

## **REVIEW**

from Prof. PhD Rumen Hristov Yankov - member of the scientific jury for evaluation of the dissertation of Prof. PhD Kliment Minev Naydenov, for the degree of Doctor of Science (DSc) in the professional field 3.7. Administration and Management (Regional Development) from scientific domain 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

This review has been prepared on the basis of the Order of the Rector of Sofia University №RD-38-39/19.01.2024 determining the composition of the scientific jury and the date of public protection and the decisions of the first hearing held on 31. 01. 2024.

### **1. Under the procedure**

The documentation provided meets the requirements of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring academic degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University. The candidate's diplomas, CV, declaration of authorship, information on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for awarding the degree "Doctor of Science", etc. are presented. The scientific production of Prof. PhD Kliment Naydenov has exceeded the required number of points by groups of indicators for the professional field 3.7. The similarity report of texts in connection with the procedure for preventing plagiarism and the expert opinion for admission of the candidate confirm the original nature of the dissertation. The author has presented seven scientific publications related to the dissertation.

I don't find any violations under the procedure.

### **2. General characteristics and content of the dissertation. Autoreferat**

The dissertation of Prof. PhD Kliment Naydenov is entitled "Geographical Determinants of Social and Cultural Dynamics: Regional Discourses in Intercultural Communication in the Context of Sustainable Development". The total volume is 726 pages. After the main text are: author's reference for scientific contributions, list of publications – approbation of the topic and list of used literature.

The exposition is arranged in an introduction, three chapters, and conclusion. The text includes 28 thematic maps of the world, corresponding to the current content. The work is quite in detail structured in several dozen (unnumbered) sections and subsections of the chapters.

In the introduction (20 pages) the topicality and versatility of the topic are justified. The author outlines his original research direction in the field of fundamental questions about the geographical factor in the development of society. The main components of the studied interaction are defined: geography – culture – sustainable development. The importance of contextual (geographical, regional) content of social and cultural communication has been identified as key in shaping sustainable development policies and practices (p. 9). This is basically the concept around which the overall content is built.

The topicality of the topic, according to the author, stems from both cognitive and constructive functions of geographical science in modern times. The object of the study is presented in the introduction in five focuses – the geographical determinants, the social and cultural dynamics of the regions, etc. (pp. 18-19), which are reformatted into research tasks. The formulation of the goal further expands the scope of the work suggesting the interest in the possible relationship of the cultural characteristics of countries and regions with environmental behavior, the specifics of intercultural business communication, etc. The thesis of geographical determinism is applied to the social and cultural dynamics of the regions, and as a consequence – to the peculiarities of cultural (in the focus of the author – intercultural) communication and understandings of sustainable development. These landmarks become clearer than research subhypotheses (pp. 20-21).

The introduction concludes with a scientific review, including a brief bibliographic review of about twenty guiding literature sources on the subject – monographs, articles and reports.

Chapter One, "Geography Science, Geographical Laws and Their Implications for Society Development, Culture, Sustainable Development and the Green Growth Index," includes an overview of geographic factors in some integrative areas of human activity. Their impact on the components making up the green growth index has been reported. An author's interpretation in the light of Tobler's geographical laws/principles is presented. Their postulates are related to the processes of globalization, cultural exchange and ecology.

The second chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the analysis of intercultural differences and in particular the differences in business culture with examples from a large number of countries. In the work, it is this term that is used for the culture of business relations and much less often the compound term -

corporate (company) culture. The connection with traditional local cultures is sought. The following is an extensive (over 200 pages) review of approaches to establishing business contacts and negotiating in dozens of countries and regions of the world.

The title of the last, third, chapter "Regional Discourses in Intercultural Business Communications in the Context of Sustainable Development and Environmental Behavior" repeats the clarifying part of the title of the dissertation. This corresponds to the valuation and character in terms of the effects of the business culture. They are viewed through the prism of societies' adaptability to social and environmental change, as well as their ability to engage with the Sustainable Development Goals. The research tool here is based on Geert Hofstede's model of the dimensions of culture. The most essential for the purposes of the dissertation are the geographical aspects, the possibilities for quantitative measurement and mapping. The maps 1-6 in this chapter of the work present the indexation of countries according to the views on the six dimensions of culture.

The following is an analysis of the impact of cultural attitudes, especially those in business culture, on commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The analysis is supported by an assessment of the degree of their implementation.

The conclusion argues once again the importance of geographical studies of intercultural communication. Understanding the regional dimensions, in the views of the author, is crucial for achieving social and cultural progress in the context of sustainable development.

### **3. Literature assurance and methodological approach of the study**

The sources used in the development of the dissertation include 475 titles, of which only six are in Bulgarian. Methodically, the work is based on an extensive review of the scientific literature on the problems being developed. The selection of the literature gives an idea of the current state of the studies in the thematic scope of the study. The sources concern issues of geographical environment, culture, sustainable development, intercultural interactions, etc.

The candidate's literary awareness is very good. The outlined wide base of literature sources is an essential indicator of the theoretical preparedness for the implementation of the study.

The main theoretical and methodological issues are discussed in the introduction. In accordance with the adopted interdisciplinary approach, general

scientific and private-scientific quantitative and qualitative methods of geography, sociology, economic science, etc. were used. The author's views on the limitations of the study of chronological, informational, ethical or other nature are correctly stated.

The autoreferate (128 pages compressed text) very strictly follows the structure and content of the dissertation and offers a condensed reading of its most important parts.

#### **4. Scientific contributions**

The scientific contributions of the dissertation stem from the significance and persuasiveness of the results obtained, interpretations and conclusions. The deepening of economic and social inequality, international migrations, the climate transition of the economy and a number of other processes create global challenges that require cooperation, social and cultural dialogue. An adequate research response is needed, which makes the dissertation presented extremely relevant in the scientific space. The work of Prof. PhD Kliment Naydenov contains a significant theoretical and methodological contribution to geography and regionalism. It represents an advance in the interdisciplinary methodology for the study of complex geographical, social and cultural interactions. The dissertation is a serious attempt to bring the topics of geographical environment, cultural differences of regions and sustainable development into a single framework of academic discourse.

The conclusions of the dissertation have scientifically informative, but also conceptual significance for the development of policies, initiatives and strategies for sustainable development in a regional context. The study contributes to the understanding of differences in approaches to global problems - differences that arise from the geographical and cultural diversity of societies. The promotion of governance, policy and business towards a deeper awareness of the geographical context and cultural dynamics in global and regional level interactions has important scientific and applied significance.

The developed dissertation is a manifestation of the deepening interest of geography in aspects of culture and cultural interactions. The topic focuses mainly on business culture and the resulting from its norms relations to the environment and intercultural dialogue. The author's reading of a wide range of empirical facts makes it possible to draw convincing evidence of the impact of the geographical environment on the formation of cultural practices, respectively, on their bearers –

social structures. The dissertation expands the theoretical support of research in the field of cultural geography and sustainable development. This study of the interactions in the triad of geographical conditions - social dynamics – culture contains an innovative approach and original results. The author's conclusions are a solid argumentation of the regional differences that manifest themselves in the attitudes and practices of social inclusion, cultural exchange and "green" growth.

A methodological contribution of the work is the successful approbation of the cross-disciplinary approach in a difficult to delimitation research area. The basis points in the knowledge and methodology of geography and regionalism are placed in a common research field with those of the social sciences. The candidate uses innovative quantitative methods of cultural and social ecology. The experience of the dissertation can serve in the development and application of derived models of sociogeographic, cultural geographic, etc. cross-disciplinary research.

I summarize the scientific contributions of the dissertation in several directions. Sustainable development policy and planning are (or should be, according to the author) adaptable and 'sensitive' to the geographical and cultural context. The work provides in this respect an abundance of empirical data and analytical constructs. Sustainable development at national and regional level in response to global challenges – this thesis is well supported.

The study of the geographical determinants of social and cultural dynamics in different societies results in important conclusions about intercultural interaction in business and other areas that experience the strong influence of economic and political globalization. They have practical importance for effective work management in multicultural teams and in the development of communication strategies.

The theoretical references, models and research methods used in the dissertation can find educational input, enriching the content of the corresponding academic courses.

## **5. Critical remarks**

Along with the merits of work reported above, critical remarks can be made to some of the author's interpretations and approaches. In the extensive bibliography, for example, the almost complete absence of Bulgarian scientific titles (except five) is impressive. I do not think that the literary sources in Bulgarian are exhaustively used or that the chosen ones are the most authoritative.

It is noteworthy that the text is for the most part not easy to read. This seems implied for such a voluminous and complex scientific work, but not insignificant reason is the stretched author's expression, expanding some paragraphs to more than two pages.

Some conceptual ambiguities had to be avoided. At different places in the text, the terms containing "geography", e. g. , create some uncertainty, whether the author has in mind the objective geographical reality with the inherent and factorial impact, the subjective cultural and social perception of the environment or the geographical scientific knowledge itself and its (possibly) reverse impact on the environment. This duality in the understanding of geographical context and of geographical knowledge is found in many places in work. There are stylistic inaccuracies in the parallel use of the "survey/study", incl. in the presentation of methodological issues in the introduction, in the reference for contributions and other key places in the work, in the use "urban/cultural/social geographers", etc.

Regarding the structure of a dissertation of a Doctor of Science, I believe that in order to fully clarify the methodology and methodology of the study, an independent section in the text should be separated. The understanding of a number of concepts and ideas would have been facilitated if at least a few schemes of functional connections had been visualized in the presentation.

## **6. Conclusion**

The dissertation of Prof. PhD Kliment Naydenov "Geographical Determinants of Social and Cultural Dynamics: Regional Discourses in Intercultural Communication in the Context of Sustainable Development" contains significant theoretical generalizations for science and useful for management practice conclusions on current issues of regionalism, intercultural interaction and sustainable development.

The scientific contributions of the dissertation, the results achieved in the research and the compliance of the candidate's quantitative scientific indicators with the regulatory requirements give me grounds for a positive assessment. I will vote "for" the acquisition of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science", and I call on the members of the honorable scientific jury to also support the candidacy of Prof. PhD Kliment Minev Naydenov.

21.02.2024

Reviewer:

Prof. PhD Rumen Yankov