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## Professional qualifications and standards as a policy instrument aimed at improving the competitiveness of the Russian market for tourist industry

To cite this article: V A Zolotovskiy *et al* 2019 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **483** 012071

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# Professional qualifications and standards as a policy instrument aimed at improving the competitiveness of the Russian market for tourist industry

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**Abstract.** The paper discloses the current condition and promising ways of tourism policy aimed at improving the skills of tourist enterprises personnel and enhancing the overall competitiveness of the Russian market for tourist services. The study has defined the goals and methods of the government policy as to improving the skills of tourist enterprises, identified the teleological content of the professional qualifications and standards as instruments of the tourism policy, formulated the concept of integrated development of the professional training in tourism. The material in this paper can be useful both for training institutions and representatives of the tourism and hotel businesses.

## Introduction

The worldwide growth in tourist arrivals and the increase of the share of tourism in the global economy are attracting growing attention of businesses, international tourism organizations and national tourist administrations. According to UNWTO forecasts that were pronounced at the 19th session of the General Assembly in 2011, by 2030 the annual international tourist arrivals will amount to approximately 1.8 billion [1]. Judging by the world dynamics of tourist arrivals from 2017 and general statistics of inbound and outbound tourism in Russia we can assume that the Russian market will be about 84 million people. Special importance of tourism for the economy is emphasized by the fact that the tourism sector constitutes about 10% of the world GDP and 8.7% of full employment [2]. It is expected that alongside with the expansion of the tourist market, a qualitative change will take place primarily due to improvement of professional skills of tourist enterprises personnel.

**The purpose** of the paper is to describe the current state and promising ways of the policy to improve the skills of tourism enterprises personnel and the general competitiveness of the Russian market for tourist services. The objectives are to determine the goals and methods of the state policy on improving skills of tourist enterprises personnel, to identify the teleological content of the professional requirements and standards in tourism as an instrument of the tourism policy, and to formulate a concept of the integrated development of training in tourism.

## 1. Discussion

The issue of forms, content and methods in tourism education and training has been repeatedly debated in literature. The interest in these questions has been boosted by the special importance of tourism in the global and national economies.

Vanessa A. Amoah and Tom Baum studied the role of the state policy to solve the problem of improving the quality and professionalism in tourism industry through public education activities. As for the institutional aspect of the problem, the authors note that the difficulties of creating a balanced system of interaction between the training and the business come from the multisectoral nature of



tourism and the dynamics of its development. Accordingly continuous monitoring and making the training system more flexible are needed.

Experts note that it is the training policy in tourism that can solve such pressing issues as the strategy for introduction of training in the field of tourism, the availability of training as well as promising directions and factors for the sustainable development of tourism. The experts write that this content of training policy in tourism should be based on the adoption of a special general program (curriculum). At the same time, the development of such a program is only possible through consultations between the educational authorities, educational institutions and representatives of the tourism business [3].

Jameson-Charles Madgerie's study focuses on the concept of relationship management that shapes the training in tourism in the Caribbean. Using the methods of interviewing and social survey, the author puts an emphasis on the issue of compliance of the training system with the needs of employers. Defining the role of the training policy in tourism the author concludes that it is necessary to make the whole system more open and to allow businesses to participate in shaping training programs [4].

The group of experts is particularly interested in the issue of training based on the problem method. Using the data of a long-term research of the training practice the authors reveal the specificity of the training content and describe the characteristics of its application in undergraduate training programs. The authors conclude that using the problem-based training and other active training methods for tourism and hotel clusters can improve the quality of advanced training programs. The main conclusion leads to the idea that the problem method does not only allow to improve the approaches to the forming of professional skills, but also to bring students closer to the tourism business in the region [5].

The paper by Tawanda Makuyana and Melville Saayman deals with the matching of the training system in tourism to the needs of the tourism industry. On making a comprehensive analysis of certified training curricula for tourism and hospitality the authors conclude that there is a lack of coherence between the teaching staff and the employers. A similar situation is in the advanced training system [6].

Iryna Skrypchenko stresses the need to purposefully train specialists for youth tourism. She notes the importance of joined efforts of training institutions of all levels, travel agencies and public organizations that are focused on the practical problems of youth tourism in Ukraine. Exchange of experience between these organizations should contribute to the successful training, retraining and advanced training of specialists in tourism. The author also focuses on the prospects of problem-based learning that involves simulation of problem situations in order to develop students' cognitive and creative activities [7].

## **2. Analysis and Results**

A review of the directions and forms of the state policy on development of skills of tourism companies staff reveals two groups of specific instruments:

- 1 program-and-organizational instruments that set the development priorities, goals and objectives, and mechanism of their achievement;

- 2 framework and recommendatory instruments that set the qualification standards of tourist enterprises personnel as well as the main goals and characteristics of programs of skills development and retraining in the tourism industry.

Before we study the first group of instruments it must be noted that in Russia tourism is determined as a promising sector of the economy. The case is not unique. In many countries the significance of tourism for the economies is estimated very high. In this regard the development of the state policy strategy for tourism is considered very important [3].

The Russian state authorities know that resources themselves are not enough to develop the national tourism market that has been forming in a rather chaotic manner. This conditioned the development of a specific approach to the state regulation in the Russian tourism industry. It led to

adoption of special target and inter-branch state programs in order to ensure a high quality in the tourism industry. We are going to consider their pivotal points.

In 2011 the Russian Government adopted the Federal Target Program “The Development of Domestic and Incoming Tourism in the Russian Federation (2011 – 2018)”. It stipulates for creation of the up-to-date, highly efficient and competitive touristic and recreation complex in Russia. It should provide extensive possibilities to meet the demand from Russian and foreign tourists for various touristic services [8]. The program stipulates for improvement of quality of touristic services.

The goal of the program is to increase the competitiveness of the Russian tourist market so that Russian and foreign tourists could enjoy high-quality services. The goal should be achieved through a series of tasks. One of them is improvement of touristic services. To fulfill the task some measures must be taken to develop the tourism specialists training system. The system should include higher education institutions, secondary professional education institutions, improvement of professional skills and retraining programs. Fulfillment of the second task can be greatly promoted by assigning to market participants the rights to control and supervise over tourist organizations including the quality of services they provide. Self-regulatory organizations also must be supported.

Among the principle drawbacks that undermine the competitiveness of Russia in the international tourist market is a low-quality service in every sector of the tourist industry. It is caused by the lack of high-skilled personnel.

In December 2012 the State Program “Culture and Tourism Development” for 2013 – 2020 [9]. Clause 2.2 formulates the main goal of the program. It is the realization of the strategic role of culture as a psychological and moral basis for the individual and state development, integrity of the Russian society and development of tourism for familiarization of people with the world culture and nature heritage. Among the tasks to reach the goal the program states “Development of quality and availability of the domestic and international touristic services”.

It must be noted that according to the State Program “Culture and Tourism Development” for 2013 – 2020 the lack of high-skilled personnel and the low quality of service in every sector of the tourist industry are among the principle impediments in the development of tourism in Russia. In this regard the authors of the program note that the state regulation is oriented to introduction of the voluntary unified system for accreditation (classification) of guides and guides-interpreters; introduction of professional standards in tourism; and creation of the legislative basis for the development of organizations for tourism specialist accreditation.

In a draft of the program “Development of domestic and incoming tourism for 2019 – 2025” the task of improvement of professional training in tourism is formulated in more detail [10]. The draft states that the whole range of measures of the future program will contribute to improvement of the quality and competitiveness of Russian tourist services in the home and international markets. It will favor business and public initiatives in tourism including creation of small businesses.

The draft of the program sets the task to develop the system of training specialists and qualification improvement to solve the problem of low-quality services in tourism. It is proposed to continue the work on improvement of the methodic basis of the training system in the tourist industry including the technological basis for development of the tourist industry and introduction of innovative technologies of touristic services via the system of qualification improvement in the tourism infrastructure. Beyond the programs activities programs of qualification improvement and professional adaptation should involve the constituents of the Russian Federation and touristic organizations. Their participation can be in organizational forms and co-financing taking into account the real personnel demand in touristic organizations. The realization of the whole range of measures will remove the problem of low-quality service in every sector of the tourist industry due to personnel qualification improvement.

The principal mechanism of solving the task is the established practice of Government orders for preparation of specialists in tourism on the secondary professional education, bachelor and magistracy levels. The training must be carried out strictly in accordance with the federal educational standards.

Besides under conditions of the established tourist market the real ways of the personnel development are in-service qualification improvement and retraining programs. In this regard the program draft specifies the task of personnel qualification improvement – target indices are planned as the percentage of the specialists who have completed courses of development and retraining including the targets for the constituents of the Russian Federation that are realizing investment projects on tourist clusters.

It should be noted that there have occurred considerable changes in the mechanism of development of the training and qualification improvement system for tourism specialists who are the potential staff for solving the problem of quality of touristic services. In particular, the Russian executives have passed from declarations of intent to direct participation in the process – from government orders for tourism education on the bachelor and magistracy levels to creation of the special on-line project of the Federal Agency for Tourism (the educational platform Turobrazovanie) [11]. On the basis of the latter interactive training courses are introduced by means of regional educational organizations. On the modular system basis programs are run for qualification improvement of heads of means of accommodation; hotel reception and accommodation personnel; hotel room stock management personnel; catering service personnel; travel agencies personnel; guides; up-to-date marketing instruments in tourism industry organizations; tourist services management for disabled persons; raising the efficiency of sales in the services field; effective use of modern marketing instruments for attraction of visitors to national parks; innovative approaches to forming museum exhibitions and conducting excursions; revenues management in a hotel; effective communication with visitors of mass event-driven actions.

Besides in the few last years the practice of professional competitions has been introduced – WorldSkills Russia (“Young Professionals” Union) [12]. WorldSkills Russia is a representative of the non-commercial world organization WorldSkills International whose mission is to develop professional qualifications, raising prestige of professionals, and demonstration of importance of high qualification for economic growth and personal success.

In September 2017 the first inter-university championships started in Russia according to the WSR standards. Due to these championships the public interest to the profession is developing and guidelines are set for development of touristic training programs. The competitions are to demonstrate skills in real working conditions on the basis of the expert-community standards that require high professional skills of competitors. The competitions are organized on the modular principle [13].

Before we analyze the second group of instruments it should be noted that after the liberalization of the market in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the mandatory certification of touristic products was abolished as well as accreditation of tourist agencies and tour operators. In the state regulation of the touristic market the optional method became a priority when tourism organizations can choose their staff strategy themselves. In the last few years special documents have been adopted as main guidelines for formation of the structure of tourism organizations in order to improve commercial and non-commercial organizations management. These documents are “qualification guidebooks”, state standards, and professional standards. We are going to review them in more detail.

The basic document is “The Common Qualification Guidebook for Management Positions, Specialists, and Office Workers” [14]. The section “Qualification Characteristics of Tourism Organizations Workers” is designated to solve problems of the regulation of labor relations, providing an efficient system of personnel management in tourism organizations irrespective of their ownership and legal form. The qualification characteristics are applied as normative documents or as a basis for working-out job descriptions with detailed lists of responsibilities taking into account the peculiarities of labor organization and management as well as rights, responsibilities and competency of personnel.

The qualification characteristic for each job has three sections: “Job description” (basic functions), “Must know” (principal requirements as to specific knowledge) and “Qualification requirements” (level of skills necessary for fulfillment of functions). For the purpose of this paper we need to view the qualification requirements of the guidebook.

Section 2 is on the qualification characteristics of personnel of excursion organizations. The higher education degree in tourism or professional training are required for the following positions: heads – director (manager) of an excursion office; specialists – interpreter (in tourism); guide-interpreter (in tourism); guide; excursion organizer. Section 3 sets forth the qualification characteristics of travel agencies personnel. The higher education degree in tourism or professional training are required for the following positions: heads – director (manager) of a travel agency; head of the department of marketing and sales of a tourist agency; specialists – tourism manager (outbound, inbound tourism and domestic tourism); manager of reservations and sales; head of tourist groups; reservation agent; tourism agent (outbound, inbound and domestic tourism). Section 4 sets forth the qualification characteristics of tour operators. The higher educational degree in tourism or professional training are required for the following positions: heads – director (manager) of a tour operator organization; head of the reservation and sales department of a tour operator organization; head of the department of tourist products of a tour operator organization; specialists – manager for forming tourist products; manager for tourist products (outbound, inbound and domestic tourism); manager for exit visas; manager for corporate organizations servicing; adviser on touristic services. Section 5 sets forth the qualification characteristics for hotels personnel. The higher educational degree in tourism or professional training are required for the following positions: heads – director (manager) of a hotel; manager for reception and accommodation.

Professional standards are no less important. Today the standard “Guide” is active in the tourist industry. The professional standard “Specialist on organization and providing tourist services” is also worked out. Both documents contain detailed requirements for tourist organizations personnel. In particular, the professional standard “Guide” determines competencies for travel and transport agencies personnel and for heads of organizations on the basis of functions (accepting and processing orders for excursions; coordination of execution of orders; organization of excursions; working out excursion programs; conducting excursions; determination of the conception and the strategy of an excursion organization development; organization of activities on excursion services; formation and execution of the staff policy of an excursion organization). Besides for each job the professional qualification and work experience are stipulated [15].

Professional skills and educational requirements for jobs in the tourism industry are similarly formulated in the draft of the professional standard “Specialist in organization and delivery of tourist services”. The skills are determined on the basis of the following generalized functions: processing orders for formation of excursion (tourist) groups; subsidiary activities on formation, promotion and selling a tourist product; organization of tourists leisure; working out and use of tourist routes; working out, promotion and selling a tourist product; management and servicing of a tourists group; management of a subdivision in a tourist organization [16].

In spite of the detailed elaboration and immediate necessity of the professional standards for tourism organizations still they are not mandatory. According to the interpretation of the Russian Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Russian Labor Code stipulates for application of the professional standards if activities are connected with compensations, benefits and restrictions or if the application of the standards is demanded by the Labor Code and other legislation of the Russian Federation. Otherwise the standards are optional [17].

The optional character of the professional standards is a temporary measure needed for adaptation of the market to higher professional requirements. The professional standards will become mandatory in 2020 only for state and municipality-owned organizations as well as for public-private organizations [18]. Modern federal educational standards 3++ are being introduced in the higher education system obviously in connection with these plans. These mandatory acts provide educational organizations with more freedom in formulation of the professional competencies. At the same time the authors of the educational standard direct educational organizations toward the requirements of respective professional standards. In particular, the Federal State Educational Standard for tourism bachelor degree directs authors of educational programs toward the “Guide” professional standard.

Such approach allows educational organizations to form their educational programs according to the problem-based learning method (PBL) [5] considering the demand from a regional tourist industry market [19]. In this regard it is necessary to point out that the authors of the professional standards focused on the demand of the market [20]. So, we think that it is the professional standards that must become a guideline for the elaboration and realization of programs of qualification improvement and retraining. Our opinion is supported by the list of the programs of qualification improvement and retraining that are being worked out and realized according to the project “Turobrazovanie” (Tourism Education).

Special state standards that set the requirements for skills in separate organizations (sectors) in tourism are particularly important. Particularly we can mention the state standards requirements to personnel of tour operators and travel agencies, the requirements to the programs of qualification development of guides and accommodation personnel [21, 22, 23, 24]. Besides it must be noted that the special state standards that set the requirements as to the basic and supplementary touristic services and to touristic facilities and territories also hold certain requirements to the personnel skills. The formulation of the important tourism services shows the most important tourism sectors that require the special skills. These are accommodation personnel, catering personnel, excursions personnel, sales of tourism products, promotion and sales of tourism services, services in active, cultural, recreational tourism, and so on. The general analysis of the state standards for tourism services and products and for personnel development programs permits to formulate the important requirements as to the duration of training programs, fields of training, and objectives of personnel development programs [25, 26, 27]. As for the latter, the most important requirements refer to foreign languages competency, knowledge of the legislation, providing security, knowledge of the conditions of providing services in accordance with tourist categories, and so on.

### 3. Conclusion

On the analysis of realization of the policy on qualification improvement and on the general competitiveness of the Russian tourism market improvement we can conclude:

1. The first group of instruments seem important and can solve the problem of qualification improvement of tourism organizations personnel on the strategic level. At the same time the actual system of the higher education that is being transformed to the Standard 3++ can strengthen training programs by the problem-based learning method that is oriented on the local, regional, federal and global problems of development of the tourist industry [28].

2. The second group instruments due to their optional character can formulate the guidelines for market solving of the mentioned problem. Focusing on the recommendations for professional skills using the problem-based learning method in personnel development and retraining we can solve local tactic tasks on raising the quality of tourist organizations activities. The development of the education system with the on-line courses via the “Tourobrazovanie” portal will keep in action the tourism sector.

3. Due to the inter-branch character of tourism we consider the most effective a mixed form of on-line training in the form of the modular system. Particularly prospective we consider forming a system of distant education with a program that is realized as autonomous modules (sub-programs – personnel development programs). Each of them can be devised on the problem-based learning basis [19]. Each module of the program will be oriented on creation of specific skills. Training on the modular system will depend on the demand from customers – the employer or employee of a tourist organization. Some modules of the program can be of a universal character and realized via the “Tourobrazovanie” portal. However, the organizational connection of tourism with a touristic area defines advisability of realization of such training programs in regional educational organizations.

The approach that we propose to develop the State tourist policy as to touristic personnel development and the general competitiveness of the Russian market for touristic services is of a model character. If the similar instruments of the personnel policy are created in other industries, this approach can be adapted to be used in other industries of services and production.

## Acknowledgement

The reported study was funded by RFBR and the government of Volgograd region according to the research project № 18-413-342003.

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