

## OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Nikolina R. Popova – Dimitrova  
member of the jury with order No. 29 of 13.02.2024 by the Rector of the IBS- city Botevgrad, in  
a competition for the academic position "docent"  
in professional direction 3.9 "Tourism (Sustainable regional development of tourism)",  
announced by the IBS- city Botevgrad SG. no. 103 of 12.12. 2023, with one candidate  
Ch. assistant Dr. Desislava Ivanova Alexova

### **Applicant requirements** according to ZRASRB and PPZRASRB)

The candidate in the competition was born on 23.08.1979 in the city of Sofia. He completed his higher education at the New Bulgarian University (NBU), Sofia, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in "Tourism", specialization "Cultural tourism" (1998- 2002), OKS "Master" in "International Tourism" (2002-2003), specialization "Alternative Tourism". In 2019, he obtained a doctorate from the International Business School- city Botevgrad, in the scientific specialty 3.9. "Tourism", "Social, economic and legal sciences" area. The candidate has many years of teaching experience in tourism - from 2007 to 2012 he was a part-time assistant at the International Business School- city Botevgrad, and from 2012 until now, he has a permanent employment contract at the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition, it is distinguished by an active professional activity directly related to tourism in the private and public sector. Participates in specialized councils and working groups: Advisory Council to the Minister of Tourism (since 2020), Public Council to the Ministry of Tourism (since 2017), Advisory Council on issues related to tourism in Botevgrad Municipality (09.2017-03.2018), Council for Sustainable Development of Tourism, Nature Protection and Cultural Heritage (since 2014), Expert Council of Forum Cultural Heritage in Tourism (since 2015 .), Interdepartmental Council of Personnel in Tourism (Member of the International Business School- city Botevgrad,since 2016).

The accumulated experience contributes to achieving a high quality of teaching.

### **Requirements for the learning activity**

According to the submitted reference for subjects read in the last 5 years

Desislava Alexova is a holder of 7 academic disciplines, one of which is in the Master's program "Resort and Spa Tourism". This proves that the applicant's workload is in accordance with the MVBU standard of 360 hours of annual employment.

### **Requirements for scientific research activity**

The candidate for "associate professor" meets the minimum requirements for the scientific, teaching and/or artistic-creative activity of candidates for the academic position of "associate professor" in professional fields, in accordance with PPZRASRB (groups of indicators A-D) and a corresponding number of points: A 50 /50, B 100/100, D 444.5/200, D 265/50, or a total of 859.5 for the required 400 points.

The bibliographic reference of Dr. Desislava Alexova's publications covers the period 2009-2023.

They are distributed by groups of indicators as follows:

**Group A** Indicator 1 Dissertation work for the award of an educational and scientific degree "doctor" 1 pc.

**Group B** Indicator 3. Habilitation work - monograph, 1 pc.

**Group D.** Indicator 5. Published book based on a protected dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", 1 pc.

**Group D.** Indicator 6. Articles and reports published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information, 1 item.

**Group D** Indicator 7. Articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes - 45 nos.

**Group D** Indicator 8. Studies published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information - 1 pc.

**Group D** Indicator 9. Studies published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes - 1 pc.

The presented list of publications includes a total of 54 issues. From them, the person who prepared the opinion deducted two publications: No. 19 from Group D Indicator 7. – included in the list of publications in the dissertation work and No. 34. – fully matching the topic of the dissertation work.

According to the thematic focus of the publications, we distinguish the following main directions:

- 1) Types of tourism - various aspects related to the sustainable development of natural and cultural resources and attractions (No.5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 25, 29, 35, 36, 42, 44, 47, 48, 50, 52,53, );
- 2) Sustainable tourism - various aspects (No. 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 24, 37, 38, 43,51,54);
- 3) Territorial planning and tourism policy (No. 20, 22, 28, 33, 41);
- 4) Education and training in tourism (No. 26, 30, 31, 40, 49).
- 5) Competitiveness of tourist destinations (No. 27, 39);
- 6) Tourist marketing (№№32);

The indicated directions correspond to the interdisciplinary nature of tourism, respectively to the research topic of the production of the "associate professor" candidate.

The main research work of the candidate is the monograph "Sustainable development of the municipality of Chiprovtsi as a tourist destination. Creation of a tourist brand and strategic planning" 2021, It represents a successful synthesis of the overall creative activity of the candidate and contains indisputable contributions from a theoretical-methodical and practical aspect. The monographic work examines all the main aspects of sustainable tourism development at the local spatial level and is built following a clear research plan within an adequate methodological framework.

All the necessary structural elements, tailored to the thematic specifics, are present. The results and conclusions are substantiated by using an adequate research procedure and research tools, respectively research methods. A large-scale empirical study of sustainable tourism development at the municipality level was conducted. Through sociological methods - surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, a large database was obtained, revealing the attitudes and behavioral patterns of key factors influencing the development of tourism at the local level.

The contributions in the presented Reference on the contribution nature of the works are too many

and in some places they are equated to the elements typical for the various stages of any research, which do not have a contribution nature. Regardless of the stated inaccuracy, we accept the presence of substantial scientific contributions as follows:

**1. Theoretical-methodological contributions** - a significant volume of empirical data was obtained

information related to the profile of tourists, the attitudes of the local population, the views of business entities and public authorities on the sustainable development of tourism. Micro-zoning (tourist zoning) is proposed and indicators for monitoring ETIS sustainable tourism at the municipality level are derived.

**2. Practical applicability** – the applied model, incl. criteria and indicators for monitoring and assessing the sustainability of tourism at the municipality level is of wide applicability. This circumstance allows comparability of the results when conducting different types of research. The results obtained from the conducted large-scale research are the objective basis for the development of policies and strategic planning documents for the sustainable development of tourism in the main investigated municipalities of Chiprovtsi and Botevgrad.

### **Quoted**

Based on the attached reference from NACID for citations from 2005 - 2023, a total of 46 citations were found from the WEB OF SCIENCE, SCOPUS and other databases. Another NACID report dated 20.10.2023 on the impact factor of journals in which citations of Desislava Ivanova Alexova's publications were found shows 2 journals: *Miscellanea geographica – regional studies on development* 2022, ISSN 2084-6118, IF – 0.8, SGR 0.198 *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* 2020, ISSN 1755 – 4217, IF – 0.0, SGR 0.392.

### **Critical notes and recommendations**

As a main critical note, we will point out the need for greater precision in handling commonly accepted terms that have been permanently established in the academic literature, especially when proposing new definitions that should be subjected to serious comparative analysis.

We take the liberty of recommending the candidate for "docent" to narrow the thematic research focus on the aspects of territorial organization and territorial planning of tourism at the regional level in accordance with the theme of the announced competition.

The production presented in the competition contains the following comparative advantages:

- 1) Study of key issues related to the fundamental aspect of tourism sustainability - policy and planning at the local level, competitiveness, etc.;
- 2) Use of a wide arsenal of research methods from various scientific fields, combined in an appropriate methodological framework for the study of sustainability in the development of tourism at the municipal level;
- 3) Application of an empirical approach with the generation of a significant volume of primary information, enriching knowledge about the development of tourism at the municipal level in Bulgaria.

Contributions are the personal business of the "docent" candidate.

The bibliographic apparatus is used correctly. No inadmissible borrowings from other authors were found.

### **Conclusion**

From the inspection of the submitted materials for the competition, no violations in the procedure were found.

Based on the familiarization with the documents for the "docent" competition and the evaluation of the submitted publications, the following conclusions can be drawn about the candidate: 1. He is the only candidate in the competition;

2. Has obtained the educational and scientific degree "doctor";

3. Holds the academic position of "principal assistant." in the Ministry of Education and Culture - Botevgrad, announced the competition;

4. He is provided with the necessary classroom and out-of-classroom employment;

5. He reads full lecture courses on academic disciplines in the Bachelor's College and the Master's College;

6. Submitted and accepted for opinion is sufficient in volume, unrelated to the doctoral thesis, scientific production;

7. 46 citations are documented, including 2 in journals with an impact factor;

8. The candidate for associate professor meets the minimum requirements for the scientific and teaching activities for holding the academic position of "associate professor" in PN Tourism, in accordance with PPZRASRB (groups of indicators A-D) with a total of 859.5 with a required number of 400 points;

9. As a whole, the publications submitted for review by the candidate contain scientific and applied contributions that further develop scientific knowledge in the field of the announced competition.

We believe that according to the criteria and indicators for educational and research activities ch. assistant Dr. Desislava Ivanova Alexova meets the requirements of PPZRASRB for occupying the academic position "docent" in professional direction 3.9 Tourism (Sustainable regional development of tourism)"

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Prepared the opinion:  
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