

## OPINION

from Prof. DSc. Pepka Boyadjieva, department “Knowledge Society: Science, Education and Innovation”, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, BAS

concerning Bagryan Malamin’s dissertation work “Artificial intelligence and creative professions: sociological projections of their current and future interaction”, presented for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “doctor”

### **General characteristics and relevance of the PhD thesis**

There is no doubt that a key factor of social development in the 21st century is the rapidly developing and ubiquitous digitization. Both societies and individuals are daily faced with the need to take advantage of the opportunities of new technologies, but also to deal with the various challenges and problems that their application gives rise to. In this context, the relevance of Bagryan Malamin’s thesis on the topic “Artificial intelligence and creative professions: sociological projections of their current and future interaction” is obvious and does not need special justification.

The problems related to the future of professions in the conditions of digital transformation have become particularly acute in the last decade in all countries, regardless of the level of their development. In our country, sensitivity to these issues is heightened due to the difficulties, contradictions and duration of the social transition from a totalitarian to a democratic social order and a developed market economy. Both among the general public and the academic community, there is a clear need to seriously consider the process of digital transformation and to search for new approaches to understand it and to solve the specific societal problems it gives rise to. With his dissertation, Bagryan Malamin is involved in a convincing way in this very actual scientific and public debate.

The dissertation focuses on the development of creative professions in the conditions of increasing digitization and entry of artificial intelligence into them. More specifically, the subject of research is the changes in three creative professions as a result of the digital transformation, as well as the attitudes and expectations of translators, graphic designers and writers of advertising texts and creative concepts towards these changes, primarily related to the nature of employment in them.

The objectives and tasks of the dissertation thesis are well formulated and relate to a real social problem – the changes and challenges in creative professions caused by digital transformation. The dissertation “attacks” this problem on three levels: theoretically – developing its own theoretical model for its interpretation; empirical – bringing diverse empirical data from two author’s studies outlining its different dimensions; and at the “policy” level – formulating guidelines for specific policies to improve the readiness and capabilities of those employed in creative professions to respond to technological change.

The main doctoral thesis, that artificial intelligence is a tool supporting work in creative professions and therefore their future is not in danger, is well-argued and in itself has an important scientific value, insofar as it emphasises the understanding and future of a main characteristic of homo sapiens – the ability for creativity.

The presented PhD thesis has the merit of not only being extremely up-to-date, but also of offering interesting ideas and conclusions based on diverse and seriously considered empirical data. The analysis is logically coherent, unfolded in three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion, and is visualised through 35 figures and 10 tables. The toolkit of the conducted empirical studies is presented in an appendix, and the bibliography includes extensive literature, primarily in English.

### **Scientific and applied contributions of the PhD thesis**

I believe that the main contribution of Bagryan Malamin’s dissertation is the justification and delineation of the dimensions of a specific, new for Bulgarian sociology and insufficiently developed in international sociology, research field, which can be labeled as “artificial intelligence and creative professions”. From this point of view, the presented dissertation enriches the horizon of sociological research.

As an important contribution of the PhD thesis I also appreciate the well-argued and implemented research approach to current changes in employment. I define the implemented approach as holistic, insofar as the analysis of the transformation of the labor market in the three researched creative professions is based on an understanding of the changes in the demand for these professions, but also in the formation of the necessary skills in those who exercise them, and in the opportunities for realisation of creative people in the conditions of digital transformation.

Among the theoretical achievements of the dissertation, I will also highlight the developed relatively complete model of digital transformation. A heuristic significance for

future research has the justification at three levels – macro, meso and micro – of digital transformation and the emphasis on the interactions between these levels (pp. 71-73).

A very important merit of the presented dissertation is the rich empirical material on which the analyses are based. The conducted by the author empirical surveys and the data obtained through them provide a solid basis for the argumentation of the Malamin's theses. For example, it has been shown that artificial intelligence is not perceived as a threat to the possibility of creativity, but rather as a tool supporting its unfolding. The expectations and attitudes of those employed in the three creative professions towards technology in general and specifically towards artificial intelligence, their preferred technological products, as well as the practiced methods of training and self-study for working in a digital environment are revealed.

I consider the systematisation and analysis of empirical results to be an important achievement of the dissertation, on the basis of which the thesis which is dominant in the literature about the formation of a tendency for a significant loss of jobs in creative professions as an inevitable consequence of the entry of artificial intelligence into them, is disputed.

The highlighting of new facts and empirical relationships should also be mentioned as a contribution. I will point out two here. The first relationship shows that those practicing creative professions who follow the development of innovation feel less threatened for their future by the advent of artificial intelligence. According to the second revealed relationship, translators who work in companies express more pessimism about their future work compared to those who work in the government administration or freelance (pp. 101-102 of the dissertation).

The PhD thesis also has contributions of a clear applied nature, among which I will single out the following. First of all, this is the conclusion, based on the conducted empirical research, that pessimistic scenarios for the development of employment in creative professions in the conditions of digital transformation are not without alternatives. The second contribution is expressed in the formulation of specific recommendations to those employed in creative professions, as well as to their professional organisations and clients regarding possible and adequate measures and initiatives to address the challenges related to the entry of artificial intelligence into these professions.

Overall, the author's statement of contributions is carefully worded and reflects actual accomplishments in the dissertation.

Bagryan Malamin's dissertation has already received significant visibility in the academic community through 3 publications, two of which are in English. An important indicator of the scientific value of the PhD student's publications is the fact that they have already received a positive peer review, being cited 12 times.

### **Critical notes and questions**

I will formulate two notes-recommendations and one question for the doctoral student.

I believe that the theoretical model proposed in the dissertation needs further development and refinement. At this stage it is sketched rather than developed in depth. The interrelationships between its individual elements are not sufficiently covered in their versatility, and its application in making sense of empirical research data is rather fragmentary.

Two hypotheses are formulated in the dissertation, the relevance of which is commented on in the conclusion of the work, indicating whether they have been confirmed or not. I would like to draw attention to the limited reliability of data collected through non-representative studies as a basis for testing hypotheses. Moreover, many authors in the social sciences accept that for testing hypotheses even data from large-scale representative quantitative studies are not sufficient, but experimental studies and processing of the data with complex statistical and mathematical methods are necessary.

My question is as follows: How would the PhD student explain the empirical result that seniority has no statistically significant effect on respondents' assessment of whether they feel their jobs are threatened by the advent of artificial intelligence? (p. 101 of the dissertation).

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of the distinguished scientific and applied contributions in the PhD thesis of Bagryan Malamin "Artificial intelligence and creative professions: sociological projections of their current and future interaction" I strongly recommend the members of the esteemed jury to vote unanimously for the awarding of the doctoral student of the educational and scientific doctorate degree.

February 07, 2024  
Sofia

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