

REVIEW

By Prof. Nikolay Nenov, PhD, Rousse Regional Museum of History

Concerning a competition for the position of Associate Professor in higher education domain 3. Social, Business and Law Science; professional heading 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences (Cultural Anthropology – Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Policies) at the Ethnology Department of the Faculty of History and Philosophy, promulgated by Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the State Gazette, issue 40 of 14.05.2021

The only applicant for the competition is Senior Assistant Elitsa Rumenova Stoilova, PhD, from the University of Plovdiv. She has filed in all documents as required under the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its Implementation Regulations and the ADASRB Implementation Rules in Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. Doctor E. Stoilova participates in the competition with one monograph, two studies, six articles and a chapter in a collective monograph. The publications and citations she has submitted meet the minimal national standards and the additional requirements of the University of Plovdiv regarding the position of Associate Professor.

Elitsa Stoilova has completed the bachelor programs in Ethnology and Sociology at the University of Plovdiv, followed by a course in Cultural Studies at Lumiere University Lyon 2; then she graduated from the master's program in Research and Innovation Management in Plovdiv.

She is a doctoral student at the University of Plovdiv and Eindhoven Technical University in the Netherlands, and was awarded a PhD degree after having successfully defended her dissertation 'The Bulgarian Yoghurt: Production and Authenticity Export'. Her first job was an Assistant Professor at the University of Plovdiv, and since 2016 she has been Senior Assistant Professor there. Her research interests embrace cultural heritage, cultural policy, institutions, food and eating. She has written a total of 20 articles and studies in Bulgarian and international periodicals. Ms. Stoilova has been team member in 15 applied research projects, and has been a speaker at local and foreign research events. Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Elitsa Stoilova participates in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor with a habilitation paper titled 'Food Celebrations and Festivals: Local Culinary Heritage Valorization' published in 2021 by Paisiy Hilendarski University Press. The paper is 169 pages that include an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography

and an appendix. The monograph is the fruit of a long research work; it is the first Bulgarian research monograph on food-related celebrations and festivals.

Seen as a phenomenon of a new type in the Bulgarian celebration calendar and culture, the festivals and events related to food defined as local reveal a process of constructing local culinary symbols (p. 10). The researcher traces food-related events and festivals as key tools in the valorisation processes concerning food and food technologies represented as authentic and strongly descriptive to a specific region, and tied to the social and economic transformations generating their existence. Elitsa Stoilova finds elements of the traditional town and village fairs and gatherings in the newly-born celebrations, as well as ‘elements of collective celebrations in support to the local identity’ (p. 7). A particularly important element of this theme is the description of the features specific to the Bulgarian context. Consequently, the deep knowledge of the theoretical frameworks of festivalisation and new-localism combines very well with the local examples, giving grounds for a critical analysis of the modern events discussed in the paper.

Elitsa Stoilova proposes a new term, and actually uses it in her work: *gastrolocalism*; it defines the construction processes of a local product locality and authenticity, while the need to have that term is manifested in the course of unveiling the specific features of the processes running behind the newly coined celebrations. ‘The idea is to not simply understand the ways in which culinary festivals are part of the processes of festivalisation, new localism and food authentication; it is just as important to see the part they take in constructing local identity.’ (p. 10). The researcher uses some other new terms in her work, like, for example, in the situation of stage presentations of folklore customs fitting in the category of reconstructions, while she designates them as theatricality and, at the same time, as overacting. I think that such nominative hesitation in designating the object under observation will perplex the readers, as these lexemes are not even synonyms in their use.

The study that has been performed is important on account of the possibility to track the transformations of collective celebration forms and their festivalisation and to reveal the ways food products and culinary forms are constructed into local heritage as some of the local identity building bricks.

The monograph is structured in three chapters. The first chapter covers the food-related festival parameters: their emergence, the presence of a popular local product, calendar connections, themes, relations to inherited forms of folklore celebrations. The review of the

new type of celebrations reveals the researcher's perspective to the processes running in the country and serves as a fundament on which the research can be focused. The second chapter outlines the festivalisation processes and the grounds for the local-global opposition. Cultural pluralism and mobility are essential features of the food-related celebrations, while their capacity to undergo changes pins the researcher's attention. Chapter Three unfolds a row of observations on Kurtovo Konare Fest where the author goes deep into the processes to reveal the changing qualities of the products getting transformed into elements of the local cultural heritage. The focus on a particular case study certainly gives profoundness of the research, as it shows the process development prospect. Nevertheless, I believe that adding more examples would not only expand the scope of this text, but it would just as well give better prospects to the researcher by enabling her to verify her observations in other cultural contexts.

The analysis and summaries step also on systematic field observations the author has performed mainly on the bases of included observation and other field techniques. That way she has had the opportunity to closely follow the moments of constructing local food, to make deconstruction for research analysis purposes, and also to register the active part food takes in the heritage form construction process defined as authentication.

Dr. Elitsa Stoilova describes the transformation progress of the meanings contained in personal and collective identity through the processes of constructing food into part of the local. Keeping a track on the celebration aspect integrated in the food festivals featuring local culinary emblems, the author traces their uses, beginnings and changes, and places her research focus on the transformations that upgrade the elements of the modern celebrations and are related to local development plans and ideas. She writes about manifestations of local cultural forms regarded as heritage that has the potential to become a local community development resource.

Regardless of the insufficient editing of some parts of the text and the errors that seem to reveal hastiness, the author, as a matter of fact, has been through a long process of preparation for this research and has observed her research object for a long period of time, which can only make the research community happy. Elitsa Stoilova's monograph is important not only because it is the first systematic research on this matter in the Bulgarian science; it is also worthy because of the relevant research questions that are raised concerning the nature of this modern cultural phenomenon that open possibilities for future research efforts. The studies and some of the articles Dr. Elitsa Stoilova has submitted for the competition also cover the

issues of festivalisation and new localism processes; some of them discuss matters that are not mentioned in the book. The author is attracted by the craft beer sphere, which is often connected to the local as a brand although it is really not close to food festivals. It is namely this example that reveals Dr. Elitsa Stoilova's leading research interests, unquestionably related to food and eating, but focused also on the local identity and the complex processes leading to its construction and manifestations today.

I will highlight here the research that presents 'the artist's covenant' in a chapter of the collective monograph *On the Road: Images, Sounds and Stories*. This text places the author in the art anthropology field, and presents the possibilities art possesses to be a transmission element, a vehicle to transmit and interpret inherited knowledge. Constructing the past of a specific community by using visual images is certainly a significant act in the processes of its strengthening, and Dr. Elitsa Stoilova's work offers a modern interpretation of that manifestation because it shows the prospects of that knowledge to grow into cultural heritage through the visual narrative created by the artist.

My impressions of all publications of the doctoral student give grounds to say that she truthfully identifies the sources she has used; therefore, no plagiarism elements are noticed. Elitsa Stoilova's research works are topical and contributing, and at the same time contain possibilities for future studies. The manner of performing the research reveals the applicant's personal qualities; moreover, she tries to establish a dialogue with her predecessors in science. All those efforts have yielded commendable results that are her personal contribution beyond any doubt.

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Elitsa Stoilova is a respected specialist in cultural anthropology, and meets the requirements of the existing regulations concerning the academic position of Associate Professor. Her research contributions related to the theoretical interpretation of the modern cultural identity manifestation processes, the quest for heritage forms and expressions of local culture viewed through the specific food festival and celebration structures give me grounds to propose to the respectable Jury members at this competition to support Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Elitsa Stoilova's election for the academic position of Associate Professor in higher education domain 3. Social, Business and Law Science; professional heading 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences (Cultural Anthropology – Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Policies) for the needs of the Ethnology Department of the Faculty of History and Philosophy, under the Act on

Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementation Regulations.

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