



## STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Teodora Veleva Rizova, New Bulgarian University, Department of  
Administration and Management

Academic Field 3.9 Tourism

Regarding: PhD thesis for acquiring the educational and scientific degree  
“Doctor” in the academic field 3.7 Administration and management, Academic  
speciality (Organisation and management of production (forestry and forest  
industry)

Theme: Possibilities for sustainable tourism development of the forest areas  
in the Middle Rhodopes

Grounds for submitting a statement: participation as a member of the jury  
for the defence of a PhD thesis according to Order ZPS -88/26.02.2024 on the  
basis of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture  
from 20.02. 2024 with Protocol No. 344, Art. 4(1), (2) and (3) and Art. 34, (3), (4)  
of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the Forestry  
University to conduct a procedure for the defence of a PhD thesis to acquire an  
educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” written by the full-time doctoral  
student Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev, Department of Marketing and Management of  
Production, Alternative Tourism at present.

### 1. General characteristics of the PhD thesis

The presented PhD thesis consists of three main chapters, an introduction  
and a conclusion, as well as a bibliography and relevant appendices. The length of  
the PhD thesis is 204 pages of body and 161 sources, including scientific literature  
and websites.

The study has both a theoretical and an empirical part based on an  
autonomously developed toolkit as well as data analysis. The instruments and the  
results of the study are indicated in the appendices to the dissertation work.

The topicality of the theme *Opportunities for the development of  
sustainable tourism in the forest areas in the Middle Rhodopes* is determined by  
two main elements: on the one hand, the availability of opportunities for the  
development of new types of tourist activities, using the natural resources of  
Bulgaria, and on the other, from the fact that a large part of the study is of general  
theoretical character which extends the path from theoretical analysis to the  
practical application of knowledge for the development of tourist activity. The

theoretical, normative and empirical analysis of the theme is essential for the topicality, while the availability of specific data enables immediate application of the results of the PhD thesis.

The purpose of the study is the establishment and assessment of the organisational forms that are directly relevant to the implementation of the tourist activity. The main goal of the study envisages solving five main tasks.

The object of analysis of the thesis is the territory of 6 municipalities, namely Smolyan, Chepelare, Asenovgrad, Borino, Devin and Banite, collectively called Middle Rhodopes.

The subject of the study is the organisational forms of alternative tourism in the forest areas in the Middle Rhodopes region.

The thesis of the study is that the sustainable development of tourism in the forest areas in the Middle Rhodope region implies the formation and development of a tourist market that preserves natural, cultural and other resources for future generations, increases the level of education and responsibility of tourists and entrepreneurs, and economic benefits are observed for local small and medium businesses as well as the local population in the current time period.

The thesis comprises 161 sources, highlighting the wide range of sources used, and practically all of them are directly related to the subject and object indicated in it.

## 2. Evaluation of the scientific activity presented in the PhD thesis

The basis of the assessment is the fulfilment of the tasks set by the author and, ultimately, the realisation of the purpose of the study. Based on the tasks set, it has to be noted:

- The essence of sustainable tourism has been revealed, presenting the various variants of the understanding and among them an accurate assessment of the possibilities for sustainable tourism development in the forest territories;
- An analysis was made of the main organisational forms of tourist activity, indicating those that find can be applied in the specific conditions of our country. A review of the main methods for analysing the degree of sustainability of tourism activity in individual types of tourism was carried out;

- Based on the analysis, an adapted methodology for assessing sustainability in the Middle Rhodopes was prepared, taking into account the existing environment for the realisation of tourist activities;
- A predictive analysis of the forms of sustainable development of tourism activity was made, and along with it, the main opportunities for the region were presented, considered both under the existing conditions and with a view to possible development;
- The PhD thesis contains a detailed analysis of the organisational forms of tourist supply, with particular attention being paid to the economic aspects characterising the individual forms, their strengths and weaknesses from the point of view of tourism.

Proceeding from the fulfilment of the tasks of the PhD thesis, it can be stated that it fulfils to a completely satisfactory extent the goal set prior to the study.

Methodologically, the principle of compliance with the idea of sustainable development and, in particular, sustainable development of tourism is followed.

The author's analysis of the sources is accompanied by his own view, based on the specific conditions in the Rhodopes, the state of the tourist offer and the possible prospects for development.

This shows that the author is not only well acquainted with the existing methodology, but is able to adapt it to solve specific tasks facing the tourism industry.

It should also be noted that on the basis of the study, recommendations have been made that can be used by business entities, given a certain level of preparation. Thus, the PhD thesis has not only scientific, but also purely practical significance.

### 3. Scientific and scientifically applicable contributions of the dissertation

The main contributions of the dissertation should include:

- an analysis of six municipalities, namely Asenovgrad, Chepelare, Smolyan, Borino, Devin, Banite, or Middle Rhodopes, and the tourist environment in them. At the same time, the information is sufficiently up-to-date and was collected during the period 2020-2023.

An assessment of popular routes in the region was made, and for this purpose a corresponding study of the tourist industry was conducted, verifying the data for the needs of the study;

- an analysis of the events in the municipalities was made, as well as the possibility of the events being tied to certain tourist activities. Variants of using certain events for the implementation of specific types of sustainable tourism were considered;
- an innovative approach was created for collecting, processing and evaluating tourism information in the respective region. The model takes into account the peculiarities of tourism activities and, at the same time, adapts to the assessment of individual entrepreneurs.

In the application of the model, a comparative analysis procedure was carried out, taking into account the opinion of entrepreneurs engaged in tourism and tourists as users of the specific tourist product.

A study of the comparative degree of sustainability of individual types of tourist activity was also carried out.

Proceeding from the mentioned contributions, it can be stated that, on the one hand, there is a scientific contribution, namely in the adaptation of models for sustainable tourism to the conditions of our country and, more specifically, to a certain region of it, and, on the other hand, the contributions provide a scientific-applied element as follows:

- an up-to-date analysis of the state of the tourist industry in the Middle Rhodopes;
- an application of a specific evaluation model that allows the creation of a profile of sustainable forms of tourism in the region;
- the model is not characterised by purely speculative construction, but it is based on the opinion of both entrepreneurs from the industry and tourists on the implemented projects in the relevant area.

The general evaluation of the scientific contributions is high since the adaptation of the existing models of sustainable tourism to the conditions of a specific country and even more so to the conditions of a specific region is sufficiently complex and brings its own scientific potential.

The analyses made are based on a maximally broad approach, and the author did not fail to analyse all, including the administrative and legal conditions of the functioning of the tourist business.

The assessment of the scientifically-applied significance of the PhD thesis is also high enough, since the presented models are based on one hand on real data, and, on the other, provide specific recommendations and models for application in the field of business.

#### 4. Critical remarks

In general, I have no significant critical remarks on the PhD thesis. However, it seems appropriate to me that in conducting the study of the model that the author developed there should have been a more detailed analysis of the methodology and the degree of representativeness of the data obtained through it.

It would also be appropriate to indicate the possibilities of adapting the model to other regions in the conclusion of the PhD thesis.

#### 5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the submitted PhD thesis, I support awarding the scientific and educational degree "Doctor".

March 17, 2024

Assoc. Prof. Teodora Rizova, PhD