Role and place of geographic knowledge as a component of tourism education

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Abstract. The present article is concerned with a role and place of geographic knowledge in training of specialists in the specializations of Service, Tourism, Hotel Business in the Don State Technical University. Analysis of geographic disciplines, their interrelation and mastery sequence is performed. It was found that the most effective sequence is from fundamental and conceptual to principal and highly specialized ones. Opinions of students in various courses, as well as of employers on the importance of geographic knowledge in tourism education are studied. Upward trends of the role of geographic knowledge in tourism education are explored. Curricula for training of specialists are analyzed with respect to the quantity of geographic disciplines and hours devoted to their learning in absolute terms and as a percentage. A trend to decrease the study time devoted to geographic disciplines is defined that may cast a pall on the quality of training specialists. Problems of grasping geographic knowledge and mastering the corresponding skills are identified. The present paper examines the best possible modes of study for students of the sphere of service, tourism, and hospitality industry. Evidence of importance of students’ involvement into scientific workflows is provided. Special attention is paid to importance of internship in training of future specialists. Ways to enhance efficiency of tourism education through optimization of methods to learn disciplines in the sphere of geographic knowledge.

1 Introduction

Tourism is not a basic science, it fully refers to professional sphere. However, it is based on knowledge of key sciences, which are applied in practice. One of such sciences is geography. It is a base for most tourism disciplines. Geography is a comprehensive science. It studies both traditional basis of geographic knowledge (nature, population, culture, etc.) and territorial differences. For example, for tourism it is important to know geography of demand for a touristic product, geopolitical processes, geography of culture, religion, etc. All these knowledge are essential for future tourism specialists.

The purpose of this article is to study of the role and place of geographic knowledge in training specialists in the specializations of Service, Tourism, Hotel Business in the Don State Technical University and identifying areas of successful studying up of geographic disciplines.

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The purpose of the study determines the following tasks - to cover special aspects of geographical component in teaching students of touristic specializations; to analyze curricula for specializations of the integrated group of Service and Tourism specialties; to identify problems of grasping geographic knowledge and mastering the corresponding skills in the process of studying; to study how students of first courses and graduate students of the Service and Tourism faculty, as well as specific employers, aware the importance of geographic knowledge; to identify the best possible pedagogical forms in training specialists for the sphere of tourism and hospitality.

2 Materials and methods

Training of specialists for the tourism sphere is extremely important. It demands constant actualization, as continuous changes occur in the tourism market. In this regard, it is necessary to update educational material, teaching forms so that future specialists have required skills in accordance with up-to-date requirements of the labor market. The same goes for experienced specialists. They need proficiency enhancement in order to upgrade their competency as the situation in the tourism sphere dictates.

In the present paper, state-of-the art technologies of teaching in higher educational institutions represented in the paper of Anne Mai Walder, 2017 [1], are taken into consideration. The concept of the present study is built to an extent on opinions of several scientists on dynamics of processes in higher education and innovative trends in the tourism-exursion sphere, such as Janne Liburd, Anne-Mette Hjalager, 2010 [2]. The authors of the present study rest on up-to-date instructional techniques and technologies, which are described in the academic papers of Ana Dias Daniel, Rui Augusto Costa, Mariana Pita, Carlos Costa, Valentina Ndou Gioconda Mele, Pasquale Del Vecchio, Jianwei Qian, Rob Law Xinjian Li, 2019 [3-5]. Some authors suggest that, in the modern context there is a need to reprofile training of tourism specialists to practice-oriented education Abu Bakar Barkathunnisha, Diane Lee, Anne Price, 2017 [6]. This study considers the scientific views of Narcís Basols i Gardella, 2020, Chih-Hsing Liu, Jeou-Shyan Horng, Sheng-Fang Chou, Yung-Chuan Huang, 2017, Syed Zamberi Ahmad, Abdul Rahim Abu Bakar, Norita Ahmad, 2018 [7-9].The authors of the present paper take the conclusions of the studies of Cathy H.C. Hsu, 2018 [10] concerning the need for principal innovative changes in training tourism specialists, into consideration. The authors used the studies related to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on training tourism specialists, 2021 [11].

The opinion on the need to upgrade practical skills of the students studying tourism studies is based on the views of Yang Zhang, 2017, Stephen Schweinsberg, Stephen L.Wearing, Phil McManus, 2013, Huei-Ming Chiao Yu-Li Chen, Wei-Hsin Huang, 2018 [12-16]. Views of O. Brel concerning the importance of geographical knowledge in professional training of tourism specialists are used. In the study, the authors used materials containing conclusions made in the process of studying tourism education in the Don State Technical University. Papers of Lyudmila Kazmina, Valeria Provotorina, Vadim Makarenko, Elena Shevchenko, 2020 [18, 19] are found to be important. For better insight into the touristic image of the Rostov region, for which training of specialists is carried out, papers considering various types of tourism - agritourism, food and wine, cultural and educational, 2020, 2021 [20-22] as well as general trends in development of tourism, hospitality, and corresponding infrastructure, 2021 [23-25].

The following methods were used when conducting the study: analysis of academic papers, descriptive, comparative, sociological ones, statistical data processing.
3 Results

Geography is a base for most tourism disciplines. Tourism occurs in touristic territories, which are a part of geographical space. The principal objective of geographic disciplines is to shape the geographical worldview for students, i.e. the whole picture of all natural-geographic and public-geographical processes and their interrelations. The whole layer of geographical knowledge is to lay down concepts of touristic zoning, allocation of touristic resources, tourist and recreational potential of both large regions of the world and small tourist destinations, specifics of their activity. A future specialist should know geographical nomenclature, i.e. location of geographical features and areas on the map.

In addition to geographical knowledge, skills are extremely important for tourism specialists. They may include being map-minded (reading marks, overlaying various geographical processes and phenomena on territory, inferring cause-and-effect relationships), ability to align and compare countries and regions, touristic destinations, ability to analyze socio-economic phenomena and to do forecasts. It is important for future specialists to know integrated performance of the area: climate index, topographies, water resources capability and their characteristics, flora and fauna, population (size, diversity, religions views), socio-economic development, political stability, as well as natural risks. Tourism is a specific activity, as a point of sale and a point of tourist services consumption are geographically separated. Therefore, qualitative training of specialists competent in this sphere requires knowledge of not only sales technologies and specifics of office work, but also knowledge of the area where the tour or excursion will be realized.

Students’ involvement into scientific workflows is important. For this reason, in the Don State Technical University there is a scientific circle, where students conduct research and development, including geographic subject theme, under the supervision of lecturers. Students do research, represent their results at scientific conferences, publish scientific articles. Experience shows that this type of activity is effective in training specialists for tourism specialists. Grasping geographic knowledge and mastering practical skills is impossible without extramural internship. In the Don State Technical University, education is practice-oriented, that is why much time is contributed to extramural internship. So, throughout the training period, students have four types of internship: introductory internship, research and development, internship related to mastering practical skills and experience in professional activity, pre-graduation internship. Training of a future specialist results in a final qualifying paper. Its objective is assessment of practical and theoretical readiness of a graduating student for fulfillment of objectives, level of mastering skills, established by the Federal Educational Standard of higher education for the corresponding specialization and by the higher education academic program, realized by the university.

In the Don State Technical University, the process of training specialists is accomplished by a variety of teaching methods. Traditional forms - lectures, seminars, practical sessions - are largely used. Such up-to-date forms of teaching, as management decision simulation, case-study, problem-sessions, discussions, training excursions, game situations. But there is a need for more intensive application of active methods of teaching, such as project management, auction of ideas, analysis of various situations in the profession, simulation exercises. In recent times, distant educational technologies are applied more actively due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These methods have a lot of advantages, for example, they provide students from remote places with access to educational materials, save time on trips to a teaching block, especially for extra-mural students, etc. Nevertheless, in case of on-line education, there is no face-to-face contact between a lecturer and a student, there is no opportunity to fully grasp many geographical disciplines, which require using maps and other teaching aids. A combination of on-line and in-class forms of communication seems to be the best option.
4 Discussion

In the Don State Technical University, three specializations are realized within the integrated group of Service and Tourism specialties: Service, Tourism, Hospitality. Curricula of all specializations include geographical disciplines, as geographical knowledge is necessary for each of it. Analysis of a share of geographical disciplines in every specialization showed that most disciplines account for the Tourism specialization in absolute and relative terms. It is the specialization, which requires the widest range of geographical knowledge. These geographical disciplines are taught: Recreational Resource Studies, Tourism Geography, Recreational Geography of the Rostov Region, Basics and History of Tourism, Country Studies, etc. All they are closely interconnected to and based on fundamental principles of geography. Curricula of the Service, Tourism and Hospitality specializations are examined to analyze quantity of geographical disciplines and their share in the total volume of disciplines. It was found that most geographical disciplines account for the Tourism in absolute terms. Hospitality is in the middle; the Service program contains the least geographical disciplines. The same conformity was identified in percentage ratio of study hours devoted to learning geographical disciplines in total volume of hours of the whole study program. The results are represented in Figure 1.

![Graph showing distribution of geographical disciplines quantity and the percentage of study hours for their studying in the general program of the Service, Tourism and Hospitality specializations in the Don State Technical University.]

But the new Federal Educational Standard shows a tend to decrease the study time devoted to geographic disciplines in all specializations. It may cast a pall on the quality of training specialists.

The authors identified some problems in studying up of geographic disciplines by students of the Don State Technical University. Most common causes are as follows:

- originally low level of geography training. Quantity of study hours devoted to this subject by a school is extremely small. This subject’s course finishes in tenth grade given that the full school course is 11 years.
- school-leaving examination (the Russian National Test) and university admission tests, all in one, are tests. This option makes it impossible to bring out the whole geographical knowledge system. But training of future school graduates is focused just on such a control option;
- secondariness of geographical disciplines in schools. Much geographical knowledge fades from memory by the start of studying in a university.
- Geography is not obligatory for admission to the Don State Technical University.
As an option, it is chosen by less than 1% of intending students; – low motivation of learning geographical disciplines due to low basic level of competence and imperfect understanding of the importance of geographical knowledge for future profession.

In order to study the importance of geographical disciplines in tourism education, the authors conducted a survey of students of first courses (1-2 years of study) and graduate students (3-4 years of study), which disciplines they consider necessary for their future profession. Students were offered to choose most important disciplines from the curriculum for their future professional activity. As a result, 1-2 years students chose 45% of geographical disciplines and 55% of other disciplines (foreign language, psychology, marketing, and others). Graduate students marked more geographical disciplines as the most important (75%). Consequently, it was found that understanding of the importance of geographical disciplines for qualitative performance in tourism increases in process of studying. The results of students’ survey are represented in Figure 2.

![Fig. 2. The results of the survey of students of various years concerning the importance of geographical disciplines for future profession.](image)

Similar survey was carried out for employers - representatives of tourist enterprises, with which the Don State Technical University collaborates. The results of employers’ survey are represented in Figure 3.

![Fig. 3. The results of employers’ survey (representatives of tourist enterprises, partners of the Don State Technical University) concerning the importance of geographical disciplines in training future specialists.](image)

Speaking from the perspective of tourism industry representatives, the most important disciplines for qualitative performance in tourism include 80% of geographical subjects. It
shows that tourism industry representatives note high importance of geographical disciplines in training students. First of all, they give accent to the need for knowledge of location of countries, tourist destinations, their climatic and cultural features, topographies, water bodies, population, hazardous natural phenomenon.

5 Conclusions

Consequently, on the basis of the material presented, the following conclusions can be drawn.

1. Geographical knowledge is very important in training future tourism specialists. In the Service, Tourism and Hospitality specializations realized in the Don State Technical University, geographical disciplines are largely essential for Tourism. They are the base for tourism education.

2. A certain sequence - from fundamental and conceptual to principal and highly specialized ones - is observed in the curriculum.

3. There is a number of problems in studying up of geographic disciplines by students. They include low motivation, low basic level of competence at admission to universities, etc. They require up-to-date solutions, application of active methods of studying, wider involvement of students into practice.

4. It was found that students’ understanding of the importance of geographical disciplines for qualitative performance in tourism increases in process of studying from first to higher courses. The importance of geographical knowledge was noted by tourism industry representatives as well.

5. Efficiency of grasping geographic knowledge and mastering the corresponding skills requires both academic forms of training (lectures, seminars) and up-to-date forms of teaching, such as management decision simulation, case-study, problem-sessions, discussions, training excursions, game situations, brainstorm, roundtable discussion, etc. All this should be supported by various types of practices and scientific activities of students as well.

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