

“The Role of Supervision in Building Excellence in Social Work Education”, Region-specific Conference of the BUIBRI Project, Nanjing, October 13th, 2018

Welcome speech by Professor Juha Hämäläinen, Director of the BUIBRI Project, University of Eastern Finland

Honored colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to greet you personally and on behalf of the BUIBRI Project, all the six partner universities of the project included. These are three Chinese Universities – Fudan University, Nanjing Normal University, and Sun Yat-sen University – and three European Universities – University of Gothenburg, Sweden, University of Hertfordshire, the United Kingdom, and my own University of Eastern Finland as the coordinating institution.

In addition, two Chinese associations of social work education are involved in the project, supporting sustaining the project significantly. We are very pleased to have representation from both associations in the Steering Committee of the project, professor Gu, Vice-President of China Social Work Association of Academics, and professor Ma, Vice-President and Secretary General of the China Association for Social Work Education. These cooperation links are very important for the sustainability of the Project’s innovation scores.

The fundamental aim of the Project is to strengthen the capacity of Chinese universities to develop social work as an academic discipline and a branch of academic studies, practice studies in particular. In addition, the Project provides opportunities to build bridges between Chinese and European social work institutions of higher education. This sounds like the Belt and Road Initiative in the field of social work education, right? The Project provides excellent opportunities to learn from each other.

Relevant interaction between educational institutes and working life is an important element of any profession. The BUIBRI Project aspires to develop cooperation between academic and practice institutions of social work, focusing on practice studies in social work education. The vision is to improve the practice studies with respect to the cooperation system as well as supervision skills of social work teachers and supervisors, relevant tools and approaches included. In this sense, the Project strives to amplify pedagogical and organizational resources for social work education. Indirectly, this promotes the development of social work as an academic research-based and practice-oriented discipline and professional system.

The length of the BUIBRI Project is three years, containing two training programs: one for teachers and one for supervisors of practice studies. In addition, several workshops and conferences will be held and materials for improving placement studies will be selected and produced, as well as research-based activities. One national conference has been held so far, last May in Shanghai, so this Nanjing regional conference is number two. This conference is also a part of the training of 30 trainers who come from Shanghai, Guangzhou and Nanjing regions.

Our ambitious aim is to be innovative regarding new ideas and practices in the practice studies of social work. I think that this innovativeness takes place mostly in the frame of interactive

debate between Chinese and European partners. We can inspire each other. The Chinese colleagues have expressed a special interest in the European design of social work education. From the European point of view, this interest is very challenging because the models of social work vary significantly from country to country.

For the most part, the innovativeness of the Project is connected with strivings to implement some key elements of the European experience in the Chinese national context and develop the social work discipline and a profession appropriate for the Chinese social order. In this sense, the cooperation between Chinese and European universities provides opportunities to develop pedagogical tools, study programs and organizational structures of the practice studies of social work education with Chinese character. Accordingly, the European partners gain chances for advancement and progress.

In this way, pedagogical ideas, methodological tools and theoretical approaches of supervision and organization of practice studies in social work education will be engendered with reference to the Chinese welfare system and governmental customs. From the outset, European policies and practices in question are not imported to China but they are adopted and modified by the Chinese side as far as possible according to the demands of the Chinese civilization. In my opinion, this makes the Project innovative.

The long-term aim is that the activities and structures elaborated in the Project will continue after the end of the Project. The Project Steering Committee has emphasized that cooperation with governmental organs is very important for sustainable and high-quality development. This is what we want to do.

I am very grateful happy for the greetings of the Dean, the Head Master of the School, and the representative from the City of Nanjing. Thank you very much for the important words.

I also want to warmly thank the organizers at Nanjing University for all their efforts.. The conference program is very attractive and inspiring and I am convinced that this event fits the aims of the Project excellently. Thank you very much for the outstanding preparations.

On behalf of the BUIBRI Project, I thank also all presenters and each participant. I am very grateful for your attendance and I highly appreciate your efforts. I wish us all a delightful time with inspiring discussions and rewarding associations.

Welcome everybody!