

## ADAPTIVE GUIDE FOR CHILDREN - A PERSONALIZED SERVICE IN MUSEUMS

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**Abstract:** This paper aims at identifying various ways to adapt and customize guiding according to the target group, to its age or location particularities. Adaptive guiding for children contributes to a better understanding and potential retention as they represent an important target group in tourism activity, in both family structure and considered individually. From the economic point of view, children can be considered potential consumers of tourism products and services, especially if these are provided in an attractive form. Adaptive guiding for children leads to creating customized tourist products which will allow a good knowledge and understanding of the tourist potential and of the region's socio-cultural and economic heritage. This paper presents the research results of a tourist guiding activity for children in museums and the teaching experience in observing their behavior during planned travel experiences, organized under the supervision of a tourist guide.

**Key words:** personalized products, the psychological profile of the tourist guide, Tilden's principles, adaptive museum guiding.

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### INTRODUCTION

Being both a core activity - in museums, and an optional one - in tourist programs, tourist guiding contributes to the development of tourism from the quantitative and qualitative point of view. The tourist guide accompanies individuals or groups of people during their visits, tours and walks; he provides comfort and offer explanations on tourist attractions. In order to perform a successful guiding activity, he must have extended geography, history, art, culture, economics, politics and also psycho-pedagogy knowledge. He must take into account the group's homogeneity in achieving tourist guiding, while also being able to adapt to unforeseen situational conditions and to the group's characteristics. Starting from this premise, tourist guiding was differentiated according to the target audience, taking into account the age particularities, needs, interests and their motivations. Adaptive guiding has emerged as a consequence of dividing tourist activity according to target groups. Based on the „adaptive” concept set by Cooper et al (1987) in the

context of „*adaptive behavior*”, i.e. the extent to which an individual reaches personal independence standards, and the social responsibility specific of his age and of the social group where he belongs; focusing largely on age, physical and social environment, tourist guiding adopted this feature to perform tasks more efficiently and with remarkable results. Thus, adaptive guiding represents a type of guiding which can be adapted to different categories of groups, adaptivity being one of the tourist guide’s basic qualities, alongside creativity, spontaneity, empathy and effective communication.

## METHODS

Adaptive guiding for children will help each child in developing personal skills to explore the universe, in understanding and driving to its sustainable development. This paper combines the practical experience gathered during several tourist activities for children or families with children with information from specialized literature, considered from a geographical and psychopedagogical perspective. These are sent to potential tourists according to age particularities, as defined by Tilden’s principles. The first part of the paper defines the main concepts making reference to specialized literature, respecting the traditionalist approach of geography by using quantitative methods (observation, bibliographic documentation, mapping, analysis, synthesis, field research etc.), followed by a group of children study who visit a museum, carried out according to the modernist perspective. After identifying the main shortcomings of the adaptive guiding for children, the main action directions and the tourist guide’s responsibilities were outlined in order to achieve efficient activities. In carrying out this work, I contributed with my creativity, creative thinking, teaching experience, personal style, work, effort and efficient cooperation with the tourist guide.

## ANALITICAL DEBATE

**1. Tourist Guide - concept.** The word „*guide*” is etymologically of French origin (guide, which means to guide, to lead); it was later taken over and assimilated by the British which gave it a more complex connotation, meaning to show something to someone, to lead someone to a certain destination, but also to organize and direct events. In this regard, the tourist guide is a person who, based on the qualification certificate, can guarantee the good running of tourism programs.

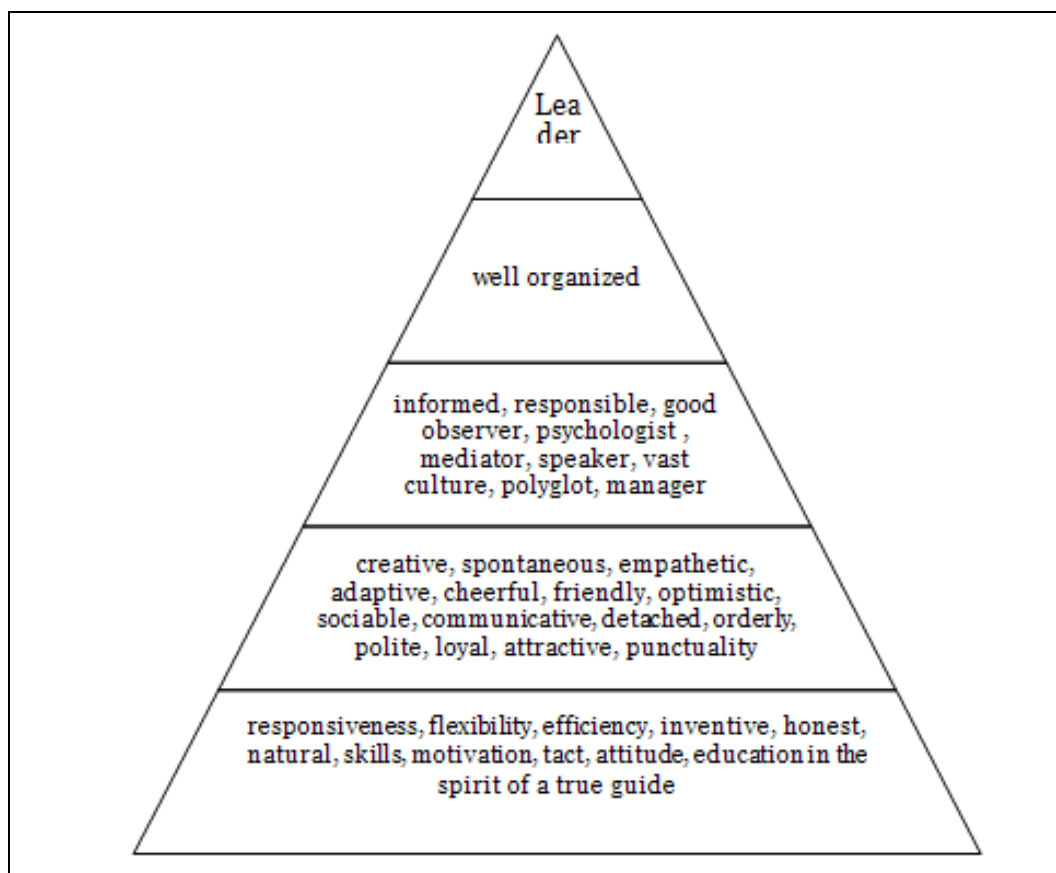
C.E.N. (Comité Européen pour la Normalisation) defined the tourist guide as follows (UNI EN 13809:2004 Tourism - Travel agents and tour operators - Terminology): „*A person who provides explanations to visitors in the language of their choice and interprets for them the cultural and natural heritage of certain areas (city and province or region); that person must be the holder of an authorization issued / recognized by the competent public authority in the specified territory to have extensive history, artistic, cultural and naturalistic knowledge of the territory where he wants to perform his activity.*”

The normative act underlying the guides’ certification in Romania is Order no. 637/2004, approving the Methodological Norms regarding the conditions and criteria for the selection, training, certification and use of tourist guides.

## 2. Bio-psycho-behaviour characteristics of the children’s specialist tourist guide

The tourist guide is a person who proposes activities, promotes the ideas and services of the company where he works, provides information, tips, answers and displays a positive attitude that motivates participants (Stănciulescu & Jugănar, 2006). He creates a joyful environment through the activities proposed and the through way he guides participants.

In general, the tourist guide must be imaginative and creative, must possess the ability to present information in front of various communities, must be a good observer and psychologist, must be able to manage and boost different groups, must be fit and have sport skills for verbal and bodily expression. He must adapt like a chameleon to any situation so as to satisfy all types of customers, he must be charismatic, kind and patient and become the customer’s best ally (figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The psychological profile of the tourist guide  
(Processed by Oprișan, 2009)

Children's specialized tourist guides must adapt tourist products (route, duration, components/stages) depending on children's group size, the physical and mental level of participants, to avoid risks and accidents and also to achieve a relaxed and flexible schedule. They must also have solid knowledge of „*Child Psychology*” (Piaget, 2005) and „*Psychology of ages*” (Crețu, 2009; Cosmovici & Iacob, 1999), must use plain and comprehensive language, must include „*surprise elements*” in performing the guiding activity and, why not, demonstrate or explain things practically, by calling for children's help (Ilieș, 2009). The important information will take the form of stories to attract children into this activity, it will also be included in current topics, and the activity leaders will often require children's intervention (figure 2).

**3. Professionalism in adaptive guiding for children.** Caught in the vortex of emotional, physical or cognitive communication barriers, the tourist guide may give wrong information or choose an inappropriate way to deliver the message. Therefore, during a presentation, he must resort to several techniques, tactics, tricks and schemes learned and practiced over time to maintain control and balance during communication (figure 3, 4).

Communication with tourists or potential tourists is very important because this is the guide's means of providing information and advice or of settling the potential problems (Rotaru et al., 2006). The information forwarded to children must take into account the particularities of children's age, their level of intellectual development as well as their motivations.



**Figure 2.** The adaptive guide for children

(Source: Museum of Oaş, 2011)



**Figure 3.** Professionalism in adaptive guiding for children. Practical examples of pottery

(Source: Museum of Oaş, 2011)

To provide a clear picture of the information given to young tourists, we must take into account **Tilden's principles** (Ilieș, 2010) and adapt them to practice, as follows:

1. *The information that is not bound in any way to anything that can be seen or doesn't relate to tourist's personal experience is useless.* The child assimilates the information only by observing systematically the tourist attraction or passing it through the filter of its own understanding; according to Piaget, this is the preoperative stage, with concrete and even formal operations.

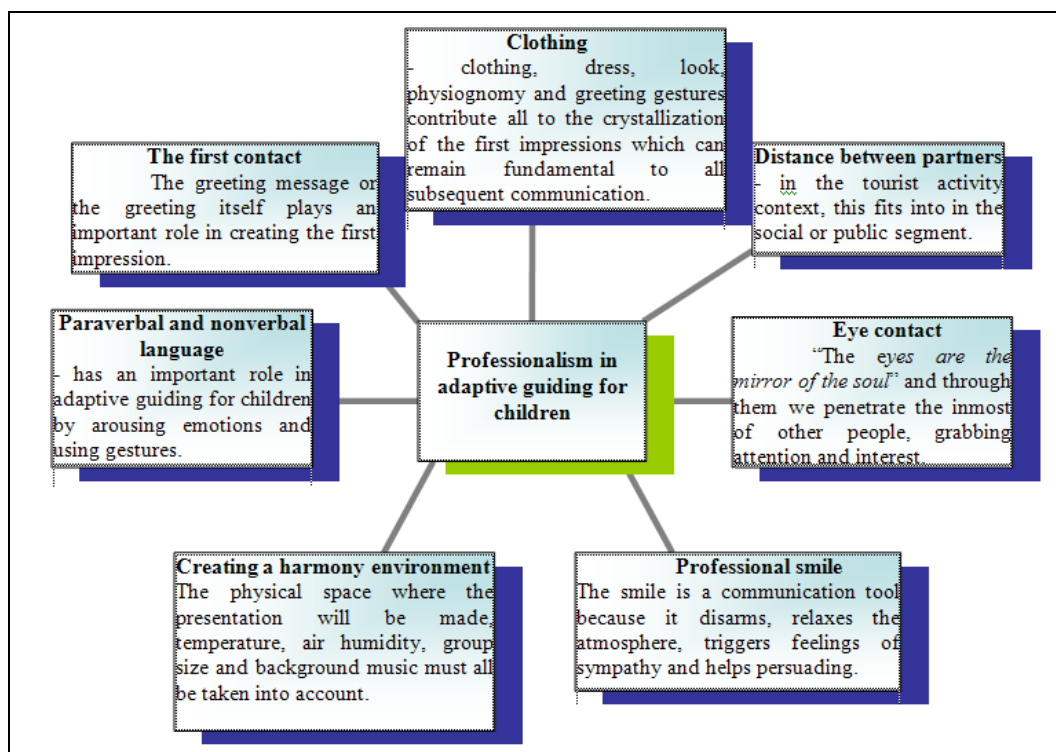
2. *The information itself is not yet perceived as a guiding activity.* To form complex structures in the students' mind, the guide must provide information such as conceptual maps with connections and relationships between components, so that when the student has to talk about a specific objective in mind, he can remember keywords leading to the wanted answer.

3. *Guiding is an art which combines several arts, regardless if the materials presented relate to science, history or architecture. Any art can be taught (to some extent).* The tourist guide must provide children with information in geography, history, art, architecture, culture, economics, politics, etc., but must also take into account the characteristics of the tourist group. Therefore we say that the guiding activity is both a science respecting certain rules and principles, and also an art as it depends on the guide's vocation.

4. *The main purpose of guiding is not the training, but the challenge.* The guiding activity is like a mystery which doesn't have to be solved entirely, but rather deepened even more, to determine tourists to discover things themselves. During childhood, working through discovery is essential because it contributes to the development of critical and creative thinking needed by today's individual. Thus, tourists must be challenged to participate in the conversation, thus carrying out the actual guiding.

5. *The guiding activity must provide comprehensive information and must address the target group.* The information shall provide a clear picture of the tourist attraction and the guiding is closely related to the tourist age specificities. Even if there are young children, the guide must speak clearly, concisely, expressively to catch their attention, but must describe the tourist objective taken as a whole, so that they form a clear picture and provide positive feedback. If the information is ambiguous and unsystematic, the children will not remember much of the information provided.

6. *The guiding activity targeting children (under 12) should not be a dilution of the information provided to adults, but must follow a completely different approach / being completely different from the others.* Often, the tourist guide processes children's texts into a dilution of the information provided to adults, which is completely wrong. Even if they have a lower level of understanding, children can process some important information if it is passed through the personal filter and is reduced to their level of understanding. Adaptive guiding for children means choosing the essential information and processing it depending on age particularities, in familiar contexts and environments.



**Figure 4.** Professionalism in adaptive guiding for children  
(Source: Pruteanu, 1998)

## ANALITICAL FRAMEWORK

**Organising adaptive guiding for children in museums.** Tour guide was reviewed and investigated by a number of authors (Ozeki & Sato, 1998; Leahy, 2004; Rodgers Bundren, 2004; McCage, 2005) who have worked hard on children can understand tourist destinations, adapting them to their level of understanding. Verité (2000) offers a packet with practical tips, useful advice and real-life case studies drawn from all the different areas of the industry.

Orely and Smith (2009) give a background to the many ethical and practical issues involved, an essential guide for anyone interested in ethical, fair and sustainable tourism. Rigden and Roger (2009) offer a guide that shows unusual itineraries. From this travel guide, a tourist will learn what other guides leave out.

Marcus (2003) has created and narrated twenty walking tours of New York City based on children's literature. Illustrated with maps, photographs, and book art, the tours can be followed from start to finish or abbreviated to suit a reader's, or a family's, particular interests.

Thematic trips aimed at visiting museums contribute to the development of non-formal education and also to the stimulation of the social relationships between of education subjects. Making random presentations can have serious moral consequences for children, who can evaluate the work of a tour guide according to the success of such an activity; on the other hand, well organized thematic trips contribute to the development of people's ecological consciousness, their mentality change, while respecting the nature and the environment where they live. Any presentation must be thoroughly organized to enjoy success. Thus, as a good group leader, the tourist guide will set tasks for each student in the group, will present various information and guidance materials to arouse the students' curiosity, will prepare the necessary equipment and will continuously monitor to ensure the good activity organization. He must also take into account the group's abilities and skills

so as to solve the issues which may arise during the trip. He must analyse the group of children, manage resources in an appropriate manner, use adequate language with age-specific features, and adjust to time limits as an extended presentation will lead to boredom.

In order to create a favourable atmosphere, the guide must have (Ilieș, 2010):

- presentation skills, voice rotation, good diction, breathing techniques, where appropriate, microphone use, position, non-verbal language, personal style and behaviour, and so on;
- communication skills, such as the selection and connection information ability, question management, stress and time management and interpersonal communication;
- group management skills, such as the position of the guide and the group, the fair and polite behaviour of both the guide and the group of students, group dynamics and conflict management, focusing on settling them at an early stage.

If the tourist guide manages the group of children efficiently and creates a pleasant environment, he will then be highly appreciated and loved by children because they are very sincere in expressing their feelings.

The purpose of a visit to the museum is to identify the original or collection items which are specific of a particular area, to identify local beauties, to understand natural phenomena and stimulate the act of cognition. Organizing and conducting tours of museums contributes to understanding the cultural heritage and its importance to society in an organised way (Schafer-Mehdi, 2008).

The practical application was made for a group of pre-school children aged 3 to 6. In order to achieve the presentation goals at the Mineralogical Museum, the presentation was outlined around simple language based on known terms and concrete situations, and the guiding activity was adapted to children's age-specific features (Giurcaneanu & Vodă, 1983).

The tourist guide specialized for children will provide explanations, demonstrations and answer to questions based on age-specific features. This does not mean that he will change the information content and give children the wrong information, but he will simplify it to children's understanding level, given the age-specific particularities.

The main elements to be presented are the museum's profile, origin, evolution, history and exhibits, everything explained for children, the information being provided through a story. The mining activity and mine flowers were likened to the work of the dwarfs in Snow White, and the whole guiding was adapted to the structure of the story.

## CONCLUSION

The activity of the tourist guide does not begin when tourists arrive and does not end when they leave. Like any other activity, tourist guiding also needs an exploration stage, which give the guide the opportunity to assimilate the entire information so as to be well prepared; he take notes about the typology of tourists, he practices the professional smile, acquires group communication and management skills, he designs the tourist product and adapts the guiding according to tourists' age, interests and motivations. Next, he promotes the tourist product through travel agencies or through websites or web pages, or directly by making flyers, brochures, posters, etc.. Then, he must sell the tourist products through tickets, tourism programs or handicraft specifically designed for that particular tourist target. The most important stage in developing tourist products is the presentation of the tourist product. Now, the tourist guide gets into contact with the tourist, he must identify the group's particularities to achieve an effective guiding activity and to create a favourable atmosphere. If all these steps have been followed, then the evaluation's results will be outstanding and the assessments will be consistent. The criteria evaluated are different; they depend largely on tourists' age and are aimed at obtaining an efficient tourist guiding presentation and an overall positive appreciation of the tourist sight.

Joint activities have a positive effect on children because they can express their opinion, they can compare their ideas with the ideas of others and can find new solutions to solve problems. Involving students in organizing and conducting presentations in museums will become a wider phenomenon if they are made to feel important, if they are considered essential parts without

which this work cannot be carryout. Research is no longer a scientific activity that can take place only after you go through certain stages, but a way to explore and exploit your environment to discover new things or to demonstrate and bring pros and cons of the existing ones. Differences of opinions, different views on some issues will lead to the development of each child's cognitive horizon, so they will be able to express themselves, solve problems or inquire about organization issues, to create a world to perfectly match their imagination.

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