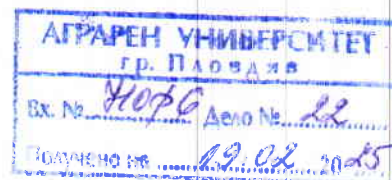


STATEMENT



regarding a dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in: **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: Ivanka Dimitrova Dimitrova PhD student (part-time education) at the Department of Economics, Agricultural University, Plovdiv

Dissertation topic: "Institutional Problems and Challenges of Tour Operator and Travel Agency Activities"

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vanya Krasteva Georgieva, Agricultural University - Plovdiv, Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.8. Economics, Scientific Specialty Accounting, Control and Analysis of Economic Activity

appointed as a member of the scientific jury by Order № RD-16-1430/20.12.2024 of the Rector of AU.

1. Relevance of the problem

The development of tour operator and travel agency activities in Bulgaria is of strategic importance for the country's economy, whilst being heavily influenced by the institutional framework, legislative changes and global challenges. This dissertation focuses on key issues related to coordination between various institutions, transaction costs and legal regulation of the industry.

The relevance of the research topic is justified by the impact of regulatory mechanisms on the competitiveness of tour operators and travel agents, the dynamic changes in Bulgaria's tourism legislative framework, and the effects of global crises such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine on the sector's institutional environment. The dissertation presents these issues with well-reasoned arguments, which demonstrates its scientific and practical significance.

2. Aim, objectives, hypotheses and research methods

The main aim of this dissertation is to identify and analyse institutional problems in the tour operator and travel agency sector and to propose solutions for overcoming them. The research focuses on evaluating the institutional environment and regulatory mechanisms, analysing the coordination and management structure of tour operators and travel agents, as well as examining transaction costs and their impact on the sector. It identifies factors leading to market distortions and formulates recommendations for optimising the institutional framework.

The research hypotheses are well-reasoned and encompass institutional changes, information asymmetry, distribution of property rights and transaction costs. The methodological approach includes institutional and discrete structural analysis, comparative analysis of legislation, statistical methods and empirical studies, which ensures high reliability of the obtained results.

2. Visualisation and presentation of results

The dissertation is well illustrated with 15 tables and 24 figures, which present key quantitative data and analyses. The tables contain information about transaction costs, institutional changes and financial indicators, whilst the figures illustrate the dynamics of regulatory processes and their impact on

the sector. The graphical presentation contributes to clarity and better interpretation of the main findings, successfully combining quantitative and visual analysis.

4. Discussion of results and literature review.

The dissertation analyses institutional problems and challenges in tour operator and travel agency business (TOTAB) through the lens of neo-institutional economic theory. The main findings indicate that frequent legislative changes increase transaction costs and administrative burden, which limits the sector's efficiency. Uncertainty in the regulatory environment and information asymmetry hinder long-term strategic planning and company competitiveness.

The empirical analysis reveals high market entry costs, which restrict access for new participants. There is also a risk of rent-seeking behaviour, arising from insufficient coordination between institutions and businesses.

The dissertation proposes guidelines for improving the institutional environment, including optimisation of regulatory regimes, promotion of digitalisation, and enhancement of coordination between government bodies and businesses.

The dissertation builds upon a broad theoretical and empirical foundation, including research in institutional economics, analyses of regulatory frameworks in tourism, and data from national and international sources. The literature review demonstrates thorough knowledge of existing scientific concepts and their application in TOTAB analysis. The sources used are current and diverse, supporting the main theses and conclusions of the research.

5. Contributions of the dissertation

Although the abstract does not contain a separate section for contributions, the content of the dissertation reveals scientific and applied contributions that advance institutional analysis in the field of tourism.

Scientific contributions

The dissertation expands the application of neo-institutional economic theory in TOTAB analysis by formulating a conceptual framework for examining coordination and management structure, transaction costs and property rights. The analysis identifies institutional barriers and market distortions affecting sector efficiency and offers a classification of their impacts.

Applied scientific contributions

A methodology has been developed for measuring transaction costs in TOTAB, which provides quantitative assessment of administrative burden. The research offers specific recommendations for improving the institutional environment, including reducing regulatory uncertainty and optimising administrative procedures.

6. Critical notes and questions.

Ivanka Dimitrova Dimitrova's dissertation is a thorough study with scientific and practical value. However, several observations can be made:

1. Lack of in-depth international comparative analysis - Whilst institutional problems in Bulgaria are examined, a broader analysis of successful models from other countries would contribute to better conclusions.
2. Assessment of regulatory changes - The recommendations for improvement are well-reasoned, but it would be beneficial to include a quantitative analysis of the proposed measures' effect.
3. Role of digitalisation - Although mentioned, there is a lack of detailed analysis regarding the impact of technology on the institutional framework and administrative processes in tourism.
4. Business-institution interaction - It would be useful to analyse best practices in coordination between them and opportunities for improving the regulatory environment.

Questions for the author:

- How do you propose to measure and reduce transaction costs in TOTAB?
- To what extent can the proposed reforms be implemented without legislative changes?
- What specific technological solutions would improve coordination between institutions and businesses?

These critical observations do not diminish the value of the research, but rather could contribute to future development of the topic.

7. Published articles and citations.

The author has published scientific articles and papers reflecting the main findings of the dissertation in specialist publications and conferences. These focus on institutional problems and challenges in tourism, contributing to scholarly discussion in the field. No citation data has been provided.

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

CONCLUSION:

Based on the research methods used and applied by the doctoral candidate, **correctly conducted analyses, made generalisations and derived conclusions**, I consider that the presented dissertation **meets the requirements of the Academic Development Act and the Rules of the Agricultural University** for its implementation.

This gives me grounds to evaluate it **POSITIVELY**.

I take the liberty to propose that the honourable Scientific Jury also vote **positively** and award **Ivanka Dimitrova Dimitrova** the **educational and scientific degree of "Doctor"** in the scientific specialty of **Economics and Management (Agriculture)**.

13th February 2025
Plovdiv

Подписите в този документ са заличени)

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