

„D. A. TSENOV“ ACADEMY OF ECONOMIES -
SVISHTOV

REVIEW

By Professor Rumyana Nikolaeva Neykova, Doctor of Economics, external reviewer,

Of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the doctoral program “Planning” at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov

Author of the dissertation: Tanya Minkova Nikolova

Dissertation Topic: Strategic Solutions for Poverty Reduction in the Northwest Planning Region

Grounds for presenting the review: Order No. 490 / June 10, 2024 of the Rector of the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov

Scientific advisor: Assoc. Prof. Anastasiya Marcheva, Ph.D.

I. General presentation of the dissertation

The topic of the dissertation is dedicated to the issues of poverty, which have always been relevant, but in the last decade they have been on the rise. Therefore, the doctoral student’s orientation towards the problems of poverty should be assessed positively as a favourable ground for organizing and conducting scientific research.

Poverty is linked with and dependent on multiple individual factors that are conditioned by regional, economic, ethnic and historical factors. It is not only limited to the lack of financial resources, but also includes the lack of vital resources to meet basic human needs for a decent life.

The *object of this study* is poverty in the Northwest Planning Region, which according to statistical information is the poorest region in the country. Researching and uncovering the causes and factors that give rise to poverty is a condition for looking for effective solutions to overcome it.

The *subject of the study* is the strategic solutions for reducing poverty in the Northwest Planning Region, which may be implemented in the foreseeable future, because in the last 15 years there have been quite a few that have remained in the past without being implemented.

The *aim of the dissertation* is to analyze poverty as a phenomenon and to

examine the implementation measures and the perspectives of strategic solutions to reduce poverty and social exclusion in the Northwest Planning Region. To achieve the defined aim, the following objectives are set:

- clarifying the nature of poverty;
- analyzing the socio-economic processes in the Northwest Planning Region related to poverty;
- studying the interaction of stakeholders in the fight against poverty;
- developing a conceptual model for the implementation of strategic solutions to reduce poverty, also applicable in the Northwest Planning Region;
- developing a system of indicators for evaluating the efficiency (the degree of achievement of goals) of strategic solutions to combat poverty and social exclusion in order to form a basis for developing a software solution.

The dissertation submitted for review has 204 pages and includes an introduction, a main body of three chapters, a conclusion and a list of references. The structure is of serious scientific research, with well-grounded logic, consistency and connection between the problems under consideration. It is subordinated to the task of analyzing the actual state of poverty in the Northwest region and the possibility of proposing effective strategic solutions to limit and overcome it.

The dissertation is well balanced in terms of structure and content.

The doctoral student's *research thesis statement* is that poverty in the Northwest Planning Region can be overcome with clear, purposeful and innovative strategic solutions, expressed in: applying a regional principle in developing the strategic national projects and directing investments to the region; applying a regional principle of taxation; empowerment and partnerships with citizens and businesses for efficient and effective participation in joint activities; legislative changes to transform the economy towards a socially responsible one; holistic approach and digitization in strategizing and implementing the anti-poverty policies.

A total of 187 sources are used in the preparation and writing of this dissertation, of which 71 are in Bulgarian and 116 are in Latin script. 46 tables, 32 figures and 7 appendices are presented as evidentiary material used in studying and proving the thesis.

In support of her research work and as an expression of publicity of the ideas to reduce poverty, the doctoral student indicates 6 publications, including three scientific papers (one abroad and one in co-authorship), two articles (one abroad) and

participation in one study. They are published in legitimate journals and scientific conference proceedings after being assessed by reviewers and editorial boards.

The *research methodology* used is based on a rich set of methods and approaches that complement one another in order to achieve the necessary depth and thoroughness of the research on the problems of poverty, both in theoretical and in practical-applied aspects. To solve the complex problems of poverty, the doctoral student has successfully used a combination of methods of analysis and analogy, desk research, observation method, questionnaire survey, comparative analysis method, statistical methods, etc. The conducted empirical research is based on an electronic survey questionnaire. Excel and SPSS are used to process the results. Data from the survey are analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

Based on the set of approaches and methods used and the systematized empirical data, the doctoral student has conducted an in-depth study and presents reasoned conclusions and specific proposals for formulating strategies to overcome poverty in the Northwest region.

No classified information is used in writing the dissertation and it does not contain such.

II. Assessment of the form and content of the dissertation

The structure and content of the presented dissertation correspond to the set aim and follow the logic of the research activity to disclose and analyze the problems of poverty, including in the Northwest Planning Region.

The *introduction* outlines the research framework of the dissertation, including the relevance and importance of the problem of poverty, as well as the degree of development of the topic. It defines the main elements of scientific research: the object, the subject and the research thesis statement and formulates the main aim, the research objectives, the methodology and the limitations of the study.

It emphasizes that although poverty research has a long history, the evolution in the collection and accumulation of knowledge about poverty and the distinction between “poverty research” and “poverty knowledge” is a topic that has been *relevant* over the past decade. However, there are still missing or insufficient specific practical applied studies for certain regions, including the Northwest region. This also determines the need to study the problems of poverty, as they are economically and socially significant for the society in this region.

In the process of research, the doctoral student comes to the conclusion that there are no universal strategic solutions to reduce poverty. Therefore, it is necessary for each region to develop its own specific measures to overcome poverty and social exclusion. The choice of priorities is determined by the characteristics of the area – demographic, economic, social, structural, political, cultural, as well as by the available resources.

Chapter One “Overcoming poverty – dominants” is entirely theoretical in nature. Through an in-depth literature review, the doctoral student explores the nature, character and causes of poverty. With the help of statistical methods, basic indicators of poverty are studied – the poverty line in the period 2016–2023, the relative share of the poor, the state measures for reducing poverty and receiving social transfers. In this part of the dissertation, the good global practices for combating poverty are also presented, such as: creating safe and decent jobs, implementing programs for the economic empowerment of disadvantaged groups; ensuring decent working conditions for all employees throughout the supply chain, creating and marketing goods and services that satisfy and improve the lives of vulnerable groups, partner international engagement, etc.

Chapter Two “Poverty in the Northwest Planning Region” is a logical continuation of the first one, analyzing and investigating the specifics of poverty in the Northwest Region through the prism of general theoretical statements. As a result of the research carried out on the basis of rich statistical and other documentary information and her own observations, the doctoral student rationally substantiates the existing significant regional differences in the profile of poverty, economic conditions and social well-being in the Northwest region and the other regions of the country. In order for them to be reduced, she justifies the need to develop policies and regional strategies for attracting investments, improving the labour market and the educational structure, the health system and social conditions. Particular attention is paid to the characteristics of the population, and the economic potential is examined as a factor for overcoming poverty.

Chapter Three “Political and Business Solutions for Poverty Reduction in the Northwest Planning Region” has an applied nature. It examines key issues related to the impact of poverty on lifestyle, measures for poverty reduction and social inclusion in the Northwest Planning Region. Strategic solutions and their effectiveness are explored. The main emphasis in this part of the dissertation is the empirical study and the model for a strategic solution to combat poverty.

The survey was conducted in the period from March to May 2024 on the territory of the Northwest Planning Region using the online survey method. Within This chapter presents a conceptual model for the implementation of strategic solutions, considering its applicability for poverty reduction in the Northwest Planning Region. A merit of the doctoral student is the proposal made to study the factor influence to measure the effectiveness of the strategic solution to combat poverty. This approach will allow to predict in advance the importance and success rate of the strategic solutions related to the fight against poverty, as well as its use as a main guide for the authors of anti-poverty political and strategic solutions.

In the conclusion, the doctoral student presents systematized main conclusions that she has reached in the process of the conducted scientific research. She proves that poverty is a multifactorial problem, requiring a comprehensive approach and strategies that cover financial, social, educational and health aspects, as well as policies to attract young people and offer better living conditions.

All of the above gives me grounds to conclude that the presented dissertation has a clearly research and practical-applied nature and meets all the requirements according to the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the internal Regulations for its application at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics.

In the process of developing the dissertation and the author's abstract, scientific ethics is observed – the doctoral student correctly and conscientiously indicates the literary sources and normative documents used, the style and language used are in accordance with the accepted requirements for scientific expression.

The *presented Author's abstract* consists of 34 standard pages. It gives an idea in a summarized, synthesized form about the content of the dissertation. It briefly reflects the content of the dissertation, the thesis, the object, the subject and the methodology of the scientific research, the summarized final results, conclusions and proposals. The information about the contributions of the research and a list of the author's publications on the dissertation topic are included in the author's abstract.

III. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation

In the information on the contributions, attached to the abstract, the doctoral student has listed six contributions without structuring them according to the

usual classification of scientific and scientific-applied. I acknowledge the presence of these contributions in the dissertation, but I believe that they should be structured into two groups: contributions related to the enrichment of research on poverty and contributions of an applied nature that are important in applying the good foreign practices and developing policies and strategies for poverty reduction in the Northwest Planning Region.

IV. Critical remarks, questions and recommendations on the dissertation

The dissertation is developed in accordance with all the requirements for research and it reflects erudition, the innovative attitude to uncovering unclear or insufficiently developed issues in the field of poverty and strategic solutions to overcome it.

The achievements are significant and indisputable, but some recommendations could be made:

1. The dissertation abounds with information that is very useful for proving the defined thesis, but in some cases the author's comments are not sufficiently thorough (for example, Table 1.13, Table 1.14, Table 2.19).

2. To activate participation in scientific and international scientific forums (conferences, specializations, etc.) debating the latest ideas in the field of poverty, which is a world problem.

3. **Question:** I would like the doctoral student to answer the question: What is poverty line and what factors influence it?

V. Summarized conclusion and opinion

The dissertation, the author's abstract, the information on the contributions and the scientific publications related to the dissertation are the result of independent scientific work of the doctoral student. They are evidence of her efforts to analyze the theoretical achievements in studying the problems of poverty and its specific condition in the Northwest Planning Region and to propose guidelines for reducing and overcoming it.

The presented dissertation can be assessed as a comprehensive theoretical-methodological study and a summary of the achievements in the field of the modern interpretation of poverty and the policies to overcome it. It is independent complete

scientific research. The aims and objectives are successfully achieved, and the results obtained are structured and interpreted correctly.

As a reviewer, I clearly and accurately state that the dissertation on the topic: “Strategic solutions for poverty reduction in the Northwest Planning Region” fully meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, Svishtov. Therefore, I propose that the members of the scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the field of higher education: 3. “Social, legal and economic sciences”, Professional direction: 3.8. “Economics” to Tanya Minkova Nikolova.

15 July 2024

Svishtov

Reviewer:

(Prof. Romyana Neykova, Ph.D.)