

## SUPERVISORS REPORT

IVANA NIKOLOVSKA: *Skopje 2014: Governmental Role in the Spatial Politics of Collective Memory*, Master Thesis, 2013, 84 p.

Ivana Nikolovska designed her project of MA research during her first year in the Erasmus Mundus master program, when she studied at EHESS in Paris with Marie-Vic Ozouf-Marignier, e.i. during Fall semester 2011/2012. In the second year she continued in Budapest under the supervision of Gábor Czoch and with myself during the last semester, however I was informed about the project since the beginning and was in touch with the student.

Ivana Nikolovska's main concern is with the intentional, political use of public places through their labelling through names, statues or buildings, and thus identifying the city spaces with larger entity. This procedure classified by the author as branding (Andrew GRAAN, 2013, *Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the politics of nation branding in Macedonia*, Cultural Anthorpology, number 1, p. 161-179.) is in case of Skopje, organized by the Macedonian government. Branding is having impact not only on the city, but on the new nation/state of Macedonia. Her hypothesis is that the way how the government uses public spaces directly involves the continuity of the narratives and either it is conceived to maintain collective memories, or to modify them.

She has chosen to focus on the works of artists and architects who responded to the call for Skopje 2014, which is a project that should transform the centre of Skopje to meet the expectations: certain grandeur attributed to capital cities, institutions, public spaces etc. comparable with other capital cities in Europe.

The artists who responded to the call and proposed projects for buildings, squares, bridges, statues etc. replicated in their projects historical styles and various symbols that expect that the memories will be affected. Macedonia being a multi-ethnic state, where the public is opinionated and the relations between the two major ethnicities of Macedonians and Albanians polarized, the project has an ambivalent effect.

Ivana Nikolovska has organized her research into two steps, three steps respectively. First she has executed ethnographical observation of a newly constructed public space – the square Macedonia decorated with a statue and fountain which have very strong political message. The statue of warrior is, although anonymous, identified with Alexander the Great. She has been asking about opinions of the visitors of the square on the project and new investments in the city. In the next step she has analysed the public debate about the project in the media – periodical press, blogs, electronic journals, where the opinions of critics and authors were voiced. In the second (third) step Ivana has applied diachronical analysis, she is showing how the contemporary city relates to its past. Not the one narrated by politicians, but the one discovered by archeologists and explored by historians. She presents the scholarly

interpretation of the history of Skopje, and in the third chapter she discusses the branding process on the bases of the two interpretations. She attempts to examine the level of manipulation while demonstrating history in public space, creating false correlations of the past. She insists that such practice has negative influence at present, as it can mutilate the image of the past and complicate the process of identification of future generations.

On the positive side, the topic chosen for the research project is interesting and original, moreover – important and relevant to public debate. The research question is clearly articulated, inquiry methodologically embedded in ethnohistory. Ivana is theory informed, she is very sensitive reader of works concerning memory, nation building and nationalism.

On the problematic side – since her topic is very contemporary, there is still only limited scholarly, exploration of the project Skopje 2014 published, thus it was very difficult to collect all the necessary sources. It is difficult to identify how complex is the corpus of collected sources. We can only presume, that all sides in the debate, and all perspectives are represented, as the project is still running, the debate continues.

While Ivana was quite at ease with the ethnographical inquiry and analysis of the digitalized sources, and printed debates for the synchronic analysis, more difficult was for her to develop the chapter based diachronic perspective. Not trained previously as historian, she has however been very cautious to all suggestions, and made her best in search for support in literature, which was not always easy. Although, there are still reserves in the presentation of the history of Skopje as the mirror to the analysis of project Skopje 2014, it was a good idea to include this perspective. Concerning the interpretation of the project, the term branding is originally used in relation to tourism, in marketing places. Here, inspired by A. Graan, its meaning is expanded. I would like to ask the candidate to explain how she understands this concept.

Particularly difficult for Ivana, was to edit the final product in publishable academic English. During the first year of her master studies she worked mainly in French, and only during the second year she focused seriously on presenting her thoughts in English. As we all know very well, writing in academic English is peculiar and not easy at all, this aspect of her MA project was most difficult for her. She has faced the situation, when she was not able to express what she had on mind, but what she was able to say in English.

To conclude by evaluation: the MA thesis of Ivana Nikolovska is an original and straightforward result of her personal research, however she would not be able to conclude it successfully without support, when she was editing the final text.

Grade: velmi dobře/very good in Czech grading system, 15/20 in French grading system, B in ECTS.

29.8. 2013,

  
Prof. PhDr. Lud'a Klusáková, CSc.