



## STATEMENT

Вх. № PA20-443/05.04.2022 г.

From: Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD;  
University of Economics – Varna;  
Scientific specialty: "Economics and Organization of Tourism Department"

**Regarding:** Dissertation thesis for acquiring the scientific degree  
" **Doctor** " in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences. Professional field: 3.9. Tourism. The scientific specialty: "Economics and Management (Tourism)" at the University of Economics - Varna

**Author of the dissertation:** Olga Vasilevna Belan

**Dissertation topic:** "Marketing of a tourism destination for health tourism on the example of the municipality of Varna"

Grounds for submission of the statement: participation in the scientific jury of defence for the dissertation thesis in accordance with Order № 06-43 /07.03.2022 of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna.

### 1. Information about the PhD Student

The PhD Student studied under a doctoral program at to the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism, Faculty of Management, University of Economics - Varna in the doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" according to the decision of the Faculty of Management at the Faculty Council, protocol № 24 / 24.10.2017 and order № 17-3542 / 02.11.2017 of the Rector of UE-Varna. The training was carried out in regular form during the period 24.10.2017-12.02.2020. The PhD student was expelled with the right to defense according to a decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Management, protocol № 8 / 30.01.2020 and order № 17/ 14.02.2020 of the Rector of UE-Varna.

### 2. Summary of the presented dissertation work

The dissertation contains a total of 295 pages . It has a balanced structure that includes all the mandatory elements of scientific research : an introduction (9 pages), a presentation in three chapters with a total of 209 pages, a conclusion (5 pages), reference (13 pages) and 26 appendices (49 pages).

The dissertation has a clearly defined object and subject of research. *The object* of consideration is is the municipality of Varna as a tourism destination for health tourism, and *the subject* of research is is the marketing activity of the municipality of Varna as a tourism destination for health tourism

*The research goal* is formulated correctly and states "based on the conceptual market model of a destination for health travel to analyze the marketing activities of the municipality of Varna in the field of health tourism and to determine strategic guidelines for its improvement." The goal is correctly specified in four research tasks

The author demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the available literature on the



subject and has used a wide range of information sources. The list of used literature includes a total of 122 titles, of which 85 are in Cyrillic and 37 in Latin,

The interpretations and conclusions in the exposition are illustrated and argued with 47 tables and 38 figures.

The author uses appropriate research methods and approaches to achieve the scientific goal such as: analysis and synthesis, statistical and descriptive methods,

For the needs of the research, an unstructured in-depth interview was conducted to differentiate the marketing activities of the stakeholders in the field of health tourism in the destination and to identify the main competitors of a tourism destination for health tourism. A structured survey with rating assessments was conducted to determine the image of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism by stakeholders.

The content of the dissertation proves the achievement of the set scientific goal.

The first chapter of the dissertation systematizes the theoretical and methodological aspects of a destination marketing for health tourism at the municipal level.

The second part of the study characterizes the macro environment and the internal environment of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism. The market positions of the health tourism of the municipality of Varna are analyzed. The competitiveness of health tourism in the municipality of Varna is assessed and a SWOT analysis of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism is made.

In the third chapter of the study the author presents the trends in the development of health tourism. She formulates marketing strategies and goals for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna. The strategy is linked to a marketing program for the development of the municipality as a destination for health tourism.

### **3. Evaluation of the scientific and applied scientific results**

In our opinion, the dissertation contains four significant applied scientific contributions.

First, definitions of basic concepts for health tourism (health tourism, medical tourism, spa tourism, wellness tourism) have been updated and a classification of types of health tourism has been proposed.

Second, a methodology has been developed to study the marketing activities of a municipal health tourism destination. The methodology is operationalized in the form of an in-depth interview and a questionnaire for users of a health tourism destination.

Third, the competitiveness of health tourism in the municipality of Varna was assessed. Methods for research and derivation of the psychographic and socio-demographic characteristics of tourists are presented in order to form the profiles of the guests 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. The possible and expected results from the realization of the marketing program are presented.



#### **4. Assessment of the dissertation publications**

Olga Belan applies 17 publications on the topic of the dissertation with a total volume of more than 80 printed pages. Two of the publications are stand-alone articles in peer-reviewed publications. 15 are scientific reports in collections of scientific forums in Bulgaria and in Ukraine. 12 of all publications are in foreign languages - Russian and Ukrainian. The presented publications reflect significant results of the dissertation and provide it with sufficient publicity

#### **5. Evaluation of the abstract**

The presented abstract summarizes the content of the main structural parts of the dissertation and meets regulatory requirements.

#### **6. Critical remarks and recommendations**

In her future research work, I would recommend PhD student Olga Belan to focus on the role of tourism destination management organizations in promoting health tourism.

#### **7. Conclusion**

No plagiarism was found in the dissertation and the abstract

The candidate fulfills the quantity requirements under Art. 35, para. 1, item 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff in UE-Varna and the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of ADASRB.

Having assessed comprehensively the qualities of the author and the merits of the proposed dissertation work, without any reservation, I give a **positive assessment** and highly recommend the scientific degree "Doctor " in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)" in the professional field 3.9 Tourism to be awarded to Olga Vasilevna Belan

30.03.2022 / Varna

Signature: .....

(prof. S. Marinov, PhD)

**TO  
CHAIRMAN OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL  
DETERMINED BY ORDER OF THE RECTOR  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA**  
according to the procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"  
in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

### **Opinion**

**For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in a professional field 3.9. "Tourism", according to a procedure announced by the University of Economics – Varna**

by Prof. Dr. Bratol Georgiev Koprinarov University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" – Burgas  
Department of Marketing and Tourism

for the dissertation of Olga Vasilevna Belan, PhD student in the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna on "Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the example of the municipality of Varna" for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field 3.9. "Tourism", doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

### **1. Grounds for the opinion**

Order № RD-06-43 / 07.03.2022 of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna for determination of the Scientific Council and decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Management (Minutes № 31 of 23.02.2022)..

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

The dissertation of Olga Vasilevna Belan consists of a total of 295 pages, of which – introduction (9 pages); exposition in three chapters (209 pages); conclusion (5 pages); list of used literature (10 pages). The main text contains 47 tables and 38 figures. The list of used literature sources consists of 122 literature and information sources.

The development is dedicated to the current issues in modern Bulgarian tourism regarding the development of health tourism.

The subject of the scientific research focused on the development of the marketing activity of the municipality of Varna as a tourist destination for health tourism is extremely clearly and precisely defined. In the conditions of a developed competitive market, Bulgaria has a significant potential to develop health tourism with an emphasis on balneology (Medical SPA) and SPA (Wellness SPA). The possibility and the need for specialization in balneology and SPA tourism determine the relevance of the topic of the dissertation.

The scientific goal of the dissertation is to develop, on the basis of a conceptual market, a model of a destination for health tourist travel to analyze the marketing activities of the municipality of Varna in the field of health tourism and to determine strategic guidelines for its improvement.

The doctoral student has indicated four research tasks to be solved in her dissertation: systematization of the theoretical aspects of the marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism; modeling of a marketing system at a tourist place for health tourist trips and development of a methodology for marketing analysis of a destination for health tourism at the municipal level; analyzing the marketing activities of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism; outlining guidelines for improving the marketing activities for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna.

To carry out the research, PhD student Olga Belan used a set of research methods and approaches: induction and deduction, systematic approach, method of observation, analysis and synthesis, comparative analysis, in-depth interviews and surveys.

The conducted field research covers various sites in the destination Varna. Analyzes, interviews with representatives and specialists from the tourism industry in the field of health tourism were used.

The dissertation proposed for review has been developed on the basis of a thorough review and analysis of the available scientific publications on the topic of Bulgarian and foreign authors.

Structurally, the content of the dissertation is logically constructed and well balanced, the style is clear and understandable. The doctoral student successfully managed to develop and prove the hypotheses set in the development. In general, the dissertation is characterized by a clear authorial position, originality and depth of conclusions.

The research methodology used in the dissertation is subordinated to its scientific goals and specific research tasks. In the course of her research, the doctoral student has achieved optimal use and combination of abstract, scientific and practical methods.

The empirical research was conducted in two directions – **a survey and an in-depth interview** with specialists in tourism practice. Research tools have been developed in the form of a structured survey to assess the possibilities of the destination Varna for the development of health tourism.

The author's intervention of the doctoral student is in accordance with the requirements of the used research methods. There is a clear authenticity of the source data, logic and reliability of the conclusions and recommendations.

The research logic and structure of the dissertation are correct and well developed. The structuring follows the traditional approach in writing such research papers, first clarifies the theoretical foundations of the issue, secondly presents the research methodology and thirdly, logically applies the described methodology to the specific issue and the necessary conclusions and suggestions.

The illustrated material in the dissertation – 47 tables and 38 figures and 26 appendices, is presented clearly and with the required quality. The sources of the illustrated material are correctly cited. In general, this material is sufficient to present and argue the author's ideas and conclusions.

The doctoral student demonstrates abilities to analyze, generate ideas and interpret results of scientific research, to conduct independent scientific research.

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

Doctoral student Belan has published fifteen scientific reports at scientific forums, which meets the quantitative requirements of Art. 35, para. 1 and items 1-4 of the Rules for development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

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

The dissertation is developed by applying the classical structure for this type of research: introduction, main content of research in three chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendices.

In the **first chapter**, the content and details of the theoretical foundations for revealing the content of the marketing of a municipal tourist destination are presented. Logically, the author begins the analysis with a study of the nature and typology of health tourism. The doctoral student concludes that "the concept of marketing management of the development of a health tourism destination at the municipal level should be reduced to the coordination and harmonization of the social, economic and environmental component of sustainable development of the health tourism destination together with its territorial, economic and long-term social complexes for the fullest satisfaction of the needs of both the current and the future generation of residents of the municipality".

The **second chapter** in structural and logical aspect is dedicated to the analysis of marketing analysis of health tourism in the municipality of Varna. The summary is given that the successful development of health tourism services is related to achieving a multiplier effect in economic and social terms. In the long run, this will have a positive impact on building a favorable international image of Bulgaria and in particular the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism, with high competitiveness and high consumer value of the products offered. The Municipality of Varna can and should develop health tourism in order to attract Bulgarian and foreign tourists not only with its natural resources, but also with the affordable prices of health services.

The **third chapter** is dedicated to the marketing planning of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism. The tendencies in the development of the health tourism are considered. Proposals have been made for creating organizational prerequisites for effective marketing activities regarding health tourism in the municipality of Varna in three areas:

1. Analysis of the European experience in the field of health tourism.
2. The main normative acts related to balneo-, SPA and wellness tourism.
3. Creating a system for interaction between institutions, professional and branch organizations and local authorities for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna.

#### **5. Identification and evaluation of scientific contributions:**

The current state of tourism theory and practice in our country is still characterized by the lack of a comprehensive concept for the development and supply of health tourism. In Bulgaria, research on the role and importance of this highly efficient tourism is extremely limited. The studies are fragmentary, lacking both theoretical and empirical analyzes.

In this context, in the dissertation "Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the example of the municipality of Varna" stand out the following scientific and applied contributions:

##### *Scientific contributions of theoretical and methodological nature:*

- ✓ In the theoretical and methodological plan the definitions of the terms health tourism, medical tourism, medical tourism, spa tourism, wellness tourism have been updated and their content has been interpreted in the context of their modern use. The subcategories of health tourism are differentiated.

##### *Practical applications:*

- ✓ A methodology for research of the marketing activity of the municipal destination for health tourism has been developed. 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.
- ✓ An assessment of the resources for health tourism in the municipality of Varna has been made. The competitiveness of health tourism in the municipality was 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.
- ✓ 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. Detected or undetected plagiarism**

No plagiarism was found in the dissertation

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

Regarding the dissertation, the main exposition and the argumentation of the author's thesis and the argumentation of the conclusions, I have no critical remarks and recommendations.

## 8. Conclusion

The doctoral dissertation proposed by Olga Vasilevna Belan, PhD student in the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna on Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the example of Varna” significantly enriches science and practice in terms of opportunities for health development. tourism in the country, in particular in the municipality of Varna.

In conclusion, based on the positive aspects of the dissertation, scientific achievements and personal contribution of the doctoral student, I confidently give my unequivocal positive assessment of it and propose to the esteemed **Scientific Council to award doctoral student Olga Vasilevana Belan educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”, professional field 3.9. “Tourism”, scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”**

25.04.2022  
Burgas

Prepared the opinion:  
Prof. Dr. Bratoi Koprinarov

17.

**TO  
THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCIENTIFIC JURY  
DETERMINED BY ORDER OF THE RECTOR  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA**

according to the procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

**SCIENTIFIC OPINION**

For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in a professional field 3.9. "Tourism", according to a procedure announced by the University of Economics – Varna

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Veselina Ivanova Atanasova, University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" – Burgas Department of Marketing and Tourism

for the dissertation of Olga Vasilevna Belan, PhD student in the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna on "Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the example of the municipality of Varna" for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field 3.9. "Tourism", doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

**I. Grounds for writing the opinion**

Order № RD-06-43 / 07.03.2022 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna for determination of the Scientific Jury and decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Management (Minutes № 31 of 23.02.2022).

**II. General presentation of the dissertation**

The dissertation of Olga Vasilevna Belan consists of a total of 295 pages, of which –introduction (9 pages); exposition in three chapters (209 pages); conclusion (5 pages); list of used literature (10 pages). The main text contains 47 tables and 38 figures. The list of used literature sources consists of 122 literature and information sources.

The author's dissertation is dedicated to current issues in modern global tourism, the development of health tourism in its various forms of manifestation. The author's choice regarding the topic of the development is very well motivated and logically justified. The object of study is the municipality of Varna as a tourist destination for health tourism, interpreted in the context of a concept for the development of a tourist destination based on a marketing approach.

The subject of research is the marketing activity of the municipality of Varna as a tourist destination for health tourism. The scientific goal of the dissertation corresponds to the need indicated by the author, based on the conceptual market model of a destination for health tourism travel to analyze the marketing activities of the municipality of Varna in the field of health tourism and to determine strategic directions for its improvement.

The subject of the scientific research focused on the development of the marketing activity of the municipality of Varna as a tourist destination for health tourism is extremely clearly and precisely defined. In the conditions of a developed competitive market, Bulgaria has significant potential to develop health tourism with an emphasis on balneology (Medical SPA)



and spa (Wellness SPA). The possibility and the need for specialization in balneology and spa tourism determine the relevance of the topic of the dissertation.

The scientific goal of the dissertation is to develop, on the basis of a conceptual market, a model of a destination for health tourist travel to analyze the marketing activities of the municipality of Varna in the field of health tourism and to determine strategic guidelines for its improvement.

In order to achieve the formulated scientific goal, PhD student Olga Belan sets and realizes four research tasks:

1. First, systematization of the theoretical aspects of marketing a tourist destination for health tourism.

2. Second, modeling of a marketing system at a tourist place for health tourist trips and development of a methodology for marketing analysis of a destination for health tourism at the municipal level.

3. Third, analyzing the marketing activities of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism.

4. Fourth, outlining guidelines for improving the marketing activities for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna.

The thesis successfully proves and proves that the marketing of the destination for health tourism is a function of the joint coordinated, planned and organized actions of all stakeholders in the field in the implementation of tourist trips with health needs and motives.

The formulated thesis is concretized in five research hypotheses.

The used research methods correspond to the research goals and tasks set in the dissertation. Their combination includes: analysis and synthesis; observation; Questionnaire survey; comparative and SWOT analysis; statistical methods; method of alternative scenarios.

The sources of information are primary and secondary. Doctoral student Belan has thoroughly reviewed the publications in the field of research by Bulgarian and foreign authors, conducted his own empirical research.

Structurally, the content of the dissertation is logically connected, detailed, consistent, with relatively well-balanced parts, the style is clear and understandable. The dissertation is characterized by a clear author's position, originality and depth of conclusions, with a precise scientific apparatus.

The author's approach of the doctoral student is in accordance with the requirements of the used research methods. There is a clear authenticity of the source data, consistency and reliability of the conclusions and recommendations.

The research logic and structure of the dissertation are correct and well presented. The structuring follows the traditional approach in writing such research papers, first clarifies the theoretical foundations of the issue, secondly presents the research methodology and thirdly, logically applies the described methodology to the specific issue and the necessary conclusions and recommendations. The doctoral student successfully demonstrates the ability to conduct and analyze independent research, to interpret results, to generate ideas and suggestions.

The dissertation has the character of a complete, complete, original and significant research on the problem of developing a marketing strategy for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna. These findings allow me to draw the following conclusion: the dissertation is presented in a form and volume meeting the requirements of Art. 34, para. 2 and para 3 of the Rules for the conditions and the order for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions in the University of Economics – Varna.

Structurally, the content of the dissertation is logically constructed and well balanced, the style is clear and understandable. The doctoral student has successfully managed to develop and prove the hypotheses in development. In general, the dissertation is characterized by a clear authorial position, originality and depth of conclusions.

The research methodology used in the dissertation is subordinated to its scientific goals and specific research tasks. In the course of his research, the doctoral student has achieved optimal use and combination of abstract, scientific and practical methods.

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

Doctoral student Belan has published fifteen scientific publications, incl. 2 articles and 15 reports at scientific forums, which meets the quantitative requirements under Art. 35, para. 1 and items 1-4 of the Rules for development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

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

The dissertation is developed by applying the classical structure for this type of research: introduction, main content of research in three chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendices.

In the first chapter, the content and details of the theoretical foundations for revealing the content of the marketing of a municipal tourist destination are presented. The doctoral student confirms the conclusion that the marketing management of the tourist destination is one of the main principles of management. For the application of marketing in the management of the tourist destination it is necessary to analyze the specifics of the resort production and to develop a marketing plan for the municipality.

The second chapter in structural and logical aspect is dedicated to the analysis of marketing analysis of health tourism in the municipality of Varna. The summary is given that the climate in the municipality and the natural conditions create favorable opportunities for the development of industry, trade, tourism and communications in the region. Great wealth are the hot mineral springs and the healing mud, the favorable geographical position and natural resources, the sea coast, the built infrastructure, the level of employment and the great economic and human potential, which create real opportunities for development of Varna municipality as a destination for health tourism.

The third chapter is dedicated to the marketing planning of the municipality of Varna as a destination for health tourism. The tendencies in the development of the health tourism are considered. Proposals have been made for creating organizational prerequisites for effective marketing activities regarding health tourism in the municipality of Varna in three areas:

1. Analysis of the European experience in the field of health tourism.
2. The main normative acts related to balneo-, spa and wellness tourism.
3. Creating a system for interaction between institutions, professional and branch organizations and local authorities for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna.

Marketing strategies and goals for the development of health tourism in the municipality of Varna are proposed. The focus is on four priorities:

- ✓ Development of the product of health tourism.
- ✓ Improving the pricing policy of health tourism.
- ✓ Improving the distribution of health tourism.
- ✓ Improving the communication of health tourism.

### **V. Identification and evaluation of scientific contributions:**

The dissertation "Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the example of the municipality of Varna" highlights the following scientific and applied contributions:

Scientific contributions of theoretical and methodological nature:

- ✓ In the theoretical and methodological plan the definitions of the terms health tourism, medical tourism, medical tourism, spa tourism, wellness tourism have been updated and their content has been interpreted in the context of their modern use. The subcategories of health tourism are differentiated.
- ✓ A methodology for research of the marketing activity of the municipal destination for health tourism has been developed. 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.
- ✓ An assessment of the resources for health tourism in the municipality of Varna has been made. The competitiveness of health tourism in the municipality was 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.
- ✓ 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.

#### **VI. Established or undetected plagiarism**

No plagiarism was found in the dissertation

#### **VII. Critical remarks and recommendations:**

Regarding the dissertation, the main presentation and the argumentation of the author's thesis and the argumentation of the conclusions, I have no critical remarks and recommendations.

#### **VIII. Conclusion**

The doctoral dissertation proposed by Olga Vasilevna Belan, PhD student in the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna on "Marketing of a tourist destination for health tourism on the example of Varna" significantly enriches science and practice in terms of opportunities for health development tourism in the country, in particular in the municipality of Varna.

In conclusion, based on the positive aspects of the dissertation, scientific achievements and personal contribution of the doctoral student, I confidently give my unequivocal positive assessment of it and propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award doctoral student Olga Vasilevana Belan educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field 3.9. "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

28.04.2022

Burgas

Prepared the opinion

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Veselina Atanasova

