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Portuguese Tourist Guides and the Digital Age

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The experts of tourist information, namely, the tourist guides, are a highly qualified professional class and in continuous training. Many of these professionals seem to have certain limitations in terms of using new technologies, since many of those, working today, were not born in the digital age. They have been obliged to accept these technologies and sometimes tend to look at these new ways of communicating in a sceptical way, mainly because they do not properly know how to use them. These professionals are constantly facing the need to learn how to use these new tools, which have become essential for both their personal and professional lives. We therefore consider it pertinent to better understand how this professional group is dealing with these new information and communication technologies. Through a survey applied to three Facebook groups constituted, exclusively of certified tourist guides in Portugal, we sought to know the valorisation that these professionals attribute to the new technologies, what are their main difficulties, as well as the strategies developed to overcome them. We believe this is the right time to study these issues, taking into account that recently, due to the health crisis of COVID-19, people have had to rapidly adapt to other, never expected forms of life. The new technologies in their different formats now play a key role, and it is expected that these technologies will be increasingly implemented in the future. Finally, we can ask how far this will be a threat to the tourist guide profession.

Key Words: tourism, tourist guides, new types of tourism, new technologies

Introduction

Since Antiquity, there has been the role of the guide or travel companion. Visitors have always looked for someone who knows not only the path but also speaks the foreign language and is able to understand and explain the 'Other'. Those professional or non-professional guides have managed to build communication bridges between cultures and people, allowing the exchange of experiences. Tourist guides are professionals who understand the complexity of intercultural relationships because they combine two different roles: pathfinder and mentor as Cohen (1985) refers, and they can be called 'cultural mediators' (Rabotic, 2010; Feldman & Skinner, 2018), 'intercultural mediators' (Brito, 2008) or even as 'experience brokers' (Weiler & Walker, 2014; Weiler & Black, 2015a).

This mediation is always based on the communication process because 'the communicative component is the kernel of the professional guide's role' (Cohen, 1985:20). But, the way people communicate has changed a lot over the last few decades both in content and in form. The way tourist guides are able to use the communication process for their work in all its different aspects, must adapt to this new reality. To achieve this, guides have to develop better skills connected to the new ways of communicating. These innovations in communications are, in part related to new technologies, and as some authors suggest *these technological changes and developments have implications for guided tours and tour guides' communication* (Weiler & Black, 2015a:376).

Through centuries tourist guides have had to adapt and develop new ways of working, sometimes offering different products depending on the political, economic, social and technological conditions which have emerged in modern societies. Generally, tourist guides have managed to adapt to new motivations and different needs and even different cultural levels of visitors in the past decades because

as tourism has become a more globalised phenomenon, contemporary guided tours have developed into diverse, multifaceted, context-specific and adaptable products, offering benefits beyond safety and convenience (Weiler & Black, 2015b, p.13).

Guides have to respond to this and have to adapt and consider using the new communication tools that are available.

This is important because these tools are already being used by persons who managed to quickly understand how important and easy it is to reach clients through the internet and attract them to use their services even though they aren't licensed or certified professionals¹ and their number has been increasing.² Nowadays 'licensed and unlicensed tourist guides work side by side in most European towns' (Brito & Farrugia, 2010:7, Brito, 2020:34). However, some authors suggest that:

the main competitors to (professional) tour guides are not machines (as some persons may think) but people, partially outside the traditional tourism sectors, who offer guide-like services (Salazar, 2018:114).

Tourist guides are professionals with very specific training and some authors defend that it is '... necessary to have a basic scientific and technological education' (Santos Veloso & dos Santos Queirós, 2019:315) to have the skills for this job. It is necessary for a tourist guide to have both knowledge and creativity to provide a good performance. Some authors defend that the 'educational framework ensures high standards of guiding service' (Brito & Farrugia, 2020:8), but not all tourist guides have

had training in terms of new technologies, which puts them in a situation that is sometimes a little uncomfortable and can be quite a disadvantage in some moments. It is not only the question of their inability to use new technologies that led us to write this article, but also the consequences that this may have on the relevance of the existence and performance of this profession. It is time for professional guides to evolve and take new paths because

the capacity of guides to acquire and adapt their communication approach and skills in response to these (new) trends is central to their future and that of the guided tour itself (Weiler & Black, 2015a:368).

Tourism is an industry which has developed most rapidly in recent decades. For instance, Portugal has won several international tourism awards³ which also reflects the huge economic and social importance that tourism has in this country⁴. Tourist guiding was one of the professions that was quite well developed and many have embraced this profession. But due to Corona virus, everything changed⁵ and this turned

3 In the site *Turismo de Portugal* we can read: 'For 4 years Portugal won the price of Best European Destination' and was the first European country to receive the certificate of 'Safe Travel' from the World Travel & Tourism Council (see: http://www.turismodeportugal.pt/pt/quem_somos/Organizacao/Premios_Distinoes/Paginas/default.aspx) In the site of the World Travel Awards for 2020 the winner was Portugal as the Europe's Leading Destination and we also can read: 'Portugal's islands enjoyed excellent performances' and Dark Sky Alqueva, Portugal & Spain won the Europe's Responsible Tourism award (see: <https://www.worldtravelawards.com/press-396>)

4 According to the Portuguese Tourism Satellite Account, in the Year 2018 it represented 14,6% of the GDP of this country (see: <http://www.turismodeportugal.pt/pt/Noticias/Paginas/conta-satelite-do-turismo-2018.aspx>)

5 Already in March 2020 a survey was carried out by the Portuguese Tourist Guides and Tour Managers Association (AGIC) to investigate the situation of their members. The results show that in April 2020, 81.8% of the services had been cancelled and in May the same happened to 50.3%. The 165 respondents, when asked about predictions for September stated that 77% of the members had no work and in October it rose to 80%. These results prove how bad this crisis is because we are speaking about the high season periods (April, May–September, October) when usually every tourist guide should be working (information obtained from the president of the above mentioned association, in November 2020).

1 These were for many years called 'pirates' by the Portuguese 'official' guides.

2 This has to do with the deregulation of the tourist guide profession in many European countries and took place in Portugal on July 2011.

out to be one of the professions that has suffered severely with the crisis. In recent times, Portuguese tourist guides have been obliged to develop new strategies trying to reach new clients, giving some visibility to the profession and undoubtedly new technologies have an important role to achieve that. Guides have also had time to think about the real situation of their profession and their role as professionals. Some authors suggest

the tour guide profession itself has been undergoing an entire transformation, through which guides have gradually lost some important mediating roles (Salazar, 2018:114)

and we can have

... the perception that technology can in some cases substitute for what tour guides previously provided, notably the one-way delivery of directional and services information, commentary, site interpretation and language translation... (Weiler & Black, 2015b:168).

The tourism industry has been quickly changing and absorbing new concepts and

The survival of tourist organizations will depend to a large extent on the proper use of the new technological applications (Serra, 2008:8).

We just have to think about Augmented and Virtual Reality which for now are seen as novelties bringing new possibilities in so many fields including tourist activity. Virtual travel apps have increased exponentially in recent years. Some authors like Diamandis (2018) even propose that virtual reality will be able to give the users incredible tourist experiences without the hassle of travel. For those who in the field of tourism adopt a more avant-garde position, the following question should now be raised: can new technologies help tourist guides in general to maintain and develop their profession? To answer this, we need to know how tourist guides, namely the Portuguese tourist guides, are reacting to the implementation of new technologies.

The new types of tourist tend to be more autonomous, more individualistic and more informed, as mentioned by Cravidão (2006). We also know that since the 90's tourists are

empowered by information and booking systems and increase their personal efficiency by creating tailor-made products independently (Buhalis, 1998:411).

With technology such as virtual reality being implemented as well as the increase of individual travelling, some people even think that tourist guides are set to disappear. However, Thiegi and Muniz (2020) say that the use of virtual reality has increased in the last years not as a way to replace travel, but as a way to make a pre-visit by the traveller. They also refer the high price of this technology which is an obstacle and other authors also consider another important obstacle which is the fact that the tourist experience is wider than just to be able 'to see things' and human relationship is still extremely important for tourist satisfaction (see Hsu, Huang & Chan, 2009).

As proposed by Hsu *et al.* (2009), the value of the profession is still recognised as essential for the success of a trip. This happens mainly due to an intrinsic characteristic of the profession, the human relationship, which is very difficult, if not impossible to replace. We are talking about

[the human face, which] they provide the system ('the tourism machine') ... giving them an advantage over developing technology tools such as virtual, audio or mobile guides (Salazar, 2018:115)

A further advantage of the guide is the ability to adapt a presentation or information to the visitor, which is an issue more related to the psychological forum because the way things are explained and the emphasis that is placed on different aspects, must vary from person to person and from nationality to nationality. So, due to their important role as mediators, they take an important '... shifting positioning between two distinct cultures ...' (Feldman & Skinner, 2019:11) and they 'play an important role in staging the experience'. (Weiler & Black, 2015b:35).

Tourist guides still are important players in the tourism chain and some authors defend that they

are ‘indispensable to convey to tourists the richness of local natural and cultural Heritage’ (Salazar, 2012:15), but we have to acknowledge that ‘new forms of guided tours are emerging’ (Weiler & Black, 2015b:13). In this context, tourist guides have many roles to play.

Apart from providing tourists an unforgettable experience, they can be instrumental in helping communities to have more realistic expectations about tourism development (Salazar, 2012:20).

In addition to their role as an interpreter

... they must also play a role in the conservation and enhancement of tangible and intangible heritage (Santos Veloso & dos Santos Quéiros, 2019:311).

Their mediation role gives them big responsibilities and these are all reasons why it is so important for these professionals to exist and adapt, being able to explore the potential tools that are now at their fingertips in order to improve and diversify their professional performance.

Digitals and the tourist guide profession

Whenever in the history of Humanity there is a great change in technological terms, there are reactions in favour of change and others against. These negative reactions mainly arise from the fact that people do not understand or know how to control or dominate these new technologies and sometimes have fear of the unknown. Korb (2017) notes that Plato spoke about the fact that technology would dominate and it seems that he was then referring to ‘writing’, which has served us well. This is a natural reaction, because ‘things that are uncertain or unpredictable amplify the limbic system response’ (Korb, 2017:np) and thus, people tend to reject them. After some time these new technologies become understood and they prove to be very useful and reliable; eventually they are completely accepted. This is what has been happening since the beginning of time, but is extremely intensified at the moment, and for the purpose of this paper, has occurred in the relationship between tourist guides and new technologies. We can consider this profession to be in the midst of a paradigm shift where information technologies will

certainly bring a future full of ‘new opportunities and challenges for tourism industry’ (Buhalis, 1998:409).

Globalisation in tandem with digitalisation has contributed much in terms of changes. Buhalis (1998) referred to the whole system of Information Technology which has rapidly diffused throughout the tourism industry and how ‘no player will escape its impacts’ (Buhalis, 1998:411). Tourist guides are one of those players and they are a professional group which has proved to be resilient. The big difference at the current time is how quick these changes are happening. Maybe this is the reason why Portuguese tourist guides, as our study intends to prove, still seem to be unaware of how properly to use these technologies for their profession and it seems that they have been trying to avoid the situation and leave a deep engagement for later... but they cannot now avoid it.

During the confinement from March to June 2020 everyone was confronted with the need to use digital platforms. Tourist guides were not an exception. People became dependent on the internet, both on a personal level, since social networks were the only way to keep contact with family and friends, as well as on a professional level, and suddenly people were obliged to develop skills regarding teleworking. Even children had to use it to attend classes and their parents, some of them professionals of tourist information, were obliged to help them. Society has learned a lot. This was an unique moment that, due to its proximity, we have not yet been able to assign real importance; in the future when someone talks about the year 2020, this will be a historic milestone in terms of the evolution of new ways of living and working and of course communicating.

In general, tourist guides were seeing information and training as a way to fill the free time that the quarantine forced them to have. In Portugal, the entities representing these professionals, which are the National Union of Tourist Guides and Interpreters (SNATTI) and the Association of Tourist Guides and Tour Managers (AGIC), have organised training webinars in order to occupy their

affiliate members, thus using the available time in a useful way; this type of action has multiplied throughout all social networks. In June, the official Portuguese entity *Turismo de Portugal* (TP) held on-line training sessions to award a Clean & Safe Certificate, which had a huge response from these professionals. Sometimes in these training systems the big challenge was to correctly download the documentation and the correct use of the virtual meeting applications, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

Despite the techno-stress sometimes emerging because everything is so different, sometimes because changes are occurring so quickly and make it difficult to follow, these professionals have to understand that new technologies are essential for the tourism activity. As Serra (2008) defends, digital and tourism are ideal partners because of the nature of the products sold. All of this necessarily has consequences for the tourist guide profession. As some authors suggest

The growing popularity of internet-based hospitality networks are widening and broadening the field of hospitality actors. They both challenge and contribute to a redefinition of professional tour guiding (Salazar, 2018:114),

and

In addition to the internet, technology-assisted experiences en route and on-site are more common, ranging from highly interactive visitor centres to mobile phone apps to podcasts in the language of the visitor's choice (Weiler & Black, 2015b:168).

Therefore, it is urgent that professionals learn how to adapt and live in this Digital Age, always considering its positive and negative impacts.

For instance, Google has changed the way tourism professionals work today, because it is possible to Google a location or site whenever needed, to get quick information about opening hours of a monument or museum to be visited or even to check how long it takes to get there. Nowadays guides can easily find the location of any of the places in a program or can look for a quick overview of

a monument which they plan to visit. As Salazar (2018) reminds:

Guiding in tourism settings now increasingly happens in conjunction with, or solely by non-human agents. Maps, travel guides, interpretative signs, and information boards have existed for a long time. However, the explosive growth of new information and communication technologies, Geographic Information Systems and Global Positioning Systems has led to a revolution in the touring landscape, which has evolved from loanable audio guides and digital display guides to applications and content (e.g. podcasts) that can be downloaded at any time, in different languages, and often free-of-charge, to one's own mobile device (cell phone, PDA, tablet, MP3-player, etc.) (Salazar, 2018:114).

Tourist guides as well as other tourism professionals mostly agree that it is extremely practical to use new technologies, which allow them to have easy access to a wide range of information - this is seen as positive. The communication system has become much easier and quicker. But we also find some negative aspects because, in part some of these technologies have been replacing previously assigned roles of the tourist guides. And as we also mentioned before these new technologies also make it possible for some people to offer their services as guides without being certified, which means that they are able to reach clients, who risk booking someone who is not qualified, who probably doesn't know the intricacies of the profession, that goes much beyond being friendly or telling a story in the client's language⁶.

Nowadays without the mediation of a travel agency which in the traditional system managed the distribution of services and functioned as a guarantee of quality because they mostly worked with certified tourist guides, the tourism activity has changed completely. Tourist guides cannot depend

⁶ Even though these guides might be cheaper this is a serious matter because it concerns quality. Quality has always been something very important for the Portuguese certified professionals, who have been able through the past decades to create a good image of this profession and the country itself.

exclusively on the support of these partners, because travel agencies themselves are experiencing major challenges with the advent of online global booking networks.

In this sense, we may say that the new technologies have brought problems to tourist guides, who in order to overcome this situation, will have to learn how to better use these digital tools and appear in the same communication channels that the non-certified people normally do, thus trying to stay in a position of equality. But the use of new technology should not just happen in the moment where guides are trying to reach their clients, it should also take place at other times, i.e. the preparation of the tour and during the visits. Utilising technology at all of these steps will completely modernise guiding methods using digital technologies. As Black and Weiler (2013) suggest, tourist guides must become highly skilled, they have to embrace technology to be able to face the challenges of the global communication environment.

The passivity that many of the Portuguese professionals have shown for some time in relation to new technologies, has not only to do with the fact that many of them did not have contact with these new means of communication right away as these means appeared, it was also because in the past they were not quite allowed to reach directly the client, but mainly, it was because they didn't need to. Many of them had already established themselves in the profession, continuing to use traditional methods related to their entrance into the market and in the course of their profession⁷.

Nowadays for the profession to survive, it is not enough to be sure that quality services are provided, which in the past was quite simple to accomplish since the number of tourist guides was much smaller and almost everyone knew each other⁸. Today, the big challenge for tourist guides to maintain their activity is to be able to make themselves known to potential

⁷ This attitude comes from the fact that the profession was regulated until 2011, which gave the guarantee that everyone who exercised it was qualified to do so and there was no need to use new technologies to come into the market and reach clients.

clients because the communication channels have completely changed.

As stated by Salazar: 'The context in which tour guides are operating has dramatically changed' (2018:115). This demands different attitudes from these professionals, who need to become more proactive, changing their approach in order to follow trends and assert themselves into the tourism market, because 'new technologies are all likely to affect tour guides and the guided tour' (Weiler & Black, 2015b:166)

This (also) underlines the need for tour guiding to be innovative and marketed as a service that adds value in ways that technology cannot (Weiler & Black, 2015b:168).

Methodology

We understand that

[the] tourism market is evolving due to technological changes and globalization, phenomena that are shaping the productive chain and services (Hassan, 2011:46).

This is the reason why we find the main objective of this study so pertinent; we intend to explore the ways in which Portuguese tourist guides are using the new technologies. This study is based on the following research questions:

Are Portuguese tourist guides using digitals for their profession?

Are Portuguese tourist guides skilled enough to use the new technologies in their profession?

Is it possible to improve the use of digitals by Portuguese tourist guides?⁸

We are aware that 'There has been a notable diversity in the methods used by researchers to investigate tour guides and tour guiding' (Weiler & Black, 2015b:10) and to explore the changes, this study mainly took a quantitative approach. Nevertheless, some preliminary semi-structured interviews were

⁸ The President of the Tourist Guides Association - AGIC estimates that although there are only about 300 members in the Association and also around 300 in the Union, there are about 900 active professionals in Portugal.

made by telephone in May 2020, to the President of AGIC, Dra. Cristina Leal, and to 6 tourist guides comprising different generations, which allowed the investigator to have a better overview of the situation that these professionals are now facing. The author also attended, on the 11th and 12th of December the VIth National Congress of Tourist Information (CNIT) organised online (Zoom) by AGIC, in which the second day was completely dedicated to the theme: 'Tourist Guides and Digitals'.

It was decided to use a mixed method approach. This style of research has been used since the 80s, and integrates both quantitative and qualitative data in a single project. As Bryman (2008) defends, this method provides a better comprehension about a phenomenon than just using a single method. The author, being herself a tourist guide, had to be very vigilant in keeping a distance and even though it is very difficult to be completely neutral, endeavoured not to interfere. However, it is possible that some of personal knowledge about the profession is somehow evident throughout the text. The quest for neutrality was the main reason why the author chose to use a survey.

The questionnaire, built on Google Forms was carried out in June (24th to 28th) being sent to 3 Tourist guide Facebook groups. In total, it had 39 questions, the first 5 questions were to characterise the respondents and all the others aimed at understanding the value that professionals attribute to new technologies, the difficulties presented, as well as strategies that they have been adopting in order to adapt to them, always with the intention of mastering these tools in favour of their profession.

The author decided to present 34 closed-ended questions with the 4 remaining questions being open-ended to allow the respondents to give freely their own opinion - the results later being analysed by the author. 123 responses were validated and the results are described in the following sections.

Survey results

16 men and 107 women answered the survey, which might be quite representative of this professional group, where we generally find many more women than men.

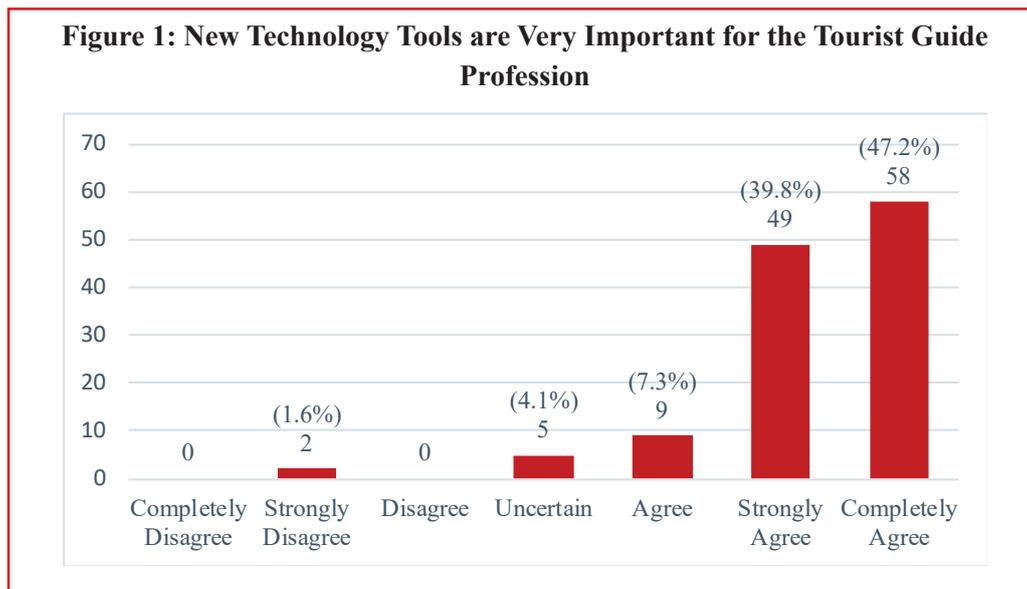
The most largest cohort of respondents (43.9%) were between 50 and 60 years old. This fact becomes quite important because these are exactly the professionals who may have more difficulties dealing with new technologies, since there was no digital technology in general usage when they undertook their initial training. This fact certainly enriches this study and will allow the author to give a better answer to the starting questions.

Most of the respondents (76.2%) live in Lisbon, 37.4% of them are single and 30% are married. Through interviews the investigator managed to understand that to have a family life is quite difficult for some of these professionals, who sometimes are many days away from home. Some of the tourist guides with children mostly try to do one day tours, which allows them to come back home in the evening.

More than one half of the respondents are licensed and 38,2% have a bachelors level education, because until the 1990's the 3 years long tourism course, that existed in the private education system, was then a bachelor degree. The respondents were mainly tourist guides (74%) followed by 25.2 % who combined both tour guiding and tour management.

Relevant for the survey to be representative is the fact that many of the respondents have long practised in the tourist guide profession; one third of them (32.6%) have worked for more than 30 years in this profession, followed by 18.7% have work for less than 25 years and only 2.5% have been working for less than 5 years and in this last case we find 4 respondents between 20-30 years old.

For 86.2% of the respondents, tourist guiding or sometimes tourist guiding combined with tour management was their main professional activity,



which means that most of our respondents are dependent on the tourist information profession to survive, which means that they are having huge difficulties at the moment because this profession has been severely quite affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

Coming back to the main subject of our study: the new technologies and to be able to understand how Portuguese guides feel about digitals, we asked them when did they have the first contact with digital technologies and we found out that 42.3% of the respondents had their first contact with new technologies during their professional lifetime, 32.5% of them had this contact during their studies and only 19.5% had this contact when they were children/teenagers.

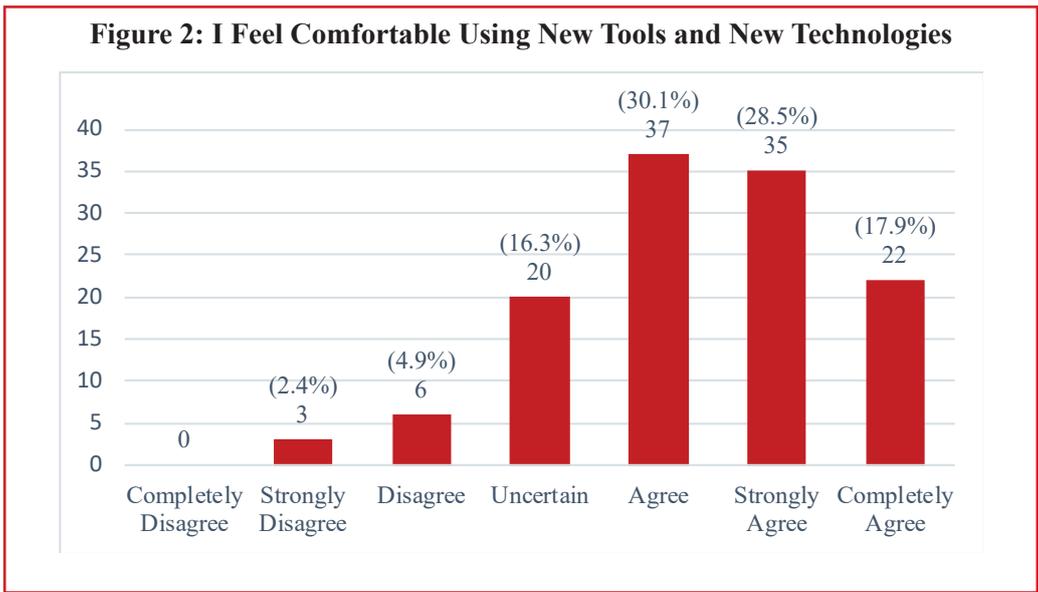
Considering a Likert scale of 7 points, the majority of our respondents (54) agree completely that new technologies facilitate our everyday life and many (43) strongly agree, 26 just agree and no respondent disagrees. This means that all respondents understand the importance of the new technologies and see them as a positive value. When asked about the interest they have in these new technologies, 34 completely agree, 37 strongly agree, 38 respondents just agree and 8 gave negative answers. So, there is a minor difference in these results which reflects that the interest they have in new technologies isn't as strong as the importance they consider them to have

in their lives.

When asked about the importance of these new tools for their profession (Figure 1), we see similar results. As we can see 47.2% completely agree that new technology tools are important for the tourist guide profession, 39.8% strongly agree with it and 7.3% agree, the other (negative) almost being residual. This indicates that guides recognise the importance of these new tools for their profession.

Also to understand better their 'relationship' with the new technologies, respondents were asked if they considered themselves to be suffering from techno-stress and 53.7 % of the respondents said Yes. This may have to do with the time they spend using the computer, either because they do not notice the time passing by or because they really need more time since they don't dominate digitals as one of the interviewed tourist guides said.

When they were asked if they feel comfortable using new technologies (Figure 2), we see the following answers. Only 17.9% of the respondents agree completely, 28.5% strongly agree and the majority with 30.1% agree, which indicates that many of them don't feel completely comfortable. We have 16, representing 3%, that are neutral and we also have a few respondents giving negative answers. Combining the result of this chart with the open question, the interpretation can be: despite expressing



different levels of discomfort, in general they don't feel completely confident with new technologies. This idea is also reinforced by the results when we asked them if they consider attending a digital course, which they strongly supported, as we can see in Figure 3. Here, 42.3% of the respondents completely agree with this possibility and 33.3% strongly agree, while 14.6% just agree, leaving only some residual neutral and negative answers (approximately 10% combined). This means that guides want to complete a course to improve their skills. In part this doesn't completely agree with the results of Figure 2, which suggests that they feel quite comfortable using the new technologies. The question then is, how are they using it?

When they were directly asked if they consider it possible to improve their digital skills, we obtained the following answers (Figure 4). The majority (74.8%) of the respondents said Yes and 23.6% answered 'perhaps; with only 2.2% saying No. This means they strongly believe that they can improve their skills, which agrees with the acceptance of the possibility of offering a digital course. So, it seems that the respondents are aware of their limited ability regarding new technological issues and they want to increase their digital skills.

So, to really understand if they are properly using these new tools and all the possibilities they offer, we had to find out how these professionals are

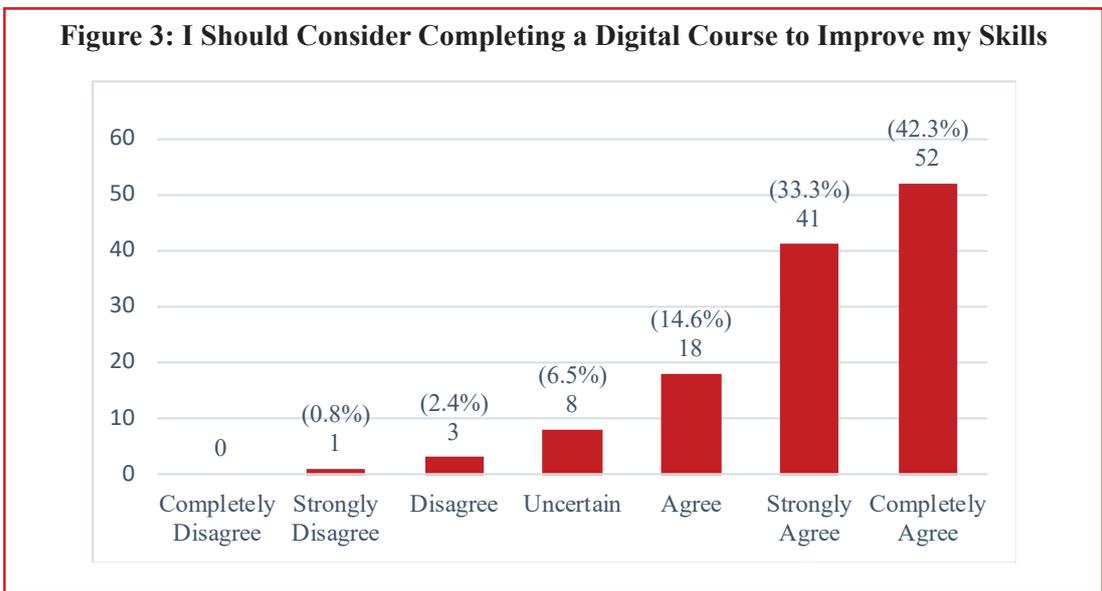
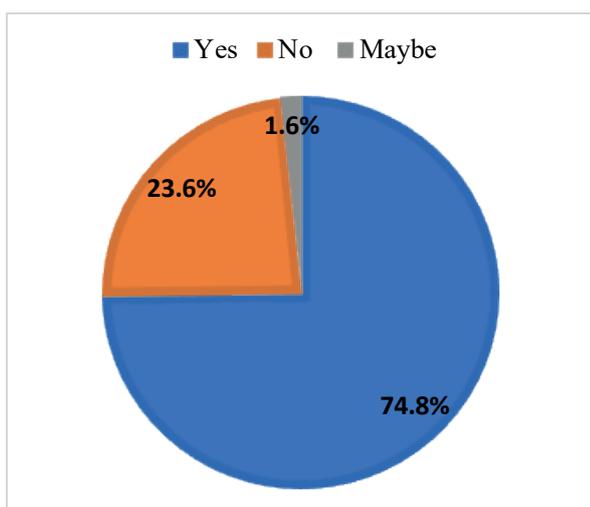


Figure 4: I Could Improve my Digital Skills



effectively using them. Even though we had one respondent showing a huge reluctance towards these technologies saying that he ‘feels obliged to use it and that is the only reason to do so’, the majority do use technology in 3 main ways:

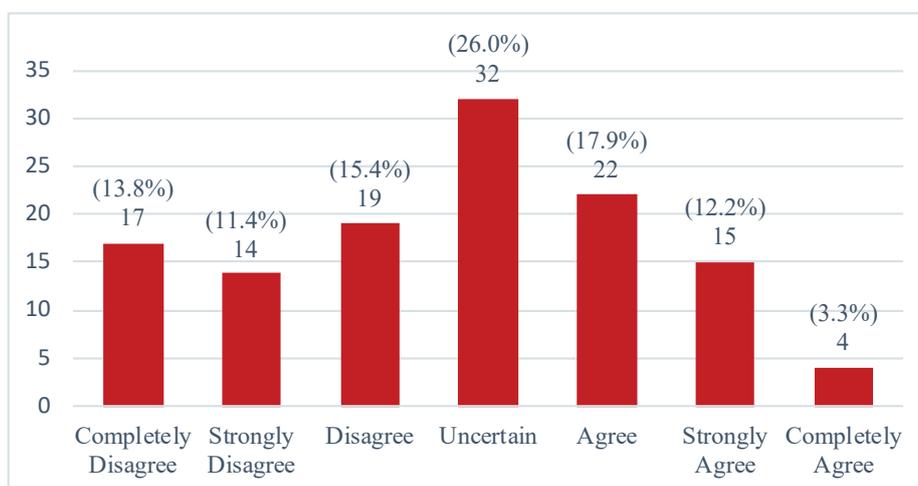
- to search for information and obtain more knowledge connected or not to the profession (38);
- professional marketing and seeking services / clients (26);
- Exchange of interesting informations with colleagues (16).

We consider that they are mainly using the technologies to seek more information but only a few

are using it in a more effective way for promotion or to give more visibility to the profession. Another way which allows us to understand how they are really using digitals for the profession was to ask their opinion about professional sites. Almost all respondents (92.7%) considered it important to have a professional site and, in fact, 64.2% of them already have a professional site either alone or together with other colleagues.

The author also wanted to know if respondents feel threatened by new technologies, namely, virtual tours which strongly appeared during quarantine and the answers were as follows (Figure 5). In general, they seem to have doubts or no opinion because many of them were neutral (26.0%), 40.6% don’t think that virtual tours will be the future of the profession, while only 33.4% of them considered a positive answer regarding virtual tours as being the future of tourist guiding. Those completely agreeing were comprised just 3.3% of the sample. In one of the open questions of the survey it is evident that respondents see this possibility as only applying for the time being, due to reduced tourism activity because of COVID-19, and many believe that in a long term everything will return to a situation pretty close to the normality they knew before. Nevertheless, 73.3% answered in another question that if they had the technical skills, they would consider creating their own virtual tours, which they regard as an opportunity for the moment.

Figure 5: Virtual Tours May be the Future of the Tourist Guide Profession?



Considering that many respondents didn't feel completely skilled, the author also wanted to know who would help them whenever they had problems. The majority answered that whenever they have difficulty with digitals they mainly ask their family to help them (61.8%). Others ask friends (38.2%) or colleagues (17.9%) and the rest use the service of professionals (18.7%).

The fact that they don't turn to colleagues very much drew our attention since there is ample evidence of guides asking colleagues on social networks for different kinds of informations. This could be connected to the perception that profession colleagues also have difficulties themselves with digital matters - this is explicit in the results obtained when asked to evaluate their own difficulties and those of their colleagues. Evaluating difficulties in a scale from 1 to 10 (ten being the highest difficulty level) they agree to having more difficulties than their colleagues but the difference isn't very substantial - their own difficulties are mainly at level 6 and those of their colleagues at level 5.

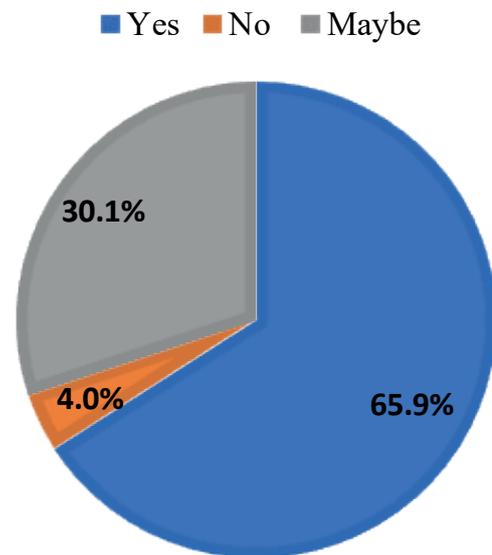
When asked about the relationship between younger generations and digitals, 63.4% of the respondents consider that the younger generations have a greater aptitude for digitals, which can be in part questioned by the results of the survey, since two of the 4 youngest respondents (21-30 years) also consider themselves as having some difficulties when using new technologies.

Considering the most common difficulties identified by respondents, we have the following results:

- Several basic problems like downloading, using pens or even using excel or word (34);
- using new apps and new programs or in general technical problems with software (17);
- staying up to date since everything changes so quickly (6);
- Just to be able to understand the vocabulary (5).

It seems that the most common problems maybe connected to the fact that many of the respondents

Figure 6: Digital Skills are Fundamental for my Profession



haven't been prepared to use computers and if we consider the difficulties presented by the two older respondents (above 70 years) that were: 'technical problems with the computer' and 'selecting the information that may be interesting' and then we compare them with the difficulties presented by the 3 youngest respondents (21- 30 years) who had mainly 'problems with hardware', 'solving errors about a specific function of a program', we can say that the level and nature of the difficulties seem to be rather different; the youngest seeming to be more comfortable when dealing with software issues. However, the majority agree that digitals are fundamental for the profession as we can see in Figure 6.

This strongly agrees with the information in Figure 1 which identifies the importance of new technology tools for the profession. Here, the majority of the respondents (65.9%) consider digitals not only important but fundamental for the profession. Only a few (4.0%) think the opposite and many (30.1%) are unsure. Is it because many guides are so used to working without it? We suggest therefore that some respondents are still sceptical about the fundamental role of technology. We must think that many of our respondents were working for a long time with no

digital tools, or perhaps they simply don't understand the potential of such technology, not knowing how to use it properly. In such case many may tend not to consider it fundamental, because they still conceive a way to continue to work with out it.

From the total of 123 respondents, 122 of them (99.2%) regularly use social networks. About the electronic devices being used by them to connect to these social networks, 78.0% of the respondents are mainly connected through smartphones, which are quite practical for the profession. Only 13% mainly use the computer and the rest use a tablet that they can also easily carry with them. About the networks being used, Facebook comes in first place, in second place is Whatsapp and in third place LinkedIn. The main reasons for using these social networks are firstly socialisation and secondly professional reasons.

The majority (85 - professionals, which represents 69.0% of the respondents), are aware that the quarantine incentivised the use of new technologies, providing the conditions to strongly push them into learning how to use these new tools. Probably because of it, 52 of them, which represents 42.3% of the respondents, completely agree that the state of emergency contributed to develop new skills, 37 (30.1%) strongly agree with that and 14 (11.4%) also agree. Only 10 (8, 1%) respondents gave a neutral answer and the rest gave negative answers towards this possibility.

From analysing one of the open questions in the survey, it can be proposed that quarantine has positively influenced the way the respondents are now using digital technologies:

Respondents had some free time to discover more about digitals

- I started giving more importance to digitals*
- I had time to discover my computer*
- I understood that I need some better equipment'*

The respondents have noticed the importance of new technology for their current and future life

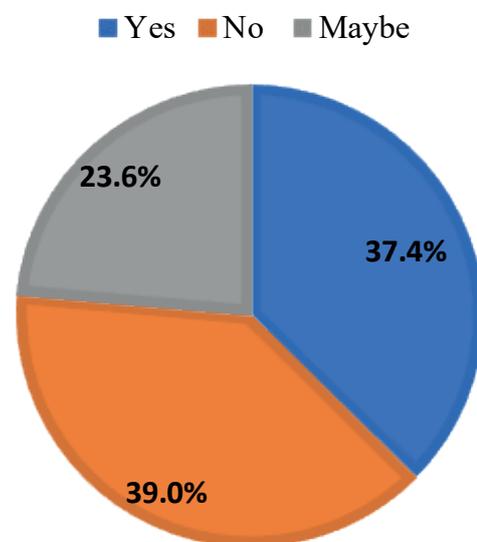
- That was the only way to have some social contact*
- It became an important tool for our life*
- I am now more aware of what happens in the world*
- I understood how important it will be from now on'*

They understood the importance digitals may have for their profession

- We could do some courses learning more interesting things*
- I am able to notice more professional opportunities*
- I decided to have a site, advertising mywork'*

Despite the above comments their attitudes towards digitals hasn't changed much, because when asked if quarantine had made them change their attitude towards digitals we obtained the results presented in Figure 7. The majority (39.0%) gave a negative answer and only 37.4% said they have changed their attitude, while 23.0% were not sure. Does this result mean that they still feel uncomfortable if not frustrated about technology?

Figure 7: I Have Changed My Attitude Towards Digital During Quarantine/Lockdown



This brings us to our last question, which was how they feel about living in this Digital Age. 63.4% said that they feel good about it, but 9.8% said they were unhappy. 22.8% had doubts and some didn't even answer. In a last open question they were asked why they feel like this and the author was able to register several main opinions:

Respondents understand the importance of digitals and how practical it may be for their personal or professional life, allowing us to do things quickly and at distance;

Respondents sometimes feel that they would like to disconnect because it is 'just too much' or 'too quick' or even too 'stressy' and sometimes they 'feel frustrated';

Respondents are afraid of this Digital Age because the internet gives a wrong impression of safety and they miss real personal relationships;

Some consider that without noticing it, the internet takes too much time of their life. They would prefer to do other things.

In the concerns of Portuguese tourist guides we find a clear duality about digitals. They are using digitals and recognise their importance, but such technologies can be seen as both communication facilitators or certain obstacles in real human relationships. They can be seen and are being used as a good vehicle to obtain information but they can also sometimes be considered as a way to feel disappointed when users aren't able to achieve all the possibilities which technologies offer. The professionals agree that new technologies are fundamental, but they understand they can and have to improve their skills, to be able not to feel sceptical or frustrated when they don't control it. This paradox is nicely summarised by one of the respondents who said:

It depends how we use it, it has benefits and disadvantages.

Conclusion

The tourism market is changing and considering the fact that tourist guides are

frontline employees in the tourism industry who play an important role in shaping tourists' experience in a destination (Hsu et al., 2009:3)

it is very important for them to be able to adapt to new times and new tourist trends. The future will be somehow different and the changes are already happening. Due to COVID-19 quarantine, as mentioned before, everything changed at an incredibly fast rate, mainly due to the fundamental role achieved by the new technologies in the communication process. Thus, we know that information technologies can 'reshape the nature of competition in most economic activities' (Buhalis, 1998:410) and E-tourism 'has revolutionised the entire business process and the entire value chain' (Serra, 2008:5). These technologies present new rules, but professionals are learning and adapting.

Concerning the Portuguese guides, we can say that this professional group is always learning and developing their capabilities. Quarantine made it possible for many respondents to approach the technologies more enthusiastically. The majority of these professionals suggest that quarantine helped them to develop new skills, nevertheless 39.0% said they haven't changed their attitude towards digitals during that time, while 37.4 % of the respondents who have changed their attitude to digitals in the last months. It was a steep learning curve for many. These professionals were obliged to risk and learn new ways of communicating, which will allow them to develop their skills and for sure will allow these professionals to modernise the way they work.

Many of our respondents don't feel very comfortable yet, in using the new technologies, nevertheless, they are aware of this, and they believe they can learn. Furthermore, they understand that they not only can but also have to improve the way they use digitals. This is a situation that seems to affect to varying degrees all generations of tourist guides, since it is a completely new way of communicating with visitors, not only before preparing the visits but also during their visits. As Black and Weiler (2013) claim, new technologies should be used to choreograph memorable experiences for tourists.

Thinking about new generations it is important that during their education they are trained to properly use new technologies for their future tourism

profession. As Brito (2020) says in his study about the deregulation of the tourist guide profession in Portugal, one specific case for improvement that was referred by these professionals had to do with how to use new technologies which were considered as an important tool by them. Also the majority of our respondents consider it not just important but rather fundamental and they also consider the possibility of undertaking a digital course to improve their skills allowing them to better understand and use these new technologies⁹.

Coming back to the subject of new technologies as competitors to tourist guides, we can think about audioguides, digital guidebooks and new apps with all kind of tourism information. Brito says that these new technologies are not to be seen as competitors but more as complementary tools,

because unlike machines, guides produce tailor-made discourses and convey emotions, proving that the human factor is essential in tourism (Brito, 2020:43).

As Brito defends, and despite the negative futurology of Diamandis (2018) who predicts the tourist guide profession being replaced by technology, our respondents consider that personal relationships will always be the preferred way of communicating. Our respondents are not afraid of virtual tours replacing them. Some would even like to be skilled enough to develop a virtual tour, that in very specific moments, like quarantine, could be a kind of temporary substitute and should certainly and increasingly be used for marketing and image purposes.

Digitals seem to have a dual relationship with tour guides. On the one hand technology seems to work as a facilitator, on the other hand it seems to be a threatening element as for instance when it is used by the wrong professionals since there is no

⁹ This is essential and in fact, *Turismo de Portugal* understood it and through their digital platform: Academia Digital, is offering since December 2020 several courses under the title *Digital Program Upgrade*, which are totally meant for tourism professionals, which includes tourist guides. Through this course it is expected that they will be able to learn more about how to properly use digitals in tourism (see: <https://academiadigital.turismodeportugal.pt/>)

quality regulation. However, the positive opinion of several authors about the importance of the tourist guide profession suggests that a larger study should take place, considering the tourists opinion. The following questions need to be considered:

What are the expectation of visitors towards tours and digitals?

In the future, can virtual reality be a real substitute for travelling?

How is the tourism industry and its different stakeholders dealing with this digital Age?

Co-operation between different stakeholders is also changing as a consequence of the new technologies. Portuguese tourist guides recognise that the relationship between them and the (traditional) travel agencies / operators has been fundamental, appearing not only as a job supplier but also as a quality regulating element. According to the President of AGIC 'the travel agencies are still the preferential partner for tourist guides'. However, they realise that traditional travel agencies have lost quite a percentage of the market to the internet platforms and they also need to adapt to this new reality which is already happening by the creation of online agencies or online departments of traditional agencies.

These travel professionals have to find new paths not only to survive the current crisis but also to reach new segments of tourism, and digitals are seen as a possibility to facilitate reaching both the national and the international markets. New technologies are the future, because they have '... immense possibilities of communication and connectivity on a global scale' (Azevedo, 2005:2). Also, new forms of working together with other stakeholders have to emerge and that is why some authors defend that

Guides and operators can also embrace technology to enhance the delivery of guided tours, such as incorporating podcasts and smartphone apps into their tours (Weiler & Black, 2015b:168).

There are many new possibilities but tourism professionals must be skilled in these digital issues to be able to use it for their benefit.

As Weiler and Black (2015b) noted, new types of tour guiding are emerging and Portuguese certified tourist guides are developing new strategies both in terms of content and form. Even though many of our respondents still mainly use social networks such as Facebook, for personal / private purposes, 64.2% of them already have a professional site and 92.7% considered it important to have one. Portuguese certified tourist guides are now starting to adapt and for sure they will prove that they are capable of being good entrepreneurs and will start having new ideas and offering new kinds of visits and new attractive and thematic programs, because they have the know-how to

improve visitor experiences and enhance the reputation of tourism operators and visitor destinations (Weiler & Black, 2015b:133).

Some good examples of the strategies, already developed by Portuguese tourist guides towards a different performance, are the actions of some of these professionals, who already feel more comfortable with these new opportunities, having developed blogs and sites such as *'A Teia da Guia'* that was extremely active in quarantine, presenting several cultural actions¹⁰. Several tourist guides have created different kinds of walking tours with interesting themes and they were able to advertise these properly through the internet¹¹. The same happened to another group of these professionals that had already created literary tours *'Passeios literários'*, which were first meant for schools, but they have adapted them for tourism¹². Some created cooking workshops for visitors such as *'Portuguese cooking with Sofia'*¹³ using digitals as the main channel for reaching clients. Others are more humble when it comes to digitals, but we have the example of the botanical tours *'À conversa com as plantas'* created by a certified tourist guide in Lisbon, or tours with musical themes such as *'Lisboa Italiana'*

or *'Viver Amália'*¹⁴. These successful tours can be found in several social networks since they are being advertised through Facebook and Instagram. More actions are being developed in other national areas like the *'Madeira Exquisite food and foot tours'*¹⁵ and certified guides from the Azores and the Algarve who are developing other interesting projects that were presented at the CNIT and involve the local municipalities.

As said before, many professionals have created a business site and those who had more difficulty in doing it individually, found a way to insert themselves in websites where groups of colleagues got together in order to give greater visibility to their profession. One of the best examples is the recent site created by certified guides: Tourist Guides Portugal (<https://tourguideportugal.com/>) or the one created by the AGIC for their affiliate members: Tours by certified guides (<https://toursby.agicportugal.com/>). Other professionals have decided to enter websites like *'Get your guide'* or *'Toursbylocals'*, which is now offering live virtual tours with private guides.

We consider that we are now able to answer to our research questions:

Are Portuguese tourist guides using digitals for their profession?

Yes they are, but still with some limitations. As our respondents said, they mainly use technology to search or exchange information and only 21% used it to look for clients or advertise their services. Many of them are faced with the need to use digitals and even though they consider it to be important for their profession, they don't explore all the possibilities given by these tools. This probably happens due to

10 See: www.ateiadaguia.com. Just by setting an example this site has helped colleagues to overcome fears about new technologies. Also they were obliged to develop skills to be able to attend to the cultural actions they presented.

11 See: www.lisbonyourway.com or thisislisbonwalkingtours.com or <https://callingoutours.com/>

12 See: www.passeiosliterarios.com

13 See: <http://portugueseccookingschool.com/>

14 This is a 3 hours walking tour created to commemorate 100 years after the birth of the most famous Fado singer Amália Rodrigues and it combines history, story telling and music. It appeared in *Lisbon Cultural Agenda* and it was mentioned in TVI Portuguese Television and *Evasões* Magazine. This project has received a Tourism and Sustainability prize 2020 from Inatel. Contact info.lisbontourguide@gmail.com.

15 See: <https://www.madeirafoodonfoot.com/>

the lack of knowledge about their functioning¹⁶. As our respondents said they find several difficulties and they have to ask for help in several basic matters.

This brings us to our second question:

Are Portuguese tourist guides skilled enough to use the new technologies in their profession?

No. As our respondents show, they don't feel completely comfortable to properly use all the potential of these new tools. Only a few of them claim at the moment to be able to properly use digitals for their profession.

Is it possible to improve the use of digitals by Portuguese tourist guides?

Yes, because they believe they can learn and they consider digitals to be fundamental for their profession. Many of our respondents considered attending a digital course¹⁷ to improve their skills. They are adjusting themselves to new ways of marketing, booking and traveling and they are trying to be proactive and innovate their offer allowing the tourist guide profession to evolve.

This study proves that Portuguese tourist guides are now starting to understand the potential of new technologies for their profession and they intend to

use this potential for both their continuous education connected to the profession as well as for their communication skills. They will improve their skills enabling them to increase the use of these new tools, which should be considered as an opportunity and not so much as a threat. They are sure that in the coming years, nothing will be able to completely replace the human relationship and that will always give importance to quality and will be lead to demand for the service of a good professional.

Salazar (2018) has the same opinion when he defends that

Human tour guiding is a brokering service that adds to the tourist experience in ways the latest information and communication technologies can impossibility match (yet) (Salazar, 2018:115).

But, the person and the technology should be complementary. Let us wait a couple of years to see this changing. The professionals in this survey are just waiting for this pandemic to be defeated or at least controlled, for tourism to recover, then they can start over with the (now reformulated and modernised) activity, that they like the most: tourist guiding.

16 This is the reason why at the end of the VIth CNIT the President of AGIC referred to the possibility of creating a digital course specific for Tourist guides and Tour managers that would help them to overcome this situation.

17 Many of these professionals intended to participate to the course organised by *Turismo de Portugal*, called Digital Upgrade, already mentioned in this work and that was announced by the Secretary of State for Tourism, Dra. Rita Marques and the Coordinator Director of *Turismo de Portugal*, Dra. Ana Paula Pais, during the VIth CNIT. This course giving them new digital skills is considered to be a important measure to help the tourism professionals to recover after the crisis.

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