

OPINION

on the dissertation work of Evgenia Krasteva-Blagoeva on the topic: "Nutrition of the young: Trajectory of taste" for awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences"

by Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Peycheva,

appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury based on the Order of the Rector of the NBU dated 27.07.2024.

1. General characteristics of the dissertation work

The dissertation of assoc. prof. Evgenia Blagoeva consists of an introduction, 3 chapters, a conclusion, and references in a volume of 215 standard pages. The work includes 3 appendices in a volume of 53 pages: a register of meals in food diaries, a questionnaire and selected examples from food diaries. Aimed at the present and starting from Barthes (2008:33), the aim of the dissertation is to present and analyze the food practices and the tastes conditioned by them in full - food is presented in its basic ambivalence of a material substance, wrapped with many immaterial ones, i.e. cultural and social envelopes (p. 2).

The transformations of young people's food tastes are also the object of a kind of "magnifying glass" in which the dissertation reflects and through which she refracts a number of other significant issues, such as modern trends in national cuisine, the role of the media and screens in the formation of taste and cooking practices, as well as communication through food, etc. letters, in which assoc.prof. Blagoeva analyzes, theorizes and conceptualizes her searches.

Two main methods of collecting information were actually used: "nutrition budget" - a specific research method for recording dietary practices in special diaries by NBU students within a week. It could be seen as a variation of the "time budget" conducted under the leadership of Prof. Zahari Staykov from the Institute of Sociology more than 40 years ago. In the meal budget, they described on a voluntary basis what the NBU students ate during the whole days within 8 years; 2 in-depth interviews. Both methods are relevant.

The tasks that the Blagoeva set herself to reveal are also relevant: They take into account what young Bulgarians eat, what types of food, what products and dishes, is there a difference in the nutrition of men and women, etc. And second - how, where, with whom, who cooks, where they buy from, with whom they share, from whom they learn, etc.

The food choices, food constellations/profiles and food landscapes of the respondents are explored.

2. Contributions

The main contributions of the dissertation work, which I bring out partially differ from the self-assessment of Blagoeva, are:

1. An extensive study of an unexplored and fundamental problem for Bulgarian science, related to the delineation of a model of the food taste of young people in its three dimensions - food choices, individual food profiles, and food landscapes;
2. Innovative application of the food diary as a tool of the "time budget" research method (introduced by Prof. Zahari Stajkov and a team from the Institute of Sociology in the 80s of the last century), applied in its aspect for the nutrition budget;
3. The theoretical understanding of the main characteristics of food taste in its static and dynamic dimensions;
4. A derived food model of young people, providing a solid base for theoretical understanding and building on in future research with its two characteristics: a "postmodern" transformation of taste, giving rise to a hybridity of food choices on the one hand, and a "patriarchal" social organization of home eating on the other.

3. Considerations The dissertation text gives occasion to express two types of considerations on what has been achieved: texts that reveal a certain overestimation of what has been achieved, and texts with which Blagoeva belittles herself.

The first substantial text on which I allow myself consideration is related to the articulation of content analysis, as part of the methodology used in the dissertation, which she calls "mixed" with an original, innovative, and contributing character, which I do not accept.

The author says that "since content analysis can be applied both as a quantitative and as a qualitative method of data processing, in the present work it is applied in both ways, that a similar research design has not been used in Bulgarian anthropology so far of nutrition (page 23). However she should have added that it is not a method or a technique for analysis, but a research method, along with the direct questionnaire (survey), the structured interview, the in-depth interview, the focus group, etc., i.e. method of gathering information. The specificity of this research method as both a quantitative and a qualitative method is that its tool for the specific collection of information on a certain topic, according to European theory and research

practice, is the codebook (registration card), that it is composed of categories and categorical signs, that it allows to code (register) only explicit findings, and implicit ones are eliminated to avoid any subjectivism, does not allow assumptions and improvisations.

The second consideration is related to implied excessive underestimations regarding the achievements of Blagoeva in the work: associate professor Dr. Krasteva-Blagoeva emphasizes that "the present study does not claim to be anything more than a snapshot", that "the work does not claim to be representative - neither in relation to all students at NBU, nor in relation to students in general, and even less - in relation to young Bulgarians in general, that "the research highlighted some basic trends in the nutrition of young people, which are undoubtedly typical to one degree or another about the food culture of this age cohort in the country as a whole"(21p) Such an approach to conclusions can be perplexing, because it can cause someone to conclude that what is said in the dissertation about the nutrition of young people is not valid for young people, on the one hand although it does not correspond to the first part of the thesis topic, and the highlighted trends in the second part of the conclusion are only "to one degree or another typical of the food culture of this age cohort. Whatever that means.

However, in the dissertation, a series of theoretical constructs and achievements deserve positive evaluation. There are sociocultural reconstructions of the kind of hybrid taste, combining in different proportions the consumption of "Bulgarian", "Italian" and "global new"; predominant consumption of home-cooked food but also frequent visits to restaurants. There is a social construction of ideas about the healthiness of food, as well as about class conditioning, etc.

Notes

I also have some notes on the dissertation text in the form of recommendations:

1 To avoid some non-academic expressions such as" which as a rule (according to whose rule p. 2); three-part structure of work; to illuminate; dismembered (7) including grammatical errors (21; 26)

2- be careful when using ready-made project texts; incomplete sentences, etc

Some of my notes are less substantial, others more so. The marking of both types is due to my experience of setting the higher criteria and requirements that apply to doctoral dissertation defenses for the scientific degree of Doctor of Science, which is both far greater in volume than an ordinary dissertation, and on their distinction with precision, on building and defending a

scientific thesis, knowledge and application of relevant scientific methods, on the skills for formulating possible contributions, etc.

I also have one question for Assoc. Prof. Blagoeva for the dissertation - what is the scientific thesis in the dissertation work?

The main two characteristics of the food model described - the "postmodern" transformation of taste, giving rise to the hybridity of food choices, on the one hand, and the "patriarchal" social organization of home meals, on the other, could be, but still I wish to I hear what she is like, according to the doctoral student herself.

Conclusion. The considerations expressed and the notes in my opinion do not detract from what has been achieved in the dissertation work, which is not small; I declare that I will vote positively for the awarding of the Doctor of Science degree to Evgenia Krasteva-Blagoeva in professional direction 3.1. Sociology, anthropology, and cultural sciences.

Member of the Scientific Jury:

Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Peicheva, DCs

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