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ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ВАРНА

Bx. № 2120-1041 / 12.08.2024

## REVIEW

of dissertation work

for the establishment of an educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the  
doctoral program “Economics and Management (Tourism)” of the University of  
Economics – Varna

### 1. General information

*Reviewer:* Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgina Lukanova, University of Economics - Varna

*Grounds for writing the review:* participation in the Scientific Jury, determined  
by order of the Rector at the University of Economics - Varna RD-06-75/29.05.2024,  
and decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on June 4, 2024.

*Author of the dissertation:* Denitsa Miladinova Nankova, a PhD student at the  
Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of  
Economics – Varna.

*Topic of the dissertation:* "Opportunities for the development of agritourism  
through organic products in Bulgaria".

*Supervisor:* Prof. Dr. Velina Kazandzhieva.

### 2. Information about the PhD student

Denitsa Nankova studied in the doctoral program "Economics and  
Management (Tourism)" at IU – Varna from September, 2016 to September, 2019.  
During her studies, she successfully passed all the exams of the doctoral minimum,  
published 2 articles and 4 reports.

Denitsa Nankova obtained a bachelor's degree in "Marketing" at the University  
of Economics – Varna in 2014. One year later, in 2015, she received a master's degree  
in "Sales Management and Merchandising" at the same university.

Denitsa Nankova's work experience is mainly in the field of tourism. For the past 15 years until now, she has been working as a tour guide for the Union of Tour Guides in Bulgaria.

The presented circumstances and the attached documents show that the requirements of Art. 34, para. 1 and Art. 35 of the Regulations of the University of Economics – Varna are met and Denitsa Nankova has the right to appear in defense of her dissertation.

**3. General presentation of the dissertation (following requirements of Article 27, paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria)**

The general presentation of the dissertation implies the highlighting of the following essential points:

- Denitsa Nankova's dissertation submitted for review bears the marks of a completed, in-depth study dedicated to an interesting and current topic related to the development of agritourism through the use of bioproducts. The significance and relevance of the researched issues, justified in the introduction of the dissertation, are related to the role of agritourism through organic practices in achieving a positive relationship between nature and society, as well as the need to study its features in order to outline the favorable opportunities for its development.
- The research objective, as well as the object and subject of the study, have been defined correctly, following the formulated topic.
- To achieve the objective, five research tasks have been defined.
- In the introduction to the dissertation, the research thesis is appropriately stated, thereby predetermining the essence and direction of the research. This is then substantiated through the testing of three working hypotheses and the application of appropriately selected research methods.
- The limitations of the research are accurately delineated.

- The bibliographical apparatus includes 154 sources, in the structure of which the foreign ones prevail. The selection of sources is appropriate for the topic under investigation and includes a significant number of recent publications.

- The quantitative characteristics of the dissertation are in accordance with the requirements for works of this kind, comprising a total volume of 206 pages of main text and 12 pages of appendices. The main text is structured following the specific requirements of the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism and contains the requisite components: an introduction (5 pages), an exposition comprising three chapters (Ch. I - 68 pages, Ch. II - 56 pages, Ch. III - 55 pages, 179 pages in total), a conclusion (4 pages), and a list of sources used (14 pages). The illustrative material in the exposition is represented by 13 tables and 43 figures.

#### **4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation (compliance with the requirements of Article 34, paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 of the Regulation for the Development of the Academical Staff at the University of Economics)**

The dissertation structure and content correspond to the set aim and the research tasks.

The **introduction** comprises all the requisite elements, including a justification of the topic's relevance and significance, definition of the subject and object of the research, formulation of the research goal and tasks, delineation of the research thesis and working hypotheses, specification of the research methods, and outline of the research limitations.

The **first chapter** is comprised of four paragraphs, which provide an exhaustive theoretical overview of the subject area under study, defining the principal concepts therein. It provides a systematic account of the features of agritourism, distinguishing the term from related concepts such as rural tourism, farm tourism, and green tourism. It also presents an analysis of the socio-economic role of agritourism and offers an elucidation of the nature of organic products and their importance for the sector. The author presents a well-founded case for the interrelated development of the two sectors, emphasising the economic and non-economic benefits of combining

organic farming with tourism. Based on the theoretical review, by applying a systemic approach, a conceptual model for the development of agritourism through biological products is developed.

**Chapter Two** employs a similar structural format, comprising four paragraphs. The chapter commences with an exposition of the methodological steps undertaken in the course of the research, in accordance with the conceptual model delineated in the preceding section. The development of agritourism through organic products in Bulgaria is evaluated through a situational analysis. Following the established methodological framework, the PhD student designs and conducts an empirical study on the attitude of Bulgarians towards the consumption of organic products through the practice of agritourism. It is recommended that the study also examine the attitudes of the participants in the supply of agritourism through organic products, in addition to the study of consumer attitudes. However, it should be noted that such a study is subject to limitations, primarily related to the availability of information.

In accordance with the research objectives of the dissertation, the **third chapter** elucidates the guidelines for the development of agritourism through organic products in Bulgaria. The tendencies and perspectives in its development are systematised, and specific structural components of a marketing strategy for its sustainable development are outlined. However, the marketing actions are not specified. In the third paragraph of this chapter, the main problems and challenges of agritourism and organic production in Bulgaria are presented. Based on this analysis, further proposals and recommendations related to their integral development are formulated.

**The conclusion** summarizes the completion of the research tasks.

The structure and content of the dissertation are fully aligned with the research aim and objectives. The dissertation demonstrates a clear logical consistency and a balanced integration of the individual structural elements. The style and language of the presentation are consistent with those expected in a scientific document. It can be argued that the author of the dissertation possesses a

thorough theoretical knowledge of the relevant specialty and the capacity for independent research.

The **abstract** has been prepared in accordance with the requirements and accurately reflects the content of the submitted work.

#### **5. Identification and assessment of scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation**

The submitted report on the usefulness of the dissertation contains five contributions. After the analysis of the dissertation work, I confirm the stated, contributions, which can be specified as follows:

- I appreciate as an achievement and theoretical contribution of the dissertation author the formulation of the author's definition and the derivation of the typology of agritourism;

- I accept the author's proposed conceptual model for the use of organic products in agritourism as a theoretical contribution;

- as a contribution of scientific-applied nature, I commend the situational analysis and precise evaluation of the evolution of agritourism through organic products;

- I evaluate as an achievement of scientific-applied nature the developed methodology and tools for empirical research of consumer attitude towards agritourism through organic products;

- the formulation of strategic guidelines for the development of agritourism through organic products in Bulgaria constitutes a contribution of a scientific-applied nature.

#### **6. Publications related to the dissertation**

Doctoral student Denitsa Nankova has submitted a list of six publications on the dissertation, including 2 scientific articles and 4 reports, which are closely related to the subject of the dissertation, largely reflecting its essential parts and giving it publicity. The volume of the doctoral student's scientific outputs and the nature of the publications correspond to the requirements for acquiring the PhD degree. The

report on compliance with the national requirements under the Regulations on the Implementation of the LASDRB shows achievement of the required points for acquiring the doctoral degree.

#### **7. Detected or undetected plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract**

No plagiarism was found in the PhD thesis and the abstract submitted by Denitsa Nankova.

#### **8. Critical remarks and recommendations**

The submitted dissertation of Denitsa Nankova has been found to be free of significant theoretical, logical, and methodological errors. However, some inaccuracies, mainly of a technical nature, are inherent in this kind of work. To enhance the empirical research, it would be beneficial to include a study of the attitudes of the participants in the supply of agritourism through organic products in Bulgaria.

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

1. What marketing initiatives could be undertaken by agritourism operators to promote their product among young people?
2. Might the author propose particular culinary souvenirs associated with agritourism in Bulgaria?

#### **10. Conclusion**

The presented dissertation represents a complete independent research project that meets the requirements for the award of the PhD degree. The dissertation has yielded certain scientific and scientific-applied results, and the points of contribution are clearly delineated. These findings provide a rationale for my unequivocal positive assessment of the dissertation and for my recommendation to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to vote in favour of conferring the educational and scientific degree 'Doctor' in professional field 3.9 'Tourism', scientific specialty 'Economics and Management (Tourism)' to doctoral student Denitsa Nankova.

August 10, 2024

Varna

Reviewer:

Заличена информация съгласно  
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

(Assoc. Prof. ~~Dr. Georgina Lukanova~~)



UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD  
ECONOMY



## 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 No. RD-06-75/29.05.2024 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna for the appointment of a Scientific Jury and the decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on 06.04.2024.

**Author of the dissertation: Denitsa Miladinova Nankova** – full-time doctoral student in the Department of “Economics and Organization of Tourism” at the University of Economics – Varna

**Topic of the dissertation:** “Possibilities for the development of agritourism through the use of organic products in Bulgaria”

**Research supervisor: Prof. Dr. Velina Ivancheva Kazandzhieva**

### 2. Data about the dissertation student

**Denitsa Nankova** graduated from the University of Economics – Varna, EQD “Bachelor”, specialty “Marketing” (2014). Acquired Master’s degree in “Sales Management and Merchandising” at the same university (2015).

Her **professional development** began and continues as a tour guide for Spanish groups at the Union of Tour Guides in Bulgaria (2009 – until now). She speaks English, Spanish and Catalan.

**Denitsa Nankova** is enrolled in full-time doctoral studies with order No. RD-17-4003/03.10.2016 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna in the field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”, professional direction 3.9. “Tourism”, on



the doctoral program “Economics and Management (Tourism)” at the Department “Economics and Organization of Tourism”, for a period of **3 (three) years**, starting from 01.09.2016 – 01.09.2019.

Completes the work provided in the individual plan. Successfully passed the **doctoral exams** as follows:

- Internet and office applications in scientific research – Excellent (6.00);
- Research methodology – Excellent (5.50);
- Economy of tourism – Excellent (5.75);
- Theory of Management – Excellent (5.75).

During the period of her doctoral studies, she conducted seminars on the subject “Introduction to Tourism”. She was the scientific supervisor and reviewer of a diploma thesis on the topic “Project for the creation of a themed hotel product in the village of Cherni Vit”. She participated in the work of six doctoral-level courses organized by the University of Economics – Varna. She took part in two scientific projects.

During her studies as a doctoral student, Denitsa Nankova was certified with a **positive grade**. The dissertation work was discussed at the Faculty Council of the “Economics and Organization of Tourism” department. She was dismissed with the right of defense by order No. RD 17-2819/19.09.2019 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna, effective from 02.09.2019.

*A defense procedure was opened before a Scientific Jury, in accordance with **Art. 31, para. 1 and para. 2** of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”.*

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

The dissertation work of doctoral student **Denitsa Miladinova Nankova** submitted for review, the abstract and the scientific publications related to it are the result of independent scientific research. **The actuality and significance** of the researched issues are highlighted in a well-argued and convincing manner. It is emphasized that agrarian tourism has become an effective way to achieve sustainable development in the tourism industry and rural areas worldwide. The main objective of agritourism is the promotion of the local ecological community, aimed at achieving a positive relationship between society and nature.

**The object of research** – *“agritourism in Bulgaria as an alternative form of tourism carried out in rural areas in order to satisfy the specific needs and wishes of visitors from participating in agricultural activities”* and **the subject of research** – *“the peculiarities and*

*opportunities for the development of agritourism with emphasis on the use of organic products in the process of tourist consumption*". **The main goal** is clearly and precisely defined: *"based on the theoretical aspects of agritourism and biological products, to study the possibilities for their development in Bulgaria, in order to define the directions for improving the agritourism business in the country"*. The goal was achieved by solving **5 specific research tasks**.

**The research thesis** is appropriately formulated: *"there are a number of favorable opportunities for the development of agro-tourism activities in Bulgaria through the use of biological products"*. **3 working hypotheses** are correctly defined.

**The research toolkit** includes the application of a set of **research methods and approaches**. Among them are system analysis; induction and deduction; analysis and synthesis; comparative and situational analysis; descriptive, statistical and mathematical methods; desk study, focus group and online survey. **The information provision** is based on data from academic publications of specialists in the field of agritourism and bioproduction, statistical data and reports of national institutes, non-governmental organizations, local and foreign tourist places and Internet sites related to the supply and development of agrarian tourism and bioproducts.

**The main limitations** relate to the *specificity of the survey* and the *characteristics of the respondents*. **The main problems** in the development of the dissertation work are *the lack of specialized literature on agritourism, insufficient research and summarized local and foreign official statistics and refusal of respondents to participate in the survey*.

*The dissertation meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.*

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

The dissertation is 218 pages **long**. 13 tables, 43 figures and 1 formula are illustrated in the main text. **The structure** of the dissertation work is maintained in the spirit of well-grounded logic, consistency and connection between the treated problems. It consists of an introduction (5 pages), an exposition in three chapters (179 pages), a conclusion (4 pages) and references (14 pages). 4 appendices (12 pages) have been prepared for the dissertation work. **The bibliographic apparatus** includes 154 titles, including 56 literary sources and 98 specialized Internet sites.

Doctoral student Denitsa Nankova **knows well** the theses and concepts of established authors on the researched problems, and successfully interprets them. Literary sources have been used in **good faith and correctly**.

The style of the thesis is concise and precise. The text is written in **scientific language**. The content of the dissertation testifies that the doctoral student Denitsa Nankova has carried out a **thorough scientific study** and a very good **practical proof** of the author's goals and tasks.

The logical framework of the exhibition is presented in the **introduction**. The need to improve the opportunities for the development of agritourism through the use of organic products in Bulgaria is substantiated.

In the **first chapter** of the dissertation "**Theoretical foundations of agritourism and bioproducts**" the essential characteristics and typology of agritourism are examined. Its importance is highlighted. Research interest is focused on the characteristics of organic products and their importance for agritourism. A conceptual model for the use of bioproducts in agritourism has been developed.

In the **second chapter** of the dissertation "**Analysis and characterization of agritourism through bioproducts in the Republic of Bulgaria**" the methodology and research tools are presented. The importance of agritourism in Bulgaria is indicated. An in-depth analysis of organic products in Bulgaria, their market evaluation and legal framework was carried out. A characterization and assessment of agritourism through bioproducts have been made. A situational analysis of agritourism was carried out. The attitude of Bulgarians towards the consumption of organic products in agritourism was investigated.

In the **third chapter** of the dissertation "**Guidelines for the development of agritourism in the Republic of Bulgaria through bioproducts**" the trends and prospects for agritourism through bioproducts are examined. A marketing strategy for the sustainable development of agritourism and organic products is presented. A special place is devoted to the problems and challenges facing agritourism and organic production. Proposals and recommendations for improving agritourism through the use of organic products have been formulated.

In the **conclusion**, the main analyzes and conclusions related to the improvement of the opportunities for the development of agritourism through the use of bioproducts in Bulgaria are summarized.

Outstanding scientific and scientific-applied results represent an original contribution to science. They give grounds for the conclusion that the main goal of the dissertation work

has been **achieved**. The set research tasks have been **fulfilled**. The research thesis is **confirmed**. The formulated working hypotheses have been **proven**.

*In terms of structure and content, the dissertation **corresponds to the requirements** of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”.*

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

The abstract is **34 pages in Bulgarian** and **30 pages in English**. It correctly corresponds with the dissertation work 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 6 parts, which include: 1). general characteristics of the dissertation work; 2). content of the dissertation; 3). brief presentation of the dissertation work; 4). report on the contributions in the dissertation work; 5). list of publications on the dissertation work; 6). declaration of originality.

#### **5. Identification and assessment of scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation work**

Doctoral student Denitsa Nankova **correctly formulated the contributions** in her dissertation. We assess the submitted statement of contributions as correct and realistically reflecting the achieved results. In our opinion, **scientific and scientific-applied contributions** clearly stand out in the dissertation work, which can be summarized as follows:

**first** – an author’s definition of agritourism was formulated, the typology was derived and its role and importance for the development of the tourism sector were traced;

**secondly** – a conceptual model was developed for researching the possibilities for the development of agritourism through the use of organic products in Bulgaria;

**third** – a situational analysis of agritourism was carried out;

**fourth** – an empirical study was carried out, on the basis of which the attitude of Bulgarians towards the consumption of agritourism and organic products in Bulgaria was investigated;

**fifth** – strategic guidelines for the development of agritourism through organic products in the Republic of Bulgaria have been formulated.

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

Doctoral student Denitsa Nankova has **6 scientific publications** directly related to the topic of the dissertation work. It has achieved points by group of indicators “G” as follows:

*Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals and edited collective volumes.*

- **2 scientific articles**, independent, in Bulgarian, indexed in secondary databases;
- **4 scientific reports**, independent, in Bulgarian, included in the National Reference List.

**Papers** have been published in Proceedings of Scientific Forums as follows:

- 1). Regional Economy and Sustainable Development, 2017.
- 2). Tourism. Innovations. Strategies., 2017.
- 3). Construction Entrepreneurship and Real Estate, 2018.
- 4). Fourteenth International Scientific Conference of Young Scientists, 2018.

The publications of PhD student Denitsa Nankova are **representative** and ensure sufficient dissemination of the research results among the academic community and interested circles of the tourism business.

*The scientific production, dedicated to the treated issues, **meets the minimum national requirements** for awarding the ONS "Doctor", according to Art. 2b para. 2 and 3 of LDASRB and Art. 35, para. 1, item 4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".*

#### **7. Confirmed or unconfirmed plagiarism in the dissertation or abstract**

There is no proven plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract.

#### **8. Critical notes and recommendations**

Some notes may be made to the dissertation that would improve the overall presentation of the work.

1. It is **expedient** to expand and supplement the market research on the topic of the dissertation work to overcome the problems with the information security of the agritourism sector.

2. The study can be enriched by researching the attitudes of agricultural producers towards the agritourism product through the application of biological practices in Bulgaria.

The mentioned notes do not reduce the merits of the study and do not affect the general positive assessment of the dissertation work, as an independent study with indisputable scientific and scientific-applied contributions.

In order to utilize the potential of agritourism, I recommend that PhD student Denitsa Nankova continue her research in the field of expanding organic production in this perspective form of tourism in Bulgaria.

## 9. Questions for the dissertation student

The investigated issue raises the following questions for a decent defense:

1. What are the more important problematic aspects of the dissertation topic and what are the potential solutions for them in perspective?
2. What are the effective tools for increasing interest and interest in agritourism through organic products in Bulgaria on the part of tourists, businesses and the scientific community?

## 10. Conclusion

With conviction, I give a **positive assessment** of the dissertation work on the topic “Possibilities for the development of agritourism through the use of organic products in Bulgaria”. I confirm that it fully **complies with the requirements** of LDAS in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”.

The dissertation is a **scientific-applied solution** to a real practical problem of social significance. The doctoral student has in-depth theoretical knowledge in the field of “Tourism” and the ability to conduct independent scientific research.

I propose to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to make a **decision “FOR”** the awarding of the **educational and scientific degree “doctor”** in the field of higher education 3. “**Social, economic and legal sciences**”, professional direction 3.9. “**Tourism**”, scientific specialty “**Economics and Management (Tourism)**” of **DENITSA MILADINOVA NANKOVA** – full-time doctoral student in the Department “Economics and Organization of Tourism” at the Faculty of “Management” at the University of Economics – Varna.

Sofia,  
07/03/2024

**REVIEWER:**

(Prof. D.Sc. Tanya Parusheva)

Заличена информация съгласно  
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679