

Dr Jarosław Gowin
Minister of Science and Higher Education
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Poland

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Dr. Julia Zenker

Berlin, 25 February 2019

Statement of Support for Restoring Anthropology / Ethnology on the List of Officially Recognized Disciplines in Poland

Dear Minister, Dr. Gowin,

With great interest and apprehension, we have been following the recent political developments in the field of education, specifically in academia, in Poland. As board and advisory board of the *German Anthropological Association* (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie e.V.), and in full agreement with our colleagues from the Polish Ethnological Society and international anthropological associations such as the WAU, WCAA, IUAES, and AAA, we wish to express our deepest concern in regard to the recently passed law on Higher Education and Science that merges several scientific disciplines, among them social and cultural anthropology/ethnology, into the umbrella discipline of "Cultural and Religious Studies." In our view, the revocation of anthropology/ethnology as an officially recognized, self-standing discipline will have highly detrimental consequences for our colleagues at Polish universities, for the international academic exchange with Polish academia, as well as for the discipline itself.

Social and cultural anthropology/ethnology stands out among the social sciences due to its unique emphasis on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, which was first articulated by the Polish scholar Bronislaw K. Malinowski, a founding figure of modern social anthropology, and which became the standard methodological approach of our discipline. It is precisely this approach, in combination with ethnographically grounded theories, that renders anthropology/ethnology a well-established and globally acknowledged social scientific discipline of great political and societal importance. The discipline's relevance manifests itself thereby in both immediately applicable research results (e.g. in the fields of health and

medicine, education and learning, or technology) as well as foundational research on processes of sociocultural transformation and diversification whose comprehensive understanding is essential for human (co)existence and conviviality in contemporary societies.

We apprehend that abolishing anthropology/ethnology as an independent scientific discipline and subsuming it under the heading of "Cultural and Religious Studies" will lead to a decreasing appreciation of the discipline's unique research approach and contribution to the production of societally relevant knowledge and expertise. It will also result in reduced funding options for our fellow anthropologists/ethnologists working in Polish academia. More than that, they will be deprived of important opportunities to enrich and benefit from the global scientific community and discourse as it will become increasingly challenging for them to get involved in international research projects and publish in internationally renowned anthropological/ethnological journals. In the long run, the nominal erasure of the discipline from the tableau of social sciences will seriously endanger the international visibility of our esteemed Polish colleagues and have a tremendously negative effect on the global disciplinary academic exchange with Poland. From a global perspective, the contemporary developments at one of the world's leading universities in the Social Sciences, the National University of Singapore (NUS) might serve as example. After invisibly merging social and cultural anthropology into the Department of Sociology for almost two decades, the faculty and the presidency of the university are flagging the department as "Department of Sociology *and* Anthropology" from 2020 onwards for reasons of transnational cooperation and the international visibility of the Singaporean academic landscapes. As one of the founding origins of the discipline, the international academic community stands in need of a strong Polish anthropology.

We therefore stand in full solidarity with our colleagues from Polish universities and strongly support their request to reconsider the recent reforms and reinstate anthropology/ethnology as a discipline in its own right.



Prof. Dr. Hansjörg Dilger (Chair)

[On behalf of the Board and Advisory Board of the German Anthropological Association]:

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