

## **STATEMENT**

by Assoc. Prof. Teodora Veleva Rizova, New Bulgarian University,  
Academic Field 3.9 Tourism (Integrated Tourism Management)  
on the scientific work for participation in a competition for holding the academic position of associate professor in academic field 3.9 Tourism (Sustainable Regional Tourism Development) announced by International Business School (IBS) with Order №29 of the Rector of IBS/13.02.2024 with a candidate Chief Asst. Prof. Dessislava Alexova

### ***1. Assessment of the minimum national requirements***

The candidate for associate professor meets the minimum requirements for the scientific, teaching and/or artistic-creative activity of the candidates for the academic position of associate professor in the academic fields in accordance with the Regulations for Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (groups of indicators A-D) with number of points as follows: A 50/50 , B 100/100, D 444.5/200, D 265/50, or a total of 859.5 with the required 400 points.

### ***2. Scientific and research activity***

#### ***2.1. Evaluation of a monograph***

The monograph of Chief Asst. Prof. Desislava Alexova, PhD, titled "Model for sustainable development of a developing tourist destination based on the example of the municipality of Blagoevgrad" is a theoretical and practical study that consists of four chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The total number of pages in the study is 271, the main part consisting of 240 pages and 31 pages of appendices.

The monograph sets several tasks on the basis of which its main goal is achieved.

The first task that the author sets herself is to reveal the nature of the territorial system for recreation and tourism as well as the interaction of individual and subsystems. This is fulfilled in the monograph as the main part of the information is contained in the first chapter of the study and is supplemented by separate parts of the second and fourth chapters. The systemic nature of all elements having both a natural and anthropogenic nature in the creation of a tourist product and the development of the sustainable tourism system has been analysed.

The second task that the author sets herself is an analysis of the territorial system for recreation and tourism in the municipality of Blagoevgrad as well as an

outline of the guidelines for the sustainable development of tourism in the municipality. It can be reasonably argued that this task has been accomplished as the applicable criteria for evaluating the municipality are contained in the second chapter of the study which specifies the specific metrics that can be used for the evaluation and explains the reasons why other gauges cannot be rated as relevant. In the fourth chapter of the study, the main guidelines for the development of tourism in the municipality of Blagoevgrad are indicated, including the specific types of tourist activity that can be realised in the individual regions of the municipality. An on-the-ground analysis is also made regarding the prospects for the development of sustainable tourism activity as well as those systemic characteristics that can be defined as the most essential for the sustainable development of tourism.

The third task of the monograph is defined as designing a methodology for the evaluation of tourist resources and adapting the evaluation methods to the specific conditions. The main elements for solving the task find a place in the second and third chapters of the monograph, of significance being the integration of social research methods, cartographic methods, the camera method, as well as finding an adequate model for their combination under different conditions and in compliance with the various users of the respective ratings.

The fourth task of the monograph is related to the introduction of the micro-districting model in the municipality of Blagoevgrad, and this process is used to the maximum extent for the development of local types of tourist activity and the achievement of a high degree of efficiency of the respective tourist destinations. The main analysis is concentrated in the fourth chapter of the study, indicating the mechanisms through which micro-zoning enables the optimal use of both natural and human resources for the implementation of projects in the field of both recreational tourism and specific types of tourist activity.

The fifth task of the monograph is the formulation of the goals and strategic priorities for the tourism activity in the municipality of Blagoevgrad. The fulfilment of this task was achieved through the introduction of a tree of goals for sustainable development as well as the formulation of strategic priorities whose implementation would lead to a full and sustainable development of tourism in the municipality of Blagoevgrad. The conditions are analysed step by step with the following being set: a vector of goals, a vector of the state and a vector of errors that exist in the achievement of sustainable development.

On the basis of the implementation of the tasks of the study, it can be reasonably claimed that its objectives have been fully met as well as the theoretical and practical results expected by the author as a result of the study.

## ***2.2. Contributions of the monographic work***

The main contributions of the monograph include:

- the theoretical contributions of the monograph consist of the following elements: a high degree of generalisation of the systemic approach applied to the practice of tourist activity and, in particular, in the analysis of the tourist destination as a form of systematic organisation of both the immediate elements of the tourist activity and of the elements of socio-economic development of the respective region. An essential theoretical contribution of the monograph is the analysis of the brand, applied to the conditions of a specific region and the possibilities for the branding of the tourist destination, based on the systematic analysis of the external and internal data of the region. Within the framework of the monograph, a number of theoretical issues related to the information provision of the tourist activity and, in particular, the formation of the image of the destination in the mind of the potential target group of tourists are analysed. As a theoretical contribution, the special attention that the author has paid to the importance of local cultural traditions and the impact of these cultural traditions as a significant factor in achieving sustainable tourism in the region should be indicated;

- the theoretical-practical contributions of the monograph are related to the application of a wide range of methods for collecting empirical information related to the development of the specific destination, the possibilities for longitudinal tracking of the dynamics of changes in individual factors of the environment, as well as the relative weight of these factors in the changes of environmental factors. An integrated method of analysis of social research (based on survey methods), observations and reports presented by various economic entities within the respective destination is of essential importance for the monitoring of the destination. As a theoretical-practical contribution, the developed methodology for zoning and its use in the practical development of certain types of tourism in the region should also be noted;

- the practical contributions of the monograph consist in the practical analysis of the tourist potential of the municipality of Blagoevgrad, the possibilities for the development of tourist activity in the municipality, as well as the application of a tree of goals for the achievement of sustainable development in the municipality of

Blagoevgrad. As a result of the research, five strategic priorities for the development of tourism were formulated, namely: development of administrative capacity, with particular attention being paid to the development of those areas in the work of the administration that would have the maximum positive effect on tourism activity, the creation of tourist brand in the municipality of Blagoevgrad, creation of conditions for unique positioning and promotion of the destination, opportunity for micro-zoning and development of regional tourism products in view of the specificity of the regions in the municipality, as well as the opportunities for the development of specialised types of tourism, which would be in full compliance with the concept of sustainable development of tourism in the region.

### ***2.3. Other forms of scientific and research activity***

Within the framework of her scientific activity, Desislava Alexova realised the following scientific products:

- a total of 6 monographs, 2 of which are independent, and the remaining 4 are within scientific collectives. The subject of the monographs is research in the field of tourism marketing, the introduction of a model for sustainable development in tourism, as well as the evaluation mechanisms through which the characteristics of sustainable tourism in a specific region can be established;

- there are 4 research articles in total, and the main part of them is also focused on the creation and implementation of a model for the sustainable development of tourism in specific regions, taking into account their local specifics;

- there are 6 articles in total. In some of them, various methods of research in the field of tourism activity are considered as well as elements related to the introduction of a model of sustainable tourism. The subject of some of the articles deals with specific types of tourist activity and their relationship with the conditions of the external and internal environment in specific tourist destinations;

- there are 63 papers with extremely diverse topics in the field of general problems of tourism, marketing in tourism activities, the impact of specific social, economic and natural factors on the development of tourist activities, the adequate and full use of tourist resources as well as general problems of sustainable development and proposed solutions for the sustainable development of regions in our country.

### ***Personal impressions of the candidate***

I know Dr. Desislava Alexova personally and I confirm my high evaluation of her academic authority, including outstanding merits for the practical training and

conducting internships of the students as well as her broad and public activity for promoting cultural tourism in our country. She has been a long-term organiser and participant in the Travelling University "Place for the Future - Chiprovtsi" together with students from the Tourism programme.

***Opinions, recommendations and notes on the activity and achievements of the candidate***

My main recommendation is to activate her publication activity and popularise scientific research achievements in a wider range of international publications, indexed and referenced in international databases.

In conclusion, there is indisputable evidence of fulfilment of the requirements of Art. 24, paragraph 1, 27 (4) item 1 and item 2 of the Act on Academic Staff Development in the Republic of Bulgaria and of Art. 53 (1) and (2) and 57 (2) items 1 and 2 of the Regulations for Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act as well as of the Ordinance on the development of the academic staff at IBS for holding the academic position of associate professor.

This provides grounds for giving my positive assessment for the candidate Chief Asst. Prof. Desislava Alexova, PhD, for the academic position of associate professor in the Academic Field 3.9 Tourism (Sustainable Regional Tourism Development) and I propose that she be elected by the Academic Council of IBS.

Sofia

March 30, 2024

Assoc. Prof. Teodora Rizova, PhD