

STATEMENT

By Prof. Dr. Tatyana Ivanova Kotzeva, Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

of a dissertation on the acquisition of a PhD educational and scientific degree in:

Field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences

Professional area: 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences

Doctoral Program "Sociology"

Author: Darena Dimitrova Hristozova

Theme: Youth Life Transitions in the Context of Globalization

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Siyka Kostadinova Kovacheva, University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski"

1. General overview of the procedure and the doctoral student's CV

By Order No PD-21-645 of 23.03.2023 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU) I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury to provide a procedure for the defense of a dissertation titled "Youth life transitions in the context of globalization" for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, Doctoral program "Sociology". The author of the dissertation is Darena Dimitrova Hristozova – full-time PhD student at the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology, supervised by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Siyka Kostadinova Kovacheva from University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski", Plovdiv.

The presented by Darena Dimitrova Hristozova set of materials (in paper and electronic) is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Rules for the Career Advancement of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University and includes the following documents: an application to the Rector of Plovdiv University for the start of the dissertation procedure; CV in European format; minutes of the Department meeting regarding readiness for opening the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation; dissertation; Dissertation Abstract – in Bulgarian and English; a list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation; copies of 4 scientific publications; a list of citations noticed in the Reference for the implementation of the minimum national requirements; a declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents; report from the scientific supervisor on the level of completion of the dissertation. All necessary documents are presented in perfect form.

Brief biographical data about the PhD student: Darena Hristozova has a Bachelor's degree in Sociology (2016) and a Master's degree in Human Resources Management (2018) at Plovdiv University "P. Hilendarski". Since 1.03.2019 she has been enrolled in full-time doctoral studies at the Department of Applied and Institutional Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy and History,

Plovdiv University. Her active participation in seminars and training courses, as well as her teaching seminars with students is very impressive. The candidate indicates 5 participations with reports/posters at international forums in Bulgaria and abroad, 6 publications (including 4 on the topic of the dissertation), of which 2 the candidate is the only author and 3 co-authored articles in a monograph. Her significant publication and forum activity during the period of doctoral studies, as well as the fact that she has managed to complete the dissertation work for 4 years, testify to her working capacity, organization and high self-discipline.

2. Topicality of the PhD thesis

The topic addresses current issues of life transitions in youth with a focus on the transition from education to work. In the process of globalization of Bulgarian society – labor market and education – the candidate sets herself relevant research tasks – how the transition from completed education to work takes place – as institutional opportunities and barriers and as personal choices for young people.

3. Knowledge of the problem

The doctoral student knows well the scientific field of the dissertation topic and systematizes a significant number of sources from the international and Bulgarian scientific literature /116 in English and 48 in Bulgarian, a total of 166 sources in the Bibliography/. The first theoretical chapter presents the main ideas in theoretical perspectives from different disciplinary fields such as sociology (and psychology) of the life course with a focus on youth age (Mayer, Levinson, Erikson, Elder, etc.), theories of globalization (Bauman, Beck, Castells, etc.), changes in education and work, as well as an overview of youth studies in Bulgaria from the last 30-40 years. Another important line of analysis is the topic of social inequalities and how they are mitigating or, conversely, growing in the face of changing working and educational conditions. There are also presented lesser-known ideas of "bounded agency" (Evans), "structured individualization" and "structured individualization" (Roberts) as well as the ideas on the de-standardisation and individualisation of life trajectories and patterns of life transitions for young people.

4. Methodology of the study

The PhD student chooses the mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative methods, which aims at the comprehensiveness of the analysis through the strengths of the online survey and the complete answers through the method of in-depth interview and detailed entry into the life stories of 4 cases. The research toolkit of the online survey and the interview guide seems well thought out and implemented. Using the strengths of the methods, the candidate formulates interesting findings from the empirical material. On this basis, 4 models of youth's life trajectories from education to work are derived. An advantage of the work is the candidate's elaboration on the limitations of the empirical study and, respectively, the limitations in the conclusions.

5. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation and its contributions

As stated in section 3, the doctoral student not only knows well the theoretical field of the dissertation topic, but also presents in a clear and consistent way the main assets of the theoretical perspectives. This is the content of the first chapter. I fully agree with the self-assessed by the PhD student fifth contribution to the "correct theoretical systematization", which makes the presentation in chapter one devoid of eclecticism and formal connectivity. The second chapter presents and argues the chosen methodology of the empirical research – 121 online questionnaires with young people, 13 in-depth interviews and a presentation of 4 cases. The third chapter presents successively the main findings of both types of analyses on quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative analyses are based on a descriptive presentation of the answers and cross-variable analysis, mostly by gender. The conclusions drawn are based on the analysis and have added value /contributions 2, 3 and 4/ in terms of the outlined models of transitions from education to employment, the place of temporary and flexible employment, as well as the continuing educational qualification in the life plans of young people. To some extent, the family environment as conducive to or limiting the life plans of young people is also described. The conclusion section summarizes the main conclusions and compares them against the hypotheses formulated beforehand.

6. Evaluation of the publications and personal contribution of the doctoral student

The doctoral student presents 4 publications on the topic of the dissertation – 2 individual papers published in authoritative Bulgarian journals /the article in the journal *Sociological problems* is published in English / and 2 papers - co-authored with her supervisor, published in international journals with impact factor - *Sociologija* and *Societies*. The three publications in English are a very good start for a young researcher. In the Reference for the implementation of the minimum national requirements are indicated 5 citations in international editions and 1 in the Bulgarian edition /these citations include other publications of the first co-author and from this point of view can be considered as auto citations/.

7. Thesis abstract

The thesis abstract reflects the structure of the content and presents the most important theses and conclusions of the conducted research.

8. Critical comments and recommendations

In the theoretical chapter in sub-section 7.2 – on education in Bulgaria – the presentation is schematic and there is no analysis of the quality of education and the trends of polarization, which are later commented on in the empirical study. In section 9 – on youth studies in Bulgaria, there is no analysis of the values that young people profess in time dynamics. In sub-section 6.2., the youth transitions models of Walther and Pohl need more explanation as they involve a combination of criteria. In the methodological chapter, the distinction between in-depth interview, case study, life history and biographical method is not clear. The technology of the thematic analysis applied for the analysis of the interviews – what steps were followed – is not clear. The quantitative study

lacks information on age variable, especially for the second group – graduates. Cross-variable analyses are based mainly on gender. The conclusion that education does not meet the requirements of Bulgarian employers has been often repeated, but it is not discussed what these requirements are. There are also inaccurate expressions such as "unemployed and not looking for job" in table 4 /the unemployed is the one looking for job/, "identified causal links of the phenomena studied" /in contribution 1/ - even the use of advanced statistics cannot prove a causal link in the social sciences, etc. These deficits can be overcome in the next stages of the research work.

Conclusion:

The dissertation shows that the PhD student Darena Hristozova has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills for empirical data analysis, demonstrating skills for independent scientific research. I confidently give my **positive** assessment of the conducted research and propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Darena Dimitrova Hristozova in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, Doctoral Program in Sociology.

2 May 2023

Prof. Dr Tatyana Kotzeva