

REVIEW

of a dissertation thesis for acquiring the academic degree of *Doctor of Science* (D.Sc.) in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies (Sociology)

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Thesis: Swimming against the Tide: Bulgarian Textile Crafts and Their Evolution into a Factory Industry, 1800 – 1912

Area of Higher Education: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

Department: Sociology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

Doctoral Programme: Sociology

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Milena Iakimova, D.Sc., member of the Scientific Jury appointed by Order No. RD 38-147 of 15 March 2021 of the Rector of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

The set of materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov, Ph.D., is in compliance with Sofia University's Regulations on Academic Staff Development and contains all required documents.

The candidate has submitted a dissertation thesis, an extended summary of the thesis, and 34 publications on the subject of the dissertation, including another monograph, a series of social portraits in the Bulgarian edition of *Forbes*, two articles in English in peer-reviewed journals, and numerous academic publications in prestigious Bulgarian periodicals. The dissertation thesis consists of 501 pages, structured in an Introduction, three chapters, a Conclusion, an impressive 12 appendices (more on them below), and an extensive bibliography containing 1,098 titles.

The thesis examines the complex economic, cultural, and political processes of modernization of Bulgarian society through a heuristic "laboratory" – the woollen textile industry, and more specifically, the evolution of the textile crafts into a factory industry in the years between the Crimean War and the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars.

Before I proceed to present the thesis, I must say that Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov and I have a collegial relationship, based not only on our work together

at Sofia University's Department of Sociology but also on an academic friendship built in the discussions of his books about the specificities of economic modernization in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century (*Network Capitalism*, 2010; in Bulgarian) and the political economy of the socialist regime (*Reformism without Reforms*, 2008; in Bulgarian). Both the wealth of his publications and the above-mentioned discussions inspire respect for an erudite scholar of modernization processes in the Bulgarian economy and society as well as for an accomplished academic author and eloquent interlocutor.

The other aspect of the candidate's work which I am familiar with are his lecture courses in the Bachelor's degree programme in Sociology at Sofia University, which integrate research into teaching and are very popular with students.

Characteristics of the Dissertation Thesis

The thesis undertakes a laborious task – explaining the distinct asynchronicity of textile production in the Bulgarian lands in the second and third quarter of the 19th century: the textile boom in the second and third quarter of the 19th century when, elsewhere, the textile industry had fallen into recession.

This task is contextualized in historical and historiographic sources as well as in the interpretations that are dominant among economic historians; interpretations that are convincingly disqualified in some cases and strongly revised in others.

But exactly what asynchronicity are we talking about?

When the first globalization de-industrialized the periphery, the Bulgarian woollen textile industry was modernized.

Here is the dominant interpretation which is contested by Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov's study: Industrialization led to a decline in the price of manufactured goods and to an increase in demand for and the price of raw materials, most scholars say. This agrarianized the periphery as the population turned to arable agriculture, which was in higher demand, while transport costs fell. Cottage industries and crafts were left without a workforce, and competition from cheap manufactured goods, imported at low transport costs, finished them off. But the Bulgarian textile boom, argues Martin Ivanov, has a chronology that is unusual for this version and which needs special explanation. This is at the centre of his study.

As a result of vast, painstaking work with a sea of scattered data and sources rendered into a commensurable form and processed by quantitative methods (some of them specially developed for the purposes of the study), the dissertation puts an end to at least two dogmas of social science: regarding the firm opposition between traditional and modern, and regarding the conceptualization of modernization processes in terms of centre-periphery, where the periphery always lags behind the centre and eventually catches up with it at the cost of social frustrations and traumas. Another dogma is also dethroned – this time of the national narrative – regarding Bulgaria’s crossroads location. On the contrary, the study demonstrates – isolation, both geographical and infrastructural, is part of the explanation for the specific asynchronicity of the economic cycle in the textile industry in the Bulgarian lands and of the textile boom. Back then and here in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, peace and calm set in, trade opportunities for agricultural products opened up, and there was a demographic boom. Why didn’t the population migrate to the lowlands to engage in arable agriculture and, instead, there was a textile boom? I view the explanations (presented in disputation with Michael Palairret’s established version) as a serious contribution: Despite the big opportunities for export, the necessary transport infrastructure was missing. Cultivating the lands that were far from the ports was not attractive. This led to a labour surplus to the south of the Balkan mountains.

These explanations are based on a systematic, meticulous analysis of the ways of production of woollen textiles, clothes, and other articles (braid, rugs); the ways they were marketed, calculation of the volumes of this scattered production by various methods, particularly noteworthy among which is experimental ethnography, a very innovative approach that does not rely on nostalgic area studies but neither does it ignore them. The comparison of cubits, bales, and arshins, the calculation of 19th-century wealth, the quantification of production in comparable units, the calculation of wages in the textile manual and mechanized industry: all of this is based on systematization of scattered heterogeneous sources and records, and the results are a reliable basis for researchers of practically all fields of social science disciplines.

The thesis offers a sociology of entrepreneurship and a history of technology transfer, of the emergence and reorganization of sociotechnical networks as the result of the intertwinement of global and local factors, heterogeneous networks and actors. Here I will give as an example the vicissitudes of the manually powered wooden braiding machine (*chark*) – how and where it was imported from, but invariably in parts so as to be kept secret; how local craftsmen were commissioned to make a replica of each part, but they made two replicas and thus assembled a whole braiding machine; as well as the differentiation of professions by the guilds in the course of technology transfer.

I want to especially underline the importance of the third chapter of the dissertation. It builds the picture of the emergence of factory production in Bulgaria as adaptation of artisans to the new conditions: artisanal entrepreneurship in manufacturing and the reorganization of sociotechnical networks between the country's 1876 Liberation from Ottoman rule and the Balkan Wars. A serious scientific contribution is the revelation of the hybrid character of these forms and processes (the hybrid form of entrepreneurship in a situation of capital scarcity; the combination of the steam engine with putting-out weaving; the factory that used the organizational forms of the putting-out system; the social profile of the textile worker – mostly young women with little education and no property who left their jobs once they got married – hence a low labour cost, but difficulty of mechanization; etc.)

Undoubtedly the biggest sociological treasure in the dissertation, however, is to be found at the end of the third chapter and it is called “industrial sociology”. For the first time ever, many scattered data are collected and systematized here in order to describe, in a comparable way, 196 industrialists, so as to draw a profile of the modern Bulgarian textile entrepreneur – *aba* (heavy woollen cloth) and *gaitan* (braid) makers who became factory owners: to compare their origins, educational level, networks, political activities and affiliations, but also the forms of inheritance and of transformation of capital, both financial and social. Here the biographies of 196 textile industrialists are collected, rendered into a comparable form, and disaggregated by education, family ties, political party affiliations. Thus, the data organized in Appendix 11 are a gift to other researchers.

The thesis presents an astute sociological analysis of a specific segment of Bulgaria's business elite with its chronic problems in securing capital and credit and with its close family entanglements. Within this network, there was transfer of social and financial capital, not inheritance of professions. This is elaborated by Assoc. Prof. Ivanov as an indicator of economic dynamism.

In reviewing such a multilayered study, one can say much more, but I will limit myself to pointing out another important contribution: the demonstration of the role of the mediation of taste (your business rival is not someone who merely sells at a lower price, it is someone who responds to the local taste), of the meaning of taste as a modernizing force, and the investigation of the channels of fashion trends and their impact on production and reorganization in the textile industry.

The dissertation abounds in micro-discoveries, each one of which merits a separate monograph – for example, the gender division of labour, the impact of distant markets on the egalitarianism of guild associations, the combination of industrialization with low motivation for urban migration, etc.

I have no critical comments on this work: the methodological arguments, knowledge of the relevant literature, systematization and processing of data and the drawing of conclusions are impressive for their precision and depth. In addition, the dissertation is as precise as it is highly readable.

I will venture to ask a *question* which has to do less with the defence of the dissertation than with pure curiosity. Along with the many sources, the dissertation processes in a systematic way the reports of trade consuls. What procedures of assessing the reliability of those documents were necessary, what are their limitations as a source?

The candidate's scientific works exceed by several times the national minimum requirements for conferral of the academic degree of Doctor of Science, provided for by the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act. The submitted dissertation thesis contains significant scientific contributions and is an entirely new study that does not repeat previous works of the candidate.

The Extended Summary presents the study in a correct, systematic and concise way, the listed contributions are genuine, and even more can be added.

In conclusion: Considering the excellent quality and originality of the dissertation thesis and of its scientific and scientific-applied contributions, as well as the other submitted publications and the many citations of the candidate's works which significantly exceed the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, its Implementing Regulations, and Sofia University's Regulations on Academic Staff Development, I wholeheartedly support awarding Assoc. Prof. Martin Ivanov, Ph.D., the academic degree of Doctor of Science (D.Sc.) in Professional Field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Studies (Sociology).

Sofia

Reviewer:

31 May 2021

(Assoc. Prof. Milena Iakimova, D.Sc.)