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–
with nature hand in hand…

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ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: THE CASE OF INTERNATIONAL DOUBLE MASTER DIPLOMA IN TOURISM BETWEEN RUSSIAN AND FRENCH UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract
Northern oriental territories of Russia are characterised by some non exploited high potential of tourism of nature in the specific context of the little territorial development, the needs of diversification of the economic activities at the local level, under the process of regional integration with Asia, the exploitation of mineral ressources, and the global warming. Tourism is considered one of the key economic branch to develop. According to the policy issues of the North-Eastern Federal University of the Repubic of Sakha (Yakutia) to support the economic development, the creation of double diploma programs with the foreign universities is essential due to the need of best practice application and to insufficiency of local competences in this field . The joint master curriculum in tourism and environment built with Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines University of France aims to train the future specialists of touristic development of the territory of Yakutia. The questions of distance learning and TIC as well as the integration of the environment and the nature fixing contents structuring the curriculum constitute the key-points of joint master program. The study was conducted within the scientific project of the Russian science Foundation No. 15-18-20047 "Landscape Ontology: semantics, semiotics, and geographic modeling".

Key words: touristic potential, North, Bologna process, Nature, Natural Heritage

Introduction

Republic Sakha (Yakutia) is situated in the Northeast of Eurasia, taking up a vast territory of over 3 million km². The area is both largest and richest in mineral deposits among the subjects of Russian Federation. Variety of natural landscapes, intact nature, extreme climates, vivid indigenous cultures of the North, as well as large-scale international events of the last decade draw growing number of both Russian and international tourists to Yakutia. Strategy of development of the tourist industry in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) till 2025 lists a number of major problems obstructing the progress of international and domestic tourism in the region. One of them is lack of qualified specialists despite active tourism programs being part of curricula offered by educational institutions of the Republic's capital. The drawbacks they all seem to suffer from are overt theoreticity of courses, lack of first-hand practical experience in the sphere on the part of faculty (and absence of professinal training in some cases), as well as sub-standard quality of facility-based training programs. As part of follow-up on Bologna process the Northeastern Federal university introduced the double diploma Master's program titled „Tourism, cultural heritage and environment". The program is aimed at meeting the urgent need for qualified tourism specialists in the Republic. The much-needed international expertise will be provided via involovement of long-time partners from Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines University of France.

Material and methods

Nowadays tourism is considered on of the most perspective branches of the Republic's economy. Conceptual perspectives and tourism development moves have been determined on governmental level: Strategy of development of the tourist industry in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) till 2025 was established[1] as well as the Concept of creation of a special economic zone of tourist and recreational type in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)[2]. The new law „Of tourist activity in the Repulic of Sakha (Yakutia)" was passed, and the state program „Development of domestic and international tourism on the territory of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) for 2012-2016" is adopted. Tourism development in Yakutia is comparable with tourist development in the North of Canada. "The development of the tourism industry in the north of Canada is followed not only by the increasing flow of tourists and hence creation of new jobs, bigger investments, the growth of household incomes and local government budgets, but also it helps to solve the social problems of the indigenous population[3]".

"Tourism has been considered as a major factor in environmental degradation, although lately the situation has been reversed, to that of harmonizing the gap that previously existed, with greater demand for and interest in nature, local communities and their heritage but also as an attempt to escape from big urban centers. However, there is still a lack of responsibility on the part of tourists, as to the preservation of nature and tourist destinations. This urges a focus on environmental education. Within this perspective tourism should promote environmental knowledge and education, combining information and environmental actions through direct contact and / or experiences related to local natural heritage[4]".

Following the need for qualified specialists by the Republic's economy, the M.K. Ammosov Northeastern federal university came up with several educational programs developed in collaboration with international universities. Introduction of double diploma programs is an effective way of implementing the principles of Bologna process and an important step in establishing a shared educational environment among universities. The primary advantage of such approach is based on the fact that students are able to obtain a single degree program (Bachelor's, Master's or postgraduate) with two diplomas (from two respective universities). The latter provides significant advantages both in terms of further step in education and job placement perspectives. Another important advantage of double diploma programs is student's gradual introduction to international educational environment. With basic professional knowledge and expertise provided by home university as well as language skills enabling students to continue the course abroad, they suffer

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[1] Strategy of development of the tourist industry in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) till 2025 http://old.sakha.gov.ru/node/10821

[2] The concept of creation of a special economic zone of tourist and recreational type in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) http://old.sakha.gov.ru/node/10821

[3] TOTONOVA, Elena. Tourism Planning and Management of Canada's Northern Territories in Indian Journal of Science and Technology, Vol 8(S10), DOI: 10.17485/ijst/2015/v8iS10/84875, December 2015, ISSN (Print): 0974-6846, ISSN (Online): 0974-5645.

[4] PADRÃO, Joana. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy. Vol.5 No.22 September 2014) ISSN 2039-2117 (online) ISSN 2039-9340 (print).

significantly less stress and spend much less time adjusting to new learning environment.

First attempts at implementing the double diploma programs were made in Russia before the Bologna declaration was signed in 2001. From that moment on these programs became the focus of several initiative. TEMPUS began to develop the first project aimed at drawing closer universities from different countries based on comparable programs and degrees. The first double diploma program developed jointly with a French university was introduced in Northeastern federal university in 2007.

The difference in education systems between 5-year system in Russia and Europe's system of degrees (Bachelor's (3 years) + Master's (1/2 years) + Doctoral (3 years)) caused certain problems prior to Russia's transition to level education system. However, after 2010, when Russian universities officially adopted the level system, the problems lingered due to remaining difference in length of study. One of the obvious disadvantages is expanded time period required now for obtaining , a European diploma. Previously European Diploma Supplement (EDS) allowed Russian university specialist program graduates to apply for second year of Master's programs at French universities. It was possible due to European Bachelor's programs being 3 year (4 year in some cases) long while Russian universtiy graduates obtained their diplomas upon completing a 5-year program. This prolonged period was credited as first/second year of European Master's program study whereas now Russian Bachelors are only eligible for first-year application. In spite of the flexibility of French Master's degree system (enabling students to switch programs after the first year of studying) French students obtain their Master's degree only upon completion of the second year. Thus, it takes a Russian Bachelor the whole two years of stydying in France in order to obtain French Master's degree.

As of now there is a considerable number of double diploma programs in Russia. According to the data provided by the Embassy of France, more than 90 joint Russian-French double diploma programs were active in 2011. Only 5 of them were tourism-centered and mostly focused on management.

The term „double diploma program" often refers to all types of university cooperation in the sphere of joint education programs. The certificate granted upon completion in these cases can be: 1) joint diploma from two or more universities recognized by partnering nations; 2) diploma from an abroad university as a supplement to national diploma; 3) national diploma that lists supplementary courses (as a supplementary certificate having no force or effects)[5]. Theoretical courses are usually provided in Russia with study placement taking place in partner university.

Northeastern federal university and Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines University of France joint double diploma program was built on the principle of two state diplomas and developed in accordance with the necessity of tourism development in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). First year of study takes place in Russa (Northeastern federal university); second year in France (Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines University). Distant learning technologies are implemented as well as visits from partnering university professors. The program is built on the principle of complementarity with each university offering region-specific courses absent from the curriculum of partnering university.

Double diplomas have become a key index of universities' innovative activity in Russia. The number of joint double diploma programs keeps growing every year. In

[5] http://edurt.ru/index.php?link=225&lang=1&type=1

Europe too, according to AERES (Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher education) data, the availability of such programs is an indication of international attractibility. At the same time the program holders often have to face a number of problems mostly caused by the difference of basic principles in respective educational systems. For instance, the French ECTS credit system differs from that employed by Russian education system. One ECTS credit equals to 25-30 hours of work[6]. In Russian system one credit equals 36 hours with half of it given to independent work. Even starker difference is the absence of State Educational Standards in France.

In Russian system the whole process of education is built on an academic curriculum suggested by the Federal State Educational Standard. Academic curriculum lists all the study hours, competences formed by each course, number of credits distributed among the types of academic activity (practical training of all types, state final certification, research activity), supporting departments, hours given to administering department for provision of various academic activities. Moreover, a Standard precisely states the requirements for material security and methodological support of a given program – something that is a university's sole responsibility in France. French universities are not presented with requirements which program supporting faculty has to meet. Academic Master's programs are divided into research and professional ones (the equivalent of academic and applied Master's programs in Russia). Graduates of research programs may continue their study in Doctoral programs, while graduates of professional programs seek employment upon completion. That is why a significant number of working professionals from corresponding spheres of potential employment are involoved in teaching in order to maintain the practice-oriented approach. However, no precise percentage ratio of professional lecturers with a degree to invited specialists is given. This requirement (involvement of professionals from respecive spheres) is also mandatory within Russia's new Standards: the ratio of faculty members with a degree is to be no less than 80 % form academic programs and no less than 65 % for applied programs while ratio of invited faculty comprised of specialists in respective professional sphere should no be less than 10 % for academic programs and no less than 20 % for applied programs.

The process of follow-up on Bologna process and corresponding reforms of Russian education system and Federal State Educational standards is ongoing. Educational standard on Master's programs in tourism (43.04.02) adopted in 2015 allows Russian universities more freedom in forming the academic curriculum. To compare, the previous standard on tourism programs (100400.68) established in 2009 went as far as prescribing course titles and competences formed by the courses. Such rigidity caused problems when it came to crediting courses already taken within partnering university curriculum. Competences formed by the program, titled „results expected upon program completion" in European system and delineated by each university independently were of strictly prescriptive nature within the Federal State Standard. As of now universities are free to form their courses as well as to determine their own competences in supplement to competences suggested by the Federal standard. For instance, the new standard in tourism Master's programs does not list competences focused on environment, cultural or natural heritage. Therefore, the Northeastern federal university tourism program added these competences accounting for the regional specifics.

[6] http://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

All of the listed above and some other differences in higher education systems of different nations at times obstruct successful collaboration of partner universities. However, the opposite trend; that of mutual rapproachment of education systems is coming into prominence lately.

Conclusion

Master's program in tourism 43.04.02 „Tourism, cultural heritage and environment" (double diploma jointly with Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines University of France) is aimed at training professionals in tourism in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) with focus on cultural, social, economic, geographic and climatic specifics of the region; specialists who realize the meaning of Yakutia's cultural and natural heritage in both national and international contexts. Involvement of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines University expertise in teaching practice-oriented segments of the program focusing on tourism, cultural heritage and environmental issues is one of the program's strongest advantages. Further development of educational programs in the sphere of tourism aimed at meeting the evolving industry's demand for qualifed specialists will doubtlessly help in greatly improving the tourist services in the Republic, both on domestic and international markets.

Acknowledgement

The study was conducted within the scientific project of the Russian science Foundation No. 15-18-20047 "Landscape Ontology: semantics, semiotics, and geographic modeling".

Souhrn

Republika Sacha (Jakutsko) se nachází na severovýchodě Eurasie, rozkládající se na území více než 3 miliony km². Tato oblast je zároveň největší a nejbohatší zdrojem ložisek nerostných surovin mezi republikami Ruské federace. Rozmanitost přírodních krajin, nedotčené přírody, extrémního podnebí, domorodých kultur ze severu, stejně jako velkých mezinárodních akcí v posledním desetiletí přitahuje do Jakutska stále rostoucí počet ruských a mezinárodních turistů. Území se vyznačuje nevyužitým potenciálem cestovního ruchu ve specifickém kontextu rozvoje lokálních území. Dále je potřebná diverzifikace ekonomických aktivit na místní úrovni v rámci procesu regionální integrace s Asií a těžba nerostných zdrojů. Cestovní ruch je považován za jedno z klíčových odvětví ekonomického rozvoje oblasti. Podle strategických otázek Severovýchodní Federální Univerzity Republiky Sacha (Jakutsko) je nutné podporovat hospodářský rozvoj, vytvářet studijní programy se zahraničními univerzitami. V současnosti probíhá převod na Boloňský vzdělávací systém a implikace odpovídajících reforem ruského vzdělávacího systému. Rozdíly ve vysokoškolských systémech různých států mohou občas bránit úspěšné spolupráci mezi partnerskými univerzitami. Navzdory tomu, vzrůstá snaha ke vzájemné spolupráci. Projekt v oblasti cestovního ruchu a životního prostředí byl vypracován ve spolupráci s francouzskou univerzitou Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, který si klade za cíl školit budoucí specialisty v oblasti rozvoje cestovního ruchu na území Jakutska. Studie byla zpracována za podpory vědeckého projektu ruského Science Foundation No. 15-18-20047 "Krajinná ontologie: sémantika, sémiotika a geografické modelování".

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