



REVIEW

regarding the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in Professional Field **3.9 Tourism**, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry), under a competition procedure announced by the University of Economics – Varna

1. General Information

Reviewer: **Professor Tanya Dabeva Filipova, PhD**

Field of Higher Education: 3. „Social, Economic and Legal Sciences“

Professional Field: 3.9 „Tourism“, Scientific Specialty: „Economics and Management (Tourism)“, Department: „Economics and Organisation of Tourism“, University of Economics – Varna

Grounds for preparing the review: Order No. **RD 06-103/05.06.2026** of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna appointing the Scientific Jury, and the decision adopted at the first meeting of the Scientific Jury held on 16.07.2026 regarding the election of its Chair and the appointment of reviewers for the competition.

2. Information about the Competition

The competition for the academic position of Associate Professor was announced in the State Gazette, Issue No. 44/14.05.2026, in the field of higher education 3. „Social, Economic and Legal Sciences“, Professional Field 3.9 „Tourism“, scientific specialty „Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry)“, for the needs of the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna.

3. Candidate for the Competition

A single candidate, Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, has submitted a complete set of documents that complies with the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its Implementation (RILDASRB), and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna.

The candidate exceeds the **minimum national requirements** for the academic position of Associate Professor in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,



pursuant to Article 2b, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the LDASRB. She has achieved a total of 988.62 points under indicator groups A + V + G + D, compared with the required minimum of 400 points. The candidate also substantially exceeds the additional quantitative requirements of the University of Economics – Varna, pursuant to Article 2b, paragraph 5 of the LDASRB, having achieved 372.5 points against the required minimum of 170 points.

The submitted documentation demonstrates that the candidate fully meets the requirements of Article 101 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna.

4. Candidate Profile (Personal Characteristics)

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD, was born in Varna. She completed her secondary education at the First Language High School "Hristo Kabakchiev" and obtained a Master's degree in English Philology from St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo in 1995. She continued her education at the University of Economics – Varna, where she obtained a second Master's degree in Tourism in 2012. In 2017, she was awarded the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) after successfully defending her doctoral dissertation entitled "**Market Positioning of a Seaside Tourist Complex as a Gambling Tourism Destination (The Case of the Golden Sands Tourist Complex)**". The candidate has an excellent command of English and German and a good command of Russian.

A significant strength of the candidate's professional profile is the combination of her academic career with extensive practical experience in the tourism industry. Since 2007, she has held the position of Front Office Manager at Astera Hotel Complex, Golden Sands Resort. Her previous professional experience includes managerial positions and work in the hospitality industry in Bulgaria and abroad, as well as experience as an English language teacher and translator.

From 2013 to 2023, Chief Assistant Professor Ilieva served as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Economics and Organisation of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna, while simultaneously teaching at the College of Tourism – Varna, both in specialised tourism-related courses and in English language courses. Since October 2023, she has held the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor in the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna.



Dr Ilieva's research activities focus on contemporary issues in tourism and hospitality. Her main research interests include hospitality, luxury hospitality, digitalisation in the hospitality industry, intercultural communication, communication skills, customer care, service operations, guest interaction, and specialised forms of tourism.

The candidate actively pursues continuing professional development through specialised training in leadership, management, communication, digital marketing, research methodology, and statistical data analysis. She is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria and professional organisations in the field of tourism, and also serves as a reviewer for the international academic publisher MDPI.

The curriculum vitae submitted by the candidate reflects successful academic development, combining teaching activities with substantial practical management experience.

5. Description of the Scholarly Works

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, has submitted 73 publications for participation in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, of which 71 have been accepted for review. Their distribution by type is presented below:

Table 1. Publications of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, submitted for the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor

№	Type of Scientific Publication	Single-authored		Co-authored		Total	
		num ber	pages	num ber	pages	num ber	pages
1.	Monographs	1	236	11	275.9	12	511.9
2.	Scholarly Studies			2	37.5	2	37.5
3.	Research articles	7	61	9	64.51	16	125.51
4.	Conference papers	22	200	17	101.9	39	301.9
5.	Textbooks			2	124.6	2	124.6
6.	Other publications						
	Total:	30	497	41	604.41	71	1101.41

The candidate has submitted a substantial body of publications with a total volume of **1,101** pages. Monographs and studies account for 49.8% of the total volume, and when scientific articles are included, their combined share reaches 61%, indicating the depth and scholarly nature of the candidate's research. Of the 14 monographs and studies submitted, 1 is single-authored and 13 are co-authored, with 2 published in English. Of the scientific articles, 7 are single-authored and 9 are co-authored, with 14 published in English. Of the conference



papers, 22 are single-authored and 17 are co-authored, with 9 published in English. Three of the candidate's publications are indexed in internationally recognised scientific databases – 2 in Scopus and 1 in Web of Science – for which supporting evidence has been provided. Together with the publications in English, this contributes to the candidate's international scholarly visibility.

The candidate's habilitation work, **Ilieva, G. (2026). Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry**. University of Economics – Varna, Science and Economics Publishing House (Prof. Tsani Kalyandzhiev Library), ISBN 978-954-21-1216-7, complies with the requirements of Article 112, paragraph 2 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna. It has been published by a specialised academic publisher, discussed by the primary academic unit – the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism, University of Economics – Varna (Minutes No. 2/29.09.2025), and reviewed by two habilitated academics – Professor Velina Kazandzhieva, PhD, and Professor Vladimir Salov, PhD.

The monograph deserves a high evaluation for the following reasons:

- it is innovative in nature and further develops and extends the theoretical, methodological, and empirical foundations established in the specialised Bulgarian literature;
- through an analysis and synthesis of the leading research areas, it systematises the scientific paradigm of hospitality as a social and economic phenomenon and highlights the role of digitalisation as a strategic transformation that reshapes management practices and the overall market positioning of hospitality organisations;
- two analytical models have been developed and applied to identify the factors influencing the actual implementation of digital technologies and their impact on efficiency, competitiveness, and customer satisfaction. The first model examines the relationships between hoteliers' attitudes towards digitalisation, the barriers hindering its implementation, and the outcomes of adopting digital solutions. The second focuses on consumers by analysing tourists' perceptions of and willingness to use self-service technologies in hospitality establishments;
- the two interrelated models provide a basis for applied research aimed at improving hospitality management, thereby making the monograph relevant not only to the academic community but also to a broader professional audience.



The candidate's remaining publications are numerous and diverse and are closely related to the main research areas corresponding to the profile of the competition.

The scholarly works of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, are characterised by high quality and a strong degree of representativeness. They focus on the analysis and resolution of significant theoretical and practical issues and problems and are written in an appropriate academic and professional style.

On this basis, it can be concluded that, in terms of quantity, structure, and scholarly content, the submitted works fully comply with the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its Implementation (RILDASRB), as well as Article 101, paragraph 3 and Article 112, paragraph 2 of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Occupying Academic Positions at the University of Economics – Varna.

6. Identification of the Candidate's Research Contributions

In the scholarly output of the candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor, significant scientific and applied contributions can be identified and systematised into the following thematic areas:

A. Hospitality, Digital Technologies and Innovations in the Hospitality Industry Scientific and Theoretical Contributions

1. The theoretical foundations of digital transformation in the hospitality industry have been systematised and further developed by substantiating the role of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, and automation as strategic factors for enhancing the competitiveness, service quality, and sustainable development of hospitality enterprises. Publications: 8.1., 17.9., 18.10., 61.22., 75.36.

2. The interrelationships between technological innovations, organisational changes, sustainable development, and the transformation of business models in the hospitality industry have been identified, thereby enriching the conceptual framework for the development of the contemporary hospitality business and refining the approaches used for their investigation. Publications: 8.1., 17.9., 31.8., 61.22., 66.27., 73.34.

Scientific and Applied Contributions

1. Models and practical solutions have been developed for the implementation of digital technologies, self-service technologies, robotic systems, and artificial intelligence in



hospitality enterprises, aimed at optimising business processes and improving the quality of tourism services. Publications: 8.1., 17.9., 18.10., 61.22., 75.36.

2. Applicable management solutions for organisational restructuring through outsourcing have been proposed, together with guidelines for integrating sustainable and socially responsible practices into the management of hospitality enterprises. Publications: 31.8., 66.27., 67.28., 68.29., 73.34.

B. Tourist Destination Management and Sustainable Tourism Development

Scientific and Theoretical Contributions

1. The theoretical foundations of tourist destination management have been further developed by expanding the concepts of competitiveness, strategic management, and sustainable development, and by substantiating an integrated approach to the management of tourism resources and stakeholders. Publications: 12.4., 13.5., 14.6., 15.7., 16.8., 21.13., 22.14., 45.6., 51.12.

2. Scientific knowledge of the factors determining the sustainable development and competitiveness of tourist destinations has been enriched through the analysis of tourism resources, the quality of tourism supply, destination image, and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Publications: 12.4., 13.5., 15.7., 16.8., 21.13., 22.14., 45.6., 47.8., 50.11.

Scientific and Applied Contributions

1. Methodological solutions, strategic documents, and programme frameworks for sustainable tourism development have been developed and practically implemented at national, regional, and local levels. Publications: 12.4., 14.6., 15.7., 16.8., 21.13., 22.14.

2. Models for the management and monitoring of tourist flows have been proposed, aimed at enhancing the sustainability and competitiveness of tourist destinations. Publications: 12.4., 13.5., 45.6., 47.8., 50.11., 51.12.

C. Marketing, Consumer Behaviour and Digital Communications in Tourism

Scientific and Theoretical Contributions

1. The theoretical foundations of tourism marketing have been further developed by systematising the concepts of digital communications, social media, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), online ratings, and influencer marketing as factors shaping consumer behaviour. Publications: 26.3., 27.4., 29.6., 53.14., 71.32.



2. Scientific knowledge of the factors determining tourist behaviour, satisfaction, customer experience, and the marketing positioning of tourism products and destinations has been enriched, while the approaches to their empirical investigation have been further refined. Publications: 19.11., 28.5., 30.7., 52.13., 54.15., 56.17., 57.18., 62.23., 71.32.

Scientific and Applied Contributions

1. Practical models and recommendations have been developed for the use of digital marketing tools in building competitive marketing strategies for tourism enterprises and destinations. Publications: 26.3., 27.4., 29.6., 53.14., 56.17., 62.23., 71.32.

2. Guidelines have been formulated for improving the quality of tourism services by adapting tourism products to the needs and expectations of different consumer segments. Publications: 19.11., 28.5., 30.7., 57.18.

D. Contemporary Forms of Tourism and the Development of Specialised Tourism Products

Scientific and Theoretical Contributions

1. The concepts of management and market positioning of specialised forms of tourism have been further developed by expanding the theoretical framework for gambling, wine, cultural, historical and archaeological, sports, MICE, and nature-based tourism, and by refining the methodological approaches to their investigation. Publications: 9.1., 10.2., 20.12., 24.1., 25.2., 32.9., 40.1., 41.2., 48.9., 49.10., 52.13., 54.15., 59.20., 65.26., 76.37.

2. Scientific knowledge of the prerequisites for the development and competitiveness of specialised tourism products has been enriched through the analysis of tourism resources, market demand, and opportunities for integrating natural and cultural heritage. Publications: 10.2., 24.1., 25.2., 40.1., 52.13., 54.15., 55.16., 74.35.

Scientific and Applied Contributions

1. Models and practical solutions have been proposed for the development, diversification, and market positioning of specialised tourism products as a means of enhancing the competitiveness of tourist destinations. Publications: 9.1., 10.2., 20.12., 24.1., 25.2., 40.1., 41.2., 48.9., 65.26.

2. Guidelines have been formulated for the effective utilisation of natural, cultural, and historical heritage in the development of tourism products with high added value and sustainable market positioning. Publications: 10.2., 52.13., 54.15., 55.16., 74.35.



These contributions provide a basis for enhancing the visibility of the candidate's scholarly works. Chief Assistant Professor Ilieva has reported and provided supporting evidence for 32 citations, of which 10 are indexed in Scopus. According to her overall bibliometric profile, her Scopus h-index is 1, with 145 citations, while her Google Scholar h-index is 5, with an i10-index of 4 and 383 citations.

7. Participation in Research Projects and Scientific Forums

The candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor has participated in the implementation of 14 scientific research, applied research, and expert projects funded by the Ministry of Tourism, the University of Economics – Varna, the municipalities of Varna, Nessebar, and Momchilgrad, European programmes (Regional Development, Environment, and Interreg V-A Romania–Bulgaria), and the Bulgarian National Science Fund. Two of the projects (2025–2027) are currently ongoing. Among the results achieved are the development of tourist routes and marketing plans for tourism products, a strategy for nature-based tourism and tourist flow management in Strandzha Nature Park, as well as methodologies for studying intercultural competence and customer experience, among others. The results of some of the completed projects have been summarised and disseminated through 9 published monographs, demonstrating the successful integration of the candidate's research and expert activities.

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, has presented papers at more than 30 scientific conferences hosted by leading educational institutions in Bulgaria and abroad.

8. Teaching Activities

Chief Assistant Professor Ilieva has been a part-time lecturer since 2013 and a full-time faculty member since October 2023. According to the submitted documentation, during the last two academic years – 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 – she has completed a total of 907 contact teaching hours with Professional Bachelor's and Bachelor's degree students.

Dr Ilieva's teaching activities cover a broad range of courses in the fields of tourism and hospitality. At different stages of her academic career, she has delivered lectures and seminars in Hospitality, Hotel Service Operations, Service Management in Tourism, Luxury Hospitality, Hospitality and Restaurant Management, Gambling Tourism, Economics of the Tourism Enterprise, Tourism Management, as well as English language courses. Her accumulated teaching experience includes teaching students at the Professional Bachelor's, Bachelor's, and



Master's degree levels, both at the College of Tourism – Varna and the University of Economics – Varna.

The candidate is a co-author of five course syllabi for the following courses: Hospitality, Hotel Service Operations, Luxury Hospitality, Practical Training at a Partner Establishment – Hotel, and Gambling Tourism.

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva's work with students includes supervising student teams participating in the Student Scientific Session at the College of Tourism – Varna, supervising Bachelor's and Master's theses at the University of Economics – Varna, and serving as an academic mentor under Project BG05SFPR001-3.002-0001 "From Higher Education to Employment".

The candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor has completed three Erasmus+ teaching mobilities at universities in Slovenia, Italy, and Poland. She is also a co-author of two teaching aids designed to support the linguistic preparation of students.

Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva has extensive teaching experience and strong pedagogical skills. The declared areas of her teaching activities correspond to the specific profile of the announced competition.

9. Plagiarism

No plagiarism, use of incorrect data and/or improper referencing of other authors' scholarly works has been established in accordance with the legally prescribed procedure in the candidate's scientific publications submitted for review.

10. Critical Comments and Questions to the Candidate

I have no critical comments regarding the teaching and research activities of Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD. I recommend that the candidate focus her future research on the current challenges and opportunities for the development of the hospitality industry at the national level.

11. Conclusion

The findings presented in this review demonstrate that the application of the sole candidate for the academic position of Associate Professor fully complies with the regulatory requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its Implementation (RILDASRB), and the additional requirements of the University of Economics – Varna.



I have known Chief Assistant Professor Galina Ilieva, PhD, first as my student in the Master's degree programme and subsequently as a doctoral student in the Department of Economics and Organisation of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna. She is a knowledgeable, responsible, and competent lecturer and researcher who demonstrates a high level of professionalism and significant scholarly achievements.

Therefore, I give a **positive evaluation** of the candidate's activities and achievements in relation to the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor. I confidently vote **"IN FAVOUR"** of Chief Assistant Professor **GALINA PENEVA ILIEVA, PhD**, being elected to the academic position of Associate Professor in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.9 Tourism, scientific specialty Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hospitality Industry), in the Department of Tourism, College of Tourism – Varna, University of Economics – Varna.

Varna,
03.08.2026

Reviewer:

(Professor Tanya Dabeva, PhD)

Заличена информация съгласно
ЗЗЛД и регламент (ЕС) 2016/ 679

**REVIEW**

regarding a competition for the academic position of **“Associate Professor”** in the professional field 3.9. **“Tourism”**, scientific specialty **“Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hotel Industry)”**, according to a procedure announced by the University of Economics – Varna

1. General information

Reviewed by: Prof. Tanya Petrova Parusheva, Dr.Sc.

Field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”

Professional field 3.8. “Economics”

Scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

Department of “Economics of tourism”

University of National and World Economy, Sofia

Grounds for preparing the review: order of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna No. **RD 06-103/05.06.2026** on the appointment of a Scientific Jury and decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury of **16.07.2026** on the election of a chairman and appointment of reviewers for the competition.

2. Information about the competition

The competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” is announced in the field of higher education 3. “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”, in the professional field 3.9. **“Tourism”, scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hotel Industry)”** for the needs of the Department of “Tourism” at the College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna (UE – Varna) in the **State Gazette, issue 44/14.05.2026.**

3. Candidate in the competition

The candidate in the competition – **Chief Assistant Professor Galina Peneva Ilieva, PhD** has deposited a set of documents that is in accordance with the LDASRB RILDASRB, and RDAS at the University of Varna.

She convincingly exceeds the fulfillment of the **minimum national requirements** for the academic position of “associate professor” in the field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences” under Art. 2b, para. 2 and 3 of the Law on Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Republic of Bulgaria. She achieved 988.62 points in groups of indicators A+B+D+E, with a required 400 points.

The candidate in the competition for associate professor also meets the **additional quantitative requirements** of the University of Varna on the basis of Art. 2b, para. 5 of the Law on the State Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria. She scored 372.5 points, with a minimum threshold of 170 points. The candidate meets **the requirements in Art. 101** of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff (RDAS) at the University of Varna:

1. She has obtained the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”.
2. For more than two years she has held the academic position of “Chief Assistant”, Doctor at the College of Tourism, Varna and the University of Tourism – Varna.
3. She has proven achievements in her field.

4. Candidate data (personal characteristics)

Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Peneva Ilieva is **the only candidate** in the competition. She graduated with a Master’s degree in **English Philology** from the University of Veliko Tarnovo “St. Cyril and Methodius” (1995). She continued her studies with a Master’s degree in **Tourism** at the University of Economics, Varna (2012). She defended her dissertation on the topic: “Market positioning of a sea tourist complex as a destination for gambling tourism (on the example of the Golden Sands tourist complex)” with the scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Stoyan Marinov and obtained the **Doctor’s degree** (2017). She has excellent English and German languages skills, and a good level of Russian language.

Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Ilieva began her professional development as an English translator, continued working as an English teacher (1997). She has **extensive experience in tourism practice**. She successively held the positions of receptionist and assistant manager in hotels “Obzor”, “Perunika”, “Air-Hotel Wartburg” and “Barcelona” Bed & Breakfast (1998 – 2007). From 06.09.2007 to the present she is a **front office manager** in “Astera I”, Golden Sands. She continues to work as a part-time English teacher in the Department of “Western European Languages” at the University of Tourism – Varna and the College of Tourism, Varna; part-time teacher, PhD in the Department of “Tourism” at the College of Tourism, Varna and in the Department of “Economics and Organization of Tourism” at the University of Tourism – Varna. From 01.10.2023 to the present, she is a **chief assistant professor, PhD** in the Department of Tourism at the College of Tourism, Varna.

Her **research interests** include Hospitality, Luxury Hospitality, Digitalization in Hospitality, Intercultural Communication, Communication Skills, Customer Care, Service Technology, Guest Interaction, and Specialized Tourism.

The candidate for associate professor has participated in numerous **trainings**. They were organized and conducted by Asser International Ltd., Varna Free University, University of Economics – Varna and Varna Chamber of

Tourism. The topics are as follows: Building trust, motivation and communication, Conflict management, Leadership and management, Emotional intelligence and flexibility, Presentation skills, Digital marketing and development of digital competence of personnel from the tourism industry, Working with specialized software for statistical processing and data analysis (SPSS), Multimedia presentations and working with software for interactive whiteboards, Techniques for writing scientific and research papers, Marketing in tourism with training modules: Marketing analysis, Consumer behavior, Market segmentation, Brand and product quality, Price of a hotel product, Distribution channels, Communication mix and Relationship marketing.

5. Description of scientific works

Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Ilieva participated in the competition for associate professor with **73 publications**. The scientific production proposed for review includes:

- 1 published independent monograph – habilitation work;
- 1 published independent monograph based on a defended dissertation work for the award of the educational and scientific degree “doctor”;
- 14 monographs and studies – in co-authorship;
- 16 scientific articles – 7 independent and 9 in co-authorship; 14 in English;
- 39 scientific reports – 22 independent and 17 in co-authorship; 10 in English and 2 in Russian;
- 2 teaching aids – in co-authorship.

The candidate impresses with her publication activity and the high quality of her scientific works. All publications for participation in the competition for associate professor have a total volume of 1391.41 pages. She has 3 (three) publications referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information – 2 in Scopus and 1 in Web of Science, for which evidence has been provided. 88 (eighty-eight) of the publications are in publications included in the National Reference List of Contemporary Bulgarian Scientific Publications with Scientific Review, maintained by the National Center for Information and Documentation (NCID). Publications on the dissertation are not subject to review.

The publications presented by Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Ilieva are of high quality from a linguistic and stylistic point of view. In terms of quantity, structure and content, they fully comply with the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as Art. 101, item 3 and Art. 112, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the Varna University of Economics.

5.1. Evaluation of the monograph

The monographic work *Ilieva, G. (2026) Digital Transformations in Hotel Management, Publishing House "Science and Economics" – University of Varna, (Library Prof. Tsani Kalyandzhiev) ISBN 978-954-21-1216-7* deserves high praise. It meets the requirements of Art. 112, para. 2 of the RDAS of University of Varna. It was published in a specialized scientific publication "Science and Economics". It was discussed in the primary unit – Department of "Tourism" at the College of Tourism, Varna (Protocol No. 2/29.09.2025). It was reviewed by two habilitated persons – Prof. Dr. Velina Kazandzhieva and Prof. Dr. Vladimir Salov. The monographic work solves a significant scientific and scientifically applied problem at a high modern level.

The monograph **aims** to explore how digital technologies are changing management models and customer behavior in the sector, **defending the thesis** that digitalization is a strategic resource for creating value for both the hotel enterprise and the end user.

The first chapter examines the evolution of concepts for the hotel industry. The hotel product is analyzed in the tourism system. The features and trends of tourist demand for the hotel product are highlighted. Modern business models in the hotel industry are analyzed.

In the second chapter, a retrospective analysis of the application of information technologies in tourism and hospitality is carried out. Digitalization and the hotel business model are examined. Emphasis is placed on digitalization and cybersecurity in the hotel industry.

The third chapter presents the conceptual framework for studying digitalization in the hotel industry. A model for studying hoteliers' attitudes towards digitalization and a model for studying tourists' attitudes towards digitalization in the hotel industry are successively presented.

The fourth chapter devotes special attention to the method for collecting empirical data and the characteristics of the sample. The results of the survey are presented and the attitudes towards digitalization of the hotel business model are analyzed. The hypotheses are tested and the results are interpreted.

In the fifth chapter, the research interest is focused on the method of collecting empirical data and the characteristics of the sample. The results of the survey and the analysis of consumer attitudes are presented. The hypotheses are tested and the results are interpreted.

The findings show that the attitudes of managers towards the implementation of digitalization are significantly positive. In contrast, tourists demonstrate a more cautious attitude towards digital technologies, preferring human service in situations related to personal attention, interaction and problem solving.

The monographic work complements the theoretical and practical knowledge in the specialized tourism literature. The work is also valuable for interested circles in the tourism business.

6. Identification of the contributions in the candidate's research work

The creative output of the candidate for associate professor clearly highlights significant contributions in **four main thematic areas**. They can be summarized as follows:

I. Hospitality, digital technologies and innovations in the hotel industry

A. Scientific and theoretical contributions

1. The theory of digital transformation in the hotel industry has been upgraded through systematization, critical analysis and formation of concepts, models and approaches related to the implementation of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, robotic systems, automation and intelligent solutions in the management and servicing of hotel enterprises.

Publications: 8.1., 17.9., 18.10., 61.22., 75.36.

B. Contributions of a scientific and methodological nature

1. Developed and tested author's conceptual and research models for analyzing the digital transformation in the hospitality industry. Developed a methodology for assessing the possibilities for organizational restructuring and adaptation of hospitality enterprises through the implementation of outsourcing.

Publications: 8.1., 17.9., 8.1., 17.9., 18.10., 61.22., 67.28., 68.29.

C. Scientific and applied contributions

1. Pragmatic recommendations for the implementation of digital technologies, robotic systems, artificial intelligence and self-service technologies in hotel enterprises have been formulated. Guidelines for the sustainable development of hotel enterprises through the integration of socially responsible practices have been systematized.

Publications: 8.1., 17.9., 18.10., 61.22., 75.36., 31.8., 66.27.

II. Tourism destination management and sustainable tourism development

A. Scientific and theoretical contributions

1. The theory of tourism destination management has been enriched through models and approaches regarding its competitiveness, strategic management and sustainable development. The scientific knowledge regarding sustainable tourism development has been enriched.

Publications: 13.5., 14.6., 15.7., 16.8., 21.13., 22.14., 45.6.

B. Contributions of a scientific and methodological nature

1. Methods for developing strategies for sustainable tourism development have been improved and tested. A methodology for managing and monitoring the tourist flow in protected areas has been developed.

Publications: 14.6., 15.7., 16.8., 21.13., 22.14., 12.4., 51.12.

C. Scientific and applied contributions

1. Strategic documents and program frameworks for the development of sustainable tourism have been developed, implemented in the practice of the Ministry of Tourism, the municipalities of Varna, Nessebar and Strandzha Nature Park.

Publications: 12.4., 14.6., 15.7., 16.8., 21.13., 22.14.

III. Marketing, consumer behavior and digital communications in tourism

A. Scientific and theoretical contributions

1. The theory of tourism marketing has been upgraded by systematizing and further developing concepts related to the influence of digital communications. Scientific knowledge regarding the factors determining tourist behavior has been expanded.

Publications: 26.3., 27.4., 29.6., 53.14., 71.32., 19.11., 28.5., 30.7., 57.18.

B. Contributions of a scientific and methodological nature

1. A methodology for studying the influence of digital marketing tools on tourist behavior has been developed and tested. The methodological toolkit for analyzing consumer behavior has been improved by applying models for assessing satisfaction and customer experience.

Publications: 26.3., 27.4., 29.6., 71.32., 19.11., 28.5., 30.7., 57.18.

C. Scientific and applied contributions

1. Recommendations for the use of digital marketing tools, social media, word-of-mouth communication and influencer marketing are formulated. Guidelines for improving the quality of tourist services are proposed.

Publications: 26.3., 27.4., 29.6., 53.14., 71.32., 19.11., 28.5., 30.7., 57.18.

IV. Modern types of tourism and development of specialized tourist products

A. Scientific and theoretical contributions

1. The theory of specialized types of tourism is enriched by further developing concepts and models regarding the management and market positioning of gambling, wine, cultural, historical and archaeological, sports, MICE and nature-friendly tourism.

Publications: 9.1., 10.2., 20.12., 24.1., 25.2., 32.9., 40.1., 41.2., 48.9.

B. Contributions of a scientific and methodological nature

1. Methods for research and evaluation, and market positioning of specialized tourist products have been improved and tested. The proposed toolkit can be used in the development of new tourist products.

Publications: 9.1., 24.1., 52.13., 54.15., 59.20.

C. Scientific and applied contributions

1. Recommendations have been formulated for the development and market positioning of specialized tourist products, including in the field of gambling, wine, cultural, historical and archaeological, sports, MICE and nature-friendly tourism.

Publications: 9.1., 10.2., 20.12., 24.1., 25.2., 40.1., 41.2., 48.9., 65.26.

Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Ilieva has provided evidence of 32 **citations** to 20 of her publications. There are 10 citations in the world-renowned scientific information database Scopus and 22 in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review in secondary databases.

7. Participation in scientific projects and scientific forums

Chief Asst. Prof., PhD Galina Ilieva has participated as an expert in 14 scientific research and applied projects. Monographs have been published for 9 of them. The candidate for associate professor has participated with reports in 39 scientific conferences in the country and abroad. She is a member of renowned public and scientific organizations, such as the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, the Association for Advertising and Communications in Tourism and the Varna Chamber of Tourism. She is a member of the Council of the College of Tourism.

8. Teaching work

The analysis of the study load report of Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Ilieva shows that she teaches students in full-time, part-time and distance learning. She conducts lectures and seminars with bachelors in the disciplines "Hotel Service Technology", "Hotel Management", "Luxury Hotel Management", "Training Practice in a Base Facility (Hotel)", "Gambling Tourism". Over the last two academic years – 2024/2025 and 2025/2026, she has a total classroom load with bachelors – 907 hours.

The candidate for associate professor has contributed to the creation and updating of the educational documentation of the specialty. She is a co-author of 5 curricula. The 2 teaching aids written in co-authorship for the needs of the educational process have high scientific value.

The work of Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Ilieva with students includes leadership of student teams for participation in the Student Scientific Session, College of Tourism – Varna; scientific supervisor of bachelor's and master's theses at the University of Tourism – Varna and academic mentor on project BG05SFPR001-3.002-0001 "From higher education to employment".

The candidate for associate professor has completed 3 teaching mobilities under the Erasmus + program at universities in Slovenia, Italy, Poland.

Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Ilieva has extensive teaching experience. She has a high level of preparation for the academic position of associate professor. The candidate's academic competence corresponds to the specifics of the competition.

9. Plagiarism

In the scientific publications of the candidate for associate professor submitted for review, there is no plagiarism, use of incorrect data and/or incorrect reference to other people's scientific works proven in accordance with the statutory procedure.

10. Critical comments and questions to the candidate

I have no comments on the teaching and research activities of Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Ilieva. I would recommend that in future

research she focus her attention on publishing in Scopus and Web of Science journals.

11. Conclusion

The candidacy of Chief Assistant Professor, PhD Galina Ilieva for participation in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" complies with the regulatory requirements, according to the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the additional requirements of the University of Varna. She possesses undeniable merits as a teacher and researcher, with proven contributions in the scientific specialty of the competition.

I clearly state my **positive assessment "FOR"** the only participant in the competition for Associate Professor. With full conviction, I vote for **Chief Assistant Professor, PhD GALINA PENEVA ILIEVA** to be elected to the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of **higher education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional direction 3.9. "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism – Digital Transformations in the Hotel Industry)"** in the Department of "Tourism" at the College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna.

Sofia,
03.08.2026

Reviewer:
(Prof. Tanya Parusheva, Dr.Sc.)

Заличена информация съгласно
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