AUTHOR'S STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

on the scientific and applied-science contributions

of Chief Assist. Prof. Dr. Ivanka Petrova Vasenska

applicant in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" (Docent) in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty "Economics and Management of Tourism (Digitalization and Artificial Intelligence in Tourism)", announced by the College of Tourism – Blagoevgrad in the State Gazette, issue 64 of 14 July 2026.

I. General Overview of the Submitted Scientific Output

The scientific output submitted for the competition covers research carried out after the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and is organized as follows:

Type of scientific output	Number
Monographs (incl. 2 sole-authored and 1 collective)	3
Chapters in collective monographs and encyclopedic editions	5
Studies	1
Articles and conference papers in publications referenced and indexed in Scopus and Web of Science	9
Articles and conference papers in non-referenced peer-reviewed journals and in edited collective volumes	22
Citations noted – total	204
of which in publications referenced in Scopus / Web of Science	90
of which in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes	12
of which in non-referenced peer-reviewed journals	102
Reviewing activity for international scientific journals (Risks, JRFM)	2
Participation in national research and educational projects	6
Participation in international research and educational projects	7

For the habilitation work, the sole-authored monograph "Digital Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Tourism" (in Bulgarian; "Neofit Rilski" Publishing House, Blagoevgrad, 2022, ISBN 978-954-00-0328-3) is submitted, which corresponds directly in subject matter to the announced scientific specialty.

The publications are grouped into six interrelated research areas. The nature of each contribution is indicated in brackets after its number: theoretical, methodological or applied (scientific-applied).

II. Research Areas and Contributions

Research Area 1. Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Tourism Demand Forecasting

Main publications: monograph (2022); chapter in Encyclopedia of Tourism Management and Marketing, Edward Elgar (2022); FinTech, 4(3) (2025); Ekonomicko-manazerske spektrum, 18(1) (2024); ITEMA Conference Proceedings (2024); Smart Analysis of Tourism Policy Efficiency in Bulgaria for the Period 1980–2017, Sciendo (2020).

1.1. (Theoretical) A methodological framework for deep machine learning in time-series analysis has been systematized and adapted to the specifics of the tourism sector. Requirements have been defined for the structure and quality of input data, for model architecture, and for the criteria used to assess forecasting accuracy for inbound tourist flows.

1.2. (Methodological) A comparative research design has been proposed and tested that compares classical econometric models, machine learning models and deep learning models in forecasting tourism demand with macroeconomic determinants included. The design allows an objective assessment of the relative forecasting ability of the different classes of models under equal conditions.

1.3. (Theoretical) It has been empirically demonstrated that including economic indicators as exogenous variables improves the forecasting accuracy of tourism demand models, and the relative importance of the individual indicators has been established.

1.4. (Methodological) The concept of methodological pluralism in forecasting highly volatile time series has been formulated and applied; it justifies the simultaneous use of alternative methodological approaches instead of selecting a single “best” model.

1.5. (Applied) An analytical toolkit has been developed for assessing the effectiveness of Bulgaria’s tourism policy for the period 1980–2017, applicable in substantiating management decisions at the national level.

1.6. (Applied) The economic implications of implementing artificial intelligence technologies in tourism practice have been systematized with respect to revenue management, capacity planning and marketing decisions.

Research Area 2. Digitalization of Financial Relations in Tourism and Financial Technologies

Main publications: Risks, 9(3) (2021); Risks, 13(10) (2025); SHS Web of Conferences, 129 (2021).

2.1. (Applied) Consumer behavior in the use of fintech solutions during the crisis caused by COVID-19 has been empirically studied and measured for Bulgarian conditions, and the resulting structural changes in payment habits have been identified.

2.2. (Theoretical) The determinants of the adoption of cashless and digital payments have been derived and classified, taking into account the factors of trust, perceived risk and technological readiness.

2.3. (Methodological) A bibliometric approach has been applied to map the research field of corporate social responsibility in the context of COVID-19, outlining the leading thematic clusters and research gaps.

Research Area 3. Competitiveness, Attractiveness and Image of the Tourist Destination

Main publications: monograph (2018); chapter in Tourist Destination Management, Springer (2019); study Improving Destination Management Effectiveness (2017); Ekonomika, 61(3) (2015); Tourism & Management Studies, 13(3) (2017); Marketing and Branding Research, 4(3) (2017); Entrepreneurship, 2(1&2) (2014).

3.1. (Theoretical) A theoretical model of the interrelations between culture, tourism, competitiveness, attractiveness and destination image has been developed, explaining the mechanism by which cultural resources are turned into a competitive advantage.

3.2. (Methodological) A methodology for factor analysis of the competitiveness of an operating tourist destination has been proposed and tested, applicable to periodic measurement and comparative analysis.

3.3. (Applied) The attractiveness of Bulgaria as a destination has been empirically assessed and a system of indicators for monitoring it has been derived, including the recognizability of its image in external markets.

3.4. (Methodological) The toolkit of game theory has been tested in analyzing the interactions among stakeholders in a tourist destination.

3.5. (Applied) Guidelines have been formulated for increasing the effectiveness of destination management, addressed to destination management organizations.

Research Area 4. Cultural Heritage, Event Tourism and Local Identity

Main publications: collective monograph (2015); chapter in Fulbright International Summer Institute: Interdisciplinary Doctoral Papers (2017); Tourism & Management Studies, 11(1) (2015); Globalization and Its Socio-Economic Consequences (2018); The Cultural Corridors of South-Eastern Europe (2018); publications from the "Cultural Corridors" series (2012–2017).

4.1. (Theoretical) The role of festival tourism as a tool for raising awareness and strengthening the viability of local traditions has been demonstrated, and the mechanism of its impact on the host community has been derived. This publication has the highest resonance in the scientific literature among the applicant's works (68 citations).

4.2. (Methodological) Interpretive approaches to intangible cultural heritage have been developed for building a tourism product and tested on the case of Santorini.

4.3. (Applied) A creative-economic interpretation of the archaeological heritage of the Valley of the Thracian Kings (Starosel) has been proposed as a basis for developing a specialized tourism product.

4.4. (Applied) The model of the total tourism product, built on shared cultural heritage on a cross-border basis, has been substantiated and tested on the cultural corridors Via Pontica and Via Diagonalis.

4.5. (Applied) The opportunities and challenges of the "European Capital of Culture" initiative for Bulgaria as a destination have been analyzed.

Research Area 5. Crises, Risk, Sustainability and Post-Pandemic Transformation of Tourism

Main publications: Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics (2021); Ekonomicko-manazerske spektrum, 14(2) (2020); Tourism and Connectivity (2020); ICTR Conference Proceedings (2021, 2022); "Cultural Routes of the Balkans" (2021); 10th World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism (2018).

5.1. (Methodological) A measurement toolkit has been developed for assessing travel attitudes under conditions of heightened risk, applicable to monitoring consumer behavior during crises.

5.2. (Theoretical) Changes in the attitudes and behavior of tourism consumers during the crisis caused by COVID-19 have been systematized, and a typology of responses has been derived.

5.3. (Applied) The consequences of the crisis for the sharing economy in tourism have been empirically established using the example of Airbnb in the Czech Republic, with conclusions applicable to other markets in Central and Eastern Europe.

5.4. (Theoretical) A terminological and substantive distinction has been made between new forms of tourism as real market phenomena and as linguistic neologisms, which brings conceptual clarity to the research field. The approach has been tested on the case of glamping.

5.5. (Applied) The potential of the "Tourism 4.0" concept and of open-air museums for organizing safe tourism consumption in post-pandemic conditions has been substantiated.

5.6. (Methodological) Adaptive schemes have been proposed for reconciling security and sustainability requirements in the management of tourist destinations.

Research Area 6. Institutional Transformation of the Tourism Sector and Human Capital

Main publications: chapter in Tourism Development in Post-Soviet Nations, Palgrave Macmillan (2020); Management, Knowledge and Learning International Conference (2013); Regional Studies Program (2015).

6.1. (Theoretical) A periodization and analysis of the transition of the Bulgarian tourism sector from a planned to a market economy has been carried out, identifying the institutional factors that determined its development trajectory, as well as the contemporary discourses about it.

6.2. (Applied) The relationship between organizational learning and staff empowerment, on the one hand, and the performance of the tourist destination, on the other, has been demonstrated.

6.3. (Applied) Good practices for achieving sustainability through innovation in tourism, applicable at the regional level, have been systematized.

III. Summary of the Contributions

The contributions in the submitted scientific output can be summarized in three groups:

A. Theoretical contributions – enrichment of existing knowledge. The methodological framework of deep machine learning has been adapted to the specifics of tourism time series (1.1); the influence of economic determinants on forecasting accuracy has been demonstrated (1.3); the determinants of the adoption of digital payments have been derived

(2.2); a model of the culture – competitiveness – image relationship has been developed (3.1); the role of festival tourism in sustaining local traditions has been demonstrated (4.1); a typology of consumer reactions in a crisis has been derived (5.2); a conceptual distinction between new forms of tourism and terminological neologisms has been introduced (5.4); the institutional transformation of the Bulgarian tourism sector has been analyzed (6.1).

B. Methodological contributions – creation of new methods, models and research designs. A comparative design for assessing forecasting models (1.2); the concept of methodological pluralism for volatile series (1.4); a bibliometric approach for mapping a research field (2.3); a methodology for factor analysis of destination competitiveness (3.2); the application of game theory in destination analysis (3.4); interpretive approaches to intangible heritage (4.2); a measurement toolkit for travel attitudes under risk conditions (5.1); adaptive "security – sustainability" schemes (5.6).

C. Applied (scientific-applied) contributions – application of scientific results in practice. A toolkit for assessing tourism policy (1.5); a systematization of the economic effects of artificial intelligence in tourism practice (1.6); an empirical assessment of fintech behavior in Bulgaria (2.1); a system of indicators for the attractiveness of Bulgaria as a destination and guidelines for destination management (3.3, 3.5); product models based on cultural heritage (4.3, 4.4, 4.5); empirical results on the sharing economy (5.3); the application of "Tourism 4.0" in post-pandemic conditions (5.5); results concerning human capital and innovation (6.2, 6.3).

IV. Impact of the Scientific Output

A total of 204 citations of the applicant's works have been identified, of which 90 are in publications referenced and indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, 12 in peer-reviewed monographs and collective volumes, and 102 in non-referenced peer-reviewed journals. The citations come from authors in Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America, which attests to the international recognition of the research results.

The publications with the highest impact are: Stankova, M., & Vasenska, I. (2015). Raising cultural awareness of local traditions through festival tourism. Tourism & Management Studies, 11(1) – 68 citations; Vasenska, I., Dimitrov, P., Koyundzhiyska-Davidkova, B., Krastev, V., Durana, P., & Poulaki, I. (2021). Financial transactions using fintech during the COVID-19 crisis in Bulgaria. Risks, 9(3) – 74 citations; Dimitrov, P. M., Stankova, M. Z., Vasenska, I., & Uzunova, D. (2017). Increasing attractiveness and image recognition of Bulgaria as a tourism destination. Tourism & Management Studies, 13(3) – 14 citations.

The applicant has participated in 6 national and 7 international research and educational projects and is a reviewer for the international scientific journals Risks and Journal of Risk and Financial Management (MDPI).

V. Declaration

I declare that the scientific results and contributions presented in this statement are my own and are not borrowed from research and publications in which I have not participated. In the case of collective publications, the contributions are the result of the equal participation of the co-authors, unless explicitly stated otherwise. The submitted works have not been used to

obtain the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”, nor in previous procedures for holding academic positions.

Date: 03.09.2026 Applicant: .....
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