



EVALUATION REPORT

ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ВАРНА

Вх. № PA20-803/12.05.2026г

on a doctoral dissertation,

authored by **Maria Peycheva Undzhieva,**

full-time PhD student, Doctoral Programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

Professional Field 3.9 Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna

on the topic: “**Improving the Image of a Resort Complex on an Emissive Tourist Market
(the Case of Borovets Resort on the British Market)**”

Scientific Supervisor: **prof. Stoyan Petkov Marinov, PhD**

Evaluation report prepared by: prof. Velina Ivancheva Kazandzhieva, PhD
University of Economics – Varna, Professor in Professional Field 3.9 Tourism,
Scientific Specialty “Economics and Management” (Tourism),
validated in the Academic Staff Register of the National Centre for
Information and Documentation (NACID),
section “Habilitation Academic Staff with Scientometric Indicators”,
member of the Scientific Jury appointed by Order No. RD-06-82/06.04.2026.

The present **evaluation report** has been prepared pursuant to Decision No. 3 adopted at the first meeting of the Scientific Jury held on 30.04.2026.

1. General Presentation of the Dissertation. The dissertation authored by Maria Undzhieva comprises 202 pages and is structured into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, and seven appendices.

The first chapter examines the theoretical foundations of destination image. The essence and characteristics of destination image, its structural components, and the factors influencing its formation are analysed. Special attention is devoted to the author’s conceptual model for the formation of the image of a mountain tourist destination, as well as to the developed methodology and research instruments for destination image analysis.

The second chapter has an analytical character and focuses on the study of the image of Borovets Resort on the British emissive tourist market. A general overview of the resort as a mountain destination is presented, together with an analysis of the British emissive market for mountain tourism. Of particular interest are the conducted field survey among British tourists and the evaluation of the image of Borovets Resort. A positive aspect is also the comparative analysis conducted between Borovets, Bansko, and Pamporovo as mountain destinations on the British market.

In the third chapter, the PhD candidate proposes guidelines for improving the image of Borovets Resort as a mountain destination on the British market. Recommendations are formulated regarding the tourism product, pricing policy, distribution, and marketing communications, as well as strategic directions for improving the competitiveness and market positioning of the resort complex.



The dissertation addresses a topical and practically significant issue for tourism practice, while the exposition is characterized by very good structure and consistency. The research successfully combines theoretical aspects with practical applicability. The main focus is placed on the opportunities for improving the image of a Bulgarian mountain tourist destination and enhancing its competitiveness on the international tourism market.

2. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums. The scientific results of the dissertation have been disseminated through publications and participation in scientific forums related to the research topic. The PhD candidate presents four publications focusing on various aspects of the image of mountain tourist destinations and the consumer behaviour of British tourists, which directly correspond to the subject and research problem of the dissertation.

The publication activity includes scientific articles and conference papers addressing issues related to destination image formation factors, the specifics of mountain ski destination offerings, motivation in the selection of ski destinations, and the impact of crisis processes on tourist behaviour. The submitted publications are independent and demonstrate consistency in the candidate's scientific research and a profound interest in destination marketing and destination image issues. The dissertation results have received the necessary scientific dissemination and academic validation.

3. Assessment of the Structure and Content of the Dissertation. In the dissertation, the PhD candidate demonstrates very good theoretical preparation in the researched scientific field and the ability to conduct independent scientific research. The dissertation is characterized by structured and consistent exposition, including all necessary components of a doctoral dissertation. The theoretical, analytical, and applied aspects of the research are clearly distinguished.

The conducted analyses and proposed recommendations have practical orientation and are related to improving the image and market positioning of a Bulgarian mountain tourist destination on the British emissive market.

The dissertation abstract correctly reflects the main parts of the dissertation by presenting in a synthesized form its structure, subject, objective, research tasks, methodology, principal results, and contributions. Correspondence exists between the dissertation content and the information presented in the abstract.

From a lexical and stylistic perspective, the dissertation has been developed at a very good academic level. An appropriate scientific style characterized by clarity, consistency, and terminological precision has been employed. The text demonstrates high linguistic quality and logical coherence.

4. Identification and Evaluation of the Scientific and Scientifically Applied Contributions of the Dissertation. The dissertation outlines scientific and scientifically applied contributions corresponding to the subject, objective, and tasks of the research.

First, attention should be drawn to the contribution related to the development of an integrated theoretical framework for analysing the image of a mountain tourist destination. A positive aspect is the attempt to combine cognitive, affective, and behavioural image components, together with factors related to sustainability, service quality, and pricing policy.



The developed model adapts established international concepts to the specifics of Bulgarian mountain resorts.

A significant scientifically applied contribution is the conducted analysis of the image of Borovets Resort on the British emissive tourist market. Major competitive advantages of the resort have been identified, together with several problematic areas related to infrastructure, service quality, pricing policy, and seasonality dependence.

The conducted empirical study among British tourists and representatives of the tour operator sector also has contribution-oriented character. Through survey research and expert interviews, consumer attitudes toward Borovets Resort have been systematized, and factors influencing satisfaction, perceived value, and revisit intentions have been identified.

Practical significance is demonstrated by the formulated strategic directions for improving the image of Borovets Resort, related to modernization of the tourism product, enhancement of service quality, integration of sustainability principles, and optimization of pricing policy. The proposed solutions are substantiated through the results of the conducted research and possess applicability in managerial practice.

A positive aspect is also represented by the developed recommendations for multi-season resort development, digitalization of tourism services, quality standardization, and adaptation of marketing approaches to the specifics of the British tourist market.

Contribution-oriented character is also demonstrated by the proposed segmented pricing model based on value perception and the specific characteristics of British tourists. Overall, the contributions of the dissertation demonstrate an effort to combine theoretical analysis with practical applicability and contribute to the development of research in the field of destination image and destination competitiveness.

5. Established or Non-Established Plagiarism in the Dissertation and the Dissertation Abstract. No indications of plagiarism have been identified in the dissertation or the dissertation abstract. The cited sources have been properly referenced and included in the bibliography in accordance with the principles of scientific ethics and academic integrity. No unauthorized borrowings of texts, ideas, or scientific results have been identified that could call into question the originality or authorship of the dissertation.

6. Critical Remarks and Recommendations. The empirical research is focused mainly on the British emissive market, which is fully justified considering the subject of the study; however, this limits the possibilities for broader comparative interpretation. Future studies could include other key emissive markets for Bulgarian mountain resorts.

It would also be useful to expand the analysis of the influence of digital marketing tools, social media, and online reputation on the formation of the image of mountain destinations in conditions of increasing international competition.

It is advisable for the PhD candidate to continue research in the field of destination marketing and tourism image management by testing the proposed models and strategic directions in other destinations as well.

The remarks and recommendations made are constructive in nature and do not diminish the qualities, contribution-oriented character, or practical significance of the dissertation.


7. Question to the PhD Candidate. How, in your opinion, could the proposed strategic directions for improving the image of Borovets Resort be adapted to changing consumer



attitudes and to the growing importance of sustainable and digital tourism on the British market?

8. Conclusion. The dissertation entitled *“Improving the Image of a Resort Complex on an Emissive Tourist Market (the Case of Borovets Resort on the British Market)”* complies with the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the internal regulations of the University of Economics – Varna concerning the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. The dissertation contains scientific and scientifically applied results with contribution-oriented character and demonstrates profound theoretical knowledge and the ability to conduct independent scientific research. The dissertation is distinguished by its relevance, logical structure, and practical applicability of the obtained results. Based on the presented assessments and findings, I give a **positive evaluation** of the dissertation and propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury *award Maria Psycheva Undzhieva the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)”*.

11 May 2026
Varna


Signature:
prof. Velina Iv. Kazandzhieva
Member of the Scientific Jury

SCIENTIFIC STATEMENT

By Assoc. Prof. Ivanka Vasileva Lulcheva, PhD

Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Department of Tourism

for the dissertation work of **Maria Peycheva Undzhieva**, doctoral student in the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics - Varna

on the topic: **"Improving the image of a resort complex on an emissive tourist market (following the example of Borovets resort on the British market)"**

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in the field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field 3.9. "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and management (tourism)"

1. Reason for writing the opinion

OrderNo.-RD 06-82/06.04.2026, of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna and decision of the Scientific Jury dated 30.04.2026.

2. Candidate details

Maria Peycheva Undzhieva has the necessary educational background and professional experience in the field of tourism. The candidate has teaching experience in disciplines such as "Animation in Tourism", "Hotel Service Technology", "Transport, Tour Operator and Travel Agent Activities". From the presented creative CV, it is evident that her scientific interests focus on the image of tourist destinations, sustainable development, and the circular economy.

3. General presentation of the dissertation work

Maria Undzhieva's dissertation is dedicated to the extremely topical topic of improving the image of a mountain resort complex - in this case Borovets resort, aimed at the British outbound tourist market. The author correctly identifies the British market as key to winter tourism in Bulgaria and conducts an in-depth analysis of its specifics. The object of the study is the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination, and the subject - the image of the resort in the perceptions of British tourists, formation of its image, specified through the analysis of perception, evaluation and opportunities for improving the positioning of the destination. The aim of the dissertation is to develop and implement an integrated model for assessing the image of a mountain destination in the British bond market and on this basis to formulate guidelines for its improvement. To achieve the goal, five research tasks, one main thesis and four hypotheses have been formulated, which have been empirically verified. The research methodology includes theoretical and applied analysis of scientific sources, a quantitative survey among 207 British tourists, interviews with experts from British tour operators, comparative benchmark analysis with Bansko and Pamporovo, as well as statistical data processing. Such a mixed approach ensures reliability and depth of the conclusions.

4. Structure and content of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and appendices. The material is illustrated with 16 tables, 41 figures and 7 diagrams. The list of sources used includes 148 titles, of which 67 are academic and 43 are Internet sites, which demonstrates good awareness of the topic. Modern concepts (cognitive, affective, and behavioural components) are systematized, and a conceptual model for image formation is developed at a mountain tourist destination. The empirical study reveals a positive perception of the destination, with natural features, hospitality and value for money being the highest rated. Through a comparative analysis, it was established that Borovets occupies a competitive position compared to Bansko and Pamporovo, especially in terms of pricing policy and quality of services. The third chapter formulates strategic guidelines for improving the image, united in four directions: modernization of the ski product, integration of the principles of the circular economy, improvement of the quality of services (including the introduction of the "Borovets Quality Standard") and optimization of the pricing policy. The proposals are justified by scientific models and empirical data and have practical applicability. The dissertation presents a scientific and applied solution to a real problem concerning the sustainable development of a mountain tourist destination. I believe that the structure and content of the dissertation of **Maria Peycheva Undzhieva** meet the requirements of PRAS of the University of Economics – Varna.

The conclusion summarises the results, confirms all four hypotheses, and outlines the contributions of the dissertation. The candidate submits an abstract of 40 pages. It sufficiently reflects the developed scientific work. The attached list of publications on the dissertation work contains the required number of titles for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of Doctor. The abstract (40 pages) correctly reflects the content of the work and the main achievements.

5. Publications and participation in scientific forums

PhD student Maria Peycheva Undzhieva presents four publications related to the dissertation work (three in Bulgarian, one in English), a journal article and reports from international scientific conferences. The publications reflect the main aspects of the research and meet the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD", according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, no plagiarism or incorrect use of other people's works has been established.

6. Scientific and applied scientific contributions of the dissertation

The dissertation contains both scientific and practical contributions:

The original scientific contribution is the developed integrated theoretical model for analyzing the image of a mountain tourist destination, which unites cognitive, affective and behavioral components, as well as factors for sustainability, quality of services and pricing policy. The model is adapted to the specifics of Bulgarian mountain resorts.

The following contributions of a scientific and applied nature can be mentioned:

- A comprehensive empirical analysis of the image of Borovets resort on the British market has been carried out, identifying the key competitive advantages (nature,

traditions, accessibility) and weaknesses (quality of services, infrastructure loads, pricing policy, limited multi-seasonality).

- An original systematic study of the consumer attitudes of British tourists was conducted through a questionnaire (32 questions) and interviews with experts from tour operators.
- Four strategic directions have been formulated to improve the image, including specific measures such as modernization of the lift infrastructure, intelligent snow cover management, introduction of a quality standard, segmented pricing policy and integration of the principles of the circular economy.
- A model for multi-seasonal development and digitalization of tourism services is proposed, which can be used by local authorities and the tourism business when planning marketing and investment decisions.

These contributions have value for both the scientific community and practical destination management.

7. Critical notes and recommendations

I recommend that the PhD student continue working on the issues of sustainable development of destinations and the possibilities for increasing the complex quality, to expand the research with qualitative methods such as focus groups among British tourists or long-term tracking of changes in image and to present the achieved results in established and international journals with impact factor, to promote the Bulgarian experience in managing the image of mountain destinations.

These remarks do not diminish the high scientific value of the work and do not change my positive assessment.


8. Conclusion

The dissertation work of Maria Peycheva Undzhieva represents a complete, original and up-to-date scientific research with a clearly expressed theoretical and practical focus. The author demonstrates in-depth knowledge in the field of tourism, the ability to apply modern research methods and the ability to formulate applicable strategic guidelines. The achieved results confirm the defended thesis and the four hypotheses. The personal contribution of the PhD student is evident.

The above gives me reason to give a positive assessment and to vote in favor of awarding the educational and scientific degree "PhD" to Maria Peycheva Undzhieva in the professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific speciality "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

19.05.2026

Plovdiv



/ Assoc. Prof. Ivanka Vasileva Lulcheva, PhD /



OPINION

ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ВАРНА

Вх. № PA20-850/19.05.2026r

From: **Assoc. Prof. Lyubka Mincheva Ilieva, PhD**
Department of Tourism Economics and Management,
D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov,
Scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

Regarding: dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional field 3.9. Tourism, doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

Author of the dissertation: **Maria Peycheva Undzhieva**

Title of the dissertation: **“Enhancing the Image of a Resort Complex on an Emissive Tourist Market (a case study of Borovets resort on the British market)”**

Grounds for submitting the opinion: participation as a member of the Scientific Jury for the public defense of the dissertation in accordance with Order No. RD 06-82/06.04.2026 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna and decision of the Scientific Jury dated 30.04.2026.

I. General Information

Maria Peycheva Undzhieva was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in professional field 3.9. “Tourism”, scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”, doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)” at the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna by Order No. RD 17-399/14.02.2020, with a period of study from 03.02.2020 to 03.02.2023. Her academic supervisor is Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD. The doctoral student was dismissed with the right to defend her dissertation by Order No. RD 17-18/30.01.2023.

By application dated 25.03.2026 addressed to the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna, submitted pursuant to the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Maria Peycheva Undzhieva expressed her intention to be admitted to a procedure for public defense of a dissertation for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)”.

II. General Presentation of the Dissertation

The submitted dissertation has a total volume of 227 pages and includes an introduction, exposition in three chapters, conclusion, list of references and appendices. The main text contains 16 tables, 41 figures, 7 charts and 7 appendices. A total of 148 sources were used.

The object of the research is the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination, while the subject of the research is the perception of Borovets resort in the public consciousness of the British emitting tourist market.

The aim of the dissertation is, through the development and application of an integrated model for evaluating the image of a mountain tourist destination, to formulate guidelines for improving the image of Borovets resort on the British emitting tourist market.

The topic of the dissertation is relevant and significant both in theoretical and applied terms. Under conditions of increasing competition among tourist destinations and dynamic changes in tourist behaviour, the management of the image of mountain resorts becomes



particularly important for their competitiveness and sustainable development. The choice of the British emitting market is justified by its traditional importance for the development of winter tourism in Bulgaria.

The first chapter examines the theoretical foundations of the image of tourist destinations and systematizes the main scientific concepts related to the formation and management of destination image. A conceptual model for the formation of the image of a mountain tourist destination has been developed.

The second chapter has an analytical and empirical character. It presents a profile of Borovets resort and the British emitting market, as well as the results of a survey conducted among 207 British tourists and interviews with representatives of British tour operators. A comparative analysis with competing Bulgarian winter destinations has also been carried out.

The third chapter is focused on formulating guidelines for improving the image of Borovets resort through the tourism product, pricing policy, distribution and marketing communications.

III. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums

The publications and scientific activities of the doctoral student were examined for compliance with the quantitative requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna and the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. Compliance with these requirements has been established.

Four publications related to the dissertation topic have been presented, with a total of 40 points achieved under Group G indicators, compared to the required minimum of 30 points. The publication activity demonstrates consistency and sustained interest in the researched topic.

IV. Evaluation of the Structure and Content of the Dissertation and the Abstract

The structure of the dissertation is logically sound and complies with the requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna. The sequence of the exposition ensures a good connection between the theoretical, analytical and applied parts of the research.

The theoretical part demonstrates good knowledge of the scientific literature related to the image of tourist destinations and the specific characteristics of mountain resorts. The author successfully systematizes the existing scientific concepts and develops a conceptual model for the formation and evaluation of the image of a mountain tourist destination.

The empirical part is based on a survey conducted among British tourists and interviews with representatives of British tour operators, while the obtained results are analysed through an appropriate methodological framework and visualized through tables, figures and charts. The research methods used – theoretical analysis, comparative analysis, survey method and statistical data processing through SPSS and Excel – are adequately selected and applied in accordance with the objectives of the dissertation.

The practical orientation of the dissertation is highlighted through the formulated guidelines and recommendations for improving the image of Borovets resort on the British market.

The abstract has been prepared in accordance with the established requirements and correctly reflects the content of the dissertation, its structure, research thesis, methodology and the main contribution-related findings.



The lexical and stylistic characteristics of the dissertation meet the requirements for a scientific study. The exposition is consistent, terminologically precise and distinguished by a good academic style.

V. Scientific and Applied Research Contributions

I accept that the following more significant scientific and practical contributions can be identified in the dissertation:

1. The doctoral student develops an integrated theoretical framework for analysing the image of a mountain tourist destination, combining the main components of destination image and adapting established international concepts to the specifics of Bulgarian mountain resorts.
2. An in-depth analysis of the image of Borovets resort on the British emitting tourist market has been carried out, identifying both the competitive advantages of the destination and the main problematic areas related to infrastructure, service quality and pricing policy.
3. For the first time, an empirical study has been conducted among British tourists and representatives of the tour operator business, systematizing consumer attitudes and the factors influencing satisfaction, intention for repeat visits and perceived value of the tourism product.
4. Strategic guidelines and practically applicable recommendations have been formulated for improving the image of Borovets resort, related to modernization of the tourism product, improvement of service quality, sustainable resource management and adaptation of marketing and pricing policies to the characteristics of the British market.
5. I believe that the proposed solutions and recommendations have practical applicability and can be used in the management and positioning not only of Borovets resort, but also of other Bulgarian mountain tourist destinations.

VI. Findings Regarding Plagiarism

No evidence of plagiarism has been identified in the submitted dissertation or the abstract. The citation of the used literature sources is correct and complies with academic standards.

VII. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

Along with the positive aspects of the dissertation work, some notes and recommendations can be made:

1. In certain parts of the exposition, some descriptiveness can be observed, which could be reduced in favour of a more in-depth analytical approach.
2. I would recommend that future research expand the comparative analysis by including other European winter destinations.
3. A promising direction for future research would be a more in-depth study of the role of digital marketing and social media in shaping the image of tourist destinations.

The above remarks do not diminish the scientific and practical value of the dissertation.

VIII. Questions to the Doctoral Student

In order to stimulate the discussion during the defense, the following questions are posed:



1. In your opinion, which factors have the strongest influence on the formation of a positive image of Borovets resort among British tourists?
2. Which specific marketing tools would you recommend for improving the competitiveness of Borovets resort on the British market?

IX. Conclusion

The doctoral student fulfils the minimum national requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”. The submitted dissertation complies with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, and contains scientific and applied research findings and contributions relevant to the researched topic.

Based on the above, I give my **positive assessment** of the dissertation work and I propose that the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury vote “**in favour**” of awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in field of higher education 3. “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, professional field 3.9. “Tourism”, doctoral programme “Economics and Management (Tourism)” to **Maria Psycheva Undzhieva**.

15.05.2026
Svishtov

Opinion prepared by:
/Assoc. Prof. Lyubka Iieva, PhD/