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ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ВАРНА

## REVIEW

Вх. № PA20-1365/17.11.2023 of dissertation work  
for the establishment of an educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the  
doctoral program “Economics and Management (Tourism)” of the University of  
Economics – Varna

### 1. General information

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

*Grounds for writing the review:* participation in the Scientific Jury, determined by order of the Rector at the University of Economics - Varna RD-06-42/07.03.2022, and decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on March 15, 2022.

*Author of the dissertation:* Yanislav Ignatov Markov, a PhD student at the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna.

*Topic of the dissertation:* "Market positioning of a destination for wine tourism (following the example of the Pazardzhik region)".

*Supervisor:* Prof. Dr. Stoyan Marinov.

### 2. Information about the PhD student

Yanislav Ignatov Markov is studying in the doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" at the University of Economics - Varna in the period from October 2021 to October 2023. During his studies, the PhD student successfully passed all exams of the doctoral minimum, published 2 articles, and 4 reports, and took part in one monographic work. He managed to complete all the tasks set in his plan and was discharged ahead of schedule.

Yanislav Markov obtained a professional bachelor's degree in "Hotel and Restaurant Management" at the College of Tourism at the University of Economics -

Varna in 2016. Two years later, in 2018, Yanislav Markov received a master's degree in "International Tourism business" at the University of Economics -Varna.

Yanislav Markov's work experience is mainly in the field of the processing industry and more specifically in the processing of fruits and vegetables, he holds various positions such as export organizer, supply and sales specialist, and project coordinator related to public procurement.

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

### **3. General characteristics of the dissertation**

The dissertation submitted for review has a total volume of 245 pages, of which 216 pages are main text and 29 pages are appendices. The main text is structured as follows: introduction (5 pages), exposition in three chapters (chap. I – 75 pages, chap. II – 72 pages, chap. III – 38 pages, total 185 pages.), conclusion (5 pages), list of references (13 pages). The illustrative material in the exhibition comprises 27 tables and 19 figures. There are also 9 appendices to the dissertation.

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

**Relevance.** The dissertation is devoted to the theoretical and empirical study of the possibilities for market positioning of a destination for a specific type of tourism. The chosen topic is relevant and of practical importance, especially in the conditions of negative economic, political, and social conjuncture, in which the achievement of a clear market position is a tool for sustainable success and competitive advantages for the tourist destination. The researched issue is related to the current market trends and the efforts of the state and local tourism management entities towards diversification of the integral tourism product and image positioning of Bulgaria as a four-season tourist destination.



**Research aim and tasks.** According to the formulated topic of the dissertation, the doctoral student specified the research objective: "By upgrading the theory of the positioning of a tourist destination for wine tourism and based on good practices in the field of wine tourism, to outline guidelines for sustainable market positioning of a destination for wine tourism on the example of Pazardzhik region". Five research tasks have been defined which follow the logic of the content and contribute to the achievement of the research objective.

**Object and subject of research.** The object and the subject of the research have been successfully distinguished.

**Research thesis and hypotheses.** The research thesis, which specifies the essence and directions of the research, links the successful market positioning of a wine tourism destination with an original marketing mix, orientation towards appropriate target segments, and stakeholder engagement. The proof of the thesis is realized by testing three working hypotheses.

**Research methods.** Appropriate and applicable research methods have been selected to achieve the aim of the study and accomplish the resulting tasks.

**The study's limitations** are correctly pointed out, but the limitation regarding the lack of previous scientific and practical-applied research on the issue in Bulgaria is debatable.

**The list of references** includes 200 sources, of which 25 are in Cyrillic (Bulgarian) and 175 are in Latin (all in English). The quantitative and qualitative structure of the literature sources shows that the doctoral student has a good knowledge of the literature on the researched topic. Contemporary sources are predominant, appropriately selected, correctly interpreted, and correctly cited.

#### **4. Dissertation structure**

The dissertation structure corresponds to the set aim and the research tasks.

The **first chapter** of the dissertation represents the theoretical-methodological framework of the study. Following the path of the deductive approach from the general to the particular, first of all, the features of the tourist destination for wine tourism are

presented. The research deepens by clarifying the essence of market positioning. As a logical third step, a methodology for market positioning of a wine tourism destination has been derived. An impression is made by the good knowledge of the main theoretical achievements on the studied topic and their appropriate interpretation and generalization. The doctoral student presents his position in an argumentative manner and formulates conclusions and generalizations. Based on the theoretical overview, a conceptual model for market positioning has been developed. This model has a contributory character and demonstrates an ability to develop methodological frameworks based on the interpretation of theoretical propositions.

In the **second chapter**, the research moves from the conceptual to the operational level and according to the logic of the proposed model, the content elements of the internal environment of the studied destination, as well as the influences of the factors of the external environment, are analyzed and evaluated. Through the methods of descriptive analysis, dispersion analysis, statistical tests, correlation, and regression analysis, the author empirically tests several working hypotheses regarding the influence of various components forming the successful market positioning of a wine tourism destination. The results of the statistical analyses are presented and interpreted in strict compliance with the proposed methodology. The PhD student demonstrates very good skills in conducting independent empirical studies and demonstrates analytical abilities to formulate reasoned conclusions and assessments.

The **third chapter** presents and interprets the results regarding target market segments for wine tourism. Descriptive statistics reveal the demographic characteristics of potential market segments, the main motives for choosing a destination, the evaluation of wine cellars, the evaluation of consumer experiences and the degree of coverage of preconceptions, the degree of satisfaction, etc. The in-depth knowledge of the issues, the precise logical connection between the theoretical reasoning and the conclusions of the conducted empirical study, as well as the knowledge of the good practices in the researched area, allow the doctoral student to



formulate justified recommendations for creating a strategic marketing mix for the market positioning of the Pazardzhik region as a destination for wine tourism.

**The conclusion** summarizes the implementation of research tasks and highlights the contributions of the research.

We can summarize that the structure and content of the dissertation fully correspond to the set research aim and tasks. A good logical sequence of the individual structural elements has been achieved. The style of the exposition is concise and precise, and understandable scientific language is used.

**The abstract** adequately reflects the content of the paper submitted for review.

### **5. Main scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation**

The submitted report on the usefulness of the dissertation contains four contributing points.

The submitted statement of contributions of the dissertation contains four contributions. After the analysis of the dissertation, I confirm the 4 contributions, following Art. 6 para 3 of LASDRB.

The theoretical contribution is related to the upgrading of the specific conceptual apparatus of wine tourism and the systematization of the theoretical aspects of the market positioning of a destination for wine tourism.

The methodological-applied contributions are related to the development and validation of a conceptual model for market positioning of a wine tourism destination.

The practical-applied contribution refers to the formulated guidelines for the competitive positioning of Pazardzhik region as a destination for sustainable wine tourism.

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

PhD student Yanislav Markov has submitted a list of seven publications including 2 scientific articles, 4 reports, and participation in a collective monograph. The publications are closely related to the dissertation topic, to a large extent reflect its essential parts and give it publicity. The volume of the doctoral student's scientific outputs and the nature of the publications correspond to the terms and conditions for

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

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

No significant theoretical, logical, and methodological errors were found in the dissertation of Yanislav Markov, presented for review. Some inaccuracies, mostly of a technical nature, inherent in this kind of work have been admitted. I would recommend the doctoral student to continue working on the issues of wine tourism and the possibilities for its development and to share the achieved results in more publications.

### **8. Questions**

1. What are the main barriers to the successful positioning of the Pazardzhik region as a destination for wine tourism?
2. In § 3.1. of the dissertation, it was found that women are a strategic target market segment with growing potential. What initiatives could the wineries in the Pazardzhik region undertake for the successful development of this market segment?

### **9. Conclusion**

The presented dissertation is a completed independent research that meets the requirements for such work for structure, completeness, and significance. With its development certain scientific and applied results have been achieved and contribution moments are clearly distinguished. The dissertation work shows that doctoral student Yanislav Markov has in-depth theoretical knowledge on the researched topic and good abilities to conduct independent scientific research. Based on the overall assessment made in this review, I believe that the dissertation meets the requirements of the LASDRB and the Rules for the Development of the AC of IU-Varna.

Based on the positive evaluation of the dissertation, as well as the scientific and applied achievements of the candidate, I propose to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to award doctoral student Yanislav Markov the educational and scientific

degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.9 "Tourism" and specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

November, 2023

Varna

Reviewer:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgina Lukanova)



**ECONOMY**

**REVIEW**

of dissertation

for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**",  
according to a procedure, announced by the **University of Economics – Varna**

**1. General information**

**Reviewer: Prof. D.Sc. Tanya Parusheva**

UNWE – Sofia, Department "Economics of Tourism"

Field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences"

Professional field 3.8. "Economics"

Scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

**Reason for writing the review:** Order No. RD-06-203/09.11.2023 of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna for the appointment of a Scientific Jury and decision from the first meeting of the Scientific Jury on 13.11.2023.

**Author of the dissertation: Yanislav Ignatov Markov** – PhD student of independent training in the Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" at the University of Economics – Varna

**Topic of the dissertation:** "Market positioning of a destination for wine tourism (following the example of the Pazardzhik region)"

**Scientific consultant: Prof. Dr. Stoyan Petkov Marinov**

**2. Data about the dissertation student**

**Yanislav Markov** graduated from the College of Tourism, Varna at the University of Economics, Varna, majoring in "Management of Hotels and Restaurants" and acquired the qualification "Professional Bachelor of Tourism" (2016). He continued his studies in Master's Degree, majoring in "International Tourism Business", also at the University of Economics, Varna (2018).

**His professional development** began as an expedition expert to the Customs in Pazardzhik (1992 – 1994). He successively worked as an export organizer at "Maris" EOOD, Pazardzhik (1998 – 2005); procurement and sales specialist at "Maritsa Ecofroze", JSC, Sofia, Pazardzhik Factory (2005 – 2011); executive director and shareholder in "Maritsa Ecofroze", JSC, Sofia, Pazardzhik Factory (2011 – 2022); sole owner of the capital in "Grant



The research **object** – *“the market positions of the Pazardzhik administrative region as a wine tourism destination”* and the research **subject** – *“the peculiarities of the market positioning of a wine tourism destination”* are correctly distinguished. The **main goal** is clearly and precisely defined: *“by upgrading the theory of the positioning of a tourist destination for wine tourism and on the basis of good practices in the field of wine tourism, to outline guidelines for sustainable market positioning of a destination for wine tourism following the example of the Pazardzhik region”*. The goal was achieved by solving **5 specific research tasks**.

The **research thesis** is appropriately formulated: *“the correct market positioning of a wine tourism destination is based on an original marketing mix, orientation to appropriate target segments and stakeholder engagement”*. **3 working hypotheses** are correctly defined.

The **research toolkit** includes the combined application of **research methods and approaches**, the most important of which are: *historical and systemic approach, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, analogy and comparison, survey and statistical and descriptive methods of analysis*. The **limitations** accompanying the dissertation work are related to the lack of previous scientific and practical-applied research on the problem under consideration in Bulgaria, and the territorial limitation of the research within the boundaries of the Pazardzhik administrative district.

The **main problems** in the realization of the dissertation work are gaps and incompleteness in statistical data, incomplete and inaccurate information in the register of places of accommodation and ZRH, as well as a low degree of commitment of winery owners to questionnaire surveys. The **information provision** of the dissertation work was carried out through a systematic study of specialized scientific publications by Bulgarian and foreign authors. Literary and informational sources in Bulgarian, foreign titles and specialized internet sites were used.

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

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

The dissertation is 245 pages long. 27 tables and 19 figures are illustrated in the main text. The **structure** of the dissertation work is maintained in the spirit of well-grounded logic, consistency and connection between the treated problems. It consists of an introduction (6 pages), an exposition in three chapters (199 pages), a conclusion (5 pages) and references (13 pages). 9 appendices have been prepared for the dissertation work. The **bibliographic**

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

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

#### **4.1. Evaluating the abstract of the dissertation work**

The abstract is 26 pages long. It correctly corresponds with the dissertation work and reliably presents the researched problems in a synthesized form. **The lexical and stylistic characteristics** of the text are **sustained and precise**. It consists of 5 parts, which include: 1). general characteristics of the dissertation work; 2). structure and content of the dissertation; 3). a brief statement of the dissertation work; 4). a reference to the scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation work; 5). list of publications on the topic of the dissertation.

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

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

**first** – the specific conceptual apparatus of wine tourism has been upgraded and the theoretical aspects of the market positioning of a wine tourism destination have been systematized;

**second** – an author's conceptual model for the market positioning of a wine tourism destination was developed and a methodological toolkit was proposed for researching the market positions of a wine tourism destination;

**thirdly** – the conceptual model was tested by conducting its own research (quantitative and qualitative) regarding the market positions of the Pazardzhik region as a destination for wine tourism. The strengths and weaknesses of the wine destination in a marketing context are outlined;

**fourth** – opportunities are indicated and guidelines are outlined for competitive positioning of the Pazardzhik region as a destination for sustainable wine tourism.



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

In our opinion, no plagiarism has been found in the dissertation and the abstract.

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

A note can be added to the dissertation that would improve the overall presentation of the work.

In paragraph 3.3. of chapter three "*Strategic marketing mix for market positioning of Pazardzhik region as a destination for wine tourism*", attention should also be paid to the organizational aspects of the implementation of the proposed strategic mix and specifically to the partnership of the business with the bodies of local self-government and local administration – municipal councils, mayors and regional governor.

The mentioned note does not diminish the merits of the study and does not affect the overall positive evaluation of the dissertation work, as an independent study with indisputable scientific and scientific-applied contributions.

I recommend that in his future research work, PhD candidate Yanislav Markov expands and deepens his research on the problems of wine tourism at the national and international level. A research problem useful for practice is related to the management, marketing and efficiency of wineries as enterprises oriented to the tourism sector.

#### 9. **Questions for the dissertation student**

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

1. What is the potential of the Pazardzhik region for the development of wine tourism combined with health tourism?
2. How could the initiatives of the World Tourism Organization in the field of wine tourism be used for the needs of positioning the Pazardzhik region as a tourist destination?

#### 10. **Conclusion**

With conviction, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation work on the topic "Market positioning of a destination for wine tourism (on the example of the Pazardzhik region)". I confirm that it fully **complies with the requirements** of ZRAS in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

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