



**D. A. TSENOV ACADEMY OF ECONOMICS –
SVISHTOV
DEPARTMENT OF STRATEGIC PLANNING**

OPINION

for the award of educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

The opinion is prepared by: Prof. Margarita Bogdanova, Ph.D.

Author of the dissertation: Tanya Nikolova

**Topic: STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE
NORTHWEST PLANNING REGION**

I. General presentation of the dissertation

This opinion is prepared pursuant to Order No. 490/10.06.2024 for approving the scientific jury under the open procedure for the public defence of a dissertation entitled “Strategic Solutions for Poverty Reduction in the Northwest Planning Region” with author Tanya Minkova Nikolova, for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional direction 3.8. Economics, in the doctoral programme “Planning”.

The opinion is in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria – LDASRB, the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov.

The relevance of the topic is undeniable due to the complex range of factors and conflicting solutions related to poverty. Owing to insufficient research in the chosen area, especially in countries like Bulgaria, the topic has even greater potential, due to the need to implement effective strategic documents with workable solutions to deal with “multidimensional” poverty, “subjective poverty line”, “culture of poverty” and the need to apply a strategic integrated approach to sustainable development in order to overcome poverty.

At the same time, the issue of poverty should be seen in a broad context as part of national security, and in this sense interventions in it are particularly relevant to the Northwest Planning Region for obvious reasons. In this regard, the aim of the dissertation is formulated: to study the implementation measures and perspectives of strategic solutions for poverty reduction and social exclusion in the Northwest Planning Region.

The doctoral student indicates the **object** of the dissertation – poverty in the Northwest Planning Region, and the **subject** – the strategic solutions for poverty reduction in the region. The thesis states that *poverty in the Northwest Planning Region can be overcome with clear, purposeful and innovative strategic solutions, expressed in: a regional principle when developing the strategic national projects and directing investments; a regional principle of taxation; empowerment and partnerships with citizens and businesses for efficient and effective participation in joint activities; legislative changes for transforming the economy towards a socially responsible one; a holistic approach and digitalization in strategizing and implementing anti-poverty policies.*

The aim is decomposed into five research objectives, which are fulfilled in the course of the work on the dissertation.

Tanya Nikolova's dissertation has 204 pages. The structure is balanced and includes an introduction, a main body consisting of three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references and 7 appendices. 187 literary sources are used, including 116 in English. The author's judgments are illustrated by 46 tables and 22 figures, duly described in tables in the appendices. The literary sources are used appropriately and cited correctly.

II. Assessment of the form and content of the dissertation

The dissertation clarifies basic concepts related to the topic and makes an analysis of the opinions existing in the scientific literature regarding the essence, goals, functions and meaning of poverty as a multidimensional and complex concept.

The introduction contains the main attributes for a dissertation – relevance of the topic, aim, object, subject, objectives, research thesis, a set of research methods and limitations.

Chapter One is devoted to the main dominants in overcoming poverty. Basic definitions, approaches and elements of the framework for addressing poverty are reviewed. An analysis of key thematic publications related to poverty is made, analyzing the degree of applicability of some of the instruments in Bulgaria.

Issues of the national and global dimensions of poverty and the possibilities of governmental intervention in solving this problem are examined in the context of trust in the institutions related to their activity in the fight against poverty.

Some good practices for overcoming poverty in rich and developed countries are also critically analyzed, the main conclusion of which is that "there is no universal formula for dealing with poverty, but the existing good practices can be adapted to the specific conditions in order to be successfully implemented and to have a real contribution".

Despite the lack of a universal solution, the author nevertheless highlights some basic conceptual subcategories to be observed when developing and/or implementing specific actions in the fight against poverty. These are used as a basis in the search for solution proposals.

At the end of the chapter, the most important conclusions of the study are summarized.

Chapter Two examines characteristics of the Northwest Planning Region. A comprehensive descriptive analysis is made based on secondary data, so that the reader can become acquainted with the general picture of the poverty indicators that are observed in the country and in the EU.

Data are analyzed and the significant regional differences in economic conditions and social welfare in Bulgaria and in particular in the NWPR are indicated. Factors such as economic structure, employment, investment and availability of social services are indicated. Intra-regional differences in per capita household income, labour market, investment, financial and demographic aspects, health and legal systems, waste and transport management are analyzed and the need for targeted efforts to improve economic conditions in the region is argued.

Chapter Three presents some proposals for political and business solutions for reducing poverty in the Northwest Planning Region. At the beginning of this chapter, the impact of poverty in the Regional Development Plan of the Northwest Planning Region for the period 2007-2013 is examined in depth, as the first period after the country's accession to the EU, when the process of development and implementation of policies, incl. addressing poverty started.

The survey of stakeholders in the fight against poverty is presented in the second paragraph of the third chapter. The methodology of the research conducted using the online survey method is described. The content and arguments for formulating the individual groups of questions in the survey questionnaire are presented, with the research hypotheses and assumptions clearly indicated for each group of questions (a total of 22 questions – Appendix № 3). 99 survey questionnaires were filled out by several groups of respondents. The opinion of the respondents regarding the carrying out of the measures that support the implementation of the individual priorities in the anti-poverty policies is tracked in detail.

Based on the questionnaire, several conclusions are drawn, the most important of which is related to the need to apply a metaplan approach when preparing the strategic documents, in order to match the regional strategic documents with the international ones.

The third paragraph of chapter three presents the measures to overcome poverty in the NWPR, and the fourth paragraph presents the author's Model of the strategic solution to fight poverty. This is a fundamentally new approach for Bulgaria, as most proposals for policy-related solutions are made on a different principle. But this holistic approach provides the possibility of a strategic choice from several options, which is rarely considered as an alternative by planning practice.

At the end of the dissertation, a comparative analysis is made with the existing software solutions and the author's idea for such, describing some of the possible functionalities. The overall objective of the Software Solution, as specified by the author, is to unlock the potential of intelligent solutions to address poverty in the NWPR, consisting of a cloud-based platform, with optimized sections for various stakeholders including health, education, social institutions, non-governmental sector and public authority.

In the conclusion, the implementation of the objectives is stated, which supports the research thesis and once again emphasizes that there is an underutilized potential in the NWPR for overcoming poverty. Part of the problem is the insufficient poverty research infrastructure at the regional level, which is why there is often a lack of experts with appropriate educational and/or professional experience in the field. This leads to inaccuracies in the data, and hence to inaccuracies in the scientific works and the decisions of politicians.

A list of proposals for strategic solutions is formulated, which can be implemented in the NWPR if there is political will.

III. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions

Scientific-applied contributions dominate in the dissertation, which is typical for most Ph.D. theses. I acknowledge the information on scientific and scientific-applied contributions, which includes:

1. Thematic scientific publications and good practices related to the global and national goals and dimensions of poverty are studied and analyzed, on the basis of which main conceptual subcategories are derived to be observed in the development and implementation of policies in the fight against poverty at the regional level.

2. A detailed analysis of secondary data is carried out on the status and trends of main poverty indicators in the NWPR. Significant regional differences in the economic conditions and social well-being of the region are highlighted in several aspects, and unused potential opportunities for overcoming poverty in the NWPR after Bulgaria's accession in the EU are outlined.

3. Empirical research is conducted on the opinion of respondents from the NWPR regarding the causes, consequences of poverty, the institutions that have a role in the fight against poverty, and the possible instruments for the implementation of policies. On this basis, the need for preparing a meso-scenario plan in the region and a metaplan approach when preparing the strategic documents at the regional level is highlighted.

4. An equation is proposed to serve as a basis for developing a system for measuring the factor influence of the Strategic solution to fight poverty.

5. A model of "Success of Strategic Solutions to Fight Poverty in the NWPR" is developed to be used in the visualization of the decisions made.

6. A system of indicators is proposed for evaluating the success of the Strategic Solutions to fight poverty based on the example of the Northwest Planning Region.

I believe that the contributions formulated in this way adequately reflect the author's achievements.

IV. Critical remarks and recommendations

As a member of the teaching department, I have monitored Tanya Nikolova's progress in developing the dissertation and the consistency with which the recommendations are followed. I have no critical remarks to the author.


I recommend that she continue to work and publish the results of her research, as the topic is relevant and will probably be relevant for the regions of Bulgaria for a long time to come.

V. Summarized assessment and opinion

The dissertation submitted for review is a topical and significant independent scientific study with theoretical generalizations and practical contributions. The author has planned and implemented a research methodology that is adequate to the described problems, and the conclusions are correctly presented. She has independently reached conclusions and generalizations that complement and enrich the existing knowledge and the application of the existing theory in the analysis of specific management problems. These merits fully cover the requirements of the regulatory framework in the country – LDASRB and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov.

With full conviction, I give a categorical positive assessment of the dissertation and propose to the scientific jury to award Tanya Minkova Nikolova the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in professional direction 3.8. Economics, doctoral programme “Planning”.

Date: 15.07.2024

Prepared the opinion: 

(Prof. Margarita Bogdnova, Ph.D)