

STATEMENT

From: Assoc. Prof. Rumen Draganov PhD MEng
University of Library Studies and Informational Technologies

Regarding: A competition published in the Official Journal no. 103 of
12.12.2023, for the academic position "associate professor"
in professional direction 3.9. Tourism (Sustainable regional development of
tourism),
for the needs of the International Business School,
with a single candidate Desislava Alexova PhD

1) Contest data

The announced competition for associate professor in sustainable regional development of tourism, according to order No. 29/13.02.2024 of the Rector of the Ministry of Education, Botevgrad by art. 4, paragraph 2. of ZRAS and the Rules for its implementation, meets all requirements, as no procedural violations were found. The only candidate, Desislava Alexova PhD, submitted all the necessary documents for the competition on time, complying with the requirements of the Law and the Regulations.

2) Applicant data

Desislava Alexova graduated from the National Academy of Sciences with a Bachelor's degree in Tourism, specialization in cultural tourism, in 2001 a Master's degree in 2003, and a doctoral degree on the topic: "Resort-tourism potential of the Smolyan region - priority development of ecotourism, as part of the sustainable complex tourism" at New Bulgarian University, Sofia. In 2020, he defended his doctorate at the International Higher Business School, Botevgrad in direction 3.9. "Tourism" from the scientific field of "Social, economic and legal sciences". Defended dissertation on the topic: "Investigation of the tourism potential of the municipality of Botevgrad for sustainable development of the destination". after that

She started working as an intern at the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism (BAAT) in 2002, an intern at the Ministry of Economy, a Sofia Intern at the National Tourism Policy Directorate, English teacher at Letec

Hristo Toprakchiev Secondary School, Bozhurishte. In the period 2004-2012, he was a part-time assistant at the New Bulgarian University. He teaches courses at the Master's Faculty, Bachelor's Faculty, and at the Distance Learning Center. In 2006, he was a tourism expert in the directorate of Vitosha Nature Park, Sofia, dealing with planning, ensuring, and controlling the construction and maintenance of tourist infrastructure, and monitoring tourist activities within the park's borders. Since 2007, he has been a part-time assistant, and since September 2012, he has been the main assistant at the International Business School, Botevgrad. Since 2020, she has been the owner and manager of "Kreativo.com" EOOD, Bozhurishte.

3) Description of scientific works

Desislava Alexova participated in the competition with one independent monograph, one co-authored monograph, 51 publications in Bulgarian and foreign publications, of which 38 articles and studies in Bulgarian and foreign scientific journals, and 13 articles and studies in proceedings of scientific conferences and one monograph.

The habilitation thesis is on the topic "Sustainable development of the municipality of Chiprovtsi as a tourist destination. Creating a tourism brand and strategic planning". The monograph introduces potential readers to the basic principles and research approaches in the studies of the tourist environment and the sustainable development of a tourist destination, the creation of a tourist brand, as well as the organization and technology of strategic planning at the local level. The topicality of the topic is connected with the unrecognizability and inefficient use of tourist resources in the municipality of Chiprovtsi at the current stage, despite the inclusion of carpet traditions in the list of UNESCO's World Intangible Cultural Heritage. Tourism does not figure in the vision of program documents and practice there is still a lack of sufficiently implemented targeted local policies in the sector. At the same time, sustainable development is included in the National Tourism Development Strategy and is a priority of the World Tourism Organization. This necessitates the adaptation and application of a working model and established methodologies for the sustainable development of a tourist destination. The object of research is the municipality of Chiprovtsi as a territorial system for recreation and tourism. As a tourist destination, the municipality has limited resources for the development

of some specialized types of tourism. Preserved nature, plant and animal diversity and protected areas are a basic prerequisite for the development of ecological and, in particular, ornithological and botanical tourism. The favorable landforms, combined with small caves and waterfalls, could attract tourists for mountain, adventure, and extreme sports and tourism. Historical and religious monuments are the basis for a comprehensive offer of cultural, festival, and religious tourism. There are favorable opportunities for the development of educational and volunteer tourism. Tourism Development Program of Chiprovtsi Municipality 2021-2027. The monograph is intended both for students studying tourism, marketing, and mass communications in the various universities, business, journalism, and geography faculties in the country, as well as for teachers and experts in tourism, marketing, and public relations, tourism organizations, institutions and entrepreneurs in the field of tourism. It is a useful practical guide for local authorities and tourism management organizations in the country.

The doctoral program is on the topic "Research of the tourism potential of Botevgrad municipality for sustainable development of the destination" for a protected dissertation in scientific direction 3.9 "Tourism". The goal of her doctoral thesis is an analysis and assessment of the resource potential for sustainable development of tourism in the municipality of Botevgrad. The object of research is the tourist potential of Botevgrad municipality. The subject of research is the study, analysis, and evaluation of the tourist potential (tourist resources/attractions, human resources, material base, administrative capacity). The defended research thesis is that the achievement of sustainable development of a tourist destination at the local level is possible only with the systematic use and application of the criteria and indicators for the analysis and evaluation of the tourism potential of Botevgrad municipality for the sustainable development of the destination.

In the collection of reports from the Fifth Annual International Scientific Conference "Ecologization - 2013", the topic of the report is Tourist resources of the cross-border region Bulgaria - Romania - opportunities for a common regional brand, where the author presents the basic principles for creating a regional brand, built on the tourist resources of a cross-border "Bulgaria-Romania" region. The report examines the peculiarities of the tourist resources of the cross-border region "Bulgaria - Romania". An analysis of the Bulgarian part of the region was made, based on which the possibilities for the

development of alternative tourism were outlined. The possibilities for creating a common regional brand to ensure the recognition and sustainable development of the region as a tourist destination have been analyzed.

The journal "Ethical Studies" examines the application of the principles of the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism in the sectoral policy of Botevgrad Municipality. Infrastructure and communications. Trends and challenges facing global tourism, and during the presentation of the lecture "Challenges and prospects for the development of volunteer tourism in Bulgaria" Desislava Alexova examines the main market trends determining the need for the development of volunteer tourism. The characteristics of volunteer tourism have been analyzed, including the specifics of the organizations participating in the offer, the various types of volunteer programs, etc. Good practices from the strata related to environmental and educational voluntary practices are presented and several main conclusions are outlined regarding the prospects for the development of this type of tourism in Bulgaria, as one of the alternatives to the traditional mass tourism product.

Desislava Alexova invariably defends the thesis that the subject of the research work is: 1) the study, analysis, and evaluation of the tourist potential of the municipalities, as subsystems of the territorial system for recreation and tourism and the study of the interrelationships between them, 2) the possibilities for creating a tourist brand and 3) strategic planning of the sustainable tourism development of the destination (TSOT). The main approaches of the research are the systematic, related to the systemic nature of TSOT, and the empirical approach, used to gather the necessary volume and nature of primary quantitative and qualitative information (low degree of study of the research object). The research methods used follow a deductive approach, that is, conclusions are drawn logically from general situations to specific cases. An approach of research and systematization of information from literary sources and planning documents was also used; collection, processing, systematization, and interpretation of statistical data and documents; method of critical analysis and expert evaluation; comparative analysis method; survey method and field survey; analytical-prognostic method; scientific analysis and synthesis, work with focus groups; field observation. The defended research thesis is that the achievement of sustainable development of a tourist destination at the local level is possible only with the systematic use and application of the criteria and indicators for the analysis and evaluation of the tourist potential, clear definition,

and following of the strategic goals and priorities for the sustainable development of a tourist destination. destination according to its identity and reputation. The main problems and limitations are related to the lack of sufficient up-to-date and reliable information about tourist resources and objects on the territory of the municipality, service providers, and the state of the tourist offer. In visitor surveys, a serious shortcoming was the lack of targeted local tourism-related policy, as well as insufficient marketing and advertising.

4) Scientific contributions

The scientific interests and research activity of Dr. Desislava Alexova is concentrated in several areas. First of all, they are focused on sustainable tourism development, the development of specialized types of tourism, planning and management of tourism in protected areas, destination management, and more specifically on creating and testing a model for local tourism development of emerging destinations, research of concepts and good practices for responsible, solidarity and volunteer tourism. Secondly, research is focused on the specificity of specialized species tourism, as part of the alternative tourism offer and the product policy of the destinations, which contribute to sustainable local tourism development and improving the quality of tourism products of the destinations. Thirdly, the publications cover various aspects and problems of the strategic planning of destinations and the creation of brand identity, including research aimed at marketing in tourism and, the unique positioning of a tourist destination, accompanied by a regional trademark as a voluntary certification for quality in tourism.

5) Teaching and project activity

Since 2007, she has been a part-time assistant, and since September 2012, she has been the main assistant at the International Business School, Botevgrad, and in 2012 she was appointed as a full-time teacher in the position of main assistant. In the period 2004-2021, he has extensive teaching experience as a part-time assistant at the New Bulgarian University, Sofia (2004-2012), Private Professional College of Management in Tourism, Restaurants, and Hospitality

"Interbusiness", Sofia (2011-2014), Higher School of Agribusiness and Regional Development (VUARR), Kardzhali, (2012-2014), Kardzhali, Center for Professional Training of Mountain Guides at APH, Sofia (2016-2020), Forestry University, Sofia (2020-2021), as well as a trainer at Center PRO Expert, Sofia. In parallel with his teaching activity, the period 2006 to 2019 he has practical professional experience in the tour operator sector: tourism organizer "At Lidia Tours" Ltd., "2MKO" Ltd., and "Bulgaria Tours" Ltd.; she also worked as a tour guide at "Albena Tour" AD, head of the tourism department at "Leonardo da Vinci College of Sciences" EOOD, technical assistant at the National Museum of Natural History - BAS. has realized projects for the promotion of tourism in the municipalities of Chelopech, Gorna Malina, Kostinbrod and Radomir, within which he implements part of his research contributions, namely: development of concepts for tourist zoning according to the author's taxonomic scheme, marketing, and communication guidelines for the development of tourism, a regional trademark concept that has been implemented in Radomir Municipality. In the period 2020-2023, he develops the Tourism Development Programs of the municipalities of Kostinbrod and Chiprovtsi and updates the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism of the Municipality of Gorna Malina.

Desislava Alexova also participates in specialized councils and working groups: Advisory Council to the Minister of Tourism (from 2020), Public Council under the Ministry of Tourism (since 2017), Advisory Council on Tourism-related issues in Botevgrad Municipality (09.2017-03.2018), Council for Sustainable Development of Tourism, Conservation of Nature and Cultural Heritage (since 2014), Forum Expert Council cultural heritage in the field of tourism (since 2015), Interdepartmental Council of Personnel in Tourism (reserve member of the Ministry of Education and Culture since 2016), and carries out social activity, activity includes assistance and support work of various professional organizations, including individual member and expert at the Bulgarian Tourist Chamber, member of the Association of Parks in Bulgaria, volunteer and expert at the Coalition "For Nature to Remain in Bulgaria", consultant "ecology and alternative tourism" at "Place for the Future" educational network, consultant to the municipalities of Chiprovtsi, Kostinbrod, and Gorna Malina.

6) Main criticisms and recommendations

Regarding the future research activity of Dr. Desislava Alexova, I would like to make the following recommendations:

- Due to the lack of developments by Bulgarian authors, concerning the problems of destination management and the tourist brand of the destination, I recommend that the candidate continue and deepen his research in this area;

- I also think that publishing the results of the monographic work in English in foreign journals to achieve greater dissemination and citation of the results will be beneficial;

- Increasing the number of independent publications in English in the world databases "SCOPUS" and "Web of Science", since the candidate has sufficient theoretical and empirical material in his developments and scientific publications.

6) Conclusion

Based on everything stated above, I can categorically state that Desislava Alexova, as the only candidate in the competition for associate professor of sustainable regional development of tourism at the International Graduate School of Business, meets all the requirements for occupying this academic position, and I recommend her election.

Sofia, 04/04/2024

Assoc. Prof. Rumen Draganov PhD MEng