

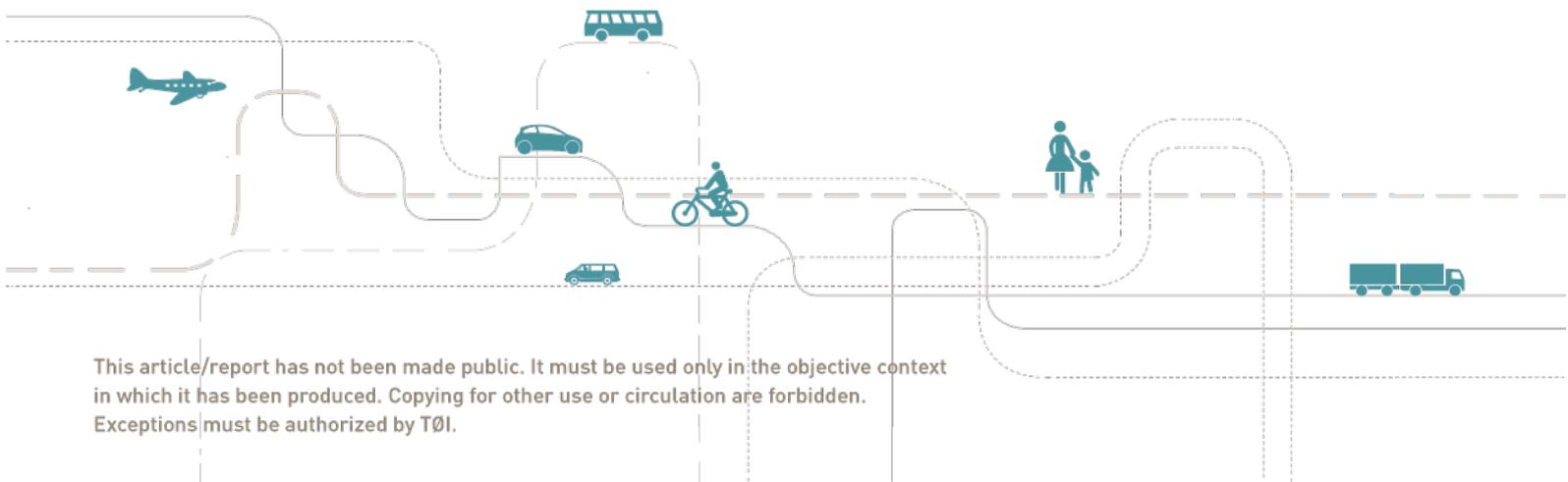
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Educational tourism and interpretation



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This working paper is an initial compilation of literature dealing with the concepts of educational tourism and interpretation, and finally interpretation in the context of nature-based tourism or eco-tourism.

Educational tourism

One of the forerunners for today's educational tourism was the *Grand Tour*, undertaken initially by aristocratic British youth as part of their education during the 17th, 18th and 19th century. Many of these were scholars and the English, the Germans, and others, travelling on a grand tour of the European Continent, came to be known as tourists (Richie (2003) referring to Kaul (1985)). Travel for education and learning, in addition to travel as a practice confirming the status and power of the aristocracy, was at the outset an important motive and much tourism activities were in their initial phase (and still are, one may add) responses to tourists' curiosity (Richie, 2003). Today, several national tourism agencies have taken advantage of this learning interest in their tourism strategies, see for example Canadian Tourism Commission (2001):

<http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/C85-6-5-5E.pdf>.

Educational or learning types of tourism can take a variety of forms and can be understood according to a scale ranging from 'general interest in learning while travelling' at one end to 'purposeful learning and travel' at the other (Ritchie 2003). The first category of travellers would for instance take an interest in guided tours and interpretative programmes, which may be organised independently (informally) or through organised groups (formally), while on tour. The second type would represent tourists dedicated to take part in distinct educational training courses. The educational tourism segment may thus be classified as 'tourism first' or 'education first' respectively (Richtie 2003). Sub segments of the latter category, such as school excursions and university/ college student experiences, may not see tourist experiences as their primary motivation but their activities still

have tourism-related impacts on the local and regional levels (Richie 2003). Broadly speaking, it is thus possible to classify educational tourism in accordance with the ‘tourism first’ – ‘education first’ dichotomy.

A general increase in the educational level in society has had a profound impact on the tourist market. The growing trend towards involvement and participation has been described as ‘active vacation’ (Richie 2003; Hall & Weiler 1992) and Smith and Jenner (1997) describe this as a trend towards a ‘leisure-education hybrid’, whereby a new demand for leisure products which have an educational or learning component is created. Educational tourism can take a variety of directions and serve a diversity of visitor interests, “such as satisfying curiosity about other people and their language and culture; stimulating interest in art, music, architecture or folklore; inspiring concerns for natural environments, landscapes, flora and fauna; or, deepening the fascination of cultural heritage and historic places” (Kalinowski & Weiler 1992, p 17). Educational tourism goes beyond a curiosity, interest or fascination for a particular topic but includes an element of organized learning (Kalinowski & Weiler 1992).

According to Richie (2003, p 14), a diversity of organisation may combine to develop the supply side of the educational tourism experience. Among the most relevant are:

- “*Attractions and events* which provide the venue for learning experiences (e.g. parks, historic sites, zoos, bird and wildlife sanctuaries and archaeological dig sites),
- *Resource specialists* who are responsible for delivering the learning component of these vacations (e.g. employees, curators, interpreters, lecturers, storytellers, researchers and academics),
- *Affinity travel planners* from organisations who help plan and develop learning programmes for travellers (e.g. special interest groups, conservation organisations, universities and language schools)”.

Educational tourism in its more recent appearance can also be seen as a category of alternative tourism (i.e. alternative to the conventional, standardised and large scale mass tourism) or as a subset of special interest tourism. Hall and Weiler (1992) refer to Heywood (1990, p 46) who claims that this active component mirrors the on-going trends in tourism “towards conservation, scholarship, science and environmental awareness”. Hjalager et al. (2008, p 37) present some examples where destinations to invite tourists into learning experiences together with scientists. For instance in the context of whale watching in Húsavík, Iceland, tourists are asked to contribute to the research work by assisting in localising and counting the whales while on sightseeing tours. Another example is learning opportunities at the Seatrout Funen destination in Denmark that are placed together with the educational facilities at the premises of the aquaculture company of the area, which can be used by both groups of tourists and students.

Wearing (2001, p. 30) refers to educational and scientific tourism as two forms of alternative tourism and “serious leisure” and “volunteer tourism”¹ may operate successfully within for instance an ecotourism framework with its conservation ethic. A Norwegian example of tourism that comes very close to “volunteer tourism” that is mentioned by Hjalager et al. (2008, p 37), is Beitostølen, where the Sports Health Centre has become an attraction for medical professionals and semi-professionals in the medical field, with the opportunity to assist in sports activities for the disabled.

¹ “Volunteer tourism” is described by Wearing (2001) as a form of tourism where the major aim is to sustain the well-being of the local community where tourism takes place: “Volunteer tourism can be viewed as a development strategy leading to sustainable development and centring the convergence of natural resource qualities, locals and the visitors that all benefit from tourism activity”.

The concept of interpretation

The assumption that interpretation will lead to understanding and that understanding in turn will lead to appreciation which finally will lead to protection was first formulated by an anonymous US National Park Service manager in an administrative manual according to Ham (2009) and afterwards made known by Freeman Tilden (1957, p. 38) in the book *Interpreting Our Heritage*. The idea is that the interpretation's success is based on the meaning that visitors themselves make (which is different from the mere knowledge that the interpreter may want them to obtain). The crucial point is that interpretation should lead to the formation of subjective meaning or personal understanding (Ham, 2009).

The underlining of generating meaning and understanding is thus apparent in many definitions of interpretation:

”Interpretation is an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”
(Tilden, 1957, p 8)

National Park Service (NPS) in the US defines interpretation as “a catalyst in creating an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings and significance inherent in the resource.”
(National Park Service (2001) as referred to in National Park Service (2007)).

“Interpretation is an explanation of the natural, cultural or historic values attached to places. It enables visitors to gain insight and understanding about the reasons for conservation and ongoing protection of our heritage.”
Department of Conservation (New Zealand), see
<http://www.doc.govt.nz/documents/about-doc/concessions-and-permits/conservation-revealed/interpretation-lowres.pdf>

“Interpretation is a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meanings in the resource”.

(National Association for Interpretation, as referred to in National Park Service (2007), see

<http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/101/foundationcurriculum.pdf>

“Interpretation is the process of explaining to people the significance of the place or object they have come to see, so that they enjoy their visit more, understand their heritage and environment better, and develop a more caring attitude towards conservation.”

(Society for Interpreting Britain’s Heritage, as referred to in Moscardo (1998))

“Interpretation is a planned effort to create for the visitor an understanding of the history and significance of events, people, and objects with which the site is associated.”

(Alderson & Low (1985), as referred to in Moscardo (1998)).

“Nature interpretation refers to mediation of feeling for, and knowledge of nature. Nature interpretation aims to increase understanding of fundamental ecological and cultural relationships and the human role in nature. Thus improve opportunities for positive experiences in nature and increased environmental awareness of the individual and the society” (Zettersten 1990).

Following Beaumont (2001), Moscardo (1995, p 2) has given the following definition of interpretation:

“Interpretation is the process of communicating to people the significance of a place or object so that they enjoy it more, understand their heritage and environment better, and develop a positive attitude to conservation.”

As we see from this sample of definitions some define interpretation as an experiential phenomenon while some in addition underline that interpretation is a means to an end: environmental understanding as a basis for a caring attitude (and

possible engagement in) towards nature protection². The idea behind the positive impact of environmental education is that understanding and insight lead to appreciation which again causes support for protection of the natural resources (Chartres 1996), especially if the experiences are enjoyable (Fien, 1992; Orr, 1992; Van Matre, 1990). Moscardo (1998) asserts that interpretation clearly is about education but the term “also concentrate on the importance of visitor enjoyment, on exiting curiosity and on contributing to conservation” (p 3) and thus this kind of communication is especially relevant to tourism and recreation.

The positive impacts of environmental education are somewhat disputed and said to be dependent on a series of intervening factors related to both the individual and the experience (Beaumont 2001). Several researchers underline thus the importance of affective processes and interpretive programmes that should provide opportunities for self-discovery, participation and sensory involvement. Besides, communication skills of the presenter are also deemed important in these settings (Beaumont 2001, p 321).

Powell and Ham (2008) state that successful environmental interpretation should be based on the EROT model (Ham 1992), which means that the message must be Enjoyable or Entertaining, Relevant to the audience, Organised (the audience must be able to follow the communication) and Thematic, “which refers to communicating a moral of the story or message that promotes intellectual and emotional connections, rather than relating individual and isolated facts and figures” (Powell and Ham, 2008, p 472). In Ham’s (1992) practical guide for

² The active role of the tourist is in itself also an important element. The National Park Service (2007, p. 6) summarizes the art of interpretation in this way:

“So what is interpretation? It is a bridge between the meanings of the resources and interests of the visitors. It connects the tangible artifacts, collections or natural resources of a site to the intangible concepts they can represent. It is the role of the interpreter to ensure that those connections are built on the interests of the visitor. And it is the role of the visitor to determine which bridges will be crossed.”

interpretation these four qualities are highlighted as important in the profession of interpretation (National Park Service, 2007). For more information on this, see this brochure called *Interpretation* from the Department of Conservation, New Zealand: <http://www.doc.govt.nz/documents/about-doc/concessions-and-permits/conservation-revealed/interpretation-lowres.pdf>

Moscardo (1998) asserts that interactive/ participatory exhibits are thus likely to induce more mindful visitors compared to more static displays found in traditional museums (Moscardo 1996). Such settings are supposed to produce more learning, better understanding and greater visitor satisfaction. A summary of studies of the effectiveness of audio-visuals, multisensory and dynamic interpretive techniques indicate that such features appear to enhance visitors' attention and learning (Moscardo, 1996). Uniqueness is also considered to be an asset; Bitgot and Patterson (1986) concluded that the most memorable exhibits were those that were different from the other exhibits.

Environmental educational and interpretation in a nature-based tourism (ecotourism) context

Nature-based tourism is often described as an alternative form of tourism which can also be classified according to its relationship to the environment (Newsome et al., 2002): The activity can take place *in* nature (like for example adventure tourism), be *about* nature (like for example wildlife tourism) and also be developed *for* nature (like for example ecotourism). In ecotourism the idea to foster increased ecological awareness and learning opportunities are one of the core criteria of ecotourism (Fennel & Weaver 2005). This is in line with the *Tbilisi Declaration* (1977) that says that one of the goals of environmental education is “to provide every person with opportunity to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment”. An additional goal is also “to create new patterns of behavior of

individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment”.
(UNESCO/ UNEP, 1997, p. 1).

Education and interpretation are according to McNeely & Thorsell (1989) basic tools used to manage tourists and the implementation of a visitor interpretation service is essential to encourage appreciation of the natural resource's value. Sander (2010, p. 19) maintains that it is important that a learning atmosphere is created that facilitates learning and creates insights. He refers to Ceballos-Lascurain, ‘a founder of the term ecotourism’ and many other authors who are underlining the importance of the educational component (Ceballos-Lascurain 1988; Honey 2008). By definition ecotourism must provide environmental education or interpretation (Fennel & Weaver, 2005) and it is a commonly held opinion that this factor “fosters awareness and understanding of natural environments and consequently promotes proenvironment attitudes and responsible environmental behaviour” (Beaumont 2001, p 317). Moreover, Beaumont (2001) maintains that supporters of ecotourism claim that by providing environmental education and interpretation to participants, awareness and understanding of the natural environment and pro-environmental attitudes, support for conservation and responsible environmental behaviour will occur. Ecotourism can also often showcase the degradation that humans are responsible for (Sander 2012) and thus create insights about environmental impacts of human activity. A similar conclusion was reached by Powell and Ham (2008) who on the basis of their Galapagos study observed that the participants in the actual interpretation framework increased their philanthropic support for conservation and also were positively influenced in their environmental knowledge and behavioral intentions.

It is said to be the mixture of environmental education and immediate nature experiences that is supposed to be decisive for stimulating pro-environmental attitudes (Beaumont 2001; Charters 1996; Olivier, 1992). It is also assumed that the nature experiences in themselves lead to increased appreciation of nature and endorse proenvironmental attitudes and behaviours (Beaumont 2001; Brown

1991). Research has shown that a large share of those who take part in an ecotourism experience possess high motivations for learning about nature (Beaumont 2001). But many of those who take part in a ecotourism activity as part of a larger, overall trip (termed 'soft ecotourists' (cf. Weaver 2005)) seem to be less proenvironmental in their attitudes compared to tourists whose major destination was a national park (Ulyssal et al., 1994). Still those visitors with less environmental experience will have the greatest potential to be influenced in their value orientation by ecotourism experiences (Beaumont 2001; Dresner & Gill, 1994; Lisowski & Disinger, 1991, Eagles & Demare, 1995). Roggenbuck (1992) underlines that the first-time or low-knowledge visitors responds much more readily to so-called persuasive information than more experienced visitors who have established certain knowledge patterns (p173-174). This is often referred to as a "ceiling effect" (Beaumont 2001; Sander 2010) in the latter group. This means that wilderness information specialists must do more to gain the attention from more skilled visitors. Still, also in cases with strong ecological attitudes, participation in an ecotour has been found to reinforce these views (Asfeldt, 1992).

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