

## OPINION

By: *Assoc. Prof. Andrei Ivanov Nonchev, UNWE*

Scientific specialty: *Sociology*

Concerning: *Dissertation thesis for awarding a degree "Doctor of Sciences" in the scientific specialty "Sociology" (Field of Study 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Humanities)*

Author of the dissertation: *Rumiana Ruseva Jeleva*

Thesis theme: *Sustainable development in times of uncertainty*

Reason for submission of the opinion: *participation in the scientific jury for the defence of the dissertation thesis according to Order RD-09-380/19.07.2023z. of the Director of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (IPS)*

### **1. Summary of the presented dissertation**

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, each with an intermediate summary, conclusion, appendices (7 items), 47 graphs, 21 tables and a bibliography in a total volume of 315 pages. A total of 250 titles in Bulgarian, English and German are indicated in the cited bibliographic sources.

The structure of the dissertation is well thought out and logically organized, the author's statements and conclusions are supported by strong arguments, and the presentation style corresponds to the requirements of the scientific discourse.

The dissertation has an original character and is devoted to a relatively underresearched theoretical and practical problem. The chosen subject of the dissertation and the adopted perspective to the research problem are significant in scientific and scientific-applied terms.

The dissertation work is ambitious not only as a quantitative volume, but mostly as a conceptual and strategically oriented text with the intention to develop a new sociological

field - sociology of sustainable development, which also has clearly expressed applied dimensions.

The dissertation was discussed and directed for defence at an extended seminar of the "Stratification, Inequalities, Mobility" section at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (IFS) at the BAS. The seminar was held on July 14, 2023, based on Order RD09- 359/07/04/2023. of the Director of the IFS.

## **2. Evaluation of the significance, objectives, tasks and methodology of the dissertation**

The chosen subject of the dissertation and the adopted perspective to the research problem are significant in scientific and scientific-applied terms. The goals and tasks of the dissertation research are well formulated and sound-founded. It is stated that the purpose of a dissertation is "to contribute to the theoretical understanding, empirical research and practical application of the sociology of sustainable development by problematizing the sustainability-society-social action nexus." The set goal has been realized, while at the same time new data on the topic of the dissertation research have been presented and original conclusions have been drawn.

The research methodology is relevant to the subject of the dissertation and the set research objectives. The theoretical framework and methodological tools are adapted to the specifics of the research subject and are distinguished by an original author's style.

## **3. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation**

The author is distinguished by an wide erudition and a very good knowledge of the scientific literature, theoretical developments and empirical studies on the topic of the dissertation. Her ability to systematize and critically evaluate diverse theoretical concepts and methodological approaches in the field of sociology of sustainable development and its relationships with sociological theories of social change, transition theories, and modernization theories, makes a good impression.

Jeleva demonstrates very good skills to adequately analyse a significant amount of information and to draw well-founded conclusions. One of her significant achievements is the coherent logical connection between the theoretical framework of the research, the

chosen research methods, the tools used for collecting empirical data and the performed analysis of the obtained information.

The dissertation is well structured and has a clear logic. The author's views are well-argued. The presentation style follows the good patterns and standards of scientific discourse. The language used is readable and understandable.

I accept the formulations of the dissertation contributions indicated in the abstract, which adequately present the author's research achievements. In the dissertation can be identified several scientific and scientific-applied contributions, which I would summarize in the following areas, corresponding to the author's self-assessment:

First, the dissertation research enriches the available knowledge, the methodological approaches, the conceptual interpretations and the apparatus in the thematic subject area. New theoretical perspectives are identified in the field of sociology of sustainable development in times of public uncertainty and increasing global risks in late modern society. The sociology of sustainable development is conceptualized as a subject-specific middlerange theory, which also increases the heuristic possibilities for relevant empirical sociological research. The specificity of the main relationships of the sociology of sustainable development and sociological theories of social change, theories of transition and modernization theories is theoretically justified.

Second, a methodological perspective for empirical research in the sociology of sustainable development based on theories of social action (following Max Weber's interpretations) is outlined. The relationship of social action and sustainable development is thematized in three interrelated aspects: (1) specific social actors such as entrepreneurs, business leaders and sustainability experts; (2) their organizations (business companies, employer and business organizations, various expert groups) and other interested parties (advocacy groups for environmental protection and sustainable development, state and/or independent control bodies, financial and credit institutions); (3) the tool of non-financial reporting of the sustainability of companies, also known as "sustainability reporting" or "corporate sustainability reporting", through which social practice contributes to sustainability of development..

Third, several empirically proven relationships between different variables related to sustainable development have been identified. Regarding the relationship between the

variables "sector of economic activity" and "obligation to report" for example, a large part of the Bulgarian companies report on sustainability voluntarily, without it stemming from regulations and legislation directly. At the same time, these reports are also motivated by obligations within the framework of an international commitment in the supply chain of the respective company or other requirements related to various activities and roles of the companies in the labour market. Companies that are part of international supply chains are more likely to be subject to national and international sustainability regulations. It is also empirically confirmed that the format of sustainability reports does not depend on the company's obligation to report, with a variety of reporting formats existing.

Fourth, a moderate relationship between sustainability reporting and the high degree of technological/innovativeness of Bulgarian businesses has been empirically established. Non-financial reporting is seen as a driver for sustainable development. Companies required to report on sustainability expect greater change over the next five years as a result of more effective regulatory policies and increasing demand for high standards of quality and sustainability. There is also a statistically significant correlation between companies' obligation to report on sustainability under national/European legislation and their expectations for the introduction of future new international standards related to sustainability and corporate reporting.

Fifth, for Bulgarian companies, a statistically significant relationship was empirically established between their obligation to report on sustainability and the verification/audit of the reports by a third independent party, as well as between the size of the company and the obligation to report on sustainability. Company size affects the importance companies place on sustainability reporting. Larger companies are more likely to consider sustainability reporting important.

#### **4. Assessment of dissertation publications and citations**

A list of 11 author publications (one study and 10 articles and chapters in collections) is presented, which are related to the topic of the dissertation, four of which are in English.

The author's publications are sufficient in number according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, meet

professional quality standards and have received recognition in a critical academic environment.

Seven citations of scientific author's publications are indicated.

## **5. Abstract assessment**

The abstract (51 pages) accurately reflects the content and the results achieved of the study. It also correctly presents the contributions of the dissertation with a theoretical and scientific-applied character, as well as a list of publications of the dissertant on the subject of the dissertation.

A reference for the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of the ADASRB has been applied, according to which it can be concluded that these requirements have been met.

## **6. Critical remarks, recommendations and questions**

I appreciate the work done by the author on her dissertation research, carried out on a well-founded theoretical framework, original research tools and supported by the sound empirical data and in-depth analysis of the collected information.

I recommend Rumiana Jeleva to increase the international visibility of her research activity by publishing more actively in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information.

## **7. Conclusion**

The dissertation has been elaborated in compliance with the normative requirements for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences", as reflected in the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB), the Regulations for its Application adopted by the Council of Ministers and the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and for occupying academic positions at the BAS.

Based on the merits of the dissertation and the creative achievements of the author indicated in the opinion, taking into account her extensive knowledge of the researched topic

and her contributions to the development of the disciplinary field of sociology of sustainable development, I believe that the dissertation work "Sustainable Development in Times of Uncertainty" meets the requirements for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sociological Sciences" to Rumiana Jeleva, and I call upon the members of the distinguished scientific jury to vote accordingly.

30.9.2023 г.

Sofia

Assoc.Prof. Andrey Nonchev, PhD