

ECONOMIC UNIVERSITY – VARNA
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND ORGANIZATION OF TOURISM

Maria Peycheva Undzhieva

**“ENHANCING THE IMAGE OF A RESORT COMPLEX
ON AN EMISSIVE TOURIST MARKET
(a case study of Borovets resort on the British market)”**

AUTHOR’S ABSTRACT

of a dissertation

for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

in professional field 3.9. Tourism,

scientific specialty Economics and Management (Tourism)

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR:

Prof. Dr. Stoyan Marinov

Varna

2026

The dissertation consists of an introduction (13 pages), exposition in three chapters (167 pages), conclusion (5 pages), and a list of references (13 pages). The main text includes 7 tables, 11 figures and 37 graphs. The list of sources contains 185 information units, including 87 scientific publications and 98 institutional and online sources. Two appendices are attached to the dissertation.

The defense of the dissertation will take place on at in hall of the University of Economics – Varna, at a meeting of the scientific jury appointed by Order No. of the Rector of UE–Varna.

ECONOMIC UNIVERSITY – VARNA
FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND ORGANIZATION OF TOURISM

Maria Peycheva Undzhieva

**“Enhancing the image of a resort complex on an emissive tourist market
(a case study of Borovets resort on the British market)”**

AUTHOR’S ABSTRACT

of a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree
“Doctor” in professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty Economics
and Management (Tourism)

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR:

Prof. Dr. Stoyan Marinov

ACADEMIC JURY:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

REVIEWERS:

- 1.
- 2.

Varna

2026

Author: Maria Psycheva Undzhieva

Title: Enhancing the Image of Borovets Resort on the British Emissive Market

Print Run:

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Relevance of the Topic

This dissertation is dedicated to examining and enhancing the image of the Borovets mountain resort on the British emissive market - a topic of high significance in the context of global competition among winter destinations, accelerated digitalisation, and shifting consumer preferences. Mountain resorts are particularly sensitive to factors such as seasonality, climate change, infrastructure quality, and the sustainability of tourism supply, which makes image management a strategic priority.

The British market has traditionally held an important place in the structure of international tourist flows to Bulgaria, especially in the winter tourism segment. In recent years, this market has been characterised by dynamics shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, changes in tourist behaviour, and a growing interest in sustainable, affordable, and authentic destinations. In this context, the need for targeted image management of Borovets has become especially relevant, as the destination seeks to strengthen its position on one of the most competitive European winter tourism markets.

Borovets is one of the oldest and most recognisable winter destinations in Bulgaria, with a long-standing presence on the British market and an established reputation as an accessible and naturally attractive ski resort. At the same time, the resort faces a number of challenges related to infrastructure modernisation, service quality, destination management, and the integration of sustainable practices - factors that directly influence the formation of its image and competitive position.

2. Object and Subject of the Study

The object of the study is the image of Borovets as a mountain tourist destination.

The subject of the study is the perception of Borovets in the collective consciousness of the British emissive (outbound) market, examined in the context of the process of image formation and manifestation of a mountain tourist destination, and specified through the analysis of perceptions, evaluations, and opportunities for improving the destination's positioning.

3. Aim and Research Tasks

The aim of the dissertation is to develop and apply an integrated model for assessing the image of a mountain tourist destination on an emissive market, using Borovets and the British market as an example, and to derive guidelines for its improvement.

To achieve this aim, the following research tasks are formulated:

Task 1: Systematisation of the theoretical foundations of destination image and the specific characteristics of mountain resorts.

Task 2: Development of an integrated model for assessing the image of a mountain tourist destination.

Task 3: Empirical study of the British outbound market and the perceptions of British tourists regarding Borovets.

Task 4: Benchmark analysis of Borovets' image compared to competing Bulgarian winter destinations.

Task 5: Formulation of strategic guidelines for improving the image of Borovets, including through the application of sustainability and circular economy principles.

4. Research Thesis and Hypotheses

The defended **thesis** states that the image of Borovets on the British outbound market can be sustainably improved through the application of an integrated managerial and marketing model based on empirical data and a strategic approach.

Hypotheses:

Hypothes 1: Borovets has a positive preliminary image among British tourists visiting for the first time.

Hypothes 2: The actual experience improves the preliminary image of Borovets among British tourists.

Hypothes 3: Socio-demographic characteristics influence the satisfaction of British tourists with the ski product offered in Borovets.

Hypothes 4: Borovets possesses competitive advantages that make it a preferred destination.

5. Research Methodology

The dissertation applies a combined methodological approach, including:

- ✓ theoretical and applied analysis of scientific sources;
- ✓ a quantitative survey among British tourists who visited Borovets (n = 207);
- ✓ expert interviews with representatives of British tour operators;
- ✓ comparative (benchmark) analysis with Bansko and Pamporovo resort;
- ✓ statistical processing using SPSS and Excel;
- ✓ visualization through tables, figures, and graphs.

This approach enables the construction of a comprehensive, reliable, and well-argued picture of the destination's image and the factors shaping it.

6. Scientific novelty and contributions

The dissertation has both theoretical and practical significance.

Theoretical contributions include:

- ✓ enriching the understanding of the image of mountain tourist destinations;
- ✓ developing an integrated model for assessing destination image.

Practical contributions include:

- ✓ conducting an empirical study of the British market;
- ✓ performing a comparative analysis with competing destinations;

✓ formulating applicable strategic guidelines for improving the image of Borovets.

7. Scope, duration, and limitations of the study

The scope of the dissertation is defined by the aim to examine the image of Borovets as a mountain tourist destination as perceived by the British emissive market. The study covers both the theoretical foundations of destination image and empirical research focused on evaluating British tourists perceptions and expert opinions from the tourism industry. Attention is directed to key elements such as natural resources, infrastructure, service quality, pricing policy, digital visibility, and sustainable practices that influence the image of mountain resorts.

The **spatial scope** includes Borovets as one of Bulgaria's leading winter destinations and the British emissive market, which traditionally generates significant tourist flows to the country. The analysis encompasses both the characteristics of the destination and the specifics of British tourists - their preferences, behavior, motivations, and evaluation of their experience.

The **temporal scope** covers the period 2018-2023, allowing the study to trace changes in tourism demand and supply before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as trends related to digitalization, sustainability, and new consumer behavior patterns.

The limitations of the study arise from several factors.

First, there is a lack of previous in-depth scientific research specifically dedicated to the image of Borovets on the British market, which necessitates the construction of the analytical framework almost entirely on the basis of primary data.

Second, the seasonality of winter tourism restricts the opportunities for fieldwork during certain periods of the year.

Third, part of the statistical data related to the British outbound market is incomplete or aggregated, which requires additional interpretation. A further

limitation is the restricted access to internal data from tour operators and travel agencies, which could otherwise provide more in-depth information about the behavior of British tourists.

Despite these limitations, the collected data and the applied methods make it possible to construct a reliable and well-argued picture of the image of Borovets and to formulate practically applicable recommendations for its improvement.

8. Information Support

The information support of the study is based on a systematic review of specialised scientific publications by Bulgarian and international authors. A total of 148 information sources were used, including 42 sources in Cyrillic, 63 in Latin script, and 43 specialised internet sources.

II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Structure of the dissertation

The structure of the dissertation is subordinated to the goal, objectives and logic of the study and reflects the author's approach to the analysis of the image of the Borovets resort on the British emissive market. The development is built sequentially - from the theoretical foundations of the image of tourist destinations, through the empirical study of British tourists and experts, to the formulation of practical guidelines for improving the image of the destination.

The dissertation is structured in an introduction, three main chapters, conclusions and recommendations, a list of literature used and appendices. The total volume of the development is about 190 pages of main text, illustrated with tables and figures and diagrams that support the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained.

The dissertation includes: Introduction (8 pages), an exposition in three chapters (176 pages), a conclusion (5 pages), a list of references (13 pages). The

main text contains 16 tables, 41 figures and 7 diagrams. The list of sources used consists of 148 information sources, including 67 literary sources and 43 Internet sites. There are 7 appendices to the dissertation.

The list of sources used includes over 148 bibliographical items, of which about 42 sources in Cyrillic, over 60 sources in Latin and over 40 specialized Internet sources. 7 appendices are attached to the dissertation, containing additional data and research tools.

2. Content of the dissertation work

The content of the dissertation work is in accordance with the tasks set and is presented in the following sequence:

Introduction

Chapter One. Theoretical foundations of the image of a tourist destination

1.1. Concept of the image of a tourist destination

1.2. Image characteristics of a tourist destination

1.3. Conceptual model for forming the image of a mountain tourist destination

1.4. Methodology and tools for studying the image of a mountain tourist destination

Chapter Two. Analysis of the image of Borovets resort on the British market

2.1. Characteristics of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination

2.1.1. Geographical characteristics

2.1.2. History of the emergence of Borovets resort

2.1.3. Tourist infrastructure of Borovets resort

2.1.4. Hotel superstructure of the resort Borovets

2.1.5. Ecology of Borovets as a ski resort

2.2. Characteristics of the British emissive market for mountain tourism

2.2.1. Tourist demand in the British emissive market for the period 2018-2024.

2.2.2. Profile of British tourists

2.3. Analysis of the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination

2.3.1. Parameters of the field study conducted on the image of Borovets resort

2.3.2. Assessment of the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination according to British tourists

2.4. Comparative characteristics of the image of Borovets resort, Bansko resort and Pamporovo resort as mountain tourist destinations on the British market

Chapter Three. Guidelines for improving the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination on the British market

3.1. The tourist product as a prerequisite for improving the image of Borovets as a mountain tourist destination

3.2. Pricing policy as a prerequisite for improving the image of Borovets

3.3. Distribution as a prerequisite for improving the image of Borovets

3.4. Marketing communications to improve the image of Borovets as a mountain tourist destination on the British market

3.5. Strategic guidelines for improving the image of Borovets on the British market

Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendices

III. SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is structured in three chapters, which sequentially examine the theoretical foundations of the image of tourist destinations, the empirical results of the study of the British emissive market and the practical guidelines for improving the image of the Borovets resort. Each chapter performs a specific function in the logic of the development and contributes to the construction of a comprehensive analytical framework.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TOURIST DESTINATION

IMAGE

1.1. The concept of tourist destination image

The first section presents the conceptual framework of the term “tourist destination” and its development in the academic literature. Various terms used to denote tourist space “tourist centre”, “resort”, “tourist complex” are - analysed, as they reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the concept. Based on the research of *Marinov*, it is emphasised that the term “destination” has become the most widely used, as it integrates spatial, functional, and marketing aspects.

Classical and contemporary definitions of a tourist destination formulated by *Gunn, Leiper, Kotler, Davidson and Maitland, Cooper, and Vanhove* are presented. The different interpretations are systematised according to the main approaches to defining a destination: geographical, structural-content, functional, and result oriented. The analysis highlights the absence of a single universal definition and shows that the variety of concepts stems from the complex nature of the tourism system and the multi-layered functions of the destination.

The second part of the section is devoted to the concept of “image”, presenting the main interpretations in dictionaries and academic literature. The views of *Doganov and Durankev*, the *BBC English Dictionary*, and the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* are outlined, which consider image as a mental picture, impression, or emotional representation. Contemporary concepts of tourist destination image formulated by *Aksoy and Kiyici*, *Harchoff*, *López and Molina* are also included, emphasising its cognitive, emotional, and informational character.

Holistic models by *Echtner and Ritchie*, as well as dynamic interpretations by *Gartner and Pike*, are examined, highlighting the manageability of image through marketing communications and tourists’ experiences. The role of image as a mediator between the quality of the tourism product and consumers’ perceptions, as proposed by *Dwyer and Kim*, is also presented.

In conclusion, it is emphasised that the image of a tourist destination represents a complex of perceptions, emotions, and evaluations that shape tourists expectations and behaviour. It is a key factor for the destination’s competitiveness and a foundation for its market positioning.

1.2. Image characteristics of a tourist destination

This section systematises the main characteristics that shape the image of a tourist destination and determine how it is perceived by tourists. The natural and anthropogenic resources are presented as the core of tourist attractiveness, in line with *Evrev’s* views, as well as the role of infrastructure, superstructure, and the tourism industry for the quality of the tourist experience.

The importance of the tangible and intangible elements of image is analysed, including identity, atmosphere, hospitality, safety, and sustainable practices, drawing on *Stoycheva’s* concepts regarding the intangible characteristics of the destination. Contemporary academic approaches to tourist destination image

formulated by *Aksoy and Kiyici, Harchoff, López and Molina* are examined, emphasising its cognitive, emotional, and informational nature.

The presented holistics models by *Echtner and Ritchie*, as well as dynamic interpretations by *Gartner and Pike*, highlighting the manageability of image through marketing communications, tourists' experiences, and digital reputation. The views of *Dwyer and Kim* on the role of image as a mediator between the quality of the tourism product and consumer perception are also included.

Special attention is given to the specific features of mountain tourist destinations, using *Evrev's* conclusions on the importance of natural conditions, climate, snow reliability, and environmental management for their competitiveness. The role of sustainable management, climate adaptation, and environmental responsibility, as discussed in the research of *UNWTO, Bramwell and Lane*, and *Scott*, is underlined as a key factor for the future development of mountain resorts.

1.3. Conceptual model for the formation of the image of a mountain tourist destination

This section presents the conceptual model for the formation of the image of a mountain tourist destination, developed within the dissertation. The model integrates the main factors that influence tourists perceptions. It builds on the existing theoretical approaches discussed in the previous sections and adapts them to the specific context of mountain resorts. It incorporates resource-related, infrastructural, marketing, socio-psychological, and sustainability elements that shape the overall image of the destination.

The scientific foundations of the model are outlined using the concepts of *Aksoy and Kiyici, Harchoff, López and Molina* regarding the cognitive, emotional, and informational components of image. The holistic dimensions proposed by *Echtner and Ritchie* are included, as well as the dynamic interpretations of *Gartner and Pike*, which emphasize the role of marketing communications, tourists

experiences, and digital reputation. The model also takes into account the views of *Dwyer and Kim* on the relationship between competitiveness, product quality, and tourists' perceptions.

In conclusion, it is emphasized that the developed conceptual model serves as an analytical framework for the empirical research, enabling a systematic assessment of the image of the mountain destination and the identification of the factors that determine how it is perceived on emissive markets.

1.4. Methodology and tools for studying the image of a mountain tourist destination

The final section presents the methodological framework used to study the image of a mountain tourist destination, substantiating the choice of approaches, methods, and tools. The mixed methods approach is described, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques tailored to the specificity of image as a complex and multi layered phenomenon.

The main stages of the research process are outlined, including the development of a survey among British tourists, expert interviews with representatives of the tourism industry, and a comparative (benchmark) analysis against competing mountain destinations. The choice of the survey method as the main tool for measuring tourists' perceptions is justified, with emphasis on its applicability in assessing the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of image.

Arguments are presented for including expert interviews, which complement the quantitative data through professional assessments by tour operators and representatives of the tourism sector. The use of comparative analysis is also described, allowing the positioning of the Borovets resort relative to other Bulgarian mountain resorts.

The section further presents the tools used for data processing and visualization, including statistical methods, tables, figures, and charts that support the interpretation of the results. The role of the methodology is underlined in ensuring the reliability, validity, and representativeness of the research, as well as in building the analytical foundation for the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF THE IMAGE OF BOROVELTS RESORT ON THE BRITISH MARKET

The second chapter is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination on the British emissive market. The chapter brings together the characteristics of the destination, the specific features of the British market, and the results of the empirical study, tracing the factors that shape the perception of the resort and influence its competitiveness. The analysis is supported by rich visual information—climate diagrams, maps, tables, and figures—which enhance the objectivity of the conclusions.

Section 2.1 presents the characteristics of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination. **Subsection 2.1.1** analyses the natural resources, geographical features, and climatic characteristics of the area, using data from *NIMH, the Ministry of Environment and Water, Meteoblue, and the Bulgarian Parks Association*. The role of relief, snow cover, and climatic reliability for the image of the resort is highlighted, in line with *Evrev and Stoycheva's* views on the importance of natural endowments for the specialization of mountain destinations. Climate trends are illustrated through a series of diagrams visualizing average temperatures, precipitation, sunny days, winds, and maximum temperature values. These data underscore the impact of climate change on British tourists' perceptions of the reliability of winter conditions.

Subsection 2.1.2 examines the history of the emergence and development of Borovets resort. The main stages are traced from Chamkoria as an aristocratic resort at the end of the 19th century, through the construction of “Tsarska Bistritsa”, to the modernization in the 1960’s and 1970’s under the guidance of the French institute “Les Arcs”. The role of international expertise in shaping the architectural and functional profile of the resort is emphasized, as well as the importance of sports traditions and hosting FIS calendar events for the international recognition of the destination. The historical development is presented as an important element of the resort’s image, which is perceived as a destination with traditions and professional planning.

Subsection 2.1.3 analyses the tourism infrastructure of Borovets resort. The main ski areas (“Sitnyakovo”, “Yastrebets”, “Markudjik”), lift facilities, artificial snow systems, and technical equipment are presented, using data from Samokov Municipality and Borovets Resort. The resort map, included in figure 1, visualizes the layout of the slopes, lifts, and main tourist zones. The role of infrastructure for the quality of the tourism product and for the image of the resort as a reliable winter destination is underlined, particularly for the British market, which places high value on the security of ski conditions and modern technical facilities.



Figure 1. Map of Borovets Resort (ski runs, lift facilities and main accommodation areas)

Source: <https://www.borovets-bg.com/bg/borovets>

Section 2.2 examines the specific features of the British emissive market.

Subsection 2.2.1 analyses the volume and structure of tourism demand, highlighting post-pandemic trends related to digitalisation, online reviews, and the growing interest in affordable, safe, and sustainable winter resorts. **Subsection 2.2.2** presents the profile of British tourists - their demographic characteristics, travel motivations, preferences for winter sports, price sensitivity, and the importance of snow reliability.

The profile of British tourists, presented in Table 1, outlines the socio-demographic structure of visitors to Borovets resort. The data show that the majority of tourists are between 31 and 50 years old (60.4%), corresponding to the active, economically stable, and travel-oriented segment of the British population. This group traditionally demonstrates a high propensity for international travel,

including winter sports, and is sensitive to the price-quality ratio - an essential factor for the positioning of Borovets on the British market.

In terms of gender, there is a predominance of men (58.9%), which is typical for winter sports, where men often represent a larger share of active skiers and snowboarders. The share of women (33.8%) is also significant, indicating that the destination attracts diverse tourist segments, including families and mixed groups. Marital status reveals that nearly half of the tourists are in a relationship (44.4%), and another 31.4% live with a partner. This suggests that Borovets is perceived as a suitable destination for couples and families—an important consideration for product development and communication strategies.

The educational profile shows that more than half of the tourists have secondary education (52.7%), while one third hold higher education (32.9%). This corresponds to the typical British winter tourist who seeks affordable yet quality ski services, without necessarily belonging to the highest educational or income groups.

The professional structure is diverse, but several sectors stand out clearly: management (21.3%), IT (14.0%), and education (12.6%). These professions are characteristic of the middle and upper-middle class in the UK, who have the financial capacity for international winter travel. The presence of representatives from the medical sector, engineering, logistics, and construction further confirms that Borovets attracts a broad socio-professional spectrum.

Annual income is a key indicator of visitors' purchasing power. The data show that more than half (54.6%) earn between GBP 51,000 and 100,000, and another 27.1% earn between GBP 31,000 and 50,000. This means that 81.7% of tourists fall within the middle and upper-middle income groups highly favourable for a destination aiming to improve service quality and develop a higher-class tourism product. The share of tourists with incomes above GBP 100,000 is small (2.9%),

which is typical for accessible ski destinations like Borovets that attract broader, rather than luxury, market segments.

Table 1. Socio-economic and demographic profile of British tourists (n = 207)

Indicator	Categories	Share (%)
Gender	Male	58.9
	Female	33.8
	Prefer not to say	7.2
Age group	18–30 years	18.4
	31–50 years	60.4
	55+ years	21.3
Marital status	Single	12.1
	In a relationship	44.4
	Divorced / separated	12.1
	Cohabiting	31.4
Education	Secondary education	52.7
	Higher education	32.9
	Other	14.5
Professional status	Management	21.3
	IT sector	14.0
	Education	12.6
	Medical sector	5.8
	Self-employed	6.8
	Construction	6.3
	Logistics	5.3
	Engineering professions	4.3
	Other professions (each below 3%)	23.6
	Annual income	21,000–30,000 GBP
31,000–50,000 GBP		27.1
51,000–100,000 GBP		54.6
Over 100,000 GBP		2.9
No data		3.9

Source: Table created by the author.

Subsection 2.2.3 examines the socio-psychological characteristics of British tourists, including attitudes toward safety, service quality, and the authenticity of the experience. In summary, it is emphasized that the British market is among the most significant for Bulgarian winter tourism and represents a key segment for the positioning of Borovets resort.

Section 2.3 presents the results of the empirical study on the image of Borovets resort. The parameters of the fieldwork, the research tools used, and the main indicators for assessing the image are described. In **subsection 2.3.1**, the perceptions of British tourists regarding natural resources, infrastructure, service quality, price levels, and the overall experience are analyzed. The results are visualized through tables and graphs that support the identification of strengths and problematic areas in the resort's image. Key findings related to satisfaction, intentions for repeat visitation, and tourists' recommendations are highlighted, with particular emphasis on factors such as accessibility, service, price–quality ratio, and snow reliability. **Subsection 2.3.2** presents the results of the image assessment of Borovets resort according to British tourists.

The survey was conducted during the active winter season of 2022/2023, both on-site in the resort and at Sofia Airport during tourists' departure. The questionnaire was designed to capture the level of satisfaction with the main elements of the tourist experience - natural resources, infrastructure, service quality, price levels, and overall experience.

The results indicate predominantly positive perceptions of the destination, with the highest ratings given to natural features, hospitality, and the price-quality ratio. The data also reveal significant relationships between tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and their satisfaction, allowing the identification of specific market segments and factors influencing intentions for repeat visitation.

Figure 2 presents the assessment of the overall level of tourist services, confirming the prevailing positive attitudes among British tourists and highlighting the role of service quality as a key component of the destination’s image.

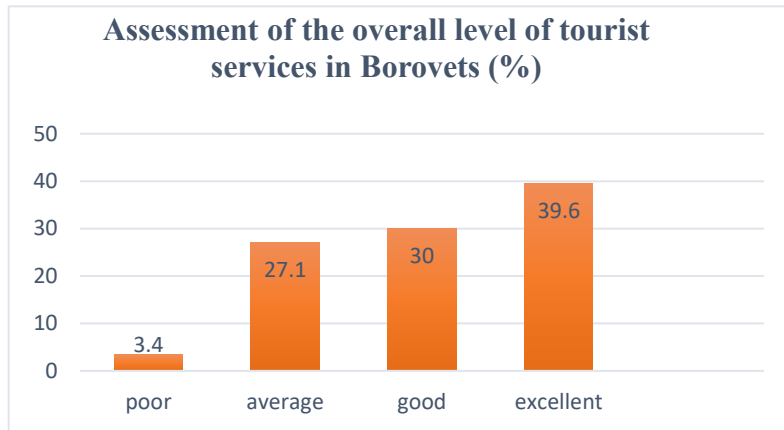


Figure 2. Assessment of the overall level of tourist services in Borovets (%)

Source: Figure created by the author.

The figure shows that the overall level of tourist services in Borovets is evaluated positively by the majority of British tourists. The share of “good” and “excellent” ratings reaches a combined 69.6%, confirming the high degree of satisfaction with the quality of services offered. Only 3.4% of respondents describe the services as “poor,” indicating a very low level of negative perceptions. These results underscore the importance of service quality as a key factor in shaping a positive destination image. **Subsection 2.4** presents a comparative profile of the image of Borovets, Bansko, and Pamporovo on the British emissive market. The analysis covers key elements such as prices of ski services, prices of additional services, and the overall perception of the price-quality ratio. The results show that Borovets occupies a competitive position compared to the other two destinations, receiving the highest ratings across all three indicators. Figure 3 visualises the comparative evaluations and clearly highlights the advantage of Borovets in terms

of perceived value of the tourism product. Bansko and Pamporovo lag behind primarily in the “price-quality ratio” criterion, underscoring the importance of pricing policy and service quality in shaping a positive destination image.

The comparative analysis serves as a basis for formulating the strategic guidelines in the next chapter, emphasising the need to strengthen marketing visibility, improve digital presence, and apply sustainable practices to enhance the competitiveness of Borovets.

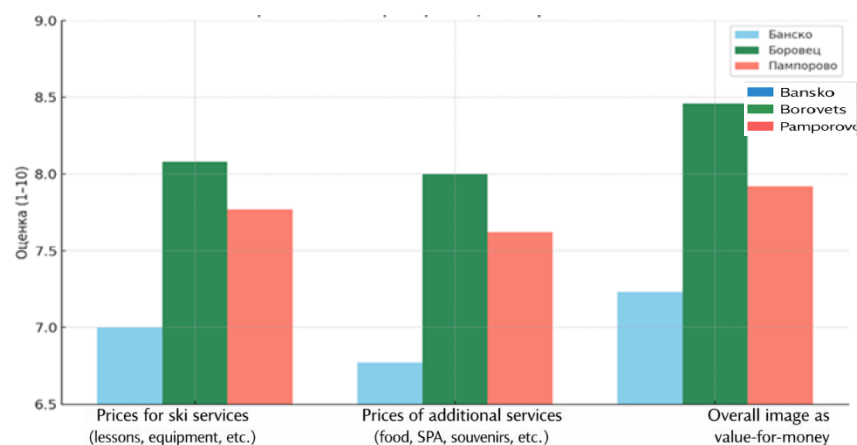


Figure 3. Comparison of the three resorts across three criteria: prices of ski services, prices of additional services, and overall image (price–quality ratio)

Legend: ■ Bansko ■ Borovets ■ Pamporovo

Source: Chart created by the author.

The graph shows that Borovets receives the highest ratings across all examined indicators, confirming its competitive advantage on the British market. This highlights the role of pricing policy and service quality in shaping a positive destination image.

CHAPTER THREE

GUIDELINES FOR ENHANCING THE IMAGE OF BOROVELTS RESORT AS A MOUNTAIN TOURIST DESTINATION ON THE BRITISH MARKET

The **third chapter** is dedicated to formulating strategic guidelines for enhancing the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination on the British market. The proposals are based on the results of the survey conducted among British tourists (a 32-item questionnaire included in Appendix 1), interviews with expert representatives of leading British tour operators (Appendix 2), as well as the comparative analysis with competing destinations. Drawing on these empirical data, the key factors influencing the perception of the resort and determining its competitiveness on the British market are identified.

The **first strategic direction** concerns the improvement of the tourism product, which represents the primary materialisation of the destination's image. In line with *Pike's* conceptualisation of the role of the tourism product in shaping destination image, the analysis highlights the need for modernisation of the core ski product, which is the main motivator for British tourists. The survey results show that slope quality, snow reliability, lift efficiency, and the professionalism of ski schools are among the most important criteria when choosing a ski destination. These findings correspond with the academic results of *Hudson and Ritchie*, who identify snow reliability, lift efficiency, slope quality, and ski school quality as key determinants in the selection of an international ski destination.

Within this context, several priority directions are formulated:

- ✓ modernisation of parts of the lift infrastructure to reduce congestion during peak periods;
- ✓ implementation of intelligent snow-management systems to increase the reliability of the ski product and reduce climate-related risk;

✓ expansion of beginner areas, which is particularly important for the British market, characterised by a high share of families and tourists with limited experience.

The importance of multiseasonality is also emphasised as a strategic tool for sustainable development. In line with the conclusions of *Steiger, Scott, and Abegg*, the diversification of tourism products through summer and shoulder season activities stabilises revenues, reduces dependence on climatic fluctuations, and strengthens the destination's image.

The **second strategic direction** concerns the integration of circular-economy principles into the management of the tourism product.

In line with the positions of *Bramwell and Lane*, mountain resorts represent a suitable environment for implementing sustainable management practices, including energy efficiency, waste management, and resource optimization. For Borovets resort, several concrete measures are proposed: minimizing waste through recycling systems; using renewable energy sources in lift stations and hotels; optimizing water resources in artificial snow production; using sustainable materials in infrastructure maintenance; and introducing a *green operations* certification for tourism services.

The importance of these measures is confirmed by the survey results, according to which 62% of British tourists prefer destinations with visible sustainable practices, as well as by *UNWTO* data indicating that sustainability is becoming an independent motivator in destination choice.

The **third strategic direction** focuses on improving service quality, which is a key factor in shaping the destination's image.

Survey and interview results show that British tourists are particularly sensitive to hygiene, food quality, service consistency, and staff professionalism. In line with the findings of *Gössling, Scott, and Hall*, service quality is critical for restoring trust in post-crisis conditions.

In this context, the introduction of a unified **Borovets Quality Standard** is proposed, covering hotels, restaurants, ski schools, and equipment rental shops. The need for staff training programmes aligned with British standards and best practices including those of the **British Snowsports Schools Association**, is emphasized. Additional measures include the development of internal electric transport, modern information shops, multilingual navigation, and digital solutions that improve accessibility and orientation within the resort.

The **fourth strategic direction** concerns pricing policy, which is a key factor in perceptions of value and fairness.

According to Zeithaml's model, price is perceived not only as a cost but also as a signal of quality and reliability. Survey and interview results show that British tourists are highly sensitive to the price–quality ratio and often report discrepancies between price and service quality. In line with the conclusions of *Xia, Monroe, and Cox*, perceived price unfairness leads to negative reactions, including refusal to revisit and negative **word-of-mouth** communication. In this context, the development of a segmented pricing policy is proposed one that accounts for different consumer groups, offers clearly structured packages, and communicates visible added value. The need for greater transparency, predictability, and consistency of prices is emphasized, as well as alignment with British market expectations, which place high value on **value-for-money**.

In conclusion, the chapter emphasizes that enhancing the image of Borovets resort requires an integrated approach combining product modernization, sustainable management, high service quality, and strategic pricing policy. These directions align with the theoretical models of *Tasci and Gartner*, which argue that the real tourism product exerts a stronger and more lasting influence on destination image than communication messages. The formulated guidelines provide a foundation for

building a competitive, sustainable, and recognizable image of Borovets resort on the British market.

CONCLUSION

The present dissertation is dedicated to examining and enhancing the image of Borovets resort as a mountain tourist destination on the British emissive market, and to formulating strategic guidelines for its improvement. In the condition of intensified international competition, dynamic changes in tourist behaviour, and growing sensitivity to sustainability, destination image is established as a strategic intangible asset that determines recognisability, attractiveness, and long-term competitiveness.

The aim of the research is to develop and validate an integrated model for assessing the image of a mountain tourist destination on an emissive market and, on this basis, to formulate guidelines for its improvement. To achieve this aim, a mixed-methods approach was applied, including a survey among British tourists, interviews with expert representatives of British tour operators, a comparative analysis with competing Bulgarian winter resorts, and a systematisation of good international practices. This approach enabled the construction of a comprehensive, valid, and well-substantiated picture of perceptions, problem areas, and development potential regarding the image of Borovets resort.

The **first chapter** systematises contemporary concepts of destination image, its components, and the factors shaping it. The cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements of image are analysed, along with the role of marketing communications, the tourism product, and the tourist experience. The theoretical review highlights the importance of image as a strategic asset influencing destination choice, satisfaction, and intentions for repeat visitation, and served as the basis for formulating the hypotheses and methodological framework.

The **second chapter** focuses on analysing the image of Borovets resort on the British market. The characteristics of the destination are presented, including natural resources, climatic features, infrastructure, history, and tourism potential. Climate diagrams, maps, and statistical data demonstrate that natural features and terrain are key elements of the resort's image. The analysis of the British emissive market outlines its specificities high sensitivity to quality, snow reliability, **value-for-money**, and service professionalism. The empirical research, conducted through a survey and expert interviews, reveals the strengths of Borovets (*nature, accessibility, winter-sports traditions*) as well as its weaknesses (*service quality, infrastructure congestion, pricing policy, limited multiseasonality*). The comparative analysis with Bansko and Pamporovo highlights the need for clearer positioning and modernisation of the tourism product.

The **third chapter** formulates strategic guidelines for enhancing the image of Borovets resort on the British market. The proposals cover four main directions: modernisation of the core ski product, integration of circular-economy principles, improvement of service quality, and optimisation of pricing policy. Based on the theoretical models of *Pike, Hudson & Ritchie, Bramwell & Lane, Zeithaml, and Tasci & Gartner*, it is demonstrated that sustainable image improvement requires a systemic approach combining product, organisational, and communication solutions. The proposed measures include lift modernisation, intelligent snow-management systems, development of multiseason products, introduction of a **Borovets Quality Standard**, digitalisation of tourism services, sustainable energy solutions, and a segmented pricing policy aligned with British consumer expectations.

Based on the conducted research, the following main conclusions can be formulated:

First, the image of Borovets resort is most sustainably shaped through a synchronised approach combining the real quality of the tourism product, transparent pricing policy, modern distribution channels, and consistent marketing communications supported by sustainable practices.

Second, the perceptions of British tourists are predominantly positive, with the highest ratings given to natural resources, authentic atmosphere, and accessibility, while infrastructure and service-related factors exert a more moderate influence on the overall evaluation.

Third, a statistically significant relationship is established between the overall destination image and the level of satisfaction, confirming that a positive image is a key factor for loyalty and intentions for repeat visitation.

Fourth, interviews with British tour-operator representatives reveal discrepancies between expert assessments and tourists actual perceptions, highlighting the need for better alignment of marketing messages with the destination's real competitive advantages.

Fifth, the comparative analysis shows that Borovets possesses sustainable competitive advantages in terms of pricing and resource potential, but lags behind in infrastructure, digital communication, and international brand recognition.

The results allow for the well-substantiated conclusion that the thesis formulated in the introduction is confirmed. Targeted improvement of the tourism product, pricing policy, distribution, and marketing communications - combined with the application of circular-economy principles and sustainable management - leads to increased perceived value, trust, and recognisability of the destination. This directly contributes to the sustainable enhancement of the image of Borovets resort on the British emissive market.

The practical value of the results lies in the possibility for the proposed guidelines to be used by local authorities, the tourism industry, and tour operators

when formulating policies, marketing strategies, and investment decisions aimed at the long-term positioning of Borovets as a competitive, sustainable, and recognisable mountain destination on the British and international markets.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the analyses and recommendations presented in this dissertation outline a realistic and applicable framework for the targeted enhancement of the image of Borovets resort.

They imply not one-off measures, but a consistent policy of quality, sustainability, and coordination that can transform the destination into a more recognisable and more competitive alternative to leading winter resorts on the highly competitive British market. The results of the study also outline perspectives for future academic research related to the economic effects of the circular economy, the influence of sustainable practices on customer loyalty, the role of *digital nomads* and the *workation segment*, as well as the importance of **green branding** for the perceived value of tourist destinations.

The results from the three chapters including: the theoretical framework, the survey, the expert interviews, and the comparative analysis - allow for a well-substantiated evaluation of the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study. Based on the collected data, it can be concluded that the hypotheses are confirmed:

Hypothesis 1: *Borovets resort has a positive preliminary image among British tourists visiting it for the first time.*

Conclusion: Confirmed.

Argumentation: Survey data show that a significant share of British tourists arrive in Borovets with positive expectations, formed mainly through recommendations (WOM), online reviews, tour operators, and social media. The results clearly indicate that:

✓ most tourists have a clear and positive preliminary perception;

- ✓ the main sources of information are friends, online platforms, and tour operators;

- ✓ negative preliminary attitudes are almost non-existent.

This demonstrates that Borovets already possesses a solid positive baseline image on the British market.

Hypothesis 2: *The actual experience improves the preliminary image of Borovets among British tourists.*

Conclusion: Strongly confirmed.

Argumentation: Responses to the question “Did your perception of the destination change after the visit?” show that:

- ✓ for the majority of tourists, the image improves after the real experience;

- ✓ cases of worsened perception are extremely rare;

- ✓ overall satisfaction is high.

This indicates that the *real tourism product meets or exceeds expectations* and *essential indicator* of a strong image and a prerequisite for repeat visitation.

Hypothesis 3: *Socio-demographic characteristics influence the satisfaction of British tourists with the ski product in Borovets.*

Conclusion: Confirmed, with selective but statistically significant effects.

Argumentation: *Data analysis shows that:*

- ✓ *age groups 31-50 and 55+ evaluate infrastructure, safety, and price differently;*

- ✓ tourists with higher incomes are more demanding regarding service quality and lift facilities;

- ✓ family tourists place higher requirements on beginner areas and safety;

- ✓ professional status influences perceptions of the price–quality ratio.

These relationships are reflected in Table 1. Therefore, socio-demographic characteristics do influence satisfaction, although not equally across all groups.

Hypothesis 4: Borovets resort possesses competitive advantages that make it a preferred destination.

Conclusion: Confirmed, with specification.

Argumentation: *The comparative analysis with Bansko and Pamporovo shows that Borovets has clearly expressed competitive advantages:*

- ✓ natural features (climate, terrain, landscapes);
- ✓ authentic atmosphere;
- ✓ favorable price–quality ratio;
- ✓ strong winter-sports traditions;
- ✓ proximity to Sofia and good accessibility.

At the same time, there are areas where the resort lags behind:

- ✓ lift modernisation;
- ✓ slope maintenance;
- ✓ digital communication;
- ✓ diversity of après-ski services.

Despite these weaknesses, British tourists evaluate Borovets as a preferred and competitive destination, which confirms the hypothesis.

Final synthesis

The findings allow for the well-grounded conclusion that the thesis stated in the introduction is confirmed. Targeted improvement of the tourism product, pricing policy, distribution, and marketing communications - combined with the application of circular-economy principles and sustainable management - leads to increased perceived value, trust, and recognizability of the destination. This directly contributes to the sustainable enhancement of the image of Borovets resort on the British emissive market.

The practical value of the results lies in the opportunity for the proposed guidelines to be used by local authorities, the tourism industry, and tour operators

when formulating policies, marketing strategies, and investment decisions aimed at the long-term positioning of Borovets as a competitive, sustainable, and recognizable mountain destination on the British and international markets.

LITERATURE

1. Doganov, D., & Durankev, B. (2005). *Bulgarian Advertising Encyclopedia*. Sofia: Ciela.
2. Evrev, P. (1999). *Territorial Planning of Recreation and Tourism*. Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press.
3. Evrev, P. (1987). *Mountain Resorts: Structure and Planning*. Sofia: Technika Publishing House.
4. Marinov, S. (2015). *Destination Management*. Varna: “Science and Economics” Publishing House, University of Economics – Varna.
5. Stoycheva, M. (2008). *Climate and Tourism*. Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press.
6. The rest of the list (already in English) remains unchanged
7. Pike, S. (2016). *Destination Marketing Essentials*. Routledge.
8. Hudson, S., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2002). Understanding the ski destination choice process. *Journal of Travel Research*, 40(3), 222–234.
9. Steiger, R., Scott, D., Abegg, B., Pons, M., & Aall, C. (2019). Climate change risk for ski tourism. *Tourism Management*, 71, 1–16.
10. Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2011). Critical research on the governance of sustainable tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4–5), 411–421.
11. Zeithaml, V. (1988). Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value. *Journal of Marketing*, 52(3), 2–22.
12. Xia, L., Monroe, K., & Cox, J. (2004). The price is unfair! *Journal of*

Marketing, 68(4), 1–15.

13. Tasci, A., & Gartner, W. (2007). Destination image and functional relationships. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(4), 413–425.

14. Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 83, 102–111.

15. UNWTO. (2020). *Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals*. Madrid.

16. ABTA. (2024). *Holiday Habits Report 2023–2024*.

17. Financial Times. (2025). *UK travellers' value sensitivity reports*.

18. VisitBritain. (2024). *Outbound Travel Trends and Consumer Insights*.

19. Undzhieva, M. (2022). Motives for Choosing a Ski Destination According to the British Ski Experts' Opinion. *Izvestia Journal of the Union of Scientists – Varna*, 11(3), 98–106.

20. Undzhieva, M. (2020). The Tourism Industry – Positivism During the COVID Crisis. *Conference Proceedings, Varna*.

21. Undzhieva, M. (2019). The Specifics of the Offer of a Mountain Destination for Ski Tourism. *Conference Proceedings, Bulgaria*.

IV. STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

As a result of the research conducted for this dissertation, the following key scientific and practical contributions can be identified:

First, an integrated theoretical framework for analysing the image of a mountain tourist destination has been developed. It combines cognitive, affective, and behavioural components, as well as factors related to sustainability, service quality, and pricing policy. The theoretical model adapts leading international

concepts (Pike; Tasci & Gartner; Baloglu & McCleary) to the specific context of Bulgarian mountain resorts.

Second, a comprehensive analysis of the image of Borovets resort as a tourist destination on the British emissive market has been carried out. Key competitive advantages of the resort have been identified natural resources, winter-sports traditions, accessibility, and recognisability. Structural weaknesses have also been outlined, including service quality, infrastructure congestion, pricing policy, and limited multiseasonality.

Third, an empirical study has been conducted among British tourists and representatives of leading tour operators, which for the first time systematises consumer attitudes towards Borovets resort.

The research includes a 32-item questionnaire and expert interviews, through which the factors influencing satisfaction, intentions for repeat visitation, and perceptions of value (value-for-money) have been identified.

Fourth, four strategic directions for enhancing the image of Borovets resort have been formulated:

- ✓ modernisation of the core ski product;
- ✓ integration of circular-economy principles;
- ✓ improvement of service quality;
- ✓ optimisation of pricing policy.

These directions are substantiated through theoretical models and empirical data and represent practically applicable managerial solutions.

Fifth, specific recommendations have been developed for multiseason development of the resort, sustainable resource management, digitalisation of tourism services, quality standardisation (“**Borovets Quality Standard**”), and marketing approaches adapted to the British market.

Sixth, a model for segmented pricing policy has been proposed, based on perceived value and the specific attitudes of British tourists. The model includes package solutions, price transparency, and communication of added value.

Seventh, the study contributes to the development of academic literature on destination image by adapting international theoretical models to Bulgarian conditions and proposing new approaches for analysing mountain tourist destinations.

In conclusion, the dissertation demonstrates that enhancing the image of Borovets resort requires a strategic, sustainable, and integrated approach that combines product modernisation, high service quality, environmental responsibility, and an adapted pricing policy.

The implementation of the proposed measures will strengthen the resort's position on the British market and support its long-term development as a competitive and recognisable mountain tourist destination.

V. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION CONFERENCE

Papers

1. Undzhieva, M. (2022). Motives for Choosing a Ski Destination According to the British Ski Experts' Opinion. *Izvestia Journal of the Union of Scientists - Varna, Economic Sciences Series*, 11(3), 98–106.

Articles

2. Undzhieva, M. (2021). Factors That Form the Image of a Destination for Mountain Ski Tourism. *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, Burgas*.

3. Undzhieva, M. (2020). The Tourism Industry – Positivism During the COVID Crisis. *Scientific Conference Proceedings, Varna*.

4. Undzhieva, M. (2019). The Specifics of the Offer of a Mountain Destination for Ski Tourism. Conference Proceedings, Bulgaria.