

## The problem of creative activity in of social work research

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**Abstract.** Current Latvian research in the area of social work is not characteristic of a creative and innovative methodological approach. The methodological conservatism derived from general sociology is particularly affecting students in doctoral studies. This proposes a question: should, in the name of scientific novelty, we support research in which the PhD student aims to get rid of his personality behind the shield of authority, sometimes even general sociology textbook truths? Or should we encourage bold challenges to methodological schematism, in which the researcher takes a pose of truly creative research and avoids becoming a representative of scientific marginality lacking one's personality? The subject of creative activity – the researcher in social work – can best express oneself in the level of philosophic wisdom, identifying only the main guidelines of his creative processes and allowing a large headspace for one's creative quests. A scientist, also one interested in the problems of social work, can ascertain his/her uniqueness by relying on the concept that any researcher has embarked on an individual journey, circulating on different orbits around one central idea. If the distance between such central idea and the researcher's activities is increasing, this signifies of either a creatively productive reevaluation of the researcher's position, or the death of the research process in having lost the original idea. On the other hand, continuous approach towards the central idea either means that the researcher is consistent and determined in his creative research, or there is complete lack of scientific novelty in cases when borrowed foreign ideas are worshipped.

**Key words:** *social work, methodological conservatism, creative work*

Current Latvian (but not exclusively Latvian) research in the field of social work is rather conservative and suppressed by complete practicality. In most cases this research cannot boast of creatively innovative methodological approaches as requested by the very essence of social work, intervention, which often is required in social processes of highly variable conditions and activities of persons involved. Creative work in research and thus also novelty (if any is to be found) is usually manifested as the identification and analysis of new, poorly studied areas or objects of research. This is where creative activity frequently ends, constantly reinforcing methodological conservatism and schematism, usually presented as a) excessively detailed application of approbated empirical methods of sociological research, in which every creative methodological quest that revises the established practice is considered crippling for the results of the research; or b) maximum preclusion of exploratory risks posed by methodological innovations related to intervention.

### Results and discussion

Methodological conservatism and schematism is particularly affecting students pursuing doctor's degrees and young scientists, among others in the area of social work. This substantially curbs their initiative for creative work. In December 27, 2005 The Cabinet of Ministers of Republic of Latvia issued Regulations No 1001 (Protocol No 772) "Order and Criteria of Conferment of PhD Degree (Promotion)" (<http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=124787> in Latvian) which feature a clear emphasis on the fact that a PhD thesis is an original research the results of which have a great significance in the relevant scientific area and in which methods of data processing and analysis should be up-to-date.

In this aspect one should pay particular attention to the request for: a) originality and b) modernity, thus posing the following questions: 1) Can scientific creativity and modernity in research regarding social work be attributed also to research methodology? 2) Or, quite on the contrary, should one aiming for a PhD in social work limit his/her originality and proposed novelty to the quest for and analysis of research objects poorly studied or not studied at all, thus firmly respecting the methodological premises already established in sociology?

The answers to these questions might portray the attitude towards versatile scientific progress, also in the area of social work. In many cases this constitutes a serious problem for both PhD students and the evaluators of their activity. That is, in social work research – should a conventional, authority-approved, smoothed-out, often sociology-derived schematism be supported more than “unorthodox” novelty, likely to cause objection and criticism? (for novelty often bears its name and essence on the fact that it has crossed the conventional, “orthodox” borders) In other words, which research in terms of scientific novelty should one support more? The one in which the student is aiming to be devoid of his personality under the cover of authorities, and often – general truths? Or the one in which the student is courageous enough to challenge methodological conservatism and schematism based on tradition, thus demonstrating his/her creative position and avoiding becoming a representative of scientific marginality with no individuality whatsoever?

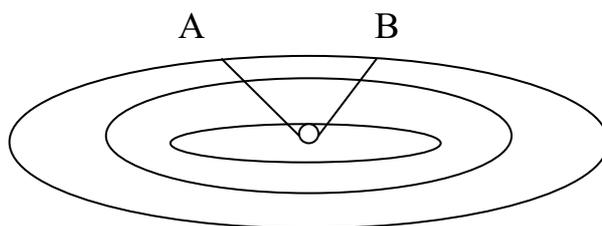
Franco Ferraroti, the remarkable Italian sociologist states that a human person is not data but is a process instead, and that laws relating to him or her cannot be eternal and infinite, and cannot be useful in all contexts (Ferraroti, 2007; 8). He writes: “Humans are not a piece of data, but rather, a process which acts creatively in their quotidian world” (Ibid; 1) and that “in social studies every researcher is also a “researched”” (Ibid; 3).

Supposedly, these conclusions hold true for all researchers in the area of social work – that is, not exclusively PhD students and young scientists. Any scientist regardless of experience is, above all, a human being, capable of representing oneself as the carrier of “data pieces” just as well as the subject of creative work. This difference depends on which level of wisdom does the researcher act in. There are various levels of wisdom (Vilks, Vilka, 2010; 38–42). In ascending order of completeness, they are: *everyday wisdom* → *wisdom based on one certain science* → *encyclopaedic wisdom* → *philosophically theoretical wisdom*.

Surely, any scientist, especially one interested in social work, should not stall in the existential particularities of everyday wisdom up to the point of denying theoretical thought altogether. What is more, such scientist should not emphasize a sole particular science or a separate aspect of its expression when embarking on his/her creative quests – for instance, in the field of social work this often happens in the form of excessive preference towards psychology. Such tendencies signify of a single-sided approach that lies outside vast social contexts.

It is quite safe to assert that a social work researcher, one who possesses “data piece” wisdom, is unable to ascend above encyclopaedic wisdom during his/her career. Encyclopaedic wisdom often lacks the necessary degree of systematization and thus impedes creative activity in the way that it overcrowds the researcher’s intellect with various data, facts, concepts, theories, events, persons, etc. The scientist simply cannot gain access to enough creative space in which original novelties could be formulated. A social worker is the subject of creative work, and the most suitable area for expressing oneself in this case is the level of philosophical wisdom, in which the researcher could observe, analyse and evaluate the research subject as if “from above”, that is, from the height of philosophical thinking. In this case the identification of guidelines for creative processes only leaves the researcher with many opportunities for his/her quests.

Surely, the creative work of a researcher is tightly bound to the *self-confidence* gained as a result of self-reflection. Self-confidence is an essential part of creative research work. It should be appreciated that any human being, therefore also the social work researcher, is a unique personality. A person is not a computer and his/her skill and talents do not usually meet any unified requirements. Some researchers are best at patient and highly detailed collection of empirical data, subject to subsequent



**Figure 1.** Arrangement of planets in a cosmic system.

classification and description. Some researchers are better at theoretical thought. Should these individual differences be subjected to negative pressure of any kind, it just might so happen that promising research perspectives are destroyed, especially if the self-confidence of the researcher is not too high.

How can a scientist, especially a young researcher, assure oneself of his/ her uniqueness? One of the possibilities is the process of *self-reflection* focused on the factor of *space-time* (Vilks, Vilka, 2010; 42–46).

As it is known, planets belonging to a certain cosmic system orbit around a central object. This movement is elliptical and every planet is on its own orbit closer to or further from the centre (see Figure 1).

This concept of “cosmological map” can be successfully interpreted by any scientist in one’s personal self-reflection with the aim to define the uniqueness (novelty) of one’s creative activity. The central questions in this case are: 1. Is the centre of a researcher’s creative quests formed by his own idea or is it one of another author, maybe even an elementary truth taken from a textbook? 2. To what extent is the researcher loyal to his/ her central idea?

One must respect the irrefutable fact that these elliptical movements are subject to a certain centrifugal force. That is, the greater the distance between the central idea and the orbit on which the researcher embarks on his/her creative quest, the greater this centrifugal force. Therefore this poses increasing possibility that the scientist on such orbit can lose the connections holding him/her to the central idea of the research. However, this can be evaluated both positively and negatively. Positively – in the sense that moving away from the central idea might mean a) the transition from a borrowed idea to one’s own persuasion, or b) a radical change in personal beliefs upon understanding the scientific fallacy of the initial plan. At the same time, this centrifugal force also poses a negative aspect in the sense that it might result in the refusal of a truly creative and scientifically perspective idea.

On the other hand, these orbits are also subject to some centripetal force. There are quite a few suggestions on the nature of orbits close to the centre: a) the researcher is faithful to one’s ideas, plans and creative work, b) the researcher implicitly believes one’s scientific authority (in cases when the central idea is borrowed), or c) it can signify of the researcher’s dogmatism, even fanaticism, and unwillingness (or inability) to perform critical inspection of one’s initial creative concepts.

Of course, the problem of measuring the centrifugal or centripetal force in this case remains open. It should be noted that the solution to the problem can only be very hypothetical. Supposedly, one of the solutions might be found in the idea of *segments of space-time*. As illustrated in Figure 1, it is obvious that when overcoming the distance from initial point A to goal B, researchers whose quests lie on an orbit further from the centre are subject to overcoming a greater distance, thus spending more intellectual power and energy than the researchers whose orbits are nearer to the centre. Again, such situation can be evaluated from two points of view. On one hand, an increase in the distance between the central idea and the researcher’s activities signifies either on the productive reevaluation of the creative position of the researcher, or the death of the research process in losing the central idea. On the other hand, continuous approaching to the central idea suggests either of the consistency in the researcher’s scientific creativity, or a complete lack of scientific novelty in cases the researcher cannot get rid of foreign, borrowed ideas.

## Conclusions

1. Current Latvian research in the area of social work is not characteristic of a creatively innovative methodological approach. 2. Methodological conservatism particularly affects PhD students, also those in the area of social work. 3. The subject of creative activity (the social work researcher) can best express oneself in the level of philosophical knowledge, identifying only the guidelines of one's creative processes and allowing for a vast headspace of possible quests, that would allow for determined intervention and taking into account the variability of possible situations. 4. The social work researcher can assure oneself of own uniqueness by using the concept that every scientist circulates around one central idea, each on his/her own orbit. An increase in the distance between the central idea and the researcher's activities can signify either of a creatively productive reevaluation of the researcher's position, or of the death of the research process in losing the central idea. On the other hand, continuous approaching to the central idea either signifies of the consistency of the scientific creativity of the researcher, or complete lack of scientific novelty in cases the researcher worships foreign, borrowed ideas.

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