

## REVIEW

For the dissertation of Nadezhda Yankova Dzhakova on the subject  
**"Modern Ideas and Trends for Working with Audiences in Art Museums.  
Audience Orientation in Bulgaria (The Example of the National Gallery)"**  
For awarding the educational and academic degree "DOCTOR"

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. PhD Alexander Kuyumdzhiev

The dissertation thesis of Nadezhda Dzhakova with a volume of 253 pages is an original and will contribute to the humanities as well as to modern museum practices in Bulgaria. An interesting and insufficiently researched topic has been selected, fully developed at a theoretical level and with many possible applications in the practical activity of museums. The topic is also relevant in connection with our country's belonging to the common European and world cultural space. The doctoral student's analysis of the law on our cultural heritage with regard to the views on the development of museums in our country and their work with the public should also be emphasized.

The structure of the dissertation is fully in line with the set goals. The work consists of five chapters. In the first two, a detailed analysis of the role of the public in its relations with the museum institution is made, and in the next three, contemporary museum practices in Europe, North America and in Bulgaria are traced, presented through appropriately selected examples. This approach not only adds to the interdisciplinary nature of the selected topic, but allows important conclusions to be drawn that are of practical relevance to the level of development of Bulgarian museums. The proposals for improving their activities through the application of various European and world practices are a significant contribution. The dissertation also contains an emphasized socio-cultural context, presented in 63 surveys, which is skillfully combined with the empirical study of the matter, giving a more comprehensive character to the studied issues.

The text is well written and its general concept breaks conservative and hard-core ideas about museum work. It has always been unclear to me how theory, in this case a scholarly work, could influence practice, since "written word" and theoretical analysis often fade into direct confrontation with the reality, called "museum." However, reading the text of the dissertation, not only did I gain a clearer idea of the reason for the existence of art museums, their purpose and the practical activities that should be carried out in them, but I noticed in myself the beginnings of "tolerance" for the "audience" which I otherwise consider to be an inevitable, but completely "external" part in regard to the actual work of the museum. Because the so called "public" for which museums are principally created, in education, training and interests, should in fact only visit NON-artistic places. For the most part, the audience

is "ignorant," and its interest, enthusiasm, and desire for social contact within the museum building are at times overwhelming in their infantile or annoying with the aggressiveness of a dilettante who thinks that everything she/he knows, is authentic truth. As far as I know, the unspoken European practice of the recent past has overcome this problem by isolating the "audience" from any contact with the professionals and leading curators of a museum. In contrast to the practice in our country, in larger museums, it was noticed that the "audience" was mainly engaged by beginners, who are in the process of specialized training, as well as a huge number of people with education in the border areas of culture and art. The extent to which this division is still relevant abroad, and applicable in Bulgaria, is very difficult to say, but the existence of such a "buffer zone" between museum professionals and the public seems to me compulsory. Because, at least in theory, the museum specialist is an expert whose work should not be related to the "audience" but to the expert activity of the museum. Therefore, the active presence of such an expert in the museum space, which is accessible to the "audience", would lead to an inevitable conflict caused by its ignorance, combined with requirements and expectations. Exactly this problem should be overcome in our country as well, because as Dzhakova writes - "the audiences are different" and opposing them from the position of knowledge obviously does not bring attraction to our museum institutions as they must be "audience oriented" and serve it in order to exist. That is why, it seems to me that Nadezhda Dzhakova's dissertation is an important step towards better integration of museums in society, and I sincerely hope that they will acquire the necessary prestige to attract and cultivate this audience, since in practice the subsidy depends on the audience. Because it is clear that their original purpose of creation and free access to them today cannot be maintained.

In this sense, I think that in the thesis of Nadezhda Dzhakova, real every day and longer-term problems related to museum work and the work of the museum specialist are discussed and analyzed in an academic manner. At the same time, they are presented against the background of the historical development of museums and "audiences" at home and abroad, which also brings the obligatory theoretical contribution of the dissertation. Particularly interesting in this regard is the first chapter, and especially the sections in it, devoted to the research of museum audiences, which provide historical overviews of the development of relations between the "audience" and the "museum" abroad and in Bulgaria. As the text also reflects in detail the contemporary world-wide museum practice, marketing, and in particular branding, I think it would be very useful not only for the academic community. Because in a utopian world, this dissertation should become obligatory to the people and institutions that determine the cultural policy in Bulgaria and set the pace of development of Bulgarian museums. It would not be superfluous for some of the responsible persons from the Ministry of Culture to be administratively obliged to fill in the questions from the conducted surveys, which are given in the annex to the

dissertation, in order to have an orientation of how familiar they are with the situation of the Bulgarian museums and what their attitude towards them should be.

Nadezhda Dzhakova has conducted a thorough research to collect, systematize and summarize the material presented in the dissertation. This rich and varied information is also reflected in the attached catalog. The presence of very well-selected, photographed and annotated illustrations that allow visual access to artistic activities and events in various world museums should also be emphasized. The doctoral student's knowledge of contemporary literature on museum practices and their relationship with the public are exhaustive. Among the 203 titles pointed out in the dissertation, it is immediately apparent that twice as many are those reflecting a foreign bibliography. Nadezhda Dzhakova's work at a museum institution, her curatorial projects, which show a lasting interest in the public-museum relationship and knowledge of contemporary methods of working in European and world museums, speak eloquently of her doctoral level and are another reason to be highly evaluated. All this gives me reason not only to suggest to the honorable members of the Academic Jury to award Nadezhda Dzhakova a PhD degree, but I would also recommend her work for publication.

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. PhD Alexander Kuyumdzhiiev