

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

The travel and tourism industry employs 127 million workers (one in fifteen workers world wide). Overall, the tourism industry is expected to double by the year 2005 (Hawkins 1994: 262).

Summary of the Thesis

This thesis began with the statement, 'take only photographs, leave only footprints' as a metaphor for the necessity of low impact tourism in the context of the worldwide expansion of the industry. Having considered the vast array of ways this can be achieved through the advent of ecotourism and, the positioning within that tourism market sector of tourist guides, I am now able to draw together some salient threads regarding the occupation of the tour guide within ecotourism, and further, as personified in the tour leader of guided tour reputation.

This thesis has filled an important gap in the literature on tour guides and emotional labour. It also has combined existing literature on tour guides and tourism. I have identified the lack of theory pertaining to and interconnected with emotional labour and tour guides. From a sociological perspective, the tourism-environment literature, tour guides literature and

emotional labour literature need to be interwoven to form a new and comprehensive theoretical position of all these models. This thesis has made a modest contribution to this end.

In undertaking this research, I have incorporated both sociological and tourism perspectives into an understanding of the tour guide occupation. Accordingly, I suggest that this thesis has a great deal to offer in both these areas. Before I address the theoretical implications of the research, I will summarise the findings and conclusions presented in the substantive chapters of the thesis.

Becoming a tour guide or a Savannah Guide, is a process that involves adhering to an acceptance of prescribed group norms and perceptions. The constraints and tensions of complying with the group processes and actually 'becoming' the essence of what it is that constitutes a Savannah Guide, was a theme that emerged, in some way, in each chapter. In Chapter Four, 'It's Not Difficult to Be a Savannah Guide', the ways in which group members are attracted to the Savannah Guide organisation, how they gained a collective sense of identity and how that made them identifiable as a tourism product, were discussed. My findings support the view that, in this case, engaging with entrepreneurial activities leads to the recognition of an identifiable and marketable tourism product. This has happened through adherence to a more quasi-militaristic form of governance. Thus, professionalisation of the

organisation occurs and rationalisation of nature and the outback results. Researchers of emotional labour have identified the processes behind an engagement with clients as part of the rationalisation mechanism; my data both supports and reinforces this point. Extended working hours together with the isolation of time spent away from families also contributed to the 'construction' of the Savannah Guides in this study. Such constructions were widespread among the subject group. Issues of race and gender were also highlighted in the organisation. My findings also highlight that it is, in fact, difficult to become a Savannah Guide.

The data also demonstrates the theme of elitism, which is utilised in maintaining Savannah Guide symbolism. In Chapter Five, accounts of ritualistic behaviour regarding initiation into the organisation and evaluation of individuals' skills and competencies were used as measurements of acceptability by the Savannah Guides. Thus, the socialisation process became a test of personal determination, rather than merit, based on acceptability by other group adherents. I argue in that chapter, that a significant dimension to group acceptance is mandatory compliance with organisational activities and attendances. On the other hand, one of the glaring inconsistencies within the organisational behaviour is that individuals who are members, but who practice non-compliance, are still acceptable as group constituents. This directly contravenes the By-Laws and Constitution of the guides. However, this does not affect the camaraderie,

group closeness and personal attachments that have formed between the association's members over extended periods of time. I argue that these have occurred through common interests, collective goals and necessity. This also encompasses their particular brand of informed, authoritative interpretation that they utilise to 'guide' the tourists on tours. 'World's best practice' was a phrase used to validate their paternalistic brand of information transfer. Here, my findings also support the view that the guides have commodified the interpretation product. This, in turn, leads to an assignment of value upon the product of interpretation itself.

Many of the tensions discussed in Chapter Six are concerned with the guides' interaction with the tourists. The guides describe what happens during an ecotour and how each of the tour groups develop a consciousness, or determination, of their own. It also highlights the instructive side of the guides' occupation, where they attempt to 'teach' the tourists how to behave in the wilderness. Many of the tours I studied, were not actually based in the wilderness but had other cultural and historic values. Therefore, my research supports the view that ecotourism exists in a continuum as part of the mass tourist industry. It also appears that one nationality of tourists is really no different from another. Most ecotourists in this study are in their later years of life, well educated and have a high standard of living. This is not necessarily indicative of the sociological profile of ecotourists but simply part of the attraction of the savanna region, at this point in time, for a group

who are affectionately known as 'grey nomads'. 'Escape' forms part of their reason for joining guided tours in the bush. But, this does not make the ecotourists experts in bush lore or, environmentally conscious.

Chapter Seven concentrates on the intricacies of managing an ecotourism business. The findings suggest that marketing issues and retaining a sustainable region to be gazed upon by the ecotourists were central to the daily maintenance of the businesses, and to planning strategies. The Savannah Guides have successfully gained a marketing image of their association and themselves through identification with a uniform and through appropriation of badging levels. However, there are numerous problems with the organisational side of marketing and some of the smaller operations have suffered while the larger concerns have received greater benefits and recognition. My data suggests sustainability is a point of major concern in the everyday lives of the guides. State and federal governmental imposed restrictions caused some areas of concern for the group. This did not stop the guides implementing their own form of restrictions to sites they believe are in need of protection. But, admittance to an 'at risk' site is possible with the right bureaucratic connections and fiscal exchange.

In summary, becoming and remaining a Savannah Guide is difficult and involves an on-going process of self and group construction, where the association creates and monitors the members' adherence levels, or

compliance. The ideal of the group has been reached through an identifiable marketing product, their uniform and their characteristic badging. These have served as a means to professionalise the group and to obtain and maintain a marketing edge in a tough tourism market sector.

Sociological Implications of the Study

Within the emerging sociology of tourism literature, this study makes a contribution to two main areas. Firstly, my research provides a comparison and a contrast to somewhat dated previous work on the vocation of the tour guide, and extends and expands on this within the framework of ecotourism. Secondly, it relates to the model of the guide within an organisational setting and, in particular, within a selective alliance to a group membership.

As discussed in Chapter Two, theorists from within the sociology of tourism recognise that tourism occurs in a 'manufactured' setting which is often unreceptive to notions of self-determination and individual agency. The province in which tourism occurs contains both proponents and adversaries. However, attention to the structured (in one sense) nature of the sector has focused principally on mass commodified tourism and not upon the alternative or nature-based side of the product. Consequently, the effects of nature-based tourism, or ecotourism, have been measured in terms of their sustainability and effects on tourism in natural settings, rather than on the individuals involved in the occupation of providing the tourist experience.

When a typology of the tour guide has been addressed, it has been theorised in terms of role behaviour and management of the tourist encounter. In Cohen's (1985) model, the accent is on the individual and group needs of the tourist, rather than on the location or the host population. This study demonstrates that the complexities of the tour guide occupation are apparent no matter where the act of interpretation is performed and, no matter what the affiliations with organisational hierarchies. The ecotour guides are continually attempting to legitimise themselves through the interpretation and protection of the sites under touristic focus. The concept of interpretation, as defined and applied is adequate because it recognises the plethora of locations to be interpreted and also, the numerous and wide ranging categories of tourists to be instructed and educated at the places under scrutiny. Further, although the definition of interpretation is somewhat dated, it remains applicable and in wide use today. Compliance with organisational norms are implicit and explicit, covert and overt, and target both individuals involved in the organisational process (insiders) as well as those on the periphery (outsiders), seeking membership. At the individual level, the organisational values and norms not only target rule compliance, they also encourage and enforce it.

Another important sociological implication to be drawn from this study is the contention over the term 'ecotourism'. This term has a wide appeal and currency. It is also a term that makes sense to people even

though it is used in a number of different ways and in different contexts. Ecotourism is made up of many diverse forms of tourism and further, can be named in disparate ways. Categories of ecotourism that are subsumed under the 'generic' umbrella of tourism include 'adventure' tourism, 'alternative' tourism, 'appropriate' tourism, 'cultural' tourism, 'ethical' tourism, 'green' tourism, 'heritage' tourism, 'historical' tourism, 'nature based' tourism, 'responsible' tourism, 'sustainable' tourism and 'wilderness' tourism. This list however, is by no means exhaustive.

Tourism, in general, has not generated much interest in sociological circles until recent times. In a postmodern sense, perhaps there will be no need for a sociologically based theory of tourism. Grand theorists may not divert their attention solely to the study of tourism as a burning issue. According to Hall (1998), tourism was, and still is, through the present focus on ecotourism, seen as a mechanism both to conserve the environment and develop peripheral areas, even though the effectiveness of management tools is still highly debatable (Hall 1998: 23).

Theoretical Development

This section of the thesis aims to suggest new ways of understanding the occupation of the tour guide within ecotourism as a result of my inductive approach to the research inquiry.

I make the claim that ecotourism is simply one component of mainstream tourism in the mass tourist industry rather than a distinct subcategory with its own dynamics. This distinction, between tourism and ecotourism, which is frequently and uncritically portrayed in media and marketing accounts is, from a sociological perspective, not sustainable. Ecotourism may well be highlighted as distinct by tourism marketers simply to gain a competitive edge and to establish product differentiation. Within the social sciences literature, post Fordism, is a well-developed concept used to denote the rise of niche markets in the context of the rising importance of tourism (Meethan 2001).

John Urry's (1990) *The Tourist Gaze* has been embraced both academically in tourism and marketing, as well as from within the sociology of tourism. This adds credence to an evolving social theory of tourism and its various components, while simultaneously developing a critical position for the niche market position of ecotourism.

Through the aim of product differentiation, ecotourism has targeted the experience of tourism in one of its many other forms (cultural, historical, green, adventure, alternative, heritage, sustainable, responsible and wilderness tourism) (Pine and Gilmore 1999). This has led to the heightened commodification of all sectors of tourism and its related products. Therefore ecotours and ecotourism have become highly visible products of tourism,

driven by market need, niche marketing and fiscal desire. This is not, in itself a problem for the industry unless the consumers of ecotourism see it as highly staged and manipulated; there was evidence of such findings in my research and tourists sought to reject the idea that they were simply 'bums on seats' regardless of the content of the ecotourist experience.

The 'grey nomads' and other tourists with considerable expendable incomes and cultural capital do not want to feel that their experience is commodified in the sense of being the same as previous or subsequent tours. They want the feeling that their experience was a 'one off' occurrence. The good tour guide (Grinder and McCoy 1985) is aware of the tourist's desires and attempts to give them what they want through informed authoritative interpretation (Gurung, Simmons and Devlin 1996). This is possible through the mechanism of emotional labour, where exchanges of personal feelings and empathy create the atmosphere of unity or 'oneness' between the environment, the tourist and the tour guide. Deep emotional sensations are the result of this base level interchange.

Post Fordism translates into smaller outputs and more customised commodities, products and experiences. As a result of modifications in technology, especially computer controlled construction and mechanisation, the length of time involved in the turnover rate and the time interval between planning and manufacture has become noticeably shortened. As a

result, this means that the manufacture costs for smaller more modified sets of commodities are no longer more costly per item than those created under the Fordist procedure (Slater 1997: 189). The escalating flood and globalisation of information has brought about a decentralisation and globalisation of production that is no longer as connected to specific locales, as it used to be. Post Fordism and deterritorialisation mean a more mobile and transnational labour force (Meethan 2001).

As the spatial and profitable administration of production have altered, so too have models of consumption. The aim of post Fordism is niche marketing in which the mass markets of Fordism are split into fragments or niches or lifestyle sectors (Abercrombie 1991). These are not classified by socio-demographics or class, but rather by the 'cultural meanings which link a range of goods into a coherent image' (Slater 1997: 191). With regard to tourism, this has produced the development of more flexible arrangements of both marketing and holidaying, short-term weekend vacations, and the evolution of 'specialist' vacations, such as varieties of ecotourism. Within dynamic sectors of the tourism industry there has been a concerted move away from mass markets towards inflexible, small, predictable and interactive tours (Urry 1990). Within the Savannah Guides, many of the operators spoke of their businesses in this way. The guides themselves providing the discerning older, post, educated, wealthy tourist

with accessibility to areas of the outback, that appeared to be harsh and unknowable.

In some segments of the tourism industry, tourists seek events that are transparently visible as tourist experiences, where there is little attempt to hide the fact that the tourist is a tourist. In other situations, reminiscent of the Savannah Guide experience, tourists eschew this candid inauthenticity. Where previous literature has focused on the role of the tour guide as an inert species, this thesis has highlighted the increasing occupation of tour guides in terms of knowledge, authenticity and the management of tourist's emotional and spiritual encounters at tourist sites which attempt to deny the mass tourist experience. The contribution of this thesis is that it links disparate areas of sociological research from work to consumerism and leisure in the context of the increasing recognition of 'the environment' as a way of educating discerning people seeking an 'authentic' experience.

Future Research

This thesis seeks to investigate and answer questions in a relatively unexplored and underexamined area within the sociology of tourism. As such, it makes an empirical addition to the small and selective works on tour guides and the tourist experience, and has highlighted the importance of the need to make connections between these two areas of interest and ecotourism. My execution of the study used an eclectic conceptual approach,

which was theoretically grounded in the data. Taken together, all these aspects will prove to be interesting categories for future research.

For example, it would be interesting to examine the occupation of the tour guide from the viewpoint of the tourist group undergoing the interpretive guided tour. The contested nature of 'experience' and the search for the authentic as opposed to the spurious (MacCannell 1976), both require further empirical and theoretical exploration. This would include an examination of the genuine over the contrived (Eco 1987), as well as the increasing interest in the role of rationalisation.

Another area requiring more focus is a closer analysis of the nature of interpretation. Interpretation can be viewed as a subjective and emotional concept and an ethnographical approach to content and delivery would illuminate the particular dynamics of the discourse used to both inform and educate the tourists.

It would also be useful to focus more closely on the dynamics of organisational approaches to control and participation within membership cohort ranks. In particular, the notions of rule compliance and inculcation as mechanisms of control and power within the individual/organisational (agency/structure) debate. Also, the question of how elitism and exclusivity

are practised and maintained by both group controllers (leaders) and group adherents (members) could be addressed.

Further, cross comparisons with other guiding organisations would lend themselves to expand and increase our knowledge of the tour guide experience. In the future, all tour guides will eventually have to adhere to strict standards of accreditation, assessment and interpretation.

Finally, I would argue that no singular sociological viewpoint can maintain a dominance in supplying an understanding of tourism, and thus, ecotourism. To some extent, the perceptions advanced by eclectic approaches should be considered as forming pieces of a puzzle, which, when put together, can supply the base for a pluralistic sociological interpretation of ecotourism activity. Indeed, some of the best work in tourism has been eclectic, connecting components of one paradigm with another, rather than maintaining a restricted position. Simultaneously, it may be understood that even the eclectic approach many encounter difficulty (Dann and Cohen 1996: 312-313). I would argue that there must be a call to open up dialogue and begin mutual collaboration with touristic entrepreneurial groups in order to provide society with a sociological perspective on tourism, ecotourism, tour guides and the touristic experience. A sociological focus on these points can potentially add meaning and substance to the already dominant and ultimately pro-tourism perspective.

This thesis has contributed to the theory of tourism, and by extension, ecotourism, by its reflections on tour guiding and interpretation of guided tours. The ecotour guides in this study are similar to, but different from, the Boy Scouts of the 1950s and 1960s and the 'Crocodile Hunters' and 'Bushtucker Men' of more recent times. They are active agents in the construction of meaningful and experiential touristic experiences derived from the everyday interactions of tourism.