

## ANALYSIS OF THE LICENSED TOURIST GUIDES' EVOLUTION OF ROMANIA AND CRITICAL ISSUES AFFECTING THEIR ACTIVITY

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**Abstract:** The study refers to the licensed tourist guides of Romania during 1998-2016, namely their numerical evolution during this time series as well as an analysis of their numerical evolution by different types of tourist guides, be they national, local or specialized. The statistical analysis showed an increment from 24 tourist guides in the year 1998 to 4,335 licensed tour guides in 2016. The analysis is supplemented by current issues and shortcomings affecting the tourist guiding activity of Romania, as revealed by the tourist guides present at the annual tourist guides' national conferences, various stringent problems raised and debated within these encounters and highlighted by this study as well as proposals for a better functioning for this segment of tourism entrepreneurs.

**Key words:** licensed tourist guides, numerical evolution, tourist police, industry shortcomings

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### LITERATURE REVIEW

Tour guides play a pivotal role in the experience of visitors who undertake a guided tour (Weiler and Black, 2014), a character being born and evolving along with the emancipation of modern societies. Research on tour guiding has also developed quite recently, a trailblazer in this sense being Cohen's (1985) work, up to the latest researches focused on tour guiding (Xu and McGehee, 2017; Hansen and Mossberg, 2017; Lee, 2017; Kotiloglu et al., 2017), the sustainability of tourist guides' activity (Hu and Wall, 2014; Weiler and Kim, 2011) and customer satisfaction referring to tourist guides activity (Albayrak, 2017).

A tourist guide is defined as a person with a broad knowledge whose primary role is to inform, thus performing the function of an educator. According to Weiler and Black (2014) a tourist guide is a professional who guides groups around venues or places of interest and interprets

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the natural and cultural heritage in an inspiring and entertaining manner in the language of the visitors' choice, who possesses a recognized qualification by the appropriate authority.

Tourist guides are also referred to as tour guides, local guides (Salazar, 2005), city guides, docents, interpreters (Cruz, 1999). The tour manager undertakes more administrative and social tasks. The mostly preferred term in Europe and the UK is that of a tourist guide rather than tour guide, the latter inappropriately referring to a book or a brochure (Weiler and Black, 2014). The term of tour guide is extensively used and agreed upon by a leading worldwide association in the field, namely the *World Federation of Tourist Guide Association* (WFTGA), a reason why the term *tourist guide* was also used within this research paper.

More types of guides can be encountered such as: urban guides, business and industry guides, adventure guides, tour managers, interpreters, escort interpreters, docents or volunteer guides, tour leaders (Tsaour and Teng, 2017) and couriers. The use of this terminology varies from country to country and even region to region between the private and state sector and the tourism industry itself (Weiler and Black, 2014).

Professional certification is a crucial measure meant to ensure the quality of tour guides. Tourist guides activity is dictated by a wide range of skills and attributions among which a high degree of professionalism which involves a high degree of generalized and systematic knowledge; primary orientation to community interest rather than to individual self-interest; high degree of behavioural self-control through codes of ethics and a system of rewards.

Tourist guides play more roles: namely the professional guide, the ambassador, the employee and the entrepreneur role. Most often tourist guides act as ambassadors due to the personal connections they create between places and visitors. The diplomatic and public relations skills are a pre-requisite for this commitment as tour guides need to project a favorable and positive image on the regions they present to visitors (Cruz, 1999).

It is important whether the tour guide is customer-oriented or self-interest oriented, namely has a communitarian or an individualistic approach towards guiding. Cooperation between educational institutions and the travel industry are considered vital for raising the overall standard of the guiding profession. Intense competition forces companies to cluster and cooperate for enhancing agility, flexibility and performance. Furthermore collaboration with local communities, staff, tourists, authorities plus the protection of the holiday destinations are the results of a successful tour guiding activity (Min, 2012), in other words a sustainable approach towards tour guiding. Nonetheless, there are negative incidents (i.e. commissions) in package tours related to shopping and optional tours (Mak et al., 2011).

Some guides are self-employed; they create and market their own tours. Ninety percent of tour managers and guides work as freelancers, whereas the need to have some other job to fill in, between seasons (Collins, 2000). Others are employed by the travel industry (i.e. tour operators) and conduct predesigned tours; some others are employed by private or state corporations. This activity is highly skilled but in some states still poorly remunerated, thus more problems can emerge such as: a lack of recognition by the employer, low and unstable income (no fixed salary, they rely on commissions received from the purchase made by tourists; the commissions are received from selling souvenirs or optional tours), lack of commitment, high turnover rate, no employment protection; allochthonous guides tend to use own culture to acculturate the local culture.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology consisted in desk research by the consultation of specialized national and international references in the field of tour guiding, as well as an analysis of the evolution of licensed tourist guides across time during 1998-2016, data acquired from the official website of the Ministry of Tourism of Romania. In this scope, the research process consisted in data collection, analysis and interpretation, an evolution meant to provide an insight in the past and current trend of the certification of tour guides within Romania. A secondary purpose of the study was to

pinpoint the current shortcomings which this industry faces as revealed by the practitioners of this activity within Romania, information gathered during the authors' participation at tour guides' conferences and public debates held in Sinaia (16<sup>th</sup> of January 2016) and Oradea (19 to 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2017). In this prospect, data saturation was reached after a few interviews with practitioners from the field, as there are no rules for sample size in qualitative enquiry (Patton, 2002) which further enabled the authors to draw attention on current real issues which this industry faces, as well as information extracted from the conference memorandum (Tourism Memorandum - The Tourist Police, 2016).

## **TOURIST GUIDES' ACTIVITY IN ROMANIA**

### **Laws and orders**

The legislation concerning the tourist guides' activity of Romania envisages three law decisions, namely: the Law Order no 305/2001 about the certification and use of tourist guides; 631/2003 with changes and additions to the former order and the Order of the Ministry of Transportation, Construction and Tourism no. 637/2004 about the methodological norms concerning the conditions and criteria for the schooling, certification and use of tour guides .

The latest issued law order number 637/2004 (turism.gov.ro/legislatie) foresees that the economic agents should use qualified guides who own a certificate, namely Romanian citizens or European Union citizens who are above 18 years old and maximum 65 years old, own a baccalaureate degree, to have attended and finished the specialized courses for this professional qualification, a clean criminal record, be medically fit, own a foreign language certificate in the case of Romanian guides and the Romanian language certificate in the case of other EU member states guides, having passed a test of general knowledge. The specialized courses can be organized by authorized/accredited institutions according to the law within the national education or the lifelong professional training system. After finishing the courses the applicant solicits the tour guide licence and badge from the National Authority of Tourism.

At the Romanian level there are three categories of guides: the local, national and specialized one. The latter can include the mountain; animation; sports guide, etc.

A tour guide's activity can be carried out as a main or complementary activity, based on an individual labor contract, as well as a freelance activity according to the laws in force. It is a contravention to carry out the tour guide's activity without a licence and badge, being sanctioned accordingly.

### **Shortcomings and benefits**

At the level of Romania there are currently 12 associations (e.g The National Tour Guides' Association of Romania, Sibiu Guides, Tourist Guides Association „*Banat - Crisana*”, Theme and Specialised Tourist Guides' Association, Professional Guides' Association of the Danube Delta, etc) which involve tourist guides' activity.

After joint periodical meetings and public debates of the licensed tourist guides across the country, their aim is to set up a National Tourist Guides' Federation of Romania (Federația Națională a Ghizilor de turism din Romania FNGTR). Eight associations joined forces to found the federation, as follows: Cluj Guided Tours Association; Tourist Guides' of Bucovina Association; The Hungarians' Tourist Guides' Association of Transilvania; Mountain Guides' Association of Romania; National Tourist Guides' Association of Romania; The Tourist Association – the Tourist Guides of Romania; The Mountain Tourist Guides and Leaders; The Tourist Guides Association of Maramures) meant to enhance the opportunities of entrepreneurship in the tour guiding activity and to have a say in the decisions and actions to be taken by the national public authorities. Some of the shortcomings referred to at the Tour Guides' Conference in Sinaia (16<sup>th</sup> of January 2016) and Oradea (19 to 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2017) refer to a lack of supervision of this activity, therefore many individuals practice this activity illegally, at the level of Romania there doesn't currently exist a tourist police, the fact that the law should cover more issues, among

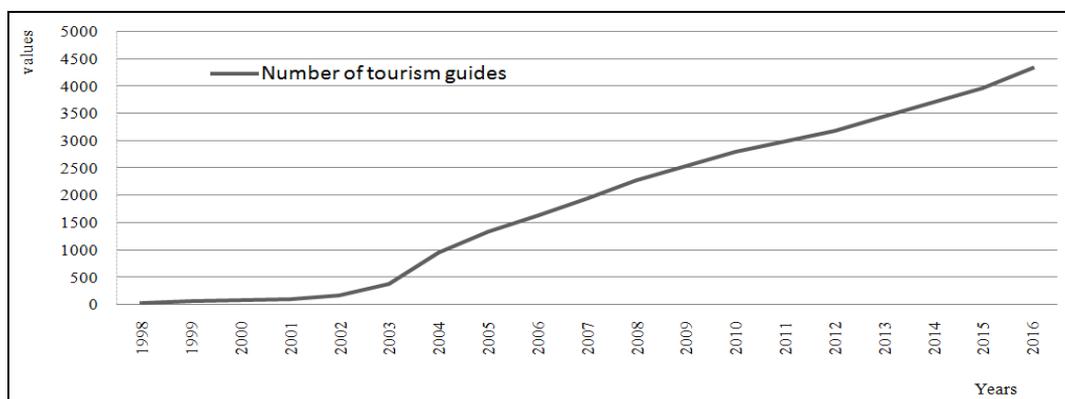
which a clear-cut point referring the regulation of the tourist guide's activity, their life-long training, their representation within the Advisory Council of Tourism, the recognition at a national level of the International Tourist Guide's Day - 21<sup>st</sup> of February, granting of further rights for the tourist guides of Romania, a new shape of the badge with safety bar codes, etc.

As far as legislation is concerned some issues need to be further regulated and changed for the protection and crossing out of legislative vagueness and overlappings, such as in the case of "local guide" whose specification for limited territory is not clear; the term tourist guide overlaps too often within the nomenclature; there is a need to standardize the content of tourist guide training courses, as there are many differences among schools and training centres within Romania; the term association "travel agent-tourist guide" within the occupation classification system which currently exists should be individually classified; tourist guides require to be allowed free access within tourist sites (e.g Parliament Palace), meant to also train the tour guide; it would be advisable for large scheduled groups to have separate entries to tourist sites; bus accessibility should be better planned. Besides all these issues claimed and voiced at conferences by tourist guides across the country, they also require the set up of a tourist police, not a necessarily a new entity, but enabling the current police further control skills so as to check upon the fake guides who practice this activity illegally. The basic reason lies in the fact that despite the fact that the law foresees that only Romanian licensed tourist guides can perform their activity on the Romanian territory, there isn't actually somebody controlling this issue constantly and efficiently.

The Federation wishes to fully collaborate for the accomplishment of this purpose, i.e. to conclude a protocol with IGPR (the General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police) for these new skills that would solve a problem strongly affecting the tourist guides' activity of Romania, as most neighboring countries (Bulgaria, etc) have it functioning for years.

#### ANALYSIS OF LICENSED TOUR GUIDES DURING 1998-2016

The evolution of the licensed number of persons to carry out the tourist guide profession, according to "Government Decision no. 305/2001 regarding the certification and use of tourist guides, subsequently amended and supplemented" and "The Order of the Minister of Transport, Constructions and Tourism no. 637/2004 for the approval of the methodological norms regarding the conditions and criteria for the selection, schooling, certification and use of tourist guides, with subsequent modifications and completions", between 1998 and 2016, ascended from 24 tourist guides in the year 1998 to 4,335 licensed tourist guides in 2016. The years when most tourist guides were licensed refer to: 2004 (584 guides), 2005 (389 guides) and 2008 (329 guides). At the opposite end, namely the years with the least number of licenses were: 2001 (19 guides), 1998 (24 guides), 2000 (25 guides), 1999 (29 guides) (figure 1).

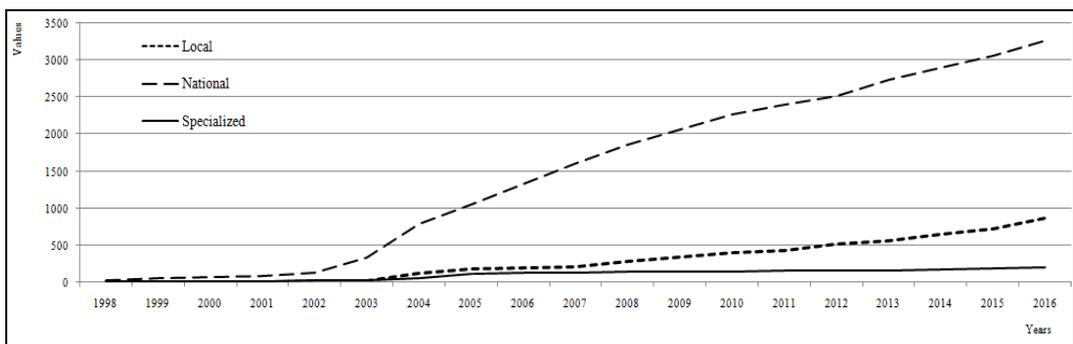


**Figure 1.** The numerical evolution of licensed tourist guides between 1998-2016 of Romania

Source: Ministry of Tourism of Romania, 2017

According to the methodological norms of April 1, 2004 "on the conditions and criteria for the selection, schooling, attestation and use of tourist guides", the tourist guide license is granted for three types of guides: "a) local guide providing tourist assistance on a limited territory; b) national guide, which provides tourist assistance on the national territory and abroad; c) specialized guide for certain segments of tourist services: - mountain, mountain hiking; - art; - supervisor; - animation - natural habitat: fauna, flora; - ornithology; - sports, namely climbing and climbing on rocks, skiing, bobs, swimming, canoeing, yachting, flying with ultra-light devices (hang gliding, paragliding and others); - other specializations according to the demand of the tourist market".

From the analysis of licensed tourist guides typological categories during 1998 - 2016 there is a similar evolution to the general one, as follows: the number of national tourist guides increased from 20 (1998) to 3266 (2016); the number of local tourist guides increased from 0 (1998) to 870 (2016); the number of specialized tourist guides increased from 4 (1998) to 199 (2016) (figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The evolution of the number of licensed tourist guides, on typological categories, during 1998-2016 in România

Source: Ministry of Tourism of Romania, 2017

From the point of view of the percentage, in the year 2016, the largest share is held by national tour guides (75%), followed by local (20%) and specialized (5%). The analysis of the percentage weighted evolution on the three typological categories (national, local and specialized), in the period 1998-2016, revealed the existence of a trend similar to that registered in the year 2016, with the predominance of the national guides, followed by the local and specialized ones.

As for the specialized guides, we can notice an increment in the following segments of tourist services: mountain (141 persons), religious (35), mountaineering (5 persons), ecotourism (5 persons), sportsman (4 persons), skiing (3 persons), equestrian (2 persons), natural habitat (2 persons), animation (1 person), paragliding (1 person).

## CONCLUSIONS

From the consultation of the national and international reference it was revealed that the terminology of tourist guide varies from country to country and from region to region which creates some vagueness and even overlappings within the field. Furthermore within Romanian legislation and the occupation classification system the term needs a better dissociation from the travel agent which the tourist guide often overlaps with as well as a clearer specification in the case of the local guides and his/her range of action.

According to the statistical analysis carried out, the study highlights the way in which the tour guiding activity has evolved in Romania across time, based on the available data of the Ministry of Tourism, in the 1998-2016 time span. Thus it shows that this activity is quite recent but very dynamic with a fast growing rate of the number of licensed tourist guides ranging from 24 tourist guides in the year 1998 to 4,335 licensed tour guides in 2016, with some peaks in 2004

when 584 tourist guides were registered, in 2005 with 389 guides and 2008 with 329 registered guides. Further on the analysis is completed by the numerical evolution of tourist guides per different categories, thus for the same time series, the number of national tourist guides increased from 20 in the year 1998 to 3266 in 2016; the number of local tourist guides increased to 870 in 2016; the number of specialized tourist guides increased from 4 in the year 1998 to 199 guides in 2016. Therefore a preponderance of the licensing of national tourist guides can be tracked (i.e. 75%), also due to the fact that it covers a wider range of practicing this activity at a national level and therefore a higher probability of employment throughout the year.

The shortcomings affecting this industry are quite varied, ranging from legislation vagueness to very specific problems, such as need to set up a tourist police to detect and take measures against the fake tourist guides, granting of free access to certain tourist sites for the tourist guides, etc. All these aspects were highlighted at tourist guides' annual meetings as well as revealed from focus interviews with active practitioners from the field, research meant to bridge some gaps existing in the current literature in the field of tour guiding at the level of Romania and to provide a synthetical statistical approach for the evolution of licensed tour guides in Romania.

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