

REVIEW

on the dissertation work of Kalina Tilko, a full-time doctoral student, on the topic "Cultural events as an engine of local tourism development: effects related to the announcement of Plovdiv as the European Capital of Culture 2019"

with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elka Dogramadzhieva,

submitted for the receipt of the scientific and educational degree "doctor" in the professional area 4.4. Earth Sciences (Recreation and Tourism Geography)

By Prof. Dr. Maria Vodenska, MVBU-Botevgrad, professional area 4.4. Earth Sciences (Recreation and Tourism Geography)

The review is prepared according to Art. 4 of ZRASRB, the Rules for its application, the Rules of Sofia University, Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Geology and Geography dated 07.09.2024 (protocol No. 8) and Rector's order No. RD-38-457/19.07.2024.

The present dissertation has a volume of 223 pages, literature of 95 Bulgarian and 125 foreign language titles, 5 Internet sources, 20 tables and 36 figures, 9 appendices. It is structured into an Introduction, five chapters and a Conclusion.

The topic is formulated correctly, the Introduction is written very well, the relevance of the research is argued, the subject, object, goal and sub-goals of research, tasks and methods are formulated. 5 research questions are derived. The main difficulties and limitations of the study are discussed. The essence of each chapter is briefly presented.

In the **First Chapter**, the main concepts and theoretical statements related to the European Capital of Culture initiative are examined in sufficient detail and depth. The doctoral student follows in detail the origin of the initiative, its administration,

goals and expected effects. It is indicated how the ESC is expected to impact tourism, although this is not a specific goal of the initiative. The benefits and risks of its implementation are described.

The second part is dedicated to local tourism development and, in particular, to the role of cultural events in it. Special attention is paid to the publication of Andriotis (2000) and in particular to the relationship between the two concepts of "development" and "growth". The evolution of the concept of tourism development is also traced in some Bulgarian sources. Considerable attention is given to the classification and nature of individual participants (stakeholders) in tourism. An interesting analysis of the various definitions has been made, with which I fully agree. The author declares his understanding of tourism participants by supporting the third type of classifications, including the local population and tourists.

A number of concepts related to ECC have been examined in great detail and depth. Cultural tourism has been traced through its numerous definitions (in foreign and Bulgarian sources) from its appearance to the present day. Its presentation in significant Bulgarian state documents such as the Concept for Tourist Zoning of Bulgaria, the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development, and the Tourism Law has been analysed. The author unequivocally indicates the definition adopted by her for the needs of the current dissertation work.

In a similar way, the concepts of event tourism, festival tourism and cultural events are analyzed constructively, with a clearly expressed author's opinion. The presentation of the term "festivalization" is also interesting, although it has no specific relation to the dissertation work.

Quite rightly, K. Tilko pays great attention to the nature and theory of tourism impacts in general and the impacts of event tourism in particular. A number of

opinions and criticisms from both foreign and Bulgarian authors are presented. Two classifications of the impacts of this type of tourism are presented, and the analysis and commentary of the doctoral student at the end of the chapter is completely relevant.

The **Second chapter** consists of two parts - an analysis of the studies known so far on the effects of the ECC initiative in various destinations, and an exposition of the specific methodology of the research carried out by the doctoral student.

The extremely large number of publications on the subject, studied and cited by Kalina Tilko, both abroad and in Bulgaria, is impressive. The author quite expediently grouped the numerous publications into 6 sections and according to them she carried out her analyses. Some of the main methods applied by the authors are indicated - social exchange theory, description and descriptive analysis, systematic review, etc.

What follows is a detailed and in-depth study and analysis of the publications from the individual 6 sections, which allows to highlight their characteristics, peculiarities and differences. Several comparative studies are also reviewed. This allowed the author to summarize the results of the research and formulate several more general conclusions, which, according to the reviewer, are fully justified.

The own research methodology is explained and described in great detail. The model for researching the impact of large-scale cultural initiatives on local tourism development, which the PhD student presents as a contribution, is logical and actually follows the sequence of the tasks performed.

A proprietary model was constructed to specifically assess the attitudes and perceptions of interested parties (adapted from Dogramadzhieva et al., 2018), which

allows the separation of the effects of the initiative in terms of local tourism development into five separate groups.

The sources and methods of collecting secondary and primary information are described in detail. The individual questionnaires, their structure and purpose are presented in depth and content. A number of direct and derived indicators were used in processing the secondary data. Primary information about the attitudes and perceptions of tourists and the local population were analyzed primarily quantitatively, according to the sociodemographic profile of the respondents. The perceptions of the other participants in the local tourism development were processed using qualitative methods and, more specifically, content analysis.

Here also the difficulties and limitations of the study are objectively presented.

In **Chapter Three**, the history of the application, preparation, organization and holding of the 2019 ECC - Plovdiv is traced in detail. It started in 1999, when the European Month of Culture was held in the city. It is believed that this participation served as a good exercise for Plovdiv and a useful experience in the implementation of the ESC in 2019.

The following text reflects various initiatives and activities during the ECC application period (2011-2014). The main initiators and participants in the preparation of the application are described, as well as the evaluation process itself. Information on the costs incurred for the application is indicated. It is reflected to what extent tourism was a part of the application documents. Plovdiv won with the main strengths of the broad involvement of the public and the approach to the Roma community included.

Year by year - from 2015 to 2018 inclusive, the initiatives, projects (key 7 in number), efforts and activities in preparation for the year of the ECC are presented.

The recommendations of the internal monitoring carried out in 2016 are reflected, followed by a second one in 2017. The EC also carried out two external monitoring in 2016 and 2018. According to the author, the interim internal monitoring did not provide sufficiently reliable results to represent the effects of the initiative on local tourism development. The document did not provide sufficient evidence that all the changes registered in it were caused by the ECC initiative.

The year of the ECC - Plovdiv (2019) is followed step by step, reflecting many different, sometimes curious, aspects of the organization and its conduct. The use of open invitations (unlike in other ECCs) is noted, which ensured transparency and increased participation of the local community in the process of implementing the initiative.

The PhD student makes a constructive analysis of the Final National Monitoring Report of 2020, paying particular attention to the part dedicated to tourism growth. In particular, the 5 indicators associated with it are analyzed in detail and concerns are raised about the methodology used and the data presentation. Kalina Tilko considers that as a consequence to the above results are not sufficiently reliable. The difference between this report and the so-called Follow-up evaluation of ..., 2020 with author Ecoris is not very clear.

The analysis continues in the next period 2020-2023, again year by year. Various reports, results and activities (severely limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic) are tracked.

In **Chapter Four**, the author reveals the current trends in the development of tourism and the effects of the ECC Plovdiv 2019 based on secondary sources. First of all, the planning documents at municipal level are examined. As main documents, the Strategy and Plan for the sustainable development of tourism in Plovdiv for the

period 2014-2020 and the Integrated Development Plan of the Municipality of Plovdiv (PIRO) 2021-2027 are analyzed, and data on various indicators related to the cultural tourism is presented. The doctoral student believes that with some actions taken by the municipality, the participation of local entrepreneurs in the development of the city's cultural offer is reduced, the local initiative is hindered and thus the local community is harmed.

The following is an analysis of local tourism development (2012-2022), with relevant summaries, compared to other destinations (again based on official statistics). The tourist supply, tourist demand, efficiency of the accommodation base were examined successively, and very important conclusions were made regarding the influence of the ECC on them. According to PhD student, the impact of the ECC initiative is most strongly felt as a factor in terms of tourist behavior, and more specifically the change in the motivation of domestic tourists to visit the city. In general, the ECC has not contributed to the transformation of Plovdiv into a cultural destination of a higher rank, but it has helped to strengthen its positions. The impact on tourism demand in Plovdiv is lower than expected. The efficiency of the accommodation base in the municipality of Plovdiv has also not been affected by the ECC to the expected extent, and in relation to some indicators the effect is even negative. Most important, according to the reviewer, is the finding of serious information deficits in official tourism statistics, which do not allow a full and thorough assessment of the impact of the initiative on local tourism development.

The most significant contribution of the dissertation work is **Chapter Five**, in which Kalina Tilko presents and analyzes the results of her field studies (3 in number). Surveys were conducted among the main groups of interested persons – local population, tourists and key informants. The primary information gathered using these methods has been analyzed thematically - the results of the polls are

presented for individual types of effects of the ECC initiative - Plovdiv 2019. The exhaustive analysis and the revealed details, however, are summarized in just one sentence - "Based on the results of the three conducted empirical studies, it can be summarized that the perceptions of the effects of ESK Plovdiv 2019 are mostly positive and balanced..." (p. 198).

The conclusion is clear, concise and very well structured. Comprehensive answers to the 5 research questions are provided. It is emphasized that this is the first case among the studies on the subject of ECC, in which the local population is examined on the basis of its real involvement in the practical realization of the event, including as a volunteer. The conclusions follow from the conducted research, as well as directions for future research are outlined.

The doctoral student's impeccable in-text citation must be noted. The language and style are clear, concise and logical. Grammatical and punctuation errors and mistakes are not noticeable.

The abstract meets the requirements and reflects the content of the dissertation sufficiently fully and in detail.

I agree with the scientific and applied contributions formulated by the doctoral student.

The presented publications are two in number, which is quite sufficient according to the requirements of the procedure.

I have no questions or criticisms for the PhD student.

In **conclusion** - a thorough and independent wide-scope scientific study is presented. Dissertation student Kalina Tilko has shown excellent knowledge in the field of cultural tourism, its scientific research, the ECC initiative and its

implementation in Plovdiv, as well as good skills in handling a lot of various data and a knowledge in research methods and indicators.

Based on her analyses, the doctoral student has achieved the goal of her dissertation work – to determine whether hosting the ECC has an impact on local tourism development and, if so, in what way and how stakeholders perceive these impacts. She has completed all the assigned tasks.

Considering that a dissertationable doctoral dissertation is considered one that shows a very good knowledge of the theory and scientific literature on the subject, the ability to use different research methods, the ability of the doctoral student to make independent studies, analyzes and conclusions, I consider that the dissertation presented by Kalina Tilko significantly exceeds these requirements.

Based on the above, I express my fully positive assessment of the presented dissertation work. I believe that there is a completed independent scientific study with significant scientific and practical-applied contributions, the author has shown in-depth knowledge of theory and methodology in her chosen field, there is a completed empirical study, mastery of the main methods of processing and analysis of primary data and secondary information is proven. Taking into account all this, I propose to the respected members of the scientific jury to vote positively for Kalina Krasimirova Tilko to receive the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences (Geography of Recreation and Tourism).

09/25/2024

Sofia

Reviewer:

Prof. Dr. Maria Vodenska