

Subject:

Dissertation with title:

"Life Cycle of the Tourist Product of the Destination Samokov Municipality)", with scientific supervisor Prof. Maria Vodenska, D.s.

for the award of the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in the professional field 4.4 Earth Sciences, scientific specialty "Geography of Recreation and Tourism" to the PhD student

Vasya Verchova Yaneva at the Department of Geography of Tourism, Faculty of Geology and Geography, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

#### OPINION

by Professor Boian Iordanov Koulov, PhD, Economic and Social Geography,

Institute for Climate, Atmosphere and Water Research, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

Member of the Scientific Jury

The submitted documentation complies with the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation.

In terms of volume (277 pages in total, including 26 tables, 61 figures, 5 appendices, 3 maps and one map-chart, main text divided into 5 chapters, introduction, conclusion and a huge bibliography of 365 sources, of which 90 in Cyrillic, 275 in Latin, and 14 internet sources) and structure, the presented dissertation and the abstract comply with the requirements of the aforementioned law, the regulations of the training organization, as well as the specificity of the topic under study. In my opinion, the map of the Borovets resort complex, presented as an economic map, is more of a tourist map, but the dissertator has correctly indicated that he is not the author and, like the other maps in the dissertation, is used exclusively for illustrative purposes.

The bibliography demonstrates a high degree of knowledge of Bulgarian authors and also the rich base of foreign publications in this field. I recommend more precision in the bibliography: for some publications - the first two - the publisher is not mentioned. Clearly separate the documents and publications without an author from those for which authors are indicated. Where there is sufficient information to cite publications correctly, it is not necessary, nor is it accepted, to cite the websites, e.g. science direct, from which they have been 'downloaded'.

I find the topic of the presented dissertation to be topical, as the object and subject of the research are correctly defined. The methodology is correctly selected in accordance with the set tasks. The methods, such as drawing up questionnaires to explore the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders, conducting self-administered surveys and semi-structured interviews with key informants in the field, are appropriate and their use leads to interesting and scientifically useful results. The structure of the thesis

is fully consistent with the stated aim and plays a very significant role in the successful development of the thesis topic. However, I believe that its second part, namely "Life Cycle of the Tourism Product and the Tourism Destination", despite its considerable volume, in its essence belongs to the first part - "Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of the Research". The life cycle of the tourist product, as well as that of the tourist destination, in my opinion, are also parts of the theoretical basis of the research and are the basis for the methodology used in it. A number of criticisms can be made and have been made in the literature about the 'biologization' of economic concepts such as 'product' and 'tourist destination' in relation to attributing processes and phenomena such as life, behavior, rejuvenation and the like to them. Importantly, the PhD student has demonstrated here his ability to analyze them critically, with reference to scholarly opinions, arguments, facts and arguments. Theoretical models, e.g. the Buchalis' model (2000), have been successfully applied to the destination of Samokov municipality. I agree with the findings and conclusion of the thesis, which are consistent with and follow from its content.

The abstract meets the requirements and, with some editorial remarks and more substantial exceptions, such as chap. V.4, fully and accurately reflects the dissertation as presented. The contributions of the dissertation are correctly presented and reflect the actual work done by the dissertation advisor. I accept them with a remark to reword the second contribution.

Three publications related to the dissertation topic are presented, all from 2024, one under seal. It makes an excellent impression that the PhD student is the sole author of the three publications. Two of them are parts of international conference proceedings, without indicating whether they are edited or refereed. In this regard, I make a recommendation for greater activity with a view to publication in refereed journals.

My conclusion is that the candidate is familiar with the current Bulgarian and foreign scientific literature on the topic under study and is able to handle the scientific toolkit professionally, including conducting independent and successful field research and analyzing the results. I believe that the results obtained from the research are of considerable interest to science and are very useful, especially for local planning authorities. No plagiarism has been identified. The submitted documents comply with the requirements and, in view of all the above, it is with great pleasure that I propose to the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to award to the candidate the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in the scientific specialty of Recreation and Tourism Geography.

29. 11. 2024, Sofia

Signed by:

B. Koulov