



UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD ECONOMY

STATEMENT

From: Prof. Dr. Elenita Kirilova Velikova
UNWE, Department of "Economics of Tourism"
Scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

Regarding: Dissertation thesis for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.8 Economics, in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)" at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov

Author of the dissertation thesis: Simeon Ventsislavov Simeonov
Topic of the dissertation thesis: State and development of culinary tourism in Bulgaria

Basis for presenting the statement: Participation in the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation thesis according to Order No. 472/11.06.2025 by the Rector of D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov and the decision from the first meeting of the scientific jury held on 17.06.2025.

I. General presentation of the dissertation thesis:

The dissertation has a total of 225 pages of computer-typed text. Of these, 212 pages are introduction, main text and conclusion, 5 pages - list of references used, 7 pages of appendices and one page declaration of originality and reliability. The bibliographical apparatus includes 108 references in Cyrillic and Latin (37 in Bulgarian and 71 in English). The text contains 16 tables, 31 figures and 1 annex. Structurally, the work consists of three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The theoretical determinants of culinary tourism, the research approaches for establishing its status and the perspectives for its development in Bulgaria are consistently discussed.

The dissertation topic is well formulated. Its importance and relevance are clearly justified due to the growing global interest in authentic forms of tourism, as well as the need to diversify the tourist offer in Bulgaria. Its significance is conditioned by the economic and cultural potential of gastronomy for the development of regions and affirmation of national identity. The proposed framework for culinary tourism is a comprehensive strategic planning tool that integrates behavioural, managerial and communication dimensions of destination development. It creates conditions for sustainable management, effective positioning and implementation of policies that respond to the needs of tourists and the objectives of local communities.

The aim of the dissertation is "to carry out an in-depth analysis of the state of culinary tourism in Bulgaria, focusing on identifying the main factors influencing its development and formulating effective strategic directions for its sustainable improvement." From the objective thus defined, five research tasks were derived.

The subject and object of study are well defined, the aim and objectives are correctly stated, accurately reflecting the research work carried out by the PhD student. The dissertation thesis that "the improvement of the environment for the development of culinary tourism, along with the consideration of the factors that form the satisfaction of the culinary tourist, are a significant prerequisite for the discovery of the potential of culinary tourism and

its establishment as an attractive element of the palette of offering specialized forms of tourism in Bulgaria" is developed and proven. The methodology of the research, the possibilities of its implementation and the probability of achieving new scientific knowledge and contributions, the limitations of the object and subject, as well as the system of measurements and indicators for analysis are distinguished by their merits. The exposition and the literature used show that the doctoral student has consulted a considerable number of literature sources. The structure of the dissertation can be rated very well.

II. Evaluation of the form and content of the dissertation thesis

A number of advantages can be outlined in the dissertation, which are of a scientific and practical-applied nature. Scientifically, the research is distinguished by an interdisciplinary approach and a justified application of established theoretical models, such as the European Customer Satisfaction Index (EPSI), adapted to the specificity of culinary tourism. The author develops an original conceptual framework for strategic destination planning, which contributes to the development of tourism theory. In a practical-applied aspect, the dissertation proposes concrete tools for the management and development of culinary tourism - from the analysis of consumer attitudes to the formulation of sustainable product and territorial solutions. The research is particularly valuable in that it provides opportunities for the results to be used by a wide range of stakeholders - public institutions, tourism operators and local communities - in developing policies, strategies and marketing initiatives in the field of specialised tourism.

The dissertation is presented in a clear, academic and coherent style, with well-structured scientific language. Terminology is correct and concepts are clearly defined. The developed methodological toolkit enables PhD student Simeonov to achieve the main goal set in the dissertation and to solve the set tasks. The scope of the development is fully consistent with the requirements for a doctoral dissertation, with each chapter building on the previous one. The research uses a combined methodological toolkit including quantitative and qualitative methods - survey research, STEEP analysis, economic and behavioural models, as well as a proprietary algorithm for the study of culinary tourism. The approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of the factors influencing the development of this type of tourism and the formation of practically applicable conclusions and recommendations. The approaches are methodologically sound and the interpretation of the results is analytical and convincing.

The abstract correctly presents the structure, objectives, main theses and results of the thesis. It describes the theoretical determinants of the object of study as well as the research approaches and conclusions drawn. The summaries and figures presented in the abstract adequately reflect the content of the dissertation. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the abstract is a complete and credible document that reflects the substance, structure and main contributions of the research. It is developed in a volume of 44 pages.

In terms of type and number, the publications submitted correspond to those announced by the PhD student in the attached list. A total of six publications were submitted - two articles and four reports. I believe that these publications represent the real achievements of the PhD student and are sufficiently representative to make them known to the academic community and interested business circles of practice.

III. Scientific and practical-applied contributions of the dissertation thesis

A number of contributions of scientific and practical-applied nature can be reported in the dissertation. I accept the statement of contributions made by doctoral student Simeonov, I believe that his self-assessment is correct. The dissertation contributes to the development of theory and practice in the field of culinary tourism by adapting the EPSI model and creating a

conceptual framework for strategic destination planning. Through empirical research and practical guidance, it proposes applicable solutions for the sustainable management and development of tourism products based on culinary heritage.

IV. Questions regarding the dissertation thesis

For the purpose of a worthy defence I have the following question for the PhD student: how could your proposed model be applied at the local level by tourism organisations or municipalities in developing a strategy for the development of culinary tourism?

V. Summary evaluation of the dissertation thesis and conclusion

The dissertation thesis sets clear objectives and tasks, which PhD candidate Simeonov has undoubtedly achieved and fulfilled. The analyses are accurate, the recommendations are well-founded, and they stem from the results of the research. The PhD candidate demonstrates skills in conducting thorough and well-reasoned analysis, making summaries, and critical thinking. The analyzed dissertation represents a creative achievement, which in terms of subject matter, theoretical generalizations, conclusions, and recommendations has undeniable significance for the theory and practice of the tourism industry.

All this gives me grounds to recommend to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award Simeon Ventsislavov Simeonov the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)," professional field 3.8 Economics.

Date: 20.07.2025

Prepared by:
(Prof. Dr. Elenita Velikova)