

OPINION

By **Assoc. Prof. Gabriela Milcheva Yordanova, PhD**
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at BAS (IPS-BAS)

of a dissertation for the award of an educational and scientific degree ‘**Doctor**’

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

Professional area 3.1. *Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences*

PhD program ‘*Sociology*’

Author: Darena Dimitrova Hristozova

Topic: ‘Youth life transitions in the context of globalization’

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Siyka Kostadinova Kovacheva, PhD, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

1. General description of the presented materials

By order № ПД-21-645 of 23.03.2023г. of the Rector of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU), I was appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury for a public defense procedure of a dissertation on the topic ‘*Youth life transitions in the context of globalization*’ for obtaining the educational and scientific degree ‘Doctor’ in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional area 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, PhD program ‘Sociology’. The author of the dissertation is Darena Dimitrova Hristozova – PhD student in full-time form at the ‘Applied and Institutional Sociology’ department with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Siyka Kostadinova Kovacheva, PhD at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The presented set of materials by Darena Dimitrova Hristozova is in accordance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. They are as follows:

- Application to the Rector of PU for the disclosure of the procedure for the defense of the dissertation;
- Opinion of the scientific supervisor for starting the dissertation defense procedure;
- Referral report for internal defence procedure;
- Report of the departmental council related to the reporting of the readiness for the opening of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;

- CV in European format;
- Dissertation thesis;
- Abstract – in Bulgarian and in English;
- List of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- Copies of the publications on the dissertation topic;
- Declaration for originality and reliability of the attached documents;
- Declaration for originality of the results and contributions in the dissertation;
- Reference for the compliance with minimum national requirements.

The PhD student has attached 4 /four/ publications on the topic of the dissertation.

The PhD student is a long-time graduate of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. In 2018 she graduated with a Master's degree in Human Resource Management, and two years before that (2016) she graduated as a Bachelor of Sociology in Sociology of Law, Economics and Innovation. Darena Hristozova's secondary education has a foreign language profile with intensive study of English. In the period 1.03.2019–01.03.2022 Darena Hristozova is PhD student in full-time form at the 'Applied and Institutional Sociology' department at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, PhD program 'Sociology'. Darena Hristozova's consequent training in sociology and human resource management provide a statement of commitment and scientific interest in the above-mentioned problem areas, as well as familiarity with the subject matter to provide suggestions for their solution.

2. Relevance of the topic

The transition from education to employment and from parenthood to starting a family of their own and having children is a process that confronts young people with various difficulties and during which they have to make important decisions about their future lives. When this process coincides with an economic and financial crisis, a health crisis with the Covid-19 pandemic, a political transformation and a transformation of the labour market in the country where they live, the situation of young people is further complicated. To address this problem, Bulgaria is introducing various initiatives aimed at reducing youth unemployment. However, the dimensions of the problem remain alarmingly high. For example, the youth unemployment rate is double or more than doubled the national average (NSI, 2022). Dealing with youth unemployment is an important issue because of its short- and long-term effects on various aspects of young people's lives. With this background, Darena Hristozova's dissertation is extremely topical because it focuses precisely on the youth transition from education to employment as part of the life path of young people and as one of the most important transitions in the youth period (from the age of majority to the age of 33), thus contributing to filling the knowledge gaps about the observed age group in Bulgarian society and at the same time proposing some solutions to the registered problem.

3. Knowledge of the problem

The PhD student has carried out a theoretical analysis and review of a total of 166 sources, of which 118 titles in English and 48 titles in Bulgarian. The results obtained by a significant number of foreign and Bulgarian authors are correctly cited. The problem of youth life transitions is analyzed in an interdisciplinary way through an analysis of the relationship between the sociology of the life course and developmental psychology. The dissertation thesis is the result of a thorough research of the considered issues (after 1989 until today) and creative application of the acquired knowledge and skills. Darena Hristozova demonstrates theoretical and practical skills to independently conduct a comprehensive scientific study.

4. Research methodology

The aim and tasks, subject and object, as well as the hypotheses in Darena Hristozova's dissertation are correctly formulated. The scientific work focuses on those young people who continue to study, work, create families and children on the territory of Bulgaria. The methodology is in accordance with the age characteristics of the persons under study and is subordinated to the theoretical statements. The wide age range covered by the dissertation (apart from the territorial scope) is extremely valuable for scientific knowledge - from taking the first steps towards adult life (age 18) to the period in which young people revise and correct the life choices already made (age 33). Respondents are divided into 2 /two/ groups - secondary school leavers and tertiary graduates in 2020, given the particularities and characteristics of each. A mixed mode approach was successfully used - quantitative (web-based survey) with qualitative methods (in-depth interview and case study implemented in a virtual environment). The chosen research methodology allows achieving the set aim and obtaining an adequate answer to the tasks solved in the dissertation. The results of the conducted studies are analysed, summarised in tables and illustrated with corresponding graphs and figures.

5. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation and contributions

The dissertation of Darena Hristozova 'Youth life transitions in the context of globalization' has a total volume of 226 pages (introduction, three chapters and a conclusion – 153 pages, four appendices – 57 pages, references – 12 pages, declaration of originality – 1 page, list of appendices figures, tables and charts – 3 pages).

In the introductory part the PhD student discusses the topicality of the subject, object, aims of the research and the structure of the dissertation.

In chapter one, through a theoretical review of basic concepts, the terms dealt with in the research are derived and argued. Emphasis is placed on the impact of changes (social, economic,

financial, health) over the youth period and the life transitions characteristic of it. The social context in the country is analysed in depth, and the same is supported by statistical data on indicators related to the youth education and employment situation. Comparative data from other European countries on the issues under study are also provided.

In chapter two, the research methodology is developed, including the formulation of the research problem, the main thesis, the aims and objectives; the subject and object of the research are defined, as well as three main hypotheses. The choice of the research approach and the applied methods for collecting empirical data (quantitative and qualitative) are argued in depth. The details related to the planning and organization of the research (including the period of the research and the number of respondents/participants); the content of the questionnaire and the scenarios for the in-depth interview and the case study; the socio-demographic characteristics of the research subjects are presented.

In chapter three, the empirical data collected for this dissertation is analysed. The results of the quantitative research have been processed statistically (using SPSS) - being presented in tabular and graphical formats, and the results of the qualitative research have been subjected to thematic analysis. In addition to the interpretation of the data obtained from the case study, figures containing the timeline of the life transition of each of the persons under observation were prepared.

The conclusion contains the main findings of the field research with reference to the literature sources used in the dissertation and the formulated hypotheses of the research. Two out of three hypotheses are confirmed.

The appendices contain three transcribed in-depth interviews and also the questionnaire used to conduct the quantitative research.

I accept Darena Hristozova's authorship claims for scientific and applied contributions in the thesis, which are well approbated and popularized through publications on the problem area she works on and her participation in various forums and symposia.

I would like to explicitly highlight one of the contributions of the dissertation, specifically the proof of already existing scientific problems and theories by new means. PhD student Darena Hristozova enriches the research toolkit for youth research by using a mixed method approach through information technology (quantitative and qualitative in a virtual environment). This contribution is particularly relevant in the context of the global Coronavirus pandemic, where physical contact with respondents is severely limited, even impossible, on the one hand. On the other, it is young people who are the largest group of individuals who regularly use the Internet in their daily lives (NSI, 2022), which contributes to better mapping and access to this group of respondents.

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

In the competition for obtaining educational and scientific degree ‘Doctor’ Darena Hristozova participated with 4 /publications/, 2 /two/ of which in co-authorship with the scientific supervisor, published in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information (Scopus and Web of Science) and 2 /two/ independent publications - published in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review. Three of the four publications are in English and one is in Bulgarian, which ensures good promotion of the results in the country and abroad.

The two independent publications of the PhD student confirm her own position and serve as evidence of her personal contribution to the researched issues.

One of the publications co-authored with the scientific supervisor is cited in an article in a scientific journal, refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information (ERIH PLUS).

Darena Hristozova's participation in national and international forums and symposia (a total of 5) also contributes to the dissemination of her scientific results within her PhD in Sociology and recognition among the academic community in Bulgaria and abroad.

7. Abstract

The submitted abstract consists of 34 pages, is prepared in accordance with the requirements and correctly reflects the content and structure of the thesis, presenting the main results achieved in the dissertation research. It also describes the links between the aims, objectives, contributions, exposition and publications of the dissertation.

8. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

PhD student Darena Hristozova critically discusses the lack of early career guidance as a major obstacle in the life trajectory of young people in Bulgaria. I recommend the PhD student to continue her sociological research and scientific interests by developing and proposing a methodology for ‘shortening’ the transition from education to employment and formulating recommendations for public policies.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation *contains scientific and applied results that represent an original contribution to science* and **meet the requirements** of the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ADASRB and the relevant Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski Plovdiv University.

The dissertation thesis shows that the PhD student Darena Dimitrova Hristozova **has** in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty 05.11.01. Sociology by **demonstrating** the qualities and skills to independently conduct scientific research.

In view of the foregoing, I confidently give my *positive evaluation* of the research presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, results and contributions, and *propose to the Honourable Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree ‘Doctor’* to Darena Dimitrova Hristozova in in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional area 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, PhD program ‘Sociology’.

09.05.2023

Prepared the opinion:
(signature)

Assoc. Prof. Gabriela Yordanova, PhD