YOUTH INITIATIVES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

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Аннотация. *Бұл мақалада туризм саласындағы жастар бастамалары мен қызметкерлердің кәсіби даму мүмкіндіктері қарастырылады. Зерттеу барысында туризмдегі адами ресурстардың рөлі, кадрлардың тұрақтылығы мен қызметтік қанағаттану деңгейінің маңызы, сондай-ақ инновациялар мен тәжірибе арасындағы өзара байланыс талданды. Мақалада инклюзивті және тұрақты туризмге бағытталған жобалар, digital-туризм мен стартаптардағы жастардың рөлі қамтылды. Зерттеу нәтижесінде кадрлық саясатты жетілдіру, мемлекеттік қолдауды арттыру және жеке бастамаларды ынталандыру бағытында ұсыныстар жасалды.*

Кілт сөздер: *туризм, адами ресурстар, жастар, кәсіби даму, инклюзивті туризм, тұрақты туризм, digital-туризм, slow tourism, zero waste, мотивация, кадрлық саясат.*

Аннотация. *В данной статье рассматриваются молодежные инициативы и возможности профессионального развития сотрудников в сфере туризма. В ходе исследования проанализирована роль человеческих ресурсов в туризме, значение стабильности кадров и уровня профессиональной удовлетворенности, а также взаимосвязь между инновациями и практическим опытом. В статье освещены проекты, направленные на развитие инклюзивного и устойчивого туризма, а также роль молодежи в digital-туризме и стартапах. По результатам исследования предложены меры по совершенствованию кадровой политики, усилению государственной поддержки и стимулированию частных инициатив.*

Ключевые слова: *туризм, человеческие ресурсы, молодежь, профессиональное развитие, инклюзивный туризм, устойчивый туризм, digital-туризм, slow tourism, zero waste, мотивация, кадровая политика.*

The tourism sector is one of the most diversified branches of the economy and is directly dependent on human capital. Successful development in this field relies not only on infrastructure and natural recreational resources, but also directly on the quality of professional specialists, that is human resources.

Tourist services are industry based on human interaction. Communication between a tourist and a guide, a travel agent and a tour operator, the level of professionalism, the ability to find common ground and the skill to establish intercultural dialogue all of these factors influence the quality of the tourism product and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the level of professional training, motivation, and stability of employees working in the tourism sector are considered among the key indicators of a country's tourism image.

In recent years, youth activity in the tourism sector has been particularly noticeable. Young professionals bring fresh momentum to the industry through their ability to quickly master new technologies and work on digital platforms. At the same time, youth initiatives contribute to the development of sustainable and inclusive tourism. This, in turn, opens the way for renewing the talent pool, professionalizing the sector and implementing innovative projects. In this regard, the systematic development of human resources in tourism should be seen as a key component of a sustainable development strategy. Professional training, skills development courses, internships and mentorship programs for young people play an important role in this process. In addition, issues related to raising the social status of industry specialists and enhancing job motivation should not be overlooked.

Tourism is an industry that constantly evolves and renews itself in line with the demands of the times. In this process, human resources, especially youth and professional personnel stand at the forefront as the main driving force. Today, the role of a new generation of specialists, including young people, in the global tourism industry is steadily increasing. This change can be seen as a natural outcome of global trends and technological progress.

Today's youth are a generation raised in a digital environment, capable of creative thinking and quick adaptation. They bring new perspectives and fresh ideas to the tourism sector, actively contributing to the development of areas such as service automation, virtual tours, artificial intelligence, and online booking systems. At the same time, professional personnel remain the key resource ensuring the stability and quality of the industry. The experience of skilled specialists, their knowledge of industry networks and standards, as well as their mentorship of young staff, are crucial factors in enhancing professionalism in tourism. One of the emerging trends today is the continuous professional development of personnel updating and deepening their knowledge through courses, internships and international programs.

Another noteworthy trend is a human resources policy based on inclusivity and diversity. Providing equal opportunities to employees regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or social status is becoming an ethical cornerstone of modern tourism. This trend increases young people's interest in tourism and gives them opportunities to express themselves and participate actively.

The role of youth and professionals in the tourism sector carries strategic importance. Youth are the idea generators of the future, while professional personnel are the main pillars who turn those ideas into reality. Continuity and interaction between these two generations pave the way for competitive and sustainable tourism development. Young specialists bring fresh ideas and modern solutions to the market. They also view the development of local tourism, the promotion of rural areas, and the preservation of national values as key priorities. Young professionals serve as a golden bridge of communication in the tourism industry. Many of them speak multiple languages, are capable of engaging in intercultural dialogue and can communicate with tourists in a modern and relatable way. Their openness, charisma, and energy enhance the tourist experience. Furthermore, the fact that young people undergo professional guide training, obtain certification and work in the industry on a legal basis indicates that tourism is developing in a high-quality and safe direction.

The volunteer movement is also becoming an important component of tourism. University students and active young people participate as volunteers in tourism events, expeditions, and international forums, gaining experience while contributing to society. In areas such as ecotourism, cultural heritage preservation and the restoration of historical sites, the voluntary work of young

people is especially valued. This movement also plays an important role in fostering patriotism and cultivating a sense of civic responsibility.

The modern tourism industry is evolving not only as a source of economic profit but also as a field that embraces social and environmental responsibility. In this process, the concepts of inclusivity and sustainability are becoming core directions in tourism. Worldwide, the number of projects implemented in this area is growing, and several of them are also being supported in Kazakhstan.

Inclusive tourism is based on the principle that every person has an equal right to travel, regardless of their social, physical, or economic limitations. Projects in this area often focus on tourism products and infrastructure designed for people with disabilities, the elderly or socially vulnerable groups. Examples include ramps for museums and historical sites, tactile maps, guided tours in sign language and discounted rates - all of which are tangible manifestations of inclusive tourism.

Sustainable tourism is a type of tourism activity that does not harm the environment, takes into account the interests of local communities and aims to preserve natural and cultural heritage. In this area, projects such as ecotourism, agritourism, and slow tourism are actively developing. For example, rural tourism projects increase the income of local residents while preserving natural resources and promoting tourism. Rural tourism has its own geographical focus. This type of leisure is characterized by a high level of urbanization, with farms in rural areas being considered the most effective places for recreation. Rural tourism is also in high demand among children. [1]. In addition, introducing a zero-waste travel culture and encouraging tourists to adopt environmentally responsible behaviour are important parts of sustainable tourism. In Kazakhstan, recent years have also seen initiatives in this direction. Local NGOs and youth associations are implementing pilot projects to develop inclusive tourism, creating accessible routes for people with disabilities. Environmental initiatives include ecological trails in national parks, volunteer expeditions, and tourism facilities aimed at preserving biodiversity. Such projects not only strengthen the social responsibility of the tourism sector but also represent a significant step toward renewing public awareness and creating equal opportunities for all.

Digital technologies are one of the key factors reshaping the tourism sector. Young people, in particular, are at the forefront of these changes. They are mastering new digital tools and launching various startup projects aimed at making tourism services more accessible, convenient, and creative. This phenomenon can now be referred to as the development of digital tourism and the role of youth in startups.

Digital tourism is a system that covers all stages of travel from planning to implementation and sharing in a digital format. This includes online booking, virtual tours, mobile guides, AR/VR technologies, chatbot services, and the marketing of tourism products through social media. Young people are showing exceptional activity in these areas. Their IT skills, creative thinking, and strong understanding of the market are contributing to the emergence of new solutions and services in tourism.

For example, in recent years in Kazakhstan, youth-led startups have developed projects such as automatically generating tourist routes, offering route maps in interactive formats, and creating multilingual mobile applications. These initiatives have made travel more convenient for foreign tourists and improved the quality of tourism services. Another important element of digital tourism is marketing and social media. Young bloggers and travel influencers on platforms like Instagram,

TikTok, and YouTube are enhancing the country's tourism appeal and sparking greater interest in travel among young people. This further highlights the impact of a digital approach to tourism. Through startups, young people are not only offering new types of services but also addressing social and environmental issues in cooperation with local communities. For example, some ecotourism-oriented startups aim to preserve nature while increasing the income of local residents.

The tourism sector is a constantly evolving industry that requires rapid adaptation to global changes. Therefore, the professional development and skills enhancement of its workforce are key conditions for fostering sustainable tourism. In this process, continuing education, training programs, and participation in international initiatives play a decisive role.

Job satisfaction and motivation are crucial concepts in any field, especially in the tourism industry, which is based on direct human interaction. The mood and enthusiasm of employees working in tourism directly influence the quality of the tourism product and customer satisfaction. Therefore, increasing employee satisfaction is one of the sector's strategic priorities. Job satisfaction refers to a person's emotional and professional fulfilment from their work, as well as feeling useful and valued. In tourism, this factor is closely linked to the quality of service provided to customers. A cheerful and confident employee leaves a positive impression on tourists, whereas a professionally burned-out employee struggles to establish proper communication with customers, which can negatively affect the reputation of tourism.

Motivation is the ability of a person to act, driven by internal or external incentives, in order to achieve a specific goal. In the tourism sector, motivation encourages employees to work creatively, improve service quality, and propose new ideas. In line with current trends, non-financial incentives - such as recognition, reputation, professional acknowledgment, flexible working hours, and work-life balance – are becoming increasingly important. For young people, the main forms of motivation include opportunities for career growth, platforms for self-expression, and gaining international experience. Therefore, employers should pay close attention to these aspects. Additionally, the motivation system must be fair and transparent, as this builds employee trust. In tourism, job satisfaction and motivation are not only crucial for the employee but are also among the key factors determining the overall quality of an organization's and a country's tourism image. When proper conditions are created for employees, high-quality service for tourists naturally follows.

Continuing education enables professional tourism specialists to keep pace with innovative technologies, international standards, and evolving customer demands. Training programs in this area are designed for guides, tour operators, hotel managers, and other industry professionals. In Kazakhstan, this trend is also gaining momentum: regional training centers, colleges, and universities are organizing short-term courses and certification programs.

Training sessions are an important form of education based on practical experience and aimed at developing specific skills. For example, trainings are often conducted in areas such as customer service etiquette, actions in emergency situations, emotional intelligence, and working in a multicultural environment. Such short-term but targeted training helps employees enhance concrete skills and paves the way for delivering high-quality services.

International programs provide opportunities for global knowledge exchange, networking with foreign professionals, and learning international standards. For example, the UNWTO Tourism Academy, Erasmus+ projects, internships, and conferences in the tourism sector are considered major opportunities for young specialists. Such programs broaden young people's professional

horizons and enhance their competitiveness. In addition, within the framework of international cooperation, joint educational programs between Kazakhstan and foreign universities are developing. This partnership paves the way for training domestic tourism professionals at an international level. Continuing education and professional development in the tourism sector are investments that enhance not only the capabilities of individual specialists but also the overall competitiveness of the industry. Well-educated, innovative, and versatile professionals are the main pillars of the tourism industry.

Tourism is, above all, an industry based on direct interaction with people. The quality of a tourism product depends not only on natural or cultural resources but also directly on the professionalism and stability of the specialists providing the service. From this perspective, staff stability plays a decisive role in the long-term development of the tourism industry. Staff stability refers to employees remaining in their positions for a long period without frequent turnover, thereby retaining their experience and skills. This is extremely important for tourism, as the employee is the main provider of the tourist experience. If guides, managers, or travel agents change frequently, tourists' trust declines, service quality becomes inconsistent, and the reputation of the entire organization suffers. Stable staff members are experienced professionals who are well-versed in the organization's culture, work processes, and client relationship nuances. They not only maintain standards but also share their expertise and train young specialists. This can form the basis of internal knowledge sharing – corporate training. However, staff turnover remains a widespread problem in tourism. Factors such as seasonal work schedules, low wages, limited opportunities for professional growth, and emotional burnout hinder specialists from working in the industry for extended periods. In such circumstances, revising HR policies, strengthening employee motivation, and improving working conditions become top priorities. One of the main components of a high-quality tourism product is providing customers with consistent, reliable, and top-level service. This can only be achieved through the work of not only highly qualified but also stable, experienced, and dedicated employees. Staff stability contributes to building long-term relationships with clients, developing a loyal customer base, and enhancing the reputation of a tourism establishment. Staff stability is not merely an HR management issue – it is a key indicator of overall tourism product quality, service culture, and sector stability. Therefore, every organization in the tourism industry should treat this aspect as a core part of its strategy.

The tourism sector requires not only theoretical knowledge but also practical experience. In this regard, mentorship and practical training programs stand out as some of the most effective methods for preparing professional personnel and helping young specialists adapt to the workforce.

Mentorship is the guidance provided by an experienced professional to help a young employee grow and develop in their career. In the tourism sector especially for guides, tour operators, animators, or service staff this is particularly important. A mentor not only teaches the technical aspects of the profession but also trains young specialists in intercultural communication and familiarizes them with standards of high-quality customer service.

Practice oriented schools adapted for tourism are currently being successfully implemented at several tourism sites. One example is the , "Azret Sultan" National Historical-Cultural Museum-Reserve, where practical training is organized for college and university students.

Mentorship and practical training schools are modern tools for preparing qualified specialists and motivating the younger generation in the tourism sector. Initiatives implemented at centers such as "Azret Sultan" National Historical-Cultural Museum-Reserve, "Altyn Samuryk" and "Keruen

Saray" attract young people to the professional environment at an early stage and pave the way for the development of inclusive, cultural and experience-based tourism.

The modern tourism industry requires young, creative personnel who can quickly adapt to changing trends, technological innovations and tourist demands. However, traditional methods are not enough to attract young people to this sector and retain them for the long term. Therefore, the creation of modern motivation systems has become one of the strategic priorities of the industry. Motivation systems can be categorized as follows:

1. Material and financial incentives. Competitive salaries are an important factor for young specialists. In this regard, offering bonuses based on actual results regardless of work experience, providing discounts on tour packages and services, and awarding seasonal premiums can increase young employees' interest and engagement.

2. Career growth opportunities. Establishing a fast-track career ladder for young personnel in tourism organizations – such as a junior–middle–senior system – can help retain them for the long term. In addition, creating an internal talent pool to prepare promising young employees for management positions is an important motivational mechanism.

3. Participation in flagship projects. Engaging young people in national and international projects, forums and competitions helps them showcase their potential and boosts their motivation. For example, the "Kazakh Tourism" national company, the Kazakhstan Tourism Association, and regional administrations should annually organize volunteer programs and international exchange projects for youth.

4. Informal recognition and public support. In some cases, non-material incentives also play an important role. Recognizing young employees as "Employee of the Month," highlighting their professional achievements on social media, and presenting special awards during professional holidays provide emotional support and help them feel valued in the industry.

5. Flexible work schedule and modern work format. For Generation Z and Alpha, flexibility and freedom in working hours are highly important. In the tourism sector, offering online consultations, seasonal jobs, and freelance-based services creates a comfortable environment for young people. Such flexibility makes it easier for them to adapt to the industry.

The future of the tourism industry lies in the hands of creative, multilingual, and digitally literate youth. The key to attracting and retaining them is a comprehensive motivational system. Today, government bodies and the private sector are already working together to achieve tangible results in this area. Most importantly, it is essential to recognize young people's potential in time and place trust in them.

Tourism is not just about leisure – it is a unique industry where culture, technology, and experience converge. The digital revolution of the 21st century has given the tourism industry new momentum, demanding the creation of a bridge between innovation and traditional practices. This bridge paves the way for adapting to modern trends while preserving national identity and elevating service quality to a new level.

Many regional tourism sites rely on experience accumulated over many years. In particular, in historical and cultural excursions, ethno-villages, and tourism products linked to sacred sites, traditional guiding practices and services provided by local communities play a central role. In this sector, the knowledge acquired by experienced professionals and their ability to connect with tourists are invaluable resources.

Innovation is a key driver for elevating quality to a new level. Digitalization, artificial intelligence, virtual tours, online booking systems, big data, and AR/VR technologies have all breathed new life into tourism. Analysing tourist routes and visitor preferences, automating service quality and establishing interactive communication with clients are all the results of these innovations. For example, the Digital Nomad trend has gained popularity among young people, creating a new type of tourism product.

In the current economy, the role of innovation has increased. This is explained by the fact that in a market economy, innovation appears as a method of competition. Innovations lead to a reduction in cost and price, an increase in profit, the emergence of new needs, cash flow generation, an improved image for new product manufacturers, as well as the opening and development of new domestic and foreign markets. [2]

Today's main task is not to pit the old against the new, but to combine them. For example, using AR to visualize historical sites or developing interactive guide applications. In recent years in Kazakhstan, youth startups and experienced tour operators have been working together to take concrete steps in this direction.

The successful future of the tourism industry lies in the harmony between innovation and experience. If we can effectively combine the lifelong knowledge of seasoned professionals with the technological potential of the digital generation, a new era of sustainable development and high-quality service will begin in this sector. By treating innovation as a tool and experience as a guide, we can make this bridge strong and long-lasting.

In today's era of globalization, tourism is not merely a sector of the economy but an important tool for shaping a nation's cultural image. Success in this field requires skilled, knowledgeable and creative professionals as the main driving force. Therefore, young people and qualified specialists are considered the future of the tourism industry and the foundation of its sustainable development.

The demands of the modern tourist are changing daily. Ecotourism, digital tours, cultural and educational routes and adrenaline-filled adventures are all evolving through the creativity and initiatives of young people. In recent years, the number of young tour operators, tour guides, volunteers and tourism startup founders in our country has been steadily increasing.

The contribution of young people to tourism is not limited to technological innovations. They champion principles such as inclusivity, cultural diversity and environmental responsibility, shaping a new tourism culture. While young people bring initiative and fresh ideas, experienced professionals ensure stability and quality. Tourism is a field built on emotion and trust. Every tourist expects quality from any service and only skilled, specialized personnel can deliver it.

An effective way to develop the tourism industry is to build a bridge between young specialists and experienced professionals. Practical schools, advanced training programs, international internships, and joint projects should serve as platforms for merging the experience and knowledge of both generations. For example, excursions organized within the framework of the "Altyn Samuryk" theatre can combine traditional content with modern formats, offering a successful model for attracting young people.

Youth are the driving force that brings new energy to tourism, while professional staff are the foundation that ensures the sector's stability. Only through the synergy of both can we create a high-quality, competitive, and sustainable tourism system. Therefore, investing in human capital in

our country's tourism industry holds strategic importance. This is not just a matter for the future, but an urgent issue of today.

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