

OPINION

by

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on the materials submitted with regards to a competition for taking the academic position
of an ‘Associate Professor’ at the Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv,
in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic Sciences and Law, occupational
strand 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Cultural Anthropology –
Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Policies)

Elitsa Rumenova Stoilova, Assistant Professor, PhD, participates in the
competition for taking the academic position of an ‘Associate Professor’, announced in
the State Gazette, issue 40 of 15.05.2021, for the needs of the Department of Ethnology,
Faculty of Philosophy and History.

Outlines of the materials received

I have been assigned as a member of the scientific jury in connection with the
competition for the academic position of an ‘Associate Professor’ by order No P33-4301
dated 10.08.2021 of the Rector of the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv. Elitsa
Rumenova Stoilova, Assistant Professor, PhD, on a basic employment contract at the
Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Department
of Ethnology is the only candidate in the competition. The set of materials presented by
her is in compliance with the Regulations on the career opportunities for academic staff at
the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv and it includes all necessary supporting
documents.

A brief biography

E. Stoilova graduated the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv as a Bachelor
of Sociology (2004), a Bachelor of Ethnology (2005), a Master of Research and
Innovations Management (2006). She specialized in the Lumière Lyon 2 University,
Faculty of Anthropology and Sociology, Lyon, France (Cultural Studies) (2002). In 2007,
she started her PhD programme at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv. In 2014,
she defended her thesis on ‘Bulgarian Yoghurt: Manufacturing and Exporting of
Authenticity’ (Bulgarian Yogurt: Production and Export of Authenticity) at the Technical
University of Eindhoven, Eindhoven, the Netherlands. She has been working on a basic
employment contract at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv since 2014, taking
the position of an Assistant, and a Assistant Professor since 2016.

General characteristics of the activities

Elitsa Stoilova, Assistant Professor, PhD participates in the competition for the
academic position of an ‘Associate Professor’ with 1 monograph (*Food Holidays and
Festivals: Valorization of the Local Culinary Heritage*. Plovdiv: The Paisiy Hilendarski
University Publishing House, 2021, 169 p.), 2 studies, 7 articles (one of which in co-
authorship with M. Zlatkova) and 1 chapter of a monograph, published upon holding the
academic position of a ‘Assistant Professor’. Three of the articles have been published in
English (2 – in foreign editions). All publications are relevant to the theme of the
announced competition.

She has participated in 2 educational projects under national programs and in 6 collaborative research projects, 2 of which international in the period 2017–2021. She has been involved in numerous national and international seminars and conferences. She was part of the founders of the Intangible Heritage Research Centre at the Department of Ethnology.

The candidate has demonstrated a good teaching experience in the field of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv. She is the author and the holder of 8 subjects (among them ‘Museums and Heritage’, ‘Anthropology of Medicine’, ‘Cultural Policies and Institutions in the Field of Heritage’, ‘National Cuisine: Design and Uses’). Two of the subjects have been taught in a foreign language for Erasmus students. She participated in the creation of 2 new Bachelor's degree programme courses (‘Cultural Tourism’ and ‘Cultural and Social Anthropology’). She has been a scientific executive of 5 successfully defended graduates. All this is a proof of teaching activity.

This brief presentation shows that E. Stoilova, Assistant Professor, PhD, has got the scientific and professional expertise needed in relation to the announced competition.

Evaluation of the scientific activities and contributions

E. Stoilova has a lasting and strong interest in the processes of heritage construction and in particular in the food as a heritage. Her research work is in the fields of food studies and anthropology of festivity in its contemporary manifestations and trends.

Some of the concepts developed in the *‘Food Holidays and Festivals: Valorization of Local Culinary Heritage’* monograph are expressed in the following studies and articles: *‘Culinary Festivals: Festivalization, Neolocalism and Gastrolocalism’*, *‘Villages and Public Celebrations: Festivalization of the Culinary Traditions’*, *‘Food Festivals as a Cultural Experience Economy’*, *‘Food, Myths, and Authenticity’*, *‘Festivity and Construction of Local Cultural Heritage’*.

The festival boom in Bulgaria has not gone unnoticed by the humanities and social sciences researchers. A dozen of studies have been accomplished in a few years. These cultural events, dedicated to food and drinks, attracted wide interest. Articles and studies analyze individual cases, including those by E. Stoilova, with different focuses: as a new festivity, as a valorization tool of local cultural resources and the traditional ecological knowledge related thereto, as a reconstruction tool of local identity and a consolidation of community ties, a tool for raising awareness of local resources and their potential, as a tourist resource, as a business tool although with a limited effect, as a contextual framework that links the social embeddedness (informal knowledge, skills, local connections) to external factors (global trends, demand).

What is new and different? The monographic study of E. Stoilova is a successful attempt for a full and meaningful comprehension of this festivity type. The theoretical reflections, based on a good knowledge of the international experience, are illustrated by observations from numerous and targeted field research conducted in person over the years, that enables comparisons. I will highlight some of the merits and contributions of the monographic work.

Acknowledging a multidimensional, diverse and evolving cultural phenomenon is a difficult and ambitious task. It’s been successfully achieved by tailoring a specific approach and appropriate analytical tools that set the guidelines throughout the study.

The festivity associated with food is examined in its dynamics and elaboration in the context of the socio-cultural processes taking place in our country and around the world. These cultural events are analyzed in connection with the reconceptualization of culture, cultural traditions and territory.

The cultural resources are revealed from which the new festivity, the creation and transformation of interpretation models, the construction and use of culinary symbols, the redefinition of meanings have emerged. The decontextualization of knowledge and practices is convincingly displayed.

The reasons for holidays/festivals, the important moments of their organization and the main social actors, messages and ways in which the heritage is substantiated, are investigated by referring to individual cases in order to reveal the processes of its construction and use, as well as the processes of self-identification related to the re-enforcement of the local cultural identity.

She has attempted to typologize the rich thematic diversity of food holidays/food festivals, which I basically accept. This can be done against different criteria. One of them has been chosen hereby. I think that the examples of ethnic cuisine holidays are missing under the 'Holidays of Regional and Ethnic Cuisine' section. I cannot myself name such a holiday in Bulgaria. In any case, the '*Farshangi*' carnival celebration in the village of Bardarski geran, region of Vratsa, the celebration of Banat cuisine in Asenovo, region of Pleven, as well as the festival of Torlak cuisine are not examples of ethnic cuisine (p. 40-41). The two examples from the village of Manole, region of Plovdiv and the village of Krushari, region of Dobrich, formalizing the appearance of '*Celebrations of Traditional Dishes Related to Food Preparation*' section are not a compelling argument for this kind of festivity. There are examples of holidays dedicated to the traditional technologies in making dishes. One of them is Erminden in the village of Lozen, municipality of Lyubimets, whereby on May 1, every year, for about 10 years, the ritual kneading of the podnitsas (shallow clay pots with a lid) and their use in the Sakar cuisine takes place.

The new festivity image is tamped with an analysis of the holidays and festivals programme. It's very conditional to talk about the scientific part of the holiday programme. Organizing short round tables or individual presentations on the state and trends in a given production, usually in the first year of holiday/festival occurrence and rarely later on, as well as the shared knowledge meetings about modern technologies, to discuss the possibilities for starting and supporting business with the help of European agricultural programmes (for example in the village of Gavrailovo, region of Sliven) are not deemed to be a scientific program. It is more accurate to talk about a serious and entertaining plan of the cultural event.

I can highlight that the analyses of fluidity of the new holiday forms and of the festival identities examined through different social actors, the remarks on the rituality in the researched cultural events are among the merits of the work. It has been reasonably disclosed that food and beverage holidays/festivals represent an inheritance tool of agricultural products, culinary traditions and technologies.

This is where to put the matter to the candidate. She uses the words 'holidays' and 'festivals' as synonyms throughout her text. Based on our observations, can it not be argued that the choice of cultural event name (holiday or festival) has a certain meaning

for the event creators, that it contains and reflects certain characteristics of the cultural activity that gives us the right to think of them as different?

Another merit of the monographic work is the analysis of the culinary festivals in Bulgaria as part of the global processes of festivalization. The manifestations of neolocalism and gastrolocalism turn out to be a fruitful analytical resource for understanding the new festivity. They are important analytical tools by which the culinary holidays/festivals are vigorously studied. They help to focus on the local, make visible the social actors who use the food to construct local identities and the locality in general, the strategies for reaffirming the culinary symbols in the place, it highlights the dynamics locally – globally. The social construction of locality is convincingly displayed by re-evaluating the local traditions, knowledge, experience through mythologization and argumentation with historical references. The ‘revalorization of the pre-industrial cultural heritage, the manual and home production of food, etc., people’s willingness to escape from the imposed types of national culture and to restore their connection with the local communities’ are the specifics of the Bulgarian neolocalism (p. 88).

The case of Kurtovo Konare Fest is a model for ethnographic research. It has developed in depth and in the dynamics of the processes occurring over time. Kurtovo Konare is a particularly relevant example of heritage construction on the basis of local biocultural resources. What’s also interesting about it is that in the process of valorization of biocultural heritage, the local community led by *Lyuben Karavelov – 1897* Community centre successfully interacts with external social actors with different expertise and knowledge - scientists, non-governmental organisations in the field of culture, citizens’ initiatives, preservation of biological resources, etc. In 2019, Kurtovo Konare is among the winners in an ‘innovative and inspiring initiatives in the sectors of agriculture, forestry and agri-food chains’ contest and one of the 15 nominated ambassadors of innovations in rural areas, which represent Bulgaria with its festival. The process of valorization and development of business initiatives in Kurtovo Konare is ongoing. The economic, ecological, social, cultural effects of valorization are visible. I am myself very interested in this case since 2019 and I have carried out field research on a project for the garden as a place of biocultural diversity. E. Shusharova, the secretary of the Community centre, has participated in a discussion table organized by our team on conservation of local genetic resources, the heritage of Kurtovo Konare has been presented in our exhibition *‘The Garden – Times and Spaces’* in the Regional Ethnographic Museum – Plovdiv, etc.

In this case, the inadequacy of the term *‘authentic’* could be clearly seen in its use of an original or an exact copy of an original from the past, especially when it refers to living organisms (human or nonhuman). The author herself says: ‘The types of tomato and pepper associated with Kurtovo Konare are unique to me, they have a local character, but they are not exactly authentic’ (p. 123). In that sense it is not possible for those of the 19th century to be authentic by all natural and human laws! I would recommend to tone down/be careful when using ‘authenticity’, ‘authentication’ and related in the above sense. More like, when speaking of reconstructing the local in new contexts for the purpose of economic activity and evolution of the place, I do not consider it appropriate to talk about the construction of an ‘authentic local product’, but a model of social and cultural creation of food product as a local one, whereby innovations are used along with traditions, to show the ‘uniqueness’, the ‘unique qualities’ of the emblematic product.

The organizers of cultural events related to biocultural resources themselves gradually changed their language and instead of talking about ‘authentic’, they started talking about ‘unique’ products.

As a merit of the text, I can outline and emphasize on the opportunities for the food holidays/festivals to become an incentive for new municipal policies based on the agricultural heritage and conservation of biodiversity aimed at sustainable environmental development, in line with the international policies in the last decade.

I would like to particularly highlight the publications raising issues on heritage with the analytical tools of the sociology of technology. This includes the texts on the impact of modernization processes on food production and craft brewing in Bulgaria.

In the ‘*Clean and Safe Food for the Urban Consumer. How did the Yogurt Production Modernize in the 30s - 40s of the Twentieth Century*’ study, E. Stoilova traces the transformation of yogurt production from a domestic to a mass-market product through the development of the concepts for *clean and dirty* in various discourses, the processes of standardization of the urban dairies, the symbolic struggles between the scientific expertise and traditions. The conclusions that the modernization processes change not only the production of this traditional Bulgarian product, but also the thought patterns on how the food preparation expertise is conveyed, are contributing moments.

The ‘Neolocalism, Craft Beer and Anti-McDonaldization’ study examines the evolution of craft brewing in Bulgaria as an innovative social and economic model, as a practice directed against global production and consumption, part of the neolocal policies related to regional development and use of local resources. The development and establishment of new kinds of market relations between producer and consumer is presented with arguments.

In the ‘Craft Beer Culture and Creative Industries in Plovdiv, Bulgaria’ article, published in the ‘Papers in Applied Geography’ refereed magazine in the manner of the Kapana Creative District in Plovdiv, the author highlights the role of the creative industries in the formation of local craft beer culture, analyzing the main actors involved in its building and validation, the messages and channels used in its promotion. The question of reconsidering the global trends at local level is discussed again, the role of craft beer in revitalizing the urban environment and branding the place is pointed out.

I greatly appreciate the two texts dedicated to Karakachans – ‘Images of the Mountain in the Visual Narratives of Karakachans’ (a co-authored article with M. Zlatkova) and ‘The Covenant of the Artist’, a chapter of the ‘On the Road. Images, Sounds and Stories’ monograph. They reflect the work on the ‘CU TENDA – History, Images and Sounds in Motion (The Living Memory of Southeast Europe)’ international project co-financed by the EU’s ‘Creative Europe’ program. The publications contribute to the research of culture and heritage of this community through the use of new research tools specific to the anthropology of the visual. The mechanisms and the manner of inscribing the collective memory into the individual one, the backbones of memory in which the Karakachans’ significant images of mountain, the moments of everyday life and the holidays are stored, have been examined through an analysis of the visualization of the verbal narrative: in one case – by the physical performance of the members of a family, and in the second case – through the paintings of the artist Nikola Zarov. The text about the artist of Karakachan descent cogently represents the importance of art as a means of passing on and interpreting heritage.

In conclusion

The research conducted by Elitsa Stoilova, Assistant Professor, PhD, and used to participate in the competition for taking the academic position of an 'Associate Professor', has been published in peer-reviewed and refereed international and national editions. The reference to the explored quotations from her research portfolio shows that she is a recognizable scientist.

The research results reflected in the candidate's publications represent her personal contribution. The formulated contributions are her personal merit. No plagiarism has been found.

The publications of Elitsa Stoilova, Assistant Professor, Ph.D., reveal depth and analytics, use of current methods and theories in studying the cultural phenomena, development of the new issues involved and improving the knowledge through interdisciplinary approaches. There is an original scientific contribution in her works in the field of food anthropology, history of technology, the research of intangible cultural heritage in modern times.

E. Stoilova has a good teaching experience and she actively participates in the training of specialists.

The documents and materials submitted by the candidate meet all the requirements of the Law on career opportunities for academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations on the implementation of the Law on career opportunities for academic staff and the respective rules of procedure of the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv.

The results achieved by E. Stoilova in the teaching and research activities fully comply with the specific requirements of the Faculty of Philosophy and History, adopted in connection with the rules of procedure on the implementation of the Law on career opportunities for academic staff of the University of Plovdiv.

Based on the above, I give my positive assessment and I suggest that the scientific jury draft a proposal to the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Philosophy and History to choose Elitsa Rumenoova Stoilova, Assistant Professor, PhD for the academic position of an 'Associate Professor' at the *Paisiy Hilendarski* University of Plovdiv in the occupational strand: 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Cultural Anthropology – Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Policies).

26.09.2021

Opinion drawn up by:
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