

Statement of academic opinion

From Professor Pavel Georgiev Pavlov, PhD,

Varna Free University "Chernorisec Hrabar", member of the Scientific Jury according to Order № P-109-247/13.06.2022 r. of the Rector of the Medical University - Varna to determine

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Regarding: Dissertation thesis on "Possibilities for positioning Bulgaria on the international market as a year-round destination for health, medical, spa and wellness tourism"

with author: SIYKA ANASTASOVA KATSAROVA

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Philosophy Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and law sciences, professional field 3.7. Administration and management, specialty "Organization and management outside the field of material production (in healthcare)"

Scientific supervisor:

Prof. Todorka Kostadinova, PhD

I. Information about the procedure and general assessment of the dissertation

Siyka Anastasova Katsarova is a doctoral candidate in free form of study in the department: "Economics and Management of Health Care" Medical University "Prof. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna (MU-Varna) on the doctoral program "Organization and management of outside the sphere

of material production (in health care)" in professional direction 3.7. Administration and management, field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences.

The dissertation thesis has been discussed and directed for defense on 1.06.2022. at a meeting of the Department of "Economics and Health Care Management" at the Faculty of "Public Health" at MU-Varna.

Katsarova has successfully completed the individual study plan with the required number of credits and received a positive attestation grade for her studies at the MU - Varna. All the necessary documents according to the procedure are provided for according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the MU – Varna

I. General characteristics of the presented dissertation thesis

The dissertation thesis of Siyka Katsarova was developed in a total volume of 136 standard pages. Structurally, the study contains an introduction, main text in three chapters, conclusions and recommendations, conclusion, list of used literature and appendices. The main text contains 9 tables and 15 figures.

The dissertation research was carried out on the basis of 133 sources in Bulgarian and English, incl. normative documents and official sources, books, monographs, articles in scientific and periodicals, statistical sources, reports and analyzes of international organizations.

The topic of the development reflects the growing role of health, medical, spa and wellness tourism in Europe and worldwide in the context of dynamic changes in the macro environment, including the impact of the covid pandemic of 2020.

III. Characteristics and assessment of the dissertation thesis content

The introduction justifies the choice of the topic in the context of its relevance and practical applicability. The research problem and the author's thesis are correctly formulated. The main thesis is supplemented with several sub theses. The purpose of the dissertation and the tasks are correctly defined. **The main goal is "to analyze the possibilities of Bulgaria for the development of year-round health tourism with a focus on the directions of medical tourism, medical-SPA, SPA and wellness tourism and with a view to positioning it on the international market as a destination offering quality in this specialized tourist product" .**

The object and the subject of the research have been determined, an adequate research toolkit has been applied. The indicated limitations on the researched topic show a good knowledge of the issues and the presence of a good orientation in the real situation when analyzing and evaluating the unique advantages with which destination Bulgaria can compete on the international market as a year-round destination for health tourism.

Doctoral student Katsarova has managed to gain good access to the managers of the Bulgarian spa hotels and their teams, and her professional and personal commitment to the subject is evident throughout the dissertation.

In the literature review, main attention is paid to the essential characteristics of health tourism (medical, medical-SPA, SPA and wellness) and the State regulation of the Republic of Bulgaria in the sector. The advantages of Bulgarian spa resorts and the possibilities of positioning Bulgaria as a destination for year-round health tourism on the European tourist market have been analyzed.

In the first chapter, an analysis of the factors influencing the development of medical-spa, spa, wellness and medical tourism is presented, which would contribute in practice to the formulation of adequate policies in this area both at the national and regional level.

In the second chapter of the dissertation, good practices in Europe are selected and analyzed, emphasizing the successful model of the leading destinations for international health tourism - Germany and Hungary.

Already in this part of the dissertation, the researcher Katsarova formulates her categorical opinion that for the positioning of Bulgaria on the European and world market for health tourism, it is necessary to implement a comprehensive state policy and financial support in this sector. Her extensive professional experience and knowledge of the subject is clearly visible here.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, the results of the conducted studies on the attitudes of the management regarding priorities in the offer in health tourism are presented; to assess the state of the sector, incl. difficulties related to the COVID-19 pandemic; for priority directions in conducting balneotherapy in Europe and specifically in Bulgaria. On the basis of the theoretical statements, the analysis of the strategic documents and the results of the own study, with the inclusion of a comparative analysis with other European studies, in which Bulgaria also participates, a **"Model for the development of health tourism"** was developed. It is adapted according to the model of Dr. T. Angelova and presents an innovative portfolio for methodological support in the practical implementation of the goals of health tourism and the

positioning of Bulgaria on the European spa, wellness and health market. Valuable for the practice are the conclusions and recommendations formulated at the end of the dissertation work. The main text of the dissertation ends with a logical conclusion.

IV. Contributions and significance of the study for the practice

I accept the contributions of the dissertation formulated in the dissertation summary:

- The main stages in the development of Bulgaria as a competitive destination for health tourism are defined, with a focus on medical - SPA, SPA and wellness tourism;
- The areas have been identified and analyzed, incl. medical, with which Bulgaria can compete on the health tourism market in Europe.
- A combined national survey was conducted, including the period of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, to discuss attitudes about the existing supply, demand, market orientation and positioning of Bulgaria in the European market of medical-SPA, SPA and wellness tourism.
- A model has been developed for the development of health tourism in Bulgaria through an innovative portfolio of treatments and its positioning as a destination offering a competitive product.
- Recommendations of an operational and conceptual nature for the development of health tourism in Bulgaria have been formulated.

V. Dissertation summary and publications

The dissertation summary contains 60 pages and correctly presents the structure and the content of the dissertation thesis.

In connection with the topic of the dissertation, Siyka Katsarova has presented 5 scientific publications in Bulgarian and English, incl. participation in a chapter of an international monograph.

The listed publications of the author are visible on her google scholar profile <https://scholar.google.com/citations?&user=K2dLUeAAAAAJ>

VI. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have the following question for doctoral candidate Siyka Katsarova: "Is there a realistic possibility to implement some of the recommended steps in your dissertation thesis through European programs and projects?".

VII. Conclusion


Siyka Katsarova's dissertation is an up-to-date study of the positioning of Bulgaria on the international market as a year-round destination for health, medical, spa and wellness tourism.

In her dissertation, the author demonstrates excellent theoretical and practical knowledge, consistency, conviction, commitment to practical solutions and a strategic vision for the development of health tourism in Bulgaria.

The dissertation meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Application and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov" - Varna.

The listed arguments give me the conviction to give a positive assessment and propose the award of an educational and **scientific degree "Philosophy Doctor"** in the scientific specialty "Organization and management outside the sphere of material production (in healthcare)" in professional direction 3.7. Administration and management of **Siyka Anastasova Katsarova**.

14.07.2022r.
City of Varna

Member of the Scientific Jury: 
/Prof. Pavel Pavlow, PhD/