



REVIEW

From Prof. Dr. Sc. PhD. Sonia Varadinova Mileva-Bojanova,

Scientific specialty 05.02.18 Economics and Management (Tourism),
Department of Economics and Management by Industries
at the Faculty of Economics of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski "

Referring the participation in a scientific jury, determined by order RD 38-340 / 23 .07 .2020 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and decision of the first meeting of the scientific jury from 29.07.2020.

Subject: public defence of a dissertation for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in the professional field 4.4 Earth Sciences. Geography of recreation and tourism;

Topic of the dissertation: "**Management of transport accessibility to tourist sites in the central part of Sofia**"

Author of dissertation: **Emil Borisov Petrov** , PhD of self-study in Geology and Geography Faculty, Department " Geography of traveling- meters and " at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ".

Scientific adviser: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova**

The dissertation submitted for review is directed for public defence by a decision of the Faculty of Geology and Geography, Protocol № 07 / 03.07 .2020 and is in accordance with the requirements of the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Internal rules for development of the academic staff at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", observing all procedural requirements.

1. Brief biographical data and characteristics of the scientific interests of the dissertation

Emil Borisov Petrov was born 5/8/1975, finalized his High Scholl in Sofia (1993), "Master" degree in Geography at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (1998) and at a later stage obtained additionally two more master's degrees in Information Technology from the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy in Sofia (2011) and Transport Economics from University of National and World Economy, Sofia (2016). He speaks English and Russian. Certified Assistant at CISCO Academy (2007). Enrolled as a doctoral student in independent training at the Department of Geography of Tourism at the Faculty of Geology and Geography at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (**Order RD 20-857 / 29.05.2018**) with scientific consultant Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova. Due to the

finalization of his dissertation ahead of planned and passed all exams on time he was given the right to proceed with the public defense (Order RD 20-1035/17.07.2020). He has extensive professional experience in the field of tourism and public administration, having consistently worked at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" as a system administrator, National Center for Territorial Development, an established travel agency, Center for Urban Mobility and currently in the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. In parallel, he has extensive experience in the implementation and realization of various projects in the field of e-government, information technology, research and development, project management and others. Member of the team developed of the Strategy for Development of Sofia as a tourist destination until 2017-203 of Sofia Municipality.

2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation

Dissertation topic can be defined as meaningful in the context of contemporary the dynamic development of Sofia as a tourist destination, with significant investment in infrastructure and transport accessibility in the capital and the increasing intensity and volume of passengers, including tourist flow to tourist sites and attractions which are highly concentrated in the central part of the city.

The main **objective** is the study is the management of transport accessibility in accordance with the growing needs of travellers and tourists, taking into account the basic principles of sustainable and responsible development of the destination of the example of Sofia. **The object of study** is the historical central part of the city as part and elements of infrastructural accessibility to key tourist sites. **The subject** of research is the transport accessibility itself.

The dissertation has a scientifically applied character, looking for solutions to improve accessibility and alternatives for sustainable development of the tourist destination limited to the central part of Sofia. The scope and thematic focus is intersected between different areas such as tourist destination management, quality of life, transport system development, urban environment, urban development policies and many others. This determines the complex nature and interdisciplinary of the chosen topic to which the doctoral student approaches extremely comprehensively.

PhD student defends his **thesis**, formulated as " Sofia has the opportunity to become a year-round destination, as well as a convenient city to live, by simply adopt targeted actions to achieve easier and convenient access to tourist attractions in downtown."

The dissertation contains 303 pages of computer typed text, of which 245 pages of main text, 47 pages of appendices, incl. 82 figures, 17 tables and 41 appendices. The bibliographic reference consists of 11 pages, and cited sources are a total of 201, incl. 100 in Cyrillic and 95 in Latin and another 6 represent links to internet sources. The scope of the cited literature includes a huge volume of normative, planning and strategic documents.

3. Evaluation of the scientific content, language and style of presentation

Despite the wide scope of the dissertation, the need to refine the thesis, the lack of pre-defined limitations and assumptions of the doctoral student, it can be assumed that *the goals and objectives of the study are met.*

The applied tools and methodology are adequate to the problem - qualitative and quantitative methods as an observation, comparison, analysis, synthesis, inventory, systematization, classification, evaluation, critical analysis, spatial analysis and visualization in GIS, SWOT analysis and others.

The writing style is relatively consistent and academic. **Citation** of the used literature is considered correct.

Structurally the dissertation includes introduction, four chapters, conclusions, bibliography and appendixes. It cannot be said that the principle of transition from the general to the private has been fully observed, as is evident in the first chapter.

The literature review on the topic shows an in-depth study by the doctoral student on the topic of transport, mobility, infrastructure and accessibility in urban environments, urban space, and sustainable development of a tourist destination.

The first chapter, entitled "Theoretical and methodological foundations of the study" outlines the general principles of the tourism system and links with transport accessibility and defines the methodology of the study. Regarding the theoretical part, the peculiarities of the transport accessibility, the specifics of the transport infrastructure and the superstructure in tourism are clarified. Attention is paid to the tourist product at the destination level taking into consideration mainly infrastructure and transport accessibility. The methodological part includes defining the territorial scope, selection of the used methods, and determination of the scope and limitations of the research. Applied is situational analysis of the central part of the city, summarized are the results of foreign and author's studies on the problems of transport accessibility, supplemented by a review of good practices from other European cities. Among the more significant results are the developed SWOT analysis, typology and types of visitors to Sofia.

The second chapter "Status and analysis of transport accessibility in the central part of Sofia" covers an extremely wide range of issues directly and indirectly related to tourism, inclusive transport flows, macro-structure and mass urban transport. Attention is paid to the possibilities for parking and ride, bicycle and pedestrian traffic, information security, opportunities for movement of people with disabilities. The analysis is extended with a critical analysis of strategic and planning documents concerning the management and development of transport accessibility and tourism in Sofia city. The interdisciplinary nature and scope of the study to some extent explain the imbalance and deviations from the main topic of the dissertation (historically developed in Sofia, demographic profile of the city, migration processes, motorization, ecology, road safety, traffic and others).

The third chapter, entitled "Analysis of the results of previous studies, own survey and summary of transport accessibility problems and challenges to solve them" represent systematized results from previous studies (part of the situational analysis) and own studies covering the last five years. A significant part of the identified problems remain and remain unresolved. On this basis, the doctoral student determines the scope of a conducted survey (331 surveys) among tourists and visitors to Sofia (2017-2018) and semi-structured interviews among representatives of municipal authorities and non-governmental organizations. The study is complemented by an analysis of good practices from nine European cities and the identified six strategies for effective management of the flow of

visitors, traffic and transport to the respective destinations as defined by cited large-scale EU research project.

The fourth chapter, entitled "Concept for the development of transport accessibility" is an essential part of the dissertation. It consists of author's concept for improving transport accessibility for tourist purposes based on 10 guiding principles and a set of specific measures to solve the identified problems and challenges for Sofia city. It is worth noting the SWOT analysis compiled by the doctoral student, as a general initial framework of the presented concept based on an adapted model of the European Short Distance Transport Information Service with emphasis on the following elements related to sustainable development - city for people, accessibility, improving the quality of life and integrated planning involving a wide range of stakeholders. The outlined concrete decisions for the achievement of the general principles set in the concept for accessibility and sustainable development of the destination are a significant contribution.

The **conclusion** summarizes the main research results, confirming the defined thesis that Sofia needs a new model of urban mobility, taking into account the principles of sustainable development, technological innovation, integrated approach and tourism development. The concept proposed by the doctoral student is based on identified problems, outlines solutions and steps for achieving the set goals.

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

The main contributions of the thesis are of *applied science* nature in terms of model of transport accessibility of tourist destination. There is convincing evidence and *practical results* - author's concept and solutions for the central part of Sofia as a tourist destination. As a significant result of the dissertation are the conducted author's researches among visitors and tourists of Sofia and semi-structured interviews with a representative of municipal authorities and non-governmental organizations. Such studies have not been done for Sofia and provide a good basis for deriving principles for improving tourist accessibility.

The contributions presented in the abstract need to be specified and refer to:

First, the theoretical statements about transport accessibility and its elements have been enriched as part of the territorial system of tourism in the context of the development of the tourist destination.

Second, on the basis of author's research, a serious situational analysis and tourist transport accessibility of the central part of the city has been made for first time.

Third, developed is an author's proposal for a concept for the development of transport accessibility of the central part of Sofia.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

The dissertation also identifies some shortcomings that give reason to make the following critical remarks:

There is need to **clarify the thesis** and in particular the terminological apparatus. In the thesis "tourist attractions" are formulated, and in the dissertation they are used as a synonym of tourist sites, anthropogenic resources. On the other hand, it relies on a "comfortable city to

live in", while the purpose and object of the study are narrowed to the management of transport accessibility, taking into account the principles of sustainable development of the destination.

These **limitations of the scope** of the dissertation should be stressed in the initial part of dissertation. Logically, the situational analysis of transport accessibility and the strategic and normative documents regulating transport accessibility and tourism should precede the methodical and research part of the dissertation.

There is an imbalance of the structuring by chapters in favour of the second chapter which represents over 1/3 of the whole volume of the dissertation.

These critical remarks **do not diminish the importance** of the dissertation, as PhD student Emil Petrov, who shows in-depth knowledge in the management of transport accessibility and tourism development on the example of Sofia as a tourist destination.

6. Questions on the dissertation.

First, in relation to the pandemic and latest development that are greatly changing the intensity, mode of travel and safety and security requirements for travellers and tourists - will your proposed concept for sustainable development of transport accessibility at the destination level change significantly? Are there any new constraints and risks that need to be considered in the strategic management of the destination?

Second, based on the data that the main tourist flow in Sofia arrives with low-cost airlines, please define and grade the major critical factors for sustainable management of transport accessibility in Sofia.

7. Abstract, reference for the publications related to the dissertation

The authors' summary (abstract of dissertation) is 39 pages length and corresponds to the main dissertation content. Presents in a synthesized form the researched problems, includes a general characteristic of the dissertation, a short exposition, a reference for the contributions and publications on the topic.

By type and number of the submitted publications, they correspond to the list of publications announced in the author's summary. The doctoral student has presented a total of 3 independent publications directly related to the topics of the dissertation. Two of the publications are in Bulgarian and another 1 in English, all of which are in university publications with scientific review.

8. General conclusion

The dissertation of Emil Borisov Petrov on "Management of transport accessibility to tourist sites in the central part of Sofia" meets the basic legal and regulatory requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". All the above **gives me reason to vote "FOR" the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" of Emil Petrov in scientific filed 4.4. Earth sciences (Geography of recreation and Tourism).**

02.09.2020

Reviewer:

Prof. Dr. Sc PhD Sonia Mileva