



УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ЗА НАЦИОНАЛНО И СВЕТОВНО СТОПАНСТВО

REVIEWER'S POSITION

From: *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariya Marinova Peneva*
Department of Natural Resources Economics, UNWE, Sofia,
3.8. Economics, "Economics and Management (Agricultural Economics and Policy)"

Re: *A PhD thesis for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in the Professional field: 3.8. Economics, Scientific specialisation: "Economics and Management (Agriculture)" in Trakia University – Stara Zagora*

Background for the reviewer's position: *appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the PhD thesis defence according to the order № 2610 / 11.10.2021 of the Rector of Trakia University – Stara Zagora*

Author of the PhD thesis: *Ivanka Stoycheva Zhekova*

Topic of the PhD thesis: *Economic Assessment of the Regional Sectoral Structure*

1. Brief introduction of the PhD candidate

Ivanka Stoycheva Zhekova has studied doctoral program at the Department of Economics, Faculty of Economics, Trakia University, Stara Zagora in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agriculture)", professional field 3.8 Economics. The PhD study and training were carried out in the independent form within the period of the years 2013-2017, and the PhD student finished it with the right to defence. In 2021 she successfully completed her research and presented a dissertation, which is the subject of this review.

The PhD student holds a MSc degree in Accounting from the „D. A. Tsenov“ Academy of Economics, Svishtov. Since 2003 until now she holds the position of "assistant" at the Trakia University, Stara Zagora and teaches the following disciplines: statistics, economic statistics, economic analysis, investment, financial and economic analysis. The professional biography and development of Ivanka Zhekova over the years is a proof of her efforts to advance her knowledge and experience in the field of economics and science. She is fluent in Russian and English (both written and spoken).

2. General characteristics of the PhD thesis

The PhD thesis presented for opinion has a volume of 235 standard paper pages, main text with the appendices. The list of references includes 219 sources, 49 of which are in Bulgarian language.

The PhD thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, results and recommendations and a conclusion, which corresponds to the accepted standard structure for a scientific study. The main text is well balanced and organized by chapters.

The title of the PhD thesis is correctly formulated, and the content corresponds to the title. The main goal is to assess the "*role of the regional sectoral structure for the formation of high economic*

growth" through analyses of the "level, dynamics and structural differences at national and regional level by major economic sectors" which is an aim correctly formulated corresponding to the title. The hypothesis follows logically: "Differences in the structure of major economic sectors are a significant factor determining the national and regional economic growth." I consider that the defined main tasks are logical, consistent and leading to the achievement of the goal and the acceptance of the research hypothesis. The object and the subject of the research are correctly formulated and in accordance with the goal and research hypothesis. The limitations within which the study was conducted are also correctly indicated.

The PhD student has studied and has presented the main part of the classical and specialized scientific literature in connection with the theories of economic growth, its driving factors and the methods for economic assessment of the regional structural differences. The variety of cited publications and the presented opinions of well-known authors make a good impression.

In the PhD thesis proposed for this review, an indisputably important and complex problem is considered and the PhD student clearly formulates and argues her position. The studied theme is actual and requires a different, complex approach to cover the issues and problems considered. The research topic is important because it raises questions related to the dynamics of the sectoral structure at different levels and the assessment of its effectiveness through the localization of structural changes and the study of the factors for them. The successfully developed study is also of great practical importance having in mind the current situation involving a pandemic crisis in many areas and a period of programming and strategy setting, including those relevant to the sustainable regional development. The PhD student also emphasizes the connection between the regional efficiency of production (relative labour productivity) and the factors that form the differences in the regional structure. She faced the complex task to develop and implement an approach that reflected both the specifics of regional growth and structural changes, an approach that would allow her to explain and propose long-term solutions for the specialization, concentration and competitiveness of the economic of regions. Therefore, I believe that the choice of topic is well considered, relevant and meaningful, as well as the approach applied to the study.

3. Assessment of the scientific and applied results achieved

The first chapter is entitled "*Theoretical and methodological background to assessing the regional sectoral structure*" and it provides an overview of the understandings and key elements of economic growth. A very important point is also explained, specifically the relationship between economic growth and sectoral structure and the importance of structural changes for the regions, laying down the study background.

The second chapter presents the analysis of the processes of "*Localization and specialization by regions and industries*". It provides a consistent assessment of the differences in economic structures in the EU and in Bulgaria. The discussion and analysis of the comparative advantages by sectors and subsectors on the basis of employment, for the assessment of structural changes, brings an important moment. The in-depth analysis includes the calculation and interpretation of the coefficients characterizing the intensity of the structural changes of the employment.

The third chapter, entitled "*Factor analysis and economic assessment of structural regional differences*", presents the proposal of PhD student for factor analysis, in which she makes a choice and

evaluates the indicators determining the structural differences in the regions. In the third chapter regression analysis is also applied and critical assessment of the individual effects on the relative labour productivity of the factors: share of GVA in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the regions, foreign direct investments and the population density. In addition, applying a cluster analysis, the PhD student revealed the specific characteristics and reasons for deepening of the regional differences in the country.

The presented research is certain evidence that the PhD student is well acquainted with the scientific literature and achievements in the field of regional researches and growth theory and she has mastered in application of appropriate tools within an author's approach to unsolved or partially solved problems. All of the mentioned facts allow her to achieve specific scientific and practical contributions, properly formulated and including:

1) The PhD student successfully developed and applied a set of statistical and economic methods, on which basis she revealed key factor influences, determining the regional socio-economic differences. In this way, she formulated arguments for creating more favourable conditions encouraging the sectoral economic structure formation at national and regional level.

2) The author successfully performed a critical review and systematization of the theoretical views on the structural approach and developed an approach for grouping regions according to the criteria for assessing regional structural differences.

3) The PhD student made an excellent use of the results from the assessment and analyses of the significant amount of data to derive concrete patterns and trends related to the level, dynamics and structure of regional and sectoral differences and to justify her recommendations for targeted structuring and regulation of the economy in accordance to the sustainable development.

4. Assessment of the published articles

The PhD candidate Zhekova presented 3 publications in relation to the thesis, which are directly related to the topic of the dissertation and reflect the main parts of it. For review are submitted: two articles (in the scientific journal *Trakia Journal of Sciences*) and one publication as a co-author (co-authored with other researchers in the scientific journal *Economic thought*). The publications are made in the period 2016-2019 in well-known scientific journals, which fully meet the quantitative and qualitative requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

5. Assessment of the autoreferat

The presented autoreferat is presented in text of 42 pages and includes the general characteristics of the dissertation, its structure and content. A short exposition of the dissertation is presented, emphasizing the achieved theoretical-methodological and empirical results. Attached is presented also a list of papers authored by the PhD student. The overall assessment is that the autoreferat objectively reflects the structure and content of the PhD thesis.

6. Critical notes, recommendations and questions

The reviewed thesis has its merits and the critical remarks mentioned below do not decrease the qualities of the study. I would like also to recommend to Ivanka Zhekova to express her position more clearly and categorically in her future studies and researches, as at the moment certain parts lack

her critical views of the considered main concepts and those adopted in the development of the thesis. In her subsequent work, she should be more precise in referencing the literature sources in the discussion and analysis, as currently not all of the listed titles in the bibliography are mentioned precisely in the text. Also, such a scientific work would benefit from the included lists of tables, figures, graphs and other means of visualization of the results in the beginning of the text, which facilitates the reader and helps work with them and references if necessary.

I have two questions that I would like to ask the PhD student Ivanka Zhekova and on which I will be happy to hear her opinion during the PhD thesis defence, namely: *What is your assessment of the future changes in the regional sectoral structure in Bulgaria that will occur as result of the implementation of the action plan of the European Green Pact? And what factors would you included in the research so that to reflect the expected trends in the analyses?*

7. Conclusion

Based on the scientific and applied results achieved by the PhD student, I believe that the presented thesis meets the requirements of Bulgarian national law and the Regulations of the Trakia University – Stara Zagora for its application, which gives me reason to evaluate it positive.

I feel confident to propose to the Scientific Jury also to vote positively and to award Ivanka Stoycheva Zhekova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Agriculture)".

15/11/2021
Sofia

Reviewer:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariya Peneva)

Заличено!