

**UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS – VARNA**

**FACULTY “MANAGEMENT”**

**DEPARTMENT OF "ECONOMICS AND ORGANIZATION OF  
TOURISM"**

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**DIMITAR KOLEV**

***“STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOLF  
COMPLEXES IN BULGARIA”***

**A B S T R A C T**

of dissertation

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"  
in professional field 3.9. tourism,  
scientific specialty Economics and Management (Tourism)

**SUPERVISOR:  
Prof. Tanya Dubeva PhD**

**VARNA  
2024**

The dissertation consists of an introduction (4 pages), an exposition in three chapters (199 pages), a conclusion (4 pages), a list of the literature used (11 pages). The main text contains 34 tables and 25 figures. The list of used sources consists of 137 literary sources and 9 internet sites. There are 6 appendices to the dissertation work.

The defense of the dissertation will take place on ..... at .... room ...of the University of Economics-Varna at a meeting of a scientific jury, appointed by Order ..... by the Rector of UE-Varna.

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# I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

## 1. Relevance of the researched topic

Golf is a sport activity that has gained a lot of popularity and attention in recent years, especially after its inclusion in the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 (Millington, 2018), (Petrosillo, 2019) and in the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2021. It is currently considered the main sport in the world in terms of financial income (Han, 2016). Golf is both a sport and a leisure activity that includes specifics related to tourism, hospitality and real estate (Minoli, 2015).

The importance of golf tourism is expressed in various specific aspects. Golf tourism is one of the niche markets in sports tourism and is a sector that is growing steadily worldwide with increasing travel by golfers as well as sales of golf-related goods and services. There are over 55 million golfers worldwide, many of whom play regularly, seek variety in golf courses, and are thus potential golf tourists (Hutchinson, 2010). In financial terms, golf tourists spend more on average than other types of tourists during their trips (Correia, 2007). In addition, golf courses have become a very suitable tourist destination attraction (Shani, 2010) as they attract tourism investment, provide a quality product, improve employment and regional competitiveness, and compensate for its seasonality (Molina, 2010). Therefore, the governing authorities of many regions show great interest in including golf in their tourism development plans (Boukas, 2013).

Golf tourism has a future, and Bulgaria can undoubtedly contribute to diversifying the offering in the global golf tourism with its unique nature. Worldwide, most golf courses are located in the tropical climate zone and far fewer are in the temperate-continent climate zone. A prerequisite for the development of golf tourism in Bulgaria is the condition that the temperate-continent climate zone has more opportunities to extend the playing season compared to that in the tropical zone.

Bulgaria has a real potential to become one of the most desirable and popular golf destinations in Europe, because of its favorable climate conditions and golf courses located in remarkable landscapes. We are currently maintaining low prices compared to our competitor golf destinations such as Turkey and Spain. This makes our country an attractive tourist destination for both golf lovers and professional golfers.

## 2. Subject and object of the study

The **subject** of the present dissertation is the *development of golf complexes in Bulgaria*.

The present dissertation' **object** are the *management strategies for the development of golf complexes*.

## 3. Purpose and objectives of the study

The **purpose** of this research is to *form and derive strategies for the development*

*of golf complexes in Bulgaria based on a conceptual model for the development of these strategies.*

The defined goal requires approaching the following specific research **objectives**:

**Objective 1:** Systematizing the theoretical aspects of strategic management and the strategy development process in the context of tourism

**Objective 2:** Upgrade the concept of the golf complex as a tourist business model and develop a methodology for formulating a strategy for the development of a golf complex.

**Objective 3:** Prepare a situational analysis of the golf complexes in Bulgaria and their strategic management.

**Objective 4:** Evaluate the offerings of golf complexes in Bulgaria.

**Objective 5:** Analyze the main trends and good practices in the development of golf tourism.

**Objective 6:** Outline guidelines for creating strategies for the development of golf complexes in Bulgaria

#### **4. Research thesis and hypotheses**

The development asserts the **thesis** that a correctly formulated strategy for the development of golf complexes is a prerequisite for increasing their competitiveness and for the effective development of golf tourism in the respective destination.

To prove the main thesis of the dissertation, the following **hypotheses** are tested:

*Hypothesis 1:* There is a lack of clearly formulated strategies for the development of golf complexes in Bulgaria.

*Hypothesis 2:* The main purpose of visitors to golf complexes in Bulgaria is not playing golf.

*Hypothesis 3:* There are favorable conditions for the development of golf tourism in Bulgaria.

#### **5. Research approaches and limitations**

A set of **research methods** and approaches is used to achieve the goal and for the implementation of the set objectives.

The theoretical-methodological aspects include a historical and systematic approach, method of analysis and synthesis, comparative method, method of induction and deduction, analogy and comparison. From the methods of empirical research, survey research, statistical and descriptive methods of analysis are used, given the specifics of the objectives under consideration. Data collected from the survey are processed using methods of descriptive statistics to calculate arithmetic mean values and standard deviations in their empirical distributions. From the tests of comparative and associative statistics, we apply correlation and regression analysis in order to extract information about the statistically significant relationships between empirical data and scientific presentation of the results of the statistical research.

The **objective limitations** when writing the dissertation are related to the

information collateral of the dissertation work and the time period for conducting the research, and generally refer to the following circumstances:

- Lack of sufficient scientific and applied research on the issue in question in global literature and especially in Bulgaria;
- The limitation of the field studies to a specific period covering the summer tourist season of 2022.
- The limitation of the field research only to golf complexes in Bulgaria and to golfers residing in the destination.

The **main problem** when writing the dissertation mainly relate to gaps and incompleteness in statistical data, as well as to the low level of commitment of golfers and representatives of golf complexes to questionnaire surveys.

## **6. Information sources**

The information for the study was derived through a systematic study of specialized scientific publications by Bulgarian and foreign authors. A total of 146 literary and informational sources were used, including 31 titles in Bulgarian, 9 Bulgarian sites; 90 works in foreign languages and 14 specialized internet sites.

## **II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION**

### **1. Structure of the dissertation**

The structure of the dissertation work is determined by the combination of the subject, the object, its aims and objectives and reflects the author's approach to the research.

The dissertation consists of an introduction (4 pages), an exposition in three chapters (199 pages), a conclusion (5 pages), a list of the literature used (13 pages). The main text contains 27 tables and 19 figures. The list of sources used consists of 186 literary sources and 12 Internet sites. The dissertation includes 9 appendices.

### **2. Content of the dissertation**

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

#### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Chapter one. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF GOLF COMPLEXES IN TOURISM**

- 1.1 Characteristics of strategic planning
  - 1.1.1 Defining strategic planning
  - 1.1.2 Types of development strategies
  - 1.1.3 Strategic choice process in tourism
- 1.2 Basis of golf complexes as a tourist business model
  - 1.2.1 Characteristics and development of golf tourism
  - 1.2.2 Business model concept
  - 1.2.3 Features of the business model of a tourist golf complex
- 1.3 Methodology of creating a golf complex development strategy
  - 1.3.1 Model for the development of a golf complex strategy
  - 1.3.2 Research methodology

#### **Chapter two. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF GOLF COMPLEXES IN BULGARIA**

- 2.1 Characteristics of golf complexes in Bulgaria
  - 2.1.1 The natural environment as a prerequisite for the development of golf tourism in Bulgaria
  - 2.1.2 Characteristics of the existing golf courses in Bulgaria
- 2.2 Analysis of the business environment of golf complexes in Bulgaria
- 2.3 Quantitative and qualitative assessment of the offerings of golf complexes in Bulgaria (statistics and survey results)



## **Chapter three. GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOLF COMPLEXES IN BULGARIA**

- 3.1 Trends in the development of golf tourism and good practices
- 3.2 Analysis of the target market segments of golf complexes in Bulgaria
- 3.3 Strategies for the development of golf complexes in Bulgaria

**Conclusion**

**References**

**Appendix**

### **I. BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE DISSERTATION PAPER**

#### **CHAPTER ONE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF GOLF COMPLEXES IN TOURISM**

**In § 1.1. Characteristics of strategic planning** in accordance with the objectives set in the dissertation, the theoretical aspects of strategic planning are examined.

In *paragraph 1.1.1*, we make a comparative analysis of the existing definitions of planning and systematize the focal points they present.

The analysis made gives us reason to claim that planning is an important process in its essence, because it is the initial function of management and determines the nature of the other functions that logically derive from it. Planning is the process of determining the goals that the enterprise intends to achieve over a period of time, as well as how to achieve these goals. Although attempts have been made by many authors to provide a clear definition, no consensus has been reached in the specialized literature regarding the scale, scope and specificity of the term "planning".

Historically, company planning goes through several stages of development: budget planning; market-oriented/marketing planning; strategic planning (Kamenov, 1999). Corresponding to the historical context, each stage is distinguished by specific characteristics.

**Table 1 Characteristics of planning types**

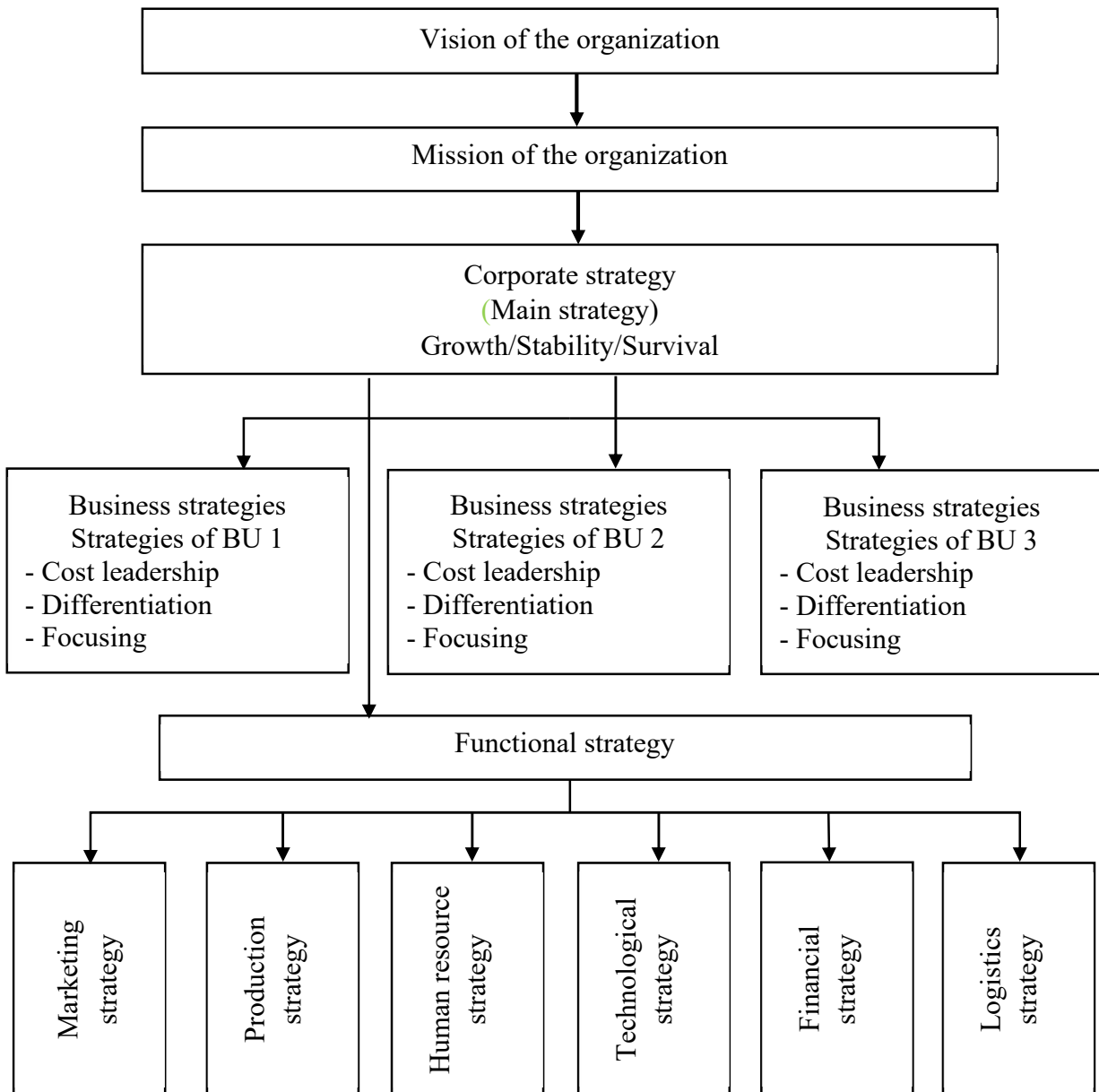
|                      | <b>Budgeting</b>                                 | <b>Long-term planning</b>                                    | <b>Strategic planning</b>                                 |
|----------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Main goal</b>     | Process control and management of its complexity | Growth prediction and dealing with complexity                | Adjustments in strategic direction and capabilities       |
| <b>Main position</b> | The Future repeats the Past                      | The Future is a continuation of past trends and developments | New trends and disruption of consistency can be predicted |

|               |              |              |              |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Nature of use | Periodically | Periodically | Periodically |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|

**Source:** Adapted from Aaker, D., (2001), Strategic market management, John Wiley&Sons

Subsequently an overview of the definitions of the concept of "strategy" and its various aspects and applications in practice are presented. After analyzing and comparing different definitions, we come to the conclusion that there is no single interpretation of the concept of "strategy", which is due to the multi-component nature of the strategic process. In summary, it is necessary to conclude that regardless of the lack of a generally accepted single definition for the concept of "strategy", in its essence it is a detailed, comprehensive and complex plan, which is designed to ensure the implementation of the mission of the organization and the realization of its goals. The strategy links the tourism enterprise to the surrounding social environment, with external opportunities and threats being connected to the internal resources and potential of the organization.

In subsection (§ 1.1.2) we consider the classifications of the types of development strategies in terms of business development, in accordance with the levels of the hierarchical structure of the company, in regards to the development cycle of the enterprise, etc. We also review the various ways of strategically positioning business units. After analyzing and comparing different classifications, we come to the conclusion that the factors affecting the development of the tourism company can be controlled or limited if necessary, through different types of marketing strategies or policies. In addition, the specifics of different industries determine the use of different strategies. The conclusion we reach is that the outlined classifications do not exhaust all the possibilities known in the theory of strategic management, but are the ones most frequently used and show the comprehensive application of strategies in practice, and are most directly related to the topic of the dissertation. As a summary of the classification concepts of the various authors, we offer our own systematization of the types of strategies, which we believe every single golf complex, considered as a business organization or enterprise, should develop and implement in order to achieve competitiveness.



**Figure 1 Classification of organizational strategies**

*Source:* Compiled by the author

In the next subsection (1.1.3), we consider the process of strategic choice in tourism. The strategies applied in tourism are specific because most products in the industry are services and not goods (ie they are intangible). Emphasis is also placed on the importance of the main characteristics that make services different from physical goods and are relevant to the way they are managed, such as their impalpability, indivisibility, perishability, heterogeneity and ownership. They change the emphasis of the manager's task of developing a strategy for selling a service compared to developing a strategy for selling goods. Emphasis is also placed on the steps of strategic choice in tourism given the peculiarities of the tourism industry. The conclusion after the literature review is that the creation of successful strategies is a complex managerial process of analysis and planning, taking into account the state and effects of all factors of the

internal and external environment of the tourist spot. A successful strategy is the key to overcoming the competition and creating customer loyalty to the destination.

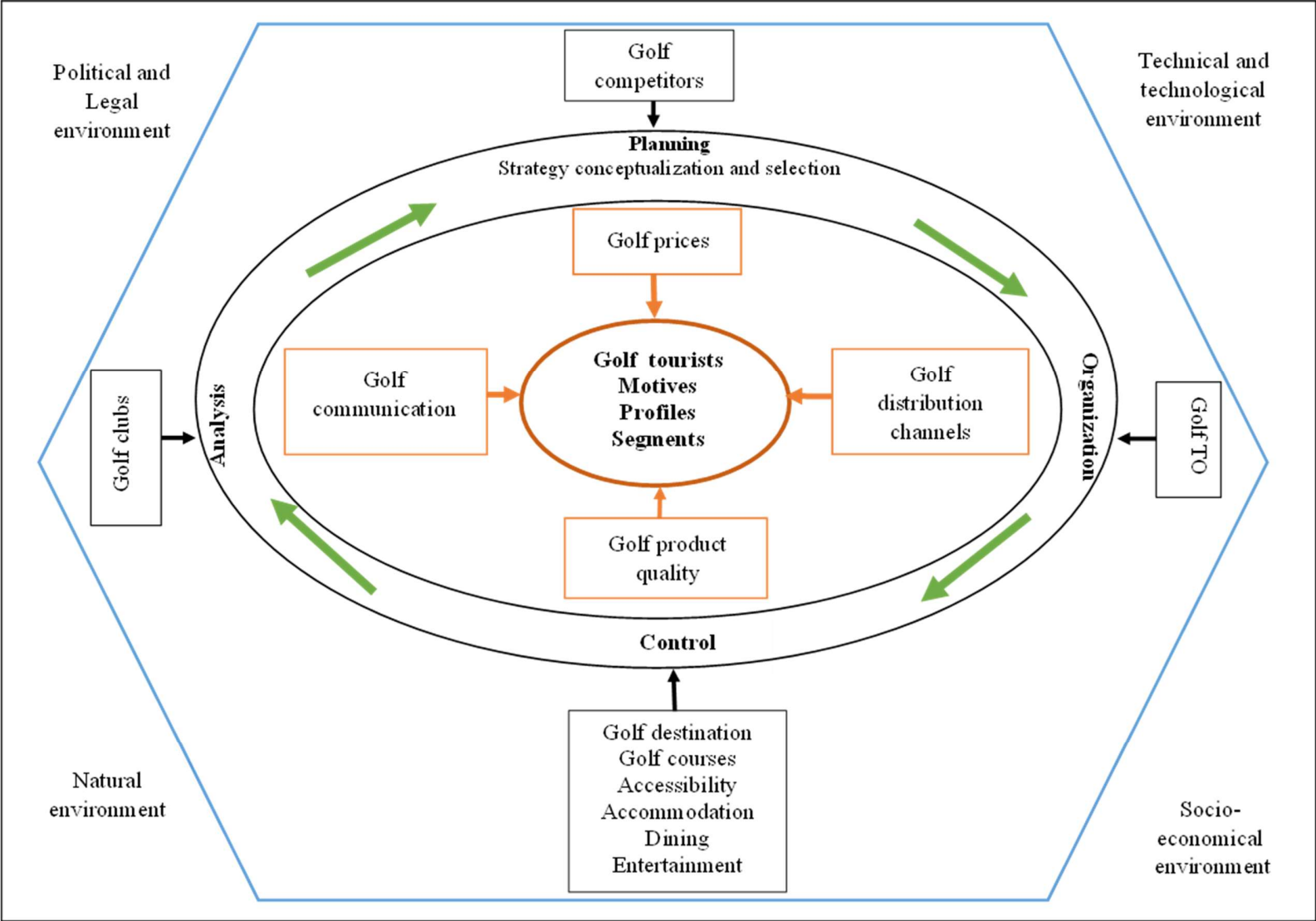
The nature of golf complexes as a tourist business model is discussed in paragraph 1.2. For this purpose, we first analyze the nature and development of golf tourism (§ 1.2.1). Summarizing the contributions of various researchers, we can conclude that golf tourism is a type of recreational travel away from home with the main purpose of playing golf and includes accommodation, meals, use of additional services, as well as higher expenses, atypical for the average tourist. Golf tourism is one of the niche markets in sports tourism and is a sector that is growing steadily worldwide with visitors traveling for golf tournaments and with sales of real estate in golf complexes. Golf is preferred by many destinations not only because of the high expenditure of golf tourists, but also as an opportunity to change the seasonality of visits and is used as a strategic tool to extend the tourist season.

Subsequently, an overview of the basis of the business model concept is introduced in subsection § 1.2.2. After analyzing and comparing different definitions, we come to the conclusion that for this study, the business model canvas introduced by Osterwalder in 2004 and Osterwalder and Pinor in 2010 is most suitable for examining the building blocks of the business model of a golf complex. The business model canvas divides revenue generation into nine parts (customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, cash flows, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, and cost structure) that take into consideration customers, offerings, infrastructure and financial viability. Based on the analysis, we can summarize that the business model serves as a scheme that shows how an organization works. It turns the company's strategic goals into a model that clearly shows the functions of the business and can also be used as a blueprint.

In the next subsection § 1.2.3, we examine the features of the business model of a tourist golf complex, emphasizing its main building blocks. After the analysis, we come to the conclusion that golf courses can complement other existing developed forms of tourism such as urban tourism, business tourism and rural tourism. Golf tourism adds value to tourism products by enhancing and diversifying them with new activities, facilities and services, and contributes positively to the development and growth of the tourism sector. It also increases revenue from ancillary tourism services (such as incentive and conference travel) and extends the season for many destinations.

In paragraph 1.3. Methodology of creating a golf complex development strategy, we present a conceptual model for the development of a strategy for a golf complex (§1.3.1)

The base assumption of this thesis is that for designing an appropriate strategy for the development of golf complexes, it is essential to be aware of the travel motives of golf tourists and what factors influence them to choose a given golf destination. On the basis of the overall consideration of the various concepts of strategic planning and the specificities of golf tourism, and given the scientific goal and objectives set in the dissertation work, we propose a model for developing a strategy of a golf complex as a business unit, based on the marketing philosophy.



**Figure 2 Conceptual model of the research**

*Source:* Created by the author

The proposed model for developing a strategy of a golf complex is developed in accordance with the marketing philosophy, suitable for a competitive presence in the saturated tourist market. It follows the logic of strategic planning, placing consumers and the target market segments formed by them first. Based on the motives and profile of tourists from the selected target market segments, the strategic marketing mix is developed. The created strategic marketing mix should correspond with the other functional strategies of the golf complex (production strategy, human resources strategy, financial strategy). All together, the marketing strategy and the other functional strategies of the golf complex should provide content for the main (base) strategy of the golf complex as a business organization (business unit).

In subsection 1.3.2 Research methodology, we argue the selected methods of collecting primary data for operationalizing the systematized model for developing the strategy of the golf complex. For the purposes of the present study, we propose that the collection of primary data should be carried out both through qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews and quantitative research based on self-administered questionnaires. Qualitative research design aims to discover important motives for attracting golf tourists. Semi-structured personal interviews are an appropriate method when exploring complex issues and collecting sensitive data that provide a better understanding of the motivations and solutions to the problem at hand.

The questionnaire we propose for the current study consists of three sections to address the research questions and hypotheses. It is designed and distributed in Bulgarian and English to collect data from both Bulgarian and foreign golf tourists.

The first section of the questionnaire aims to obtain data on golf tourists' travel behavior and characteristics. The second section identifies the motivations and destination attributes that attract golf tourists, when undertaking golf holidays abroad and visiting golf destinations. As motivation is a dynamic and multidimensional concept (Crompton, 1979; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981; Pyo et al, 1989; Kozak, 2002), a five-point Likert scale was used in the present study to measure levels of agreement/disagreement regarding variables related to the motivation to undertake a golf trip. In this section of the survey, we also include questions related to the tourist's experience in the golf complex. In the third section, we examine the socio-demographic indicators of the respondents. The questions here are designed to obtain personal information, such as gender, age, income, occupation, and educational level.

The planned research design determines the most suitable statistical analyzes for conducting it, guiding the choice of procedures to test the research hypotheses. The initial analysis of the questions is done on the basis of correlation analysis in order to determine which of them are suitable for constructing the measurement scales and which should not be included. The reliability and internal consistency of the questions that make up the scales are proven based on information about the Cronbach's alpha coefficient values.

In the first stage, descriptive statistics are used to profile all respondents in regards to their socio-demographic characteristics, golf-related behavior and travel characteristics, and destination preferences.

In the second stage, factor analysis is used to identify the factors of golf tourists' travel motivation. The factor analysis applied in the study aims to outline the main dimensions of the motivation factors for choosing golf holidays.

In conclusion, we can say that the research design thus constructed summarizes

the strengths of the previous theoretical and practical studies regarding this topic, taking into account the region-specific prerequisites of the studied phenomenon and provides a starting point for future systematic and complex studies in this area.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SITUATION ANALYSIS OF GOLF COMPLEXES IN BULGARIA

The second chapter analyses the positions of golf complexes in Bulgaria. As a prerequisite for the development of golf tourism, we analyse the natural environment in Bulgaria (subparagraph 2.1.1). From the analysis we can conclude that the favourable weather conditions in Bulgaria definitely allow playing on suitable golf courses during almost all months of the year, which in itself is a great advantage. On the other hand, the great variety of natural features is also a very important component for the successful development of golf tourism and represents a challenge for golf lovers from all over the world. The atmospheric conditions, the natural environment and the country's rich historical heritage are the key to making Bulgaria a successful golf destination for Southern and Southeastern Europe.

After the detailed analysis of the natural environment in Bulgaria as a prerequisite for the development of golf tourism, in 2.1.2 we examine the existing golf courses in Bulgaria. There are currently seven golf courses in Bulgaria that offer golf instructors certified by the Professional Golf Association. (fig. 3)



**Figure 3 Golf courses in Bulgaria**

*Source:* <https://experience.bg/golf-destinaciq-Bulgaria>

The analysis of the tourism product of the existing golf courses in Bulgaria shows that in terms of golf tourism and the conditions it offers for its practice, Bulgaria has taken the right direction for development. In comparison with Scotland, where only 20% of golf courses (out of all 557 golf courses) have their own facilities and accommodation within the golf complexes, in Bulgaria the majority of golf courses also offer accommodation for the golfers. Another advantage of the golf courses presented so far in Bulgaria is that the

majority of them were designed by world names in golf. Quality golf courses are extremely important factors for Bulgaria, especially since it is not yet an established golf destination.

As a complex socio-economic system, the golf complex is subject to the effects of numerous factors that influence its development at any given moment, to varying degrees and durations. Therefore, in 2.2. we make a detailed analysis of the business environment of golf complexes in Bulgaria. In summary, contemporary demographic, social and cultural conditions give rise to the following more significant opportunities and threats for the tourism golf destination:

- The steady trend of population aging in Bulgaria and on the planet and the increase in the relative share of people in the third age leads to the growing segment of tourists from the third age who have more money for tourism and who would look for quality, amenities (comfort) and safety in their travel choices. They would also be interested in facilities for relaxation through light physical exertion, where golf tourism and golf courses are a wonderful motivation for choosing a destination.

- The growth of conscious attitude and care towards health, which influences the choice of destinations and consumer behavior during travel, can be a good opportunity for golf resorts that also offer a spa.

- Bulgaria's favorable natural and climatic environment can also lead to an increase in the possibility of meeting the specific demand of the growing segment of golf tourists from the third age.

The threats to Bulgaria arising from the modern demographic and socio-cultural conditions can be summarised to the following:

- Threat of accelerating demographic collapse in the country and increasing its negative effects on domestic tourism consumption and labor resources.

- Threat of the outflow of qualified personnel abroad

In the era of globalization, technology has an indisputable contribution to all spheres of the economy, including the correct strategy of golf complexes in Bulgaria. Technological factors related to advances in technique and technology have a significant impact on the development of tourism, open up opportunities for the production of new types of services, marketing and improvement of customer service.

Emphasis is also placed on the importance of implementing greener business operations in golf complexes. Golf course maintenance can have significant environmental impacts, including water and energy use, pesticide and fertilizer use, waste generation, and habitat destruction. The key areas that golf courses must manage to ensure they minimize their environmental impact are water conservation, energy conservation, biodiversity and community engagement. The conclusion we reach is that through new practices and innovations, golf courses would find long-term solutions to minimize the environmental impact of their facilities and contribute to a more sustainable future.

After the detailed analysis of the macro environment of the golf complexes in Bulgaria, we consider the micro environment as a subdivision of the business environment, which includes the factors that are closest to the company and over which it can have some control. Analysing the customers of the golf resorts and their main motivation for travel, we come to the conclusion that they prioritize destinations with famous golf courses and facilities, first-class accommodation, dining and entertainment activities, contributing to the luxury segment of the tourism industry. For Bulgaria, this is advantage, as our golf



complexes offer high-class accommodation and regardless of the fact that Bulgaria does not occupy leading positions in terms of popularity of golf courses, the development of golf tourism in our country is also favored by the climatic conditions, which allow playing on a variety of terrains and almost throughout the year. In addition, golf tourists prioritize quality experiences both on and outside the golf course, including luxury accommodation, fine dining, spa services and cultural activities, which is an advantage for golf resorts in Bulgaria with their resort products.

The analysis of the suppliers shows that they play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation and the provision of quality services in the golf complexes. Establishing reliable and effective supplier partnerships is essential to the success and sustainability of the golf complex. Additionally, golf resorts can prioritize working with suppliers that align with their values, such as those that promote sustainability, local sourcing or ethical business practices.

Regarding the competitors, we come to the conclusion that the golf complexes in Bulgaria are not competitors with each other, but complement each other, as together they present a complex product with various possibilities for additional activities. As competitive destinations of Bulgaria, we would rather accept golf destinations in Europe.

The analyzed data of financial and insurance institutions lead to the conclusion that in Bulgaria banks are not inclined to grant loans for golf courses. All existing golf complexes in Bulgaria were built with bank loans. Due to unsatisfactory financial and economic results, the companies that own the golf complexes find it difficult to service their credit obligations, which prevents banks from lending to new golf projects. Regarding the labor market, it should be noted that Bulgaria lacks specialized educational institutions for training personnel for golf complexes.

The analysis of the microenvironment shows that the attitude of the local population towards the golf courses is also important for the good reputation of the golf courses. In recent years, there has been public concern about whether golf courses are dangerous to nature and how to make them as environmentally friendly as possible. The environmental arguments against golf courses are usually related to the use of pesticides, the drying of wetlands, the disturbance of the habitats of valuable plant and animal species, the interruption of migratory routes of birds, the introduction of alien plant species, the use of vast amounts of irrigation water which in some cases is even drinkable and others. An additional important ecological aspect is whether the boundaries of the golf course include areas of the European ecological network Natura 2000, which includes habitats of rare and endangered plant and animal species. Despite these concerns, each golf course receives an environmental impact assessment and, if within its territory, there are parts of Natura 2000, an environmental assessment is also carried out. It expertly evaluates whether it is environmentally friendly to carry out the given activity and gives recommendations. These conditions are respected so that there are no sanctions from the EU. Additionally, the use of green golf course management programs is encouraged through various national awards and certifications. All these factors are a prerequisite for positive public opinion and support of the local population for the development of golf complexes in Bulgaria (Ivanova, Shopova, Ilcheva, 2012).

The following are the results of the empirical research, from which the **strengths and weaknesses** of the golf complexes in Bulgaria are deduced (2.3.). For the successful implementation of the research and to obtain relevant results, an empirical study was

conducted in the period from March to November 2023. Initially, 200 surveys were distributed to participants on paper and via links. After completing the survey, it was found that the surveys of 120 participants could be used for the purpose of analysis. As a tool for collecting information, we chose a questionnaire so that the information obtained could be fully processed with quantitative methods. A main argument for our choice is the obtaining of comparable quantitative data, which allows the use of statistical software in their processing (SPSS 16.0).

The results of the conducted empirical research give us grounds to draw the following conclusions regarding the empirical hypotheses formulated in the research work in paragraph 2.3.

*Regarding the first hypothesis - There are no clearly formulated strategies for the development of golf complexes in Bulgaria - the results of the conducted surveys prove that we cannot talk about a united strategy between the individual golf complexes.*

*Regarding the second hypothesis "Visitors to golf complexes in Bulgaria do not have the main purpose of playing golf", although the difference in percentages is small, playing golf takes precedence and based on these results, hypothesis 2 is rejected.*

*In the third hypothesis: There are favorable conditions for the development of golf tourism in Bulgaria for:*

*3A: Golf facilities and golf services*

*3B: Accommodation and catering*

*3C: Various ancillary activities and services*

*the hypothesis is confirmed for all three categories.*

As a summary of paragraph 2.3, the data from the analysis gives us reason to claim that Bulgarian golf complexes are visited by amateur golf tourists rather than professional golf players, which means that in determining appropriate strategies for improving the offer in golf complexes in Bulgaria, it is not enough to focus only on the qualities of the golf facilities and golf courses, but to think about the overall experience of the visitors in the golf complex. The fact that the respondents rated above the average in all three categories - golf facilities and golf services, accommodation and food and various accompanying activities and services - is encouraging, which indicates that the Bulgarian golf complexes can come up with a competitive product on the golf tourism market.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOLF COURSE STRATEGIES IN BULGARIA**

As a comprehensive summary of the literature review and the analysis of the empirical results, the third chapter outlines guidelines for developing strategies for the development of golf complexes in Bulgaria. For this purpose in paragraph 3.1. trends in the development of golf tourism are reviewed and some good practices are indicated. Golf tourism has become a thriving industry that attracts enthusiasts and tourists from all over the world. From scenic courses to luxury resorts, the international golf tourism market offers a variety of experiences for the enthusiastic golfer. India and China are two of the largest emerging golf markets in the world. The golf industry in Asia is growing with rising incomes and increasing visitor numbers. Europe is also playing an important role in the global market, with a magnificent CAGR growth during the period 2022-2029.

Traditional golf destinations such as Scotland and the US continue to attract golfers, but new regions are also emerging that are becoming attractive golf destinations. In terms of the golf segment, about a third of all golfers in the US belong to Generation Y (also known as Millennials). This is a surprising fact, considering that golf is attractive to middle-aged and older people. Changes in the market segment of golf tourism and, accordingly, in consumer tastes and preferences require following changes in golf tourism supply:

- Increase in golf events and tournaments
- Increase in golf packages and specialized tour operators
- Convenient and quality golf infrastructure
- Focus on luxury and exclusive style
- Wellness and recreational activities
- Healthier foods in the complexes and clubs
- More media coverage and social media work
- Increasing attention to the impact on the environment
- Shorter events and courses
- More technology in golf

In response to changing preferences and demand, golf resorts are beginning to develop strategies to meet these changes. A good example is the development of multifunctionality of golf complexes. Multipurpose golf courses are currently an underutilized resource. They can contribute to increasing the benefits of golf to society if the activities are managed with a holistic perspective in which the efficient use of green spaces and the public interest in nature and recreation are at the core. In addition to providing a high quality golf course, golf facilities can contribute to, for example, improving biodiversity, protecting the natural and cultural environment, providing classrooms for outdoor learning and providing recreational areas that are open to the public. Some good practices for multi-functionality are indicated such as Motala Golf Club, Sweden and its collaboration with the local primary school for outdoor learning, the “Nes Verks” golf course in Norway and its collaboration with the local historical society and the Foundry Museum and others.

In summary, the international golf tourism market is evolving with diverse destinations, luxury experiences, major events, sustainability initiatives, technological advancements and wellness offerings. The increasing number of golf clubs, associations and institutions favors the development of this sector. Additionally, the growing influence of social media and the promotion of golf tourism by influencers, celebrities and professional golfers are contributing to its growth. Golf enthusiasts can choose from a variety of options, whether they're looking for championship courses, luxury accommodations, or eco-friendly resorts. For businesses in the golf tourism sector, these trends provide opportunities for growth and innovation. By adapting to market trends and responding to the changing needs of golf tourists, the industry can continue to thrive and provide unforgettable experiences to golf enthusiasts around the world.

In paragraph 3.2. an analysis of the target market segments of the golf complexes in Bulgaria was made. The conclusions that emerge from it are that the preferences and interests of visitors to golf complexes depend significantly on their gender, age, income and years of golfing experience. Consequently, for the development of appropriate strategies for the development of golf tourism, it is important to distinguish between distinct groups according to these characteristics. For this purpose, on the basis of the previous analysis and on the basis of the researched literature, 5 main profiles have been

defined for the different golf players based on their characteristics.

**Table 2 Main target groups**

| <b>Group</b>         | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Age</b>      | <b>Income</b>         | <b>Experience</b> |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Young enthusiasts    | male          | 18-30 years old | 17 892,55 - 29 820,50 | 1-5 years         |
| Social couples       | male/female   | 31-40 years old | 29 820,50 - 41 748,70 | 1-5 years         |
| Recreational players | male/female   | 41-50 years old | 41 748,70 - 59 627    | 1-5 years         |
| Active golfers       | male          | 41-50 years old | More than 59 627      | 1-5 years         |
| Occasional golfers   | male          | 51-65 years old | 41 748,70 - 59 627    | 6-10 years        |

*Source:* Compiled by the author based on data from research results

The summarized results for the most important reasons for visiting, significant features of the golf complex, as well as the most highly rated elements of the golf complexes in Bulgaria of the different golfer profiles lead to the following conclusions:

Young enthusiasts - for this group, several basic things are important - profitable opportunities to play and the offer of good additional services, as well as opportunities for socialization. The high evaluations of additional services clearly show that the game of golf is not a sufficient factor to attract this group. The reputation of the complex is also important for players, which indicates that it is important for them how they are perceived by others. What these users expect to be improved in golf complexes in Bulgaria are their golf facilities.

Social Couples - This group values both good golfing opportunities (facilities, lesson opportunities) and good time spent with family and friends. It is also important for them to receive a variety of additional services, such as good accommodation conditions, spa centers as well as a favorable climate and atmosphere in the complex. To improve the experience of guests in this group, it is necessary to improve the conditions for outdoor activities, as well as to offer better opportunities for gambling and activities for children.

Recreational players - for the participants of this group, when visiting golf complexes, the balance between the game of golf and rest and comfort is important. They appreciate good and affordable gaming opportunities, as well as a variety of additional services and entertainment, such as excursions, cultural events and outdoor entertainment. Since for this group additional entertainment is an important factor, it is necessary to improve the opportunities for shopping and gambling entertainment.

Active golfers - for this group, the game of golf plays a central role in visiting golf complexes. For them, it is important to receive quality golf facilities, good lesson opportunities and expect complexes to provide good golf courses. It is encouraging that

the participants from this group were satisfied with the offer of these components in the golf complexes in the country. What they are dissatisfied with are the additional services and opportunities for outdoor activities. Therefore, for their good experience, it is important to emphasize not only on the excellent quality of the golf game, but also on additional opportunities for spending free time.

Casual Golfers - For this group, playing golf is more of a hobby than the main purpose of visiting the resorts. To keep participants satisfied, it is essential to offer a variety of additional activities and services and recreational opportunities. Since participants from this group are not satisfied with the current supply of additional services, it is important to make an improvement in this direction.

In the last paragraph 3.3. strategies for the development of golf complexes in Bulgaria are presented. A prerequisite for a successful golf tourism destination strategy is understanding the nature of golf tourists and their needs. Based on the analysis of the target market segments in the previous chapter, we believe that in order to position the golf complexes in Bulgaria as a successful golf destination for visitors from local, national and international markets, they must be provided with fascinating and authentic experiences that suit all aspects of their expectations. For this purpose, products must be developed that meet the requirements and preferences of different types of golfers. Based on the profile of the target groups of golfers derived from the analysis of the survey results, we have proposed appropriate strategies for each group regarding the elements of the marketing mix.

In order for Bulgaria to be a competitive destination for golf tourism, the state and local authorities must in various ways promote and stimulate the construction of golf courses, including through various forms of public-private partnerships. A basic prerequisite for the development of Bulgaria as a destination for golf tourism is the construction of golf courses. With the presence of active golf courses, it is clear that Bulgaria is not a country offering a competitive and developed golf tourism product.

To increase the competitiveness of Bulgaria as a destination for golf tourism, cooperation in the sector is recommended.

It is also important for the golf industry to promote non-golf activities as research shows that this can become a deciding factor in the travel decision-making process. Promoting other activities would also require a commercial partnership with local businesses.

In addition, the tourism golf industry must continue to maintain and promote the quality of service that golfers demand.

In conclusion, the variety of courses combined with a rewarding visitor experience would place Bulgaria at the top of golfers' wish lists worldwide. However, we should not forget that the environment is constantly evolving and the golf industry in Bulgaria must ensure that it is prepared and demonstrates the necessary flexibility to meet the wishes of changing consumer behavior and be consistent with global trends.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion summarizes the analyses and findings regarding the formulation of strategies for the development of golf complexes as a prerequisite for increasing their competitiveness and for the effective development of golf tourism in Bulgaria. The theoretical and practical guidelines for building strategies for successful positioning of golf complexes in Bulgaria on the golf tourism market have been systematised.

The implementation of the shared ideas for the development of strategies of the golf complexes in Bulgaria, tailored to the conditions of Bulgaria and having a potential influence on the development of a sustainable model of golf tourism in Bulgaria has its favorable environment based on the declared willingness and readiness of all surveyed managers in the destination for partnership.

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#### **IV. REFERENCES FOR THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION**

As a result of the research work carried out on the dissertation, the following more important scientific and applied-scientific contributions can be highlighted:

First, in the research field of golf tourism, scientific knowledge is enriched with a specific model that contributes to the theoretical understanding of the business model of golf complex and reveals new approaches to its analysis.

Second, on the basis of the constructed conceptual model, an author's methodology was developed and a study was carried out on the state of golf complexes in Bulgaria, with which scientific hypotheses were tested.

Third, on the basis of testing the theoretical model by conducting an empirical study, it was established which are the potential market segments of the golf complexes in Bulgaria, which are the tourist motives when choosing a trip and which characteristics of the golf complex influence the decision making.

Fourth, on the basis of the results of the conducted empirical research and the emerging trends, guidelines have been formulated for the development of strategies for golf complexes in Bulgaria, tailored to the conditions of Bulgaria and having a potential impact on the development of a sustainable model of golf tourism in Bulgaria.

#### **V. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS ON THE DISSERTATION TOPIC**

##### **ARTICLES**

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