

OPPINION

By: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eduard Vasilev Marinov, Department of Economics, New Bulgarian University, Professional field „3.8. Economics”

on: dissertation for the awarding of the scientific degree „Doctor of Sciences” on the topic „The Digital Mind: Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture”, Area of higher education 3. ”Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, Professional field 3.1.“Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences”, Doctoral program „Semiotics”, with candidate Prof. Christian Krastinov Bankov, Ph.D.

1. Summary of the provided materials

By Order № 3-PK-269 / 13.07.2022 г. of the Rector of the New Bulgarian University I was appointed a member of the Scientific jury to provide a procedure for defense of a dissertation on the topic „The Digital Mind: Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture“ for the awarding of an scientific degree „ Doctor of Sciences ” in Area of higher education 3. ”Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, Professional field 3.1.”Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences”, Doctoral program „Semiotics”. The author of the dissertation is Prof. _ Christian Krastinov Bankov, Ph.D. During the first gathering of the Scientific jury, held on 14.09.2022 I was appointed as the Chairman of the Jury and I was assigned to prepare an opinion on the procedure.

The materials submitted by the candidate include a CV, thesis – a monographic book in English, abstract of the study in Bulgarian, scientometric reference to the compliance with the minimum national criteria of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the Ordinance for the Development of Academic Staff of the New Bulgarian University (NRAS), a list of the publications related to the dissertation, as well as 22 publications. The presented materials correspond to the obligatory requirements of ZRASRB for acquiring the scientific degree „Doctor of Sciences” in Professional field 3.1. ”Sociology, Anthropology and Culture science”.

2. Brief biographical data he the candidate

Christian Bankov graduated with a Master's degree in Film and Drama (Semiotics) from the University of Bologna, and in 2000 received a Ph.D. in Philosophy and Semiotics from the University of Helsinki. Since 1995 he has been an Assistant Professor in the field of semiotics at the New Bulgarian University, where in 2006 he acquired the scientific title of „Associate Professor“, and since 2011 he holds the academic position of „Professor“. In the period 2011-2012 he was Vice-Rector of NBU for International Affairs, since 2007 he has been Head of the Center for Semiotic Studies in Southeast Europe, and since 2011 – of the Laboratory of Semiotics at NBU. All this gives the candidate a good basis for deriving theoretical summaries and proposing solutions to scientific and applied problems that can be described as a significant and original contribution to science, and contributes to the highly professional implementation of the requirements for obtaining the degree „Doctor of Science“ and to developing a dissertation on the selected interdisciplinary topics.

In addition, the long years of active research and teaching activities and participation in many academic and applied projects contribute to the formation and formulation of theoretical understanding and a practical view of the process of digitalization of society, lifestyle and culture – not only for a semiotic but also form a philosophical, communication, economic and marketing point of view. The candidate is fluent in Italian and English and uses French and Russian at a professional level, which is evident from the use of many sources in these languages in the preparation of the dissertation, as well as from the publications and the active participation in international scientific forums.

The overall educational and professional profile of Kristian Bankov fully corresponds to the chosen interdisciplinary topic for the development of the dissertation and helps him to achieve the objectives of the research and its essential original scientific and applied contributions.



3. Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied relation

The process of digitalization is an integral part of modern life and although we already perceive it as inherent in the way we communicate, communicate and present in society, in interpersonal, social and economic relations, it brings with it drastic fundamental changes in perceptions, evaluations and the rationale for our actions as individuals, groups and societies. This predetermines the importance from both human and academic perspective to rethink the generally accepted ideas, concepts and models, which the candidate does very successfully, combining them into the aggregate concepts of „digital culture“ and „digital identity“. An in-depth study of the new reality and the way it changes people, the connections between them, the channels and ways of communication and understanding, the perception of recognition, value, worth and the related transformation of the semiotic, and hence epistemological and axiological paradigm, which are the basis of the way individual, communication, social and economic processes function, are up-to-date, dynamically developing and due to their complex interdisciplinary nature, a problem rarely studied in depth. It is the multidimensionality and interdisciplinarity of possible interpretations and explanations of these problems that make their complex study and derivation of critical assessments and generalized conclusions difficult, while their in-depth study and understanding is of great importance for the descriptive and predictive power not only in semiotics but and of almost all humanities, social and economic sciences, both in theoretical and in scientific-methodological and scientifically-applied terms.

4. Justification of the goals and tasks in the dissertation

The research is characterized by indisputable relevance and significance of the very choice of the topic and its development on the pages of the dissertation. Reading the study in thorough shows a correspondence between the goals set as a synthesis of the title and the results achieved. The author's courage to consider difficult, complex and extremely dynamically developing inter- and even transdisciplinary issues with serious public interest and is of great importance for the future development of society should be taken into account. The set goals and objectives, the achieved positive results in their entirety are an indisputable argument in favor of the principled approval of the study as having the necessary qualities of a dissertation to obtain the degree of „Doctor of Science“. The formulation of theoretical summaries and solutions to serious scientific and applied problems, not only consistent with but also setting the agenda of the development of scientific views and understandings of social transformations of modern society can be described as a significant and original contribution to science.

5. Methodology and research methodology

The statements and conclusions in the dissertation are the result of professionally done interdisciplinary analysis and evaluation of contemporary semiotics of digital culture through the prism of the huge cultural, economic, social and paradigmatic transformations in the age of the Internet. All this is based on a very rich academic literature, as well as an in-depth study of specific cases and facts about the development of semiotic models, theory and practice in the explanation and understanding of the „new concept of digital identity“.

The research approach to the topical issues is based on the systematization and rethinking of many aspects of semantic theory and practice and the reorientation of their perception to transdisciplinary – through the prism not only of disciplinary centered epistemology and pragmatism, but also from the ontological point of view of today's reality focused on commercialism and market principles. For the successful application of this approach interdisciplinary methodology and scientific tools have been carefully selected and used, which are based mainly on critical analysis and synthesis of theoretical statements and results of empirical research, logical approach, inductive and deductive methods and comparative analysis of different views and practices relevant to the study of the dynamic and multidimensional processes of social and transformation and change of perceptions related to the process of digitalization. The chosen methodology allows the author to achieve the set goal and to obtain an adequate solution of the tasks in the dissertation, as a result of which the idea of the need for „new semiotic research models“ is derived and substantiated.



6. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation

The presented by Prof. Bankov contributions, although in my opinion minimalist in view of the real achievements in the work, can be considered as correctly reflecting the achieved results and show the necessary sober and critical self-assessment of the author.

The monograph „The Digital Mind: Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture” fully complies with the requirements for a dissertation for the degree “Doctor of Science” in terms of volume and content, as well as relevance and original and significant scientific and applied contributions. The study is structured in a balanced way. Prof. Bankov shows depth and uses various scientific tools, conceptual perspectives and disciplinary perspectives in the study of semiotics of digital culture and brings its center – the new concept of „digital identity“ through the prism of traditional and new semiotic models and theories. The author demonstrates scientific maturity and ambition in the implementation of a unique study in this field on a global scale, which allows to formulate important scientific results with a high degree of originality, predetermining the future research agenda not only in semiotics but and in those of social philosophy, culture sciences, anthropology, sociology, communications, marketing, economics, etc. The work is a unique for both Bulgaria, as well as in an international context research with in-depth analysis and application of an integrated interdisciplinary scientific approach. I will allow myself, without being exhaustive, to highlight some of the main theoretical and practical achievements of what Prof. Bankov has achieved, especially from the standpoint of economic sciences, which I represent:

First, from the point of view of the creation of new knowledge through in-depth interdisciplinary study of the semantic features and concepts of digitalization, digital culture is defined in the context and through the prism of neoliberal perceptions of value and usefulness. This enables the candidate to derive an easily applicable from academic, but also from a practical typology perspective, systematization of new understandings of recognition, value and worth, as well as to assess the dogmatic economic ideas for the formation of economic and social identity, allowing him to define a „new concept of digital identity“.

Second, from the point of view of systematization and enrichment of scientific knowledge, various semiotic and socio-philosophical ways of perceiving and communicating the existing are summarized, supplemented and critically analyzed – knowledge, understanding, communication and evaluation of public and especially economic relations, which enables the candidate to come up with original ideas about the perception, understanding and use of the currency (especially with regard to new digital currencies without guaranteed value) and economic value through the purchasing power of the semantics of the currency itself.

Third, from a methodological point of view, an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological toolkit has been proposed and approbated – the derivation of new, critical-conceptual interdisciplinary oriented methods and models for comparative study of value/worth assessment. The toolkit has been tested in theoretical terms with an economized critical from the economic point of view synthesis of existing research in the field of digital semiotics, but also using cases from unexpected and atypical research areas, such as new communication channels, football and even sex, even during the Codiv-19 pandemic.

Without exhausting all the contribution points of Prof. Bankov's dissertation, in conclusion it can be summarized that it contains original and significant interdisciplinary contributions. They can be described as the creation of new and enrichment of existing scientific knowledge, and at the same time have a clear methodological and scientific-applied significance.

7. Evaluation of dissertation publications

The dissertation research was published in English by the renowned world-famous publishing house Springer (in the interdisciplinary humanitarian series *Numanities - Arts and Humanities in Progress*), going through serious review and editing procedures and receiving the assessment for „a text that meets the demand for change in society, which includes multi -, inter -, cross - and transdisciplinary dialogue between the humanities, social sciences and economics“.



A total of 22 publications are attached to the documents for the procedure – a book published on the basis of the dissertation for acquiring the educational and scientific degree „Doctor”, 7 studies and 1 article in publications referenced in world-famous databases, 1 study and 5 articles in other peer-reviewed publications, and 7 chapters in collective monographs. All publications are in English except one in Bulgarian and one in Spanish and are published by renowned academic publishers.

All publications meet the requirements for applying for the competition for the degree of „Doctor of Science“, showing both the high publishing activity of the author and his established name in the world academic community, as well as the evolution and deepening of his research and contributions in more detailed topics that logically lead to a summary of his contributions within the research done in the dissertation. The attached publications complement the theoretical and applied contributions to the dissertation, but also demonstrate the wider field of research interests of the candidate related to the impact of digitalization processes on various aspects of cultural, social, economic and public development.

8. Citation from other authors

Indicative of the quality of Prof. Bankov 's publications is the fact that the reference contains 7 citations by prominent international authors, all of which are in prestigious publications and publications included in the most renowned international scientific databases – Scopus and Web of Science. Taking into account the general citation rate and the established name of the candidate in the world academic circles, as well as the fact that the citation takes technological time after publication, and that most of the presented publications have been made in the last few years, it can be assumed that Prof. Bankov’s citation index will continue to grow significantly in the coming years.

9. Personal impressions

Prof. Bankov has a scientific intuition to discover new and important topics, to form innovative methodologies and to achieve significant convertible results in practice. From my joint work with him, I have established that the candidate is a graduate scientist with great potential for expanding his creative horizons. He is extremely precise in the reporting, planning and organization of research and analysis. He is well acquainted with the regulatory framework and requirements for science, which enables him to achieve high efficiency in his work. As a scientist, the undoubted merits of Prof. Bankov are that he works easily in research teams, as well as that he has vast experience in the management and implementation of research projects. Many of his publications are the product of collaboration with other scientists – thus he mobilizes scientific potential for the realization of scientific and practical goals. Prof. Bankov strictly adheres to professional scientific ethics and standards, has an extremely good and empathetic attitude towards his colleagues and shows interest in their work and commitment to the development of the New Bulgarian University.

12. Opinions, recommendations and remarks

Without in any way diminishing the importance of the candidate's contributions and advantages, I can make some recommendations to Prof. Bankov, mostly related to his even more active contribution to the development of the NBU:

1. The analyzes of the new digital identity and the new semiotic models and research tools could be supplemented and expanded structurally and disciplinary. Along with the considered specific dimensions of social transformations from the point of view of digitalization, an attempt can be made for a more general study (together with scientists from other disciplines) of the application and effects of Prof. Bankov’s ideas for changing the nature of digital society, its valorization and reorientation not only in the field of communication, semiotics and economics, but also as an attempt to completely reshape social development today and in the future.

2. I wish Prof. Bankov to continue his active participation in research and applied projects with the ambition to contribute to the successful involvement of the NBU (and in particular the Department of



Economics) in such projects. He should continue his work on projects and publications, especially together with younger colleagues, including from the point of view of the interdisciplinarity of the dissertation's contributions in the field of philosophy, communication, economics and marketing, to support their scientific and academic development.

3. The possibilities for future use of the scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation research are very wide. Therefore, I recommend the candidate to consider their wider dissemination among a wider interdisciplinary academic community by presenting scientific forums (especially abroad) and publishing extended and further in-depth analysis of individual issues in scientific journals (especially indexed in world-renowned scientific databases). These analyzes could be used both as teaching handbooks and research sources by students and academics in the field of semiotics, but also in philosophy, mass communication, economics and marketing, as well as a practical guide for representatives of civil society and institutions related to the process of digitalization.

CONCLUSION

The presented dissertation contains theoretical summaries and solutions to serious scientific and applied problems, which can be described as a significant and original contribution to science of interdisciplinary nature and meet all the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulation for its implementation. The presented materials and dissertation results fully comply with the specific requirements of the Ordinance for the Development of Academic Staff of the New Bulgarian University for obtaining the scientific degree „Doctor of Science“.

The dissertation shows that Kristian Krastinov Bankov has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills, demonstrating high academic qualities and abilities to conduct research, setting the agenda for the development of science and interdisciplinary research in the field of digitalization of society, lifestyle and culture – not only from a semiotic, but also from a philosophical, communication, economic and marketing point of view.

Due to all aforementioned, and based on the positive results achieved in the dissertation, the nature of the critical remarks made and in accordance with the accepted criteria for obtaining a scientific degree „Doctor of Sciences”, I recommend with my full confidence to the esteemed Scientific jury Christian Krastinov Bankov to be awarded the scientific degree „Doctor of Sciences” in Area of higher education 3. ”Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, Professional field 3.1.”Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences”, Doctoral program „Semiotics”.

Date 14.09.2022

Signature

/Assoc. Prof. E. Marinov, Ph.D./