**Review of graduate qualification work**

**“Contemporary art curators as cultural intermediaries:**

**German and Russian experience”**

**by Master’s degree student Ekaterina Moskaleva**

**(major 040100 – sociology,**

**MA track “Studies in European Societies”)**

The subject area chosen by Ekaterina Moskaleva can be described as topical and bearing indisputable features of novelty. In contemporary sociology and related disciplines, there is a sharp deficiency of conceptual foundations for the investigation of the market of cultural production and consumption. In particular, the questions on the boundaries of the subject of inquiry and the adequate methods of empirical research that could place the production, distribution and consumption of artworks not only in the economic context but also in the symbolic one remain debatable. The idea to consider the process of cultural production and consumption through the perspective of a specific group of cultural intermediaries – contemporary art curators – gives Ekaterina the possibility to reveal the interconnections between the everyday professional practices of these creative professionals and the mechanisms of them producing and reinterpreting symbolic meanings of artworks regulated though a set of shared norms and values maintained and reproduced by the art world, or, to use Howard Becker’s term, artistic conventions.

In the framework of the research under review, Ekaterina successfully investigates the structure and institutionalization of the professional field of curatorship, with its specific routines, communication means and resources. At the micro-level, she describes the requirements and challenges of the profession through the analysis of various professional and communication practices of curators in St. Petersburg, Russia, and Hamburg, Germany. The structure of the thesis is determined by these goals and seems quite consistent. In the introduction, the author describes the subject of her inquiry, substantiates the choice of her conceptual apparatus, and describes the methods of her field research. In the theoretical chapter, Ekaterina focuses on the paradigm of cultural production as the major analytical frame of her research. In particular, she combines the ideas of H. Becker on the collective character of artistic production and the insights of P. Bourdieu into the circulation of various forms of capital in the field of cultural production and the role of cultural intermediaries in the resulting hierarchized system of positions and relations in the field. She complements this frame by an overview of curatorial studies undertaken both within and beyond the professional community of curators. In the second chapter, Ekaterina presents the results of her empirical study. Here, she traces the educational and career tracks of curators from St. Petersburg and Hamburg and demonstrates the contribution of their educational and family experience to the obtainment and legitimation of positions in the art scene. Moreover, she shows how communication makes the core of professional duties and routines of the curators under study, and convincingly proves that the character of institutions these curators are employed in (state-funded institutions, private museums and galleries or self-run projects) determines both the range of their (internal or external) communication partners and the degree of curatorial multitasking. She manages to show that curators in both cities indeed perform as cultural intermediaries and identify themselves as such. In the conclusion, the author summarizes her key findings and reflects on the limitations of her research. The paper also includes a set of appendices fully presenting the logic and outcomes of the fieldwork done.

 Thus, in my opinion the submitted paper is an independent research carried out at high professional level. Ekaterina demonstrates great scientific erudition, including in her literature review not only the classical theory in sociology of art, but also the works in other fields: sociology of professions, curatorial studies. The latter enriches the perspective of the researcher, providing the basis for a comprehensive study of curators of contemporary art. The empirical part is also performed at the highest standard: the author presents deep and reflexive qualitative analysis, which led to non-trivial results.

However, the thesis under review is not devoid of shortages that I shall briefly outline below. Firstly, not all areas of research presented in the theoretical part described in sufficient details. For example, an issue of curators as creative professionals is certainly interesting, however, I find questionable to describe this problem only on the basis of Richard Florida’s work. In addition, the Florida approach got a lot of criticism in recent years, but Ekaterina doesn’t mention it at all. Secondly, Ekaterina’s explanation on case selection is insufficient: it would be more adequate if the author would explain the selection of St. Petersburg and Hamburg by similarity / difference of their cultural scenes, rather than area or population of the cities. Thirdly, the design of the study causes some questions. There were 10 IDI collected in the two cities, i.e. 5 interviews in each city. The sample design implies that those 5 interviews should include three categories of curators by the type of employment (public, private institution; self-organized project). So, only 1 or 2 curators in each category were interviewed. It seems to me, that’s not enough data to draw conclusions on a group of institutions. Perhaps, in this case it would be good idea to homogenize the sample or supplement the interview data with additional methods or secondary data. Fourth, I would recommend to the author to pay greater attention to the issue of identity of curators. For example, in Russian museums, they occupy the position of scientific researchers or collection keepers. It would be interesting to learn more about their complex professional identities.

Nevertheless, despite the abovementioned drawbacks, Ekaterina’s thesis can be described as a complete original research that was conducted on a level with the high professional standards

and undoubtedly has elements of scientific novelty.

The graduate qualification work by Ekaterina Moskaleva thus fully meets the requirements ascribed to such theses, and Ekaterina deserves an «excellent» (A) grade.

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