

# POSITION

From

Assoc. Prof. Metodi Valeriev Ivanov, PhD

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Faculty of Geology and Geography, Department of "Regional Development",

**Scientific specialty:** 3.8 Economics (National Economy - regional economy and administration)

**Concerning:** dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences professional direction 3.7 Administration and management (Regional development)

**Author of the dissertation:** Prof. Dr. Kliment Minev Naydenov

**Dissertation topic:** Geographical determinants of social and cultural dynamics: regional discourses in intercultural communication in the context of sustainable development.

**Reason** for presenting the position: participation in the composition of the Scientific Jury for dissertation defense determined in accordance with Order No. RD-38-39/ 19.01.2024 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

## **1. Information about the dissertation author.**

The author Prof. Dr. Kliment Minev Naydenov has submitted his dissertation for discussion in the Department of Regional Development at the Faculty of Geology and Geography of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Art. 39 of the Development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRBA). The disclosure of the dissertation defense procedure was made on the basis of a proposal made by the Departmental Council of the Department of Regional Development and the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Geology and Geography of 16.01.2024.

By Order RD-38-39/19.01.2024 of the Rector of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Regional Discourses in Intercultural Communication in the Context of Sustainable Development" for the degree of "Doctor of Science in. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field, 3.7 Administration and management, scientific specialty "Regional Development".

The set of documents submitted by the PhD student Prof. Dr. Kliment Naydenov in connection with the procedure for the award of the degree of Doctor of Sciences meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The PhD student Kliment Minev Naydenov is a PhD in the professional field 4.4. "Earth Sciences" (Geography of Population and Settlements - Regional Demography) and a full professor at the Department of Regional Development of the Faculty of Geology and Geography of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

His academic development has taken place entirely at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" as successively held the positions of lecturer (2002), assistant professor (2005), senior assistant professor (2007), senior assistant professor (2010), associate professor (2016) and professor (2021). In the period from 2016 to 2019, he was the Head of the Department of Regional Development, and currently he is in his second management term (2023 -2027) as Dean of the Faculty of Geology and Geography of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

For the third time he is a member of the Academic Council of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", first as a PhD student in the period from 2004 to 2007 , and now for the second time as Dean of the Faculty of Geology and Geography. Prof. K. Naydenov is the founder and head of the doctoral program "Regional Development", as well as has headed the master's programs "Regional Security", "Planning and Management of Territorial Systems". In addition, under his expert guidance, 10 PhD students have successfully defended their PhDs by 2023 and over 250 student graduates in Master degree. He has more than 120 publications, monographs and textbooks (also for secondary school) at home and abroad. He has participated in over 100 international and national conferences, congresses and symposia, of which he has been the organizer of over 10 national conferences. For more than 20 years he has been on the organizing and editorial committee of the annual scientific conference "Geography and Regional Development" (since 2002, - ), held in Sozopol. In addition, he is also a participant in more than 100 national, international scientific and business projects, having more than 20 years of experience in project activities. Married with three children.

In the period 2018 - 2022 Prof. Dr. Kliment Naydenov holds the position of Chairman of the Board of the Bulgarian Geographical Society and is the founder of the initiative of the Bulgarian Geographical Society - Geodecade 2020-2030.

The PhD student has participated in a number of advisory boards, committees, expert and working groups such as:

- in the period from 2017 to 2019 was a leader and member of expert groups in procedures for institutional and programmatic accreditation in the professional field 4.4. "Earth Sciences" at the National assessment and accreditation agency (NAAA);

- in the period from 2015 to 2022 he is a member of the Regional Policy Council to the Minister of the Ministry of Regional Development;

- in the period from 2017 to 2020, he was a non-permanent assistant to the Committee on Regional Policy, Public Works and Local Self-Government at the 44th National Assembly;

- in the period from 2020 to 2021 is a member of the working group at Sofia Municipality for the preparation of the Ambient Air Quality Programme of the Sofia Municipality 2021-2026;

- in the period from 2021 to 2023 is a member of the Monitoring Committee of the Operational programme "Regions in Growth" 2014-2020;

- for the period 2021-2026 has been elected as a member of a permanent scientific council at the Sofia Municipality for the implementation of the "Comprehensive Programme for the Improvement of Ambient Air Quality on the Territory of the Sofia Municipality for the Period 2021-2026;

- since 2021 is a member of the Regional Development Council of the Southwest Planning Region;

- Since 2020 is a member of the Joint Programme Committee for the development of the Greece-Bulgaria Cooperation Programme 2021-2027;

- Head of the Risk Management Unit at the Quasar Competence Centre.

## **2. Brief general description of the presented dissertation.**

### **Relevance of the topic**

The dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science on "Geographical Determinants of Social and Cultural Dynamics: Regional Discourses in Intercultural Communication in the Context of Sustainable Development" is highly topical given the increasing interconnectedness between different regions resulting in an increase in the intensity of intercultural communication that has led and may lead to the emergence of potential conflicts as a result of existing differences in cultural values and norms. The process of understanding the geographical factors that partly determine social and cultural dynamics is essential for the

integrity and enhancement of communication between different communities. Increasing the effectiveness and constructiveness of intercultural communication involves identifying the disparities and inequalities between different regions of the world, in the context of building a modern global society that is subject to the implementation and development of equitable and inclusive policies for sustainable development that reflect environmental changes and their impact on social and cultural dynamics. Furthermore, we can unequivocally agree with the author of the thesis that the topic "Geographical determinants of social and cultural dynamics: regional discourses in intercultural communication in the context of sustainable development" is a highly interdisciplinary one, integrating concepts from several academic fields" to define the ways in which geography influences social and cultural interactions and sustainable development.

### **Characteristics of the dissertation**

The dissertation "Geographical Determinants of Social and Cultural Dynamics: Regional Discourses in Intercultural Communication in the Context of Sustainable Development" has a total length of 726 pages and analyses the ways in which geographical factors influence social and cultural processes in different regions by examining intercultural communication in the context of sustainable development. The dissertation highlights the importance of regional features and determinants in the author's quest to present a new perspective on the role of geography in shaping cultural and social dynamics and determining their relevance for the sustainable development of contemporary societies.

In the dissertation 28 maps reflecting and depicting the author's views are presented, 475 literature sources are mentioned, which are mostly in English. The dissertation is structured in an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. Structurally, the thesis is balanced and meets the established requirements of completeness and logical coherence of the individual structural elements, which in turn are well presented and defended through a clear and well-presented conceptual framework that can be highly appreciated. A justification for which gives us:

- correctly defined object and subject of the study;
- the aim and objectives are clearly and logically linked to the main research hypothesis, which is decomposed into sub-hypotheses;
- the defined thesis is accurate and can be verified by the chosen methodological apparatus.

The first chapter "Geographical Science, Geographical Laws and their Implications for Societal Development, Culture, Sustainable Development and the Green Growth Index"

presents the main geographical factors that influence society and culture and suggest the development and construction of cultural adaptations to the environment. Some geographical laws and their impact on society, culture and sustainable development are presented. In addition, the impact of the Principle of Spatial Heterogeneity on society, culture and on sustainable development is presented, which has a significant impact on various aspects of society.

Chapter Two, "An Analysis of Intercultural Differences in the World (Using 78 Countries and Their Business Cultures as a Case Study)," confirms unequivocally the author's view that "recognition and appreciation of cultural differences is essential to fostering a just and equitable world where all cultures are respected and taken into account in global dialogue." Cultural understanding is key in designing effective environmental education and behaviour change campaigns, as many environmental conflicts have cultural dimensions whose resolution is also linked to finding mutually acceptable solutions to environmental problems.

The cultural and business culture analysis carried out in the 78 selected countries can be essential not only for understanding and promoting environmental behaviour, but also for designing initiatives in line with local cultural perceptions.

The third chapter of the dissertation, "Regional Discourses in Intercultural Business Communications in the Context of Sustainability and Environmental Behavior," presents Hofstede's cultural dimensions and their effects on the construction of pro-environmental behavior and identifies the ways in which business culture influences the construction of environmentally conscious behavior in the context of achieving sustainable development goals. The author unequivocally demonstrates that there is "a deep and multifaceted relationship between culture and environmental behaviour, deeply rooted in the values, beliefs, traditions and social norms of different societies". The impact of cross-cultural business communications on the performance of the Green Growth Index is also presented, as on the one hand it affects international business practices, sustainability and cultural understanding, and on the other hand the Index provides an assessment of the achievement of sustainable economic growth.

In the presented thesis, the conclusion of the research summarizes that the existing geographical determinants determining social and cultural dynamics reveal the impact of geography on the development and interaction of society, especially in the context of the concept of sustainable development, outlining the need to integrate cultural and social dimensions into environmental and economic policies of individual societies, in the shaped regional identities and in the search for opportunities to increase the effectiveness of intercultural communication and cooperation in the global features in terms of environmental

protection.

### 3. Evaluation of the scientific and applied contributions.

In the present dissertation developed by the graduate several scientific and scientific-applied results can be highlighted, which are the product of the author's research activity and allow to give a high assessment of the competence of Prof. Dr. Kliment Naydenov on the developed meaningful dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science in terms of theory, methodology and applied aspects of the topic chosen by the author.

The author of the dissertation points to 10 contributions, which I agree with regardless, that could be condensed and reduced to the number of research tasks. Out of the 10 contributions presented the following can be highlighted:

1. *Improving understanding of geographical influences on culture.* This research deepens our understanding of how geography - through factors such as climate, landscape and resource availability - influences cultural practices, social structures and cross-cultural interactions. It provides empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the complex relationship between physical (natural) geography and human culture.
2. The findings *contribute to the field of intercultural communication* by illustrating how geographical determinants influence communication styles across cultures. This knowledge is vital for improving cross-cultural interactions in various sectors, including business, diplomacy, and education.
3. The study offers *empirical data and theoretical propositions that can inform public policy and planning*, particularly in areas related to urban development, cultural preservation, environmental protection and social cohesion.
4. *The educational contribution* is reflected in the findings and theories developed from this research, which can enrich academic curricula across multiple disciplines, promoting a more integrated and holistic view of geography, culture and sustainable development.
5. In the context of international business and global collaboration, the research provides *valuable insights into managing and working in culturally diverse teams*. Understanding geographic influences on cultural practices can help organizations develop more effective communication strategies and management practices that respect cultural differences.

#### **4. Critical comments, recommendations and questions.**

My overall positive opinion is related to the established high appreciation for the achievements made in the thesis. There are no significant omissions or inaccuracies in the dissertation, but some minor editorial comments and recommendations can be made to particular points in the dissertation, which should be corrected by the author, as I strongly recommend that the dissertation submitted to me for review be formatted and published as a monograph, as it will be of considerable interest not only to the scientific community, but also to practitioners.

#### **5. Publications related to the dissertation topic**

The thesis contains a total of 7 publications related to the topic, 5 of which are in Scopus journals. The presented 7 publications reflect important theses and results of the dissertation research and can be highly appreciated.

#### **6. Evaluation of the abstract**

The abstract of the dissertation "Geographical Determinants of Social and Cultural Dynamics: Regional Discourses in Intercultural Communication in the Context of Sustainable Development" summarizes the analysis and presents the dissertation in its entirety through a total of 129 pages, where the main conclusions and scientific contributions of the research are indicated. It should be noted that, on the one hand, the abstract is in a considerably larger volume than the established practice, but considering the volume of the presented dissertation of 726 pages, we can understand the difficulties that the author has experienced in its development, even though it is supposed to be natural that the abstract has a larger volume given the presented total volume of the dissertation.

#### **Conclusion**

The proposed dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science by Prof. Dr. Kliment Minev Naydenov on "Geographical Determinants of Social and Cultural Dynamics: Regional Discourses in Intercultural Communication in the Context of Sustainable Development" has a valuable contribution to science and fully meets the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LADASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LADASRB and the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedures for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Holding of Academic Positions on Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski".

My overall assessment is that the dissertation represents an independently completed author's research, in which the research tasks have been successfully fulfilled and the main objective has been achieved, as a result of which the main theoretical and applied results of the dissertation stand out clearly. The clearly outlined real scientific and applied contributions in the dissertation allow any reviewer to give a high summary assessment of the results obtained in the dissertation, moreover, the reader of the dissertation can confidently distinguish the high theoretical and methodological training of the author, as well as the skillful handling of the existing rich empirical base. The findings of the dissertation can benefit and inform policy makers about the importance of considering geographical, social and cultural factors in sustainable development initiatives when formulating policies and taking measures to achieve it.

Taking into account the above and with full conviction I recommend the distinguished members of the Scientific Jury to award the degree of "Doctor of Science" to Prof. Dr. Kliment Minev Naydenov in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, in the professional field 3.7. Administration and Management, scientific specialty Regional Development.

Date / place  
27 February 2024.  
Sofia, Bulgaria

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a circular initial 'M' followed by a series of overlapping, stylized letters that form the name 'Metodii Valeriev Ivanov'.

Assoc. Prof. Metodii Valeriev Ivanov, PhD