

OPINION

By: *Prof. Dr. Tsvetana Aleksandrova Stoyanova - Department "Management", UNWE - Sofia, professional field: 3.7. Administration and Management, scientific area: Social management*

Subject: a dissertation paper for the award of educational and scientific degree '**Doctor**' in *higher education area* "Organisation and management beyond the sphere of material production (Public Administration).

Grounds for the submission of the opinion: appointment for a member of the scientific panel for defence of the dissertation paper acc. to Order No. 268/ 28.04.2022 of the Rector of D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics - Svishtov

Author of the dissertation paper: *Dimitrina Lyubenova Prodanova*

Title of the dissertation paper: Stimulating the economic development of rural areas through activation of local communities

1. General characteristics of the dissertation paper

The dissertation paper submitted by Dimitrina Prodanova is in the volume of 268 standard pages, including 224 pages main text and 44 pages appendices, and consists of: an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a list of references. The cited sources are of a total number 125, including 76 in a foreign language. The dissertation paper is illustrated by 52 figures and 41 tables. It is a comprehensive and logically well-structured work, that meets all established standards for a dissertation paper.

In the **introduction**, the author justifies the relevance of the topic, presents the thesis statement and the resulting hypotheses, the research purpose and the research tasks, as well as the scope and the constraints to the dissertation research.

The first chapter examines the specifics of the terminology used, the theoretical foundations, the regulatory framework and current issues of the approach to stimulate the economic development of rural areas by activation of local communities in Bulgaria. It presents

views on: the role of the concept of multi-level governance in the European Union's regional development policy; the condition of rural areas in Bulgaria in the context of the new common agricultural policy of the EU; the concepts of economic development and the place of the LEADER approach in the models of endogenous development; the functioning of local action groups as governing bodies in rural areas, their administrative capacity and efficiency. The chapter closes with conclusions drawn from the contents and the research described in it.

The second chapter of the dissertation paper debates the definition of rural areas for the purposes of practical implementation of rural development policy, applies territorial analysis (geographical method) to assess the activities of local action groups (LAGs) that implement the LEADER approach in Bulgaria. A comparative analysis and a statistical study of the effects of the LEADER approach in municipalities across the country are carried out within the framework of the EU policy for decentralized and integrated rural development. Based on the information from the Annual Reports on the Implementation of the Community-Led Local Development Strategy (CLLD Strategy), the effects of the LAG's functioning on activating local communities and achieving the goals of the CLLD Strategy are assessed using a system of absolute and analytical indicators. The assessments from the statistical observation and the analysis of the reports on the activity of the local action groups in a sample of municipalities in Bulgaria are summarized. As a result, an integrated assessment of the impact of the LEADER approach on local economic development in Bulgarian municipalities is made. Based on the data from the comparative analysis and the evaluation of the implementation of the CLLD Strategy, conclusions and recommendations are made for the improvement of the new forms of activation of the local communities in order to stimulate the economic development of the rural areas.

The third chapter presents the results of a survey on the mobilization of local potential in municipalities in Bulgaria. A survey design was created to assess the impact of the LEADER approach on the activation of local communities. A survey on the impact of the implementation of the LEADER approach on the mobilization of the local potential in municipalities in Bulgaria was conducted and analysed.

The conclusion of the dissertation paper summarises the research presented in the chapters. Conclusions are made regarding the implementation of the research tasks and the formulated research hypotheses.

2. Assessment of the format and the contents of the dissertation

The dissertation is in volume that meets the established standard for this type of research. The three chapters are logically linked; structurally the paper is well-balanced. There is a smooth transition between the different parts. The relevance of the work is indisputable, given that it presents the LRADER approach as a road to the balanced development and better quality of life in rural municipalities through development of local resources and capacity building at the local level. The topic is particularly relevant in the context of the future of the common agricultural policy - especially after the recent challenges Europe and the world face, such as Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The style used in the dissertation, as well as the scientific instruments are appropriate and well-selected for the purposes of implementation of the tasks set by the author.

The abstract is in the volume of 47 pages. It presents in a synthesized form the research conducted by the author and the results achieved. The abstract meets the requirements and complies with the established standards for structure and content.

The author has submitted a list of 5 publications related to the topic of the dissertation - 1 study, 2 articles and 2 reports. This forms a significantly higher score than the required minimum.

3. Scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation paper

The dissertation has merits that give grounds to define scientific and scientific - applied contributions. The author claims 6 contributions. I accept as existing the claimed contributions, recommending a distinction based on their scientific-applied and applied nature.

Questions and recommendations

A recommendation to the author I have is to publish more actively abroad and to present the results of her dissertation work in respected foreign journals.

4. Summary assessment of the dissertation and conclusion

The submitted dissertation titled "Stimulating the economic development of rural areas through activation of local communities" is a scientific and applied research on a significant

and current issue. Dimitrina Prodanova shows ability to conduct independent research. Her dissertation has scientific and scientific-applied contributions and meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the regulations for educational activities at UNWE.

The above gives me grounds to propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Panel to confer to **Dimitrina Lyubenova Prodanova** the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in higher education area 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, scientific specialty "Organisation and management beyond the sphere of material production (Public Administration).

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Prof. Dr. Tsvetana Stoyanova

08 May, 2022

Sofia