, there are discussions about classification of various disciplines and it is understandable that things can change over the years. These discussions and exercises in classification are usually associated with relationships of ethnology and anthropology to either humanities or social sciences or internal divisions within anthropology that may extend into biology and linguistics, especially in North America. It is an unprecedented decision, however, to drop ethnology or anthropology entirely from the list of official disciplines.

Polish ethnology and anthropology have a long tradition with considerable impact on the global academic community. One of the founding fathers, Bronisław Malinowski, became a central figure in the history of anthropology and ethnology. His texts are read across the globe and it is hard to imagine an introductory class for undergraduate students without references to Malinowski. Indeed, he was the person who defined the essential method of our research: participant observation. Perhaps, it is not perceived the same way in Poland but his name became a vehicle for the global promotion of Polish greatness comparable to Maria Skłodowska-Curie or Henryk Sienkiewicz. Denying the recognition of ethnology and anthropology as official disciplines simultaneously diminishes Polish contribution to the development of humanities and social sciences in general.

Of course, Malinowski is only a tip of the iceberg. Polish ethnologists and anthropologists have been a strong intellectual force in Central Europe over the decades. Many of Czech scholars have been collaborating with Polish colleagues. Michal Buchowski and Hana Červinková, to mention just two names, became highly visible figures within European social anthropology. The younger generation of Polish scholars have been pushing the limits of usual Central European publication strategies reaching the prestigious publishing houses and journals. Polish colleagues represent the core of our Visegrad Network organised around Max Planck Institute in Germany. This networking produced plans for the conference entitled Social and Cultural Consequences of Voluntary and Forced Migration in Europe, which will be held in Poznan in 2019. Also, Poznan will host another significant scholarly meetings within the frame of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences entitled Inter-Congress “World Solidarities” in 2019. In many respects, Polish colleagues represent an inspiration for our academic community.

One of the most powerful components of ethnology and anthropology is field research based on extensive presence of a researcher among the people that we study. This approach requires support and recognition.

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The denial of ethnology and anthropology as disciplines threatens researchers' opportunity to do what they are good at. Without proper resources and recognition, these disciplines will be condemned to the position of "arm-chair studies" instead of the disciplines that can bring first-hand information about the life of migrants, ethnic minorities, strategies to face environmental changes, or various cultural incompatibilities that endanger the integrity of contemporary world.

I thereby urge you to reconsider the decision to drop ethnology and anthropology from the list of officially recognized disciplines. Czech Association for Social Anthropology strongly supports the protests of our Polish colleagues who call for maintaining ethnology and anthropology as officially recognized disciplines.

Best regards,



Martin Heřmanský, Ph.D.

President of CASA