

COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR – THE ROLE OF TOUR GUIDES IN PRESENTING ATTRACTIONS

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This article examines the experiencing of tourist attractions presented by Tour Guides through word descriptions accompanied by the active participation of the observers, and without Tour Guides. The research is focused on experiencing beauty. Participants were exposed to an experiment comprised of three parts. In the first part, the participants were asked to observe an object from various sides, in the second part they were exposed to the Guide's description using words, and in the third part of the experiment, the participants were exposed to the Guide's description using words and, simultaneously, being asked to produce movements.

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The experiment showed the participants evaluated the object as more beautiful when it was presented by a Tour Guide.

Keywords: *tourist attractions; Tour Guide; aesthetics; beauty; experiment*

INTRODUCTION

In the profession of Tour Guides, who are significant actors in presenting an attraction or a destination, the communicative aspect is significant. The knowledge of foreign languages, mastering of “the currently popular global discourse” (Salazar, 2006: 240), the knowledge of their mother tongue and “communication competencies” (Leclerc & Martin, 2004: 181), are all essential in enriching the experience of modern tourists, who are, in many respects, co-creators of their tourism experience (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Culture, in overall economic activity, has become a significant element of creating a value chain (Porter, 1985) and, in particular, this role is also indicated in tourism activity, by visiting museums, galleries and cultural heritage sites.

The perception of artistic works and the perception of objects in general has intrigued people, philosophers and scientists for centuries. Especially in the Tourism industry, aesthetics` modes – the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque – have been significant (Knudsen et al., 2015: 179) and typical within the theoretical corpus of aesthetic judgement since the 18th century (Knudsen et al., 2015: 182). According to Urry (1995: 151), tourism consumption is increasingly aestheticized. What is essential in tourism is the subjective positive impression that stays after the tourist’s visit. This subjective positive impression could also be called beauty (Knudsen et al., 2015: 180). Obviously, the aesthetic perception has to be incorporated into tourism planning to enable good memories for tourists (Wang et al., 2008: 207). Tour Guides

are a specific group of professionals who deal with aesthetic perception. Their role in presenting the aesthetic dimension, the beautiful, to tourists is, in fact, significant. But, what is beautiful? There is a well-known proverb saying that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”. Shelley points out David Hume’s words that “beauty is no quality in things themselves,” but merely a sentiment in “the mind that contemplates them” (Shelley 2002: 48). Many experiments and treatises have shown that the appreciation of beauty is dependent upon “a wide array of social variables” (Porteous, 1996: 24).

All these dimensions are also the reason that Tour Guides have presented an important part of the experiment described in the article. The purpose of the experiment has been to induce the perception of the observed object. Prior to the experiment, it was assumed that Tour Guides enhance the perception of the object presented to the participants. The participants evaluated a post-modern sculpture by Martina Vrbljanin from the University of Zagreb in Croatia. The sculpture served as a symbol of any observed object or tourism attraction since, according to Carlson (2002: 551), “the new paradigm for aesthetic appreciation of environments is comparable to the new paradigm for appreciation of art”. Carlson (2002: 552) also points out that “environmental aesthetics embody the view that every environment, natural, rural or urban, large or small, ordinary or extraordinary, offers much to see, to hear, to feel, much to appreciate aesthetically”, and that the different world environments “can be aesthetically rich and rewarding, as are the very best of our works of art” (ibid.).

Based on the issues described above, the following research questions have been created:

1. Does the involvement of a Tour Guide in the presentation of an object (which stands for an attraction) increase the perception of beauty of a certain object when observed by tourists?
2. Does the moving activity during the observation of the object (which stands for an attraction) increase the perception of beauty?

ON AESTHETICS AND BEAUTY IN TOURISM

Aesthetics is vital to the “human sense of well-being”, and industries involved in “catering to aesthetic satisfactions /.../ are thriving economic enterprises” (Porteous, 1996: 5). It seems that beauty and beautiful represent the essence of tourism and tourism communication, which has also always involved aesthetics, which is, according to Prall (1929: 45), basic to human nature. According to Di et al. (2010), aesthetic values are at the centre of destinations’ perception, and at the centre of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Aesthetic value is also one of the significant criteria in the evaluation of application for natural areas to be designated as World Natural Heritage Sites by UNESCO (Di et al., 2010: 59). In the first half of the 1980s, Zube et al. (1982) dealt with landscape perception and, in recent decades, especially since the 1980s, the growth of the tourist industry has led leaders and politicians to reconsider landscapes as revenue generators (Porteous, 1996: 10). Aesthetics explores the nature of beauty and comprises one of the five classical fields of philosophical inquiry – together with Epistemology, Ethics, Logic and Metaphysics (Sporre, 2006: 7), and is often discussed in tourism literature (Austin, 2007; Knudsen and Greer, 2001; Scarles, 2007, etc.). To create a pleasant experience for travellers and to present attractions and destinations as beautiful, is one of the goals of Tourism marketing (Kirillova et al., 2014) and, consequently, the aesthetic dimension of an attraction or a destination is significant, despite the fact that the term aesthetics is highly disputable in Philosophy (Todd, 2012: 65).

Lee, Jeon & Kim (2011) argue that the aesthetic characteristics of an attraction or a destination influence the experiences and satisfaction of tourists, and that they also contribute to their wish to return to the destination. According to Alegre and Garau (2010), a destination’s aesthetic characteristics have been an essential element of many perception and satisfaction image scales used in Tourism research. Herwitz (2008: 25), asks whether beauty is a property of the thing judged (the sculpture, attraction) or the person judging. In

the current research, the central questions are responses to the object, artwork – sculpture, which stands for an attraction, and perception of the artwork. Thus, the question of experience, which is also “a critical concept in Tourism marketing and management literature” (Kirillova, 2012: 282). In the experiment, the research team tried to imitate the tourism experience (an attraction, various tourists, a Tour Guide). One of the essential questions was how the sculpture stimulated the senses of the observers. It should be noted, however, that Tourism aesthetics could possess its own characteristics, in that “the tourism experience involves the full immersion of an individual into an environment that may be distinct from his/her everyday living surroundings” (Volo, 2009; Kirillova, 2016: 283). Whether tourists perceive an attraction as beautiful could be related to their home environments (Maitland and Smith, 2009). On the other hand, facility aesthetics are also significant (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996; Ha and Jang, 2012), and a factor that should not be neglected in the tourist experience is a Tour Guide.

It should be observed, however, that “sometimes we are simply struck by the aesthetic qualities of an art work or natural scene” (Goldman, 2002: 265-266). What is more, in appreciation of the observed landscape, “what is aesthetically relevant is knowledge of why it is, what it is, and what it is like, whether or not that knowledge is, strictly speaking, scientific” (Carlson, 2002: 549). Thus, according to Carlson (ibid.), who speaks of the “aesthetic relevance of information”, information about an observed object’s histories, functions, their roles in our lives, is crucial, and Tour Guides are those who provide that significant information. Consequently, a lot is dependent upon how the presentations of objects/attractions are presented by the Tour Guides. In fact, the Tour Guides’ information plays a central role in the perception of an object/attraction. “The aesthetic relevance of such information seems especially evident for environments that constitute important places in the histories and cultures of particular peoples” (Carlson, 2002: 550). What is important is “an emotionally and cognitively

rich engagement with a cultural artefact, created intentionally by a designing intellect, informed by both art-historical traditions and art-critical practices, and deeply embedded in a complex, many-faceted art world”, and/or “emotionally and cognitively rich engagement with an environment created by natural and cultural forces, informed by both scientific knowledge and cultural traditions” (Carlson, 2002: 551).

Since the aesthetic component as judged by consumers was neglected in the past (Kirillova, 2014: 283), the experiment focused on this component specifically. According to Ittelson (1978), Tourism aesthetics involves multi-sensory experiences, which may incorporate many relations besides that between a tourist and the environment. Also, a tourist’s background is a factor (Kirillova, 2014: 283). In the past, several models of nature appreciation were developed (Natural environmental model - Carlson 1979, Arousal model - Carroll 1995, Sceptical view - Budd 2002, Mystery model - Godlovitch 2004, Engagement model - Berleant 2005). However, it should be noted that aesthetic judgements are relative, as is nature itself (Kirillova, 2016: 284). According to Todd (2009), tourism experience is often dominated by oversimplification, falsification, romanticizing and lack of authenticity.

When discussing the role of Tour Guides, communication of the landscape and its attractions is of great importance. According to Brochu and Merriman (2008, 1), the world “relies on interpersonal communication”, and modern society teaches about cultural topics in many ways, also with Tour Guides, who help audiences connect with history, culture, and the attractions on Earth (Brochu and Merriman, 2008: 3).

On tours, tourists are confronted by images and objects, many of which are unfamiliar to them and must be interpreted (Eco, 1976). As the experiment has shown, languages play a significant role in understanding and in the perception of the world. Cohen (1985: 16) points out Tour Guide’s interpretation skills and the representation of attractions “through the use of appropriate language”. Arbib (2012: 39-40), mentions co-speech gestures and

sign language, which can be used to complement the speech. Also, Topolinski et al. (2013: 174), discuss sign language, claiming that “motor components play a key role in fluency effects”. It can be concluded that signs and movements (gestures) are additional factors in tourism communication, more precisely in the communication of Tour Guides. Topolinski (2011: 260) argues that bodily processes are significant for “several essential mental faculties, such as processing emotions /.../, representing abstract meaning /.../, or building memory /.../.” The brain also has an important role in understanding and interpreting art (Livingstone, 2002), and what is more, aesthetics is an important form of additional knowledge that helps in shaping interpretations (Knudsen et al., 2015: 188), and also creating stories.

Interestingly enough, the word “interpret” comes up often when it comes to tour guiding. Tilden (1957) described interpretation as an educational activity aimed at revealing meanings and relationships to people. Weiler and Ham (2001) transferred this knowledge of interpretation into the relation between Tour Guides and tourists or, as they call them, visitors. The profession of a Tour Guide may seem relatively new, but it is not, as Pond (1993) explains that the first forms of tour guiding were already seen as far back as Ancient Greece and Ancient Roman times, where there was a professional that they named an “interpreter”. Those were people that interpreted the history of certain towns or areas to people who came through these towns or areas for payment, as it seems it was also on the other side of the world in Asia, where, as indicated by Hu (2007: 14), exist written testimonies of people who had the job of interpreting the history of certain areas to rulers who travelled around the country. In both cases, we can see the role of a Tour Guide being focused on a narrow group of people, or even an individual; this is quite some distance apart from the profession of a Tour Guide as we know it today. Cohen (1985:10), found that the mediatory sphere of the tourist guide’s role, noted later, “is much wider and more complex than the simple direction of tourists’ attention to such objects” and, in a way, an extension of the earlier

role, so the tourist guide has to be “a teacher, a confidant and a guru,” (McKean, 1976:13) and Schmidt (1979: 458), compares him to a shaman. The Cohen’s model (1985) of two basic roles (“outer-directed” and “inner-directed” tourist’s guides roles) has been expanded (Wiler & Davis, 1993) with a third, which is “resource management”, but the communicative role of the tourist guides has not yet been investigated clearly (Rendall & Rollins, 2008).

The theme of guidance (spiritual and geographical) is also present in literature. Cohen (1985: 8), mentions Virgil and Beatrice in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the Interpreter in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Process*, and Mephisto in Goethe’s *Faust*, but there are many more works of literature, also contemporary ones, dealing with guiding and guides, among them J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (Gandalf is a mentor/guide to Frodo) and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* (Albus Dumbledore is a Professor). It was not until the late 18th century when the first organised trip that could be considered as a tourist product was made in Great Britain, where Thomas Cook made an organised trip by train from Leicester to Loughborough that attracted some 570 people, and this is the time where we can say that the profession of a Tour Guide emerged. Cohen (1985: 6 -13), argues that “guiding is a complex concept” (6), involving many roles and activities, among them organising, leading the way, taking responsibility for the safety of a group, animating the group, etc. In addition, the Tour Guide’s is “a boundary role” (Cohen, 1985: 22) – the Tour Guide is the connection between the employer, the tourists and the natives of the site visited. Also “the demands and expectations of twenty-first century visitors have grown and evolved” (Weiler and Walker, 2014: 91), and the significance of public speaking skills, i.e. the quality of voice, diction, etc. is, therefore, crucial. The communicative aspect of guiding, and especially the knowledge of languages, is very important in the profession of Guides, who are significant actors in “the process of folklorizing, ethnicizing, and exoticizing a destination” (Salazar, 2006: 834). Tour Guides need to be able to choose the appropriate from a given code - in order to satisfy the needs of a certain selected

situation (Turner, 1973: 7). However, for tourist guides, not only the knowledge of their mother tongues and foreign languages is significant, but also the mastering of “the currently popular global discourse” (Salazar, 2006: 240).

Huang and others (2010), have confirmed that Tour Guide performance has a direct effect on tourists’ satisfaction with the guiding service, and an indirect effect on tourism experience, and that the tourist guide has to able to “to provide tourists with a transformative tourism experience, leading to positive change in attitudes and values by offering tourists a different way of seeing the world” (Io, 2013: 904). Also, during the onsite activities, their role is to create happiness, to let them experience positive emotions (joy, interest and contentment) (Filep and Deery, 2010), which is connected with positive psychology and satisfaction (Pearce, 2009) and to get an emotional, rather than educational experience (Porja et al., 2009).

The purpose of the research was to understand the more precise role of a tourist guide when presenting art facilities at tourist destinations. Thus, in theory, it is possible to find out which form of tourist guide activity is deeper into the experience of beauty with people who are listening to it, whether it is academic accuracy and precision of data, or an attempt to experience a beautiful experience by inviting tourists to some form of activity associated with the object being watched. The practical purpose of this research is to deepen and expand the education of tourist guides in order to make a deeper impression of tourist trips on tourists.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted according to the experimental design involving two groups and the so-called pretest-posttest technique. The experiment was of laboratory type. Instead of the real attractions of a tourist offer, an art sculpture was used as a laboratory tool. As the experimental facility, a sculpture, titled

"Together" by the young ladysculptor Martina Vrbljanin from Zagreb, Croatia was chosen. Prior to the selection of Vrbljanin's sculpture, the research team reviewed a series of sculptures, and, later in the process of selection from the five shortlisted sculptures, used Vrbljanin's .

The observed object, which represented a cultural attraction in the experiment, was comprised of two separate three-dimensional full-round sculptures, made of terracotta, and connected by threads of wool. On the one hand, observing an object representing a cultural attraction could be seen as a limitation of the research, but on the other hand, employing it in the laboratory experiment was a significant part of the research, due to the fact that it was essential in providing useful and efficient information for further steps of the research, along with the obvious advantages of lower cost, shorter time, and the possibility to move the object around. Further on, experimental research in the field with real attractions of cultural heritage will be carried out, according to the experiences obtained with the laboratory experiment.

The study involved professional Tour Guides who volunteered for the study and undertook the task of the experimenters. At first, the target and the method of the experiment were explained to them. Then they were asked to self-reflect on how to perform their tasks in front of the participants of the experiment. The idea proposed by the Tour Guides was coordinated carefully with the research design. Then all the details were trained and coordinated with the members of the research team.

Two groups of participants were formed randomly (as are often formed groups of tourists) out of the participants who agreed to take part. When the participants entered the room where the experiment was being carried out, they were directed to the sculpture that stood on a table in the middle of the room. The participants were asked to take a good look at the sculpture from all sides.

Simultaneously, a short video was projected presenting the sculpture from all perspectives. Students were asked to rate the beauty of the sculpture using the scale provided. The experiment

was performed in a large room, so that every student could find their own »private« space from which they could observe the sculpture from their own perspective and rate its beauty. The participants could observe the details of the sculpture from the video that was projected continuously, and they had the opportunity to be closer to the sculpture if they had the need of a more direct contact with the object. Once they had made the assessment of the sculpture, they were asked to put their papers into an envelope. After that, the students participated in the performance of the second part of the experiment.

To Group 1, a Tour Guide described the sculpture in the usual form used by the majority of Tour Guides, meaning that the Tour Guide stood in front of the whole group, sometimes pointing a hand at the object that was presented, and told the story of this object.

In group 2, a Tour Guide, in addition to the description of the sculpture, asked the participants to take part in the presentation of the sculpture by moving, so as to get a ball of ropes, and everyone was asked to tell a member of the group a few phrases associated with the object of the research and deliver the ball to a partner – another participant; the partner should wrap the rope around themselves twice and then deliver the ball with a few sentences associated with the sculpture. Thus, a closed circle of interconnectedness was created between group members. At the end of the story, the Tour Guide cut the rope around the participants with scissors.

INSTRUMENT

The instrument was used to examine the extent to which respondents evaluated the displayed object as a beautiful one. The respondents evaluated 45 words that are synonyms in all three languages (Croatian, Serbian and Slovenian) and refer to some of the dimensions of beauty. The scale was five-degree, with rating 1 in the sense that the respondent does not in any case experience the sculpture as beautiful, and rating 5, that the respondent perceived the

sculpture as perfectly beautiful. The terms were divided into five factors: 1. Authenticity, 2. Colouring 3. Fascination, 4. Perfection and 5. Characteristics of the person. Internal scale consistency is very high, Crombach's alpha is .97.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the experiment were students of the University of Maribor (Slovenia), Libertas University in Zagreb (Croatia) and in Tims University Novi Sad (Serbia). The first group involved 27 students from Croatia, 59 students from Slovenia and 30 students from Serbia. In the second group, 23 students participated from Croatia, 40 from Slovenia and 35 from Serbia. The first group included a total of 116 students, and 98 students participated in the second group. A total of 214 students participated in this project. Of these, a total of 125 were young women and 61 men. A total of 28 had not marked their gender in the protocols. The proportion of young men and young women corresponds to the proportions of sexes at the Faculties of Tourism in this region. Proportionally, a far greater number of women than men choose to study Tourism in this region. The average age of students is 21,86, with a Standard Deviation of 3,34. The Value Mode was 20, which means that the largest number of students were 20 years old.

As in most other experimental researches of similar nature, this was a student convenience sample (Tucisny, 2017:416). Groups were formed randomly from the sample, but the nature of experimental research in Social Sciences generally and Tourism, use of the results are not direct and immediate. Groups were composed of students who were in the facilities of the university on the day of the experiment. They were invited to participate voluntarily in the experiment. Before starting the experiment, the experimenter explained to them that the aim of the project was to explore the best model of work of the tourist guides. After the experiment, the techniques of experimental design of this project were explained to the students in detail.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to check whether the test results in groups affected only the independent variable and not some other factor, the difference between the arithmetic mean of both groups was calculated at the pretest. This means that it was compared whether the sculpture which was chosen as the independent variable had the same effect on the participants in the two different groups. In the pretest phase, the participants of both groups had the opportunity to see the sculpture and then evaluate its beauty on a scale of 1 to 5. Rating the beauty of the sculpture was equal in both groups of participants in the experiment before the Tour Guides presented the sculpture, meaning that the sculpture was liked equally by all research participants. This is a key result for the further course of the study. In the next step of the experiment, the participants will be affected by independent variables differing in their content. In the pretest phase of study in the two separate groups of participants, their assessment of the beauty of the sculpture was influenced only by their personal experience of the sculpture, and no other effect. If this situation is projected as an event in the Tourism industry, then it would represent tourists who find themselves in front of an object of local culture and assess the beauty of that object without any kind of influence from the Tour Guide.

The average score for each of the factors was calculated that made an overall assessment of the concept of beautiful. As the number of items in the different components is different, the arithmetic mean was calculated in order to compare the components.

It is very interesting that the greatest value was achieved on the item of fascination, and the lowest on the item authenticity. We would say that the students acted on the model of an average tourist, who is very interested in the feeling of beautiful, and less for the authenticity of art objects – thus, tourists are searching for a sense of the beautiful.

The basic idea of performing this experiment was to examine whether the experience of beauty depends on the level of participation of tourists during a visit to a cultural object. Therefore, one group of participants in the experiment had a "classic" treatment. In that treatment, a professional Tour Guide introduced the object by the most commonly used method. She stood in front of the participants of the experiment and spoke of the sculpture in the same way as she would work explaining to tourists some of the cultural monuments of southern Italy, to which she travels most often with tourists. The central part of this presentation was the story told by the creator of the sculpture on how the sculpture was created.

In the experimental group, the Tour Guide asked for the active participation of the students during the tour of the object. The Guide who participated with the experimental group told the participants of the experiment the same story about the origins of the sculpture as his colleague. In addition to that, he invited them to participate in the way that was already described.

The Multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) test was applied to identify possible statistical differences in the respondents' perceptions of beauty based on their participation in the experimental groups. The main hypothesis was that students who participated actively in the group had a more intense experience of the beauty than the students who were just watching and listening to the Guide.

All multivariate tests are significant, which means that the hypothesis that there was no statistically significant difference between groups of respondents should be rejected. This confirms a statistically significant difference between groups using a different model in the experiment.

In the first place, it should be emphasised that the experience of beauty associated with observing the sculpture has changed in both groups. Statistically, in both groups, the sense of the beauty connected with a view of the sculpture increased significantly. Thus, it may be established that the importance of Tour Guides in modern

tourism is not emphasised sufficiently in the tourism literature. A demand for reduction of operating costs, which appears to be the general trend of neoliberal capitalism in particular, struck exactly the position of guides in tourism. The costs were, in fact, mostly decreased by engaging Tour Guides, who have become more technical companions of tourists than their guides.

With the help of Scheffel's method, we identified differences in values between the pre- and post-tests in these two different experimental situations. Better results were obtained in the experimental group in which participants were invited to the activity. Thus, participation in activities linked to some cultural objects is a factor that would implant perception of that object as beautiful deeper and stronger in the memory of tourists. In Tourism, the participation of tourists in an activity is nothing new, but is, perhaps, too often neglected. In very different ways, Tour Guides have long been trying to activate and animate tourists. This issue, however, is not just the question of tourists' interest to participate actively, but it is related closely to a more sensitive topic in the Tourism industry, i. e. to the role, education, skills, and position of Tour Guides.

CONCLUSION

The current experiment unveils a new understanding of the significance of Tour Guides in perceiving attractions as beautiful by exploring the dimensions of the observer's (tourist's) aesthetic judgement. The results have answered the first research question, and confirmed that the object (which stood for an attraction in the experiment) was perceived as more beautiful when it was presented by Tour Guides. Thus, this experiment makes an essential contribution to the existing knowledge of the significance of aesthetics in the tourist experience. The experiment also showed that the participants evaluated the object as more beautiful when it was presented by a Tour Guide organising an activity in which the participants were involved actively in the presentation of the object.

The results showed that those participating actively had a deeper and stronger implant of the object as beautiful in their memories. The research obviously gave a positive answer to the second research question. Thus, it was confirmed that the Engagement model, which emphasised “the subject’s active, multisensory engagement in the environment, and the holistic, perceptual unity of the subject immersed in and continuous with their surroundings” (Todd, 2009: 161) is relevant in aesthetic judgement in Tourism. It was also confirmed in the experiment, not only that the perception of beauty varies, but also that the perception of beauty can be influenced. The latter is a central finding for the Tourism industry. When Tour Guides were involved in the presentation of an object, the object was perceived as more beautiful. Consequently, it can be assumed that objects and attractions/destinations are perceived as more beautiful when they are presented by professional Tour Guides. Thus, it can be concluded that the profession of a Tour Guide is still among the essential ones in the Tourism sector. Tour Guides, providing that they do their job professionally, are ambassadors of destinations, and, what is more, ambassadors of cultures.

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