

## **EXAMINER'S REPORT**

### **on Dissertation Thesis**

Entitled: *Migration from the City to the Village: Ethnological Research Based on Cases from Bulgaria, Slovakia and Belgium*

PhD Candidate: Petya Valentinova Dimitrova, PhD student in the Department of Ethnology, Faculty of History, *St. Kliment Ohridski* Sofia University, research supervisors: Prof. Veselin Tepavicharov PhD, Assoc. Prof. Iliya Iliev PhD

For awarding the educational and scientific degree Doctor in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Meglena Ivanova Zlatkova, Department of Ethnology, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

Petya Dimitrova's biographical report presents a talented young researcher who makes purposeful efforts not only in her education, but also in activities which help her gain knowledge of people and acquire field experience in various contexts and different countries. Such ethnological dissertations are not very common in Bulgaria, so I will duly highlight this aspect of her work, as I believe that she has successfully tackled the challenge.

The topic of the dissertation, *Migration from the City to the Village: Ethnological Research Based on Cases from Bulgaria, Slovakia and Belgium*, in practice raises the question of new trends in lifestyle changes of different people associated with the transition to rural life. This is an often researched and still insufficiently analyzed topic in view of the latest trends in the distribution of urban and rural living in Bulgaria. The dissertation explores a stage of a more comprehensive process which is still under development and this makes it particularly significant.

The dissertation contains 271 pages and is structured in an introduction, three parts, conclusion and literature reference, which contains 138 titles, of which 44 in Bulgarian and 94 in English, including Internet resources. The dissertation also features a visual application, which has its own function, as well as a QR code of a multimedia presentation, which introduces the basic research discoveries of the doctoral student through audio-visual means.

**Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied aspects**

The issue of urban-rural migration, researched in three countries simultaneously, is a very wide field of study. Although generalized in the topic of the dissertation, the doctoral student manages to find her standpoint and research approach to it, mostly guided by the conducted field research. I consider the self-limitation which Petya Dimitrova applies to be methodologically appropriate, firstly, by focusing mainly on people who choose in their life project the transition to the village at a younger age, secondly by "narrowing" the transition mainly to the concepts of *downshifting* and *lifestyle migration*, which are typical for certain groups of people and, thirdly, chooses Bulgaria and to some extent Slovakia as the main field, providing only controlled examples from Belgium. Although some of these transitions were "accelerated" by the Covid-19 pandemic, which shows that there are preconditions for this process to develop in the direction described by the doctoral student, it is still too early to draw more comprehensive conclusions and summaries. The dissertation thesis is also significant in scientific and applied terms, as these "testimonies of time" which we, the ethnologists, create and the analysis of trends could serve as a basis for policy-making and decision-making for certain processes.

**Precisely formulated goals and objectives of the dissertation.**

The goals and objectives are well formulated and are aimed not only at scientific and academic investigation, but also at achieving scientific and applied results.

**Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem and compliance with the used literature.**

What can be seen from the whole text and from the choice of literature indicated that the doctoral student conducted a lot of in-depth research of the existing sources and enters into scientific discussions with authors who study similar problems, but in different contexts. Petya Dimitrova often has to make cultural translations of concepts and theories built for other societies in order to "adapt" these theories to her research framework, which is not always an easy task, especially with less studied problems. It should be noted that the doctoral student possesses a deep knowledge of authors and studies from various scientific fields, but successfully smooths out her reasonable and reasoned theoretical framework, which is adequate to the contexts of the research cases.

**Correctness in quoting a representative number of authors.**

All authors are quoted and interpreted correctly and accurately.

**Correspondence of the chosen methodology and research methods with the set purpose and objectives of the dissertation thesis.**

The dissertation research is composed, on the one hand, in line with the good ethnological academic traditions in Bulgaria, but on the other hand it is also innovative. Petya Dimitrova copes with the challenging task of choosing a methodological path in which to conduct her research and of presenting it in the text. The methodology is appropriate and meets the set goals and objectives, which in turn allows to verify the findings and conclusions. I also congratulate the PhD student for choosing to present a tabular model of the main results of her field observations in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Belgium, which were derived as a result of in-depth analysis and serious field and bibliographic work, including Internet research. As I have already mentioned, repeating myself, along with the text there is a visual story called by the PhD student "collages", which is a comprehensive and independent layer of visual analysis of the issue – of the dwelling places, the manner of living the space, building spatial connections of proximity or distance with the place, visualizations of the "images" of rural idyll, etc.

The methodology of the research is consistently presented in the introduction and the first chapter, but further developed in the second and third chapters, where the field observations and analyzes are fully displayed. I believe that the two chapters complement each other and present the views on the environment of the newly settled "urban migrants". The second chapter, *Migrants and the Rural Environment in Transition*, presents a typology of change - as seen by migrants themselves in terms of expectations and reflection on what happened after they moved. The doctoral student uses abundant field material and manages to combine and simultaneously present the cases from the three sides to build a model. In the third chapter *Migration from City to Village for a Lifestyle Change: Cases from Zhelen, Zayezhova and Walloon Brabant*, the model built in the first and second chapters gains density by presenting people's views through their stories and assessments of their daily lives, forms of adaptation, communication with others, etc. The third chapter closes the circle of interpretation and provides the last answers to the research questions set at the beginning.

Of course, each dissertation thesis is a challenge not only for the doctoral student, who is the "discoverer", but also for the academic board and readers of the publications, for the people and communities which are the subject of research. Writing about contemporary events and people always obliges us to very responsibly approach the boundaries between our relationships with people as a research object and our personal positions and feelings as researchers. This is not always an easy task. I would recommend that when revising the text for future publications, the author's critical position towards what people - the subject of research - say be more clearly highlighted.

### **Evaluation of the abstract and the description of the contributions.**

The abstract objectively reflects the content of the dissertation. I accept the requested contributions, which are based on the independent work of the doctoral student and the field materials due to the nature and authenticity of the material on which they are built. The degree of personal participation of the doctoral student in the contributions is unquestionable.

The publications on the dissertation thesis are seven - 5 in Bulgarian and 2 in English and have been published in prestigious journals. Petya Dimitrova's active publishing activity, as well as her participation in numerous scientific forums show the scientific maturity and accumulated academic experience of a young colleague.

My personal impressions of Petya Dimitrova are precisely as a young and talented colleague who actively participates in national and international scientific life. I do not have co-publications with the doctoral student.

Conclusion: Given the above contributions and qualities of scientific work, my vote is "yes" and I strongly recommend the members of the scientific jury to award the scientific and educational degree *Doctor* to Petya Valentinova Dimitrova.

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Plovdiv

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