

STATEMENT

From

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Research Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,

professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, specialty Intangible Cultural Heritage

on: dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science of Evgenia Georgieva Krasteva-Blagoeva, PhD, with the topic: "The nutrition of the young: trajectories of taste",

Higher Education Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences; Professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences

In relation to the submitted dissertation "The nutrition of the young : trajectories of taste" in a volume of 271 p., divided into an Introduction, 3 Chapters , 3 Appendices and a substantial bibliography of the literature used, I express the following opinion:.

1. Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms

The dissertation has a, I would say, so far neglected scientific subject, in which the strategies and patterns of young people's nutrition in Bulgaria are the focus of the research. The study itself does not aim to be of such a total nature. As the author states, the subjects of the study are a limited number of students from a private university. However, the empirical material collected and the analyses made reveal certain attitudes of young people, different patterns of food choice, preparation (procurement) and consumption. These trends, which, due to the wide range of different localities represented in the study, outline a picture of diversified strategies and practices of young people in Bulgaria with regard to the food they consume. The study also draws on a significant number of foreign and Bulgarian studies in the field of anthropology of food, which provides an in-depth theoretical basis. It is the use of Western research to analyse how local food patterns of the selected study group, fit into broader global practices makes the study relevant not only to the national context, but also reveals the increasing homogenization of food practices, but also the diversity of local interpretations. In this context, sustainable cultural patterns that resist the pressures of consumer culture, specific to the Bulgarian cultural context, also emerge. As such, it reveals cultural patterns that are preserved and transmitted through the family, in which eating and food preparation are tied to emotional intimacy. The withholding of family eating practices is also highlighted. The study also reveals different learning patterns in culinary culture. The study group reveals the homogeneity of the channels and institutions that shape their understanding and attitudes towards food and eating. The dissertation also sheds light on the patterns of inheritance of culinary heritage and its re-interpretation by its young bearers. The study is a snapshot analysis of the different patterns that this seemingly homogeneous category reveals. This PhD not only fills research gaps, but also provides a deeper insight into young people's

diets, which also opens up multiple opportunities to apply this knowledge in the context of understanding and improving food landscapes in a university setting.

2. Justification of the aims and objectives of the dissertation

The aims and objectives of the dissertation are clearly defined and implemented throughout the text. The focus is established in the title, where a clear direction of research direction is given- to take a snapshot of food practices and the trajectory of taste. The focus is on a specific group- the students at the private New Bulgarian University (NBU) who have chosen to include the discipline of Food and Culture in their curriculum. The author is clearly aware of the limited nature of the group under study, but he is also able to outline more general trends that overlap it and present certain specificities that may be valid for the food choices and practices of young Bulgarians from the so-called "Generation Z". In order to understand the specificities of food choices, trends and practices are highlighted and studied. Food patterns and particularities of young people's food tastes are sought. Two clusters of research questions are stated and become guiding questions to reach the set research objectives. The first one logically looks for food choices (what young Bulgarians eat, what types of food, what products and dishes, is there a difference in the diet of men and women). The second cluster of questions seeks to uncover food practices (how young people eat, where, with whom, who cooks, where they buy, with whom they share, from whom they learn). The dissertation clearly highlights that it is difficult to seek coherence in the category under study due to the diversity within it, which determines the author's choice to focus on both empirical accumulation of certain food patterns and practices and the construction of typologies to theoretically conceptualize youth eating patterns through the example of NBU students.

3. Conformity between the chosen methodology and research methodology and the set aim and objectives of the dissertation

A hybrid methodology is used to realize the set research aims and objectives, which includes both quantitative and qualitative methods. The author is very good at debating the conventionality of such a classical distinction and sets out boundary spanning methods that can both delineate recurring attitudes, but also delve deeper with motivations and discerning embedded meanings and cultural patterns leading to particular food choices and eating practices. The methodology used allows for a gradual deepening of focus from more general patterns, to an understanding of the motivations of those who hold them. The chosen methodology of using food diaries, survey research and semi-structured interviews helps to explore the specificities of the eating patterns of those involved in the study in a multifaceted way. Data analysis involved extensive work with English-language scientific literature, analysis, descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis.

The three main methods aim to answer the central research questions set, but also set the structure of the thesis. Thus, chapter one, in which food diaries are the main meteorological tool, provides insights into food choices (specific foods that respondents consume). The second chapter extends the typologies of choices already outlined to also outline food profiles (recurring combinations of products and meals), with the food diary data complemented by the surveys conducted. Chapter three outlines what the author argues are food landscapes ("socio-spatial dimensions of food and communication through it as a symbolic code"(Abstract, p.6).

It can be concluded that there is consistency between the chosen research methodology and methodology and the stated aim and objectives of the thesis.

4. Scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation (description and evaluation), including the presence of original contributions to science

The first indisputable contribution is the empirical material gathered, using three different methods to highlight different nuances of how food choices are made, how they are valorised and what the channels are for building a culinary identity. Even if the study group is limited, the chosen methodology yields certain trends that highlight differences in the way different generations eat and think about food and nutrition.

In this respect, the second scientific contribution is also present: the choice of the problematic and the focus on students' nutrition in the Bulgarian context. Such an analysis has not been done, and this is why the work lays the foundations for research in this direction.

Another contribution of this scientific work is the introduction of rich theoretical material that reveals global trends that are analyzed in their local dimensions on the basis of the rich empirical material collected

5. Assessment of the publications on the thesis: number, nature of the publications in which they have been published

The author of the dissertation communicates his work in various publications, which are rather oriented to the Bulgarian scientific audience. The publications published so far show Krsteva-Blagoeva's expertise in the scientific fields of anthropology of food and consumer research. Regarding other publications Assoc. Krsteva-Blagoeva has attached a list of articles and chapters from collective monographs, including those published in prestigious international peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science.

6. Citations from other authors, reviews in the scientific press, etc.

The dissertant's works on the dissertation topic have been cited sufficiently to meet the requirements of the law. A Google Scholar reference shows 57 citations from the last five years, and a significant number of them are related to the main scientific fields of the dissertation.

7. Opinions, recommendations and comments

Considering that the thesis is the first of its kind study of the food culture and practices of a particular group of students in a contemporary Bulgarian context, I would like to make some critical remarks. In her attempt to build a more coherent and related to the theoretical developments of foreign authors research study, Assoc. Krsteva - Blagoeva in some moments fails to keep a critical distance and attributes seamlessly established in scientific thought statements as relevant to the Bulgarian cultural context. Moreover, not only is a fuller picture not given of why and how the conclusions were drawn, but also what empirical material from the researcher's work proves them to be valid for the Bulgarian cultural context (Example: "Adults who live alone have a similar dietary profile- they cook less often, their food is poorer, they eat irregularly and consume more store-bought items similar to teenagers (Brannen et al 1994) p.102 ; "This is the typical tourist preference for the safe, for the familiar horizon of expectation that McDonald's and related restaurants provide, especially against a backdrop of foreign cultures and foods that are defined as unsafe" (p.133).

Another comment along these lines is that the theoretical generalizations upon which the empirical data is analyzed do not always match the target population of the study-young students at a private university.

The imposition of the category "snack" in opposition to " structured eating" remains somewhat problematic for me. The main argument says that it is an "unstructured snack", "...an in-between meal,

usually with 'packaged' items, both sweet and savoury...not prepared on the spur of the moment, unlike cooked meals (p.26). For me, this type of food, as the survey itself shows, has much more variety and it is the snack category, even if it is a term borrowed from the respondents' language, that needs to be more critically defined.

8. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative evaluation of the dissertation

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that the study is contributory and provides a very good basis for deepening the understanding of the hybridity of young people's nutrition in Bulgaria, as well as the different mechanisms for it to be part of the formation of their personal, family, collective, regional and national identity. The research of Assoc. Prof. Evgenia Georgieva Krasteva-Blagoeva is a comprehensive and complete scientific work. I propose to the members of the Honourable Scientific Jury to award her the degree of Doctor of Science in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences

Date

Signed.....