

OPINION



on a dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "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: ELKA VASILEVA GENOVA – full-time PhD student at the Department of Economics at the Agricultural University, Plovdiv

Topic of the dissertation: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN MOUNTAIN AND SEMI MOUNTAIN AREAS

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Yulia Vladimirova Dzhabarova, PhD, Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; professional field 3.8. Economics; scientific specialty: Economics and Management, appointed as a member of the scientific jury by order No. RD-16-738 / 08.06.2026 by the Rector of the Agricultural University - Plovdiv.

1. Relevance of the problem.

The relevance of this study stems from the need to provide more in-depth knowledge of the mechanisms that determine the development of rural tourism in small settlements, as well as from the need to develop practically applicable solutions for more effective management of tourist destinations.

2. Purpose, tasks, hypotheses and research methods.

The main objective of the study is to analyze the conditions and factors that influence the development of rural tourism in the mountainous and semi-mountainous regions of Bulgaria, by examining the interrelationships between the resource potential, the local community, the tourist business, visitors and the institutional environment. Seven research tasks have been defined. To achieve the goal and solve the research tasks,

an integrated methodological approach has been applied, based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The theoretical part uses the methods of analysis and synthesis, the logical and comparative analysis, through which a review and systematization of the scientific literature and existing concepts related to rural tourism and the management of tourist destinations was carried out.

Several methods were used to collect primary data: questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. A multi-stakeholder analysis was also applied, through which the key stakeholders, their interests, roles, resources and degree of influence on the development of the tourist destination were identified.

3. Visualization and presentation of the results obtained.

The results obtained are presented and illustrated with the help of 15 tables, 51 figures and 18 photographs, which enrich the presented analysis and demonstrate the doctoral student's skills in good command of analytical tools.

4. Discussion of the results and literature used.

Based on the complex empirical analysis, the main factors, dependencies and limitations determining the development of rural tourism in the municipality of Brezovo have been identified. On this basis, guidelines have been developed for improving the management, coordination and marketing activities of tourist destinations in rural areas. The presented list of literature used by the PhD student is on the topic and contains a total of 106 sources by Bulgarian and foreign authors, including regulatory documents, reports and strategic documents, statistical and institutional sources, as well as internet sources.

5. Contributions of the dissertation work.

I accept all contributions to the dissertation formulated by the PhD student. labor, divided into two main groups:

- Contributions of a theoretical nature;
- Scientific and applied contributions.

Among all proposed contributions, I consider the author's most significant one to be the designed and proven practical applicability of the concept for developing a tourist destination in a rural area, which integrates resource potential, stakeholders, destination

management, marketing activities and social capital into a unified system. The proposed concept and the formulated recommendations can be used in the development of local policies and strategies for tourism development in municipalities with similar characteristics.

6. Critical notes and questions.

The dissertation is well structured, adhering to a classical structure, comprising: an introduction, three substantive chapters (theoretical, methodological and analytical-applied), conclusions and recommendations, bibliography and appendices. The total volume is 246 pages. The work is characterized by logical consistency, depth of analysis and high scientific style. The numerous and diverse sources that are used and skillfully analyzed, with the corresponding author's conclusions, show a good knowledge of the theory in the research area and serve as a solid basis for the subsequent empirical research. The author's aspiration to encompass and analyze the problem in a multifaceted way is very impressive, which is where the integrated methodological framework and multi-layered analyses come from. The PhD student shows high analytical skills for clearly defining the existing problems, developing a rich and adequate toolkit for their resolution, as well as appropriate recommendations for future development.

My question to the PhD student is the following: *How would you design the integrated marketing strategy for the successful development of the chosen tourist destination in the context of its sustainable development?*

7. Published articles and citations.

Two co-authored publications published in the collection Scientific works of the Agricultural University are presented:

1. Elka Genova, Ivan Penov, (2020), Evaluation of a project for the construction of a house for rural tourism, Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Scientific Works, vol. LXII, book 2.
2. Elka Genova, Milko Genov (2020), Research on the profile of the consumer of rural tourism services in the tourist destination Svezhen, Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Scientific Works, vol. LXII, book 1.

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

CONCLUSION:

Based on the various research methods learned and applied by the PhD student, the correctly conducted experiments, the generalizations and conclusions made, I believe that the presented dissertation meets the requirements of the Law on the Protection of Scientific and Technological Research of 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 to the esteemed Scientific Jury to also vote positively and award Elka Vasileva Genova the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the scientific specialty of Economics and Management "Agriculture"

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