

OPINION

by Prof. DrSci Maria Vodenska, PhD
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ",
member of the scientific jury for defense of the doctoral dissertation
according to order Ro038/23.07.2020 of the Rector of Sofia University "St.
Kl. Ohridski"

Scientific field of HE: 4. Natural sciences, mathematics and informatics
Professional field: 4.4. Earth sciences

Scientific specialty: Geography of recreation and tourism

Scientific unit: Department of Geography of Tourism, Sofia University "St.
Kl. Ohridski"

Dissertation topic: MANAGEMENT OF TRANSPORT ACCESS TO TOURIST SITES IN THE
CENTRAL CITY OF SOFIA

Doctoral student: Assistant Emil Borisov Petrov

Scientific adviser: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova

Data for the PhD student:

The author of the dissertation presented for an opinion is Emil Borisov Petrov - a free doctoral student at the Department of Tourism at the Faculty of Geology and Geography at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Emil Borisov Petrov was born in 1975. He holds three master's degrees - in Geography, acquired in 1998 at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", in Information Technology, acquired in 2011 at the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy, Sofia and in Transport Economics, acquired in 2016 at the University of National and World Economy, Sofia. Also in 2007 he became a certified assistant to CISCO in network technologies at the American University, Blagoevgrad.

Since 1997 he has been working at GGF, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", and his last position was as an assistant at the Department of Geography of Tourism. He teaches the course in Computer Information Systems in Tourism.

From the provided autobiographical reference it is evident that over time Emil Petrov has worked hard to improve his qualifications and professional skills in various fields. This is extremely important for the choice of the topic for the dissertation, which is in the border area of several professional fields and a dissertation with a similar topic has not been defended so far within the GGF.

In the period from his enrollment in free doctoral studies from June 2018 to his release in July 2020, the doctoral student Emil Petrov, in addition to the doctoral minimum exam in Geography of Recreation and Tourism, has taken and successfully passed four more exams in the doctoral program in. All five exams were taken by the PhD student with a grade of Excellent 6.

He has participated as an external expert, entered in the PPA register, in 11 contracts and projects and in 11 other projects in the period 2013-2019. He has appeared at 2 scientific forums with scientific reports. He speaks English and Russian.

Analysis of the content of the dissertation

The presented dissertation has a total volume of 303 standard computer pages, including 11 pages of used sources with a total of 208 titles and 41 applications. The main text is illustrated by 18 tables and 82 figures. It is structured in an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion.

The Introduction sets out the rationale for choosing the research topic. It is based on the increased mobility of the population as a whole in recent years, as well as on the increased attendance of the capital and the need to ensure sustainable development of destination Sofia. The object and the subject of the research, the goal, the set research tasks and the applied methodology are formulated. A research thesis has been formulated, as well as 6 microtheses.

Chapter I reveals the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study.

The first paragraph is devoted to the basic concepts used in the tourism system and their relationship and connection with transport accessibility. Some of the main models of the tourism system are briefly presented and analyzed. The doctoral student pays special attention to the nature and peculiarities of transport accessibility as a main element of the system of concepts applied in his dissertation. In the same context, the concepts of general and transport infrastructure, superstructure, destination, tourist product and resources are analyzed. E. Petrov shows a very good knowledge of the theory and models of the elements considered by him. Very briefly, the author dwells on the different types of visitors in urban tourist destinations in view of the fact that they are a major component of tourist transport accessibility.

The second paragraph presents the methodology of the study. Its territorial scope is specified and the main sources of information are presented. Impressive is the wide range of sources used by the author (in particular the GIS data) to which he has gained access and which have enabled further his detailed and in-depth research. The doctoral student is well acquainted with the research conducted since 2010 on the state and management of tourism in the city of Sofia. The nature and characteristics of the doctoral student's own research are described in detail (field research, surveys - excellent knowledge of the surveys conducted so far in the capital has been demonstrated, and semi-structured interviews - 16 in number). It is noteworthy that E. Petrov demonstrates a very good knowledge of tourist accessibility in other major European capitals and uses them for comparison with the city of Sofia. Such an approach to providing good practice on a given issue is relatively rare and deserves admiration.

The methods of the field research conducted by Emil Petrov are described in detail - for the condition of the street network and the different ways of moving along it.

The methods used for information processing, as well as for formulating the concept of transport accessibility are presented.

The main limitations in the implementation of the set tasks and the achievement of the goal of the research are also described.

Chapter II presents an in-depth and circumstantial situational analysis of tourism, demography, transport accessibility and other spatial and urban planning problems in Sofia, and in particular in its central part. The analysis is composed from the general to the private, as the first paragraph considers the general state of tourism in Sofia, the second paragraph - the transport infrastructure and its problems, the third paragraph - the mass urban public transport, etc. The doctoral student has thoroughly and comprehensively examined the condition and problems in addition to public urban public transport, as well as other forms and ways of getting around the city, such as taxi services, car rental, cycling and walking, as well as the problems with parking in the capital (the different types of parking and the parking regime in Sofia as a whole are considered). At the end of each analysis there is a summary of the problems and challenges to the respective element. This chapter also analyzes the information security of transport, the movement of disadvantaged people and the Legislative Framework and strategic documents for transport accessibility and its management in Sofia Municipality. Apart from the fact that the doctoral student demonstrates excellent knowledge of the situation

and its problems, there is also a great deal of constructive criticism, as well as a personal opinion of the author on the various problem areas.

It can be argued that Assistant Professor Emil Petrov has examined in detail and analyzed in depth all aspects of transport services in the capital, and for almost every single element good practices from major European capitals are presented.

Chapter III is devoted to the already known, as well as to the author's studies on the transport accessibility of the Central City Hall of Sofia. The analysis of previous studies is detailed, in-depth and objective, highlighting both their strengths and the gaps made in them, most often due to the limited purpose of the study.

The author's own survey is correctly described and analyzed. The questionnaire is well compiled and covers all aspects of transport services and accessibility of tourists in the Central City Hall of Sofia. The obtained results are presented visually in tables with multiple cross-tabs.

The analysis of the results of the semi-structured interview with representatives of municipal structures and non-governmental organizations is relatively short, but it also gives a clear summary of the issues discussed.

The main contribution point of the dissertation is revealed in **Chapter IV**, where in fact the author's vision for the concept of development of transport accessibility in the Central City Hall of Sofia is presented.

After a detailed SWOT analysis of Sofia in the context of transport accessibility, the author concludes that after a necessary change in management policy the development of transport accessibility should be based on the five principles: city for people, accessible city, increased quality of city life, integrated planning and planning by all stakeholders and institutions. Following are specific decisions and proposals of the doctoral student in 10 separate areas.

The Conclusion summarizes the main outcomes of the study.

The following more important contributions in the dissertation can be highlighted:

1. An in-depth analysis and assessment of the place of transport accessibility in the structure of tourism and in particular in the tourist product of urban destinations has been made, for which purpose an appropriate methodology has been created and tested;

2. The strategic, planning and regulatory documents of Sofia Municipality for the development of transport and tourism in the city of Sofia in general and in its central part in particular have been studied and analyzed. A number of good practices in various European capitals in this regard have been studied and analyzed;

3. The accessibility to the anthropogenic tourist sites in the central part of the city with the separate types of transport and on foot for the separate target groups has been studied and analyzed and the existing problems and the reasons for their occurrence and manifestation have been identified and analyzed separately. For this purpose, a huge amount of secondary and primary information has been collected and processed;

4. Within the framework of the developed target concept for the development of the tourist accessibility in the Central City Hall of the city of Sofia, specific solutions for limiting the identified problems in the context of the concept for sustainable development of tourism have been defined.

The summary meets the requirements and reflects to a large extent and objectively the content of the dissertation.

The doctoral student has 3 publications on the topic of the dissertation, which fully meets the requirements for conducting the defense procedure.

Question to the doctoral student: Has the dissertation been submitted to the respective competent bodies from Sofia Municipality and if YES, what is their attitude to the developed concept?

In **conclusion**, I believe that the doctoral student has put in a lot of work and effort and achieved significant results. Emil Petrov has shown that he knows the theory and methodology of tourism research. The dissertation "Management of transport accessibility to tourist sites in the central part of Sofia" has been developed with a high degree of precision, depth and detail, and contains research contributions of significant scientific, methodological and practical value. The variety of illustrative elements in the dissertation is also impressive. In general, it fully complies with the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" for awarding the scientific and educational degree "Doctor".

All this gives me the reason to give an entirely positive assessment of the dissertation and I offer the esteemed scientific jury to vote for Emil Borisov Petrov to receive the scientific-educational degree "Doctor" in the professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences, scientific specialty "Geography of recreation and tourism".

27.08.2020
Sofia

MEMBER OF THE SCIENTIFIC JURY:

Prof. DrSci Maria Vodenska