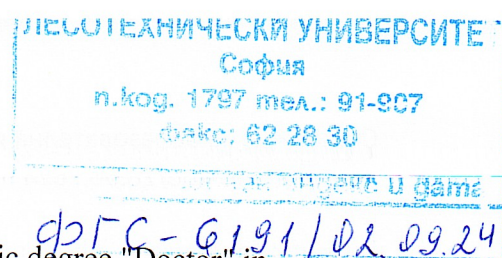


Становище за образователна и научна степен „Доктор“,
Заповед ЗПС-406/28.06.2024 на Ректора на ЛТУ



OPINION

on a dissertation thesis for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.7. "Administration and Management," specialty "Organization and Management of Production (Forestry and Forest Industry)"

Member of the Scientific Jury:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolay Konstantinov Neykov, Department of Alternative Tourism, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, University of Forestry, Sofia

Author of the Dissertation:

Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev, full-time PhD student at the Department of Forest Management and Economics, Faculty of Forestry, University of Forestry, Sofia

Dissertation Topic:

"Opportunities for the Development of Sustainable Tourism in Forest Areas in the Central Rhodopes"

Scientific Supervisor:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emil Rozenov Kichukov, University of Forestry, Sofia

Scientific Consultant:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vladimir Dimitrov Vladimirov

This opinion has been prepared based on the decision of the Scientific Jury formed by Order ЗПС-406/28.06.2024 of the Rector of the University of Forestry.

1. Brief Biographical Data

PhD student Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev completed his secondary education at the American College in Sofia. As early as 2001, he became involved in nature and tourism initiatives, notably the ILSI2001 project – International Leadership Study in Israel BBYO Bulgaria: Leadership and Communication Skills, introduction to Jewish culture and religion, survival in various natural conditions (mountain, desert), and building international connections. He completed his higher education at the University of Forestry, Sofia, Faculty of Business Management, with a Bachelor's degree in "Alternative Tourism" (valedictorian) and a Master's degree in "Business Management" (valedictorian).

Throughout his studies and after graduation, PhD student Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev has been actively engaged in tourism practice, holding various positions that enriched his competence in the field, such as working in "Restaurant and Service" at McDonald's Bulgaria, "Restaurant and Service" at "Kelis" Ltd., and as a chef at "Santa Marina" complex in Sozopol, "St. Ivan Rilski" hotel in Bansko, and Art Club "Museum" in Sofia. He is also a consultant for the "Together" Foundation, working on a project for innovation in education, creating ten educational bio-gardens in Sofia with the support of the America for Bulgaria Foundation.

General Characteristics of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of 216 printed pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, appendices, and references. The text contains 47 figures, 37 tables, and 164

information sources. There are 6 appendices containing extensive information from the conducted research and analyses.

The dissertation topic is relevant and significant for the theory and practice of alternative tourism in the country. The aim is to identify and evaluate organizational forms of alternative tourism in forest areas of the Central Rhodopes that lead to sustainable tourism development in the region. The research object is the territory of six municipalities – Smolyan, Chepelare, Asenovgrad, Borino, Devin, and Banite, collectively referred to as the Central Rhodopes. The subject of the research is the organizational forms of alternative tourism in the forest areas of the Central Rhodopes.

The first chapter examines the level of research on tourism in forest areas in the country. Problems and specific features of sustainable tourism, its role in the circular economy, and its impact on the national economy are discussed. A significant contribution to practice is the comparison between mass and sustainable tourism. Summaries are made about tourism in natural areas, and useful characteristics of natural areas in the country are provided. The information about tourism in natural areas worldwide contributes to the awareness of the significance of the topic and the overall study.

In the second chapter, the author thoroughly analyzes the methodological essence of sustainable tourism development, presenting concepts and models. The methodology of the experimental study presents the PhD student's own model, based on empirical data from territorial research in the study area. A survey method was used to collect primary information. The survey was designed to reveal the psychographics of tourists in the Central Rhodopes, a difficult criterion for market segmentation, making this dissertation particularly useful for practice.

In the third chapter, the author applies the results of the conducted research and describes in detail the elements of tourism infrastructure that support various organizational forms of alternative tourism. The chapter contains results from studies of both market participants – entrepreneurs and tourists. The PhD student evaluates the sustainability of tourism forms and trends in the Central Rhodopes, concluding that ecotourism in the studied municipalities is in a state of sustainable development, while recreational tourism in the area does not exhibit sustainable development. Such results prove the realism of the research and help address existing problems.

2. Evaluation of the Obtained Scientific and Applied Scientific Results

The dissertation contains the necessary empirical material for generating the results, as well as sufficient theoretical justification. From the presented work, it can be concluded that the PhD student can conduct high-quality theoretical and applied economic research, which is the goal of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor." The main contributions in the dissertation of Nikolay Alexandrov Tashev are as follows:

- Six municipalities – Asenovgrad, Chepelare, Smolyan, Borino, Devin, Banite – collectively the Central Rhodopes, and their tourism environment were studied. The area was visited multiple times from 2020–2023, gathering information from local sources, documenting popular routes, and collecting data on the state of tourism and related spaces from 271 representatives of tourists and local tourism sector representatives. The tourism environment and popular forms of alternative tourism

were studied, analyzed, evaluated, and recommendations were made for improving the existing situation.

- An annual event calendar was created for events held annually or periodically in the Central Rhodopes (Appendix 1). It chronologically describes the events in the municipalities, their time, location, type, purpose, and a brief description of activities and customs related to the events.
- An innovative approach for the area was applied for collecting, processing, and evaluating information on tourism development. It is based on both objective facts and personal impressions of tourists and entrepreneurs from different aspects of the tourism environment. This approach allows for outlining the main profiles of local entrepreneurs and their guests, trends in supply and demand, comparative sustainability between them, and evaluating some characteristics of the tourism environment from the perspective of participants' impressions in the tourism processes. Separate questionnaires were developed for the two surveyed groups, and the results were systematized. The results from data processing were presented as numerical values, which were the basis for the assessments, comparisons, conclusions, and recommendations.

3. Evaluation of the Publications on the Dissertation

The author has prepared four publications based on the research in the dissertation, two of which are sole-authored. They have been presented at prestigious scientific forums and show the results of the research on the dissertation topic.

4. Evaluation of the Abstract

The abstract is prepared according to the requirements and is 51 pages long. It contains all the requisites from the dissertation.

5. Recommendations

The recommendations for the dissertation are aimed at expanding research to other regions of the country. The contributions should be presented even more convincingly. They are significant and should not be underestimated. The study contains other contributory points and useful information. At the end of the third chapter, there are some ambiguities in the analysis of the costs of one tourist and the revenues that should be clarified when applying the work to solve practical problems. Often, the models are described with text instead of being illustrated analytically or in tabular form. In some graphs, the axes should be labeled.

6. Personal Impressions

The candidate is diligent, capable, and above all honest. His research is conducted with high scientific integrity. His perseverance has allowed him to solve the challenging tasks of the research.

CONCLUSION

Given the relevance and significance of the completed scientific research in the dissertation of Nikolay Alexandrov Toshev, I consider that it meets the requirements of the Law on the

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Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations for its implementation at the University of Forestry, Sofia. I recommend that the members of the Scientific Jury give a positive assessment of the dissertation of Nikolay Alexandrov Toshev and award him the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.7. "Administration and Management," specialty "Organization and Management of Production (Forestry and Forest Industry)."

August 20, 2024

Sofia

Member of the Scientific Jury:

/Assoc. Prof. Nikolay Konstantinov Neykov/