

OPINION

From: Assoc. prof. dr. Veneta Krasteva Petrunova in Department “Public Policies and Social Changes”, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Scientific specialty „Sociology“

Regarding: Competition for the academic position “Associate Professor” at IPS-BAS, scientific specialty „Sociology“, higher education area: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural studies, announced for the needs of “Social Survey Research Center” at IPS-BAS, published in the State Gazette, issue 63/30.07.2021

1. General description of the submitted materials

Only one candidate has submitted documents in the announced competition – chief assist. prof. dr. Petya Ivanova Ilieva-Trichkova. The review of the submitted materials shows that the candidate fulfils the requirements for academic position “associate professor” set by the Act for Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria – PhD degree, more than two years work as chief assistant professor, published monography. In regard to the minimum national requirements, as well those determined in the Regulations of IPS-BAS, it should be stressed that with 832,5 points when required 430, dr. Ilieva-Trichkova significantly exceeds them. In addition, dr. Ilieva-Trichkova presents a list of publications with which she has been applied in a competition for chief assistant professor and for acquiring PhD and it shows that there are no duplicated texts in the current procedure.

Dr. Ilieva-Trichkova presents 17 publications. It is noteworthy that 10 of them are published in top-ranked journals placed in Q1, Q2 and Q3. In addition nine reports from international conferences and participation as researcher in three research projects are presented. The fact that the habilitation monograph is published in an internationally renowned academic publishing house should be highly appreciated.

2. General characteristics of the applicant’s scientific, applied and teaching activity

Focus of the academic biography of dr. Ilieva-Trichkova is the scientific activity, in particular, three aspects specific to the candidate's work should be noted:

- Publication activity in journals with impact factor occupying the first three quartiles according to the indicator CiteScore (13 out of total 23 publications indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Sciences). This is a proof for the high quality of candidate`s work. Few Bulgarian sociologists can boast of so many publications in high impact journals. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there is hardly another young Bulgarian sociologist with such achievement. Quite logically, this activity leads to international recognition, evidences of which are the large number of citations and the high h-index (8);

- Active participation in prestigious scientific forums (58 participations since 2009). This contributes, on one hand, for improving the quality of dr. Ilieva-Trichkova`s work, through the feedback received from scientists from different countries. On the other hand, this is a great opportunity to acquaint the international scientific community with achievements of Bulgarian sociologists;
- Participation in research projects (16 since 2006) most of which international.

Her membership in four organizations (three of which international) promoting research and international cooperation in the field of sociology and social sciences also testifies to Dr. Ilieva-Trichkova's professional activity.

3. Analysis of the applicant`s scientific achievements

Dr. Ilieva-Trichkova's publications presented for the competition outline several thematic fields:

- Higher education and lifelong learning;
- Inequalities – educational and gender;
- Donation in education;
- School to work transition;
- Work-life balance of young people.

In all publications there is a good knowledge and skillful mastery of various analytical approaches and the hypotheses are proved by analysis of empirical information and data from international studies. In her analysis dr. Ilieva-Trichkova applies and interprets significant theoretical concepts such as justice and public good, empowerment, agency, social trust, social embeddedness, etc. In the habilitation monograph candidate`s scientific interests have acquired a complete and thoughtful form and undoubtedly it contributes to a better understanding of the place and role of adult education in contemporary (postmodern) societies. In the list of her scientific contributions dr. Ilieva-Trichkova has systematized his achievements extremely precisely and they correctly correspond to the content of the presented publications. Therefore I will not discuss each one of them separately but will summarize the most significant contributions of the candidate`s work:

First, applying the concept and the disclosure of heuristic potential of capability approach in studying adult education is significant because it gives a broader perspective for analysis of human development and life. By applying social justice perspective, both individual and external factors influencing the abilities and opportunities for realization of people are taken into account. This allows emphasizing the limited legitimate opportunities and the real freedom that people have for achieving desirable outcomes.

Second, through the theoretical concepts used by dr. Ilieva-Trichkova for studying education a different from the generally accepted and imposed as the most significant role of education is revealed – its transformative/empowering role, that has much longer-term effects on people and the development of societies than its acceptance only as a tool for creation of skilled workers for the labour market.

Third contribution is related to the analytical models regarding adult education proposed by dr. Ilieva-Trichkova. In this way main aspects of interactions with institutions, the degree of young people`s agency and factors affecting their freedom and achievements are identified and summarized. These models allow a comparison of adult education in various social and institutional contexts. In addition to the theoretical conceptual models, the candidate discusses important methodological issues related to the empirical studies in the field of education and proposes new methodological instruments for measuring inequalities in adult education and higher education.

A number of significant achievements of dr. Ilieva-Trichkova are related to the topic of inequalities. At first place I would like to point out the analysis of the link between education inequalities and two very important for each society aspects – social trust (between personal, impersonal and institutional) and human development. This connection is argued by analyzing a large amount of empirical information in comparative way. In this regard, I find it important the questions raised by the authors: “justice for whom, justice where, and justice to what” and considering them as main aspects of justice in access and participation in education because they reveal significant inequalities caused by the structure and characteristics of the higher education system. An indisputable achievement in the field of research on educational inequalities is the revealed connection between participation in non-formal adult education and receiving recognition from others.

Dr. Ilieva-Trichkova`s achievements have not only scientific but also practical value because on a solid theoretical base and rich empirical information argued recommendations for improving the educational system in the country are proposed. In particular, recommendations on lifelong learning, on the link between education and business, on reducing educational inequalities. The extensive and in-depth analysis gives grounds dr. Ilieva-Trichkova to provide arguments for the need of more differentiated and nuanced policies in the sphere of adult education. I sincerely hope these suggestions to be taken into account by policy-makers when they propose reforms in our educational system.

Apart from the field of lifelong learning, dr. Ilieva-Trichkova has also contributed to the study of gender differences – when revealing the mechanism by which the education system contributes to regional gender segregation in vocational education, showing the influence of education on work-life balance, as well as in regard to donation in the sphere of education considering it as “other-regarding agency” that fosters the multitude missions of higher education.

4. Contribution of the applicant in collective publications

Most of the applicant`s publications are collective but declaration of share in authorial contribution for all of them are provided. It is clear from them that dr. Ilieva-Trichkova has equal contribution in elaborating the joint texts. The monograph, although collective, has clearly defined authorship (declared also with separation protocol) from which it can be seen that the candidate has wrote more than 100 standard pages on its own, which meet the formal requirements for a monograph and, more importantly, makes it possible to assess dr. Ilieva-

Trichkova`s contributions. All this allows a convincing conclusion to be drawn that all of the contributions listed, including those that I have specifically emphasized, are published both in the chapters of the habilitation monograph prepared by the applicant and her individual works.

5. Reflection of the scientific publications of the applicant in the academic literature

Dr. Ilieva-Trichkova participates in this competition with 29 citations, most of which from foreign authors. It is worth mentioning that 18 citations are in editions and journals indexed in Scopus and/or Web of Science. This is a clear sign for the significant presence of the candidate in the world scientific space reached thanks to her high quality work and the importance of her publications.

6. Recommendations to the applicant

I have one main recommendation to dr. Petya Ilieva-Trichkova that isn`t aimed at her research activity rather it is result of it. Namely, to consider the possibility for teaching activity and scientific mentoring of PhD students because I am convinced that the Bulgarian students can only benefit from the knowledge she can give them, for instance for the different analytical concepts and approaches for studying education, for work with big databases, for processing of empirical information, etc.

7. Personal impressions from the applicant

I have had the opportunity to work with dr. Petya Ilieva-Trichkova in the frame of a big international project. During this time she has been working on her PhD thesis but despite his workload, she showed exceptional professional commitment and conscientiousness in our joint work. Dr. Ilieva-Trichkova works at IPS-BAS (albeit with different names) more than 14 years during which she manage to establish good collegial relationships, to develop her research potential and to achieve impressive scientific results.

Based on my personal impressions for the professional honesty and on the scientific achievements of dr. Ilieva-Trichkova, I firmly believe that she has all the necessary qualities for the academic position “Associate Professor”. I am convinced that she can be a model for the young Bulgarian sociologists how they should work and what to strive for in their academic career. There is no doubt that IPS-BAS can only benefit from a scientist like dr. Ilieva-Trichkova who with her research will not only increase the scientific potential and prestige of the Institute among the world scientific community, but also has the capacity to prepare young sociologists to work at a high academic level.

8. Reasoned and clearly worded conclusion

The quality of the habilitation monograph and of the publications presented in the competition by dr. Ilieva-Trichkova, her scientific achievements, my personal impressions give me categorically grounds to give a positive assessment and to recommend to the members of the Honorable Jury to propose to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology

at BAS chief assistant professor dr. Petya Ivanova Ilieva-Trichkova to be elected for academic position “Associate Professor” in Social Survey Research Center at IPS-BAS.

02.12.2021

Sofia

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