

2017-10-02

Editorial

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/12505>

10.1080/15022250.2017.1330843

Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism

Informa UK Limited

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Editorial

Guides and tour operators as professionals play a key role in the growing global tourism industry, supporting, engaging and diverting visitors who travel to places they want to learn more about and be entertained by. Behind the scene there are challenges and tensions related to the particular professional roles, the vibrant matters and staff that stand-in for the guide, physical efforts, and the competitive and vulnerable position guides have on a highly competitive job market. 'Key role' is also 'contested space'. This special issue focuses on the guides and tour operators and the challenges they face in their working role.

Through the International Research Forum on Guided Tours (IRFGT) a systematic work has been going on for a while by further widening the questions and assembling scholars interested in guided tours as a scientific field of inquiry (Adolfsson, et al 2009; Jonasson, 2011; Zillinger, et al 2012). The latest conference, from which these contributions emerged was hosted by Estoril Higher Institute for Tourism and Hotel Studies (ESHTE), Portugal. IRFGT still continues to produce networks and publications that have opened up questions regarding guided tours. Rather than remaining a mystifying and closed skill-set in the hands of professional or semi-professional associations and licensed individuals, the IRFGT seeks to open the multiple practices of guiding to imaginative, careful and serious scrutiny from a variety of theoretical perspectives, initiated and deployed by an emerging interdisciplinary community.

Every new place that the conference IRFGT has moved to has brought new perspectives into play. From the last conference in Estoril in 2015, it is clear that guided tours are increasingly seen by some researchers as productions of extraordinary experiences, emotions, and enjoyment of places. From this last conference it also became clear that practitioners had found their way into the conference. The dynamics between practice and research is perhaps one of the field's most interesting and volatile characteristics, which in many ways could be exploited and explored more in order to create new ways of doing and understanding guided tours.

The conference key note speakers represented different areas of theory and practice. Professor Noel Salazar opened the conference with an anthropological take on guided tours in relation to tourism imaginaries and otherness in a global context. Ester Pereira, with her considerable experience from touristic expeditions, represented a sustainable view on guided tours and tourism from a tour operator and tourist perspective. Embodying both the theoretical and a practitioner's perspective, Carles Picazo gave valuable insights from a long career of planning and education of tourist guides.

Taking the study of guided tours on a route towards the practitioner and the professional roles of the guide contributes to yet another important piece of the puzzle. This special issue converges at a parallel line by considering students' future careers as tourist guides in Jordan with a contribution by Areej Aloudat. He concludes that the occupation of guides is unevenly perceived by these students, and reveals the perceived advantages of working for a tour operator, rather than being a freelancer in the business. Gurel Cetin continues the exploration of the professional relation between tour operators and tour guides in organized package tours. As it turns out, there are many identified gaps and differences in perceptions concerning these two professional perspectives, which could be further explored when their various parts are opened up for further scrutiny and discussion. Jane Widtfeldt Meged also focuses on the professional craft of guiding, but by pointing sharply towards the stressful working conditions for guides. It is known that organizational structures shape the

conditions under which self-employed, well-educated, and yet casual laborers in a liberal and competitive job market work, but Widtfeldt Meged freshly interrogates the subject by questioning tour guides about their actual views on these conditions. Finally, Polly Macpherson & Phil Smith implicitly address the future roles of tour guides as part of a project where tourists' agency, intervention in heritage space and the recruitment of the guiding role are in focus. Macpherson and Smith draw on a range of conceptual tools in order to arrange and assemble their experiments involving different objects and agencies at Castle Drogo. The project in itself shows the importance of co-producing and co-working between different actors that parallel and converge at the point of guided tours, in order to create dynamics and development within the field. Not only must research and practice co-produce conditions for future guided tours, but other types of triggering perspectives will be needed, such as art and performance.

As can be concluded from the very brief summary of the papers included in this volume, the papers are concerned with the professional role of guiding as well as the relation between those who practice guiding or enrol guides, and those who do research or perform art and forms of critical enquiry within guided tours. To the informed observer, it is becoming increasingly clear that research on guided tours is now beginning to accumulate a range of important research that has relevance for the industry and for society. We hope that this volume will provide inspiration as well as provoking new questions and new methods in this research domain.

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References:

Adolfsson, P., Dobers, P. & Jonasson, M. (Eds.) (2009). Guiding and guided tours. Gothenburg: BAS Publishers.