

OPINION

Prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Lyubka Mincheva Ilieva, PhD, Department of Tourism Economics and Management, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov, Professional field 3.8. "Economics," Scientific specialty: 05.02.18 "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

Author of the dissertation: Nevena Rumenova Lyaskova-Velikova, full-time PhD student at the Department of Tourism Economics and Management, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov

Topic of the dissertation: "Potential for innovative tourism products based on the experience economy"

Reason for submitting the opinion: Participation in the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation, in accordance with Order No. № 585/04.07.2025 of the Rector of the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov.

I. General Presentation of the Dissertation.

The dissertation is 205 standard pages long, structured in an introduction, three main chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendices. The abstract is 37 pages long and reflects in a synthesized form the content of the study, the main results and contributions of the development, correctly presenting the achievements of the PhD student.

The structure of the work is clear and logically constructed, consistent with the set goal and research tasks. The balance between the theoretical, methodological and empirical parts is achieved through a smooth transition from the conceptual statements to the analytical model and its practical application.

A wide range of information sources was used - 161 bibliographic titles by Bulgarian and foreign authors, including specialized scientific research, books, articles in refereed publications, statistical data from the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat, regulatory documents, tourism development strategies, as well as Internet resources. This testifies to the high level of awareness of the PhD student and her skillful handling of diverse literature. The approach to the sources is analytical, not descriptive, seeking a comparison between Bulgarian and international scientific experience.

The PhD student demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the issues and the ability to combine theoretical statements with practically oriented research. The work is characterized by the use of a rich set of methods - comparative analysis, content analysis, questionnaire surveys, interviews, expert assessments and statistical processing, which ensure the credibility and reliability of the conclusions. The visualization through 26 figures and 23 tables makes the presentation clearer, aids understanding and enhances the analytical value of the text.

The abstract presents in a synthesized form the main characteristics of the dissertation work - relevance, goal, tasks, methodology, object and subject of the study, as well as the derived scientific and scientific-applied contributions. It fulfills its purpose of informing the scientific community and the members of the jury about the essence and significance of the study and can be assessed as correct and adequate to the requirements.

All literary sources used are correctly cited in the text and reflected in the bibliography.

II. Evaluation of the Format and Content of the Dissertation

The topic of the dissertation is extremely relevant and significant, especially in the conditions of a dynamically developing tourism sector, in which experiences become the basis for building a sustainable competitive advantage. The lack of comprehensive and systematized research in the Bulgarian scientific literature on this issue emphasizes the scientific and practical value of the work. The work fits into the contemporary trends of scientific integration, combining elements of tourism, marketing, experience economy and innovation management.

The introduction outlines the relevance of the topic and formulates the goal, tasks, object and subject of the study.

The first chapter has a clearly expressed theoretical nature and lays the conceptual framework of the study. In it, the author traces the emergence and development of the concept of experience economy, presents the main theoretical propositions and outlines the key directions for their application in tourism. Special attention is paid to the typology of innovative products, including those based on experiences and digitalization, which gives novelty and relevance to the study. Thus, the first chapter fulfills its staging and analytical function, building the necessary foundation for the subsequent methodological and empirical part.

Chapter two is dedicated to the methodological framework and is logically structured around three main focuses - analysis of the potential for development of innovative tourism products, systematization of methods for its research and construction of a conceptual model. An important contribution is the proposal for an integrated model that combines classical methods of analysis with modern approaches, including survey research and expert assessments. Chapter two demonstrates a high methodological culture and creates a reliable basis for conducting empirical research.

Chapter three focuses on the practical and applied dimensions of the topic. Through field research conducted in seven destinations (Varna, Nessebar, Veliko Tarnovo, Dobrich, Troyan, Svishtov and Harmanli), natural and anthropogenic resources, tourist attitudes and the positions of the tourism business have been analyzed. The author manages to combine quantitative and qualitative analysis, which gives credibility and depth to the results. Key barriers to the introduction of innovative tourism products have been identified, as well as opportunities for their development. Specific recommendations are presented that can be used by both tourism enterprises and institutions in the sector.

The conclusion systematizes and summarizes the results of the overall study, clearly confirming the main research thesis. The conclusions are justified, consistent and related to the initially set goals and objectives. In this way, the logical circle of the study is closed - from the theoretical formulation, through the methodological tools to the empirical verification and practical recommendations.

The abstract adequately and precisely reflects the content, structure and main contributions of the dissertation work. It fulfills its purpose of presenting the PhD

student's achievements in a synthesized form and can be assessed as a correct and well-formed document, corresponding to the established academic requirements.

III. Scientific and Applied Contributions of the Dissertation.

The scientific contributions of the dissertation are expressed in the enrichment and further development of the theoretical and methodological basis of the researched issues:

- Enrichment of existing knowledge about the experience economy through in-depth examination and critical analysis of fundamental theoretical propositions. Within the framework of the study, the concept has been systematized, its development has been traced and its connections with alternative forms of tourism and innovative tourism products have been outlined, which contributes to the conceptual clarification and theoretical enrichment of the topic.

- Research and critical analysis of basic theoretical and applied methods of analysis in tourism in the context of the experience economy and innovative products. On this basis, a comparison of the approaches established in the literature has been carried out and a methodological basis has been defined, which served to build the author's conceptual model.

The scientific and applied contributions are related to the development and testing of a toolkit for practical application:

- Development of the author's conceptual model for studying the potential for innovative tourism products based on experiences. The model contains clearly defined steps and stages for conducting the analysis, allowing for the assessment of resources, attitudes and barriers and offers an algorithm for achieving effective results in practice.

- Testing the proposed model in seven tourist destinations in Bulgaria (Varna, Nessebar, Veliko Tarnovo, Dobrich, Troyan, Svishtov and Harmanli), which gives the study a high applied value. As a result of the field studies, specific recommendations have been formulated for increasing the demand and supply of innovative tourism products based on experiences, which have the potential to support the formation of policies for the sustainable development of tourist destinations.

IV. Questions on the Dissertation.

When discussing the scientific work in the department as an internal reviewer, I made notes and recommendations, which were reflected by the PhD student. For the purpose of a worthy defense, I offer the following **question** to the attention of the PhD student:

What is the strategic contribution of innovative tourism products, based on the experience economy, to building a sustainable competitive advantage of Bulgarian tourist destinations?

V. Overall Assessment of the Dissertation and Conclusion

The presented dissertation by Nevena Rumenova Lyaskova-Velikova represents an independent and in-depth scientific study, in which the set goal has been

realized, the research thesis has been convincingly defended and significant theoretical and empirical results have been achieved.

In conclusion, the dissertation fully meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. Based on all of the above, I give a **positive assessment** of the dissertation and recommend to the esteemed members of the academic committee that PhD student **Nevena Rumenova Lyaskova-Velikova** be awarded the educational and scientific degree “**Doctor**” in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics, doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

26.08.2025 г.
Svishtov

Prepared by:
/Assoc. Prof. L. Ilieva, PhD/