

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Ivaylo Georgiev Dimitrov, PhD (IPhS-BAS)

for the dissertation of **Gergana Yuliyanova Dimitrova**,

PhD student at the Department of History and Theory of Culture, Faculty of Philosophy
of the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”,

on the topic

**“Exploring the Potential of Sofia University for Creating a
Center for Scientific Theatre”**

for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”

in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, doctoral
programme in Cultural Studies (Cultural connections between science and the arts.

Scientific theater as an intersection of science, art and education)

The dissertation submitted for defense covers in its main part 214 pages, and its volume almost doubled with the addition of the 14 appendices and the solid bibliography in four languages (in Bulgarian and Russian, but mostly in English and German), composed of printed, electronic and online sources. The dissertation is well organized into an introduction, five chapters, conclusion, appendices and bibliography. The author’s abstract correctly presents the structure, content and contributions of the study. Gergana Dimitrova has three publications, two of which are on the topic of the dissertation – in the journal Problems of Art (referenced in ERIH PLUS) and in the journal PIRON – while the third (in a thematic volume) is on the scientific field. The PhD student meets the minimum requirements of Sofia University and the law (DASRBA) for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”.

I do not find plagiarism, I have no joint publications and activities with the PhD student that would put me in a conflict of interest. I have no objections to the accompanying documents and the conduct of the procedure.

The dissertation is the first that I have come across as an evaluator, in which the theoretical principle is subservient to the practical. This is determined in the first place by the main research question of the work: does Sofia University have the potential to create

a sustainable initiative in the field of scientific theater in the form of an operational Center? The extremely detailed negative answer to the posed question is probably one of the most significant practical contributions of the dissertation in view of the development of this specific form of the so-called SciArt at least on local soil. In short, there is room for only one *alma alter* in the bosom of our *alma mater*. Reason for moderate optimism, however, is given by the results of Dimitrova's study in view of the broader – and subordinate to the first – question regarding Bulgaria's potential to develop sustainability in this interdisciplinary and primarily artistic practice, in which science meet art, science communication meet education, and socio-educational policy for private use meet private initiative for public benefit. Therefore, I will hasten with conviction to recommend the PhD student – from the height of Dimitrova's successful realization as a theater director, and to date also as a promising researcher – to publish on the basis of the dissertation a manual for creating a sustainable sciart center, specialized to the point of virtuosity in the so-called “aerobatics” of the scientific theater, in which the Sofia University case study is a detailed researched and resolved private case of good and not so good (quasi)theatrical and (quasi)academic practices and productions in the (un)fulfilled third mission of the *Alma mater*.

A solid basis for such a recommendation is provided by the nine groups of practice-oriented theoretical and methodological contributions of the dissertation, which I find correctly formulated and completely real. Due to the limitations of the “opinion” genre, I will highlight only a few of the contributions. First of all, the first (theoretical) chapter critically analyzes existing definitions of scientific theater in order to derive an original, unifying definition that covers the whole spectrum – or “a hand fan” – of performative art forms oriented towards scientific themes and issues – from classical dramatic theater in its broadest sense, to contemporary dance, installation, performance-lecture, scientific stand-up, etc.

Secondly, a particularly important methodological contribution is the description in the same chapter of the specific steps for creating science theatre productions. It seems to me that this methodology could be further elaborated and linked to the examples from European and local practice described later in the work, primarily with a view to the possible reformatting of the dissertation as a practical guide for institutional and private future initiatives in the study area.

Last but not least, on the contrary, I want to emphasize the contribution of Gergana Dimitrova's dissertation to the development of cultural management in the field of science communication, which consists in the precise and multi-layered model for a Center for scientific theater in Bulgaria. In practical terms, this is, in my opinion, the leading achievement of the dissertation, which brings together all the other presented contributions – from the methodology developed for measuring the impact of science theater on audiences, through the detailed description and analysis of successful science theater centers in Europe and relatively sustainable initiatives in the field of science communication and in particular of scientific theater in our country, and it comes to its general contribution to theater studies and theater management.

It seems to me that, especially with a view to the publication of the dissertation, a concise introduction to the history, theory and practice of science communication would be a relevant complement to the work. Instead of the otherwise obligatory marking of the future steps in author's development as a prospective researcher, I would end with the inference of the work, emphasized a little earlier in the conclusion (p. 213), which reads: "scientific theater is a very effective tool to stimulate thought, provoke interest and affirm the value of scientific truth against pseudoscientific claims. Bulgarian society and the young people in the country have an extreme need for this, according to the latest Eurobarometer survey on the attitude of Bulgarians to scientific knowledge".

Conclusion: The highlighted merits and real contributions of the dissertation "Exploring the Potential of Sofia University for Creating a Center for Scientific Theatre" give me sufficient reasons to vote with conviction and positively for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, doctoral programme in Cultural Studies (Cultural connections between science and the arts. Scientific theater as an intersection of science, art and education) to **Gergana Yuliyanova Dimitrova**.

Sofia, 04/09/2024

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Assoc. Prof. Ivaylo Dimitrov