

EXPERT OPINION

on a dissertation thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor",
field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences,
professional subarea 3.7. "Administration and management",
scientific specialty "Organization and management of production (forestry and forest
industry)"

Member of the scientific jury: Prof. Dr. Nadia Dimitrova Mironova - University of National and World Economy, scientific field 3 "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional subarea 3.7 "Administration and management"

Author of the dissertation: Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev, full-time doctoral student at the Department of "Management and Alternative Tourism" at the FSU of LTU - Sofia

Topic of the dissertation: "Possibilities for the development of sustainable tourism in forest areas in the Middle Rhodopes"

Research supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emil Rosenov Kitchoukov, Department of "Management and Alternative Tourism", University of Forestry, Sofia

1. Brief biographical data

Nikolay Tashev was born on September 4, 1984 in Sofia.

Education: In 2003, he completed his secondary education at the American College in Sofia. In the period 2011 - 2014, he studied at the Forestry University and obtained a Bachelor's degree in "Alternative Tourism". In 2016, he completed a Master's course in "Economic Management" and obtained a Master's degree in "Economic Management" at the Forestry University. In February 2019, he was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the Department of "Marketing and Production Management", later transformed into "Management and Alternative Tourism" by Order No. 44/04.02.2019 (Rector's Order No.ZSD- 36/04.02.2022 for the extension of the period of doctoral studies), Professional field: 3.7 "Administration and management", Scientific specialty /doctoral program/: "Organization and management of production (forestry and forest industry)".

Work experience: Nikolay Tashev began his professional career in 2003, successively working at McDonald's Bulgaria, as a domestic helper at the Social Assistance Agency, Smolyan in 2005-2006, holding various positions in the field of "Restaurant and Service" in 2006 - 2007 in Kelis" EOOD, and subsequently as a chef in various hotels in resort complexes by the sea and the city of Bansko in the period 2016 - 2018, and in 2019 in "Green Deli Cafe", Business Park 2, Central kitchen. During the period 2010-2015, he successively participated as a member of the working team of a Joint Russian-Bulgarian project with the Forest Institute of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IG SB RAN, Krasnoyarsk) and Forestry University, Sofia; in a scientific archaeological expedition; as a volunteer at the National University, Faculty of Biology, Botanical Garden, Chernivtsi, Ukraine; consultant to the "Together" Foundation - communication for support and development; participated in archaeological excavations and other activities.

2. General characteristics of the dissertation thesis

The proposed version of the Dissertation has 215 printed pages and contains an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a list of the literature used, and the main part contains 36 figures and 36 tables. An Event Calendar for the Middle Rhodope region samples and tables with survey results in accordance with the topic are presented in the appendix. The bibliographic reference contains 164 sources (82 of them are available Online), of which 62 are in Cyrillic

and the rest in Latin. The topic of the dissertation is current and significant for the theory and practice in the field of tourism and forestry in the country. The topicality of the issues under consideration, related to the organization and management of a sustainable tourist offer in forest areas, increases significantly in modern conditions, due to the growing concern due to climate changes and the need for sustainable use of resources. The object and subject of the research are clearly and separately defined. The purpose and tasks of the dissertation correspond to the current needs of management practice. The set goal is significant for the sustainable development of tourism in the considered area, and solving the tasks ensures its achievement. The research thesis and accompanying hypotheses are correctly formulated and model the logic of the dissertation research and the applied analytical tools. In the first chapter, the level of study of tourism in forest areas is examined, while the essence of sustainable tourism and the development of tourism in natural areas, the categorization of protected areas according to IUCN/IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), protected areas in Bulgaria, as well as the development of tourism in natural areas around the world. In a summary of the chapter, the important conclusions are given. The concepts presented are complete, coherent and analytical. In the second chapter, the methodological aspects for the study of the territorial development of tourism are presented. Paragraph 2.1 analyzes the scientific approaches to defining the concept of "sustainable development of tourism" in relation to the peculiarities of territorial development. In paragraph 2.2, various models for the sustainable development of nature-oriented and ecological tourism are considered, and their main advantages and disadvantages are analyzed. On the basis of the analysis carried out in paragraph 2.3, the methodology of the experimental research is presented. The analysis and assessment of the economic contribution of the organizational forms of ecotourism in the sustainable development of the Middle Rhodopes region made in the third chapter is comprehensive, complete and detailed, and the following have been consistently examined and analyzed:

- the current state of tourism in the Middle Rhodopes;
- National strategies and action plans;
- Legal framework;
- Stakeholders;
- Tourist markets and products;
- Trends in the domestic market;
- International market trends;
- Natural and socially oriented tourism and resources for their development;
- Ecological tourism;
- Event tourism;
- Results of the survey of entrepreneurs and tourists;
- Analysis of the state of the tourist environment and its visitors in the Middle Rhodopes.

Based on the above-mentioned analyses, an assessment was made of the state of the tourist environment and the degree of sustainability of tourist forms and directions of tourist offer in the Middle Rhodope region. The strengths and weaknesses of the tourism environment in terms of the sustainability of its development in the Middle Rhodopes from the point of view of entrepreneurs, tourists, the state of the existing infrastructural tourism environment and the various alternative forms of tourism offer are determined. In the conclusion, conclusions and recommendations are given, which include all the achievements of the research, and the recommendations are specific and useful for practice.

3. Evaluation of the received scientific and scientific-applied results

The dissertation contains the empirical material necessary to generate the obtained results, as well as the sufficient theoretical justification. From the work presented, it can be concluded that the doctoral student can carry out qualitative theoretical and theoretical-applied economic research, which is also the purpose of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". The more important contributions in the dissertation thesis of Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev are the following:

- Six municipalities - Asenovgrad, Chepelare, Smolyan, Borino, Devin, Banite, collectively included in the Middle Rhodope region - and the tourist environment in them were studied. The area has been visited multiple times in the period 2020-2023, collecting information from local sources, walking and describing popular routes, collecting data on the state of tourism and related space according to 271 representatives of tourists and local representatives of the tourism sector. The tourist environment and the popular forms of alternative tourism have been studied, analyzed, evaluated and recommendations have been proposed to improve the existing situation.
- An annual event calendar has been prepared for the events held annually or periodically on the territory of the Middle Rhodopes, presented in detail in Appendix 1. It chronologically describes the events in the municipalities, their time, location, type, occasion and a brief description of the activities and customs, related to the events.
- An innovative approach for the region was applied to collect, process and evaluate information on the development of tourism. It is based on both objective facts and the personal impressions of tourists and entrepreneurs from individual aspects of the tourist environment. The profile of local entrepreneurs and their guests - tourists, the trends in demand and supply, the comparative degree of sustainability between them is outlined.
- The main characteristics of the tourist environment are evaluated from the point of view of the created and existing impressions of the participants in the tourist processes. Structured survey forms have been prepared for interested parties, and the results have been systematized and analyzed. The results of data processing are displayed as numerical values, on the basis of which evaluations, comparisons, conclusions and recommendations are made.

4. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation thesis

The doctoral student has presented four publications on the issues of the dissertation work, two of which are abroad. They include texts and ideas from the main development.

5. Evaluation of the autoref

The abstract is made according to the requirements and is 51 pages long. Contains all the requisites of the dissertation work. Emphasis is placed on the main results of the study.

6. Testimonials

The recommendations for the dissertation thesis are in the direction of developing research on the possibilities and prospects for the development of various forms of alternative tourism offer in Bulgaria. Contributions must be presented even more convincingly. They are significant and their value should not be underestimated. The research also contains more contributing moments and useful information that are somehow not highlighted in the foreground and are more difficult to recognize by the user of the research.

7. Personal impressions

I know the PhD student as his supervisor. He is smart, capable, organized, fair and above all good, honest and responsible. The research in his work is done with high correctness to science. His persistence allowed the difficult tasks of the research to be solved.

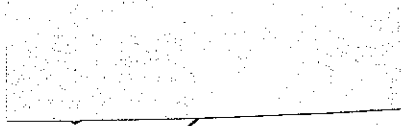
CONCLUSION

In view of the relevance and significance of the completed scientific research in the dissertation thesis of Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev, I believe that it meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations for its implementation at LTU - Sofia.

I propose to the members of the Scientific Jury to give a positive assessment to the dissertation thesis of Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev and to award him the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional subarea 3.7. "Administration and management", specialty "Organization and management of production" (forestry and forest industry).

11.04.2024
Sofia

Member of the Scientific Jury:


/prof. Dr. Nadia Mironova/