



STATEMENT OF OPINION

№ ДХ20-957/16.07.2024

by: Prof. Stoyan Petkov Marinov, PhD
Department of "Economics and organization of tourism", University of
Economics-Varna, scientific specialty „Economics and management (tourism)“

In reference to: dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree **“doctor”** in Area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences. Professional trend: 3.9. Tourism. Scientific specialty: “Economics and management (tourism)“ in UE-Varna.

Author of the dissertation: Denitsa Miladinova Nankova

Topic of the dissertation: „Possibilities for developing agritourism by use of bio-products in Bulgaria“

Ground for presenting the statement of opinion: participation as a member of the scientific jury concerning the defence of a dissertation in compliance with Order № RD 06-75 from 29.05.2024 of the Rector of UE-Varna

1. Information about the candidate

The PhD-student was taught in a doctoral programme in the Department of “Economics and organization of tourism”, Faculty of “Management” in UE-Varna in a doctoral programme of “Economics and management (tourism)“ in compliance with a decision of the FC of the Faculty of “Management”, minutes № 13/21.09.2016 and order № RD 17-4003/03.10.2016 of the Rector of UE-Varna, The PhD training was done in full-time form of education, paid by the state, in the time period 01.09.2016-01.09.2019. The PhD-student was written off with the right for defending her dissertation in compliance with decision of the FC of the Faculty of “Management”, minutes № 3/12.09.2019 and order RD 17-2819/19.09.2019 of the Rector of UE-Varna.

2. General characteristics if the presented dissertation

The volume of the research paper is 218 pages. It excels with correct structure including all obligatory elements of a research work: a 5-page introduction, a 3-chapter main body with 179 pages altogether, a 4-page conclusion, 4 appendices (12 pages) and a list of references (14 pages).

The dissertation has clearly defined subject and topic of the research. The *subject* reviewed is “agritourism in Bulgaria as an alternative tourist type implemented in rural areas with the aim to satisfy specific needs and wishes of the visitors to take part in agricultural activities.” The *topic* of research are the possibilities for developing agritourism by use of bioproducts.

The *research objective* is formulated correctly and concerns the systematization of the theoretical basics of agritourism and opening possibilities for the development of this type of tourism by use of bioproducts in Bulgaria. The objective is clarified in five tasks of research.



The author shows grasp of the scientific literature on the topic. The scope of sources of information she has used is sufficient. There are 154 titles altogether of used references in the list.

The interpretation and conclusions in the main body are illustrated through 13 tables, 43 figures and a formula.

The author uses suitable research methods for achieving the scientific objective: induction, deduction, analysis, synthesis, comparative and situational analysis, statistical and mathematic methods, office study and focus group. An online questionnaire survey is done and the results from it are processed by use of the software product SPSS.

The content of the dissertation proves that the set research objective has been achieved.

In the first chapter of the research paper there are systematized the theoretical basics of agritourism. The author has made her own classification of the various types of the particular type of tourism. The specifics of the bioproducts are brought up and their significance for agritourism is well grounded. A conceptual model is synthesised for studying agritourism by use of bioproducts.

In the second part of the paper there is a review of the agritourist market of bioproducts in Bulgaria. A situational analysis is made for bringing out the positive and negative characteristics of the internal and external environment of agritourism by use of bioproducts in Bulgaria. Based on an online questionnaire survey, the author has defined the attitude of Bulgarians to the consumption of bioproducts in agritourism.

In the third chapter of the dissertation the author presents tendencies and perspectives agritourism faces by use of bioproducts. She discusses the marketing strategy for sustainable development of agritourism and bioproducts; brings up issues and challenges in agritourism and bioproduction and formulates suggestions and recommendations for improving agritourism by use of bioproducts.

3. Assessment of the scientific and scientific-and-applied contributions

We assess that the dissertation paper contains four significant scientific-and-applied contributions.

Firstly, from the theoretical aspect, there are systematized the particularities and varieties of agritourism by tracing its role and significance for the development of the tourist sector.

Secondly, a conceptual model is made for studying the possibilities for developing agritourism by use of bioproducts following the example of destination Bulgaria.

Thirdly, a situational analysis of agritourism is made and by using an empirical survey Bulgarians' attitude to agritourism through bioproducts is defined.

Fourthly, there are formulated strategic guidelines for the development of agritourism by use of bioproducts in the Republic of Bulgaria.

4. Assessment of publications concerning the dissertation

Denitsa Nankova presents 6 publications on the topic of her doctoral thesis. Two of those are separate articles and 4 are separate research papers in collections of



research forums in Bulgaria. The presented publications reflect significant results of the dissertation and provide it with sufficient publicity.

5. Assessment of the personal abstract

The presented personal abstract sums up the content of the basic structural parts of the doctoral thesis and complies with the regulatory requirements.

6. Notes and recommendations

I would recommend Denitsa Nankova to expand the scope of her research work on the topic by encompassing the economic effectiveness of agritourism through bioproducts on micro level.

7. Conclusion

No plagiarism has been detected in the doctoral thesis. The paper complies with the requirements of article 24, item 1 and 2 of the Regulations for applying the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. It has the adequate research-and-applied results that account for original contribution in science and show that Denitsa Nankova has exhaustive theoretical knowledge in the field of tourism and the ability to do her own research work,

The PhD student complies with the requirements in article 1 from RALDASRB and article 35, item 1, p. 1-4 from the Regulations for development of the academic staff in UE-Varna. She complies with the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", according to article 26, items 2 and 3 of the Law for development of academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

I give my **positive assessment** and vote for awarding Denitsa Nankova the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and management (tourism)" in the professional trend 3.9 Tourism.

10.07.2024.

Varna

Statement of opinion ма

(Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD)

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

TO
THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCIENTIFIC JURY DETERMINED BY Rector's ORDER
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA
according to the procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

OPINION

For the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.9. "Tourism", doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" according to the procedure announced by the University of Economics - Varna

1. General information

Prepared the opinion: Associate Professor Dr. Veselin Ivanova Atanasova, University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas, Department of "Marketing and Tourism".

Reason for writing the opinion: Order No. RD-06-75/29.05.2024. of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna for the appointment of the Scientific Jury and the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Management (Protocol No. 13 of 27.05.2024).

Author of the dissertation: Denitsa Miladinova Nankova

Topic of the dissertation: "Possibilities for the development of agritourism through the use of organic products in Bulgaria".

General presentation of the dissertation work

Doctoral student Denitsa Nankova's dissertation consists of 218 pages, including main text, introduction (5 pages), three chapters (179 pages), conclusion (4 pages), list of references (14 pages) and appendices (12 pages). The main text contains 13 tables, 43 figures, 1 formula and 154 literary sources.

The author's dissertation is dedicated to an extremely topical issue reflecting the need to develop opportunities for the development of agritourism in Bulgaria based on the active use of existing bioproducts in the country. The relevance of the considered scientific issues is related to the direct and indirect influence that agritourism imposes on achieving a positive relationship between society and nature. However, there is still no unified definition of this term. This leads to the need to research and analyze the nature, characteristics and peculiarities of agritourism by applying biological products to the rural lifestyle and environment. The main goal of agritourism, PhD student Nankova points out, is the promotion of a local ecological community, directed practices both in a theoretical aspect and in terms of its practical implementation, in order to outline favorable opportunities for its development.

The subject of the scientific research is clearly and precisely defined, the emphasis is on the analysis, features and opportunities for the development of agritourism with an emphasis on the use of bioproducts in the process of tourist consumption.

The object of research in the dissertation is agritourism in Bulgaria as an alternative form of tourism, carried out in rural areas in order to satisfy the specific needs and desires of visitors from participation in agricultural activities.

The scientific goal of the dissertation corresponded with the need indicated by the author, and more specifically, 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 defined objective is realized by decomposing and implementing five research tasks:

To examine the main theoretical propositions related to the essence of agritourism and bioproducts by determining their role, typology and peculiarities in their functioning; To develop a conceptual model for the use of organic products in Bulgarian agritourism; To reveal the state and characteristics of agritourism through organic products in Bulgaria; To study the attitude of Bulgarians towards the consumption of organic products and the undertaking of agritourism activities, on the basis of which to reveal and evaluate the key opportunities for the growth of agritourism in the country; To draw up guidelines for the development of agrarian tourism by offering organic products in Bulgaria.

The set goal and tasks are related to the verification of three research hypotheses reflecting the positive development of Bulgarian organic agriculture and the practice of agritourism. The realization of the purpose of the research and the verification of the research hypothesis is carried out through the application of the following approaches: a systematic theoretical-methodological approach and an empirical approach, and the main methods and techniques on which the present dissertation is based are primarily related to the use of the first. The second approach is applied in the dissertation in the use of scientific research methods and techniques for gathering information.

The sources of information are primary and secondary. Doctoral student Denitsa Nankova thoroughly reviewed the mentioned publications in the field of the researched topic by Bulgarian and foreign authors, organized her own collection of empirical data.

Structurally, the content of the dissertation is logically bound, detailed, coherent, with relatively well-balanced parts, the style is clear and understandable. The dissertation work is distinguished by a clearly expressed author's position, originality and thoroughness of the conclusions, with a precise scientific apparatus.

The author's approach of the doctoral student is consistent with the requirements of the research methods used. There is a clearly expressed authenticity of the source data, consistency and credibility of the conclusions and recommendations.

The research logic and structure of the thesis is correct and well presented. In the structuring, the traditional approach to the writing of this kind of scientific work is followed. First the theoretical foundations of the problem are clarified, secondly the research methodology is presented and thirdly, the described methodology is logically applied to the specific problem and the necessary conclusions and recommendations. The doctoral student successfully demonstrates abilities to conduct and analyze independent scientific research, interpret results, generate ideas and proposals.

The dissertation has the character of a complete, complete, original and significant scientific study on the problem of developing agritourism in Bulgaria based on the bioproducts offered in the country. The stated findings give me the opportunity to draw the following conclusion: the dissertation is presented in a form and volume that meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the PPZRASRB and of Art. 34, para. 2 and paragraph 3 of the Terms and Conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at IU - Varna.

II. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation

The dissertation follows the classic structure for a similar type of scientific work: introduction, main content of the scientific research in three chapters, conclusion, bibliographic reference and appendices.

In the first chapter, the theoretical aspects for revealing the content of the essence of the concept of "agritourism" are presented in detail and in depth, a historical review of the term is carried out, and its features are presented. For the purposes and in fulfillment of the research tasks in the dissertation, the author formulated the following definition: agrarian tourism is a variety of rural tourism, including tourist and agricultural activities, which are offered by agricultural producers to generate additional income and carried out voluntarily by (tourists) for recreation, entertainment, enjoyment and education. The emphasis in the first chapter is also on the peculiarities of organic products and their role in the development of agritourism. There is an author's experience in constructing a conceptual model for the development of agritourism by offering organic products.

The second chapter in a structural and logical aspect is dedicated to the analysis and characterization of agritourism through bioproducts in the Republic of Bulgaria, the importance of agrarian tourism in the country is revealed. The author reveals the main characteristics and assessment of agritourism through organic products. A situational analysis of agrarian tourism

was carried out. The advantages, disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses of this alternative form of tourism are formulated.

In the third chapter, doctoral student Nankova analyzes the guidelines for the development of agritourism in Bulgaria through organic products. In fulfillment of the research tasks, the author systematizes the trends and prospects for agribusiness in the country, presents the marketing strategy for the development of agritourism through bioproducts and formulates specific proposals and recommendations for improving the development of agritourism. The guidelines for the development of agritourism through the use of bioproducts in Bulgaria, in the third part of the dissertation, are based on social, economic, demographic and consumer trends and define a number of perspectives for it. Achieving sustainable development is possible through the preparation of training and education programs, achieving cooperation between state institutions, non-governmental organizations and businesses, funding from the state, implementation of marketing activities, creation of regulations, implementation of monitoring and impact assessment of agritourism on the economic, social and natural environment.

In conclusion, doctoral student Nankova emphasizes that Bulgaria has the necessary potential for the development of agritourism through the use of organic products. Progress in these two sectors of the economy requires targeted action by side of the state, municipalities, non-governmental organizations and agricultural producers.

III. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation:

In the dissertation work of Denitsa Miladinova Nankova, the following scientific and applied scientific contributions are highlighted:

1. 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.
2. A conceptual model has been developed for researching the possibilities for the development of agritourism through the use of organic products in Bulgaria.
3. A situational analysis of agritourism was carried out.
4. 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.
5. Strategic guidelines for the development of agritourism through organic products in the Republic of Bulgaria have been formulated.

Critical notes and recommendations:

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

IV. Conclusion

The proposed doctoral dissertation by Denitsa Miladinova Nankova, a doctoral student in the Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" at the IU - Varna on the topic "Possibilities for the development of agritourism through the use of bioproducts in Bulgaria" significantly enriches science and practice in terms of development opportunities of the tourism industry.

In conclusion, based on the positive aspects of the dissertation work, the scientific achievements and the personal contribution of the doctoral student, I confidently give my categorical positive assessment of it and propose to the honorable **Scientific Jury** to award the doctoral student **Denitsa Miladinova Nankova** the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional direction 3.9. "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

Burgas

29.07.2024

The statement has been prepared by:

Associate Professor PhD Veselina Atanasova

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

TO

**THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCIENTIFIC JURY
DETERMINED BY Rector's ORDER
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA**
according to the procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor"
in the scientific specialty "Economics and management (tourism)"

STATEMENT

Regarding dissertation thesis for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.9. "Tourism", doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" according to the announced procedure from the University of Economics - Varna

1. General information

Author of the statement: Ass. Prof. Elena Ilieva, PhD, University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas, College of Tourism - Burgas.

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 decision of the Scientific Jury on 04.06.2024.

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: "Development opportunities for agritourism through the use of organic products in Bulgaria".

Research supervisor: Prof. Velina Kazandzhieva, PhD.

2. General presentation of the dissertation

The dissertation work of PhD student Denitsa Miladinova Nankova is a comprehensive independent study, dedicated to the extremely current topic for the agritourism development based on organic products in Bulgaria. The subject of the study is very well motivated and logically justified in the introduction. Agriculture and tourism are dynamically developing sectors worldwide. Agritourism, as a hybrid manifestation of the two industries, has a number of advantages regarding the well-being of agricultural entrepreneurs and the environment. However, scientific studies in the field of agritourism, especially as a way to achieve sustainable development in rural regions, is fragmentary and insufficient. Given the fact that rural areas occupy more than 80% of the territory of Bulgaria and agriculture and tourism are industries with traditions and create livelihood for a high share of the Bulgarian population, the stated arguments prove the **significance and relevance of the presented research** by Denitsa Miladinova Nankova.

The **subject and object** of the scientific research are precisely and clearly defined. They, both, indicate the particular context of the study – within the theory of tourism and agronomic science.

The **scientific goal** of the dissertation corresponds to the stated need by the author, and more specifically, based on a theoretical study of agritourism, to assess the agritourism development opportunities based on organic products in Bulgaria. In order to achieve the thus stated scientific goal, the PhD student defines and implements five specific research tasks, which are correctly formulated and completed in the dissertation work.

In the **introduction** of the dissertation, the **research thesis** is excellently formulated and is subsequently successfully attested in the study based on **three main hypotheses**. The author's valuable contribution to science is the conceptual model for assessment of agritourism development possibilities based on the use of organic products in Bulgaria

The selected **research methods** correspond to the research goal and tasks set in the dissertation. Logically, taking into account the complexity of the object and the subject of the research, the author chooses the interdisciplinary approach. For data processing during the empirical study, an appropriate statistical approach is also correctly used. The author's interpretation of the results from the empirical study and the proposed guidelines for improving agritourism based on organic products in Bulgaria, are clearly stating the author's position.

The **sources of information** correspond to the research topic. PhD student Denitsa Nankova thoroughly reviews diverse Bulgarian and foreign scientific literature, which corresponds to the interdisciplinary approach in the study. Predominantly, these are scientific papers in the field of rural tourism, organic agriculture, agritourism, sustainable tourism development. The **limitations** of the study mentioned by the author are relevant and acceptable.

As a result of the presented so far, I believe that the presented dissertation **fully meets** the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulation for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

3. Publications and participation in scientific forums

PhD student Nankova presents six scientific publications directly related to the topic of the dissertation work – 2 articles and 4 scientific reports, with which she achieves 80 points/credits. The articles are published in journals, known with their high reputation in the scientific community. The scientific production presented by the PhD student meets and exceeds the minimum national requirements for awarding doctoral degree according to Art. 3 of the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the quantitative requirements under Art. 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation

In relation to the **structure of the dissertation** of Denitsa Miladinova Nankova, it has a total length of 218 pages, of which: introduction (5 pages); exposition in three chapters (179 pages); conclusion (4 pages); used literature (14 pages) The main text contains 13 tables and 43 figures necessary for visualizing the presented information. There are also 4 Appendices with a total length of 12 pages.

The used **scientific literature** numbers 154 sources, of which 49 in Cyrillic and 105 in Latin. The used sources correspond to the subject and object of the study and are used and cited appropriately in the presented text.

Regarding the content, the dissertation follows a classical model: introduction; theoretical chapter; analytical chapter; applied chapter and conclusion. The content is well balanced and logically coherent.

In the **first chapter**, based on an historical review of the agritourism development in main EU destinations and worldwide, the influencing factors for agritourism development are reasonably presented. Theoretical positions in studies are investigated in depth, on the basis of which agritourism is characterized as an alternative to the mass and as a type of rural tourism. The main features of agritourism with an emphasis on sustainability are investigated, on which basis the main distinguishing characteristics of agritourism are presented. Following the approach from the general to the particular, the PhD student offers an author's definition of agritourism. Logically, the theoretical research continues with the positive and negative aspects of agritourism, its role in regional and national development, as well as good practices

in the agritourism development worldwide. An in-depth agritourism market research is presented with an emphasis on Europe and the USA.

Following the theme of the PhD thesis, the research continues with a study of the topic of organic products in the agricultural sector. The author defines the main terms in the organic product concept and examines substantive characteristics and specific activities in this field. Based on official statistical data, an in-depth analysis of the organic production market is provided, which clearly shows that it is dynamically growing on a global scale. The important topic of organic farming certification is also very well implemented. As a logical conclusion of the theoretical chapter, the author proposes a conceptual model for the agritourism development based on organic products. The basic concepts are related to the development of the agrarian sector and tourism as engines for the economic development in rural regions.

In the **second chapter** the PhD student provides a macroeconomic analysis with an emphasis on a comparison of rural areas in the country. Giving meaning to the importance and great potential of agritourism in Bulgaria, the author outlines the multifunctional role of agritourism in development of rural areas and overcoming some of its disadvantages. The organic production in Bulgaria is also investigated very well with an emphasis on small farms. Additionally, the size and the legal framework of the organic products market in Bulgaria are also investigated. Based on the presented data, the PhD student presents a comprehensive SWOT analysis of agritourism in the country.

The empirical study is based on a survey among 259 respondents – Bulgarian consumers, and examines their attitude towards the agritourism development based on organic products. The questions concern familiarity with the concept of agritourism, satisfaction levels, reasons and motivators, frequency of consumption and information channels. Correlation between variables is also examined to establish dependencies, and the survey data is statistically processed correctly with significant conclusions formulated.

The **third chapter** presents discussion of the results from the empirical study. The PhD student outlines the perspectives in the Bulgarian agritourism development based on organic products. The author successfully supports the thesis for the successful agritourism development in the country and constructs a marketing strategy for this purpose. Emphasis is placed on 12 particular recommendations with specific author's examples of possible actions among stakeholders in terms of successful development and overcoming general and specific challenges.

The **introduction and conclusion** of the PhD thesis effectively fulfill their role. The author uses appropriate scientific and professional terminology from the field of tourism and agronomic science.

The **abstract is in volume of 34 pages** and fully meets the requirements for this type of scientific papers and correctly reflects the main results of the dissertation work.

In conclusion, the dissertation is presented in a form and volume that meets the requirements of Art. 34, paragraph 2 and 3 of the Rules for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at the University of Economic - Varna.

5. Evaluation of scientific and scientifically applied contributions

I fully accept the scientific and scientifically applied contributions highlighted by the PhD student within the presented conclusion of the dissertation work. These are theoretical (enrichment of theoretical statements in the theory of tourism and agronomy, especially in relation to organic production); methodological (conceptual model for researching the possibilities of agritourism development based on organic products) and applied (approbation of the possibilities and consumer attitude regarding the development of agritourism through organic products in Bulgaria) contributions. I would like to especially emphasize the unique nature of the conceptual model and on the 4 strategies for agritourism development based on organic products in Bulgaria, presented in the second chapter of the doctorate.

6. Confirmed or unconfirmed plagiarism in the dissertation or the abstract

I find no plagiarism in the doctoral thesis and the abstract, presented by the PhD student.

7. Remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks and recommendations regarding the dissertation work.

8. Questions to the PhD student

I have no questions for the PhD student, in view of the comprehensive and logically stated research in the PhD thesis.

9. Conclusion

The presented PhD is an original and in-depth study that has a distinct contribution to the theory of tourism and to agritourism based on organic products. The research model and methodology are applicable, especially in terms of agritourism development possibilities at a national level. The author successfully combines her theoretical knowledge with her professional interests, demonstrating competence and a prominent author's position.

In conclusion, on the basis of the opinion presented by me, I give my **highly positive assessment of the presented doctorate and recommend the honorable Scientific Jury to award the PhD student Denitsa Miladinova Nankova the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)".**

25.07.2024,
Burgas

The statement has been prepared by:

/Assoc. Professor PhD Elena Ilieva/

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