



Executive Summary

A Comparative Analysis of Guide Training Programmes in Eight European Countries (www.innoguidetourism.eu)

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A tourist guide is a “person who guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area, who normally possesses an area-specific qualification usually issued and/or recognised by the appropriate authority.”¹ It follows that a tourist guide is a professional with the potential to contribute to an area’s development.

European Union goals that include unification, integration, citizenry development, and furthering of education ideals can all benefit from guides’ work. In this respect guides’ contribution to Europe’s image and sustainability can be significant. A way in which guides can contribute to change is through the informal education they offer tourists, an innovative way that can add to Lifelong learning goals thus influence change in behaviours and attitudes. The Innoguide Project advances that for guides to contribute to a stronger Europe; their training needs to be innovated to include concepts of sustainability as well as knowledge and skills in interculturalism and experiential guiding, which would emphasise the European Dimension.

The present research examined guide training structure and content from national and/or regional training institutions in the eight participating European countries (Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, and Spain). Wide variation was identified:

Across Europe, the guide training programmes are situated between level 4 – 6 in the EQF classification², ranging from courses to vocational qualification and training, and all the way through higher education programmes. Training may be offered as part- or fulltime programmes. There are significant differences in number of course-hours within the different programmes, varying from 366 training units in Flanders (Belgium) to 1472 in Malta. Also the balance between practical and language training, and theory vary. Foreign languages are not always central, but constitute e.g. 24.5% of the Maltese program. Teaching of area-specific knowledge varies across programmes. In the case of Maltese, Hungarian, Catalanian and Flemish programmes, the percentage of practical training con-

¹ CEN – European Committee for Standardization. NBN EN 13809, May 2003

² The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999

http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/990719BOLOGNA_DECLARATION.PDF

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stitutes 27-47.5%, but nonetheless differs from the recommendations of the CEN norm by 40%. The programme descriptions also vary with respect to minimum age and formal qualification required for admission. This is especially true in the case of vocational training or higher education programmes where a high school diploma is the prerequisite in order to be admitted. In the case of adult and further training programmes, some contain special requirements.

The fact that the majority of the programmes are regional was an additional challenge in the analysis. While they might be rich in addressing local culture, heritage, economies and nature, they lack the overarching issues addressed in Innoguide. At the other side of the spectrum is the Dutch programme with an international perspective but lacking a regional and European one. In most programmes, Profit (the economic sphere of tourism) is well represented, while the areas that address People and the Planet are not. Similarly, the study's selected criteria to evaluate the intercultural and experiential guiding aspects of programmes, in the main, are absent, hence the low contribution to the European Dimension.

There are few further training opportunities for practicing professional tourist guides, nor is there a system that requires knowledge refreshment. As far as the future tourist guides are concerned, the different topics that are under development within our project will be of varying importance within the curricula framework of both formal and further training. None of the programmes offers the opportunity for student interchange. Such interchange would facilitate mobility across Europe and the chance for students to learn concepts first-hand that include: interculturality, democracy, citizenry, and social competence.

Regarding curricula content, the study's main finding shows that Innoguide's study areas of Sustainability, Interculturalism and Experiential Guiding are not sufficiently represented in European guide-training programmes. There is not one programme that is consistently strong or weak; indeed, the various programmes show different levels of strengths and weaknesses. Altogether however, the set of programmes might be of some value in their contribution to the creation of the new Innoguide Modules in Sustainability, Interculturality and Experiential Guiding, and also enlighten the need for improvement in the area of Visitor Management Skills.

Visitor Management Skills, the transversal criterion to all areas of guiding, needs improvement as well. For example, The Maltese programme is the only one to include a course that addresses 'guiding for physically challenged tourists'. This should inspire other countries to include this subject in their training programmes. The indicator 'Carrying Capacity' is missing in all programmes and the Catalanian programme is the only one to address the indicator 'Awareness of the impact of words/actions'. Additionally, none of the programmes address the indicators 'Visual aids, New media and the use of Tour guide systems'.

The above conclusions and ensuing recommendations will assist in the development of the three Modules—Sustainability, Interculturality, and Experiential Guiding—in concert with the developed criteria and indicators used to evaluate current training programmes. These modules can be easily integrated in current tourist guide training programmes but are also designed to train individual guides, —thus increase guides' professionalism and innovation in guide training. The future modules will fill the current void that we found in the different guiding programmes, thus assist guides to incorporate in their work notions that include European unification, democratic values, environmental issues, cultural differences and similarities, and the significance of heritage. The fact that eight European countries have laboured in the development of an educational system to improve tourist guide-training programmes has proven beneficial both in cooperative efforts and knowledge sharing. These endeavours have been important steps not only in advancing Lifelong Learning ideals, but also in promoting education policy-making, transparency, innovation and the improvement of qualifications and competences, all integral to Innoguide's generic objectives.

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