



## Exploring knowledge-building in tour guiding research: A content analysis of empirical papers on tour guiding, 1980–2015



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### ABSTRACT

Despite tour guides being substantial influencers in the tourism industry, tour guiding research is relatively recent and receives insufficient scholarly attention. This paper provides a content analysis of empirical English-language journal articles on tour guides and tour guiding covering a 36-year-period. Papers were coded by journal discipline, authorship, location of study and methodology. Key findings show that while tour guiding is receiving increasing attention from researchers, research is somewhat unevenly spread geographically. Knowledge-building of tour guiding could benefit from a wider range of study locations, investigations of additional guide genres, a greater use of mixed methods and, most importantly, collaboration across locations and genres.

### 1. Introduction

Tourists have engaged the services of guides since at least the time of the Grand Tour in the 17th century. Tour guides lead groups of tourists around cultural and historic sites, cities and villages. They also take visitors to visit natural environments and view wildlife, sometimes navigating through jungles, over mountain ranges, along rivers and coastlines, and across open water. A guide may be engaged by an individual, a couple, a special-interest group or a mixed group ranging widely in size and including multiple nationalities, languages, physical and mental abilities. With the growth of mass tourism and expansion of travel in pursuit of special interests, novel experiences and access to previously remote destinations, the expectations that tourists have of their guides and thus the breadth and depth of tour guiding as a phenomenon have greatly expanded. Since the earliest scholarly attention to tour guides in the 1960s (Smith, 1961), the body of literature on tour guides and tour guiding has been expanding, approaching over 300 published papers with 200 of these in peer-reviewed English-language journals (Weiler & Black, 2015b). Despite emerging scholarly interest in tour guiding and the important role of tour guides, there have been limited analyses and reports on the progress and development of tour guiding research. As such, the present paper complements and extends the results presented in Black, Weiler, and Chen (2018), which uses the same dataset but reports specifically on theoretical engagement in tour guiding research.

A number of scholars have expressed the need for more rigorous research to foster development and credibility of the tourism field (Jones, 1996; Taylor & Edgar, 1996). As such, analysis of empirical research published in academic journals is considered 'a lens into research directions' and 'an important platform on which the evolution of a field can be examined' (Xiao & Smith, 2006b, p. 502). In addition to researchers' attempts to discuss the nature and evolution of scientific knowledge (Kuhn, 1962), to debate paradigmatic and disciplinary issues (Botterill, 2001) and to appraise the state-of-the-art tourism research methods (Riley & Love, 2000), empirical studies play an important role in knowledge production by providing verifiable, grounded and more reliable conclusions (Xiao & Smith, 2006b), and thus cannot be ignored in assessing the maturity and sophistication of a field.

For emerging sub-fields of tourism research such as tour guiding, a content analysis of past research can reveal its evolution and development and provide a basis for future research. A number of approaches have been suggested by researchers to explore the progress and development of sub-fields, for example, examining the methodologies, geographical foci, origins of the researchers and areas of interest. These approaches can help reveal how knowledge of a field has been created, thus informing and shaping future research, facilitating common understandings, and fostering sophistication and maturity of the field (Baloglu & Assante, 1999; Griffin, 2013; Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010; Xiao & Smith, 2008). In tourism research, content analysis has been used effectively to determine the progress of particular sub-fields

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such as ecotourism, visiting friends and relatives and attractions (Fennell, 2001; Griffin, 2013; Jurowski & Olsen, 1995).

The aim of this study was to investigate the evolution and development of research on tour guides and tour guiding, looking for patterns and trends in knowledge-building, by way of a content analysis of empirical studies published in English academic journals. This study represents the first systematic content analysis of empirical studies on this topic. As no empirical studies on this subject were published prior to 1980, this resulted in a 36-year dataset including studies published between 1980 and 2015. Specifically, a content analysis of the following variables was explored: 1) journal discipline, 2) authorship, 3) location of study, 4) methodology, and 5) knowledge areas.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Tour guiding and tour guides

According to Black and Weiler (2005) the earliest book on the phenomenon of tour guiding was Mills (1920)'s *Adventures of a Nature Guide*. However, it was not until 1961 that the first scholarly publication by Smith (1961) appeared in the *Professional Geographer*. In a special issue on tour guides in *Annals of Tourism Research*, Jafari (1985, p. 1) described tour guiding as a subject that had 'received little attention in tourism research'. Prior to Cohen (1985)'s seminal paper on the role of the tour guide in this special issue, there were less than a dozen published papers on tour guides and tour guiding.

Many of the early papers on tour guiding emanating from sociologists and anthropologists were primarily non-empirical in nature (Cohen, 1985; Holloway, 1981; Smith, 1961). Nearly ten years after Cohen's (1985) seminal publication on tour guiding, the paucity of published studies on tour guiding was still being lamented (Pond, 1993). However, since the early 1990s the topic of tour guiding has gained some prominence in the tourism literature, including some early empirical studies on the relationship of guiding practice to tourist satisfaction and consumer behaviour from European researchers (Geva & Goldman, 1991; Mossberg, 1995). This was followed by a growth in studies on the roles of guides (Black & Ham, 2005; Howard, Smith, & Thwaites, 2001; Hughes & Ballantyne, 2001; McIntyre & Haig, 2002; Weiler & Crabtree, 1998; Weiler, Johnson, & Davis, 1992, pp. 228–233; Weiler & Ham, 2001). Since 2000 there has been a burgeoning of research on the influence of tour guide performance on visitor satisfaction from researchers in Chinese-speaking countries, mainly involving Chinese-speaking guides and tour groups (Ap & Wong, 2001; Zhang & Chow, 2004). With tour guiding research maturing, researchers have appraised this phenomenon with regards to the contribution of Australian-based researchers (Weiler, 2016) and the role of tour guides as experience creators (Weiler & Black, 2015a). A synthesis of the body of work on tour guides and tour guiding by Weiler and Black (2015b) revealed six key themes that focused on tour guide roles, guides as interpreters, storytellers and intercultural communicators, guide's contributions to sustainability, visitor expectations of and satisfaction with the guide, training and education, and quality assurance.

### 2.2. The evolution of tourism research

Over the past few decades the broader field of tourism research has matured and become more sophisticated. In the early 1990s, following a content analysis of 653 articles in five tourism and hospitality journals over a seven-year period (1983–1989), Crawford-Welch and McCleary (1992) criticized the lack of sophistication, and called for greater use of multivariate analysis and inferential analysis. Seven years later, Baloglu and Assante (1999) analyzed subjects and research methods in more than 1000 articles from five leading tourism and hospitality journals over a seven-year period and found there had been a shift towards more sophisticated statistical techniques. Perhaps more importantly, positive trends in the contribution of tourism research to knowledge-building

have become a key point of discussion (Tribe, 2005; 2006).

As sub-fields of research such as tour guiding form their own bodies of knowledge, it is important to monitor empirical academic studies to recognise trends and to critically appraise contributions to advancement of knowledge (Doren & Heit, 1973). Researchers have examined previous literature of particular sub-fields to provide an understanding of existing knowledge on the subject and guide future research. Tourism sub-fields that have been analyzed include ecotourism (Weaver & Lawton, 2007), eTourism (Buhalis & Law, 2008), sports tourism (Weed, 2009), tourism innovation (Hjalager, 2010), tourism demand and forecast (Song & Li, 2008), sustainable tourism (Butler, 1999) and tourism economics (Song, Dwyer, Li, & Cao, 2012).

To understand the underpinnings and the patterns of tourism research and knowledge creation, researchers have measured a range of bibliometric variables including authorship of articles on the body of tourism knowledge (Sheldon, 1991), choice of geographical focus on knowledge formation (Xiao & Smith, 2006b), and methodological sophistication of tourism research (Reid & Andereck, 1989). Others have examined the use and effectiveness of particular methods or approaches in advancing understanding and knowledge in tourism, including qualitative methods (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001; Riley & Love, 2000) as well as qualitative and quantitative methods (Walle, 1997). Finally, specific methods for data collection and data analysis have been reviewed, examined and discussed, for example, photo-based research approaches (Steen Jacobsen, 2007) and case studies (Xiao & Smith, 2006a).

Given the growth and maturation of tourism research and that fact that the number of publications in tour guiding research has been increasing, it is paramount to understand the progress of tour guiding research. Despite researchers' efforts to analyze other sub-fields of tourism research, limited attention has been paid to tour guiding research, especially knowledge-building. To the authors' best knowledge, this paper represents one of the few attempts to systematically review progress and knowledge building in tour guiding research.

## 3. Methods

This study employed a content analysis approach, which is an appropriate methodology to provide an unbiased and unobtrusive longitudinal analysis of a subject (Bryman, Teevan, & Bell, 2009). Content analysis helps researchers make replicable and valid inferences from texts, increase researchers' understanding of a particular phenomenon including the origins and progression of a sub-field, and guide and inform the directions of future research (Griffin, 2013; Krippendorff, 2004). The current study conducted content analysis on tour guides and tour guiding empirical studies from 1980, when the first empirical study of tour guiding was published, to 2015. The method involved three steps: 1) a thorough search of scholarly literature, 2) application of appropriate criteria to select a subset of studies, and 3) an analysis of selected studies.

### 3.1. Searching scholarly literature

The body of literature on which this paper was based was assembled using Internet search engines together with generic business, social science and tourism-focused English language databases. Sources on tour guiding and tour guides were searched using key terms from a previous study (Weiler & Black, 2015b) – guid\*, tour guide, tour guiding, tour leader – along with search terms that captured specialist guides and guiding such as adventure guide, ecotour guide, museum guide and volunteer guide. With the aim of selecting literature on tour guides and guiding, one of the authors read the titles and abstracts to screen irrelevant sources using the following criteria.

First, the papers had to be published in peer-reviewed journals, reflecting a high standard of literature. This criterion has been applied in a number of other review articles (Crawford-Welch & McCleary,

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