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On Tourist Guiding: Reflecting on a Centuries-old Profession and Proposing Future Challenges

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On Tourist Guiding: Reflecting on a Centuries-old Profession and Proposing Future Challenges

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This paper provides a historical overview of Tourist Guiding, followed by some thoughts and reflections on how we can improve and develop our profession into the 21st Century. Thus, the paper traces the main developments of the profession through time. The idea of the paper is to offer a context to this new Journal, and hopefully entice the reader to draw useful parallels when critically reading the content of this and future issues of this publication.

Key Words: history of tourist guiding, challenges, development of tourist guiding

Introduction

As editors, we feel that the first edition of this publication would benefit from a historical overview of Tourist Guiding, followed by some thoughts and reflections on how we can improve and develop our profession into the 21st Century. Thus, the following sections trace the main developments of the profession through time. Such information offers the context for our new Journal, and will hopefully entice the reader to draw useful parallels when critically reading the content of this and future issues of this publication.

The Past: Origins of the Profession

According to Pond (1993), the profession of guide is one of the oldest in the world. The first guides led people not for reasons of fun or leisure, but in the geographical sense, to find the way and protect them, to escape climatic aggressions, ferocious animals, or groups of enemies. The reasons for traveling were related to commerce, an activity for which protection of men and goods was also required. Therefore, the activity of guide appeared to be linked to the protection of people and goods.

Costa states that

in the forms of ancient tourism the cultural and civilizational elements are well marked. In ancient Babylon and the Fertile

Crescent, the major motivating factor for the movement of people was the contact with impressive urban buildings (Costa, 2005: 282).

Thus, in an initial phase, displacements appear linked to migration and trade, but also to the appreciation of monumental works. The guide led and protected but undoubtedly also took on the role of interpreter. Only later did people begin to travel out of curiosity and pleasure, to compare themselves with others and to get to know themselves better.

The Guide on the Paths of Greece and Ancient Rome

Cohen (1985) speaks of two primary functions of the guide. The first function had a strong geographic component (pathfinder), but it was soon joined by a more complex component of a spiritual nature (mentor), which is one of the reasons that certainly led people to move from their place of residence since time immemorial - religion. Human need to search for a sanctuary, metaphorically walking in search of oneself, must be as old as human existence.

In ancient Greece, we find reports of trips to oracles to consult the gods, to places 'where contemplation, introspection and intellectual development became possible' (Costa, 2005:282).

Athletes and those who watched them also travelled since at least 776 BC ‘to participate in the Olympic games’ (Pond, 1993:3), for sport and leisure.

More important than land travel was sea travel. This is evident in literature such as the Iliad which reports on Odysseus’ adventures and his journeys around the Mediterranean, at a time when Greek civilisation dominated commerce and culture. Homer refers to the History of Herodotus, who travelled and narrated what he saw and learned, from Egypt to Babylon and from the Danube to the Black Sea, referring several times the existence of guides and their clients, to whom he did not give much credit.

The Romans, known for their pragmatic and functional sense, built the famous roads by which people traversed their empire. Pond (1993) claims that the most popular destination for the Romans was Greece, where they were attracted, not only by monuments and mythology, but also because of the Olympic games and other festivals. With the decline of the Roman Empire, roads were destroyed, trade economy weakened, thus restricting contacts between the different regions of the European continent. However, the Catholic religion strengthened and disseminated its power, to become the cornerstone of cultural union among Europeans. And with it, pilgrimages to sacred places and tombs of saints in Rome, Santiago de Compostela and Canterbury, among others, took on a new life.

Particularly dangerous at this time were the sea and land routes that led to the Holy Land, which was the scene of constant wars between Christians and Muslims. As a result, there was a preference given to European sanctuaries. Guides to the European sites of pilgrimage, or even to the Holy Land, were often members of the clergy or monks of different religious and military orders, who assumed at that time, an important function of protection and security. This was particularly important given the danger that traveling represented due to potential assailants and swindlers.

According to Coltman (1989), the first ‘tour packages’ were sold during the Middle Ages and included, in addition to the ship journey from Venice to the Holy Land, food, overnight stays, land transportation and an amount in money for protection. Vitor Ambrósio suggests that ‘the total costs of a pilgrimage were very high, for those who did not count on charity and wanted to maintain a certain well-being’ (Ambrósio, 2006:22). The author quotes Rapp to give the example of

Sebald Rieter from Nuremberg [who] spent more than 1300 florins on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Note that 100 florins represented the earnings of a very well-paid university professor (Ambrósio 2006: 22).

From the Grand Tour to World War II

Pond (1993) further informs us that the guide's image changes with the fashion of the Grand Tour that stretches from the 17th century to the 19th century. The guide then assumed the role of tutor, the cicerone, who accompanied the young English aristocrats, who was responsible for their education: they spoke several languages, were cultured and versed in different subjects, from history to literature, art to economics, theology to philosophy. Their role was highly important as young Englishmen (and later ladies) completed their education with the Grand Tour, a trip to Italy and sometimes to Greece, passing through France, and often through Germany and Switzerland, thus extending their training on classical civilisations, learning languages and refining their manners before returning to England as well-rounded scholars and diplomats.

In this context, it should be noted that, from the 17th century, another type of guide appears, in the territory of present-day Italy, the *vetturini*, who sold their services and transported the English boys and their tutors in four-wheel vehicles (*vetture*) from one location to another, taking care of their physical protection. With the proliferation of tourism, charlatans also proliferated, who called themselves guides, but had no intention other than to steal the assets of tourists.

In the middle of the 19th century, the construction of the modern railroad provided new ways of traveling, faster, safer and more comfortable. In 1841, Thomas Cook promoted a group tour to Leicester by train. A few years later, he started selling trips to Paris and leading the management and marketing of the European Grand Tour. Thomas Cook himself professionalised the role of guide and developed European (and later global) tourism. The travel agency with his name was famous for employing many 'professional' guides, however other than this isolated case, there is no evidence of the 'profession' of guide being exercised in a regulated way or subjected to training. Pond (1993) states that from 1936 to 1939, just before the Second World War, a polytechnic institution in London, the Regent Street Polytechnic, for local guides was eager to obtain services from city visitors, but unfortunately, their actions provoked great contempt.

The Post-War Guide and Training

World War II provided a huge evolution in communications and transport in general, but above all in air transport. Traveling became easier and faster, and became available to an emerging class - the middle class. On the other hand, the economic and social role of tourism came to be recognised and the organisations linked to it grew - tour operators, hotels, services and tourism schools. At that point, many American travellers began to arrive in Europe, in search of their roots and the vast heritage of the old continent. Pond (1993) informs us that, in 1949, Regent Street Polytechnic re-established its programme of guides training and about two years later the Tourist Authority began to award the first certificates and badges to guides, whose main function was to guide customers through the bombed areas of London. Later on, the English system served as a model for other European countries that, in addition to training courses, started to certify professional guides and forced them to wear a badge.

While seminal works on aspects of guiding and interpretation, such as Tilden's *Interpreting our Heritage* (1957) date to the late 1950s, the first

published articles and the first studies on the 'profession' date from the 1970s. Some of the main early studies were carried out by McKean (1976) and De Kadt (1979), and in the 1980s by Holloway (1981), Fine & Speer (1985), Almagor (1985) and, above all, Cohen (1985). These works, in addition to pointing out qualities and defects of the profession and professionals, try to systematise basic concepts about guiding and categorise the various functions of the guides. A further fundamental work on tourist guides is that of Pond (1993), which serves as the main foundation for this abbreviated history of the profession. In her history she states that European guides are considered to be the best trained and those who guarantee the best quality of service worldwide, other than in Israel, where guides are more respected, better trained and better paid.

Interestingly, after millennia of evolution, some of the most frequent guiding themes from the Greeks to the present time have become intangible: perceptions, values, roles, culture, knowledge, education, narratives, memories, or performance (Zillinger, Jonasson, & Adolfsson, 2012). As we reflect on over 2000 years of this *profession*, the question we raise in establishing this Journal is what does the future hold.

The Present: The Role of the Guide:

Paradigm Shift and Guidelines in the New Millennium

Not unlike the activity of guiding, many other professional activities have evolved (doctor, lawyer, teacher, etc.), in the sense that they were initially carried out by people without any qualifications, often incompetent and charlatans. These professions, as they evolved, acquired a financial and social status, requiring higher academic training. However, that did not happen to the same extent with guides despite the fact that lately, the demands of tourists have changed to become more specific and diverse. The tourism industry needs to become more aware of this evolution of tourism. In response, both the initial and lifelong training of guides requires essential changes to be undertaken.

There is, however, a recent focus on quality and an effort to harmonise the rules for training and qualification of tourist guides, felt by guides associations both at European level (FEG^[1] and FEAGT^[2]) and worldwide (IATM^[3] and WFTGA^[4]) and also by the European Union itself.

In 1975, European Council Directive No. 75/368 / EEC specifically excluded the activity of guide from the measures adopted by the Council of Ministers to facilitate freedom of establishment and the provision of services, due to the detailed legislation governing the profession in several countries. In 1997, after a considerable investigation, the Commission produced a document^[5] that provides a detailed description of the activity of tourist guide, with resolution of the complex legal issues that had arisen during the 1980s^[6]. In both the 1975 and 1997 documents, the Council and the Commission make a clear distinction between the activities of tourist guide and tour manager.

Several difficulties have arisen in the definition of standards related not only to tourism, but especially to guides. In October 2000, in Vienna, the members of the CEN committee^[7] finally adopted a committed definition of guide:

Person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area, which person normally possesses an area-specific qualification usually issued and/or recognised by the appropriate authority (feg-touristguides.com).

This definition was adopted by CEN, through standard EN13809, and also by FEG and WFTGA, in 2003. Still, according to FEG,

the tourist guiding qualification is specific to each and every country; in some cases, the qualification is national, in some cases it is broken up into regions. In all cases it is embedded in the educational and training ethic of that country. The Art of Guiding is a skill; it is the skill of selecting information and varying it for different audiences; it is the skill of presenting it in a simple and precise way; it is the skill of allowing the visitor to see and to understand; it is a skill which, if well performed, is invisible (feg-touristguides.com).

However, the tourist guide trade is differently defined in different European countries. In fifteen European Union member states, the tourist guide trade is bound to a qualification, while in the other countries it is an unregulated trade (Fodranová, 2019:9). Moreover, about ten years ago, professional deregulation decrees were published in several European countries as a consequence of the neoliberal market economy. The so-called ‘free guides’ started to invade towns with their umbrellas and flags, offering walking tours without asking for payment, just a tip, meaning that they do not pay taxes on their earnings, neither do the travel agents they work for, and they do not pay any contribution to health care, retirement, and social welfare of their countries.

Nowadays, licensed and unlicensed tourist guides work side by side in most European towns. According to Black and Weiler (2013), to meet the needs and expectations of 21st century tourists and the challenges of the global communication environment, tourist guides need to become more highly skilled experience-brokers, including embracing technology, which should be used to choreograph memorable experiences for tourists.

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1. European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations
 2. Fédération Européenne des Associations de Guides Touristiques
 3. International Association of Tour Managers
 4. World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations
 5. Commission working document on Guides (SEC) (97) 837 final.
 6. In the 1980s, three European countries - France, Italy and Greece - were condemned by the European court for not allowing foreign citizens of the EU to freely exercise the activity of guide in their territories. Later, Spain was also condemned.
 7. European Committee for Normalization.

The Future: Pioneering and Promoting Tourist Guiding Research

Reflecting on the evolution of the profession, we can truly claim that plenty of ink has been spread by scholars trying to define what exactly a Tourist Guide is (e.g. Weiler & Black, 2015; Weiler & Kim, 2011; Ap & Wong, 2001; Cohen, 1985; Pearce, 1984). Going forward, if we had to describe a tourist guide in one adjective, then we would probably go for the word SMART, acronymised from: Sophisticated, Memorable, Adaptable, Reliable, and Taught. These five elements, which ought to be a requirement for all tourist guides are often far from reality, and a missing element could reflect badly on the overall objectives of this profession. As we illustrate above, Tourist Guiding is one of the earliest professions. In fact we can trace this back in time, as early as the 5th century BC, when the ancient Greek historian Herodotus described how *Xerxes I*, ruler of Persia, was told stories about the temple of Jupiter Laphystius by his guides while making his way to Alos, an Achaian city (Hdt i.197). The question however that faces us is, how and in what way should the profession evolve into the 21st Century.

In *The Professional Guide: Dynamics of Tour Guiding*, Pond (1993) argues that guiding individuals in a foreign country, or to an unfamiliar destination, is perhaps one of the earliest occupations in the world. She suggests that guiding has evolved from mere pathfinding to a sophisticated and structured profession throughout the years. In the last couple of decades, the training provided by various tourism education institutions to tourist guide students can be described as one which focuses on logistical skills, but also on academic knowledge of a specific place (or places). This educational framework ensures high standard of guiding service.

Nowadays, most guides are instructed in languages, communication skills, art, history, archaeology, and customer care service among other topics. Despite the academic endeavour in trying to improve the tourist guiding sector, which has surely resulted in a better provision of service,

the context within which this sector operates is not always considered as an important link of a much larger chain represented by the tourism industry. A similar argument has been presented by Zenaida Lansangan-Cruz who laments that tourist guides are often considered as ‘orphans of the travel industry’ (1999:2) primarily because, unlike other types of tourism employment, such as Travel Agents, Tour Operators, and Airline Operators, the tourist guides mostly operate independently as freelancers, working for agencies or organisations on a part-time basis or contracting their services. Such employment status may not only affect the stability of work, but it may also affect the perception of government stakeholders, particularly those related to Tourism, in seeing this profession as a direct contributor towards sustainable tourism.

The International Research Forum on Guided Tours

This Journal has evolved out of a project to promote research into tourist guiding, which all started back in 2009, at the University of Halmstad, in Sweden. Colleagues such as Anette Hallin, Mikael Jonasson, with other knowledgeable and dynamic Professors, decided to gather a number of academics and tourist guides for a meeting. They called it the IRFGT, which stands for the *International Research Forum on Guided Tours*. Since then, IRFGT has grown older and has almost become an adolescent. IRFGT is 11 years old in 2020 and it has been contributing a lot to the development of guiding studies.

Nowadays, the International Research Forum on Guided Tours (IRFGT) is a mobile platform for research on guided tours. According to Mykletun, (2013), from the very start IRFGT aimed to bring together academics and practitioners. During its six forums (Halmstad 2009, Plymouth 2011, Breda 2013, Estoril 2015, Roskilde 2017 and Malta 2019) IRFGT has facilitated the meeting of academic researchers, students, tourist guides, educators, artists, performers, designers of audio and GPS tours, storytellers and others to discuss – and experience together – the past, present and future of guided tours, both in the ‘real world’ of

the streets, museums and heritage properties and in 'virtual realities'. By approaching guided tours from multiple viewpoints, IRFGT aims not only to explore the remarkable diversity of tours, but also to locate their meaning and significance more precisely and richly through research, debate, contestation, sharing and mapping.

The conference in Halmstad was a result of a Nordic workshop on Guided Tours that was held at Gothenburg Research Institute in 2007, and which also resulted in a book entitled Guiding and Guided Tours edited by Petra Adolfsson, Peter Dobers and Mikael Jonasson (ISBN 978-91-7246-285-4) (Hallin & Solli, 2010, p.4).

This event hosted at least 20 delegates from all over the world, from various disciplines and with different experiences of guided tours – some were practicing guides, others had various experiences of having been guided on tours. During the course of the conference, stimulating presentations were delivered with empirical material from New Zealand, USA, Turkey, England, Belgium, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. The research themes of this first IRFGT were: The characteristics of the guide and the guided tour; Landscape and nature; An urban context; Experience and performance; To be a guide and; Technology.

From the 7th to the 9th April of 2011, over 50 tourist guides, tourism academics and lecturers as well as walking artists gathered together for the IRFGT research forum at the University of Plymouth, in England to discuss the nature, identity, aesthetics, commerce, politics, technicalities and management of 'the guided tour'. They were welcomed by Phil Smith who guided the participants of the forum throughout the city of Plymouth, in a skilled and charming kind of street performance/interpretive walk. The conference delegates attended from a number of countries including Canada, Sweden, Portugal, Serbia, Egypt, Jordan, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway.

From the 4th to the 6th April 2013, the 3rd International Research Forum on Guided Tours

was held at Breda University of Applied Sciences (formerly known as NHTV) in The Netherlands. IRFGT 2013 was dedicated to the diversification of tour guiding and guided tours. The effects of globalisation, the unevenness of the accelerations and redistributions of mobility, the digitisation of information, new communication technologies and developing genres and techniques within guiding practices, and all added up to an uncertain, challenging and adapting field for guides. IRFGT 2013 was a testimony to this: over the course of three days 28 speakers - academics, tour guides, artists, entrepreneurs - from different corners of the globe (numerous Europe countries, Australia, Canada, Jordan) discussed many of the topics raised above. Presentations addressed, for example, tour guiding as a tool for sustainable tourism, the contribution of tour guides to destination image and heritage interpretation, performativity and guided tours, experience of place and space in guided tours, quality assurance and regulatory mechanisms for tour guides, and guided tours and technologies. The presentations also showed that a wide variety of methods and approaches can be applied in guided tours research: from literature reviews, participant observation, and reflexive experiences to interviews and questionnaires in various forms and combinations. IRFGT 2013 was opened by Professor Betty Weiler. In her key-note speech she noted that travellers are looking for experiences that are not only enjoyable and memorable but also meaningful, making a difference in their own lives and/or helping sustain the environments and communities visited. She looked into tour guiding's contributions to sustainability, finding that it has focused mainly on ecological sustainability while there is still much to be learned, particularly with respect to economic, social and cultural sustainability. The Conference Proceedings (ISBN 978-90-5472-194-9 - Koerts, & Smith, 2013) contain 19 of the papers which were presented at IRFGT 2013. Together they demonstrate that guided tours and tour guides are a potent, changing, multi-faceted cultural phenomenon with promising research subjects in Tourism Studies which can be addressed from a wide variety of angles.

After the meetings in Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands, the IRFGT headed southwest to Portugal. From academic to practical perspectives, each forum has rewarded its participants in intercultural, intellectual and professional terms! In Estoril, delegates were welcomed from the 18th to the 21st March 2015. The themes of the forum were as follows: Sustainability in guided tours, Empowering tour guides, Marketing and promotion of guided tours, Interpretation of natural and cultural heritage, Intercultural communication, The future of tour guiding, and Tours in a world beyond modernity. The Proceedings of the 4th International Research Forum on Guided Tours (ISBN 978-989-20-6070-5 Brito & Soares, 2015) illustrate the success of the conference. They include 40 abstracts and 7 selected papers published online. Other papers were published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* (Volume 17, 2017, edited by Mikael Jonasson and Phil Smith). The forum was organised in the Estoril Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotel Studies (ESHTE), an institution that has been training tourist guides since 1992. Therefore, students actively participated in the organisation of the conference, as well as in the performance of tour guiding. In Estoril, the keynote speakers were: Noel Salazar, from the University of Leuven (Belgium), who brought different perspectives on guiding and guides; Carles Picazo from the Barcelona Guide Bureau (Spain), who spoke about his own private association of tourist guides; and Ester Pereira from Florida International University, Miami (USA) and University of Stavanger (Norway), who discussed connections between interpretation and sustainability. In Portugal the meeting was attended by over 100 people.

IRFGT 2017 was a testimony to the current turbulence in the world of tourism. Over the course of three days 20 speakers - academics, tourist guides, entrepreneurs discussed a wide variety of issues in Roskilde University, Denmark. According to Meged, & Koerts (2017), the contributions showed that different methods and approaches can be applied in researching guided tours. Tour guiding has probably never operated in such a volatile field as today, given the ever-

increasing numbers of people travelling, the urgency of climate change and need for sustainability, changing political and economic conditions, as well as on-going technological innovations, together with the still increasing influence of social media. The programme included the following themes: Challenges of professionalisation and work between regulation and deregulation; Sustainable ecologies in guided tours; Changing markets of guided tours and guides as change agents; Challenges of professionalisation and work between regulation and de-regulation; The guide as entrepreneur in new and old economies.

In 2019 the forum took place in Malta. The overarching discussions presented by the ten speakers discussed how the tourism industry is by nature a customer-oriented sector where considerable resources and efforts are exerted in providing the best product to its client who are meant to spend money in a touristic destination - this will eventually contribute towards the overall GDP of a country. The over-focus on the clients' needs may sometimes break that balance that is required in considering issues related to the service provider, particularly with regard to tourist guides - these too having their own needs, notably when it comes to continuous professional development, collaboration with tourism regulators, employment stability and well-being. The programme included the following themes: Tourist guiding and employability; Tourist guides' contribution towards Responsible Tourism; Synergies between professions: Tourist guides and Cultural Heritage managers; and Tourist guides as catalysts to the rise of Experiential tourism.

This first journal issues draws from the 6th International Research Forum on Guided Tours, held in Malta and hosted by the Institute of Tourism Studies in March of 2019. The conference discussed the profession from a wide-variety of viewpoints ranging from language to product development to occupational accidents and formal education.

Introducing the International Journal of Tour Guiding Research: A Challenge and an Opportunity

Editing this first issue of the International Journal of Tour Guiding Research and writing this introduction, has surely encouraged us to reflect upon the history and dynamics of tourist guiding, but more importantly to consider the future of the profession. The challenge for us is to further shed light on what we are and what we do, with a view to obtaining new understandings of the realities of this centuries old profession, how it is manifest in the 20th Century around the globe.

We invite academics, industry practitioners, students, teachers, researchers and any potential author with an interest in Tour Guiding Research to join us in developing this Journal. Please get in touch with us, submit potential papers, help us in editing and reviewing papers, suggest and assemble special issues and collections. Lets explore this topic, push the boundaries and work to improve this ancient profession, raise standards and develop our professionalism.

Miguel & Glen
April 2020

Appreciation

The writing of this publication has been made possible thanks to the first batch of brave authors who have trusted us with their work, and to Dr Kevin Griffin whose direct input and indefatigable work to set up this journal must be duly credited.

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