

STATEMENT

In a competition for the academic position of "Professor" in the professional field 3.9 Tourism (Development of tourist destinations), announced by the Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" in State Gazette, issue 22 / 16.03.2021

Reviewer: Prof. Maria Stamatova Vodenska, PhD and DrSci from Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", scientific specialty 01.08.14 Geography of recreation and tourism

The only candidate in the competition: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Atanasova Assenova, Department of Geography of Tourism, Faculty of Geology and Geography, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski"

This opinion has been prepared in accordance with the Regulations of Sofia University on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", Section V, and in accordance with Order No RD 38-197 / 23.04.2021 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski".

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND SCIENTIFIC-APPLIED PRODUCTS OF THE CANDIDATE IN THE COMPETITION

The only candidate in the announced competition Associate Professor Dr. Mariana Assenova participated in it with a scientific production consisting of 46 titles (3 in press), published after the award of the scientific title of Associate Professor in 2013. The candidate's work presents the results of research activity and has been published in specialized scientific journals. Among them are 1 habilitation thesis (part of a collective monograph) - in press (indicator B.3), 5 articles and reports published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information (indicator G.6), 27 articles and reports published in unreferenced journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes (indicator G.7), 9 studies published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes - 1 under print (indicator G.9), 3 published chapters from collective monographs - 1 in press (indicator G.10), 1 published textbook, which is used in the school network (indicator E.20). It is noteworthy that a large part of the publications (38) are co-authored. 20 of the presented publications are in a foreign language, and 16 of them have been published abroad.

A list of publications up to the title of associate professor, which are not the subject of this opinion, is also presented.

I have only one joint publication with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova, namely the textbook for vocational schools "Tourism. Introduction to the profession» (2012) - under number E.20, which will not be included in this opinion. At the same time, I know the subject under consideration and this gives me grounds to give an impartial and objective assessment of the materials submitted for review.

The presented publications can be conditionally classified in the following scientific fields:

1. Development and management of tourist destinations - 14 publications

2. Development of different types of tourism in Bulgaria - cultural tourism and cultural attractions (13 publications), and mountain tourism (6 publications) with examples in various destinations
3. Corporate social responsibility and sustainable development of tourism - 5 publications
4. Tourism regionalisation - 4 publications
5. Publications related to the training in the specialty "Tourism" - 4 publications

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova has also published one material on the COVID crisis and its impact on tourism.

In the period 2013 - 2021, Associate Professor Dr. Mariana Assenova has participated in 5 university, 10 national and 13 international projects, which are presented in a separate annex. In compliance with the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the LASGRB, in an appendix the participations in 5 national and 10 international scientific or educational projects are included, as well as in one national project of which she was a leader (Appendix 12).

The attached references contain information on 211 citations, divided into three groups, according to the model for the minimum requirements of NACID. In scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information, 4 publications are cited with a total of 23 citations. 102 citations of 41 publications have been noted in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review. In non-referenced peer-reviewed journals, 86 citations of 33 publications were found.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova enjoys significant authority in the scientific and managerial circles, as evidenced by her extracurricular commitments. She is:

- Official representative of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" at the Bulgarian Institute for Standardization and a representative of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" in Technical Committee 89 - Tourist activities
- Member of the Working Group of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Demographic Policy on Tourism (2017)
- Member of the Working Group at the Ministry of Tourism for the National Vision for Digitalization in Tourism 2030 (2017-2018)
- Member of the Advisory Council on Tourism to the Minister of Tourism (Order T-RD-16-307 / 11.09.2020)
- Member of EuroCHRIE - individual membership for 2021

Until recently, she was Chairman of the board of directors of the Bulgarian Credit Rating Agency, and in earlier periods she held the same position in the Youth tourism chain Orbita and in Sunny Beach AD. In the period 1997-2001 she was Deputy Minister for Tourism in two ministries.

During 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.

II. EVALUATION OF SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

II.1. Characteristics of scientific papers and major contributions

The most important feature of the scientific production of the candidate for professor, according to the reviewer, is her ability to consider complex aspects of

tourism development, thus skillfully combining in the same publication elements of research in different thematic areas. In most publications there is a joint application of quantitative and qualitative methods, which gives the results obtained through these complex studies significant scientific and practical importance.

The main part of the author's scientific publications is aimed at clarifying the state and development of tourist destinations at different spatial levels. A number of regional studies have been conducted, applying the concepts of the TSOT and the tourist destination model. In this way the peculiarities of the tourist development of a number of municipalities and other territories are revealed, and a research model for the tourist development and management of tourism at local level is developed, which provides objective, up-to-date and reliable information. At the national level, the process of transformation in the tourism sector after the democratic changes has been followed, revealing their impact on the elements of the Bulgarian tourism market. A detailed analysis of the condition of the organizations for management of the regions (OUTR) in Bulgaria is made.

Among the different types of tourism, Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova has paid special attention to cultural tourism and tourism based on cultural heritage. Basic concepts in this area have been clarified and defined. A typology of attractions is proposed.

A successful analysis of the clusters of the tourist demand for cultural tourism in Bulgaria has been made. Special attention is paid to the management, monitoring and financing of attractions based on the cultural heritage in our country, and it is worth noting the critical approach of the candidate for professor, which is justified by detailed and in-depth research in this area.

In a separate publication, Assoc. Prof. Assenova discusses the negative consequences for the tourism sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating and describing the possible scenarios for overcoming them and overcoming the crisis.

With regard to mountain tourism, a thorough review of its research has been made and the models of development of mountain tourism centers in Bulgaria have been revealed, identifying and analyzing their positive and negative characteristics. The sustainable development of tourism in the Bulgarian mountain destinations is also commented.

Another direction in the research activity of the candidate for professor is the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of the tourist enterprises in the context of the wider sustainable development of tourism. M. Assenova proposes a modification of the European system of indicators for sustainable development of tourism at the destination level.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova has a significant contribution to the development of the Concept for tourism regionalisation of Bulgaria.

The main contributions of Assoc. Prof. Dr. M. Assenova can be summarized as follows:

1. Theoretical generalizations are made with critical analysis and own opinions, contributing to the improvement of tourism theory. Methodologies have been developed by improving methods and systems of indicators, as well as by proposing appropriate models.

2. The application of the cluster approach for the development of cultural tourism and the tourism destination is examined, the theoretical knowledge about the nature, role and functions of the tourism clusters is summarized.

3. The European system of indicators for sustainable development of tourism at destination level has been modified. Baseline values of the indicators have been established, which is essential for the further monitoring of sustainable tourism development.

4. Analyses and summaries of results from experimental research activities in various destinations and by types of tourism have been made. There are refinements, details and theoretical summaries of the conceptual apparatus and the content aspect of cultural and mountain tourism.

5. The educational process in the specialty "Tourism" at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" has been enhanced.

II.2. Critical remarks and recommendations

Critical remarks can hardly be made to the works of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova, after the characteristics and main contributions given above. In general, within the framework of her scientific interests, she has conscientiously and thoroughly conducted research, the results of which have been published in an adequate form. Therefore, it is more appropriate to make recommendations for her future work. As a scientist, I would recommend her to try to increase her independent scientific production in the form of studies and monographs, for which she has already made a serious scientific request. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova has broad prospects and great potential to develop as a scientist and lecturer in the future.

III. EDUCATIONAL AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova has 28 years of experience as a lecturer at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Geology and Geography, Department of Geography of Tourism. She successfully defended her dissertation in 2012.

Her lecturing load is significant - with a norm of 270 hours of classroom employment per year, in the period 2015-2020 she had an average of 606 hours. At the same time, in the period 2015-2021, she successfully coped with her duties as head of department, and since 2019 as Deputy Dean at the Faculty of Geology and Geography.

The main disciplines in which the candidate teaches at Sofia University are 5 in the bachelor's degree and also 5 in the master's degree courses. In the period 2013-2021 she has prepared 2 new lecture courses "Management of tourist destinations" and "Sustainable development of tourism - standards and certifications".

Under the Erasmus + program, the candidate for professor offers 3 courses in English, which in the period 2018-2021 were held in front of a total of 16 students.

For the period 2013-2021, Associate Professor Assenova supervised 20 successfully defended graduates, as well as 4 successfully defended doctoral students. She was also a research mentor to 3 young scientists and post-doctoral students.

IV. PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE CANDIDATE

I have known Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova since she started working in the Department of Geography of Tourism at Sofia University. During this long

period I have had the opportunity to be convinced many times of her love for justice, research enthusiasm, diligence and correctness. She is respected and loved by students and colleagues. As the Head of the department, she has always defended the interests of its members, as well as defended the positions of the specialty "Tourism" in GGF. I believe that she has all the necessary human qualities and personal merits for the scientific title of "professor".

V. CONCLUSION

The scientific achievements of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova fully meet the requirements for obtaining the academic position of "professor" in the scientific specialty 3.9 Tourism. All research, conclusions, suggestions and contributions are the personal work of the author. All papers and materials have been published or reported at national and international conferences and have become public. The contributions contained in them can be used in the practice of tourism development of the country.

The high theoretical level of the research work, the achieved results and contributions in the field of tourism research methodology, opportunities and development of cultural and mountain tourism in tourism destinations, the cluster approach to the management and development of the tourism destination, sustainable tourism development and CSR of tourist enterprises, the long-term and rich teaching activity, as well as my personal impressions of her, give me reason to express a completely positive attitude to the candidacy of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Assenova for the academic position of "Professor" in the scientific field 3.9 Tourism.

Sofia, 13.07.2021

Reviewer:

Prof. Dr.Sci Maria Vodenska