

# TOUR GUIDING RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP: A REVIEW OF 50 YEARS OF RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

Fifty years since the first publication on tour guiding it is timely to assess the state-of-the-art of theoretical and empirical research in this field to identify research strengths and opportunities. Based on a bibliometric and content analysis of 280 published scholarly works, a number of trends, patterns and gaps in tour guiding research were uncovered. About half were journal papers with the majority of authors based in either Australia or the US. Key themes were identified including the role of the guide as communicator/interpreter, the guide's contribution to sustainability, visitors' expectations of and satisfaction with their guide, and the use of tour guide training and other mechanisms for fostering quality. Most studies were located in Australia, China/Hong Kong/Taiwan, the US and Europe. In addition to highlighting the need for more theory when investigating tour guiding, many avenues for future research were identified that can underpin quality tour guiding practice.

**Keywords:** tour guiding; trends; bibliometric analysis; content analysis

## INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

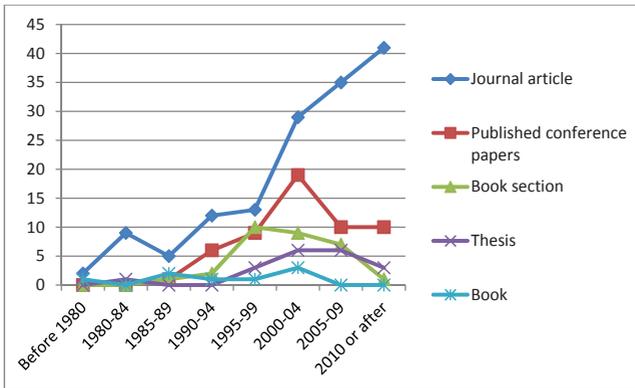
The earliest scholarly publication on tour guides and guiding was Valene Smith's (1961) call for trained tour guides, published in the *Professional Geographer*. Some 50 years on it is timely to assess the state-of-the-art of theoretical and empirical research on tour guides and guiding to illuminate gaps and opportunities for further research that can inform contemporary tour guiding practice.

A database was created of all journal articles, books, book chapters, conference papers, doctoral theses and research reports that could be located and accessed electronically, and were explicitly focused on tour guiding and published in English. An analysis of the complete database (280 entries) was undertaken to determine where the research was published and by whom; the themes, contexts and locations in which the studies were undertaken; and the theories and methods used.

## RESULTS

### *Where Is Tour Guiding Research Being Published and by Whom?*

There have been 146 papers on tour guides or guiding published in scholarly journals, including 43 papers in *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* and *Tourism Management*. Trends over time (see Figure 1) indicates that publication of tour guiding research in journals has grown exponentially in the past two decades particularly in comparison to research published as book chapters, which has declined.



Note: 2010-2013 reflects publications as at 30 June 2013

Figure 1 Trends in Publication of Tour Guiding Research

An analysis of authors whose institutional affiliation was stated (265 publications) revealed that 32% were based in Australia, 21% in the United States, and 10% in each of the UK, Europe (other) and China/Hong Kong/Taiwan.

The disciplinary perspective of the researchers provides another lens, albeit an imprecise one, with which to view who is undertaking research on tour guiding. On the basis of the affiliations of the 25 most prolific authors in the database (who collectively authored 120 of the 280 publications), human geography, environmental studies, business/marketing/management, sociology, anthropology, communication/language studies, psychology, and environmental education figured most prominently. These same disciplines are evident in the journals in which researchers publish. In the past decade the number of studies bringing theory and scholarship from disciplines outside of tourism studies to the investigation of tour guiding has increased.

#### *What Themes, Tourism Contexts and Locations Are Prominent?*

The most prominent themes in the tour guiding literature over the past 50 years were identified. Six themes that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, include (i) the multiple and complex roles and role dimensions of tour guiding, (ii) the role of the guide as communicator and interpreter, including performance, storytelling and intercultural communication, (iii) theory, research and practice relating to the guide's contribution to the four pillars of sustainability, (iv) visitors' expectations of and satisfaction with their guides and guided experiences, (v) improving tour guide performance through training, education and professional development, and (vi) conceptualising and fostering quality in tour guiding, especially through professional associations and guide certification.

The tourism context within which research on tour guiding has been undertaken could be ascertained for 259 of the publications. Of these, 21% could be considered as either focusing on tour guiding in general or mass tourism, or on a mix of tour guiding contexts. Nature-based tourism was the context for 35% of the studies, followed by heritage/cultural tourism (21%) and adventure tourism (10%).

The study locations are not evenly distributed across the globe. Of the 280 publications analysed, 215 were empirical studies, of which 191 reported a geographic location for the research. Of these, 25% were undertaken in Australia, with the majority of the remainder being undertaken in China/Hong Kong/Taiwan (17%), the US (12%), Europe (excluding the UK) (11%), Asia (excluding China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) (9%) and Latin/South America (7%) (see Figure 2).

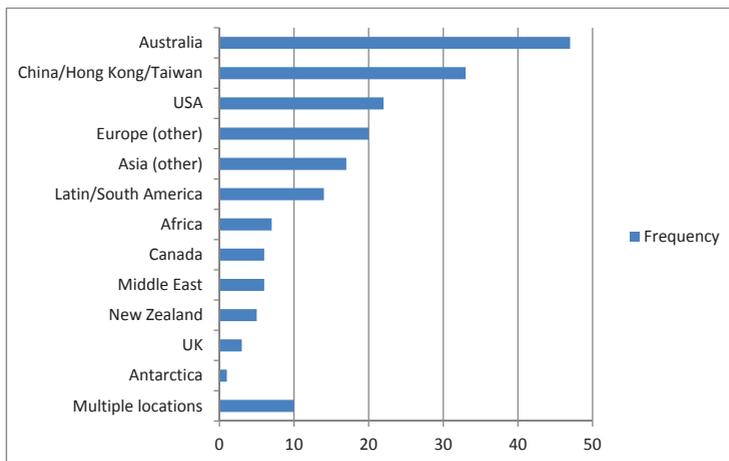


Figure 2 Study Location of Empirical Research on Tour Guides and Tour Guiding, 1979-2013 (n=191)

#### *What Theories and Methods Are Used by Tour Guiding Researchers?*

A quantitative analysis of the theories that underpinned the 280 publications reviewed was abandoned because so few authors declared or demonstrated engagement with a particular theory or theoretical framework. Those that did so relied on conceptual frameworks within the tour guiding literature such as Cohen (1985) and Weiler and Davis (1993). In recent decades the embedding of theory from other disciplines has been more evident.

A diverse range of methods were used to investigate tour guides and tour guiding. Twenty six percent of publications were conceptual or did not report methods. Those that were empirically-based (181) were fairly evenly spread in their use of qualitative (43%), quantitative (28%) and mixed methods (29%). Surveys were widely used, with 99 studies reporting the use of surveys of visitors, operators, guides and/or other stakeholders. The majority of these (71%) reported using on-site or field-based surveys. Interviews were used frequently (93 studies), with most (80%) being face-to-face, semi-structured or structured interviews. Observation, including participant-observation, was also used frequently.

#### **DISCUSSION**

Based on this analysis of tour guiding research, there are many avenues for future research. The six themes outlined earlier still offer scope for further research. In addition, there are a number of

emerging themes that offer promise, for example, the role of gender (Lin, Wang, & Chen, 2008; Modlin, Alderman, & Gentry, 2011); the health, safety and well-being of tour guides (Houge, Mackenzie, & Kerr, 2013); the economic benefits and willingness to pay for tour guiding services (Carver, Basman, & Lee, 2003); and the perspectives of tour guides themselves (Aloudat, 2010).

The trends and patterns in study location indicate opportunities for further work in Africa, Asia, Canada, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, and New Zealand. There is also a dearth of cross-national and comparative research. Tour guiding in the context of polar regions, rural areas, and marine, coastal and inland waterways is also largely under-researched.

Research on the broader context of tour guiding has been limited. For example there has been no critical historical analysis of the phenomenon of tour guiding. No research has been undertaken on how mega trends have impacted or are impacting tour guides and tour guiding. Tour guiding in the context of group/package tourism and urban tourism is relatively under-researched, and studies of tour guides and guiding in the context of specific tourism genres such as health and wellness, sport, events, philanthropic and volunteer tourism are virtually non-existent. There are a number of market segments relevant to tour guiding that seem to be neglected by researchers, for example, elderly visitors and those with special needs. Research on visitors from non-Western cultures is only very recent and is still largely limited to Chinese-speaking countries.

An analysis of theoretical development in tour guiding up until the new millennium has been characterised as being theoretically weak (Weiler & Kim, 2011; Weiler & Black, forthcoming). While some recent literature is theory-based, the development, testing and refinement of tour guiding theory have been limited. Opportunities also exist to bring insights from other disciplines.

Collectively, tour guiding researchers draw on a relatively wide range of data sources and research methods, but there is scope for making greater use of non-field based survey methods such as web-based surveys. Researchers have made relatively little use of case studies, ethnography, focus groups, analysis of government and industry documents, visitors' and guides' verbal narrative and written texts, web-based materials such as travel advisory sites, and visual/photo analysis.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The growth and maturity that is evident in tour guiding research and scholarship is encouraging. This paper has sought to leverage off what is now a critical mass of research to lay a foundation and impetus for further targeted research that can ultimately underpin quality tour guiding practice.

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