



REVIEW

regarding the competition for the academic position of "professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field, 3.9. Tourism (Development of tourist destinations), announced in SG no. 22 from 16.03.2021

Reviewer: Prof. Stoyan Marinov, PhD; University of Economics – Varna; Scientific specialty „Economics and Organization of Tourism Department”, field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”.

This review is prepared on the basis of Order №: RD-38-197 / 23.04.2021 from the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for appointing the Scientific Jury regarding the competition for the academic position “Professor” in the professional field 3.9. Tourism (Development of tourist destinations) and Minutes №: 1 from a remote meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on 20.05.2021, for election of a chairman and assignment of reviewers for the competition.

The review is prepared according to the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its implementation (RILDASRB) and the Regulations on conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University "St. K. Ohridski ”.

1. Summary of the presented materials

The only candidate who has submitted documents for the announced competition is Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova from Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The presented by the applicant set of paper materials and electronic media materials are in accordance with the requirements of the regulations. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova meets the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of LDASRB, Art. 60 item 5 of RILDASRB and the additional requirements under Art. 115 para. 1 of Regulations on the conditions and order for acquiring scientific degrees and for holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". There is no legally proven plagiarism in the scientific works and no written signal for plagiarism under Art. 4 (11) of the LDAS, as a result of which she was admitted to participate in the competition.

2. Biographical data of the candidate

Mariana Assenova is born on October 18, 1961. During the period 1975-1980 she completed her secondary education at the English language school "Geo Milev" - Burgas. In 1985 she acquired a Master's degree in Geography with a qualification as Geography-specialist in territorial organization of tourism and recreation, a geography teacher in secondary school and a second specialty in English at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski.

In the period 1996-1997 she specialized in Marketing, Advertising and Business Communications at the University of National and World Economy. In the period 2011-2012 she acquired a science degree "Doctor" in professional field. 3.9 Tourism (Geography of recreation and tourism) after a successful defense of a dissertation on "Methodology for monitoring sustainable tourism development (on the example of the municipality of Tsarevo)"

Mariana Assenova has participated in a number of short-term training and advanced training courses as follows: specialization "Marketing in Tourism" at the Institute of Technology in Dublin, College of Tourism (1994); specialization "Marketing and Customer Care in Tourism" at the Manchester Metropolitan University, Department of Hospitality, Food and Tourism (1995); work experience in tourism at the Hotel School in The Hague (1996); specialization "National, regional and local tourism organizations in the UK" at the British Know-How Fund (1998); specialization REAP (Responsible Enterprises Achievement Program) at the United Nations Development Organization (UNIDO) - Vienna (2007); Travelife Sustainability Manager training at Travelife (2016); specialization "Hotel Industry Foundations and Introduction to Analytics" at STR USA, Ohrid (2016); specialization "Basic functionalities of the global distribution system Galileo" at Travelport (2017).

The candidate uses English, Russian and German.

Mariana Assenova has a rich career. She started working in 1987 in Faculty of Geology and Geography at Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" as an "Technical and administrative assistance" expert. Over the years she has gained professional experience in tourism practice, holding responsible management positions: Deputy - Minister in the Ministry of Trade and Tourism (1997 - 1999) and in the Ministry of Economy (2000 - 2001); Chairman of the Board of Directors in Sunny Beach AD (1999 - 2001), of the Youth Tourism Chain Orbita EAD (1998-2001) and of the Bulgarian Credit Rating Agency (2004-2020), Director of the Bulgarian Market in the travel agency "International Travel" Ltd. (2002 - 2006).



Mariana Assenova's academic career began in 1993 and continues until today at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the Department of Geography of Tourism, where the candidate holds the positions of "Assistant" (1993-1997), "Senior Assistant" (1997-2003), "Chief Assistant" (2003-2013), "Associate Professor" (2013 – present). Mariana Assenova has taught at the New Bulgarian University under the cultural tourism program (1995 - 1996) and at the International Higher Business School - Botevgrad (2003 - 2007).

Since 2015 until today Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova successfully manages the Department of Geography of Tourism and holds the position of Deputy Dean "Master's and Doctoral Programs" (2019- present) at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

In the period 2013 - 2021 Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova has participated in 5 university, 10 national and 13 international projects.

The candidate takes active part in *public activity* related to the participation in working groups and non-governmental organizations. Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova is an official representative of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" at the Bulgarian Institute for Standardization (Decision of the Rector's Council on January 12, 2016) and a representative of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in Technical Committee 89 - Tourist activities. She participates in the working group under the Deputy Prime Minister of Economic and Demographic Policy regarding tourism (2017); in a working group under the Ministry of Tourism for the National Vision for Tourism Digitalization 2030 (2017-2018); in the Advisory Council for Tourism under the Minister of Tourism (Order T-RD-16-307 / 11.09.2020) and is an individual member of EuroCHRIE - for 2021.

In the period 2013 - 2021 Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova has participated in 40 conferences, seminars, round tables, etc., of which 32 were held in Bulgaria and 18 - abroad

1. Evaluation of the educational and pedagogical activity of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova carries out diverse and extensive educational and pedagogical activities. For the period 2015-2020 the average annual academic load of the candidate amounts to 1340.5 hours, incl. 606.3 hours average annual academic load at the university, with a standard for academic load of 270 hours.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova teaches full-time bachelor degree students in 5 disciplines: "*Marketing in Tourism*"; "*Tour operator and agency activities*"; "*Management of tourism destinations*"; "*World and regional tourism fairs and exhibitions*"; "*Sustainable tourism development - standards and certification*". She teaches students in 4 master's

programs - "Tourism", "Cultural Tourism", "Ecotourism", and "Management of tourism destinations", part-time students in 6 disciplines: "Intermediary activity in tourism", "Ecotourism", "Marketing in tourism", "Tourism policy", "Tourism planning", "Management of tourism destinations".

From the academic year 2018/2019 the candidate teaches foreign students under the Erasmus Program in English the disciplines "Marketing in tourism", "Sustainable tourism development - standards and certification" and "Tourism destinations management".

In the period 2013 - 2021. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova has supervised a total of 20 graduates who have successfully defended their dissertations.

2. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and applied scientific work of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova is distinguished by valuable scientific and applied scientific work. During her creative career she has issued a total of 96 publications, of which 41 independent and 55 co-authored. The candidate has one independent monograph, one monograph as a co-author, 3 chapters in collective monographs, 16 studies, 67 articles and reports, 6 textbooks and teaching handbooks and 2 other publications.

For participating in the competition for professor, Assoc. Prof. Mariana Assenova presents 46 publications: 170 pages in a collective monograph; 5 articles and reports published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information; 27 articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with peer-review or in edited collective volumes; 9 studies published in non-refereed journals with peer-review or in edited collective volumes; 3 chapters from collective monographs and one published collective textbook, which is used in the school network.

The collective monograph - Mariana Assenova, Vasil Marinov, Vera Nikolova, Elena Petkova, Radenka Mitova, Chayana Istatkova "Between culture and tourism: tourist attractions based on cultural heritage", the collective monograph - Kabakov, I., V. Marinov, M. Assenova, V. Nikolova, E. Petkova, R. Mitova, N. Stoeva, M. Staneva, P. Petrov "COVID-crisis in culture and tourism based on cultural heritage: ideas for a way out of the situation" (2021), as well as the collective article - Vasil Marinov, Mariana Assenova, Vera Nikolova "Qualification of the employee in tourist attractions based on cultural and historical heritage - condition and problems" are in print, proven by attached official notes from the respective publishers.



According to our calculations, based on the attached publications, the papers accepted for review have a total volume of 603 printed pages, structured by type as shown in Table 1.

Table № 1

Type and volume of peer-reviewed publications

№	Type of publications	Number	Number of pages	Relative share in %
1	Monographs	1	170	28,2
	Published chapters from collective monographs	3	57	9,5
2	Articles and reports published in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information	5	26	4,3
3	Articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with peer-review or in edited collective volumes	27	140	23,2
5	Studies, published in non-refereed journals with peer-review or in edited collective volumes	9	130	21,5
6	Textbooks and teaching handbooks	1	80	13,3
	Total	46	603	100

In structural terms, the participation in monographs prevails by pages with a share of 37.7%. Of all 46 peer-reviewed publications, 8 are independent and 38 are co-authored. From a total of 38 collective publications, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova is the first co-author in 16 and is the second co-author in 30. 20 of the papers were published in English and 26 in Bulgarian. 5 of the publications are printed in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in the world-famous database of scientific information Web of science.

The publications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova have a wide public response, justified by the high degree of citation. In the attached reference, the applicant presents information on 211 citations, divided into three groups, according to the template for the minimum requirements of NACID. In scientific publications, refereed and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information, 4 publications are cited with a total of 23 citations. 102 citations of 41 publications are available in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review. In non refereed scientific journals with peer-review, 86 citations of 33 publications were found.

The content of the publications of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova proves that the author has significant theoretical-methodological and practical-applied scientific contributions in *six thematic areas*.

First, analyzing the state and development of the tourist destination at different levels

The concepts for the territorial system of tourism and the models for comparative analysis and competitiveness of the tourism destination have been upgraded and tested. Based on conducted empirical research, the state is analyzed and priorities are set for the development of specific tourism destinations in Bulgaria: Lukovit municipality, Vidin municipality, Strandzha National Park, Dolen, Leshten and Kovachevitsa villages, Sofia region.

Problems are systematized and solutions are developed regarding the valorization of tourism resources, the carrying capacity of tourism resources and the territorial management of tourism in the studied destinations. [works D.7.6, D.9.4, D.9.2, D.9.1, D.7.9. according to the numbering from the list of publications]. An analysis on a national level of the impact of the socio-economic transition on the tourism sector in Bulgaria, on the country's tourism policy and on the market positions of Bulgaria as a tourism destination is conducted [D.10.2.]. Based on primary and secondary information, a detailed analysis of the state of destination management systems (DMS) and of the main destination organizations in Bulgaria - the Ministry of Tourism and all 265 municipalities in the country is made [D.9.7.].

Second, analyzing and evaluating the development of specific types of tourism

Part of the author's research is focused on the theory and practice of the development of cultural and mountain tourism.

Regarding cultural tourism, the interrelation between the cultural heritage and tourist attractions is theoretically systematized. A typology of attractions and a methodology and tools for studying the tourist demand for attractions have been developed. The formation of clusters of demand for attractions has been clarified. The process of assessing the state of attraction supply is defined. Also, the qualification of the engaged staff and the presentation of the attractions on the Internet are defined. The developed methodology has been tested in a field study along a predetermined route in Bulgaria. [B.3, D.7.21, D.7.22, D.7.23, D.7.25, D.9.9] Both the national experience and the international practice of managing, monitoring and financing the attractions based on the cultural heritage are summarized and analyzed, including in the context of European funds for the implementation of projects for the development of tourist attractions [D.6.5, D.7.8.]. In the context of the current tourism issues, a survey is conducted to study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on culture and cultural tourism [D.10.3.]. Specific scenarios for overcoming the crisis and its consequences, useful for the tourism practice, have been proposed.



In her work, Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova thoroughly studies the spatial and thematic development of tourism in mountainous areas. She systematizes models for the development of mountain tourist centers and small mountain destinations. The models are systematized on the basis of groups of criteria related to spatial structure, economic structure and socio-cultural structure and are tested in specific destinations in Bulgaria - Apriltsi municipality, the territory of Kalofer, river valley of Gorna Arda, Dolen, Leshten and Kovachevitsa. In the context of sustainable tourism development regarding to the destination "Gorna Arda" the supply chain and the value chain in the process of creating a tourism product are analyzed [D.9.8, D.6.2, D.6.3, 7.7, D.7.16]

Third, Sustainable Tourism Development

Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova has a significant theoretical and methodological contribution to the modification of the European system of indicators for sustainable development of tourism at destination level. Recommendations have been made for establishing baseline values and setting target values for the indicators, which is especially important for subsequent monitoring of the development of the tourism destination. The author tests the tools of the European Commission for measuring and monitoring the sustainable development of tourism both in the Danube region and in Sofia Municipality. Indicative fact for the practical significance of the research and the achieved results is the inclusion of some of the indicators in the monitoring systems of the Strategies for tourism development in the municipalities of Ruse and Sofia, as well as at national level [D.7.11, D. 7. 12, D.7.14 , D.7.15].

Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova examines the relationship between sustainable tourism development and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Examining the CSR practice of 25 hotels in Bulgaria, she offers a set of key performance indicators and systematizes the most commonly applied measures for social responsibility at corporate level in the accommodation sector. [D.6.1, D.7.1. D.7.4.].

The peer-reviewed publications examine the ecological aspect of sustainable development in tourism. The methodology for resource efficiency and clean production developed by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has been tested. The material and energy flows when applying this methodology in 20 hotels located in Albania, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia have been studied. On the basis of the collected data, the practices for efficient use of resources established in the Balkan region are analyzed

[D.6.4.]. A set of absolute and relative indicators (KPIs) for resource use (energy and water consumption) and generated pollution (gas emissions and wastewater) is presented and the expected savings in applying selected measures are assessed. A comparison is made between resource consumption and internationally established averages (benchmarking).

Fourth, Tourism Zoning

Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova has an indisputable theoretical and applied contribution to defining the essence of tourism zoning. Her work contributes to the application of scientific principles, requirements and criteria in the delineation of tourism areas, to the clarification of the stakeholder consultation process and to the achievement of generally acceptable boundaries, scope, specialization and centers of the regions. She participates in the analysis of the evolution of the tourism zoning of Bulgaria and in the development of a reasoned scheme with potential marketing tourism regions in the country. The regions are differentiated on the basis of the concluded agreements between the municipalities when implementing the projects for the development of tourism product and marketing of the destinations under the Operational Program "Regional Development" (2007-2013). The developed scheme is the basis of the subsequently institutionalized overall concept for tourism zoning of Bulgaria and the differentiated 9 tourism regions. [D.7.10, D.7.19, D.9.3, D.9.6].

Fifth, Marketing of the tourism destinations

In the field of tourism destination marketing, the publications of Assoc. Prof. Mariana Assenova contain contributions to the improvement of methods for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of participation in tourism exhibitions and fairs. Appropriate indicators for assessing Bulgaria's participation in selected events have been defined and their quantitative values have been determined on the basis of primary and secondary data. [D.7.2.]. Theoretical and applied contribution of the candidate is the derivation of the possibilities and limitations of gamification as a tool for popularizing a tourism destination on the example of Sofia as a destination for cultural tourism. [D.7.27.].

Sixth, education in the field of tourism

Useful for the training of tourist staff are the studies of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova on the relationship between business models in tourism and tourism training. They present the challenges regarding the knowledge, skills and competencies of the trained staff, caused by the emergence of modern business models based on the principles of the circular economy, the shared economy, the models of joint consumption, the joint creation and dematerialization of the product. An extremely valuable publication for shared good practice



is the summarized experience in the organization and conduct of the internship of students of tourism at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" [D.7.13, D.7.17, D.9.5].

4. Critical remarks and recommendations to the candidate

The peer-reviewed scientific papers, the rich professional experience in the national tourism administration and in the tourism business of Bulgaria, give us a reason to recommend Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova to expand its publishing activities to present the history, present and future of tourism policy in Bulgaria.

5. Conclusion

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova is distinguished by diverse, high-quality and effective teaching, research, practical and social activities. She manifests herself as a collegiate lecturer and researcher.

The results of the research and pedagogical activity of the candidate prove that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova meets the quantitative and qualitative requirements of Art. 29 (1) of LDASRB, Art. 60 (1) of RILDASRB and Art. 115 (1) of the Regulations on Conditions and Order for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and for Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", namely:

1. She has obtained the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".
2. She has held the academic position of "Associate Professor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for 8 academic years.
3. A total of 46 publications covering the requirements for a professor have been presented and *accepted for evaluation*, which *do not repeat* the ones submitted for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and for holding the academic position "Associate Professor".
4. Exceeds five times the minimum national requirements under Art. 2.6, para. 2 and 3, respectively the requirements under Art. 2.6, para. 5 of LDASRB and the additional requirements of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The candidate declares a total of 2696 points with a required minimum of 500 points, completing the requirements of all groups (group A - achieved 50 points for the required 50 points; group B - achieved 100 points for the required 100 points; group D - achieved 266 points for the required 200 points, group D - achieved 1795 points for the required 100 points, group E - achieved 485 points for the required 100 points).

5. There is no legally proven plagiarism in the scientific works

6. She is under 65 years of age and does not have an extended employment contract under the order of & 11 of Transitional Provisions and Consequential Amendments of Higher Education Act

The achievements of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova in the scientific-applied and educational-pedagogical activity are reasons to give without any reservation a positive assessment and to recommend her for acquiring the academic position "Professor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.9 Tourism (Development of tourism destinations).

26.07. 2021 г.
Varna

Reviewer:
Prof. S. Marinov, PhD