

LETTER OF OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivaylo Lyubomirov Vladev,

**Member of the Scientific Jury in a competition
for the academic position of Docent**

**in the Department of Geography, National Institute of Geophysics, Geodesy and
Geography at BAS, in the field of higher education. 4.4. Earth Sciences
(Economic and Social Geography), announced in State Gazette No. 86 of 15
October 2021.**

1. Competition details

The competition for „Associate Professor” was announced in State Gazette No. 86 of 15 October 2021. It was proposed by the Department of Geography and passed through all levels of approval within the NIGG at BAS.

One candidate has applied for the competition: dr Alexandra Lyubenova Ravnachka. In accordance with the requirements of the rule of law and the Implementing Rules of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the NIGG at BAS, I note the legal basis for the procedure.

According to the order of the Director of the NIGG at BAS № 01-265/12. 11. 2021 I am appointed as an external member of the scientific jury. The date of the final meeting of the scientific jury is 17. 02. 2022 r.

2. Details of the applicant

Alexandra Lyubenova Ravnachka was born on 16 December 1977 in the town of. She graduated from the University of Blagoevgrad. Higher education, master's degree, specialty „Geography” graduated in 2001 from Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski”. The educational and scientific degree „Doctor” in Economic and Social Geography was acquired in 2017 in the field of higher education 4. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics in professional field 4.4. „Territorial differences in labour supply and demand in Blagoevgrad region (2001-2011)”.

Since 2003 he has held the academic positions of research assistant III degree (2003-2006), research assistant II degree (2006-2010), assistant professor (2010-2017) and senior assistant (from 2017 to the present moment) in the Department of Geography, Section of Economic and Social Geography. The main activities and responsibilities she has performed are organizing and conducting field research, analyzing and systematizing the results obtained and research problems. She is fluent in English and French. In her public activities, the candidate is a member of the BGD. Has the necessary organisational skills and competences for teamwork in the field and in scientific projects, administration of scientific projects, public relations.

3. Scientific creativity of the candidate

In the announced competition the candidate participates with 22 publications, including 1 monograph, 2 articles in a global database, refereed and indexed publications, 17 publications in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals (5 in a foreign language and 12 in Bulgarian), of

which 7 are publications as a result of presentations at national and international forums. There are also 2 articles included in indicator G-9: a published chapter of a collective monograph. All of them are in the field of the professional field and scientific specialty. Of these, 8 are independent and 14 are co-authored. The data analysis shows that the publications of which Dr. Ravnacka is the sole author account for 36.4% of all publications. Those co-authored were 14, of which 5 were first co-authored, representing 35.7% of publications.

The range of publications is wide from specialized scientific journals such as European Journal of Geography, Problems of Geography, Teaching Geography, Proceedings of the Bulgarian Geographical Society to proceedings of national and international conferences.

An important place in Dr. Ravnacka's publications on the competition is occupied by the monograph „Demographic situation and labour market in Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil region”. It is directly related to her scientific activity. The monograph identifies and analyses the peculiarities of demographic processes in two neighbouring administrative districts through the prism of their impact on the labour market and its functioning. In the five chapters of the monograph, theoretical and methodological aspects, demographic situation, economic environment, labour market and intra-regional peculiarities are explored by applying a geographical and systemic approach. This leads to a precise identification and in-depth analysis of regional demographic processes in territorial and temporal aspects. The performed typology of the municipalities in Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil regions according to the demographic situation and the labour market could be applied as a tool for the development of targeted policies and measures for regional development.

Research on the topic of the competition can be systematized in the following areas: economic-geographic and demographic research, geographical features of the labor market, global problems and approaches to their solution.

There are 10 publications in the thematic area of „Economic Geographical and Demographic Studies” - 8.4, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8, 8.10, 8.12, 8.13, 8.15, 9.1, 9.2. They focus on the study of the demographic and socio-economic development of rural areas in Bulgaria, as well as of municipalities in the mountainous areas of the country. An assessment of the extent and intensity of rural depopulation has been made and the most vulnerable rural areas have been identified. A classification of municipalities in the mountainous areas of Bulgaria according to basic demographic indicators is proposed. The author examines the spatial segregation in the country, identifying the specific characteristics of school segregation and labor integration of Roma in Harman mahalla in the town. The author focuses on the specific characteristics of the Harman community in Plovdiv. A methodology was adapted and tested to measure five indicators of geospatial segregation in the same neighborhood. The applied methodology can be a good basis for the analysis and comparison of these problems for other cities in the country.

There are 7 publications in the thematic area „Geographical features of the labour market” - 8.1, 8.3, 8.9, 8.11, 8.14, 8.16, 8.17. The regional peculiarities in the state and development of the labour market in Blagoevgrad region during the different periods of socio-economic transformation of Bulgaria are analysed. A comparative analysis of the regional labour markets in the South Central and South West planning regions has been carried out. The impact of EU enlargement on the labour market functioning in the two regions is

identified. Some of the publications in this area explore the participation of Roma in the labour market at national and lower territorial level - Roma neighbourhood (Harman mahalla in Plovdiv). On the basis of surveys and expert interviews, the attitude of Roma towards labour activity, types of employment, and reasons hindering their social inclusion in the labour market are revealed.

There are 4 publications in the thematic area „Global Problems and Approaches to Their Solution” - 7.1, 7.2, 8.2, 8.5. It highlights the application of the ecosystem services concept with the testing of an assessment model through GIS-based mapping in the municipality of Karlovo. It can be assumed that the tested model is one of the first at local level in the country. The rest of the publications explore global issues involving diverse transformations of climate, ecosystems, natural resources and human society and the vulnerability of socio-economic systems in the Eastern Balkan Mountains to hazardous natural phenomena and processes.

With a total of 252 points in indicator G (7, 8 and 9), reflecting the candidate's scientific publications, the minimum required points for the academic position of Associate Professor have been achieved.

All of Dr Ravnacka's scientific publications are written in very good language and style. They are distinguished by clear and precise formulation of the problems treated and logically justified conclusions and recommendations. In her research work, the candidate uses a rich literary apparatus with correct citation of relevant sources.

According to the reference provided by Dr. Ravnacka for citations found, according to the minimum scientific metrics, they are 26 (excluding self-citations), which is an indication of scientific interest. With the 71 points collected under indicator D (10, 11 and 12), she fully meets the minimum required points for citations.

4. Research activities

A significant aspect of the candidate's research activity is both his publication activity and his participation in national and international scientific forums and research projects. In general, they correspond to the competition code and direction and prove that Dr. Ravnacka works thoroughly in the respective field.

According to the submitted reference, she has participated in a total of 20 projects funded under various EC programmes at GD Science and Innovation, Horizon 2020, GD REGIO, OP Science, Education for Smart Growth, Research Fund, whose themes are related to socio-economic geography, population and settlements.

The overall scientific creativity of the candidate proves that he/she has a very good knowledge of the subject area in the scientific field of the competition. Having read and analysed the proposed scientific output, I have compared it with the synthesised contribution statement and find that it truly reflects the personal achievements and societal benefits of the candidate's work.

The scientific contributions in the works of Dr. Alexandra Ravnachka can be summarized by key words such as systematization, clarification of concepts, comparative analysis, revealing trends and problems, proposing solutions with practical orientation in the field of economic and social geography. The reference for contributions is real.

In accordance with the Law on Research and Development and the adopted minimum science metrics in the professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences, the candidate meets the relevant minimum requirements with a total of 473 points (out of 400 points).

5. Critical comments and recommendations

I would recommend that in her future work Dr. Alexandra Ravnacka enrich the applied scientific tools and expand the territorial scope of her research; deepen her research activities in the field of the labor market in Bulgaria, scientifically substantiate the other thematic areas in which she works and publish more independent research papers, as well as offer them for printing in refereed and indexed journals. Research in these thematic areas of geography is also important in relation to a new understanding of the formation and implementation of regional policy and regional development in Bulgaria. I recommend the future Associate Professor to orient himself towards the scientific supervision of a PhD student and to focus on the publication of monographs and teaching aids.

6. Conclusion.

Taking into account the observance of all the requirements of the procedure, the scientific and research achievements of the candidate, his competences, skills and potential, which he shows through all his publications and scientific and teaching activities, and also on the basis of my personal impressions, I take the liberty to propose with full conviction to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to vote positively „FOR” the award of the academic title „DOCENT” to Dr. Alexandra Lyubenova Ravnachka in the scientific field of higher education 4. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics, professional field 4.4. Earth Sciences (Economic and Social Geography).

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Prepared the opinion:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivaylo Lyubomirov Vladev)