

Position
about

Elitza Stoilova

applying for the position of Associate professor of sociology, anthropology, sciences of culture (3.1)
at Plovdiv University

Eliza Stoilova is the only candidate for the position. Her documents are in order and the requirements of Plovdiv University are fulfilled.

The candidate has defended her doctoral thesis in Eindhoven, Netherlands on the topic of Bulgarian yogurt; since 2012 she has been and assistant professor on ethnology at Plovdiv University. Stoilova has specialized in food anthropology and the problems of local identities linked to it. Her seminars cover also questions of theory of fieldwork, medical ethnology. Intangible heritage, etc. She actively works with students and participates to numerous national and international research projects.

The works presented for this competition are linked to food practices and their relation to the construction of local identities. Stoilova takes a critical distance towards the notion of authenticity which, in the contemporary world, is not only a function of traditions, but also a matter of industrial production and “export”. Some of her articles have been published in prestigious foreign journals or volumes.

The main text, presented for this competition, is the monograph “Food festivities and festivals: valorization of the local culinary heritage” published in Plovdiv 2021. The extensive research of the author on food is used for a serious reflection on the contemporary economy of experience proposing to the consumer ever more varied identities. A central notion here is the “festivalization” of culture, the construction of events to attract the attention toward traditions and places.

The ambiguities emerging from this enterprise are at the center of the work. On one hand, food practices are a form of collective memory transmitted from generation to generation. On the other, food festivals are a relatively new phenomenon having emerged (according to the author) in Bulgaria only around 2000, being obviously instrumentalized by tourism.

Such economically motivated instrumentalization can be seen in the project activity, national and transnational, promoting food events. They, according to Stoilova, 'tend to be constructed “from above”. But even constructed and instrumentalized, the events have a deep impact on the local populations creating pride, participation and a sense of belonging.

The text analyzes the fluid character of the events, the role of organizers and participants, their new elements like verbalization (speeches, media coverage), visualization (reenactment of crafts and rituals), etc.

At the end, Stoilova as a good field researcher presents a concrete case to prove her theses. The “Kurtovo Konare fest” will show how an event, centered around food, tourism and local production, gradually starts to acquire higher citizenship-oriented goals like defense of biodiversity, sustainable development of the region, etc.

The monograph is not only a correct ethnographic description, but has an applied quality for the understanding and development of food events that are becoming ever more important in Bulgaria.

Having said all that, I confidently support the application of Elitza Stoilova for the position of associate professor.

Sofia 3 10 2021

Prof Ivaylo Ditchev