

OPINION

**by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teodora Veleva Rizova,
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Management, Professional Field 3.9 Tourism**

Subject: Dissertation paper for the award of educational and scientific degree
Doctor in professional field 3.9 Tourism

Grounds for submitting an opinion: participation in the composition of the
Scientific jury of the defence of a dissertation paper according to Order No. 3-PK-
302/07.08.2023. of the Rector of the NBU, Prof. Plamen Doinov, DSc.

Author of the PhD dissertation: Adelina Savova Stoyanova

PhD Dissertation Topic: Educational Ecotourism Research in the Context of the
Experience and Tourism Industry

1. Information about the doctoral student

The doctoral student was trained in a doctoral program at the Administration and Management Department, Tourism Section of the NBU. Adelina Savova Stoyanova is a doctoral student of self-study, enrolled with the right of defence in the doctoral program of Tourism at NBU, professional field 3.9 Tourism, scientific specialty Tourism, for acquisition of the educational and scientific degree Doctor.

1. General characteristics of the dissertation presented

The dissertation of the doctoral student Adelina Stoyanova submitted for review, the abstract and scientific publications related to the PhD dissertation paper are a result of independent scientific research.

The volume of the dissertation, considered as the main text and appendices, is 211 pages.

The structure of the dissertation is based on a well-founded logic, consistency and connection of the problems researched.

It consists of an introduction (7 pages), an exposition in three chapters (139 pages), a conclusion (2 pages), a list of literary sources used (10 pages) and appendices (44 pages). The body of the dissertation comprises 36 figures and 6 tables.

The abstract of the dissertation contains 53 pages, in which the main elements and conclusions of the dissertation are presented in full, but synthesised version. The auto-abstract fully corresponds to the content of the dissertation and shows the ability of the doctoral student to summarise and draw conclusions.

2. Content characteristics of the PhD dissertation

The relevance of the PhD dissertation is determined by two main factors: few similar studies in the scientific literature and the possibility of immediate application of the obtained results in the practice of our country. In this regard, it can be stated that the topic of the study is completely up-to-date, as it implies a study of a new area that corresponds to the most modern aspects of tourism activity. The research is related to a type of tourism that can be fully implemented in our country, and the planned developments can be carried out with the available opportunities of the tourism sector. The main goal set in the research, namely setting up a new tourist platform aimed at ecological tourism, is fully developed in the dissertation.

Thus, the first chapter presents the main characteristics of ecological tourism, its immediate connection with sustainable development as well as its essential importance for implementing an increase in the educational opportunities of ecological tourism.

The second chapter is dedicated to one of the extremely important problems of modern tourism in general and ecological tourism in particular. This is the problem of the individualisation of the subjective experience of tourists caused by the corresponding impressions that they receive from the perception of natural features and the peculiarities of the organisation of the tourist trip. In fact, there is a problem outlined concerning the individualised tourism product, a solution suggested which, to a significant extent, depends on the effectiveness and competitiveness of tourism products.

An essential facet and an important positive aspect of the dissertation is that in the search for a solution to this problem, the author does not resort to theorising, but presents data based on a specific study that reflects the specific conditions of our country. This study is presented in the second chapter of the dissertation. It is also a

positive fact that an independent methodology is used which can be used to conduct longitudinal studies in determining consumer attitudes, as a basis of fluctuations in consumer preferences, and long-term, variable tourism products, satisfying a significantly larger number of users.

The third chapter of the dissertation deals with the practical application of the obtained information within the framework of the theoretical analysis and empirical data collection. It analyses the possibility of setting up an information framework of ecological tourism aimed at stimulating the experiences of tourists and their full awareness. A positive element of the dissertation is that at that point the author does not only deal with theory but outlines particular opportunities that can be implemented by Bulgarian enterprises from the tourism sector.

The analysed possibilities of the Eco Wanderlust Ecological Travel Platform and their application to the Bulgarian tourism give a purely practical aspect to the dissertation. One essential feature should be noted, namely, the mutual coherence of theoretical elements, empirical information and practical application of opportunities for the development of ecological tourism.

3. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and scientific-applied results

The scientific results of the dissertation can be described as follows:

- successful application of the interdisciplinary approach in the study of the peculiarities of a specific type of tourist activity, namely ecological tourism;
- systematic application of the research, fully following the principle of theory - empirical data - practical application of the obtained results;
- adequate and up-to-date presentation of the scientific and experimental results based on an original methodology that links the obtained data with the goals and tasks set in the dissertation;
- the possibility of additional research that affects the subject and the object of the research; the results are of a purely practical nature giving the opportunity to formulate new scientific hypotheses, based on practical application.

4. Evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the PhD dissertation

One of the main scientific contributions of the dissertation is the definition of a new field of research development formulated at the border between the field of ecological tourism and different types of educational programmes. It can be considered as one of the essential elements for achieving sustainable development of society and can be used in various scientific and educational programmes.

The experimental part is also of significant importance, affecting one of the modern perspective areas of research, in particular the experience industry, which can be considered as an essential element for achieving a high degree of competitiveness of the tourism sector.

A significant practical-applied contribution of the dissertation should also be noted. It concerns the development of a new programme product based on a real-life base that can be applied in practice by Bulgarian tourist and educational structures.

5. Evaluation of dissertation publications

The doctoral student Adelina Stoyanova has 8 scientific publications directly related to the subject of the PhD dissertation, including 2 independent and 6 co-authored, of which 3 are in print. Seven publications are in Bulgarian and one is in English. Part of the papers were presented at international scientific and scientific-practical conferences and symposiums, published in edited collective volumes and journals, three of which were referenced in CEEOL.

The publications of Adelina Stoyanova are representative and ensure sufficient dissemination of the research results among the academic community and interested circles of the tourism business.

The scientific production, dedicated to the treated issues, exceeds the minimum national requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree Doctor, according to Art. 26, paras. 2 and 3 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

6. Assessment of the auto-abstract

- An assessment of the correctness and degree of reflection of the content of the PhD dissertation in the abstract is given.

The abstract is 53 pages long. It correctly corresponds to the PhD dissertation and reliably presents the problems researched in a synthesised form.

7. Criticisms, recommendations and questions.

At the preliminary discussion of the PhD dissertation, some notes and recommendations were made, which the doctoral student reflected in good faith. This improves the overall quality of the paper as an independent study with unquestionable scientific and scientific-applied contributions.

I believe that the doctoral student has enough opportunities to expand her publication activity both in the field of ecotourism and the experience economy, and in other areas.

Question:

1. Which business organisations in the tourism industry could Eco Wanderlust partner with in its activities and be useful for Bulgarian tourism?

6. Final opinion

Based on the analysis of the PhD dissertation, I give a positive evaluation of the dissertation on the topic “Educational ecotourism research in the context of the experience and tourism industry”. My overall evaluation of the dissertation is based on its relevance, structure and content, and this gives me reason to assume that it contains the scientific and applied scientific results.

With the reasoned scientific conclusions and recommendations made, it enriches scientific knowledge in the field of ecological tourism and the experience industry.

I propose to the respected members of the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree Doctor to Adelina Savova Stoyanova in the field of higher education

3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.9 Tourism.

October 12, 2023

Sofia

Assoc. Prof. Teodora Rizova