



REVIEW of a Dissertation for Acquiring Doctor's Academic and Scientific Degree

Reviewer: **Prof. Mariyana Varbanova Bozhinova**, “D. A. Tsenov” Academy of Economics – Svishtov, scientific specialty “Economics and Management” (Trade)

Author of Dissertation: **Rosen Kostadinov Kotsev**, part-time doctoral student, state funded, with the Department of “D. A. Tsenov” Academy of Economics – Svishtov

Dissertation thesis: **„Fluctuations of the development of rural areas in Bulgaria”**

The dissertation submitted for evaluation is intended for consideration by the Scientific Jury, appointed by Order No. 1043/02.12.2021 of the Rector of the Academy of Economics “D. A. Tsenov” - Svishtov.

I. General Presentation of Dissertation

Rosen Kotsev's dissertation on "Fluctuations of the development of rural areas in Bulgaria" is a coherent, logical and thorough study consisting of 167 *standard pages* of main text, supported by graphical, tabular and appropriately processed empirical material.

The dissertation has a *balanced structure* consisting of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references and 4 appendices. The study is clearly illustrated by means of 24 tables and 26 figures.

With regard to the development of the individual problems, the PhD student has studied a sufficient amount of scientific literature, the list of which covers 76 titles, of which 44 in Bulgarian and 32 in English, 22 normative documents and 16 Internet sources. This testifies to the author's awareness of research on the specific problem under discussion by both Bulgarian and foreign authors.

The *main objective* of the dissertation is to analyse the state and potential for rural development in the context of overcoming fluctuations in rural areas. In order to achieve this objective, four research tasks have been formulated which correspond to the stated aim of the research. In my opinion, PhD student Rosen Kotsev has achieved his main research objective and solved the set research tasks. On this basis, he also proves his main research thesis, which, thus defined, resembles rather a research objective. The author has formulated four working hypotheses.

The *object* of the study is rural areas with their specificities, differences, fluctuations and concrete results *reflecting* the implementation of the different measures of the Rural Development Programme.

Synthesised, the *subject* of the study is the manifested and occurring fluctuations in the rural areas of the Republic of Bulgaria.

A range of research *approaches and methods* have been used in the development of the dissertation, such as: historical, inductive and deductive, analysis and synthesis, comparison, content analysis, statistical methods, etc. In the introduction of the dissertation, the research approaches and methods used are incompletely stated.

In general, some limiting conditions of the research are correctly highlighted.

The literature sources used are conscientiously cited.

II. Assessment of the dissertation format and content

My judgment as a reviewer is that the *topic* of the dissertation is distinguished by its undeniable topicality, practical relevance and dissertationability. It is conditioned by Bulgaria's accession to the European Union (EU) in 2007, which enabled our country to join the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and to benefit from the European regional development funds addressed to rural areas, and from the operational programmes such as the Rural Development Programme. The importance of rural areas for Bulgaria is determined by the fact that they occupy almost 90% of the country's territory and cover 42% of its population. The development of rural areas is associated with a number of challenges and problems. The dissertation analyses precisely the fluctuations in the development of rural areas in Bulgaria and the possibilities for overcoming them.

The scientific study of the matter is essential both for theory and especially for agribusiness and regional development.

It should be emphasised that a thorough theoretical background and good analytical skills are required for the development of the chosen topic.

In his dissertation, the author demonstrates a commitment to critical analysis of scientific judgments and adherence to a scientific style of presentation.

The structuring and content of the study are logical and coherent. Thus structured, the exposition meets the main qualitative requirements for its evaluation: originality of the research; high degree of penetration into the depth and essence of the problem; methodological soundness and stylistic skills of the author to achieve the objective of the research, through the application of appropriate analytical tools and means of expression.

Chapter One "State and Development Potential of Rural Areas" (pp. 10-54) is theoretical and prescriptive, which I take to be correct. It is the basis for the research done in the following chapters of the thesis. This chapter is structured by three points, which successively clarify: the theoretical and institutional foundations for the delimitation of rural areas; the characteristics and problems of rural development in Bulgaria; the Rural Development Programme as an instrument of the CAP for this development. Of high value is the critical analysis of the opinions of a number of foreign and Bulgarian authors

on the nature of rural areas. The main problems in the development of rural areas in Bulgaria are thoroughly examined.

Chapter Two (pp. 55-104) is devoted to the preconditions for the occurrence of fluctuations in rural areas. Structurally, it is divided into three parts, with the first one focusing on the problems associated with the selection of beneficiaries, axes and support measures, the second examining the problems associated with the implementation and enforcement of RDP measures in the first programming period 2007-2013, and the third aiming to clarify the problems associated with the implementation and enforcement of RDP measures in the second programming period 2014-2020. A positive finding is the accumulation of a rich set of real data and their analysis related to the implementation of the RDP measures in the two programming periods and the impact of these measures.

Chapter Three "Opportunities to Overcome Fluctuations in the Development of Rural Areas" (pp. 105-149) starts with an analysis of the implementation of the implemented RDP admissions. Paragraph two examines the optimisation of RDP activities by types of beneficiaries and the effects of the RDP on rural areas. The last section focuses on the potentials of regional analysis to assess the effects of public support in avoiding fluctuations in the development of rural areas in Bulgaria. A special attention is to be paid to the unused opportunities revealed by the author with respect to the IACS and non-IACS-based measures. The necessity of applying the methods of regional analysis to support the processes of overcoming fluctuations in the development of rural areas is substantiated.

The illustrative material offered is at the required level and helps to gain a deeper insight into the matter under discussion.

The style used by the doctoral candidate meets the requirements for writing a dissertation.

The *abstract* correctly reflects the main points of the content of the dissertation thesis. The scientific and applied contributions listed in the abstract correspond to the actual contributions of the dissertation and are a personal work of the doctoral candidate.

There are 3 independent *publications under the dissertation*, including 1 scientific article and 2 scientific reports from international scientific conferences, which meets the requirement for a minimum of 30 points according to the national minimum requirements. The publications are evidence that some important parts of the dissertation have come to public knowledge and have received scientific evaluation.

III. Scientific and Scientific-Applied Contributions of the Dissertation Thesis

The main merits of the thesis can be outlined in the following directions:

First, enriching existing knowledge of rural areas through in-depth examination, synthesis and critical analysis of key theoretical propositions (scientific contribution).

Second, an in-depth and substantiated analysis of a large dataset for the first and second programming periods of the RDP and derivation of author's assessments on the

need for effective use of the Programme measures to overcome the fluctuations and inequalities in the rural areas of Bulgaria (scientific and applied contribution).

Third, development of a package of substantiated proposals for more effective, dynamic and targeted use of the RDP instruments to overcome the fluctuations in the different programming periods and to reduce their role as a negative factor for the sustainable development of rural areas in the Republic of Bulgaria (scientific and applied contribution).

Fourth, substantiation of the need to apply the methods of regional analysis, including regional risk analysis and regional investment analysis, to support the processes of overcoming the fluctuations in rural areas and making optimal decisions regarding the use of EU structural funds in these areas (scientific and applied contribution).

In *summary*, the contributions of the dissertation, in my opinion, are related to the enrichment of existing knowledge, the application of scientific achievements in practice and its improvement.

IV. Critical Comments, Questions and Recommendations on the Dissertation

Regarding the research work I could highlight some main critical remarks, recommendations and questions for the PhD student, and namely:

1. I have comments on the defined objective, subject and research thesis of the dissertation. I believe that the purpose is too simply defined, and the actual work done in the thesis exceeds it. The formulation of the subject of the research is "cumbersome" and could be made more precise. The defined research thesis "sounds" more like an objective and should also be made more precise.
2. It is recommended that the issues discussed in each chapter of the dissertation be summarised in conclusions that reflect the opinion of the doctoral candidate.
3. According to the aggregated data of the State Fund "Agriculture" as of 30.11.2021, 49% is the total utilisation rate for all measures of the RDP 2014-2020 compared to the total budget of the Programme. Hypothesis B, defined by the author, states that "inequalities in the development of individual rural areas suffer the impact of insufficiently effective measures under the rural development programmes". In this connection, could you mention measures that have proven to be effective and contribute to the sustainable development of specific areas? Do you think that there are enough projects implemented in Bulgaria that can be defined as good practice?
4. The eleventh approved amendment to the RDP allows the countries to extend the implementation of the programmes by two years and is mainly aimed at ensuring financial security for farmers and other beneficiaries in years 2021 and 2022. Do you think that the increased funding will stimulate rural areas towards the achievement of ambitious climate and environmental targets, i.e.

towards environmental sustainability?

V. Summarised Conclusion and Opinion

The reviewed dissertation represents a well-conducted, original and large-scale scientific and applied research in an area of significant relevance in contemporary conditions. It complies with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations. This gives me grounds to provide a *positive assessment* of the dissertation and to propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award **Rosen Kostadinov Kotsev** the academic and scientific degree of **Doctor** in the scientific specialty of Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics).

06.01.2022
Svishtov

Reviewer:
(Prof. M. Bozhinova, Ph.D.)