

To: the Chairman of the scientific jury, appointed by Order № P33-4301 from 10.08.2021.  
of the Rector of PU "Paisii Hilendarski"

Attached I present: Review

in a competition for an academic position ..... **Associate professor** .....

field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences

professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences

scientific specialty "Cultural Anthropology - Cultural Heritage and Cultural Policies"

announced for the needs of PU "Paisii Hilendarski", in State Gazette, issue 40 / 14.05.2021

Reviewer:... **Rayna Dimitrova Gavrilova, Prof. Dr.**

Scientific specialty: Theory and history of culture - historical anthropology .....

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<p>The review is compiled in accordance with the requirements of ZRASRB and Section III / Section IV of PPRASRB - Conditions and procedure for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor" / "Professor"</p>
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## **REVIEW**

**of Assistant Professor Dr. Elitsa Rumenova Stoilova, candidate in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski"**

**field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences;**

**professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences**

### **I. Analysis of the candidate's career profile**

Candidate Elitsa Stoilova has demonstrated interest in the study of communities from different points of view from her formative period, as evidenced by her contemporaneous bachelor's degrees in Ethnology and Sociology - an opportunity provided by the close and fruitful coexistence of the two programs at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU). This orientation was complemented by a specialization (2002) at the French University of Lyon II, which has a long tradition of maintaining this symbiosis, plus a closer association with anthropology and cultural studies. In the following years, Elitsa added a Master's degree in management (PU) and a doctorate at the Technical University of Eindhoven (Netherlands) and PU. Elitsa began her career as a part-time (2010), and from 2012 to the present - a full-time assistant in the Department of Ethnology at the University of Plovdiv.

### **II. General description of the submitted materials in the competition.**

Elitsa Stoilova presented all the documents required by the Development of the Academic Staff Act of Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of the University of Plovdiv (except for the order for appointment of the jury, but it was supplied separately by the department that announced the competition). I have read all the documents and, convinced in their accuracy, I submit this review.

The candidate satisfies the minimum national requirements for scientific record eligible to holding the academic position of associate professor (415 points with a required minimum of 400). All activities described and calculated in the table are proven by the attached materials; the

published dissertation can be viewed online. The note presented by the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and History certifies that Elitsa also meets the requirements of the University of Plovdiv in the sections of research and teaching, as well as in terms of participation in research and educational projects.

### **III. Evaluation of candidate's research**

Elitsa Stoilova published 19 scientific texts between 2011 and 2021; 10 of them are proposed for participation in the competition materials, and are not part of her Ph.D. dissertation. They include: a monograph "Holidays and Food Festivals: Valorization of Local Culinary Heritage", 2021; one chapter of a monograph, and nine articles (eight independent and one co-authored); one in English and one in French. The texts reflect the evolution of the Elitsa's research interests and form a circle, where material culture (especially food), experience, communities, and socio-economic development meet. Both the choice of research topics and the applied methods define her field as cultural anthropology. Food festivals stand out as a central theme of her work, especially in publications from the last five years. They are described and convincingly defined by the candidate as condensed social phenomena, where patrimonialization, neo-localism, the economy of experience, demographic shocks, economies of scale and the postmodern situation in general, emerge not only as research objects but as a form of communal living. The articles "Festival and construction of local cultural heritage" (2017), "Food festivals as cultural experience economy" (2018), "Villages and public celebrations: festivalization of culinary traditions" (2019) focus on various aspects of these events. A related but independent direction of her research is the role either as metaphors or as mobilizing tools, of representative systems (images, oral tradition) convincingly identified by the candidate in the construction or maintenance of the community and its heritage (the articles "Images of the Mountain" and "The Artist's Testament"). In general, the study of the invention of new old heritage(s) as a process, which develops before our eyes, especially among local communities, is among the notable contributions of Elitsa. Moreover, in addition to the purely cognitive value, the texts offer an important perspective, as the conclusions could serve as a bridge between national and regional policies and the efforts of individual local actors.

The latter circumstance signals an important aspect of the research and teaching work of Elitsa Stoilova, namely her interest in the topicality and the social role of the researchers. The mentioned publications result from consistent and methodical research work either in the library and the Internet, or in the field, but their value and the social positioning of the candidate in general, are particularly tested and attested by her consistent efforts to connect her own work with the public, colleagues and partners. The above-mentioned contacts with foreign research traditions in France and the Netherlands in the formative years convinced Elitsa of the imperative

need for networking and projects. The fact that not only her dissertation but also a number of articles have been published in foreign languages is proof of this outreach. Between 2005 and 2021, she was involved in 14 research and applied projects, 6 of which were international. She was participant in most of them and team leader in the most recent one: "Virtual Walk in Tobacco City" (2020-2021). Equal engagement in individual serious research and in scientific and applied projects seems to be a requirement for university professors nowadays; this is a significant plus in the biography of the candidate.

#### **IV. Evaluation of the monographic work submitted for participation in the competition**

Elitsa Stoilova has submitted for participation in the competition a monograph entitled "Holidays and food festivals: valorization of local culinary heritage", published in 2021. The topic became subject of interest in the last ten years, but this is the first systematic study in Bulgaria, that I am aware of. Furthermore, the author states in the introduction her intention to submit this relatively new phenomenon to critical analysis, going beyond both the description and the easy and banal pseudo-patriotic comments; beyond the timelessness of classical ethnology and the large scale of sociology.

The structure of the work follows the classical approach of presentation and analysis of the subject of research; placement in a theoretical and interpretive framework, and detailed analysis of a case to test and supplement the formulated hypotheses, observations and conclusions. The fact that the text is a published book has necessitated the minimization of purely academic attributes such as the formulation of goals and hypotheses, a review of the existing literature, clarification of methods. I mention this without criticizing it, but for example it was not clear for me whether the author knows the project and the book of colleagues from the Institutes of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research and Ethnology and Folklore at BAS *Agricultural Transformations in the context of Europeanization and globalization*. Sofia, 2018, where many of the topics covered in the monograph are discussed, although only one paper specifically focuses on festivals.

The introduction of the work argues why this topic is important; the introduction and juxtaposition of the key terminology of the work (collective memory, local identity and its construction, heritage and patrimonialization, festivalization, globalization) state clearly the orientation of the author. I list them on purpose: even their simple enumeration next to each other gives a good idea of the methodological circle from which Elitsa draws explanatory models and theories. I must say that further in the text additional clarifications on her approach have been provided, albeit briefly. In general, even without a specific indication, the methodological framework of the research is clear. In the same introductory part, she briefly mentions the tasks that the work sets itself: identification and description of the features of a class of events; analysis

of the valorization of elements new to the established understanding of the cultural heritage in Bulgaria; observation and interpretation of a specific case.

Chapter one, "Characteristics of the culinary holidays and festivals: food, locality, festivity and identity", examines the food festivals in Bulgaria, consistently discussing the time, location, theme, organizers, and programs of the observed culinary holidays. This review is far from a simple description; it interprets the elements drawn in the process of constructing the local heritage. To the expected references to the folklore, Christian traditions and historical events and personalities, she adds the heuristic moments, brought by the eclecticism of the festival programs, the territorial and seasonal continuity, etc. Interesting findings are the resuscitation of the archetypal celebration of fertility; the absorption and assimilation of regional identity by local communities (the Festival of peaches in Gavrailovo); the gradual placement of the *cuit* among the dominant *cru* themes (Festival of stuffed peppers in Levski); the well-founded thesis about the fluidity of the holidays - the penetration of elements of the private holidays into the public ones and vice versa (p. 34). Excerpts from interviews allow us to go one step deeper into the intentions behind the festivals ("In general, people need to be together and feel part of the tradition of the places where they were born" - p. 27 - one sentence, which could be the motto of the whole thing). At the same time, they give an idea of the process of dissemination of these events ("I am in bed one morning, listening to the radio. Here such a holiday, there – another one" - p. 35). Particularly interesting and unknown at least to me were the materials from regional and ethnic holidays, which raise a number of issues addressed further in the text. I found convincing the author's thesis that a little-used resource such as the food festivals, should be conceived more broadly, as "specific ecosystems. Such more ecologically oriented thinking would reveal the richness of ethnobotanical knowledge and the possibility of ethnoecology, which are not only part of older traditions, but are experience and knowledge, related to the production and consumption of local and seasonal foods" - p.43).

The second chapter "Festivalization, neo-localism and gastro-localism" is the methodological and central part of the book. A few concepts are introduced, two of which are already established (festivalization and neolocalism) and one – gastrolocalism, – is a neologism, introduced by the author, that I have seen only once and as an adjective - gastrolocalism. The model, of course, is provided by the mother-term gastropolitics, coined by Arjun Appadurai, but I find the gastrolocalism defined and applied by Elitsa to be a novel and efficient tool. This chapter discusses also the comparison with similar festivals during the socialist period, but the author does not agree with Evgenia Troeva (a leading authority in this work) that there is continuity and seeks (and finds) arguments in the totally changed socio-economic environment. The explanation of the uniformization of culinary festivals as a manifestation of the process of festivalization and, basically, a new form of celebrating, was another interesting (albeit very brief) conclusion. I found

the comments on the link between the fluidity of the events and the observed changing identities very interesting and an important key to understanding the meaning of the phenomenon (p. 84).

Chapter Three *Case Study: Kurtovo Konare Fest* looks at the details of the patrimonialization process that takes place in one locality. Elitsa studies the layers of historical events and the communal mythologies, before proceeding with a deconstructs the contemporary event, which refers back to the theses formulated earlier. The chapter is an exemplary dense description in the spirit of historical anthropology, microhistory and anthropology. Evidence from various texts from different periods, including interviews with participants, has been used, and the author traces the evolution of the forms and the ideas. The case is a documentation, but also contribution the increasingly strengthening line of research we might call complex culturological analysis, which corresponds far better to the tendencies of modern science.

The Conclusion summarizes the in-depth study of the case, but the proposed observations are valid for the entire work. An important observation is formulated here: both the invention of the local heritage by combining different elements of traditional culture and history and the festival as a form in which it manifests itself, become possible by constant process of negotiation between multiple actors. A find this conclusion important draws attention to the potential and significant resources of this new type of events for consolidating communities and identities (p. 144).

The book discussed here is an independent, original research, which fully satisfies the requirements of a scholar on the verge of habilitation. The analysis and interpretation of the culinary festivals as a vehicle toward constructing a local, territorial identity and as a form of the new festivity as a whole is a contribution to our knowledge, based on solid empirical material and sound methodological approach.

#### **V. Citation of the candidate's publications in the national and foreign literature.**

Elitsa Stoilova has identified and cited three citations in Scopus-indexed publications and two citations in scientific peer-reviewed publications.

#### **VI. Overall assessment of the research and teaching qualities of the candidate**

The biography and the list of publications of Elitsa Stoilova unequivocally present an accomplished scholar. The invitation to lead seminars for students at the University of Plovdiv, first as a part-time and then as a full-time assistant, demonstrates the confidence of the Department in her teaching and personal qualities. She regularly develops new courses and updates the existing ones. Her participation in various projects not only maintains a high level of competence, but gives her insight into the current state of the field and access to various networks, connecting science with practice - an indisputable plus for her students.

Elitsa's published research traces her evolution as scholar. She is well versed in the classic and recent literature in anthropology, sociology and economics; she has mastered the tools of academic writing and maintains a stable rhythm of publishing. Her works are original and always contribute to knowledge.

**VII. Critical remarks and recommendations.**

None.

**VIII. General assessment of the candidate's compliance** with the Academic Staff Development Act and the Regulations for Occupying Academic Positions at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

The scientific production and teaching activity of Elitsa Stoilova fully satisfies the mandatory requirements, criteria and quantitative indicators, required by the Development of the Academic Staff Act and the Regulations of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski".

**IX. Conclusion** - meets / does not meet the mandatory and specific conditions and quantitative criteria - for the academic position "ASSOCIATE" / "PROFESSOR".

Taking into account the above, I declare that Elitsa Stoilova meets the requirements for the position of "Associate Professor" at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" and I will confidently vote "for".

Rayna Gavrilova, Prof., Ph.D.  
University of Sofia "Sv. Kliment Ohridsky"