

REVIEW

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For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 8.4. "Theatre and Film Art", of PhD candidate Borislava Dimova, a PhD student in "Film Studies, Film Art and Television" at the Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show Business at NBU.

Borislava Dimova's dissertation entitled *University Television of NBU: between experience and innovation* is a, fascinating significant and topical work for two reasons. The first reason is scientific as it is the author's ambition to update the concept of university television at NBU, called NBUTV for short (after the model of Prof. Ivo Draganov), which appeared more than 10 years ago, but with practical implications of how to transform it into a novel author platform for the future of NBUTV. Secondly, from an applied research perspective, the thesis aims to consider specific examples of formats already implemented for this new structure and to propose future ones. Through the first choice in the dissertation, the old and the new concepts fit into more general cultural, television, generational and online traditions, with the intention to look at things already familiar from a different angle. The second one tracks the development and upgrading from format to format with the corresponding pragmatic conclusions about the pros and cons of individual programmes, and their technological and organizational capacity.

The dissertation is 150 pages long and its layout consist of four chapters, an introduction, a conclusion, a reference list and appendices with 6 interviews. Links to the four implemented NBUTV formats have been added separately.

It must be noted that the structure of the text is very neat, accurately formulating Borislava Dimova's goals and objectives, which may be explained by the doctoral student's high level of knowledge about and commitment to the day-to-day matters of NBUTV. One peculiarity of the doctoral thesis is that the theoretical reasoning is based on the author's interpretation of a model unbegun and untested, neither at the time of the concept of Prof. Ivo Draganov, nor at the time of writing this thesis. That is why Borislava Dimova offers

solutions to applied research problems, which will represent her original contribution to the concept - a reverse perspective going from practice to theory.

The introduction outlines the subject (NBU University Television), goals (research of the prospects in this unfinished project in close proximity to its actual start), tasks (study of the conditions of an educational and television project of modern type, a new vision for NBUTV as a type of social network, the need to include innovative approaches in the educational process), research methodology (comparative analysis of various theoretical and practical research in the field of media in our digital age, Case Studies through interviews with students and teachers, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches), as well as the perceived limitations that stem from the fact that the NBUTV does not really exist today. The thesis defended in the dissertation is that "NBUTV could become an alternative to conventional television, a working model of university media and a kind of digital network with its own channel."

The **first chapter** briefly introduces the main stages in the construction of television as a medium, the various models of television financing and management and the place of university television among these models. Following is an analysis of the proposed concept for the future university television expounded in Ivo Draganov's book "The Fourth Opportunity - University Television", from which some provisions are drawn, but given the delayed implementation, the first conclusion the author makes is that NBUTV currently has a base whose capacity it needs to adapt its productions to, and not the other way around. The doctoral student sees the prospects for the university media in the creation of a rather monothematic programme profile. She highlights several of NBU's most successful projects: Georgi Dyulgerov's master class, the New Wave Festival, the Advertising Academy project, Rayna Kabaivanska's master class to name a few. However, they are not related to NBUTV, they are rather mentioned as image products.

The **second chapter** deals with the possible directions for the development of NBUTV. It begins with a description of Generation Z to highlight decentralization in the digital world, which presupposes breaking with the conventional linear form of television if aiming at the young audiences. An attempt has been made to present NBUTV as a type of social network, and it is mainly here that the usefulness of the content and the reduction of editorial intervention in it lies. The doctoral student offers her own "project for continuous parallel creation and distribution of audio-visual content by everyone in the digital channels of NBU" (p. 69); it evolves in stages and in 6 steps. Here I can find one of the scientific

contributions of Borislava Dimova, namely viewing NBUTV as a social network, not as television, which, however, implies a change in the title. For the convenience of the reader of the text, I think it would be appropriate to clarify quite briefly the nuances between social network, social media, platform and television, in the context of media convergence. In terms of practical contribution, the doctoral student describes in detail how, with the help of modern technical means, each member of the university structure could become not only a user (viewer) but also an author of television content. Further, she offers her own "staffing" of work teams. Her thoughts on the inclusion of NBUTV in the educational process sound very relevant, especially in a pandemic situation.

The **third chapter** analyzes the challenges (the technical capabilities of networks to ensure the simultaneous use of the same virtual platforms by millions of students and teachers around the world), the transition from "phygital" to a fully digital world, rediscovering the Zoom platform for virtual environments. There follows a description of projects implemented by students and teachers, created entirely online, hybrid or in the Radio and Television Center of NBU: "Language under a magnifying glass", "Profession: student", "Faces of NBU" and "Time of Europe". The projects have been reviewed in detail with attention to the specifics of each one of them, the advantages, mistakes and obstacles to future work. The applied research contributions of the doctoral student in this part are her conclusions on these formats concerning the length of lectures; the formation of a professional team; the coming and going of students; technical and, more importantly, production support; the necessary time for production and archive; the virtual discussion matrix; post-production and editing. For example, as one of the main problems pointed out before the implementation of any form of real TV programme is that the TV studio complex lacks equipment for outdoor photography. This observation has been made by the doctoral student in her capacity as a director and lecturer who is fully engaged in the work there. For all those working in the structure she insists on clarifying whether the function of the TV studio and the complex in the RTC will be more of a training center or a production one. This is also among the fundamental applied research problems put forward by the work.

Borislava Dimova analyzes Prof. Draganov's programme proposals for the future NBUTV (concept "News", concept "Journalism"), from the production capabilities of NBU and the RTC at the moment. In fact, today NBUTV faces the difficult task of creating an educational and television project of a new kind - a hybrid model between the established experience in making television and the formation of modern content, synthesized and

proposed by professors as experts in their fields at NBU and innovation in unexplored television territories on the Internet by students of today's and tomorrow's rapidly changing and high-tech day. "

The **fourth chapter** offers well-argued and detailed ideas about two digital channels NBUTV and NBUTV Film based on the models of the National Geographic Channel and Netflix (the series "Abstract" and "Explained"). It is here that the strengths of the doctoral student are manifested at their best: her ability to summarize accumulated experience, her original thinking and practical orientation. According to the text, the most promising show is the weekly magazine programme "NBUTV presents", which contains items that can cover all important events of interest to the NBU environment; over time and with the help of state-of-the-art form it can gain the recognition it deserves by both the creators of NBUTV and its future audience. Here I cannot refrain from asking Borislava Dimova whether she finds its weekly format realistic enough, both now and in the near future, my skepticism being based on a similar show that took place on the territory of NBU with the participation of students (namely "Neshtotarsachi", produced in collaboration with BNT). Hardly does there exist technical, organizational, or expert potential for such a regular broadcasting cycle. Furthermore, the doctoral student herself rejects the need for a linear structure of the future NBUTV, so why then "anchor" the show as a weekly one? This could be a possible topic for professional debate after and outside the doctorate, when NBUTV becomes a reality.

The **conclusion** of the dissertation focuses on the proposal to create a single magazine programme TV block ("NBUTV presents") and a number of educational films in which priority is given to choosing common topics of scientific interest around the world, rather than our specific regional demands and achievements. Finally, Borislava Dimova surmises the word "team" as a key word in her research.

The scientific and applied research contributions of this work can be seen in several directions:

1. Theoretical revision of concepts familiar to the author on university television and in particular Prof. Ivo Draganov's concept about NBUTV
2. The concept of university television as a social network with a tendency for social media and television of a new type.
3. Author project for continuous parallel creation and distribution of audio-visual content by all in the digital channels of NBU.

4. The concept for two digital channels NBUTV and NBUTV film based on the models of National Geographic Channel and Netflix (the "Abstract" and "Explained" series).
5. The concept for a magazine TV show "NBUTV presents"
6. The high degree of personal participation of the doctoral student: she takes part in all four projects shot online, in a hybrid way or in the Radio and Television Center of NBU in her capacity as a director, lecturer or mentor.
7. Critical thinking about products already created or to be created at NBUTV, stemming from a profile of the channel's programme that is not clearly shaped, from insufficient production resources, insufficient expert staff to work, etc., scrutinized in the individual chapters

Recommendations and remarks to thesis "NBU University Television between experience and innovation"

Borislava Dimova's dedicated work for RTC at NBU, her desire to rethink the concept of the future NBUTV and an intensive teaching schedule could serve as an excuse for some omissions in the work, not so much for writing the work but for editing it. It seems to me that she has failed to find the key to integrating the interviews and displaying them in applications (for 4 of them there are links to YouTube, the other two have been downloaded with text). In her doctorate, the author often refers to them and leaves one with the expectation of reading them in their entirety. In the event of publishing the dissertation, it is recommended that an appropriate form and way to include the interviews be found. Another option would be, if she does not find it appropriate to publish the whole interviews, then the reference to those in the text and individual statements should be revised and edited.

I would also express my doubts about whether the first chapter needs a general introductory part on "what is television" which feels too general and well-known and barely detailed among the infinite available information. The literature for citation on this page is huge, even among the staff of NBU. I would rather the doctoral student had chosen to limit the scope to university studios but review them in greater details, e.g. the Radio and Television Center of NBU counterparts in other Bulgarian universities there is a brief mention of Sofia University on p. 28, but other exist too in UNWE and NATFA, and I guess also and at SWU and the American University in Blagoevgrad, provided they have their

programmes in cinema and mass communications). That would have been also an opportunity to draw a parallel and compare other existing counterpart formats and ours.

Personal qualities of the author

I respect Borislava Dimova as a dedicated teacher who constantly strives to "get under the skin" of students. I have observed her work on their projects: always with the desire to understand and get their point of view in service of the students self-expression. She lacks the typical narcissism of the mentor who teaches and preaches. On the contrary, she is an interlocutor, a listening ear, a friend which is a very constructive approach assisting students in their first hesitant steps. Furthermore, she is students' theses advisor, and when she is not directly involved in advising, she participates in the panels of various graduation committees.

As a colleague, she is there for you in the right place at the right time; you can count on her and she will not let you down. She is actively involved in the projects of the department, she resonates with them and never remains indifferent to anyone or anything. She was actively involved in the organization of the New Wave Student Film Festival; she participated in all endeavors not only related to the Cinema and Television Programme, but also in general projects of NBU which involved directing. Colleagues take pride in the films and visual portraits she has created about them and those films are being used in the institutional image making of NBU.

Therefore, I find the doctorate candidate very suitable to work in a future NBUTV where communication is at a variety of levels and with a very diverse audience. Borislava Dimova's communicative qualities are her business card as a teacher, a prospective manager of television, or a director. Despite her youth, she has solid experience with production on both public and private television; most of the doubts, troubles and challenges of the new digital environment and new formats shared in this work have been personally tested in her practice, so she has seen both failure and the joy of success.

In conclusion, I would like to voice my respect for the achievements of the thesis and directorial work of Borislava Dimova. I consider the dissertation as a study of value and high applicability for its scope, arguments, conclusions, examples of models and programmes and analyzes made, all taken in the aggregate. I perceive it not so much as a complete work, but rather as the beginning of a long and hopefully thornless path in the implementation of the proposed author project for continuous parallel creation and distribution of audio-visual content by all in the digital channels of NBU.

The above said gives me every reason to evaluate the thesis as an independent study with a number of merits and I therefore propose to the members of the scientific panel that **Borislava Dimova be awarded a doctoral educational and scientific degree.**

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