

ACCADEMIC REVIEW

of the dissertation thesis of

PhD student

Emil Borisov Petrov

on the topic

TRANSPORT ACCESS MANAGEMENT TO

TOURIST SITES IN THE CENTRAL CITY

PART OF SOFIA

Department of Geography of Tourism, Faculty of Geology and Geography,

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski "

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Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Mariya Zlatkova Stankova, PhD

The academic review was prepared in accordance with Order RD-38-340/23.07.2020 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approval of a scientific jury.

According to the procedure a set of materials in electronic format is provided. It includes a dissertation thesis, abstract - in Bulgarian and English, CV, publications, diplomas, declaration of authorship and reference for compliance with the minimum national requirements for acquiring ONS "Doctor" in accordance with the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its application.

1. Brief biographical information about the PhD student

Emil Borisov Petrov was born in 1975. He graduated from the High School with advanced study of English - 29th "Dimitar Homatian" in the period 1989-1993. Emil Petrov acquired higher education in 1998 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, majoring in Geography, Ecology, and GIS. During the years from 2006 to 2016, he improved his qualification by studying at: the American University, Blagoevgrad, at CISCO Academy as a certified assistant at CISCO in network technologies; the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy, Sofia, as a Master in Information Technology, the UNWE, Sofia, as a Master in Intelligent Transport Systems. Speaks English and Russian.

Emil Petrov has a rich professional biography. He currently holds the position of Director of the Information and Communication Services Directorate at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. In previous periods he has worked at the Center for Urban Mobility, Parking and Mobility Directorate, "Gumed" Ltd - Sofia, Bohemia Travel Agency,

National Center for Territorial Development - Sofia, and SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" at the Faculty of Geology and Geography.

It is noteworthy that the main activities and responsibilities of his positions are inherently related to the maintenance of computer systems, equipment and computer network, development and provision of electronic services for citizens and businesses, development of mechanisms for control and management of operational activities. E. Petrov has performed various projects and commissions as an external expert.

Based on my acquaintance with the Curriculum of Emil Petrov, I come to the conclusion that he has the **necessary knowledge and competencies** in connection with the problems on which the dissertation thesis was developed. Some aspects of his research were popularized through 3 independent scientific publications in an international scientific forum and in collective scientific publications in the country. A summary of the dissertation with volume of 39 pages is also presented on the procedure. In general, it meets the requirements for layout and correctly reflects the main accents of the research and its contributions.

2. Actuality and structure of the dissertation thesis

The dissertation thesis is developed in a total volume of 303 pages of computer typed text. The main part has a volume of 245 pages. There are a total of 41 applications. The literature used includes 201 sources, of which 100 in Cyrillic and 101 in Latin. The illustrative materials are a total of 18 tables and 82 figures. The citation is generally correct.

As structure, the thesis consists of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion, which are logically assembled and correspond to the research framework developed by the PhD student Petrov, in which theoretical, methodological and applied aspects are set in connection with the issues of the management of the transport accessibility to the tourist sites, located in the central urban part, on the example of a chosen city tourist destination - Sofia.

In fact, the focus of the dissertation thesis on the organization of accessibility and movement of tourists in Sofia is of **particular interest**. And as the candidate rightly points out, this is primarily due to the fact that as capital, Sofia has emerged as the largest center of attraction for tourists, especially foreign ones in Bulgaria. In the way it is formulated, the topic is relevant for the Bulgarian tourist practice, and in particular has its applied significance in terms of organization, functioning and management of urban tourist destinations in the country.

Emil Petrov studies the transport accessibility to the tourist sites in the central part of Sofia, noting that the decisions taken for the development of tourism in the study area do not report and do not offer satisfactory mechanisms for improvement in terms of the visitors (tourists) and the tour operators, developing travel packages. As a result of the analysis of the elements of the transport infrastructure, related to the accessibility and its provision and development, E. Petrov proposes a concept for development, in accordance with the needs of population mobility, the increased visits to the destination and the need to ensure its sustainable development.

The research subject is the transport accessibility to the tourist sites in the central part of Sofia. Taking into account the possibilities for reaching them, stopping, staying and parking of various vehicles in the immediate vicinity, as well as the adjacent infrastructure.

The object of study is the historically occurred central part of Sofia and the elements of the infrastructure falling within it, determining the possibilities for moving to the anthropogenic tourist sites for the different target groups of tourists on foot, by bicycle and with the use of motor vehicles. In accordance with the subject and the object, the main goal and the tasks providing it are presented. The research thesis is defined in view of the possibility for Sofia to become a year-round tourist destination, as well as a comfortable city to live in, for which purpose targeted actions should be taken to achieve easy and convenient access to tourist attractions in the central part. It is decomposed into 6 micro theses. With regard to them, I accept that in general they present the specifics of the research, although I believe that the work would benefit from greater specificity of the formulations.

The proposed methodological framework by E. Petrov corresponds to the specifics of the research, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, namely: observation, comparison, analysis, synthesis, inventory, systematization, classification, evaluation, critical analysis of regulatory, planning and departmental documents, mathematical and statistical methods (incl. SPSS), sociological methods; spatial analysis and visualization in GIS, SWOT analysis. And, as a result, the author's concept of the dissertation thesis outlines the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study, the state and problems of transport accessibility in the central part of Sofia, as well as the conducted own research and a proposal for a concept for development of transport accessibility in the selected destination.

Chapter one of the dissertation is devoted to clarifying the notions and the terminological apparatus, as well as discusses the place of transport and transport accessibility in the tourism system. The theoretical and methodological base of the research and its information assurance are outlined, as well as a review of the existing studies on the state and management of tourism in the city of Sofia, considered as a tourist destination, is provided. The types of visitors and the changes in the typology and the way of their travel are specified. Attention is paid to the importance of recreational and tourist resources as localization factors of tourism, as well as to other factors influencing accessibility. An analysis of the current state of tourism in the study area and the strategic framework for the development of tourism and transport in it is proposed. The theoretical base of the concept for the development of the transport infrastructure and accessibility in the destination Sofia is defined and the limitations for the research are outlined.

Chapter two is more specifically focused on presenting the state and problems of transport accessibility in the central urban part of Sofia. The author pays special attention to the lack of established methods for conducting such studies in researching of the spatial and urban development of road network, demography and related problems. Going into the details of the study, it should be mentioned that it was carried out in 8 main aspects, namely: with regard to the main incoming traffic flows to the destination to establish the movement of tourists after entering the city center, main sites to visit, identified on the basis of online information, leading tour operators and reasons for the visit; with regard to the spatial organization of the urban environment in relation to transport and accessibility; with regard to the mass urban public transport of Sofia, as the main type of transport used for the movement of tourists in the central part of the city; with regard to the organization of parking; with regard to bicycle traffic; with regard to pedestrian traffic; with regard to information security, considered not only as a communication network, part of the basic infrastructure of integrated communications services,

but also as a tool for promoting the destination; with regard to the opportunities for movement of disadvantaged persons.

Chapter three introduces the results of previous studies for Sofia in the context of transport accessibility and presents an analysis of the inquiries conducted by the candidate. There are two in total: a survey for gathering primary information and a semi-structured interview with representatives of the municipal authorities and non-governmental organizations relevant to the subject and object of the study. Thus the author summarizes the characteristics of tourist demand, the tourists' behavior in the destination Sofia and the attitude of the various stakeholders towards the development of transport accessibility and infrastructure. The survey is aimed primarily at foreign visitors, but also reflects the views of the Bulgarian ones. The semi-structured interview was conducted with representatives of municipal structures and non-governmental organizations in Sofia interested in transport and traffic management and highlights the existing problems and challenges in this regard. A review of good practices for ensuring accessibility from European capitals developed as tourist destinations has been made.

In the fourth chapter, based on the review of the obtained results and the considered good practices, a concept for development and management of transport accessibility in the city of Sofia as tourist destination is proposed, aimed mainly at stimulating sustainable ways of moving and limiting the use of cars. The concept is provided with a SWOT analysis in the context of Sofia transport accessibility and includes specific solutions: to limit access by car to the central urban part, to increase the scope of parking services, incl. the methods of payment, for the development of the Park & Ride service, the improvement and promotion of public transport, the integration of fees and public transport services, the solutions for the creation of a tourist bus management system, the reorganization and improvement of the road network for cycling and use of footpaths and routes, the introduction of intelligent transport systems, the development of tourist information systems, and the elaboration of electronic systems for reservation and payment.

In conclusion, the candidate presents his summaries and conclusions in connection with the studied problems faced by the management of transport accessibility to tourist sites in the central urban part of Sofia. The main point he emphasizes is that in order to be adaptable and flexible, Sofia needs a new model of urban mobility, based on sustainable forms of transport and open to technological innovation. Its effectiveness, according to E. Petrov, can be ensured through an integrated approach that combines tourism, transport and urban planning and includes local public and private operators, as well as all other organizations and intermediaries that contribute to the development of the destination and promote tourism mobility.

Having in mind the findings so far, I accept that as a structure and content, the reviewed dissertation thesis follows the established model of theoretical and methodological construction with justification of the object and subject of research, the purpose and the tasks arising from its detailing. I also believe that the specifics of the thematic focus have been taken into account and the main stages of research work have been observed by the PhD student.

Contributions: The dissertation thesis makes an impression with the actuality of the topic, as well as has a definite proven contribution in the presented proposals for the improvement of management of transport accessibility to tourist sites in the central urban part of Sofia. In this regard, I will highlight two other contributions which, in my opinion, are important. In particular, it is about the advisable concept proposed by the candidate for the

development of transport accessibility on the territory of the central urban part of Sofia, in accordance with the needs of all target groups, including the disadvantaged. I also accept his view that the concept can be adapted to other, similar to the studied one, tourist destinations.

Recommendations to the PhD student: I will make three recommendations to Emil Petrov. They are of a technical nature and aim primarily to provoke his attention in the future direction of his work and do not diminish my positive assessment of his research results.

My *first* recommendation concerns the used illustrative materials. For some of them there is not a complete indication of the used sources. The *second* recommendation concerns some of the formulations in regards to which inaccuracies have been identified. For example, in the introductory part the PhD student presents a research thesis, and in the conclusion he talks about a hypothesis. *Thirdly*, I recommend E. Petrov to visualize to a greater extent and to promote his work in a broader sense, as his issues are of interest to a wide range of specialists.

Conclusion: The reviewed dissertation thesis meets the requirements of the Law for development of the academic staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation, as well as the additional requirements of the Regulations of Sofia University. It is a completed research, which contains scientific and applied contributions on an actual and important for the development of tourism in Bulgaria topic, such as that of city tourist destinations and the issues of providing and managing transport access to tourist sites located in the central urban part.

Bearing in mind that the dissertation is an independent work of the PhD student, as well as the fact that the candidate has the qualities, the experience and the competencies to conduct independent research and meets the minimum national requirements for acquiring the Educational and scientific degree "Doctor", I propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific jury to vote positively and to make a decision to award Emil Borisov Petrov the educational and scientific degree DOCTOR in Professional field 4.4 Earth Sciences. Geography of recreation and tourism.

08.09.2020 г.

Prepared by:

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