



## UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD ECONOMY

### STATEMENT

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

Subject: dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" at the International Higher Business School in the field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field 3.9 "Tourism.

Author of the dissertation: Mila Zdravkova Gaidarska  
Dissertation topic: "Innovative marketing approaches for tourism development"

Grounds for presenting the statement: participation in the composition of the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation according to Order № 246 of 01.12.2021 of the Rector of the International Higher Business School - Botevgrad.

#### **1. Information about the doctoral student**

The doctoral student studied under a doctoral program at the International Higher Business School - Botevgrad in the scientific specialty of Economics and Management (Tourism) in the period from 2020 until now. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in Economics from Tambov State University "GR Derzhavin", Tambov (Russia) and a master's degree in "Digital Marketing" at MFBU, Sofia and "Finance and Banking" at VUARR, Plovdiv. He works as a freelance digital marketer, fluent in English and Russian.

## **2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation**

The dissertation has a total volume of 233 pages of computer typed text. Of these, 218 pages are an introduction, main text, structured in three chapters, conclusions, 8 pages list of references, 6 pages appendices. The bibliographic includes 140 literary sources in Bulgarian and Russian, 23 sources in Italian, German and English and 9 are websites. The text contains 18 tables, 23 figures, 20 formulas.

Structurally, the paper consists of three chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. They consistently consider the theoretical aspects of the innovative potential of the tourism business, the methodological features of marketing in tourism and the possible innovative marketing components in the tourism business. The structure of the dissertation is well balanced and logically sound.

The topic of the dissertation is well formulated. Its importance and relevance is clearly justified, given the fact that "cluster approach, digitalization and visualization as innovative approaches in marketing cause a legitimate scientific interest in achieving high results in the development of tourism." The author said that in Bulgaria due to lack of sufficient experience, their application in the field of tourism services is limited. The PhD student proceeds from the concept that digitalization and visualization can cause changes in the company in the direction of dramatically improving its efficiency. These changes require new organizational structures, processes, information flows, management systems and company culture. On this basis, an exemplary innovative structure in regional tourism is built on the basis of the cluster approach.

The subject and the object of research are well defined, the goal and the tasks are correctly stated, accurately reflecting the research work done by the doctoral student. The dissertation thesis is developed and proven, as the confirmation of the individual hypotheses confirms the statements. The merits of the research methodology and the reliability and validity of the research results are distinguished by their merits. The exposition and the used literature show that the doctoral student has got acquainted with a significant number of literary sources. The style of the dissertation is good (there are insignificant ambiguities). The structure of the dissertation can be given an excellent assessment.

## **3. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and applied scientific results**

In the dissertation work can be outlined a number of advantages that are of scientific and applied nature. Initially, the essence of the tourism business was logically clarified. Emphasis is placed on innovation in tourism and the cluster approach as an opportunity to develop an innovative tourism business. A system for assessing the innovative potential in tourism has also been adapted.

At the heart of the methodological issues of tourism marketing are traditional and modern models of various authors. The method of quality functions and specialized methods are indicated as innovative methods for developing a competitive product. In the approaches for research of the consumer behavior of tourist products the stages in the consumption and the types of the consumer are analyzed, using the semantic approach (thesaurus) for the evaluation of the consumers. Criteria for consumer segmentation have been derived and on this basis an online survey of consumer behavior in choosing a tourist product in a digital environment has been conducted.

The derived methodological tools enable the doctoral student Gaidarska to achieve the main goal set in the dissertation and to solve the set tasks. As a result of the development of labor, the cluster is defined as a tool for regionalization, and digitalization as the main tool for branding in today's environment. Practices are proposed for the use of graphic design in the advertising image of the brand and its positioning on social networks. It is concluded that the efforts of the tourism business should be focused on the path of consolidation to realize readiness for the transition to innovative approaches to work.

#### **4. Evaluation of scientific and applied contributions, dissertation publications and abstracts**

The report on the contributions presented with the dissertation objectively reflects the real achievements of the doctoral student. I fully accept the contributions. Of particular value for practice is the proposed matrix for determining the degree of innovation of the brand, revealing the relationship between the branding strategy and the innovation of the tourism business.

By type and number of the presented publications correspond to the ones announced by the doctoral student in the attached list and the abstract. A total of three publications are listed. Two of the publications are reports and one is an article. I believe that these publications really present the achievements of the doctoral student and are representative enough to make them known to the academic community and interested business circles.

The abstract faithfully reproduces the content of the work. It is prepared in a volume of 50 pages of computer-typed text and consists of three parts, which maximally reflect the research work of the doctoral student.

#### **5. Critical remarks and recommendations**

Despite the merits of the dissertation, some weaknesses that are characteristic of every young researcher can be outlined. They are not particularly serious and of a recommendatory nature, which does not call into question the expressed merits of the dissertation. For example, a clearer justification for the

choice of the proposed research methodology is needed. It is unnecessary to include at the level of dissertation work of general productions, long known in the tourist literature as such as the main and specific factors for its development. In my future work, I recommend PhD student Gaidarska to focus her efforts on researching approaches to building a successful branding strategy to increase the competitiveness of destinations at the macro level.

## **6. Conclusion**

The dissertation sets clear goals and objectives, which PhD student Gaidarska has undoubtedly achieved and fulfilled. The analyzes are correct, the recommendations are substantiated and follow from the results of the research. The doctoral student demonstrates skills for in-depth and reasoned analysis, summaries and critical thinking. The analyzed dissertation is an achievement which, as a topic, theoretical summaries, conclusions and recommendations, has its indisputable significance for the theory and practice in tourism.

**All this gives me reason to propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award Mila Zdravkova Gaidarska the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)", professional field 3.9. Tourism.**

February 15, 2022 / Sofia

Signature:



/Assoc. Prof. E. Velikova, PhD/