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THE ROLE OF TOURIST GUIDES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Sustainable tourism development is becoming an increasingly important issue as the global tourism industry continues to evolve. Tourist guides play a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism practices and preserving local cultures and natural resources. This article delves into the role of tourist guides in the development of sustainable tourism and examines the benefits of utilizing local guides in promoting local cultures and traditions, as well as the impact this has on the local economies of tourist destinations.

The significance of tourist guides in promoting sustainable tourism is due to the fact that sustainable tourism itself is not always appealing to the average tourist. Professional guides can impart not just interesting information, but also present it in a memorable and engaging manner, inciting desired actions. That is why their role in this process is undeniable. This article discusses practical ways in which tourist guides can implement this in the most effective way. After all, they have a unique opportunity to educate and engage tourists in the practice of sustainable tourism and encourage them to behave responsibly while traveling in various ways described in this article.

Key words: *tourism, travel guide, destination, sustainable tourism.*
JEL: *M51, P35*

Introduction

Tourism occupies a leading position in international foreign economic relations and is recognized as one of the fastest growing and highly profitable sectors of the world economy. In other words, tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world [1, p. 31]. However, this growth has resulted in a range of environmental and cultural impacts that can harm local communities and ecosystems. In this regard, the importance of sustainable tourism is updated.

Sustainable tourism development aims to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the preservation of local culture and natural resources [4, p. 56]. Sustainable tourism development is a process that takes into account the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism on destinations. The goal of this process is to strike a balance between preserving local culture and the environment, while also benefiting local communities and visitors.

Results and discutions

Tourist guides are key players in promoting sustainable tourism practices as they are the main source of information and interaction between tourists and local communities and all elements of tourism destinations [5, p. 45]. A tourist guide is a person who is knowledgeable about the history, culture, sights and attractions of a particular destination and helps travelers navigate and experience those aspects in a meaningful way. Another definition focuses on mediating between the guests of a destination and the local community and life: a tourist guide is a person who acts as an intermediary between travelers and the local community, helping to overcome any cultural or language barriers that may exist.

There are also definitions that consider the work of a guide as solely the presentation of some information about the destination at the time of being in it. A guide is a person who provides information, commentary, and directions to a group of people visiting a particular place or destination. A guide is a person trained to provide information and assistance to visitors or tourists in a new place [2, p. 65]. According to the author, these definitions are very narrow and do not show all the many aspects of the guide's work.

As you can see, there is no single definition of the essence of the activity of a tourist guide. Each definition focuses on individual features, which does not allow a comprehensive look at the definition, and even more so from the point of view of sustainable tourism development.

It is possible to single out the definition of a tourist guide, which most clearly traces the relationship between the activities of a tourist guide and the process of sustainable development. This emphasizes that the guide is a kind of guide for people who are unfamiliar with the local culture, way of life, features of life, to a world completely new to them.

Thus, tour guides play a crucial role in promoting and sustaining sustainable tourism development in doing so, the guide employs several methods to contribute to the advancement of sustainable tourism [3, p. 84]. A competent and professional guide offers the most accurate and dependable information throughout the tour. This information should be presented in a compelling manner, with an emphasis on emotional appeal. This does not alter the fact that the tourist guide informs travelers about the significance of sustainable tourism practices, including responsible waste management, energy conservation, and support for local businesses. Although this occurs in an indirect manner, the significance of this action is substantial as it is retained, given that the tourists are highly attentive. Local guides possess a profound understanding of the local culture, history, and environment, enabling them to offer tourists a unique and genuine experience. At the same time, they are interested in the preservation of the area, since their income depends on its preservation. It is crucial in this scenario to present this information discreetly, yet accessibly and accurately, to ensure it is remembered.

Another way for guides to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism is by promoting responsible tourism practices. By leading by example and encouraging travelers to embrace sustainable tourism practices, a travel guide can decrease the environmental impact of tourism and advance long-term sustainability. This can be conveyed through simple reminders to dispose of waste properly, to avoid smoking in designated areas, by raising rhetorical or philosophical questions about the importance of preserving nature for future generations, architectural heritage, and so on. In practice, this is typically not executed on the first excursion with a guide, but rather when the group becomes familiar with the guide and starts to see them as their trusted friend and storyteller. This usually happens on the third or fourth day of the guide's acquaintance with the tourist group. At this moment, purely psychologically, the tourist group begins to perceive every word of the guide as the only true one and involuntarily agrees with any proposals and is positively ready to answer almost any questions.

The next way, which is quite often used by guides, is to support and promote local communities. By promoting local business and encouraging visitors to interact with local communities, a travel guide can help support sustainable tourism development and have a positive social and economic impact on the local population. The use of local guides can also boost the local economy as they are more likely to support local businesses and promote local products. The guide is considered by the tour group as an expert in all areas. In addition, it often turns out that the guide is a resident of a particular area in which the tour is conducted. In this case, the degree of trust in him only increases. One of the most common questions that arise during the tour is the question of souvenirs. Such a question is addressed directly to the guide, who will gladly advise local business representatives who are ready to offer a wide range of their own products. There is no need to mention the mutual financial interest of the guide and the seller in this matter, since the ultimate goal is achieved - the tourist receives the desired products, while they do not need to look for these

places on their own and waste time, and the tourist destination and its representatives receive promotion of their own products and profit.

It is also worth adding another way to develop sustainable tourism with the help of guides - the offer of alternative leisure activities. A travel guide can suggest alternative and sustainable tourism types such as ecotourism and cultural tourism that have a lower environmental impact and contribute to sustainable development.

Thus, a travel guide can play a key role in promoting and supporting sustainable tourism development by educating tourists, promoting responsible tourism practices and supporting local communities and the environment. At the same time, we are talking not only about a specific destination within which the tour takes place, for example. Depending on how the tourist guide conveys information, how skillfully the focus on sustainable development is veiled, the idea will be remembered by tourists and will be applied not only in relation to this destination, but also in general in future travels. The typology of guides should also be considered to better understand which guides are more likely to promote sustainable tourism. Tourist guides can be divided into several types depending on their qualifications, duties and ways of working.

The authors developed the relationship between the typology of tourist guides, their characteristics and ways to promote the development of sustainable tourism, which was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Relationship between the typology of tourist guides and ways to promote sustainable tourism development [developed by the authors]

Tour guide type	**Characteristic**	**Ways to promote sustainable tourism development**
Professional tourist guide	The guide works in travel agencies or tour operators, has a license and specialized education.	Provides information on sustainable tourism practices, encourages responsible tourism behavior, raises cultural and environmental awareness, and supports local communities through the promotion of their products and services. **Ways:** Providing information on sustainable tourism practices.
Freelance travel guide	Independent contractor specializing in specific areas	Describes individual areas of sustainable tourism development (for example, environmental issues, conservation of architectural monuments, etc.). **Ways:** Encouraging responsible behavior in tourism.
Volunteer tourist guide	Works pro bono, can work with local communities	Provides information narrowly, exclusively on those areas of sustainable development in the field of tourism, which is supported by a particular local community. **Ways:** support of local communities.
Public tourist guide	Self-employed to promote sustainable tourism	Information within the framework of sustainable tourism development may be distorted depending on the focus of the guide's interests. **Ways:** Promoting cultural and environmental awareness.

These tables clearly demonstrate that from all the presented typology of guides, it is most expedient to single out professional tourist guides who are interested in promoting sustainable development in the field of tourism. When promoting sustainable tourism ideas, tour guides can use different strategies and approaches:

✓ Providing information on sustainable tourism practices. Tour guides can provide tourists with information on sustainable tourism practices, such as how to minimize their environmental impact, support local businesses, and reduce waste. This can help raise awareness and encourage travelers to act responsibly when traveling.

✓ Promoting responsible behavior in tourism. Tour guides can encourage tourists to engage in responsible tourism behavior, such as supporting local businesses, participating in cultural exchange programs, and respecting local customs and traditions. By doing so, they can promote greater understanding and respect between tourists and local communities and promote more sustainable forms of tourism.

✓ Promoting cultural and environmental awareness. Tourist guides can play a key role in raising cultural and environmental awareness among tourists. By providing information about the history, culture, and natural resources of the places they visit, they can help educate tourists about the importance of conserving and protecting these resources for future generations.

✓ Support for local communities. Tour guides can support local communities by directing tourists to businesses and organizations that promote sustainable tourism practices, and by working with local communities to develop sustainable tourism initiatives. This can help create a more sustainable tourism industry that benefits both tourists and local communities.

The sustainable development of tourism is realized with the help of important participants - tourist guides, their role in this process is extraordinary. They aim to meet the needs of today's tourists and locals while preserving and enhancing opportunities for the future. Sustainable tourism implies the possibility of creating long-term conditions for the development of both tourism itself and the preservation of rich natural resources along with the diverse social and cultural values of local communities. The ultimate goal is clear - to achieve a higher standard of living for the local population of a given destination by promoting their economic growth and preserving environmental benefits and natural capital for future generations.

Conclusion

Tourist guides play one of the most important roles in promoting sustainable tourism practices and preserving local culture and natural resources. Involving local guides in promoting local culture and influencing the local economy can help balance the economic benefits of tourism and preserve the culture and traditions of local communities and ecosystems.

Tourist guides can have a significant impact not only on the development of the tourism industry, but also on the local economy. By promoting local businesses and products, they can help increase the income of local communities. They can also provide employment opportunities that can help reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of local residents. In addition, by promoting sustainable tourism practices, tour guides can help keep tourist destinations attractive to tourists, which can result in long-term economic benefits as well as the promotion of local cultures and traditions.

The involvement of tourist guides as actors in sustainable tourism is essential for the future of the global tourism industry, as well as for the preservation of the world's cultural and natural heritage.

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