

OPINION

From: Prof. Dr. Galina Krasteva Rashkova, in the field of higher education area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.9 Tourism (Financial Management of the Tourism Enterprise)
Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Regarding: Dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences (Geography of Recreation and Tourism)

Author of the dissertation: Lyubomir Sashev Krastev

Title of the dissertation: *“Current State and Development Opportunities of Event Tourism in the City of Sofia”*

Scientific advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elena Simeonova Petkova

Grounds for presenting the opinion: Participation as a member of the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation, in accordance with Order RD-38-613/25.09.2025 of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

1. Information about the PhD candidate

Lyubomir Sashev Krastev completed his secondary education at a high school with Spanish language instruction in 2015. He obtained a Bachelor’s degree in “Economics of Tourism” and a Master’s degree in “International Tourism” at UNWE in 2019. He speaks English and Spanish.

From 2023 to 2024, Lyubomir Sashev Krastev has been a full-time PhD student, according to Rector’s Order 20 20/30.01.2023, in professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences (Geography of Recreation and Tourism), enrolled in the doctoral program at the Department of “Geography of Tourism” at the Faculty of Geology and Geography of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

His professional career began in 2018 at Catalyst Ltd., where he still works. His main responsibilities include preliminary preparation and on-site execution of team-building and corporate events, as well as client communications.

The documents submitted by Lyubomir Sashev Krastev for the defense of his doctoral dissertation comply with the Regulations for the Application of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Rules for the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring the Educational and Scientific Degree “Doctor”.

2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation

The dissertation consists of 151 pages, including an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion; 145 Bulgarian and foreign authors are cited, including online sources, as well as appendices. The main text is 137 pages, illustrated with 13 tables and 46 figures.

Event tourism plays an important role in supporting the local economy, creating positive publicity and image for the destination, providing diverse experiences for tourists, and enabling year-round tourism and its sustainable development. In this regard, the relevance of the dissertation topic is indisputable.

The object (Sofia) and subject (event tourism) of the study, its aim, tasks, and sub-tasks are clearly formulated, and the corresponding hypothesis is defined.

Chapter One, titled “*Methodological and Theoretical Foundations of the Study*”, logically justifies the use of methods such as analysis of theoretical publications, a complex approach combining empirical research with surveys, statistical data from various institutions, comparative analysis, and SWOT analysis. It is noted that the sustainability of events, their cultural impact, and their inclusion in Sofia’s strategic development plans are beyond the scope of this dissertation and remain important topics for future research.

The theoretical section reviews authors’ positions on the nature of events in general and those serving tourism purposes, mentions the “experience economy” theory, and highlights the lack of a unified definition of event tourism. It also notes that the ecological, economic, social, and marketing effects of event tourism and their influence on sustainable tourism development have not been sufficiently studied.

A shortcoming here, in my opinion, is the absence of a clearly expressed and substantiated opinion by the author and his critical analysis of theoretical concepts in the context of tourism.

Chapter Two, titled “*Current State of Event Tourism in Sofia*”, analyzes the level of tourism development in Sofia, particularly events and event tourism. Key factors influencing these processes are discussed, including the negative factor of lacking a centralized database and statistics for events, which hinders assessment of their economic contribution. Surveys were conducted among 121 visitors (22 questions) and event organizers (27 questions), leading to recommendations for event tourism development. The chapter presents empirical data and a SWOT analysis, forming the basis for practical recommendations and conclusions useful for future research.

Chapter Three, titled “*Opportunities and Prospects for the Development of Event Tourism in Sofia*”, provides examples of successful event tourism practices in Bulgaria (Plovdiv, Varna, Pernik, Bansko) and policies in Austria, Slovenia, Finland, Spain, Ireland, Scotland, and the Netherlands. It examines event management aspects such as organization, financial security, marketing strategies, innovation, and sustainability. The author concludes that “the integration of innovations in event tourism in Sofia is not only a technological issue but also a strategic process that must be implemented in close connection with the principles of sustainable development.” Recommendations are structured for stakeholders—event organizers, Sofia Municipality, national institutions, the education system, and businesses—to cooperate in establishing Sofia as an attractive event tourism destination in Southeastern Europe.

The conclusion summarizes the research results and their contributions according to the author.

3. Evaluation of Scientific and Applied Contributions

The dissertation contains certain arguments for theoretical and applied results in the form of proposals for improving the integrated management and financing of event tourism in Sofia. These proposals qualify as scientific and applied achievements and are specifically reflected in the following:

3.1. A practical contribution is the survey conducted among visitors and event organizers in Sofia. Based on this empirical analysis, specific conclusions have been drawn that can be used in planning and implementing event tourism.

3.2. An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Sofia as a destination offering special

events has been carried out, and the city's potential for developing event tourism and establishing itself in this market in Europe has been substantiated.

3.3. Based on the studied best practices in event tourism in Bulgaria and selected European countries, recommendations have been presented in the form of a model for the content and structure of event tourism management and the essential role of innovation in its governance and sustainable development.

Evaluation of Publications Related to the Dissertation and the Author's Abstract

Three independent publications have been produced on the dissertation topic, which meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its implementing regulations.

The author's abstract has been prepared in accordance with the structure and content of the dissertation.

4. Critical Remarks, Recommendations, and Questions

I believe that within the stated objectives and tasks, the author has carried out both theoretical research and practical studies in the presented dissertation. In addition to the remarks made above, I would add the absence of page numbering in the dissertation text, as well as numerous repetitions and self-assessment statements that, in my opinion, are unnecessary.

My question to the PhD candidate is as follows: Is there a developed methodology (or methodologies) for measuring the multiplier effect of different types of tourism, and if so, is it applicable to event tourism?

5. Conclusion

I consider that the dissertation submitted for review, despite the noted remarks, meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its implementing regulations. Therefore, I give my positive vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Lyubomir Sashev Krastev in professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences (Geography of Recreation and Tourism).

16.11.2025
Sofia

(Signature)

(Prof. Dr. Galina Rashkova)

