



UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD  
ECONOMY



ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ВАРНА

Bx. № PG20-483 / 11.04.2022

**REVIEW**

of dissertation

for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “**Doctor**”,

according to a procedure, announced by the University of Economics – Varna

**1. General information**

**Reviewer: Prof. D.Sc. Tanya Parusheva**

UNWE – Sofia, Department “Economics of Tourism”

Field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”

Professional field 3.8. “Economics”

Scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

**Reason for writing the review:** Order № ПД-06-43/07.03.2022 r. of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna for appointment of a Scientific Jury and decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury on 15.03.2022

**Author of the dissertation: Olga Vasilevna Belan** – full-time doctoral student in the Department of “Economics and Organization of Tourism” at the University of Economics – Varna

**Topic of the dissertation:** “Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism by the example of the municipality of Varna”

**Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Stoyan Petkov Marinov**

**2. Information regarding doctoral candidate**

**Olga Belan** obtained a Master’s degree in “Organizational Management” from the Azov Regional Institute of Management at Zaporizhia State University, Zaporizhia, Ukraine (2003). Graduated from the Center for Vocational Training at the University of Economics – Varna and acquired the specialization “Development of a marketing plan for the development of the resort town” (2015 - 2016).

**Her professional development** began as a marketing specialist at “Deka” Ltd., Berdyansk, Zaporizhia Oblast, Ukraine (2003-2013). Since March 2016 she has been the

coordinator of marketing projects of key clients in “Internobmen” Ltd., Varna and the representative office in Ukraine.

During her doctoral studies she taught at a high scientific and methodological level, according to a schedule, coordinated with the University of Economics – Varna. She has conducted an examination in a regular, corrective and liquidation session; exercise guide; scientific guidance and review of diploma theses. She has attended and participated in a doctoral level course. Participates in scientific, research, scientific-practical and business conferences, round tables and seminars in Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova and other countries. She speaks Bulgarian, English and Russian.

Olga Belan is enrolled in **full-time doctoral studies** by order № RD-17-3542/02.11.2017 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna in the field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”, professional field 3.9. “Tourism”, under the doctoral program “Economics and Management (Tourism)” at the Department of “Economics and Organization of Tourism”, **as of 24.10.2017 – 25.01.2019.**

She has completed the work provided for in the individual plan. She has successfully passed the **doctoral exams** as follows:

- Russian language – Excellent (5.50);
- Research Methodology – Excellent (5.50);
- Tourist markets – Excellent (5.50);
- Management Theory – Very good (4.75);

During her doctoral studies, Olga Belan was assessed with a **positive grade**. The dissertation was discussed at the Department Council of the Department of “Economics and Organization of Tourism”, Protocol № 7/22.02.2022. – Varna, as of January 27, 2020. She was completed her doctoral studies with the right of dissertation defense by order № RD 17-416/14.02.2020 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna, as of 27.01.2020.

*A procedure for dissertation defense before the Scientific Jury has been opened, in accordance with Art. 31, para. 1 and para. 2 of the Regulation for the development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.*

### **3. General presentation of the dissertation**

The dissertation work of Olga Vasilevna Belan presented for review, the abstract of the dissertation work and the scientific publications related to the dissertation are a result of independent scientific research. The relevance and significance of the researched issues are highlighted with arguments and evidence. It is emphasized that the development of tourism in

recent decades necessitates the introduction of new tourism activities and services of high and sustainable quality, new standards and uniqueness. In this aspect, health tourism has significant potential for the development of the Bulgarian tourism industry.

The **object of research** is correctly distinguished – “Varna municipality as a tourist destination for health tourism, interpreted in the context of the concept of tourist destination development based on the marketing approach” and the **subject of research** – “marketing activities of Varna municipality as a tourist destination for health tourism”. The **main objective** is clearly and precisely defined: “based on the conceptual market model of a destination for health tourism travel, to analyze the marketing activities in the field of health tourism and to determine strategic guidelines for its improvement”. The achievement of the objective has been carried out by solving **4 specific research tasks**.

The **research thesis** is appropriately formulated: “the marketing of the destination for health tourism is a function of the general coordinated, planned and organized actions of all stakeholders in the field in the implementation of tourist trips with health needs and motives”. **5 working hypotheses** are correctly defined.

The **research tools** include the use of a set of **research methods**: statistical, economic and others, with a systematic approach leading. The **information provision** of the research is carried out through targeted analysis of specialized scientific publications; analysis of results from empirical research in dissertations; research and analysis from own research; analysis of officially published bulletins from the Ministry of Tourism and data from the National Statistical Institute. An empirical study in the form of questionnaires was organized. The results of the studies were processed using the software product SPSS, summarized and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. They are presented in tabular and graphical form.

The **main limitations and issues** of the research work are related to the theoretical focus, the identification of competitors, the use of statistical information, gaps and incompleteness in the statistical data. Parts of the dissertation have been **tested** at scientific and practical conferences and published in specialized scientific journals.

*The dissertation meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulation for implementation of the Law for the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.*

#### **4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation**

The dissertation **volume** is 296 pages. The main text illustrates 47 tables and 38 figures. The **structure** of the dissertation is sustained in the spirit of well-founded logic,

consistency and connection between the treated problems. It consists of an introduction (9 pages), an exposition in three chapters (209 pages), a conclusion (6 pages) and used literature (13 pages). 50 appendices have been included for the dissertation. **The bibliographic apparatus** includes 122 titles in Bulgarian and in foreign languages.

PhD student Olga Belan is **well acquainted** with the theses and concepts of established authors on the researched problems, and successfully interprets them. Literary sources are used in **good faith and correctly**.

**The style** of the dissertation is concise and accurate. The text is written in **scientific language**. **The content of the dissertation** testifies that PhD student Olga Belan has carried out **in-depth research** and very good **practical evidence** of the author's goals and objectives.

The logical framework of the exhibition is presented in the **introduction**. The need for research on the marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism based on the example of the municipality of Varna is justified.

The **first chapter** of the dissertation "**Theoretical foundations of destination marketing for health tourism**" discusses the theoretical aspects of destination marketing. The essence and typology of health tourism is revealed. The peculiarities of a destination for health tourism at the municipal level are highlighted. A methodology for research of the marketing activity of a destination for health tourism at the municipal level has been developed.

In the **second chapter** of the dissertation "**Marketing analysis of health tourism in the municipality of Varna**" the internal environment of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism is studied. The macroenvironment of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism has been studied. An analysis of the market positions of health tourism in the municipality of Varna has been performed. Emphasis is placed on the assessment of the competitiveness of health tourism in the municipality of Varna. The attention is focused on the SWOT analysis of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism.

The **third chapter** of the dissertation "**Marketing plan for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna**" presents the trends in the development of health tourism. Marketing strategies and goals for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna have been identified. A marketing program for the development of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism has been proposed. The results of the marketing program for the development of the municipality of Varna as a destination for

health tourism are analyzed. The organizational prerequisites for effective marketing activities of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism are systematized.

**The conclusion** summarizes the main analysis and conclusions regarding the marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the example of the municipality of Varna.

The outstanding scientific and scientifically applied results represent an original contribution to science. They give grounds for the conclusion that the main goal of the dissertation has been **achieved**. The set research tasks have been **completed**. The research thesis is **confirmed**. The formulated working hypotheses are proven.

*In structure and content, the dissertation corresponds to the requirements of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Regulation for the development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.*

#### **4. 1. Evaluation of the dissertation abstract**

The abstract of the dissertation work is 40 pages long. It correctly corresponds with the dissertation and reliably presents the researched problems in a synthesized form. The lexical and stylistic characteristics of the text are sustained and precise. It consists of 5 parts, which include: 1). general characteristics of the dissertation; 2). structure of the dissertation; 3). short presentation of the dissertation; 4). reference for the contributions of the dissertation; 5). publications on the dissertation.

#### **5. Identification and evaluation of scientific and scientifically applied contributions in the dissertation**

PhD student Olga Belan **correctly formulated the contributions** to the dissertation. We evaluate the presented report on the contributions as correct and really reflecting the achieved results.

In our opinion, the dissertation clearly distinguishes **scientific and scientifically applied contributions**, which can be summarized as follows:

**first** – in theoretical and methodological terms, the definitions of the terms “tourist destination”, “health tourism”, “health tourism”, “medical tourism”, “spa tourism”, “wellness tourism” have been updated and their content is interpreted in the context of their modern use. Subcategories of health tourism are differentiated.

**second** – a methodology has been developed for research of the marketing activity of a municipal destination for health tourism. A toolkit for researching marketing activities in the form of an in-depth interview and a questionnaire for users of a health tourism destination at

the municipal level has been prepared.

**third** – an assessment of the resources for health tourism in the municipality of Varna. The competitiveness of health tourism in the municipality of Varna has been assessed. Specific methods for research of the combined psychographic and socio-demographic characteristics of the vacationers have been proposed and tested, in order to form the profiles of the tourists of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism.

**fourth** – marketing goals and strategies for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna are proposed and a marketing program for the development of the municipality as a destination for health tourism is systematized. An advertising strategy has been developed to promote the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism.

#### **6. Publications and participation in scientific forums**

Doctoral student Olga Belan meets the **minimum national requirements** for the award of educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. She has **collected** 170 points of publications in unreviewed journals with scientific review and in edited collective volumes.

PhD student Olga Belan impresses with her publishing activity. She has 17 scientific publications directly related to the topic of the dissertation – **2 articles** and **15 scientific reports**. They have been published in scientific journals and in collections of participation in scientific forums in *Russian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and English*.

*The publications of PhD student Olga Belan are **representative** and provide sufficient **dissemination of the results** of the research among the academic community and stakeholders in the tourism business. The scientific production dedicated to the treated issues **exceeds the minimum national requirements** for awarding the ESD “Doctor”, according to Art. 2b para. 2 and 3 of DASRBA and Art. 35, para. 1, item 4 of the Regulation for development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.*

#### **7. Critical remarks and recommendations**

Dissertations can be addressed with notes that would improve the overall presentation of the work.

1. The content of paragraph 2.4. Assessment of the competitiveness of health tourism in the municipality of Varna would benefit from the presentation of an analysis on a comparative basis between the municipality of Varna and its main competitors in the field of health tourism.

2. In paragraph 3.5. Organizational prerequisites for effective marketing activities of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism could specifically describe the role of product and industry, international, national and local NGOs for the development and marketing of health tourism in the municipality of Varna.

These remarks do not diminish the merits of the research and do not affect the overall positive assessment of the dissertation, as an independent study with indisputable scientific and scientific contributions.

In my her future research work, I recommend PhD student Olga Belan to expand and deepen her research on health tourism issues at the national and international levels. Useful research issues for the practice are related to the management, marketing and efficiency of balneo, spa and medical centers in hotel complexes.

#### **8. Questions for the doctoral student**

The researched issues raise the following questions for worthy protection:

1. Who are the main competitors of the municipality of Varna in Bulgaria in terms of health tourism and how does the municipality of Varna surpass them?
2. What is the potential of the municipality of Varna for the development of dental tourism as a specialized type of health tourism?

#### **9. Conclusion**

I am convinced to give a **positive assessment** of the dissertation on "Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism by the example of the municipality of Varna". I confirm that it fully **complies with the requirements** of LDAS in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulation for the development of academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for obtaining educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

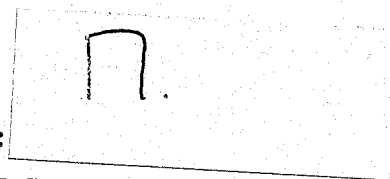
The dissertation is a **scientifically applied solution** to a real practical problem of public importance. The doctoral student has in-depth theoretical knowledge in the specialty "Tourism" and abilities to conduct independent research.

I propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to take a **decision "FOR"** the award of the **educational and scientific degree "Doctor"** in the field of higher education **3. "Social, economic and legal sciences"**, professional field **3.9. "Tourism"**, scientific specialty **"Economics and Management (Tourism)"** of **OLGA VASILEVNA BELAN** – full-time PhD student in the Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" at the Faculty of "Management" at the University of Economics – Varna.

**Sofia,**  
April 2, 2022

**REVIEWER:**

(Prof. D.Sc. Tanya Parusheva)





## R E V I E W

Bx. № РД 20-555 / 27.04.2022г.

of the dissertation of **Olga Vasilevna Belan**,  
PhD student in a regular form of education  
at the Department of Economics and Organisation of Tourism  
at the University of Economics – Varna  
on the topic: „*Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the  
example of the municipality of Varna*”

Scientific field: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

Professional field 3.9. Tourism

Specialty: Economics and Management (Tourism)

Supervisor: Prof. Dr Stoyan Petkov Marinov

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr Velina Ivancheva Kazandzhieva

Department of Economics and Organisation of Tourism

University of Economics – Varna

This review has been developed based on the decision of the Scientific jury  
from 15.03.2022, appointed by order № РД-06-43 from 07.03.2022  
of the Vice-Rector for the Research at the University of Economics – Varna

### **I. General characteristics of the dissertation**

The dissertation consists of a total of 231 pages as the main text is presented in an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. There are 26 appendices and 122 sources of information used, of which 86 are in Cyrillic. The paper follows a classical structure and the main part is extensively illustrated by 47 tables and 38 figures, which not only illustrate the research but are an essential part of its content.

The topic of the dissertation is undoubtedly of current interest. It is directly related to the current pandemic situation and the need to promote the development of health tourism in the Municipality of Varna. All the necessary elements of scientific research are present in the introduction. The aim, four research tasks, thesis and five hypotheses are correctly defined and formulated

in the paper. In addition to the in-depth and wide-ranging theoretical analyses and assessments, the dissertation also contains a number of well-presented and commented texts that reflect the results of independent research. To collect the empirical data necessary for the research, the doctoral student has conducted comprehensive and extensive surveys.

The scope and focus of the scientific research are specified in the thesis of the dissertation, according to which “destination marketing for health tourism is a function of the common coordinated, planned and organized actions of all stakeholders in the provision of tourist travels for health purposes and reasons”.

The author's aim defined in the research is “to analyze the marketing activities of the Municipality of Varna in the field of health tourism and to determine the strategic directions for its improvement based on a conceptual market model of a destination for health tourism”. The object of research in the dissertation is the Municipality of Varna as a tourist destination for health tourism. It is analysed in the context of the concept of tourist place development using a marketing approach. In this regard, the subject of the study is the marketing activity of the municipality as a tourist destination for health tourism.

The research methods used in the dissertation are well matched and applied. The introduction of the dissertation correctly identifies the more important limitations of the study. Some of them are related to “omissions and incompleteness in statistical data reflecting the scope and activity of the health tourism sector in the Municipality of Varna”.

In preparation for the dissertation, doctoral student Belan has used a large number of information sources (122). The scientific information was extracted from reliable and officially recognized sources. They have been cited accurately and correctly as required. They are sufficient in terms of volume, scope and content for a complete in-depth study of the topic. The doctoral student, to a high degree, is familiar with specialized publications in the relevant scientific field. Their use and interpretation are consistent with the structure and content

of the dissertation. The positions presented are thoroughly researched, very well understood and adapted appropriately to the aim and research objectives of the study. The doctoral student's intervention is in line with the requirements of the research methods applied in the dissertation. This ensures the authenticity of the source data and the credibility of the assertions, assessments and conclusions on which the scientific results are based. We consider them to be the personal achievement and merit of doctoral student Belan.

The individual parts of the dissertation structure are logically consistent and well- linked. In the first part, on the basis of the modern theory of tourism place marketing, doctoral student Belan skillfully comments and differentiates the features of marketing a health tourism destination. The very good knowledge of the issues and the logical connection between the theoretical reasoning and the conclusions based on them allow the doctoral student to justify and construct an appropriate methodology for the study of the marketing activity of a health tourism destination at the municipal level.

In the second part, in a very good logical sequence and in accordance with the conceptual model, the methodological steps and specific tools are justified. Empirical data from independent studies are provided and analysed in order to formulate conclusions and assessments on the competitiveness of health tourism in the Municipality of Varna. Doctoral student Belan complements the study of the municipality with a detailed SWOT analysis of the health tourism destination.

In the third part of the dissertation the marketing strategies and objectives for the development of health tourism in the Municipality of Varna are reasonably defined. A relevant marketing program is developed in line with the identified current trends in recreation and leisure. The organizational prerequisites for achieving the effectiveness of the marketing activity of Varna Municipality as a destination for health tourism are studied.

## **II. Contributions of the dissertation**

The dissertation contains contributions of theoretical and applied research. They enrich, extend and complement the available research on the topic and support its practical and applied aspects.

### ***A) Theoretical contributions:***

- a comprehensive and in-depth critical review and evaluation of the theoretical concepts and achievements in the specialized literature on tourism related to the object and subject of the study;

- the theory on the essence and features of health tourism and the specifics of marketing a health tourism destination at the municipal level has been upgraded and supplemented;

- a methodology specific to the research objectives has been developed to study the marketing activity of a health tourism destination at municipal level.

### ***b) Science-applicable contributions:***

- the resources for health tourism in the Municipality of Varna are analyzed and evaluated. An assessment of the competitiveness of health tourism in the study area is also made;

- combined methodologies for the study of psychographic and sociodemographic characteristics of tourists have been developed and approbated for the purpose of their profiling as visitors of Varna municipality as a destination for health tourism;

- marketing objectives and strategies for health tourism in the Municipality of Varna, including an advertising strategy to promote the municipality as a destination for health tourism;

- a marketing programme for the development of the Municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism has been developed.

The presented contributions are balanced in theoretical and practice-based aspects. It is our deep conviction that they will be appreciated by tourism

stakeholders as useful and necessary for further effective development of health tourism in Varna Municipality.

### **III. Other requirements**

The abstract of the dissertation (40 pages) correctly and accurately reflects the structure, main parts of the content and more important results of the research. It also includes the contributions to the dissertation, which are presented with arguments and correctly by the PhD student. The PhD candidate presents a total of 17 publications on the dissertation, incl. 2 articles and 15 scientific reports. The presented works have been published in renowned scientific publishing houses and significantly exceed the required number of publications, presenting the main results of the research on the dissertation for the acquisition of ONS "Doctor". The publications sufficiently reflect important parts of the content of the dissertation and give it the necessary level of publicity.

### **IV. Questions to the doctoral student**

1. (pp. 176 - 177) What is the assessment of the PhD student for the specific manifestation of the trends presented in paragraph 3.1 in the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna?

2. What are the main challenges in the implementation of marketing strategies, goals and marketing program for health tourism in the municipality of Varna?

### **V. Conclusion**

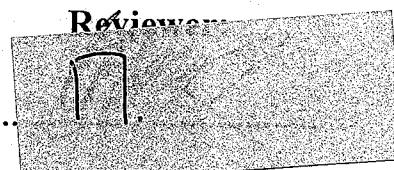
Olga Vasilevna Belan's dissertation "Marketing of a Tourist Destination for Health Tourism on the Example of municipality of Varna" contains the necessary theoretical and scientific results. They have an original contribution to science and meet all the requirements of the regulatory framework. The dissertation paper shows that the doctoral candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and research skills in professional field 3.9. Tourism, and demonstrates qualities and skills for independent scientific research.

As e result of the above mentioned arguments, I strongly recommend that the doctoral student **Olga Vasilevna Belan** be awarded the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Professional field 3.9. Tourism, Specialty: Economics and Management (Tourism).

**Varna**

**April, 2022**

Review



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(Assoc. Prof. Dr Venna Iv. Kazandzhieva)