

**OPINION
of dissertation work**

for the establishment of an educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the doctoral program “Economics and Management (Tourism)” of the University of Economics – Varna

1. General information

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgina Lukanova, University of Economics - Varna

Grounds for writing the review: participation in the Scientific Jury, determined by order of the Rector at the University of Economics - Varna, RD-06-147/01.10.2025, and decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on October 7, 2025.

Author of the dissertation: Le Thi Thu Hien, a PhD student at the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism of the University of Economics – Varna.

The topic of the dissertation: "Positioning of the destination Vietnam on the Bulgarian tourist market".

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Stoyan Marinov

2. General presentation of the dissertation (following requirements of Article 27, paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria)

The dissertation's comprehensive presentation underscores the following pivotal points:

- The dissertation meets the quantitative requirements for works of this nature. It is comprised of 213 pages, which are distributed as follows: An introduction of 13 pages; An exposition in three chapters (Chapter I – 44 pages, Chapter II – 76 pages, Chapter III – 33 pages); A conclusion of 5 pages; A list of sources used of 13 pages; 7 pages of appendices.

- It is evident that the bibliography comprises a total of 185 sources, of which 9 are in Cyrillic (Bulgarian and Russian) and 76 in Latin (English and Vietnamese); 100 internet addresses are listed. Most of the sources are contemporary and relevant to the topic; citations are generally accurate and conscientious (with a few exceptions, e.g., in the case of sources with numbers from 128 to 172, only internet addresses are listed as requisites).

- The text is illustrated with 7 tables and 48 figures. The dissertation includes 2 appendices.

A declaration of originality is attached.

3. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation (compliance with the requirements of Article 56, paragraph 1 and paragraph 2 of the Regulation for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics)

The dissertation work of doctoral student Le Thi Thu Hien represents a completed independent study with a pronounced interdisciplinary character, combining scientific statements from economics, marketing, management, and cultural studies. The structure and content of the scientific work correspond to the set goal and research tasks, which are clearly and precisely specified in the introduction. The object and subject of the study are defined correctly, in accordance with the formulated topic. Three research tasks have been defined to realize the goal. The research thesis, which determines the essence and direction of the scientific research and clearly presents the doctoral student's position on the researched issue, has been appropriately formulated. Three working hypotheses have been formulated to prove the research thesis. To achieve the goal of the study and fulfill the tasks arising from it, appropriate and applicable research methods have been selected. Small clarifications could be made regarding their highlighting. For example, regarding the methods for processing and analyzing data, primary and secondary methods have been indicated. In fact, primary and secondary are the data that are processed, not the methods themselves. In addition, the survey method, interview method, and field research methods mentioned as independent methods are types of data collection methods. The limitations of the study are correctly stated.

Doctoral student Hien is well acquainted with the contemporary specialised literature on the subject under study, as evidenced by her successful systematisation and interpretation of scientific concepts and propositions. At the same time, she is able to present appropriate conclusions and summaries that express her own opinion.

The style of the presentation is clear, terminologically accurate, and scientifically sound. No significant repetitions or logical contradictions are noticeable. In terms of language, the work is written competently, with minimal syntactic and punctuation deviations.

The abstract has been prepared in accordance with the stipulated requirements and offers a satisfactory reflection of the work submitted for review.

In general, it can be concluded that the doctoral student possesses theoretical knowledge on the research topic and can conduct independent empirical research, successfully interpreting and summarizing the results obtained.

The abstract is written according to the requirements and correctly and completely represents the main parts and content of the dissertation.

4. Identification and assessment of scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation

The report on the dissertation's contributions includes three points that reflect the scientific and applied value of the work done by the candidate. After analysis of the dissertation, I confirm the stated contributions.

5. Publications related to the dissertation

Doctoral student Li The Thu Hien has submitted a list of six independent publications related to the dissertation. The publications are closely related to the topic of the dissertation, largely reflect its essential parts, and give it publicity. The volume of the doctoral student's scientific outputs and the nature of the publications correspond to the requirements for acquiring the PhD degree. The report on compliance with the national requirements under the Regulations on the Implementation of the LASDRB shows achievement of the required points for acquiring the doctoral degree.

6. Detected or undetected plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract

The development of the dissertation has been undertaken in accordance with the established principles of scientific ethics, and no evidence of citation errors, plagiarism, or other violations of research integrity has been identified.

7. Critical remarks, recommendations, and questions

No significant theoretical, logical, methodological, or stylistic errors were found in the dissertation submitted by doctoral student Li The Thu Hien for review. Some inaccuracies have been made in specifying the research methods and the bibliographical description of the cited sources. The abbreviation BUBSPA used in the conclusion refers to the Bulgarian Union of Balneology and SPA Tourism, not the Bulgarian Tourist Association.

The above comments in no way diminish the value of the dissertation or reduce its significance.

8. Question to the doctoral student

I would like to ask a question to doctoral student Hien: What product, oriented towards the "youth" segment, could be included in Vietnam's product strategy for the Bulgarian outbound tourism market?

10. Conclusion

The dissertation developed by PhD candidate Le Thi Thu Hien represents a complete original research study that contains contributions in both theoretical-methodological and applied aspects. The research tasks have been fulfilled, and the scientific objective has been achieved. Based on the findings regarding the requirements outlined in the opinion, I believe there are sufficient grounds to provide a positive assessment and recommend to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury that they award the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' in professional field 3.9 'Tourism', scientific specialty 'Economics and Management (Tourism)' to the doctoral candidate Le Thi Thu Hien.

November 3, 2025
Varna

Author of the opinion:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Geörgina Lukanova)

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

TO
THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCIENTIFIC JURY
DETERMINED BY ORDER OF THE RECTOR
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS – VARNA
on the procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the
scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)"

OPINION

For the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the
professional field 3.9. "Tourism", doctoral program "Economics and Management
(Tourism)" according to the announced procedure by the University of Economics -
Varna

1. General information

Prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vesselina Ivanova Atanasova, Burgas State
University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas, College of Tourism - Burgas.

Grounds for writing the opinion: Order No. RD-06-147/01.10.2025 of the Rector
of the University of Economics - Varna on the appointment of a Scientific Jury and decision
of the Scientific Jury of 07.10.2025

Author of the dissertation: Le Thi Thu Hien, full-time doctoral student at the
Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" at the University of Economics
- Varna.

Topic of the dissertation: "Positioning of the destination Vietnam on the Bulgarian
tourist market".

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Stoyan Marinov

2. General presentation of the dissertation

The scientific work submitted for review by doctoral student Le Thi Thu Hien is
focused on the strategic positioning of Vietnam as a tourist destination on the Bulgarian
emissive market.

A total of 185 information sources were used and successfully integrated into the
text, including 11 sources in Cyrillic, 116 sources in Latin and 58 specialized Internet sites.

The dissertation convincingly defines the relevance of the analyzed topic, the subject
and object of the study. The main goal of the dissertation, stated doctoral student Le Thi
Thu Hien, is "to propose a solution for optimizing the attraction and use of the Bulgarian
tourist market to Vietnam as a tourist destination", and to achieve this, the author sets and
formulates 3 research tasks.

The scientific work successfully verifies and proves the thesis that "effective market
positioning of a tourist destination in a new source market requires in-depth knowledge of

consumer attitudes, competitive offering and implementation of appropriate marketing strategies. The formulated thesis is supported by three main research hypotheses:

The dissertation work applies a combined research approach - both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. The methods used fully correspond to the scientific research goal and tasks set in the dissertation. Their totality includes: analysis and synthesis, systematic approach, situational analysis, questionnaire survey. An appropriate and justified statistical approach was correctly used to process the data collected during the empirical study.

The presentation clearly expresses the author's position of the doctoral student, originality and depth of the conclusions, with a precise scientific apparatus. The author's approach is consistent with the requirements of the research methods used. There is a clearly expressed authenticity of the source data, consistency and reliability of the conclusions and recommendations.

The dissertation has the character of a comprehensive, complete, original and significant scientific study on the problems and opportunities for effective market positioning of a tourist destination

As a result of the above, we believe that the dissertation is presented in a form and volume that fully meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the PPZRASRB and of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Rules for the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at the University of Varna.

3. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Doctoral student Le Thi Thu Hien presents six scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation. The scientific output for the developed doctoral thesis meets the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Varna and the quantitative requirements under Art. 35, para. 1, items 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at the University of Varna.

4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation

From a content point of view, the dissertation has a classic structure for this type of scientific work: introduction; theoretical chapter; analytical chapter; applied chapter and conclusion.

Structurally, the content of the dissertation is well balanced, logically linked, detailed, consistent with relatively well-balanced parts, clear and understandable style.

In the course of the presentation, including a total of 213 pages, an introduction (13 pages), an exposition in three chapters (167 pages), a conclusion (5 pages), a list of used literature (13 pages). The main text contains 7 tables, 11 figures and 37 graphs. The list of used sources consists of 185 information sources. There are 2 appendices to the dissertation work.

The literary sources are of sufficient volume and thematic focus, correspond to the subject and object of the study, are used appropriately in the presentation, and are cited correctly.

The first chapter of the dissertation develops and justifies the theoretical and methodological framework of the strategic positioning of a tourist destination, with a focus on emissive markets. Definitions for the concept of "tourist destination" are derived from the interdisciplinary review and systematization of specialized publications and scientific literature in the field. The processes of "market positioning" and "tourist destination positioning" are also clarified.

A significant point in the first chapter is the working definition of the concept of "destination positioning" proposed by the author, understood as "a consciously managed process of building, communicating and maintaining a clearly differentiated and desired image of the tourist destination in the minds of specific target markets". Theoretical foundations are formulated for developing an own analytical model to be applied in the empirical part of the study.

The second chapter, in a structural and logical aspect, is dedicated to the analysis and assessment of Vietnam's positions on the Bulgarian tourist market, incl. and characteristics of Vietnam as a tourist destination in terms of tourist supply and tourist demand, key advantages of the destination Vietnam are highlighted, problems and shortcomings to be overcome are revealed.

Chapter three systematizes the opportunities and guidelines for effective positioning of the tourist destination Vietnam on the Bulgarian emissive market.

The doctoral student offers strategic solutions based on SWOT analysis. Guidelines for target segmentation and a strategic marketing mix (product, price, distribution and communication strategy) are formulated, adapted to the cultural and behavioral characteristics of Bulgarian tourists.

The author of the dissertation summarizes that the positioning of Vietnamese tourism on the Bulgarian market is a realistic and achievable goal, which requires coordinated actions by public institutions, the tourism business and international partners. Vietnam's sustainable entry into this market will diversify the tourist flow and establish the country as a significant player in the region. For this purpose, recommendations are offered for actions oriented towards all stakeholders: regarding state institutions, the tourism business, cultural and diplomatic organizations.

In conclusion, based on the findings presented, the dissertation work is presented in a form and volume that meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the PPZRASRB and Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Rules for the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at the University of Varna.

5. Scientific and applied scientific contributions

We support the author's opinion that in addition to scientific novelty, the dissertation has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the understanding of the process of market positioning of destinations in the context of emerging markets is enriched with the proposed theoretical framework and an applicable model for strategic positioning

of emerging destinations in developing source markets. The practical contribution is in the preparation of an applicable model for strategic positioning of Vietnam on the Bulgarian market, based on real research.

Prospects for future research are also outlined, including behavioral and comparative analyses that can deepen the understanding of the effectiveness of Vietnam's tourism marketing in Eastern Europe.

6. Plagiarism detected or not in the dissertation and abstract

I do not detect plagiarism in the presented doctoral thesis and abstract by doctoral student Le Thi Thu Hien.

7. Critical notes and recommendations

Regarding the dissertation work – main statement, author's thesis and the argumentation of the conclusions, we have no critical notes and recommendations.

8. Questions to the doctoral student

We have no questions to the doctoral student, in view of the comprehensive and multi-faceted research in the doctoral thesis.

9. Conclusion

The proposed doctoral dissertation by Le Thi Thu Hien on the topic "Positioning the Destination Vietnam in the Bulgarian Tourism Market" significantly enriches science and practice in terms of strategic

opportunities and challenges to positioning. The development achieves its goal of providing a theoretical and practical framework for politicians, researchers and practitioners in tourism.

The presented scientific work is a completed independent study that meets the necessary requirements for such a type of development in terms of structure, significance and completeness. Through the in-depth analysis and strategic proposals, the development contributes to the sustainable development and increase of the competitiveness of Vietnamese tourism in new international markets, including the Bulgarian market.

In conclusion, based on the opinion presented by me, I give my positive assessment of the presented doctoral thesis with absolute conviction and recommend to the Scientific Jury to award doctoral student Le Thi Thu Hien the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 3. "Social, economic and legal sciences", professional field 3.9. "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and management (tourism)".

27.10.2025,
city of Burgas

Prepared the opinion
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vesselina Atanasova/

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

TO

**THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCIENTIFIC JURY
DETERMINED BY Rector's ORDER
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA**
according to the procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor"
in the scientific specialty "Economics and management (tourism)"

STATEMENT

Regarding dissertation thesis for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.9. "Tourism", doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" according to the announced procedure from the University of Economics - Varna

1. General information

Author of the statement: Assoc. Prof. Elena Ilieva, PhD, Burgas State University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov", Faculty of Social Sciences.

Reason for writing the review: Order No. **RD-06-147/01.10.2025** of the Rector of the University of Economics - Varna for the appointment of a Scientific Jury and decision of the Scientific Jury on 24.09.2025.

Author of the dissertation: Le Thi Thu Hien, full-time doctoral student in the Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" at the University of Economics - Varna.

Topic of the dissertation: "Positioning of the destination Vietnam on the Bulgarian tourist market".

Research supervisor: Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD

2. General presentation of the dissertation

The dissertation of doctoral student Le Thi Thu Hien is an in-depth independent study with a pronounced interdisciplinary character, which examines a current topic for expanding receptive destinations for Bulgarian tourists traveling internationally with a focus on destinations outside Europe. The dissertation examines the strategic positioning of a receptive destination Vietnam for Bulgarian tourists. At the current stage of the Bulgarian outbound tourism development, there is a growing interest among Bulgarian tourists in foreign destinations outside Europe. Favorable factors for this process are the simplified procedures for visiting distant destinations outside Europe, the better accessibility of the international air and water transport, as well as wide access to diverse information concerning tourist resources, local culture and international events in the receptive destinations. Vietnam is a tourist destination with a rich cultural heritage, great natural diversity and a stable tourist infrastructure with traditions in the tourism business sector. This makes it a potential receptive destination among Bulgarian tourists seeking cultural enrichment, exoticism and authenticity of the experience. In addition to the above, the topics of globalization, digitalization and regional economic integration are extremely relevant in the field of tourism, which proves the significance and relevance of the research conducted by Le Thi Thu Hien, as they are well highlighted both in the subject and object of the scientific research chosen by the PhD student, as well as in the stated main goal of the study. Based on the clear and precise formulation of the main goal of the study, the author highlights three research tasks, which are also correctly set and subsequently implemented in the scientific work.

In the introduction of the dissertation, the **research thesis** is excellently formulated and is successfully proven in the study based on **three main hypotheses**. The research methods and scientific tools used by the author are in accordance with the subject and object of the study. The doctoral student demonstrates excellent competencies in both the field of strategic destination management and touristic markets. This is a certificate of the real applicability and perspective of the research in the doctoral thesis.

The number of **sources of information** is sufficient and corresponds to the topic of the study. Doctoral student Le Thi Thu Hien has conducted a review of diverse Bulgarian and foreign literature, with the latter significantly predominating (nearly 80% of the presented list). The information source's structure highlights an impressive volume of institutional sources, which is also a proof of the real applicability of the study in terms of statistical data, regulatory documents and international agreements. The limitations of the study mentioned by the author are relevant and acceptable.

As a result of the presented so far, I believe that the presented dissertation **fully meets** the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulation for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

3. Publications and participation in scientific forums

PhD student Le Thi Thu Hien presents six scientific publications directly related to the topic of the dissertation work – 3 articles and 3 scientific reports, with which he achieves 60 points. The scientific publications are all published in English in scientific journals with a high scientific reputation, which testifies to the valuable contribution of the author to the promotion of Bulgarian science internationally. The scientific production presented by the PhD student meets the minimum national requirements for awarding doctoral degree according to Art. 3 of the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the quantitative requirements under Art. 1-4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna.

4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation

In relation to the **structure of the dissertation** of Le Thi Thu Hien, it has a total volume of 213 pages, of which: introduction (13 pages); exposition in three chapters (167 pages); conclusion (5 pages); used literature (13 pages). The main text contains 7 tables, 11 figures and 37 graphics for visualizing the presented information. There are also 2 Appendices with a total length of 9 pages. The structure of the PhD is very well balanced in terms of length.

The used **scientific literature** numbers 185 sources, of which 87 scientific publications and 98 institutional source websites. Information sources correspond to the subject and object of the study. They are used appropriately and are cited correctly in the exposition. Their volume is sufficient in relation to the volume of the doctorate.

Regarding the **content**, the dissertation follows the classical model: introduction; theoretical chapter; analytical chapter; applied chapter and conclusion. The content is extremely well balanced and logically coherent.

In the **first chapter**, after the author emphasizes the essence of the concept of "tourist destination", the PhD student derives the main characteristics and features of a tourist destination. There is a wide range of classical and contemporary definitions of "tourist destination" synthesized, on which a strongly expressed interdisciplinary approach can be defined. Considering the understanding that the tourist destination is an integrated tourist product, the tourist destination is presented as a complex system of interacting elements. The study logically proceeds through the theoretical aspects of market positioning. The PhD student makes a reasonable analysis of the strategic positioning process as well as tourism marketing management in the light of key elements of tourist destination marketing. The

author concludes with emotional and rational components in the market positioning examination.

Given the topic of the dissertation, the researcher conceptually examines the market positioning of a tourist destination. Approaches for effective positioning of a tourist destination are suggested on the PIB-model (Positioning–Image–Branding) basis. Well-founded, the process of tourist destination positioning is structured in six main steps. Additionally, on this foundation six main effective methods and approaches for tourist destination market positioning are presented in detail. Logically, the first dissertation chapter ends with a theoretical summary with the following important conclusions: there's a need for a systematic approach to positioning the tourist destination; elaboration of an author's definition for "tourist destination positioning"; compilation of a conceptual model for the empirical study.

In the **second chapter** the author makes a critical analysis of Vietnam as an international tourist destination from the point of view of the current tourist supply and tourist demand. In terms of supply, the following indicators are studied: natural and anthropogenic tourist resources of Vietnam; the transport and tourist infrastructure; hotel and restaurant superstructure. In relation to Vietnam's tourist demand, diverse statistical information is presented, on the basis of which Vietnam is reasonably qualified as a highly competitive and sustainable destination. Special attention is also given to the Bulgarian tourist market in terms of international tourism with a focus on the economic aspects of tourist behavior; personal, psychological and behavioral characteristics of Bulgarian consumers. Based on the analysis, the PhD student makes a justified conclusion that Vietnam is a potential destination with high value for Bulgarian tourists. Additionally, two empirical surveys among the potential demand (Bulgarian tourists) and supply (tourism business) regarding Vietnam as a tourist destination. In terms of potential demand, the data concern: demographic structure; information channels; purpose and style of travel; preferred tourist resources and activities in the destination; attracting and hindering factors for Vietnam's development as a preferred destination on the Bulgarian outbound market. In conclusion, Hypotheses 1 and 2 in the study are fully justified. The study of the potential tourist supply is among key experts from the tourism industry, offering Vietnam on the Bulgarian outbound market. Advantages and disadvantages of Vietnam as a tourist destination are identified resulting in confirmation of Hypothesis 3 in the study.

The **third chapter** presents discussion of the results from the empirical study and guidelines for the effective positioning of Vietnam on the Bulgarian tourist outbound market. Based on a SWOT analysis, the PhD student formulates specific recommendations for the sustainable development of Vietnam as a tourist destination on the Bulgarian outbound market. There is a well-formulated strategies matrix, combining strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Vietnam as a tourist destination. Strong impression makes an author's three-stage development program for Vietnam. The professional approach in the author's recommendations in terms of strategic marketing mix for positioning Vietnam on the Bulgarian tourist market is impressive – it is based on specific product, pricing, distribution and communication strategies, through which to provide an integrated, sustainable, effective and competitive offering of Vietnam on the Bulgarian outbound tourist market.

The **introduction and conclusion** of the PhD thesis effectively fulfill their role. The author uses appropriate scientific and professional terminology from the field of tourism and strategic business planning.

The **abstract** in volume of 29 pages fully meets the requirements for this type of scientific papers and correctly reflects the main results of the dissertation work.

In conclusion, the dissertation is presented in a form and volume that meets the requirements of Art. 34, paragraph 2 and 3 of the Rules for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at the University of Economic - Varna.

5. Evaluation of scientific and scientifically applied contributions

I fully accept the scientific and scientifically applied contributions highlighted by the PhD student within the presented conclusion of the dissertation work. These are theoretical (enrichment of theoretical statements in the tourism theory and market positioning of destinations); methodological (conceptual model for researching destination market positioning in the context of emerging markets) and applied (applicable strategy for positioning Vietnam on the Bulgarian market).

6. Confirmed or unconfirmed plagiarism in the dissertation or the abstract

I find no plagiarism in the doctoral thesis and the abstract presented by the PhD student.

7. Remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks and recommendations regarding the dissertation work.

8. Questions to the PhD student

I have no questions for the PhD student, in view of the comprehensive and logically stated research in the PhD thesis.

9. Conclusion

The proposed doctoral dissertation by Le Thi Thu Hien represents an original and in-depth study that has a strong contribution to tourism theory and a pronounced applied nature for the development of outbound tourism markets in Bulgaria. The author successfully combines his theoretical knowledge with his professional interests, demonstrating competence, a prominent author's position and strategic business thinking.

In conclusion, on the basis of the opinion presented by me, I give my **highly positive assessment of the presented doctorate and recommend the honorable Scientific Jury to award the PhD student Le Thi Thu Hien the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)".**

02.11.2025,
Burgas

The statement has been prepared by:

/Associate Professor Elena Ilieva, PhD/

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679