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Research on Developing Tourism Human Resources Associated with Hai Phong Marine Economic Development

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Abstract

This article studies the current status of tourism human resource development in Hai Phong in the context of the marine economy increasingly becoming an important pillar of the locality. With the advantage of geographical location, seaport system and prominent sea tourism destinations such as Cat Ba, Do Son, Hai Phong has great potential to develop tourism associated with the marine economy. However, human resources in this field are still limited in quality, quantity, professional skills and support policies. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis methods based on actual survey data, the article assesses the difficulties in training, attracting and retaining high-quality tourism human resources. The research results show that tourism human resources in Hai Phong are mainly unskilled workers,

lacking in-depth knowledge, limited foreign language skills, and development policies are not really effective. On that basis, the article proposes a number of solutions to improve the quality of tourism human resources, including improving training programs, strengthening cooperation between businesses and educational institutions, developing appropriate remuneration policies, and applying technology in tourism human resource management. These solutions not only help improve labor quality but also contribute to promoting the sustainable development of Hai Phong Sea tourism, meeting the requirements of international integration and increasing competitive advantages in this field.

Keywords: Human Resource Development, Tourism, Marine Economy, Hai Phong

1. Introduction

Hai Phong is one of the important marine economic centers of Vietnam, with a strategic location in the economic triangle of Hanoi - Hai Phong - Quang Ninh, possessing a large seaport system, developed coastal industrial zones and diverse tourism potential. According to research by the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (2023), Hai Phong has special advantages in marine tourism, with Cat Ba archipelago - World Biosphere Reserve, famous Do Son beach and many cultural - historical relics related to the sea. In addition, the development of seaport, logistics and fisheries industries also contributes to creating momentum to promote the marine economy in general and marine tourism in particular.

However, one of the important factors determining the sustainable development of marine tourism is the quality of human resources. According to the report of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), high-quality human resources are the core factor to enhance the competitiveness of destinations, optimize tourist experiences and promote sustainable tourism development. Domestic studies (Nguyen Van Luu, 2020; Pham Thi Hong, 2021) also show that tourism human resources in Vietnam in general and Hai Phong in particular still have many limitations, especially in terms of professional qualifications, foreign language skills, the ability to manage marine tourism in a sustainable direction and apply digital technology in tourism business.

Although Hai Phong has made strides in training tourism human resources with the participation of many educational institutions such as Hai Phong University, Hai Phong College of Tourism and Services, there are still large gaps in training quality, practicality of the curriculum and the connection between schools and tourism businesses. According to a survey by the Hai Phong Department of Tourism (2023), about 60% of workers in the tourism industry have not received formal training, most of them work based on experience, lack communication skills and serve international guests.

Based on an overview of domestic and foreign studies, this article will analyze the current status of tourism human resources in Hai Phong, clarifying the limitations and development opportunities. At the same time, the study proposes solutions to improve the quality of tourism human resources associated with the development of the marine economy, aiming to build Hai Phong into a high-class marine tourism center, contributing to promoting sustainable economic growth.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Concept of tourism human resource development

Tourism human resources are understood as a group of individuals involved in tourism activities, including management, operation, guidance, tourist services and other related activities. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2021), tourism human resources not only play a role in providing direct services to customers but also contribute to building the image of the destination and enhancing the competitiveness of the industry.

Tourism human resource development is defined as the process of improving the quality, professional qualifications, skills and work efficiency of workers in the tourism industry through training, fostering and improving working conditions (Baum, 2019).^[2] This process includes activities such as professional training, soft skills training, foreign language proficiency improvement, digital technology application and service quality management. According to Nguyen Van Dinh (2020), tourism human resource development must be linked to market demand, technological changes and sustainable development orientation.

2.2 Marine economic development and the role of tourism

The marine economy is defined as economic activities taking place in or related to marine areas, including exploitation of marine resources, maritime transport, seaports, fisheries, renewable energy and marine tourism (OECD, 2020). In Vietnam, marine economic development has been identified as an important strategy to promote sustainable growth, ensure national security and protect the marine environment (Government of Vietnam, 2018).

Marine tourism is one of the important economic sectors in the marine economic development strategy, contributing to job creation, attracting investment and increasing income for coastal communities (Hall, 2021). According to the UNWTO report (2022), marine tourism accounts for about 10% of total global tourism revenue and has strong growth potential when combined with sustainable tourism models.

In Vietnam, marine tourism contributes about 60% of total tourism revenue and is an important driving force for the development of coastal cities (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2022). However, the development of marine tourism requires highly qualified human resources, knowledgeable about marine resource management and capable of providing high-quality services to meet the growing needs of tourists.

2.3 The relationship between tourism human resource development and marine economy

The development of tourism human resources is closely related to the growth of the marine economy. According to Baum (2022), a high-quality human resource will help

optimize tourism business operations, enhance customer experience, minimize negative impacts on the environment and contribute to the sustainable development of the marine economy.

In countries with developed sea tourism such as Thailand, Malaysia or Greece, tourism human resource training policies are focused on with the participation of universities, businesses and local authorities (Henderson, 2020). These models not only help improve labor quality but also create a close link between training and the actual needs of the market.

In Vietnam, especially in Hai Phong, the development of tourism human resources is facing many challenges such as a shortage of highly qualified workers, limitations in foreign language skills and technology application (Nguyen & Le, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to research and propose solutions to improve the quality of tourism human resources associated with the development of the marine economy to help Hai Phong maximize its potential.

2.4 Theoretical basis of human resource development

Research on tourism human resource development can be based on a number of economic and human resource management theories such as:

Human Capital Theory: Proposed by Becker (1993), this theory emphasizes the role of education and training in improving labor productivity, thereby promoting economic growth. In the context of marine tourism, investment in human resource training will help improve service quality and increase the competitiveness of the destination.

Sustainable Development Theory: According to WCED (1987), sustainable development in tourism requires a balance between economic development, environmental protection and improving the lives of workers. Therefore, training human resources for tourism needs to be associated with factors of protecting marine resources and developing green tourism.

Competency-Based Management Theory: According to Boyatzis (1982), human resource management should focus on developing core competencies of workers, including technical skills, soft skills and innovative thinking. In the tourism industry, this is especially important when tourists' demands are increasingly high and diverse.

3. Research Results

In the Hai Phong Tourism Development Strategy to 2025, with a vision to 2030, the city continues to orient itself to become one of the important tourism gateways, attractive destinations and tourism centers of national, regional and international stature. This strategy is consistent with the general orientation of the whole country, helping Hai Phong become the driving force for development of the Red River Delta and the Northeast coast.

By 2030, Hai Phong aims to welcome 15 million visitors, including 3 million international visitors. Total revenue from tourism is expected to reach VND25,000 billion, contributing about 12% of the city's GDP. The city continues to promote the development of key tourist areas such as Cat Ba and Do Son, combined with investment in upgrading tourism infrastructure, including ports for international cruise ships, the Cat Hai - Cat Ba cable car route, and the expansion of Cat Bi international airport.

Hai Phong has advantages in developing marine tourism with 125 km of coastline, over 100,000 km² of continental

shelf and 368 large and small islands. Notable destinations such as Do Son, Cat Ba, Long Chau, Bach Long Vy continue to attract domestic and foreign tourists. The city is focusing on developing eco-tourism, community tourism and sustainable tourism to effectively exploit natural resources.

Regarding the current situation by the end of 2024, Hai Phong tourism industry recorded 11.5 million visitors, of which international visitors reached 2 million. Total tourism revenue is estimated at 18,500 billion VND, an average growth of 10.2%/year. However, the development of the industry still faces many challenges, especially in terms of human resources.

By the end of 2024, the whole industry will have about 18,500 workers, of which regular workers account for 85%, but only about 65% have professional training. The number of workers with university degrees or higher is 2,500, and about 7,000 with college or intermediate degrees. The rate of workers who know foreign languages is about 60%, mainly concentrated in large enterprises. Although the number of workers has increased, the quality has not yet met the development requirements. Managers still lack experience, direct workers are not professional, and foreign language and information technology skills are limited. The main reasons are that the rate of workers with specialized training is still low, training facilities have not updated programs suitable to reality, and businesses have not focused on investing in improving the quality of human resources. To overcome these limitations, Hai Phong is promoting cooperation with local universities and colleges, as well as strengthening links with tourism businesses for practical training. At the same time, the city focuses on professional training for workers in the industry, combining long-term training and training according to actual needs, ensuring a sufficient supply of high-quality human resources for the tourism industry in the coming period.

Improving the quality of human resources not only helps Hai Phong develop the tourism industry sustainably but also contributes to enhancing the city's position on the national and international tourism map.

Current reality shows a large gap between the quality of labor in the tourism industry and the practical needs of the market. To effectively exploit the potential of tourism, especially sea and island tourism, it is necessary to consider the main causes leading to limitations in human resource development as follows:

Firstly, the rate of labor with tourism expertise is still low.

The skilled workforce, especially those good at tourism management and operations, is still limited. Many workers have not been properly trained or have not been regularly updated with their knowledge. Some businesses have not focused on skill development, and have not created conditions for employees to study and improve their professional skills, foreign languages and information technology. The clear difference between large and small businesses also affects the quality of the workforce, especially the skills of promoting tourism products and communicating with international visitors.

Second, the recruitment process and benefits are not reasonable.

Many businesses have not set clear standards when recruiting tourism workers. They do not really attach importance to criteria such as professional qualifications, foreign language skills, IT skills or understanding of local

culture and history. Some units do not have a professional human resource management department, leading to ineffective recruitment and training. In addition, small businesses often hire unskilled workers to reduce labor costs. Salaries and benefits are not attractive enough, making it difficult for high-quality employees to stay in the industry for a long time.

Third, social awareness and career orientation are not suitable.

Society still focuses on training managers rather than technical and professional staff. This causes tourism businesses to not focus on formal training, only on-site training without a long-term strategy. The lack of accurate forecasting of human resource needs leads to an imbalance between supply and demand, while career guidance has not received due attention.

Fourth, training facilities and teaching quality do not meet requirements.

Equipment and facilities at many tourism training schools are outdated, theoretical, and lacking in practice. Some training programs are still experimental, mechanically applying foreign models without adjusting them to suit the reality of Vietnam. The teaching staff does not have much practical experience, and lacks modern teaching aids for practice. Graduates often have difficulty finding suitable jobs or have to be retrained to meet the requirements of businesses.

Fifth, the seasonality of tourism affects labor stability.

The tourism industry in the North, including Hai Phong, is greatly affected by seasonal factors. This causes workers to have unstable jobs, leading to a change in career to other industries. In particular, the majority of workers in the tourism industry are women, who are under a lot of psychological pressure, affecting the quality and commitment to the profession.

4. Discussion of Research Results

Firstly, to effectively exploit the potential of sea and island tourism and the characteristics of Hai Phong's sea area, the development of tourism human resources, especially management human resources and skilled workers, needs to be carried out strategically. This requires surveying, assessing and accurately forecasting human resource needs in each stage, thereby building and implementing appropriate strategies, planning and training plans. At the same time, it is necessary to improve the quality of the workforce in the industry, including managers, tour guides, restaurant and hotel staff and chefs, ensuring professional qualifications to meet the needs of tourism development in the short and long term.

Second, the tourism human resource development strategy needs to be linked to the tourism infrastructure investment strategy, market development, product diversification and international integration expansion. There needs to be a specific implementation roadmap, identifying long-term human resource needs to build a workforce that meets both quantity and quality requirements. At the same time, maximum resources should be mobilized to promote the development of the city's tourism human resources.

Third, build a database system on tourism human resources to accurately assess the quantity, quality, training structure and fluctuations of human resources in the industry. This system will be an important basis for planning strategies, policies, programs and plans for human resource

development in accordance with the city's tourism development requirements.

Fourth, improve the quality of training and retraining of tourism human resources in the direction of international integration. This helps human resources meet regional and world standards, creating a premise for labor mobility in the tourism sector. It is necessary to focus on the following main tasks: (1) Developing a team of leading experts in specialized fields of tourism; (2) Building a team of highly qualified lecturers, teachers and tourism trainers; (3) Developing a team of state management officials in the tourism sector; (4) Perfecting mechanisms and policies to encourage the socialization of tourism training.

Fifth, promote international linkages, cooperation and integration in tourism human resource development according to the "three-house" model: State – School – Employer. The State plays a role in creating a legal corridor and developing national human resource standards as a basis for training and recruitment. Training institutions need to strengthen linkages with tourism businesses to improve training quality, while tourism businesses need to coordinate with schools to ensure output meets practical requirements.

Sixth, raise awareness and responsibility of the community in developing tourism human resources. It is necessary to propagate and educate about career guidance right from high school to orient students in their careers according to forecasts of future labor demand. At the same time, it is necessary to change the awareness of training institutions and enterprises about developing human resources in a proactive and flexible manner according to market demand. In addition, it is necessary to support vocational training for workers in tourism households, develop small and medium enterprises, and restore traditional occupations serving tourism, especially in the field of sea and island tourism.

Seventh, mobilize capital sources to develop tourism human resources. It is necessary to increase investment from the state budget (both central and local), and at the same time encourage the participation of the private sector in developing the tourism vocational training system. Promote international cooperation to take advantage of aid capital from foreign organizations and individuals to improve training quality. In addition, it is necessary to mobilize contributions from social organizations to support sustainable tourism human resource training.

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