

OPINION

from: Prof. Dr. Milen Ivanov Baltov,

Member of the Scientific Panel on the basis of Order No 380/19.07.2023 of the Director of the FSI of the BAN and appointed as the author of an opinion, pursuant to a decision of the Scientific Panel taken at a first meeting held on 24.8.2023 to defend a doctoral thesis on:

“SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF INSECURITY”,

by author: Dr. Rumiana Rousseva Zheleva,

to obtain the doctoral degree in the field of higher education: 3. Social, Business and Law Sciences under Professional Strand 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and culture sciences “Sociology”

Overall assessment and assessment of the structure and content of thesis work

Dr Rumyana Rousseva Zheleva’s doctoral degree is a highly topical issue: the link between the sociology of sustainable development and business relations is essential, as evidenced by the volume of strategic and programming documents developed over the last 20 years and reflecting on the role of companies in the transition to a sustainable society.

Desertification work is structured in an introduction, three chapters, each with an interim summary, conclusion, annexes (7 pieces) and literature in a total volume of 315 pages. A total of 250 titles in Bulgarian, English and German are mentioned in the bibliographic references cited. 47 graphs and 21 tables are shaped. A section is presented which justifies the relevance of the topic, the purpose of the dissertation and the resulting three main tasks in dissertation, which also determine the structure of the chapters, as well as the chosen research approach in dissertation work.

The purpose and tasks of the dissertation are correctly inferred and are a prerequisite for demonstrating the correct proposition. The subject matter and object of the settlement are clearly defined, and in the field methods, the benchmark and the focus group prevails. It is demonstrated that organisations need to adapt to changing environmental conditions, including (normative and/or value) sustainability requirements. The dissertation also shows how organisations can transform and drive change towards more sustainable practices.

This includes a change in organisational structures and a culture that supports resilience. The practices of business organisations themselves can be explored in terms of their influence on sustainability.

The study suggests that the sociology of sustainable public development is a middle-range theory and as such makes a concrete contribution to the concepts of the management of social change, as well as the management and activities of organisations (sociology of organisations). As part of society, business companies influence societal change and societal sustainable development. The decisions and actions of organisations influence the environment, social equality or intolerance of corruption in a given society and can thus be both drivers of and barriers to change. The sociology of sustainable development theoretical and examines whether and how organisations overcome these obstacles and support sustainable development through preventive tools and policies such as corporate sustainability reporting.

In the first chapter of disserting work "The sociology of sustainable development: disciplinary Framework and Perspectives" emerges the disciplinary framework for the sociology of sustainable development as one of the new sociological subdisciplines. It is argued that the sociology of sustainability is essentially a theory of social change. At the same time, the need for an interdisciplinary approach to research on sustainable development is emphasised.

Asecond chapter presents and analyses the author's empirical research programme to (illustrate) the research field of sustainability sociology. The empirical study was conducted with a diverse sociological arsenal, including desk research and analysis, field research with quantitative methods, qualitative research (in-depth interviews); case study and study (review, analysis and interpretation) of public databases of international organisations in the field of sustainable development.

The third chapter focuses on the conceptualisation of a model code for the sustainability of Bulgarian companies. As a model for the drafting of such a Bulgarian code, the German Sustainability Code has been proposed, arguing why this instrument could also be useful for Bulgarian companies.

The conclusion of the thesis work provides a summary of the benefits and advantages of Bulgarian business companies of complying with a consistent policy and practice in

reporting ecological, social and good corporate governance. It is summarised why consistent reporting would make Bulgarian business companies the drivers of sustainable development in the country and how it would contribute to increasing their reputational value. 11 publications have been proposed on the subject of thesis, 4 of which in English (one in print).

Assessment of contributions to thesis work

The report of contributions presented in the autograph actually reflects the work and results achieved in the thesis work. 12 those contributions are in total, four of which, in my view, are theoretical and methodological in nature, four others relate to practice-applied validations of theory and some of which may be reformulated or may support one of those eight.

The basic conceptualisation of the sociology of a sustainable propeller is described as a 'middle-range theory'. The possibilities for relevant empirical sociological research are increasing. A reliable link has been drawn between theoretical and empirical knowledge of the conditions and processes of sustainable development. In theory, the specificity of the basic sociology links of sustainable development and sociological theories of social change, transition theories and modernisation theories are justified.

A methodological perspective is outlined for empirical research in sociology of sustainability and sustainable development, based on the theories of social action and in particular the understanding of Max Weber (any action taken by an individual or group takes into account the actions of others and is influenced by those actions). Empirical research shows the link between social action and sustainable development; the role in achieving sustainable development of: specific (individual) social actors such as entrepreneurs, business leaders and sustainability experts and their organisations (business companies, employers and business organisations, various expert groups) and other relevant communities (such as environmental and sustainable development expert and advocacy groups; (governmental and/or independent) control bodies and financial and credit institutions, i.e. on which business depends on reputational institutions, international platforms and sustainability organisations.

Confirms empirically that the format of sustainability reports does not depend on the company's obligation to report for sustainability. The results obtained reflect the diversity of sustainability reporting formats currently in place, which can be identified to some extent and excessive. The new EU directive on corporate reporting, adopted at the end of 2022, could put the diversity of formats in order by offering a single one for EU firms.

Questions and recommendations on thesis work

The specific questions to the dissertor are:

1. What can explain the fact that the efforts and results achieved in the real business world compared to ESG standards are much higher than in cases where certain business units and sectors expect to receive specific funding for this?
2. The author proposes "the development of a Bulgarian code for sustainable development, combined with guidelines to help and orient businesses, especially small and medium-sized companies". Should a code as a legal basis be or only guidance and why should it have a separate Bulgarian one?

The recommendation to the applicant is in the future to test some of the proposals at the level of the scientific organisation, both in terms of purely social and environmental components and decision-making according to ESG standards.

The applicant's strong position in state and non-profit organisations is a prerequisite for future participation in international projects and research. The recommendation is to become the leader of European Union project teams and I recommend to set up a school of future PhD students in both Bulgarian and foreign universities with countries in Middle Asia.

Self-reflection and publication of thesis work

The self-referencing meets the requirements and is structurally sound, reflecting the logic and depth of thesis work. The publications on the subject are in Bulgarian, German and English. This gives weight to the work and proof of the author's international recognition. They reflect key points in the study and are linked to part of the contributions. The topics covered are the understanding of the relationship between transparency of economies and sustainability in societies, as proposed by the author of the Code of Penalty

Development in Bulgaria. There are also topics for information technology and sustainability aspects, the effects on markets have also accumulated the link with higher education. The author's work on socially responsible entrepreneurship and innovative tools for a sustainable economy is interesting, and this is also based on a project funded by the national research fund. The author is a concentrated quotation, but more importantly, its development is also of a normative nature.

Conclusion

The teaching activity fully complies with the requirements of the ZRASRB, its implementing rules and the procedural rules governing the conditions and procedures for obtaining degrees at the BAS (under a protection procedure) for the award of the doctorate of science.

I am convinced to give a **positive assessment of the thesis work on “Sustainable development in times of uncertainty”** and recommend to the Honourable members of the Scientific Panel to award the doctorate of Science to Dr Romyana Ruseva Zheleva.

3.10.2023 Drafted the opinion:

GR. Burgas

Prof. Dr. Milen Baltov/