



REVIEW

regarding a dissertation for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

Reviewer: **Prof. Mariyana Varbanova Bozhinova, PhD**, D. A. Tsenov Academy
of Economics - Svishtov, Department of Tourism Economics and Management

Author of the dissertation: **Simeon Ventsislavov Simeonov**, PhD student at the
Department of Tourism Economics and Management, D. A. Tsenov Academy of
Economics – Svishtov

Title of the dissertation: **„Status and Development of Culinary Tourism in
Bulgaria”**

The dissertation submitted for evaluation is intended for discussion by the
academic committee appointed by Order No. 472/11.06.2025 of the Rector of D. A.
Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov. I was selected as a reviewer at the first
meeting of the scientific jury, held on 17.06.2025.

I. General characteristics of the dissertation

The dissertation by Simeon Ventsislavov Simeonov is a well-structured, logically
coherent, and in-depth study consisting of **217 standard pages** of main text, supported by
graphical, tabular, and appropriately processed empirical material.

The dissertation is distinguished by its comparatively **balanced structure**,
comprising an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a list of references. The
research is clearly illustrated with 16 tables and 31 figures. The dissertation includes 1
appendix, as well as a declaration of originality and authenticity.

In the course of addressing the various research problems, the PhD candidate has
reviewed an extensive body of academic literature, comprising 108 sources—37 in

Cyrillic and 71 in Latin script. This demonstrates the author's awareness of both Bulgarian and international research related to the specific topic under discussion.

The main aim of the dissertation is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the state of culinary tourism in Bulgaria, with an emphasis on identifying the main factors influencing its development, and formulating effective strategic guidelines for its sustainable improvement.

To achieve this aim, *five research objectives* were formulated, each aligned with the main aim of the study. I believe that PhD candidate Simeon Simeonov has successfully achieved his primary research aim and fulfilled the stated research objectives. On this basis, he substantiates his main *research thesis*, namely: "Improving the environment for the development of culinary tourism, along with taking into account the factors that shape the satisfaction of the culinary tourist, is a significant prerequisite for revealing the potential of culinary tourism and its establishment as an attractive element of the palette of specialized forms of tourism in Bulgaria."

The object of the research is culinary tourism in Bulgaria, examined in the context of its role in the economic and social development of the tourism sector.

The subject of the research are the environmental factors and those that have an impact on satisfaction from practicing culinary tourism in Bulgaria.

I consider the aim, objectives, thesis, object, and subject to be well-defined.

A variety of research *approaches and methods* have been applied in the dissertation, including induction and deduction, historical method, analysis and synthesis, comparative analysis, survey and interview methods. and statistical methods. The collected data were processed using statistical methods.

Overall, the study correctly identifies certain *limitations*. The cited literature sources are appropriately referenced.

In conclusion, the dissertation complies with the requirements of Article 27, Paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

II. Evaluation of the Form and Content of the Dissertation

The topic of the dissertation is notable for its relevance, practical significance, and academic merit. Its relevance is well justified in the introduction. The dissertation demonstrates originality, evidenced both by its focus on the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria, as an attractive specialized type of tourism, and by the anti-plagiarism report, which is within the accepted limits.

The scientific exploration of the subject matter is important for both academic theory and tourism practice. PhD candidate Simeon Simeonov successfully addresses the specifics and problems of culinary tourism and its product, to propose a model for managing culinary tourism. The survey conducted in the dissertation covers both macro-

environmental and micro-environmental factors, therefore it can be used at these two levels in the management of culinary tourism and its tourist products.

It must be emphasized that developing such a topic requires strong theoretical preparation and analytical skills. In her dissertation, the author demonstrates a critical approach to scientific perspectives and maintains a consistent academic writing style.

The structure and content of the study are logically and sequentially organized. Thus, the exposition meets the main qualitative requirements for evaluation: originality of the research; deep insight into the essence of the problem; methodological rigor in achieving the research goal through the application of appropriate analytical tools.

Chapter One (pp. 6–72) has a theoretical and conceptual nature, which is appropriate and forms the foundation for the research in the following chapters. This chapter is divided into three sections, which consecutively clarify: the theoretical determinants of culinary tourism, the periodization of its historical development, the essence and scope of the culinary tourism product; the characteristics of the demand for culinary tourism and (in the last part) innovative approaches in culinary tourism, related to innovative ways of preparing and serving culinary products. Based on a literature review of the opinions of a number of foreign and Bulgarian authors on the essence of culinary tourism and other related concepts, an author's definition of the concept of "culinary tourism" has been derived.

Chapter Two (pp. 73–133) has a methodological focus. It is dedicated to the research approach to establishing the state of culinary tourism. Structurally, the chapter is divided into five parts. The first presents an algorithm for researching culinary tourism in Bulgaria. The second and third parts sequentially examine the factors of the macroenvironment and microenvironment influencing the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria. The fourth part focuses on the factors determining tourist satisfaction with culinary tourism products. The fifth part presents and justifies the criteria and indicators included in the developed model for measuring the factors influencing the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria.

Chapter Three (pp. 134–199) has a practical orientation. It begins with a presentation and analysis of the results of the survey. The second paragraph deals with trends in the global market and guidelines for managing a culinary tourism destination. The third, concluding paragraph presents a strategic model for the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria.

A notable strength is that each chapter concludes with summaries that reflect the candidate's views.

The illustrative material is of high quality and enhances the reader's understanding of the subject matter.

The writing style adheres to the standards for a doctoral dissertation.

The abstract accurately reflects the key elements of the dissertation content. The scientific and applied contributions listed in the abstract are consistent with the actual contributions of the dissertation and are the original work of the candidate.

There are 6 *publications* related to the dissertation - 2 articles and 4 conference papers (one – co-authored). These contributions earn the candidate 55 points, exceeding the 30-point minimum required by the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. These publications demonstrate that key parts of the dissertation have been publicly presented and have received scholarly recognition.

III. Scientific and Applied Contributions of the Dissertation

The main merits of the dissertation can be summarized as follows:

First, the existing knowledge about culinary tourism has been further developed, with an author's definition of the concept proposed for periodization in the development of culinary tourism in the world and its development opportunities in the nine tourist regions of Bulgaria highlighted, through an in-depth examination, summary and critical analysis of basic theoretical propositions (scientific contribution).

Second, development of a research model offering a new toolkit for analysis and assessment of the state and development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria (scientific-applied contribution).

Third, testing the proposed model, which validates its practical applicability, based on which conclusions and recommendations related to the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria have been made (scientific-applied contribution).

Fourth, proposing a strategic model for the development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria and formulating specific guidelines and recommendations, taking into account national specifics and international achievements in this field (scientific-applied contribution).

In summary, the contributions of the dissertation, in my view, relate to enriching the existing body of knowledge, applying scientific achievements to tourism practice, and contributing to its enhancement.

IV. Critical Remarks, Questions, and Recommendations on the Dissertation

During the internal departmental review process, and in my capacity as an internal reviewer, I provided critical remarks and recommendations, which PhD candidate Simeon Simeonov has responsibly and thoroughly incorporated into his work.

The dissertation addresses an engaging and important topic that raises several questions. I would like to PhD candidate Simeonov to answer the following question:

1. What cognitive value does the proposed model for studying the state of culinary tourism have to support strategic management processes in the field of tourism at the local level?

V. Summary Conclusion and Opinion

The reviewed dissertation is a thoroughly conducted, original, and extensive scientific-applied study in a relevant field of tourism research, specifically in the area of culinary tourism. It meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations for its implementation.

This provides me with grounds to confidently give a *positive assessment* of the dissertation and to recommend to the esteemed jury that *Simeon Simeonov* be awarded the educational and scientific degree *Doctor* in the scientific specialty Economics and Management (Tourism).

11.07.2025
Svishtov

Reviewer:
(Prof. M. Bozhinova, PhD)