Moscow Regional Education Cluster in Tourism and Services: A New Sustainable Development Paradigm

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Abstract: Moscow regional education cluster in tourism and services is a diverse and sophisticated education and training system. Nevertheless, a number of deficiencies threaten its sustainable development and long-term performance. The priorities, which need to be accentuated in a new paradigm, are creativity, critical thinking, more meaningful learning, practical orientation, differentiation of programs and closer links with respective industries. The current stage of accelerated development in professional standards presents challenges in terms of adaptive capacities of human resources and lagging responses of the education system become a major issue. To address this problem a systemic approach is needed with a focus on sustainability in education, by which is meant an education system’s ability to foresee future demands for competencies and ensure a high degree of adaptation, flexibility, relevance and diversity in its programs. Moscow regional education cluster has a multilevel and branched structure, but a new paradigm with sustainability priorities is needed to make that network more advantageous.

Key words: Education clusters · Education planning · Sustainable education · Sustainable development in education · Tourism education

INTRODUCTION

In Moscow region there are around 150 universities, institutes and academies with curricula in tourism and services, with 15% of students enrolled. At the college level similar specialties are present at 105 institutions with 20% of students pursuing respective degrees. And there are 72 vocational establishments, with 22% learners in tourism and services. Other subsystems of Moscow regional educational cluster include: (a) Regional and municipal education authorities; (b) Institutions of secondary and pre-school education with career guidance activities; (c) Resource centers for life-long education in the field of tourism and service; (d) Companies with their own training programs; (e) NGOs and not-for-profit organizations; (f) Industrial associations with educational and seminar programs. This variety of different sources of education, skills and competencies provide a good platform for the cluster’s sustainable development. But some conceptual shifts are needed to make that versatile structure more productive.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Social systems’ design, models of educational institutions, comparative analysis, expert views and literature review.

Findings: At the center of sustainability of regional education clusters in tourism and services is their responsiveness to regional needs’ “specificity” [1]. And that implies a higher focus on local practical problems both in teaching and research, flexible approaches to lifelong learning, closer links with the industry. International experiences and best practices are invaluable in this respect, for instance, those in China’s
technological clusters, where several successful regional models of regional education clusters have been developed [2]. Authorities in Moscow region are very supportive and participative, particularly in creating commissions and coordinating councils. The State Program "Education in Moscow region for 2014-2018 years" has a robust practical focus. Conversely, it’s the lack of cooperation between different types of institutions that is a major impediment. One of few workable professional bodies in this field is the Educational and Methodological Council for tourism and services, headquartered at Russian State University of Tourism and Service, which role is to elaborate and implement educational priorities in tourism and services and also stimulate cooperation between higher education institutions.

The 12 priorities, which are central for a long-term and sustainable approach in streamlining the regional education cluster in tourism and services, are as follows:

- Interinstitutional continuous cooperation in updating curricula;
- Forecasting competency needs of the labor market and enrollment targets together with practitioners;
- Differentiation of educational programs, implementation of modular educational programs;
- Development of a versatile concept of life-long learning;
- Multi-iterative career guidance at each educational level from pre-school to post-graduate;
- Practice-oriented training and practical experience for both students and teaching staff;
- Implementation of network programs at resource centers;
- Expanding e-learning and distance learning technologies;
- Avoiding rapid shifts in state-financing, budgetary changes should be gradual. The principles of sustainable funding and student finance should be maintained [3];
- Less short-termism approaches to commercialization of higher education, because market mechanisms need time to unfold and cannot be equally applicable in all fields [4];
- A focus on unique, unusual tasks (including regional specificity), advancing creative and pro-active attitudes [5]. That requires shifts from knowledge and information accumulation to problematic orientation, from just cognitive objectives to skill-related tasks [6]. Case studies are a vital element of this approach, including in terms of professional certification;
- Developing and enhancing synergies between tourism and services clusters and regional education clusters. Admittedly, as a vivid illustration of present disconnections, there is no link between domestic and inbound medical tourism and the education system [7].

**CONCLUSION**

Further elaboration and implementation are needed for the 12 highlighted principles of sustainability in Moscow education cluster in tourism and services with closer attention to international experience. The final objective is to combine efforts of all institutions and stakeholders in creating a reputable cluster, truly focused on long-term objectives, with robust positive externalities and diverse synergistic effects throughout the whole system.

**REFERENCES**