

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Visitor Perceptions of The Role of Tour Guides in Natural Resource Management and Sustainable Tourism

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Abstract

Undoubtedly, development of sustainable tourism activities is closely related to the protection of natural resources. Protection of natural resources is an important issue that should be taken seriously by the communities. Natural resource management includes sharing all the necessary responsibility for the purpose of protecting natural resources, ensuring the sustainability and leaving it to the next generation. This paper aims to explore the visitor perceptions of tour guides to contribute to the protection of natural resources by educating their customers through interpretation and modeling environmentally appropriate behaviors. Also it examines the potential role that tour guides can play in natural resource management and sustainable tourism. The survey has been conducted in Turkey. The questionnaire and role attributes have been developed based on a review of the literature. Data have been collected using two approaches. (1) The pre-trip questionnaire has been asked guided visitors to rate the importance of various attributes of the role of their guide. (2) The post-trip questionnaire has been asked guided visitors to rate the performance of these same attributes. The findings have been discussed within the natural resource management and sustainable tourism approaches and important assessments and recommendations have been made about the direction and quality of the policy and planning towards the tour guiding in natural resource management.

Keywords: *Visitor perceptions, Tour guides, Tour guides' roles, Natural resource management, Sustainable tourism, Importance-performance analysis.*

Introduction

Tourism has grown unabated especially during the last couple of decades and become one of the largest industries in the world. Given the large potential and variety of tourism products, Turkey is keen on attracting increased number of international tourists. As in Turkey tourism is a world phenomenon that has an increasingly important socioeconomic and cultural impact, so the heritage, nature and culture, has to be protected. The notion of impact must be combined with a belief about the importance of certain values like natural resources. There are "red signals" that reflect the concern about controlling mass tourism flows to decrease the polluting factors as well as other side effects acting on natural resources for generations to come [1]. Regarding this situation Papatya et. al (2011), stated that green/capitalist system creates ecological crisis and sustainable paradoxes, with these crisis and paradoxes, tourism activities endanger its future together and unfortunately

the nature is transformed into an object of consumption. So, all the tourism activities should be tested in terms of source based tourism and sustainable tourism [2]. Güzel (2012), states while sustainable tourism creates opportunities for new generation, with in the concept of source based tourism, all touristic activities are maintained in the nature based/orijin environment and the reasons of tourists' participating to the activities become to experience the natural and cultural environment [3]. Papatya et. al (2011) also underline that resource-based tourism, is related with sustainable tourism, but different from the traditional tourism. This difference comes from the differentiation of the main purpose of experience. While the purpose of nature based tourism is to contribute to the emotion of learning about the natural and cultural environment, the purpose of traditional tourism is to increase profits [2]. On the centre of the learning purpose of nature based tourism, one opportunity to

reduce negative impacts of tourism such as pressure on natural resources, pollution and waste generation and damage to ecosystems [4] is through the use of tour guides, who have the potential to contribute to the protection of natural areas and resources in which they operate by educating their customer through interpretation and modeling environmentally appropriate behaviors [5]. Different organizations may have different definitions of a tour guide. According to the World Federation Tourist Guide Associations a tour guide is “a person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area in which the person normally possesses an area-specific qualification, usually issued and/or recognized by the appropriate authority” [6]. International Association of Tour Managers and the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (EFTGA) defines that a tour guide is a person who “Guide groups or individual visitors from abroad or from the home country around the monuments, sites and museums of a city or region; to interpret in an inspiring and entertaining manner, in the language of the visitor's choice, the cultural and natural heritage and environment” [7]. Federation of Turkish Tourist Guide Associations defines a professional tour guide is the person who will introduce the country in the best way to the local and foreign tourists, will help them during their tour, will give them the right information and who has the authority document which was given by the Culture and the Tourism Ministry [8]. Although various definitions of a tour guide exist, key areas of a tour guide's job description include environmental interpretation in an inspiring and entertaining manner, operation in a clearly defined cultural/geographical area, and specialized linguistic knowledge [7] [9].

Due to the fact that they act as intermediaries between tourists and an unfamiliar environment, tour guides play an important role in the success or failure of a tour experience. Their performance even influences a tourist's perception of the host destination [10]. Also their performance potentially influences tourist satisfaction and loyalty, the company's image, and the overall travel experience and it is a primary attribute of a successful tour. Conversely, an unsatisfactory tour guide may ruin the tourists' enjoyment of their holiday experience and may even damage the image of a tourist destination [11]. Although tour guide performance is one of the major concerns of provinciallevel tourism administrations, research in tour guides has received little attention from the tourism

academic community [12]. In 1985, *Annals of Tourism Research* attempted to devote a special issue to the role of tour guides. However, this special issue did not prove itself to be a complete success. Only three articles discussed the designated topic in the issue. The editor-in-chief of the journal Jafari (1985) commented, “This Special Issue on the *Tourism Guides* faced an added problem: many promises for contributions did not materialize. This perhaps had to do with the theme itself, a subject which has received little attention in tourism research” (p. 1). Up until the present time, the situation has not changed much. Following the special issue, studies on tour guides have mainly focused on tour guides' roles [9]. A guide's role, it is generally agreed in these studies, extends well beyond welcoming and informing tourists. The guide is entrusted with the public relations mission of summarizing the essence of a place and serving as a window onto a site, region, or country [13]. On the other hand, various roles and responsibilities of guides are also identified and recognized by researchers, such as that of pathfinder, mediator, buffer, leader, information giver, cultural broker, motivator, counselor-guide, educator, entertainer and environment protector [11]. Tour guides are extremely “useful” in many senses. From the tourists' perspective, they are the “pathfinders,” “animators,” “tour leaders,” and “mentors”. As employees of tour operators, they are the “spokespersons” representing the image and reputation of the company, and the “salespersons” who sell the next tour. From the host destination's viewpoint, they are the “interpreters” making sense of the destination's culture and heritage, the “mediators” mediating between the host community and its visitors, and the “ambassadors” entrusted with the public relations missions of the destination. Nonetheless, in spite of their “attractiveness” and “usefulness,” tour guides are the “orphans” of the tourism industry in that their roles, value, and welfare are often neglected [14]. In addition to these roles, more recent studies indicate that the guide has more specialist roles to play in ecotourism and nature-based tourism, such as interpreting sites and motivating visitors to modify their behaviour to minimise impacts on the resource base [11,15-18].

Few systematic studies have been conducted on tour guiding in Turkey. But none of the study which have been conducted on the role of tour guides in natural areas and natural resource management. So in this paper is aimed to explore the visitor perceptions of tour guides to contribute to the protection of natural resources by educating

their customers through interpretation and modeling environmentally appropriate behaviors. Also it examines the potential role that tour guides can play in natural resource management and sustainable tourism.

The Role of Tour Guides in Natural Resource Management

The environment is the main base for the natural resources for attracting tourists worldwide. Therefore, the conservation of natural resources is very necessary for the long-term success of tourism development and sustainable tourism [1]. There is now increasing agreement on the need to promote sustainable tourism development to minimize its environmental impacts and to ensure more sustainable management of natural resources [4]. Sustainability in tourism literature can be considered within political, social, economic, ecological, and cultural contexts with sustainability of natural resources being the predominant view. For example, sustainable tourism is defined as sustainable economic development providing employment and income to local communities while allowing for the continued existence of the natural resource base [19]. It is necessary to apply some policy regarding sustainable tourism such as the promotion of national strategies for sustainable tourism development, including the decentralization of environmental management to regional and local levels, the use of both regulatory mechanisms and economic instruments, the support for voluntary initiatives by the industry itself, and the promotion of sustainable tourism at the international level [4]. On the other hand it is important to consider the potential impact of the tour guide on sustainable tourism and natural resource management. It is generally recognized that tour guides can play an important and influential role in information delivery, interpretation and as conduits for natural resource management agencies [5].

Cohen (1985), first conceptualized the role of the guide in four distinct sub roles of guiding. The orientation of the “outer-directed” role of the tourist guide is toward organization and management (instrumental roles) and the facilitation of encounters with the host populations (interactionary roles). The “inner-directed” role of the tourist guide is focused on leadership in the form of social interaction (social role) and information dissemination (communicative role) [20]. Weiler and Davis (1993), when examining the role of guides in

nature-based tourism noted that Cohen’s work did not incorporate the needs of the natural environment, so the guide must have a third focus, the natural environment, or what they term “resource management” [15] [5]. The resource management role of tour guides that encourages participants or tourists to reduce their impacts on natural sites [21]. Weiler and Davis (1993) suggested the resource management role of tour guides facilitate a change in values towards long-term conservation [15]. According to Weiler and Davis (1993) this resource management focus contains two roles: “motivator” (the modification of tourist behavior and impacts on-site) and “environmental interpreter” (the understanding and appreciation of environmental issues to facilitate responsible tourist behaviors in the long term) [15].

As Weiler and Davis (1993), some authors indicated the interpretation role of tour guides in the natural resource management [15]. For example, Moscardo (1998) stated that tour guides’ interpretation role contributes to the sustainable wildlife tourism. The interpretation role contributes to managing the interactions between wildlife and tourists, behaving in way that minimises visitor impact on environment, explaining management strategies and supporting safety messages [22]. Haig and McIntyre (2002) stated that a guide can also provide a window of opportunity to stimulate positive attitudes and behaviour to the environment. Because face to face interpretation which is considered to be knowledgeable as well as credible may be more effective than other sources in providing knowledge, behaviour models and possible attitudinal change [23].

Reisinger and Steiner (2006) indicated that interpretation role of the tour guides can raise visitors’ knowledge and awareness of wildlife and encourage pro-conservation attitudes towards natural resources [24]. Tilden (1957) states that interpretation is a type of education that focuses on: “meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media”. Interpretation and education programmes can assist in achieving parkmanagement objectives by reducing the need for regulation and enforcement, and by increasing visitor awareness of appropriate behaviors to minimize environmental impacts on fragile natural resources [5].

U Lo and Hallo (2011: 145), indicate that tour guides should be transformative in order to more

effectively change and manage tourists' behavior and attitudes toward the natural resources. Transformative tour guiding helps tourists to have a new mindset toward natural resources and to be more willing to take responsibility for their own behavior toward the natural resources. Those tourists who seek the services of a tour guide to interpret the site for them do so partially because they want to hand over responsibility to the guide that their behavior and actions at the site can be guided and monitored by an expert. Thus, tour guides should be responsible for teaching tourists how to behave properly through their high-quality interpretation. Given that insufficient information is provided at the natural site, tourists are likely to turn to tour guides for more information. Thus, tour guides become important for educating tourists about the significance of the natural sites and natural resources [18]. The tour guide is in a potentially influential position to modify and correct visitor behavior to ensure that it is environmentally responsible and contributes to environmentally sensitive attitudes. This is more likely to occur when the motivator of responsible behavior and environmental interpreter roles are delivered. Therefore, the role of the tour guide in these areas is critically important [5]. Holloway (1981) stated that the interaction between these roles could be seen as one of the essential elements in the total touristic satisfaction and experience [25]. Building on these observations, this study investigates the following hypotheses;

H₁: In the context of the resource management the motivator of responsible behaviours of the tour guides affect the perceptions of the environmental interpreter of tourists.

H₂: The perceptions of the environmental interpreter of tourists affect the evaluation of the tour guide performance.

H₃: The perceptions of the tour guide performance affect the tour experience in a positive way.

Material and Methods

This paper aims to explore the visitor perceptions of tour guides to contribute to the protection of natural resources by educating their customers through interpretation and modeling environmentally appropriate behaviors. Also it examines the potential role that tour guides can play in natural resource management and sustainable tourism. The survey was conducted in Sarigerme* Destinastion in Turkey. The

questionnaire was conducted on the tourist getting active and thrilling with the excursions related with the nature like the jeep safari and trekking. The questionnaire was administered in the months of May and July in 2013 which are the most intense months for the nature based tours in Turkey. The questionnaire was composed of the following three parts: socio-demographic items; including gender, age, educational level, occupation, nationality, first time visiting to Turkey and number of times visited. The second part including the role attributes of the tour guides about natural resource management. The role attributes have been developed based on a review of the literature, particularly the work of Cohen (1985), Weiler and Davis (1993) and Randall and Rollins (2009). The natural resource management contains two roles: "motivator" and "environmental interpreter". Two attributes were developed to capture each of the two roles of tour guiding identified by Randall and Rollins (2009), resulting in 4 items or attributes. Data from the role attributes have been collected using two approaches. (1) The pre-trip questionnaire has been asked guided visitors to rate the importance of various attributes of the role of their guide; using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all important" (1) to "extremely important" (5). The post-trip questionnaire has been asked guided visitors to rate the performance of these same attributes, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The third part including the participants' satisfaction and experience of the tour guide and tour. 4 items used to measure the participants' satisfaction and experience (1) Tour guide performance was really high, (2) I am satisfied with the guiding service, (3) I enjoyed the tour and (4) I am satisfied with the tour experience. According to the data taken from the Muğla provincial culture and tourism offices 3.132.475 tourist had entered to Muğla province in 2012 from different gateways. From this number 1.521.471 tourists had entered to the country from Dalaman airport and transferred through Marmaris, Fethiye, Dalyan and Sarigerme. From these destinations, Sarigerme was chosen as the search area, because it has not strayed far from its roots, instead focusing on tradition, culture, and avoiding the downfalls of over commercialisation [26]. Data were collected from the tourists who experienced the trekking and jeep safari tour in two months (May and July). A total of 284 questionnaires were collected, and data was statistically analysed by using the SPSS staitistic programme and Lisrel 8.50.

* Sarigerme is a touristic destination connected to Dalaman in Eagean region in Turkey. People, who wish to experience cultured Turkey away from the manmade touristic resorts, will find Sarigerme to be an attractive destination [27].

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents could be seen from the Table 1. The majority of the sample was female (52,1 %). In terms of ages, 18,0 % of the respondents were 18 years and under, 44 % were between 19-30, 27,1 % were between 30 and 50, 10,6 % were 50 years and over. The majority of the respondents were at the secondary graduation level (46,9 %) and at the junior university degree (26,1 %). The majority of the respondents nationality consists of British (34,5 %). While 29,6 % was from the other nationalities, German (16,9 %), Skandinavian (12,7 %) and Belgium (4,2 %) were the other known nationalities. The majority of the respondents (74,5 %) were coming to Turkey for the first time. The people who came for the two times (22,5 %), three times (11,3 %), and four times (7 %) follow the people who came for the first time. Very little respondents (4,2 %) came five times and over. The majority level of the incomes' of respondents was middle income (48,2 %), and the high (19 %) level followed the middle income. The majority level the occupation of the respondents consisted of white collar (22,5 %) and blue collar (16,5 %).

House wife (12,7 %), the other occupations (12,7 %), employer (7 %), and business owner (7 %) followed the majority.

From the Table 2, importance-performance mean values, standard deviation and the consistency of the measurement scales reability could be seen. While the mean of importance of the *motivator of responsible behavior* is 4,31 and the standard deviation is 0,75, the mean for the performance of the *motivator of responsible behavior* is 4,30 and the standard deviation is 0,79. The mean of importance of the *environmental interpreter* is 4,39 and the standard deviation is 0,73, the mean for the performance of the *environmental interpreter* is 4,42 and the standard deviation is 0,89. From the performance mean values it could be said that the perceptions of the resource management performances respond the resource management importance values. In order to test the consistency of the measurement scales reability estimates were used.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

	n	%		n	%
Gender			Educational Level		
Male	133	46,8	Primary (Elementary Sch.)	14	4,9
Female	148	52,1	Secondary (High Sch.)	128	45,1
Missing System	3	1,1	Junior university degree	74	26,1
Total	284	100	Bachelor's degree	34	12,0
Age			Missing System	34	12,0
18 years and under	51	18,0	Total	284	100
19-30 years	125	44,0	Nationality		
30-50 years	77	27,1	British	101	34,5
50 years and more	30	10,6	German	48	16,9
Missing System	1	,4	Belgium	12	4,2
Total	284	100	Skandinavian	36	12,7
Income			Other	84	29,6
Very Low	23	8,1	Missing System	3	1,1
Low	16	5,6	Total	284	100
Middle	137	48,2	Occupation		
High	54	19,0	White-collar	64	22,5
Very high	6	2,1	Blue-collar	47	16,5
Missing system	48	16,9	Student	8	2,8
Total	284	100	Employer	20	7,0
Number of times visited			Retired	18	6,3
1 time	135	74,5	Business owner	20	7,0
2 times	64	22,5	Housewife	36	12,7
3 times	32	11,3	Other	35	12,3
4 times	20	7,0	Missing System	36	12,7
5 and more	12	4,2	Total	284	100
Missing System	21	7,4			
Total	284	100			

From Table 2, Cronbach Alpha is 0,81 for importance of *motivator of responsible behavior*,

0,79 for performance *motivator of responsible behavior*, 0,89 for importance of *environmental*

interpreter and 0,89 for performance of *environmental interpreter*. As all alpha scores

being above the recommended point (0,70) indicates that the scale is reliable [27-28].

Table 2: Importance-performance mean values, standard deviation, scales reability and CFA scores

Role Attributes	Mean* (n:284)	SD	α	Mean** (n:284.)	SD	α	t-value***	SL	R2
ResourceManagement: Motivator of Responsible Behavior	4,31	,75	,81	4,30	,70	,79	-	-	-
MRB1: Discussed the rules and ethics to protect the area with the group	4,35	,82	-	4,37	,82	-	16,03	0,83	0,70
MRB2: Highlights the importance of not removing any garbage/relics	4,28	,82	-	4,22	,96	-	14,59	0,77	0,75
Resource Management: Environmental Interpreter	4,39	,73	,89	4,42	,70	,89	-	-	-
EI1: Helps you to develop awareness and appreciation of the natural area	4,37	,77	-	4,42	,74	-	17,75	0,87	0,75
EI2: Increases your knowledge and understanding of the natural environment	4,40	,76	-	4,42	,73	-	19,09	0,91	0,83

*Importance response categories ranged from 1 “not at all important” to 5 “extremely important”. **Performance response categories ranged from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”.*** t-values, standartized load values and R2 values are related with the performance scores.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the validity of the model as it is seen from the Table 2. The CFA demonstrated that the two factor model had a good fit to the data according to the Table 3 (χ^2/df : 3, GFI: 0.96, NNFI: 0.98, CFI: 0.99, SRMR: 0.022 and RMSEA: 0.084). With this good fit scores, results indicate that the tourist guides’ resource management role is represented in terms of two dimensions. The overall measurement model has been tested using all observed cases and the model has been represented that all two factor is revealed with two variables. From the correlation matrix of independent variables scores ($p < .01$) being between 0.81 and 0.63 show that there is a positive relationship between the variables [28]. Correlations scores for MRB1 and MRB2 is 0,63 in *motivator of responsible behavior* dimension and for EI1 and EI2 0,81 in *environmental interpreter* dimension. With the consistency of the

measurement scales reability estimates all the measurement scales show adequate internal consistency. t-values of the variables of the two dimensions are above the scores of 1.96 that means that these two dimensions are explained with two variables. If the rates proportions of the two dimension models are set out, MRB1(0,83) is the highest in motivator of responsible behavior dimension. EI2 (0,91) is the highest in environmental interpreter dimension.

The structural equation modeling was used to assess the relative impact of these two dimensions on the tour guide performance and the tour experience, after the overall measurement model was found acceptable.

Table 3: Results of the hypothesized model

Hpt	Paths	t-value	SL	Hpt
H ₁	Motivator of Responsible Behavior- Environmental Interpreter	14,91	0,92	Accepted
H ₂	Environmental Interpreter-Tour Guide Performance	11,37	0,65	Accepted
H ₃	Tour Guide Performance-Tour Experience	20,55	0,89	Accepted
Structural Equations				R²
Tour guide performance = 0.65*resource management role of guides + 0.57*x			0,43	
Tour experience = 0.89*guide performance + 0.21*x				0,79

The results from LISREL showed that the model had a good fit to the data (χ^2/df : 2,5, GFI: 0.96, NNFI: 0.98, CFI: 0.99, SRMR: 0.026, RMSEA:0.076). In table the three paths and

corresponding coefficients of the model are shown. While there is a meaningful relationship between motivator of responsible behavior and environmental interpreter external latent

variables and tour guide performance-tour experience internal latent variable statistically. From the correlation of indicators motivator of responsible behavior ($t= 14,91 > 1.96$, $p < ,005$) dimension is a significant construct that alert the perception of the environmental interpreter. Environmental interpreter ($t= 11,37 > 1.96$, $p < ,005$) is a significant construct that raise the perceptions of the tour guide performance. The results also indicated that tour guide performance ($t=20,55 > 1.96$, $p < ,005$) affects the perceptions of the tour experience as hypothesized. Thus, H_1 , H_2 , and H_3 were supported. From the squared multiple correlation scores, 43 % of total variation in tour guide performance was explained by the resource management role of guides. So there are other variables that affect the guide performance. It has been represented that the structural relations in the final model explained 79 % of the total variation in tour experience. So, tour guide performance is a significant indicators on the perceptions of the tour experience with %79.

Discussions

This study which have been conducted on the role of tour guides in natural areas and natural resource management shows that tour guides could effectively change the tourists' behavior and attitudes toward the natural resources. From the the structural equation modeling it was analyzed that in the context of the resource management the motivator of responsible behaviours of the tour guides affect the perceptions of the environmental interpreter of tourists. And as the path is going on, the perceptions of the environmental interpreter of tourists affect the evaluation of the tour guide performance. And finally, it was seen that the perceptions of the tour guide performance affect the tour experience in a positive way. So, as being a motivator responsible behavior while discussing/highlighting the rules and the ethics to

protect the area, tour guides could be an environmental interpreter. This important role could help tourists to develop their awareness/appreciation of the natural area and increase their knowledge and understanding of the natural environment. The potential role that tour guides can play in natural resource management and sustainable tourism, is not just important for the destinastions being protected but also for their living area after the holiday.

As U Lo and Hallo (2011), identify the tourist guide as being an educator tourists about the significance of the natural sites and natural resources, tour guides should be transformative on their tour and create new mindset toward natural resources for having a better world to live in [18]. So, the resource management role of tour guides facilitate long-term changes in values towards nature and has a potentially influential position to direct the visitor behavior and awareness. So, tourist guides should comprehend their environmentally responsibility and behave in this way in all their tours. And from the result, tour guides performances potentially influence tourist satisfaction with the tour experience. So near the informaton delivery role and interpretation role, the natural source management role would be harmonized by tour guides, as well. Hockings (1994), offers to the travel agencies to consider more stringent licensing requirements [29]. By this offerings guides would be a natural mediatory and not just service for the tourists but also for the World. Cause as the results of this study, motivator of responsible behavior role of guides has been identified a significant dimensions for the tour guides performance and tour experince. For the creating mindset toward natural resources, sustainable tourism and nature based tourism would be an exit ways.

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