STATEMENT

for dissertation of Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova,

PhD student at the Economics and Organization of Tourism Department

at the University of Economics – Varna

on the topic: "Opportunities for sustainable development of hospitality in a small municipality (following the example of Kavarna Municipality)"

Scientific field: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

Professional field 3.9. Tourism

Scientific speciality: Economics and Management (Tourism)

Scientific supervisor: prof. Dr. Tanya Dabeva

Prepared the statement: Assoc. Dr. Genka Ivanova Ral'jilova

Department of Foreign Languages and Communication in Tourism

College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna

This opinion was developed on the basis of a decision of a scientific jury dated 12.02.2024, appointed by Order No RD-06-19/02.02.2024 of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna.

I. Brief presentation of the doctoral student

The author of the dissertation Mihaela Dimitrova was born on 25.01.1991. She graduated in 2010 from the Secondary School "Stefan Karadzha" in Kavarna with a natural and mathematical profile, intensive study of mathematics, physics, and geography. In the period 2010 – 2014 she studied in the specialty "Tourism" at the University of Economics - Varna. In 2015 she received a Master's degree at the same university "International Tourism Business".
The rich professional experience of PhD student Dimitrova has contributed to the realization of an in-depth study of a pronounced scientific and applied nature. The responsibilities performed in the process of her purposeful professional development have contributed to the very good linking of the theoretical aspects of the dissertation with the defined guidelines for sustainable development of the hotel industry in the municipality of Kavarna.

II. General evaluation of the dissertation

For her participation in the public defence procedure PhD student Mihaela Dimitrova has presented the following work:
- dissertation in a total volume of 247 standard pages;
- self-report in a volume of 44 standard pages;
- 3 scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation, of which 1 article and 2 reports from scientific conferences. The article was published in 2022 in the specialized referenced scientific journal "Bulletin" of the Union of Scientists – Varna, series "Economic Sciences", vol. 11, issue 1 (pp. 193-201). One paper was presented at the International Conference "Sustainable Tourism and Environmental Protection" in Edirne, Turkey, and the other at the conference "Regional Economy and Sustainable Development", organized by the Research Institute at the University of Economics - Varna.

The presented scientific works sufficiently reflect essential parts of the content of the dissertation, thus giving it the necessary level of publicity.

PhD student Dimitrova presents a dissertation dedicated to a very important topic for the national and regional economy related to the sustainable development of hospitality in response to the negative environmental consequences of the uncontrolled expansion of the superstructure in tourist places. The elaborations is distinguished by high scientific-methodological and practical and applied importance. Its choice is very well motivated and justified by the contemporary diverse effects and impacts of the hotel business, as well as by the effects of the seasonal factor on the exploitation of the superstructure and employment in the sector.

The dissertation is presented in a classical structure of three main parts, which are very well balanced and correspond to the research tasks correctly formulated in the introduction. The content of the dissertation is logically bound and consistent, which determines the successful realization of the scientific goal set in the development. The structure of the text corresponds to the defined methodological framework for analysis and evaluation, and the applied research toolkit to explore
the possibilities for harmonious development of the hotel business. In this way, the thesis formulated by the author is proved that "the application of the concept of sustainable development of hospitality in a small municipality contributes to overcoming the negative consequences of tourism and generating socio-economic benefits for the host community." The presented paper unequivocally shows a very good command of the specific terminological apparatus and scientific style in the subject area under consideration.

A large number of specialized information sources in Bulgarian and English were used for the preparation of the dissertation. With the significant share of foreign scientific literature used, PhD student Dimitrova draws attention to the study of current, internationally recognized and leading publications related to the topic of the development. Information sources are cited precisely and correctly, according to the requirements.

III. Evaluation of the scientific and practical results and contributions of the dissertation

In the dissertation presented the following significant scientific and applied scientific contributions:

First, the theoretical aspects of the sustainable development of the hotel industry have been enriched, expanded and supplemented, in particular in a small municipality by exploring the diverse interactions between sustainable development, tourism and hotel activity;

Secondly, an author's conceptual model has been constructed, which has been tested through its own quantitative and qualitative studies in the municipality of Kavarna as a tourist place for sustainable hotel activity;

Thirdly, a corresponding methodological toolkit has been adapted which has been applied to an in-depth study of the aspects of sustainable hotel management in a small locality;

Fourth, the advantages and disadvantages of applying the principles of harmonious development of the hotel business are analysed;

Fifth, strategic plans have been developed for the implementation of the principles of the concept of sustainable development in the hotel activity in the municipality of Kavarna;

Sixth, a system of indicators for monitoring sustainable hospitality has been constructed.

These scientific and applied scientific and applied research contributions to the dissertation of PhD student Dimitrova are the result of independent, purposeful and in-depth research activities. The development is a comprehensive, fully completed study on a topical topic aimed at defining an
integral plan of universal measures and actions for sustainable development of the hotel industry, applicable to the construction and improvement of the superstructure in the small municipalities of Bulgaria.

IV. Notes and recommendations

The dissertation of PhD student Dimitrova does not reveal any significant theoretical, logical, methodological and stylistic errors. Unavoidable inaccuracies, technical omissions, detailed descriptions, etc. are allowed for such scientific research, similar, which do not diminish the merits specified in the opinion and the significant, author's scientific and applied scientific and applied research contributions contained in the development.

V. Conclusion

The dissertation presented for review on the topic: "Opportunities for sustainable development of hospitality in a small municipality (following the example of Kavarna Municipality)", by Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova, contains the necessary theoretical and applied scientific results. They have an original contribution to science and meet all the requirements of the regulatory framework. The dissertation shows that the doctoral student has in-depth theoretical knowledge and research skills in professional field 3.9. Tourism, demonstrates qualities and abilities for independent scientific research. As a result of these arguments, I recommend with conviction to the members of the scientific jury to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)", professional field 3.9. Tourism to PhD student Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova.

Varna

March 21, 2024

Scientific Jury Member:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Genka Rafailova)
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 "PhD" in
the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

STATEMENT

For acquiring the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in professional field 3.9.
"Tourism", PhD program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" according to the procedure
announced by the University of Economics – Varna

1. General information
The statement has been prepared by: Associate Professor Dr. Veselina Ivanova
Atanasova, University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas, College of Tourism - Burgas.

In accordance for writing the statement: Order No. RD-06-19/02.02.2024 of the Rector
of the University of Economics - Varna for the appointment of a Scientific Jury and decision of
the Scientific Jury dated 02.12.2024.

Author of the dissertation: Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova, full-time student at the
Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" at the University of Economics - Varna.

Dissertation topic: "Possibilities for sustainable development of the hotel industry in a
small municipality (following the example of the municipality of Kavarna)".

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tanya Dubeva

2. General presentation of the dissertation work
The scientific work of doctoral student Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova, submitted for
review, is focused on the possibilities for sustainable development of the hotel industry in a specific
small municipality. 191 literary and informational sources were used and successfully integrated
into the text, including 131 literary sources and 60 Internet sites.

The relevance of the analyzed topic, the subject and the object of the research are
successfully and convincingly defined. The main goal of the dissertation, Dr. Dimitrova points
out, is "to derive guidelines for the application of the concept of sustainable tourism in the
municipality of Kavarna, by developing a plan and formulating measures for the development of
sustainable hospitality." To achieve this scientific goal, the author sets and formulates 8 research
tasks.

The scientific development successfully verifies and proves the thesis that "the application
of the concept of sustainable hotel development in a small municipality seems to overcome the
negative effects of tourism development and increase the socio-economic benefits for the host
community". The formulated thesis is concretized in three research hypotheses.
The research methods used fully correspond to the research goals and objectives set in the
dissertation. Their totality includes: analysis and synthesis, systemic approach, situational analysis,
survey. For processing the data collected during the empirical study, an appropriate and justified
statistical approach was correctly used.

The presentation clearly expresses the author's position of the doctoral student, originality
and thoroughness of the conclusions, with a precise scientific apparatus. The author's approach is
consistent with the requirements of the research methods used. There is a clearly expressed authen-
ticity of the source data, consistency and crediblity of the conclusions and recommenda-
tions.
The sources of information are in sufficient volume and thematic orientation and correspond to the
subject of the research. Doctoral student Michaela Dimitrova reviewed 191 Bulgarian and foreign
literary sources.
The dissertation work has the character of a complete, complete, original and significant scientific study on the problems and opportunities for the development of sustainable hospitality within a small area.
As a result of what has been stated so far, we consider that the dissertation work is presented
in a form and volume that fully meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the PPZRASRB and
of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Rules for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific
degrees and occupying academic positions at IU - Varna.
3. Publications and participation in scientific forums
Doctoral student Dimitrova presents three scientific publications related to the topic of the
dissertation - 1 article and 2 reports. The article and one of the reports have been published in
scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific
information. The scientific output for the developed doctorate meets the minimum national
requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", according to Art. 2b,
para. 2 and para. 3 of ZRASRB and the quantitative requirements under Art. 35, para. 1, items 1-
4 of the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at IU-Varna.
4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation
From a content point of view, the dissertation work has a classic structure for similar type
of scientific works: introduction; theoretical chapter; analytical chapter; applied chapter and
conclusion. The content is extremely well balanced and logically coherent.
Sustainability, PhD student Dimitrova points out, in the hotel business is increasingly
considered not only a tool ensuring long-term financial efficiency, but also a sparing effect for the
environment.
Structurally, the content of the dissertation is logically bound, detailed, coherent with
relatively well-balanced parts, clear and understandable style.
In the course of the exhibition, including a total of 236 pages, of which: introduction (7 pages);
exposition in three chapters (187 pages); conclusion (4 pages); a list of the literature used (18
pages), the main concepts of "sustainable tourism" and "sustainable hospitality" are revealed
logically, consistently and thoroughly, the theoretical statements, the analysis are clarified, and
specific conclusions and recommendations are made. The dissertation also includes 5 appendices
(20 pages). The main text contains 58 tables and 36 figures.
The list of cited scientific literature covers 191 sources, including 44 in Bulgarian and 147
in English. The literary sources correspond to the subject and the object of the research, they are
used appropriately in the exposition, they are cited correctly.
In the first chapter, the theoretical foundations of sustainable tourism development are
systematized, the author traces the development of the concept of sustainable tourism. From the
review and systematization of specialized publications and scientific literature in the field,
definitions for the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism, sustainable
hospitality and sustainable hotel product have been derived. The relationship between tourism,
hospitality and sustainable development is also clarified.
A contributing point already in the first chapter is the author's proposed "model for sustainable development of hospitality in a small municipality."

The second chapter, in a structural and logical aspect, is dedicated to the hospitality industry in Kavarna municipality and its sustainable development.

As a result of the survey carried out by the author, regarding the attitudes of hoteliers towards the application of the concept of sustainable development in Kavarna municipality, we could make the following statements:

- the principles of sustainable development are not applied in the hotel industry;
- a small proportion of the subjects questioned are interested in the study;
- the benefits that are generated from the implementation of the concept are primarily economic in nature, the impact on the environment and the social environment of the host society is insignificant.

Based on them, we could conclude that hoteliers in Kavarna municipality do not know the essence of the concept of sustainable development, respectively the principles and benefits of its application. Regarding its implementation, they show moderate interest. For the effective application of the concept of sustainability in the hotel industry in Kavarna municipality, it is necessary to make efforts on the part of the municipal administration and the local tourist association.

In the third chapter, doctoral student Dimitrova analyzes the results of the conducted empirical research and proposes measures and actions to the main stakeholders in connection with the sustainable development of the hotel industry in Kavarna municipality.

In the author's opinion, the development vision could be defined as "creating conditions for the development of a high-quality, sustainable and competitive hotel product, whose market positions on the national and international tourist markets are improving."

The strategic objective should be defined as the proposed product being based on the available unique resources and established traditions in the destination, and the priority of the current plan is the preservation and restoration of the available natural resources, including tourism, balanced long-term economic development and improvement the well-being of the local community.

The author provides a reasoned presentation of goals, measures and actions to create a favorable environment for the development of sustainable hospitality in the municipality of Kavarna. Their implementation should conserve environmental resources and establish stable economic and social environments in which residential facilities can function. In the opinion of doctoral student Dimitrova, the development vision could be defined as creating conditions for the development of a high-quality, sustainable and competitive hotel product, whose market positions on the national and international tourist markets are improving.

A strategic objective should be defined as the proposed product being based on the available unique resources and established traditions in the destination, and the priority of the current plan is the preservation and restoration of the available natural resources, including tourism, balanced long-term economic development and improvement the well-being of the local community.

In the dissertation, the author presents goals, measures and actions to create a favorable environment for the development of sustainable hospitality in the municipality of Kavarna. Their implementation should conserve environmental resources and establish stable economic and social environments in which residential facilities can function.
In conclusion, based on the presented findings, the dissertation work is presented in a form and volume that meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the PFZRASRB and of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Rules for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at IU - Varna.

5. **Scientific and scientific-applied contributions**

In our opinion, the dissertation contains the following theoretical-methodological and practical-applied contributions:

- theoretical knowledge has been systematized and definitions have been derived for the concepts: sustainable development, sustainable tourism, sustainable hotel industry and sustainable hotel product in the context of the characteristics of a small municipality;
- an original author's model for the development of sustainable hospitality in a small municipality was created and approved;
- an empirical study was conducted on the degree of development of sustainable hospitality in Kavarna municipality;
- as a result of the experimental application of the author's model, strategic plans were developed for the implementation of the principles of the concept of sustainable development in the hotel business in Kavarna municipality;
- a system of indicators for monitoring sustainable hospitality is proposed;

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

I do not find any plagiarism in the presented doctorate and abstract by doctoral student Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova.

7. **Critical notes and recommendations**

In regard to the dissertation work - main presentation, author's thesis and the argumentation of the conclusions, we have no critical remarks and recommendations.

8. **Questions for the PhD student**

We have no questions for the PhD student, in view of the comprehensive and multifaceted research in the PhD.

9. **Conclusion**

The proposed doctoral dissertation by Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova on the topic "Possibilities for sustainable development of the hospitality industry in a small municipality (following the example of the municipality of Kavarna)" significantly enriches science and practice regarding the development of sustainable hospitality in a small municipality.

The presented scientific work is a complete independent research that meets the necessary requirements for similar kind of developments in terms of structure, significance and completeness. With its development, concrete scientific and scientific-applied results have been achieved, and there are clear points of contribution.

**In conclusion, on the basis of the opinion presented by me with absolute conviction, I give my positive assessment of the presented doctorate and recommend to the Scientific Jury to award doctoral student Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova 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)".**

19.03.2024
Burgas

The statement has been prepared by:  
Associate Professor Phd Veselina Atanasova