

REVIEW

АГРИКЛУРЕН УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ ГР. ПЛОВДИВ	
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on a dissertation thesis for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.8 Economics, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agriculture)"

Author of the dissertation: Butrint Bitici, PhD student in individual form of study, Department of Economics, Agricultural University, Plovdiv

Topic of the dissertation:

THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE FOR THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ekaterina Dimitrova Kyuskieva-Arabska, University of Agribusiness and Rural Development - Plovdiv, 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.7 Administration and Management, scientific specialty "Social Management", appointed as a member of the scientific jury by order No. RD-16-970/03.10.2025 by the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv.

1. Brief introduction of the candidate

Butrint Bitici holds a Master's degree in Management and Finance (2023, Business College, Pristina, Republic of Kosovo). His professional experience is as a teacher (2018-2023), executive director of a volleyball club in the Republic of Kosovo (2018-present) and assistant professor at the Business College, Pristina, Republic of Kosovo (2018-present). His scientific interests are in the field of economic challenges facing the agricultural sector in the Republic of Kosovo. The submitted CV also shows that he has communication and teamwork skills, developed in his training and work in the field of sports and teaching, responsibility and leadership. He is fluent in English and uses software tools for digital collaboration.

The acquired education and experience provide a good basis for training in the educational and scientific degree "doctor" at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv, conducting scientific research, preparing a dissertation and presenting the results of the studies conducted on the role of agriculture in the economic development of the Republic of Kosovo. Butrint Bitici began his training in the educational and scientific degree "doctor" at the Agricultural University - Plovdiv with an enrollment order No. RD-27-10 / 05.06.2024, scientific supervisors: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rositsa Beluhova-Uzunova and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Blagoeva. Having successfully fulfilled his obligations according to the adopted individual plan, he was discharged with the right to defend his thesis with order No. RD-27-06 / 22.04.2025.

2. Relevance of the problem

The dissertation submitted for review addresses a particularly topical issue, raising the question of the role of agriculture as a "cornerstone" for economic development, the basis of food security, employment in rural areas, social stability and structural transformation, examining the economy of the Republic of Kosovo, in which agriculture is distinguished by its strategic importance and is a vital element of the national economy. The analysis of internal and external factors influencing its development emphasizes the need to conduct scientific research in the field of building and functioning of sustainable agri-food chains, using the significant unrealized potential for transforming the sector into a "main engine of inclusive growth and transformation"

(quote from the dissertation). Modern challenges in connection with EU integration affect national policies and ways to ensure institutional modernization and investments. The justification of the role of agriculture for the economic development of the Republic of Kosovo in the context of the concept of sustainable development, incl. poverty reduction, job creation, economic development and environmental sustainability, necessitates the search for solutions to realize the potential of the sector through comprehensive reform, targeted investments and institutional coordination.

Conducting such an interdisciplinary study offers contributions in various aspects – for the formulation of national strategies and development plans, broad debates on transformative processes and the impact of contemporary trends in digitalization and green economy. Focusing on a region characterized by socio-economic imbalances in development and previous conflicts affecting all spheres, allows for the presentation of an original and up-to-date dissertation work, laying the foundations for new scientific research.

3. Purpose, tasks, hypotheses and research methods

The research presented in the dissertation is aimed at the development of the agricultural sector in the Republic of Kosovo and its importance for sustainable economic development, presenting an assessment of its economic role, incl. the macroeconomic environment, infrastructure constraints and other critical challenges to sustainable growth, emphasizing the production structures in agriculture, sectoral policies and strategic frameworks.

I accept the formulated purpose, object and subject of the research as correct and correctly reflecting its essence. The national economy of the Republic of Kosovo, as the subject of the research, is examined in the context of economic growth and ways to achieve sustainable development. The impact of agriculture on sustainable development in the Republic of Kosovo, as the subject of the research, is analyzed through key indicators and the application of systemic analysis, incl. role in the national economy, institutional measures, impact of globalization on efficiency and competitiveness, etc. Supplementing with analyses of EU policies and comparative analyses in the Western Balkans and Turkey provides a regional perspective for the development of the sector.

The goal of analyzing the role of agriculture in the sustainable economic development of the Republic of Kosovo through a theoretical and empirical assessment of its structural characteristics, dynamics and potential for future growth, as well as drawing relevant policy conclusions to support more effective strategies, has been achieved. The research tasks set for its implementation, quite detailed and comprehensive, have been implemented.

The methodological approach used corresponds to the set goal and tasks, including theoretical analysis and literature reviews, qualitative and econometric analysis, policy evaluation, etc. The application of the methods of analysis and synthesis for systematizing the concepts of economic growth and development of agriculture as a major sector, induction and deduction for building hypotheses and drawing conclusions, historical retrospection and analysis, etc. is combined with research on the political framework and institutional mechanisms, the degree of coherence and effectiveness of policies, etc., which gives the study a special scientifically applied character and potential for real application of the recommendations derived for building effective strategies for the development of the sector and having a positive impact on sustainable economic development in the region.

The main hypothesis that "the agricultural sector has a significant role in the economic development of the Republic of Kosovo" is proven. The three supporting hypotheses for the integration of new technologies, improving production and competitiveness of the sector, the improvement through adoption and harmonization of agrarian policies in the region with EU standards, the positive effect of sustainable agricultural practices and policies on the long-term sustainability of the sector and its role and importance are also scientifically substantiated.

4. Visualization and presentation of the results

The presented dissertation is 238 pages long, contains 43 figures and 50 tables, which clearly illustrate the research conducted.

The dissertation follows the classic structure of three chapters, presenting the research findings in a logical sequence. The theoretical and methodological framework of economic growth and the role of agriculture draws attention to the concepts, theories and models of economic growth, the driving forces and factors for economic growth and development, examining with particular focus agriculture as a driving force of economic development, the relationship between agricultural policies and sustainable development, the role of technology and innovation in the sector, current challenges, etc., which form the methodological basis of the study. The European and regional context in the development of agriculture addresses the EU Common Agricultural Policy, reforms and challenges, lessons for the Republic of Kosovo, the Western Balkans and Turkey, opportunities for policy harmonization and future development. Empirical studies cover analyses of the macroeconomic environment and structural characteristics of the economy of the Republic of Kosovo, public infrastructure, limiting factors and risks to economic development, macroeconomic challenges, productivity, competitiveness and markets, financial support and strategic documents, challenges and interdependence between agriculture and economic growth. Scientifically based recommendations for the development of agriculture as a factor for economic growth are derived.

The structure and way of presentation reflect the scientific research carried out and allow easy tracking of the achieved results.

5. Discussion of the results and literature used

The presented dissertation work examines the relationship between agriculture and economic development using the example of the Republic of Kosovo and in the context of EU integration and policy harmonization with the EU CAP. Theoretical foundations and empirical evidence are derived, an analysis of policies in a national and regional context is made, the main factors and the importance of agriculture for the sustainable economic development of the Republic of Kosovo are identified.

The formulated conclusions are focused on several main aspects: a comprehensive review of basic theories of economic growth with an emphasis on endogenous theories, emphasizing the role of innovation, human capital and institutional capacity, on the basis of which the need for a supportive environment for investments in these areas is justified; analysis of the opportunities for the development of sustainable agricultural practices, innovation and digitalization to increase the productivity and competitiveness of the sector; potential of reforms in agricultural policy to promote environmental sustainability and ensure the viability of rural areas through a coherent strategic framework, adequate financing and administration; comparative analysis in the Western Balkans and Turkey with an emphasis on regional challenges facing fragmented agricultural holdings, underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to

finance; identification of weaknesses in the implementation of agricultural policies and community standards in the Republic of Kosovo in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, environmental requirements and market orientation of subsidy schemes, etc.

The conclusions for development in the "right direction" (quote from the dissertation) are aimed at increasing institutional capacity, improving agricultural and land data systems and improving public administration, with a particular focus on the local context and supporting small and informal producers through flexible and inclusive support schemes, including through private and donor funds and programs, while achieving independence from political interests and promoting inclusive rural development. To address the main problems of agriculture in the country, which is defined as low productivity, poorly integrated in value chains and insufficiently financed, identified as stemming from structural economic vulnerabilities and fragmented policies, a comprehensive policy approach is recommended to address macroeconomic imbalances, expand financial services in rural areas, accelerate alignment with the CAP, etc. According to the study, sustainable sectoral transformation and long-term macroeconomic stability can be achieved by prioritizing agriculture in national development strategies and increasing public investments in infrastructure, advisory services and innovation. Favorable agro-climatic conditions, traditions in agriculture, increasing state support and increasing consumer demand for local products have been identified as encouraging factors for sustainable development and increasing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector in the country. Low productivity, outdated technologies and insufficient product diversification, the role of investments in human capital, education, training and advisory services have been identified as limiting factors; ineffective horizontal and vertical integration and producer organizations hindering the efficiency of the value chain and market orientation, etc. Based on the presented empirical evidence, the main conclusion is that the sector has significant potential for improving productivity, competitiveness and incomes in rural areas, which can be realized through institutional reforms, targeted investments and policies to ensure its inclusive and sustainable development

The recommendations derived from the studies are presented in several main areas:

- Improving the competitiveness of the agri-food chain through: diversification and innovation in agri-food products through subsidies, research and development activities and technology transfer programs; modernizing agricultural machinery and infrastructure, especially with the aim of reducing losses and improving the quality of production; promoting associations and cooperation between producers, processors and traders by strengthening producer organizations and introducing legal incentives.

- Modernizing production and infrastructure and supporting small farms through: encouraging investments in irrigation, storage, transport and agro-industrial infrastructure in order to minimize post-harvest losses, as well as increasing market realization and increasing productivity; supporting small farms, their associations, etc. to improve access to finance, technology and markets, as well as achieving economies of scale.

- Improving the level of education, training and advisory services by reorganizing the system and promoting cooperation between institutions, setting priorities, improving quality, increasing investments, incl. for practical, field training, including through demonstration farms and digital training tools, etc.

- Finance, innovation and engaging young people through: facilitating access to credit and insurance schemes, products for young farmers, small farms, etc.; promoting digitalization and precision agriculture, creating innovation hubs and incubators, with a focus on renewable energy and climate-smart practices in agriculture.

- Policy coherence and institutional strengthening through: ensuring sustainability and coherence, strong political commitment and stakeholder participation; results-based evaluation and feedback.

- Advancement of agrarian reform in the Republic of Kosovo in line with the CAP through: adoption of the CAP as a strategic framework for development, adoption of institutional and policy models to increase the efficiency of the sector, better governance and provision of public goods; promotion of inclusive policy planning; active participation of the private sector, producer groups and civil society, etc.

The author concludes that "a dynamic and well-supported agricultural sector is fundamental not only for the prosperity of rural areas, but also for broader national economic development and long-term socio-economic stability".

The cited literature sources used are 264 in number, relevant to the research conducted.

6. Contributions of the dissertation

I accept the scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contributions indicated in the abstract as original and credible and the personal work of the doctoral student. I share them in a summary as follows:

Scientific contributions: 1) A synthesis of growth theories has been made, providing a comprehensive conceptual framework for the analysis of small economies with a significant role of the agricultural sector. 2) The possibilities for adapting the EU CAP in the economic structure of the Western Balkans and a new theoretical understanding of the challenges facing the harmonization of policies in the candidate and potential candidate countries for EU membership have been presented. 3) The relationship between macroeconomic stability and agricultural development has been substantiated, conceptualizing a structural dependence between macroeconomic conditions and the performance of the agricultural sector, emphasizing the role of agriculture both as an engine of growth and as a stabilizing factor during times of economic instability. 4) A theoretical multi-faceted framework for agricultural competitiveness is proposed, integrating innovation, sustainability, policy coherence and market orientation into a single model for assessing agricultural competitiveness in transition economies.

Scientific and applied contributions: 1) Empirical evidence is derived for the role of agriculture in Kosovo's economic growth through econometric analyses of the short- and long-term effects of agricultural output, capital formation and human capital on GDP per capita in Kosovo. 2) Policy recommendations are formulated for agricultural modernization and EU integration and for aligning Kosovo's agricultural policies with the CAP framework 2023–2027, by focusing on strategic planning, measures for competitiveness, sustainability and improving the quality of life in rural areas. 3) Structural gaps in agricultural policy implementation and key institutional, financial and infrastructural challenges that need to be addressed to increase the sector's efficiency are identified. 4) A monitoring and evaluation framework is proposed, containing a set of measurable indicators to track progress in agricultural competitiveness, sustainability and policy harmonisation, which can be integrated into the Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Kosovo.

7. Critical remarks and questions

Considering the stated limitations of the dissertation, I have no critical remarks. I recommend publishing a book based on the dissertation and presenting the results of the research conducted at scientific forums in order to promote them and share them with the scientific community and colleagues working on the issues under consideration. I would like to pose the following questions to the doctoral student: *What were the main difficulties / biggest challenges in conducting the presented research? and How do you see the future development of the sector in the context of contemporary challenges and trends, including the use of the latest technologies and artificial intelligence?*

8. Published articles and citations

The three scientific publications presented meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation and cover the minimum scientometric indicators for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor". The scientific research and conclusions presented in them are in relation to the topic and contributions of the dissertation work.

The presented abstract objectively reflects the structure and content of the dissertation work.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the various research methods learned and applied by the doctoral student, the correctly conducted experiments, the generalizations and conclusions made, I believe that the presented dissertation meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of the Agricultural University for its application, which gives me reason to evaluate it **POSITIVELY**.

I would like to propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury also vote positively and award **Butrint Bitici** the educational and scientific degree "**doctor**" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agriculture)"

Date: 30.10.2025
Plovdiv

REVIEWER

Подписите в този документ са заличени

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