

Tour Guiding as a Factor of Tourism Development Along the Route of the Great Silk Road in Kazakhstan

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Abstract – International tourism is a major branch of the global economy and one of the leading directions of globalization. Under these conditions, the international program “The Economic Belt of the Great Silk Road” proposed by China became an important and timely initiative, bringing together the capabilities of individual participants in the tourist market within the framework of national programs. Kazakhstan’s participation in the program provides an opportunity to use the tourist and recreational potential of the Great Silk Road heritage, to revive historical traditions, objects of material and spiritual culture, to actively participate in economic and cultural exchange, using its geopolitical position. One of the important conditions for successful implementation of the program is the availability of qualified tourist personnel, especially guide-interpreters, guides, mountain guides, etc., directly in contact with tourists. The authors consider the practice of preparing tour guides in Kazakhstan and other countries in the post-Soviet space, analyzing the quality of training, primarily from a security point of view. It justifies the need to improve the existing methodology, taking into account modern international experience and the need for professional tourist personnel to enter the “Economic Belt of the Great Silk Road”. Case Study of positive practice on tour guides training at the al-Farabi Kazakh National University was provided. In particular: excursion-guides for Expo-2017 (2014, 2016), tour guides for working with tourist groups from China (2018), trekking/hiking tour leaders and tourism instructors (together with the Federation of Sports Tourism). Practical recommendations are given on the formation of professional competencies of tourist guides, taking into account the recommendations of the World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations (WFTGA) were given as well.

Keywords – guide, tour guiding, Great Silk Road, excursion, Silk Road Economic Belt, mountain guide.

I. INTRODUCTION

The necessity to prepare tour guides of various profiles in conditions of the development of tourist exchange, both at the country level and between the regions of Kazakhstan, is due to the stable growth of tourist flows. In view of this trend, supported by official statistics [1], in the Concept of Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2023, a separate section is highlighted, dedicated to the quality of training professional tourist personnel [2]. According to the authorized tourism state body – the Committee of Tourism Industry of the Ministry of

Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the country officially registered (2017) only 111 tour guides, guide-interpreters and instructors of tourism [3]. At the same time, the register of the Kazakhstan Tourist Association includes 95 registered excursion guides [4], the Federation of Sport Tourism - at least 20 Senior Tourism Instructors. And their total number is more than 200 people [5]. Even taking into account the discrepancy of official statistical and departmental data, this number of guides will obviously not be enough for the projected tourist flow in inbound and domestic tourism [6].

Another problem is the quality of preparing guides. An analysis of the register of existing guides showed that guides at the age of 50+ are demanded, at which point, they were trained in “Soviet” time [7]. As a mountain guides, more often people are 30-50 years old, who have special mountain training in mountain tourism and alpinism [8].

It is possible to formulate the existing problem as a niche formed on the market of tourist services, which requires taking measures to increase the number of guides and improve the methods of their preparation. The urgency of the task is enhanced by the impossibility of import substitution: as a guide (guide-interpreter), tour guide, and instructor of tourism in Kazakhstan, according to the current legislation, there can only be a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan [9].

II. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The main research idea was to identify discrepancies between the expectations of participants in the program of training guides and employers (tour operators).

Based on the interviews, the authors obtained and analyzed the answers of the participants who were trained under the programs “tour-guide” and “head of mountain hikes” (the basic level of training of instructors of mountain tourism (mountain guides), as well as representatives of tourist firms where they subsequently worked.

Due to the fact that the authors took part in all these activities as developers of work programs and coordinators, the presence of contacts and feedback from alumni allowed the survey to be completed as planned. At the same time, the interview was a logical part of monitoring the quality of graduate training.

A. Survey technique

The questionnaire included questions relating to the assimilation of theoretical knowledge and practical competencies by learner. The list of core competencies was compiled on the basis of the existing «Professional standards on tourism and hospitality of the Republic of Kazakhstan» (2012) for the “guide / guide-interpreter”, “tour guide” and “tourism instructor” [10]. The form of an interview questionnaire is presented in Tables 1, 2. Interview participants (students and employers) were asked to assess whether learner person have professional competencies on a 5-point scale (from 0 to 4 points, where “0” corresponds to the complete absence of one or another competence, “4” – to the presence full competence. Other values – “1”, “2”, “3” show partial ownership of the competence). The interview was attended by 36 graduates of the tour guides courses and 62 graduates of the School of the leaders of mountain hikes (the basic stage of the School of tourism instructors – mountain guides). When calculating the average values, the data were rounded off according to mathematical rules. In addition to filling out the questionnaire according to the described methodology, some comments were admitted to allow additional qualitative assessment of the material. Subsequently, these data were used in the development of practical recommendations for improving the methodology for preparing this category of tourist personnel.

B. Results

As can be seen from the results given below in the tables, the greatest discrepancies are related to the level of proficiency in a foreign language, the calculation of the necessary resources, as well as the presence of special competencies determined by the type of tour.

The organization of professional training of guides in Kazakhstan is envisaged on the basis of secondary specialized educational institutions and is regulated by an appropriate educational standard [11]. The training period takes from 1 to 2 years and includes the study of general educational disciplines, along with professional ones. As well as, special course preparation is possible (with a duration of 200-240 hours). Short-term raising of qualification courses, as a rule, are designed for 60-120 hours, most of which are practical exercises. The theoretical part deals with the methodological methods of working with the tourist/excursion group, ethics, psychology,

history, information processing, culture of speech, museology, etc. The practical part is devoted to the preparation and organization of the tour, working with the group on the route, ensuring safety, using technical tools. A similar approach is currently being implemented in almost all countries, including the CIS countries. At the same time, safety issues remain, traditionally, as the key issues [12, 13].

C. Case Study: Tour Guiding

For example, at al-Farabi Kazakh National University, during for 20 years, the course “Basis of technique and tactics of active types of tourism” is taught, which is the basis for the subsequent training of instructors in active types of tourism (primarily mountain tourism) and mountain

guides. The course includes theoretical and practical classes (including, on a natural relief) during the semester. The logical continuation of the course, which allows to consolidate theoretical knowledge and gain practical skills, is the educational practice in the form of a training trekking in the mountains of the Northern Tien Shan (Fig. 1).

Under the conditions of a two-week autonomous journey, students learn to work with special tourist equipment, develop a menu and daily food ration, plan tactics for overcoming natural obstacles, day transition and the route as a whole, master the technique of movement on various types of relief, the field camp technology, features of orienteering (including using a map and a basic of first aid (including transportation of the “victim”), the leadership of the tourist group, etc.

The training process includes an internship on the base of a tour operator that implements tours with an active kinds of travel along the route. If there are positive feedback from customers and the employer, the candidate is admitted to the final exam. To qualify, student must get a rating of “good” or “excellent.” The decision is accepted by the attestation commission of the authorized body (in Almaty it is Tourism and Foreign Affairs Department of Almaty city), which consists of Senior Instructors – members of the Federation of Sports Tourism.

Such multi-level training allows students to ensure the quality of training and completeness of the development of professional competencies. This fact is especially important because it is directly related to the safety of tourist travel, taking place in autonomous conditions..

Preparation of guides for working with excursion groups has a simpler structure and, as a rule, is designed for a smaller number of classes. Nevertheless, given the role of the tour guide in the formation of a general impression about the tourist resources of the region, about the host country as a whole, this work is no less important and responsible.

The first experience of preparing guides commissioned by third-party organizations at the al-Farabi Kazakh National University was obtained in 2014, when, according to the 200-hour program, 12 guides with basic tourist education were trained by order of the Almaty municipality. Since all of them had a certain experience in tourist excursion work and underwent a preliminary selection, the quality of training for most of the students turned out to be quite high in the end. These findings of the attestation commission were subsequently confirmed by employers. However, so many guides, even if highly qualified, could not meet the existing needs of the tourist market.

Training courses for tour guides for Expo 2017 (2016) were held at the base of the department of recreational geography and tourism at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. Students were recruited from among workers in the tourism sector (travel agencies, teachers, students and undergraduates of universities preparing specialists in the field of tourism).

The training program was designed for 200 training hours. 110 hours were devoted to professional trainings,

including practical exercises on the excursion route (both on foot and on a specially equipped tourist bus). Recently, all 13 students who have completed the courses are current tour guides.

From September 27 to October 10, 2016, the World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations (WFTGA) organized Training Courses in Almaty for Silk Road Heritage guides in who work in countries along the route (72 hours).

The purpose of these courses was to prepare guides who professionally conduct tours in accordance with Generally Accepted International Standards. The selection of students was carried out on a competitive basis among the current tour guides and instructors of tourism.

These were the second courses organized by the WFTGA in the countries located on the Great Silk Way. The first courses were organized in Uzbekistan (Khiva) in 2015. Courses consisted of two modules. The first module was designated as the "Silk Road Heritage Guide", the second one - "Instructor on the training of the Silk Road Heritage Guides". According to the results of the seminar, a part of students which successfully mastered the program and confirmed it at the exam, were awarded by WFTGA Certificates. It should be noted that even with careful selection of a contingent of students, only half of the participants received the Certificates confirming the qualifications of the guides in both areas of training. Generally, this fact says about development of guiding in the country, confirming the validity of the authors' conclusions about the need to change the system and improve the training methodology, especially in the identified "weak points" of learning professional competencies.

In the opinion of listeners with practical work experience who owned, to varying degrees, core competencies according to the Professional standards of the tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the courses were very useful in terms of teaching methods, improving the practical skills of guides, self-assessment and evaluation of professional growth.

In methodical terms, the preparation of guides according to the WFTGA methodology is similar to the training of tour guides in Kazakhstan in many aspects, which is based on the Soviet school of training guides. A distinctive feature is the practice oriented, use of training and gaming techniques. Special attention was paid to the health and safety of tourists on the route.

For listeners-beginners, the WFTGA Program provides 300 hour of training, 240 of them should be practical sightseeing tours on moving transport means (100 hours devoted to practical training in transport and 16 hours for seminars for the development of communication and presentation skills).

Due to the expansion of business ties and the increasing flow of tourists from China, including along the Silk Road routes, in the summer of 2018, on the basis of the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, by the Capital Tourist Association (Astana) were organized training courses for

guides with knowledge of Chinese language (240 hours). Training in these courses also included theoretical and practical parts. Since the course participants were mainly employees who speak Chinese, but are not very familiar with the tourist facilities of the city, during the training. Besides to the method of conducting excursions, considerable attention was paid to studying the tourist facilities of the "Southern Capital" of Kazakhstan – Almaty (Fig. 2) as well as heritage sites of the Great Silk Road of Almaty region (Fig. 3). Graduating on the program of courses allowed the students to become proficient in the following knowledge and skills.

Knowledge of:

- The history of the development of sightseeing activities in Kazakhstan;
- Classification of excursions;
- Sightseeing objects of Kazakhstan;
- Rules for serving tourists on routes;
- Features of the excursions for different groups of the population;
- Methods of conducting various excursions;
- Methods of preparing a new tour;
- Excursion technique.

Skills:

- apply modern methods of conducting excursions for different groups of the population;
- develop an excursion route;
- complete the "guide's portfolio";
- organize a tour;
- conduct a tour;
- to conclude a contract for excursion services;
- to conduct business correspondence;
- choose the most effective form of business activity.

The contingent of listeners was 15 people. All of them have successfully completed training and currently work as employees of tourist companies in the city of Almaty and Almaty region, as well as individual entrepreneurs, providing services of a tourism-excursion nature.

III. DISCUSSION

Describing the general trends in the development of excursion services in Kazakhstan, it should be noted an increase in the number of tourists and the volume of services in both domestic and inbound tourism [14]. The lag in the training of tourist personnel leads to unfair competition in the market. There are tour guides who do not have a formal right to work in this capacity (including from neighboring countries). On the other hand, there is an influx of labor from of related specialties (historians, linguists, culturologists and others). Training of guides in educational institutions, in many cases, replicates outdated approaches, due to the complexity of bureaucratic procedures for changing standards and educational programs. Accordingly, at present in large cities of Kazakhstan there is an increase in commercial proposals for short-term training of professional excursion guides and tour guides, with a duration of 2-3 weeks (20-36 hours). Obviously, with such a compressed training schedule, the quality of education is sharply reduced,

because students do not have time to fully master the declared competencies.

IV. CONCLUSION

Summarizing the results of the research, taking into account the existing practice of preparing guides / tour guides and instructors of tourism / mountain guides in Kazakhstan, as well as the personal experience of the authors in preparing guides, it is possible to draw certain conclusions and make recommendations for improving the quality of training tourist personnel in this category.

In the future, in order to improve the quality of training guides, tour guides and tourism instructors, in accordance with the recommendations of World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations, it is necessary to increase the practical component of training, to pay attention to organizing independent work (drawing up business projects), communicative skills museum tours.

Marketing research of the tourist and excursion services market should be continued, taking into account the trends in tourist flows, primarily along the routes of the Great Silk Road. At the same time take into account the identified discrepancies in terms of the possession of professional competencies between the students' self-assessment and their assessment by the professional tourist community.

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