

REVIEW

By Prof. D.Sc. Teodora Stoycheva Stoeva

Regarding: scientific papers submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor"; 3.2. Psychology; Scientific specialty "Social Psychology" at the University "Prof. Dr. Asst. Zlatarov"-Burgas

The only candidate in the competition is Sonya Yordanova Stefanova, currently an associate professor with a scientific specialty "Tourism-Management Ethics and Psychology in Tourism" at the Faculty of Medicine at the University "Prof. Dr. Asst. Zlatarov"-Burgas. The submitted documents meet the basic requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation.

The participation of Assoc. Prof. Stefanova is a natural continuation of her academic development from 2006 to the present. Her professional biography and overall scientific production show one significant fact - for this period her teaching and research activities have been devoted exclusively to the field of Social Psychology. I note this fact to emphasize that her scientific publications have the character of theoretical-empirical research, relevant to the lecture courses and seminars she conducts. In this sense, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova's university realization proceeds in the spirit of the classical tradition of coverage between the researcher and the teacher. The fact that she acquires professional qualifications in the field of psychotherapy, applied social psychology, which are areas with a practical focus, is also important. She participates in projects related to finding pragmatic management solutions in various fields, in particular in tourism. In this regard, her work is an example of establishing a connection between theory and practice. In this way, she shows that fundamental knowledge has direct practical application and that it is necessary for psychological expertise to participate in the formation of policies in all areas and levels of organization of society.

Biographical information and general characteristics of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Stefanova obtained a bachelor's degree in "Primary School Pedagogy" and a master's degree in "Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy" from Plovdiv University "P. Hilendarski". Her academic career began in 2006 as a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the South-West University "Neofit Rilski"-Blagoevgrad, and since 2017 she has been an associate professor at the Faculty of Medicine at Burgas University "Prof. Dr. Asst. Zlatarov".

Teaching activities

Assoc. Prof. Stefanova began her teaching career in 2006. Her total workload corresponds to the required minimum. She teaches courses in many disciplines, including "Personality Psychology", "Applied Psychology", "Social Psychology", "Social Psychology in Tourism", "Management Business Ethics", "Management Psychology", etc. It is striking that the courses she teaches, in their entirety, reflect a cycle of complementary disciplines in the field of Social and Organizational Psychology.

Assoc. Prof. Stefanova has presented the full list of her published scientific papers for the period 2018-2014 - a period that includes active research and teaching activity. Her scientific publications total 20 for the period, including 1 monograph, 3 textbooks, 16 articles and reports, 10 of which are independent, in 5 and first author, published in international and

Bulgarian journals and collections in our country and abroad. These scientific works are the subject of this review.

The monograph and textbooks are published by established publishing houses such as "Ex-press"-Gabrovo. The articles are published in prestigious Bulgarian and foreign journals such as: "Management and Education", "Bryag"; "Applied psychology: Theory, research and practice". There are publications in Bulgarian, English and Russian.

Overall, the candidate's scientific output is characterized by the relevance of the developed topics and methodological soundness. The style, language, layout, and presentation of the results correspond to the requirements and standards for scientific publications. Her collaboration with other units, as well as her knowledge in fields adjacent to psychology, has allowed for a comprehensive examination of the problems in an interdisciplinary context.

The relevance of the issues to which Assoc. Prof. Stefanova is oriented is proven by the references to her research, which have become the subject of discussion by other researchers. The number of citations of her works in scientific publications - refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases and impact factor, in monographs and collective volumes, is an indicator of the significance of her achievements, recognized by other scientists. References are also available from foreign researchers, which shows that Assoc. Prof. Stefanova has a strong authorial presence in the academic space not only in the Bulgarian, but also in the international academic community.

The candidate's scientific indicators exceed the minimum required points according to the various criteria provided for by the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University.

It is important to note that Assoc. Prof. Stefanova is a participant in a number of scientific forums, both national and those with international participation.

Assoc. Prof. Stefanova is a member of non-governmental organizations such as the Burgas Association for Ecology and Rural Tourism.

Scientific activity

Assoc. Prof. Stefanova's scientific activity is distinguished by its complexity and consistency, relevance, scientific and applied significance of the problems considered. Her scientific and pedagogical interests are oriented almost entirely towards Social Psychology.

In terms of thematic aspect, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova's works are focused on three areas. The first covers the problems of the historical development, present of Social Psychology and its place in the bosom of scientific knowledge. The works presented in this regard provide a good theoretical basis for understanding the principles of research methods and the essence of socio-psychological analysis. The second deals with the problem of personality in psychology, treated in its inseparable connection with the social environment, as a product of social relations and as a subject of public life. The third research area is aimed at examining the socio-psychological aspects of tourism and represents a unifying center of the diversity of problems posed in the field of social and personality psychology. It is here that the candidate's aspiration to deepen research in this area is evident, as the more global topics of attitudes, communication, typology of personality, individual differences find their concrete projection in the problem of consumer attitudes and consumer behavior in tourism. The cornerstone of her scientific research remains

the concepts of "attitudes", "needs", "motivation", key to the social psychology of tourism. Thus, she actively participates in the stream of efforts of many scientists to affirm the status of this area, namely as a psychological one, and as a counterpoint to the socio-economic paradigm that has dominated this area to date. The claims of this new socio-psychological approach to the tourism sector follow from the circumstance indicated by Assoc. Prof. Stefanova that it is a necessary condition for the knowledge and understanding of tourist behavior, as well as for the effective management of tourism activities, thus expanding the perimeter of previous approaches to the tourism sector, finding the intersection of psychology and tourism.

The zenith of her scientific research in this direction is found in her monograph "Consumer Attitudes and Behavior in Choosing a Tourist Destination". The theoretical design is developed towards understanding the leading constructs "attitudes", "needs", "motivation", treated as main factors for consumer behavior in tourism. The theoretical constructs are examined in the necessary completeness and content. In their examination and critical evaluation, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova demonstrates an enviable ability to fill the content of such more abstract concepts with tangible meaning, offering specific and clear explanations of the presented theories. In order to clarify her author's position, she refers to the opinions of scientists with whom she engages in polemics on discussion issues, such as the essence of consumer attitudes and behavior. Thus, in the discourse of divergent thinking, the author summarizes her main assumption that consumer behavior implies the study of individuals, groups and organizations in terms of the selection, purchase and use of goods and services in order to satisfy their needs. Assoc. Prof. Stefanova convincingly defends this thesis, indicating as a starting point the needs associated with a special type of tension, which is a source of consumer activity.

The author conceptualizes the problem of the relationship between attitudes and consumer behavior, relying on classical theories in social psychology - Haider's theory of cognitive balance, Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and Behm's theory of self-perception, reaching modern understandings of the problem in the works of Meyers, Levkova and Prodanov. In this regard, it should be noted that her research takes into account the theoretical and methodological achievements of Bulgarian and foreign scientists. In general, the previous experience in the study of this issue is well presented and integrated, with which the author convinces us that she possesses the skills of both systematic presentation and creative rethinking of the experience of her predecessors, of which she is the successor and follower. In this regard, it should be noted that Assoc. Prof. Stefanova has referred to over 200 sources in Bulgarian, English, Russian and German, related to the names of authoritative and representative scientists in the field. All this is evidence of the scientific representativeness of the theoretical analysis, which convincingly testifies that Assoc. Prof. Stefanova knows the problem both in classical and in modern scientific literature.

Outlining a skeptical field for the possibility of consumer attitudes and behavior being defined only on the basis of general definitive parameters, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova continues her research searches in a broader perspective, related to the symbiosis of cultured, social, personal and psychological factors. Without claiming to be original, it deduces a system of factors influencing consumer attitudes and behavior.

The fundamental thesis of her work is that key elements in the network of relationships that form a mental image of the tourist destination are: motives, attitudes, subjective norm,

perception of control, which thesis becomes the basis of the conceptual model of consumer behavior built by the author. Quite rightly, she sets as a leitmotif the idea that psychology has a special place in tourism, which must be respected and affirmed.

The empirical research she conducted is excellently conceived and correctly implemented, showing that the candidate possesses a high research culture. With regard to the research methodology, it should be noted that the studied constructs - motivation, attitudes, subjective norm, perception of control - have been found to have an appropriate operationalization and corresponding variables. This is an indicator of compliance with the universal principle of correspondence between a theoretical model and an empirical method. The results obtained validate the author's assumptions about the socio-psychological factors that influence consumer behavior in tourism. Complementary methods (correlation, dispersion, factor, cluster analysis) were used to process the data, which allowed for the collection of a considerable amount of information about the measured variables. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the study prove that Assoc. Prof. Stefanova masters the art of meaningful interpretations. Broad generalizations have been made about the role of "attitudes" as a function of the individual's intention. Of particular importance are the conclusions about the applicability and usefulness of the results, which can be considered both in the context of socio-economic processes and socio-psychological ones. In this sense, the evidentiary material can be used as a basis for preparing a systematic marketing strategy for those employed in the tourism business. The author's appeal is for specific actions at the state level, non-governmental organizations and industry associations, as a result of the knowledge of this process and is an attempt to build a bridge between science and practice.

Of particular importance for the educational process are the textbooks prepared by Assoc. Prof. Stefanova, corresponding to the lecture courses she leads. The textbooks presented are an indicator that the disciplines she leads are provided with methodological materials. They have been developed in accordance with the latest scientific achievements and are presented at a modern methodological level.

The textbook "Social Psychology" adequately reflects the achievements and level of modern psychological science, in particular - social psychology. In the presentation, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova relies on the historical wisdom woven into the philosophical teachings of Aristotle and Plato, passing through the classical statements of scientists who have become an emblem of psychological science - such as Kurt Lewin, Freud and Watson. The interpretation of ideas and concepts is deployed in two areas of psychological knowledge: theory and method. This type of thematic deployment is an illustration of the application of the systematic approach to science, treated as a system of knowledge, possessing the ability to create new knowledge. The presentation follows the classical scheme of transition from the presentation of universal to more particular theories and concepts related to Social Psychology.

We can characterize the presented textbook as a textbook chrisomatiuous, insofar as it treats basic problems in the field of Social Psychology related to communication, small groups, and the social role of the individual.

In the textbook "Social Psychology of Tourism", Assoc. Prof. Stefanova analyzes a number of socio-psychological problems of those employed in tourism. New elements of Social Psychology and tourist behavior are included, such as communication styles in the field of tourism. A little-studied area is covered, such as visual psychodiagnostics and its application in

tourism. This textbook addresses an important issue related to the training of personnel in tourism in one of the most delicate areas - ethical relations.

The textbook "Psychology of Personality" provides the accumulation of knowledge, the acquisition of a categorical-conceptual apparatus, stimulates creative thinking and is a source of ideas in this area. I believe that the knowledge in this textbook is complemented by that of the textbook "Social Psychology", where, as a socially oriented psychologist, Assoc. Prof. Stefanova tries to respond to the main challenge facing Social Psychology, namely - to uncover the specific mechanism of the weaving of the individual into the fabric of social reality. Undoubtedly, she has coped with this challenge responsibly and successfully, taking into account the high academic criteria in the creation of a textbook, related to the principles of scientific correctness and methodological soundness. Quite rightly, in the presentation of the research methodology, the emphasis is placed on the ideographic approach, offering a way to know the personality, in depth as a unique integrity, which corresponds to the main thesis in this area about individuality - as unique and unrepeatable.

In the article in English "To be or to have- reward as a motivational attribute" Assoc. Prof. Stefanova makes a reference to the work of E. Fromm "To have or to be". The allusion is deliberately sought in order to emphasize the dilemma of the personality, which E. Fromm describes, exploring the two modes of existence - material possession as the antithesis of the pleasure of creative activity.

Scientific and educational-methodological contributions

In theoretical terms:

1. Scientific knowledge in the field of Social Psychology has been systematized, further developed, and adapted
2. Significant problems of Social Psychology related to the theory, methodology and practice of this field have been developed. Indicative of this is the analysis of the problem of motivation and social attitudes in the tourism sector. The results of this study are a prerequisite for optimizing marketing research in this sector.
3. New knowledge has been accumulated on the treated problems based on the accumulated facts in the many empirical studies. An example of this is the established dependencies regarding the choice of a tourist destination under the influence of information sources and other factors.
4. The research toolkit of Social Psychology has been enriched. An original author's methodology has been constructed, including a survey and interview, as well as an adaptation of a test for studying self-efficacy.
5. New teaching aids in Social Psychology have been created in accordance with modern psychology curricula.
6. Some of its developments give rise to new thematic areas in Bulgarian psychology, such as that of social-psychological analysis in the field of tourism.

In practical terms:

7. A conceptual model for studying consumer behavior is presented

8. The practical knowledge obtained from the results can be used in preparing a typology of tourists and classifying target groups in order to create a marketing strategy in the tourism business.

Conclusion

The theoretical and practical training of Assoc. Prof. Stefanova enables her to face any challenges in her professional activity. She is a well-established teacher with a long teaching experience and rich professional experience.

Assoc. Prof. Stefanova is the author of 1 monograph and 3 independently developed textbooks, as well as a series of lectures in the field of Social Psychology. She successfully organizes and conducts, at a modern methodological level, the assigned activity, an indicator of which is the scientific supervision that she conducts, of numerous master's degree graduates.

The topics of her publications are in accordance with the topics of the announced competition - her scientific and pedagogical activities meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation.

Based on the positive assessment of her teaching and research activities, the scientific significance of her works, and the response they have received in the academic community, I strongly support awarding the academic title of Associate Professor in Social Psychology to Sonya Stefanova.

Reviewer:

Teodora
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