



NATOUR learning contents

Module 3: The context of nature guiding in ecotourism

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Summary

The main objective of this module is to analyse in more detail the role and characteristics of a professional nature guide, including the guiding techniques and the design of ecotourism activities in the natural environment. The module also wants to help the students to know the group dynamics, as well as offering some notions of first aid techniques, among other relevant topics associated to nature guiding. With the study of this module, the student should be able to design ecotourism guided experiences in a professional way, taking into account the necessary skills duly explained in the different themes.

Topic 1. Definition and characteristics of a professional nature guide

Ecotourism and nature tourism are activities within the tourism industry with increasing demand. Therefore, they require greater professionalism in all aspects of their development. In this sense, a nature guide is understood as the profession dedicated to the development of activities in the context of tourism in a natural environment, whether protected areas or not, in order to observe and interpret the various forms of life, and natural and cultural resources associated with it, during the leisure time of the visitors.

One of the main roles that nature guides play, apart from accompanying tourists, is interpretation (Mendoza Ontiveros et al., 2011). It is a crucial factor in protecting tourism assets as it reveals the significance of the visited places, and it stimulates sustainable behaviour (Alaudat, 2022).

The tasks that a nature guide can carry out range from the design of the tours in the field to all the follow-up with the clients, beyond the conduction of visitors itself.

The tasks carried out by the guides can be grouped by their relationship with:

- *The design of the activity*: which includes the different prospecting tasks, analysis of the territory and evaluation of the resources to be interpreted. The preparation of the activity and its relationship with logistics aspects (material, accommodation, transport and restoration), security and the creation of interpretive scripts for its development.
- *Group management*: they include all the aspects to take into account in the relationship with the guided group, the maintenance of a good environment to create a satisfactory experience for clients and the resolution of conflictive situations.
- *Safety*: includes everything from prevention to the solution of various problems involving the safety (physical, mental or emotional) of clients and the work team.
- *The interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage*: these are the actions related to the communication and interaction of the clients with the territory and its heritage in order to guarantee an adequate relationship between them that creates a meaningful experience.

The guided tours can be very diverse depending on their duration - from a few hours to several days, even months-, the resources to be observed or the specificity for observing them. According to the latter, we can speak about specialized guides or generic guides.

This profession involves sharing the passion for nature and the ecological knowledge with travellers who decide to visit a particular place during their free time as part of a non-captive audience. The tour guide must know the territory, its heritage characteristics such as its geomorphological history, the ecological evolution of that area, and the characteristics and features of local flora and fauna. As well he/she requires awareness about the relations between the ways of life of surrounding human communities and the communities of other species of animals, plants or fungi that coexist in the territory.

The nature tour guide must be able to design interpretation itineraries in natural spaces to facilitate meaningful experiences to the audience, combining the goals to inform, entertain and sensitise. To achieve this goal, it requires competences related to planning and implementing a tourism program, that is, conducting, instructing, and assisting the tourist. Moreover, the nature guide needs to have a deep knowledge of certain techniques that allow adaptation to different natural environments. To transmit their scientific knowledge in a more entertaining and meaningful way the tour guide must develop other skills that permit the adaptation of contents according to the type of visitor that can participate in the activity. In that sense, the tour guide has to be able to handle certain social skills, or social abilities that a determined individual possesses to succeed competently in a specific interpersonal task (Paula Pérez, 2000; Posada-Swafford, 2021).

In a nutshell, the nature guide must have specific skills and competences, such as the following ones:

- **Personal and interpersonal skills.** E.g., service attitude, responsibility, punctuality, organisation, empathy, patience, humility, learning determination, enthusiasm, self-management, charisma, leadership, courtesy, sense of humour, kindness, contingencies adaptability, group management, conflict resolutions, teamwork, observation skills, research skills.
- **Communication skills.** E.g., active listening, good oral expression and non-verbal expression with wide and adequate vocabulary, clear diction, and correct voice tone. As well as acting and storytelling skills, assertive communication skills and a high level of foreign languages.
- **Pedagogy notions.** E.g., capacity to express complex contents in simple way, metaphor usage, examples, comparisons and demonstrations, senses usage for exploration and contents relevance, illustrative material and technologies usage,

questions and answers strategies, pose challenges and works, ability to appeal to different human dimensions (physical, intellectual, social and specially emotional), creativity to incorporate a narrative (central idea and dramatic curve) and to produce interactions with the environment, considering expectations, preferences, attitudes, skills and previous knowledge of the tourist.

- **Outdoor competences.** The tour guide must be able to manage techniques for hiking, camping installation, flora and fauna observation, survivorship, outdoor orientation, meteorology and cooking. As well as the development of activities leaving no trace or even the less negative effect on the environment, respecting the animals, not bothering and/or stalking them and ensuring the minimum intervention on its normal behaviour.
- **Safety Competences.** The tour guide should be able to analyse, evaluate and generate risks and mitigation measures. They should also establish procedures to be followed before, during, and after the activities to ensure the safety of themselves, the visitors, the community, and the environment. Additionally, they should have knowledge of wilderness first aid.
- **Knowledge of the territory and its resources.** This includes the processes of searching and organizing diverse information about the visited place and its natural and cultural resources in a broad sense that complement and give solidity to the visit in a correct context through the data provided.
- **Knowledge of the tourism context.** The guide must understand and adequately participate in the processes and actions related to the global tourism industry, as well as its expressions at the national or local level, which include knowledge of the market, products, customers, and the value chain of the system.

In addition to having these competences and skills, the nature tour guide must have the ability to know the audience deeply, considering their characteristics, expectations, motivations, interests and previous awareness, in order to provide instances for different connections between the audience and the natural resources, on the intellectual level as much as on the emotional level (Morales et al., 2009). Last but not least, we should not forget that nature guides are the supporters and, most importantly, the implementers of ecotourism goals in the field. Good quality guiding stimulates the visitor to be committed to the visited place and to behave in a responsible and sustainable way (Aloudat, 2022).

Topic 2. Guiding techniques and orientation techniques in the natural environment: elements to consider

It is necessary to contextualize the visitor in the place where they are. It is recommended to start with the broadest geographical location, for example, in relation to its position on the planet, continent, country, or region. This will allow for an explanation of why the natural resources on which the activity is based are found in that location.

Similarly, we can locate the tourists and orient ourselves in space. Since every natural context is influenced by some cultural component, it would also be advisable to place the tourist in the cultural context and even articulate this dimension with the natural resources of the area such as livelihoods, productive systems, myths, legends, and customs.

It is important to highlight the risks associated with the area along with this context, as well as contingency plans.

Geographical orientation

Backed up by maps and cartographic maps, the tour guide should start each day by providing as much information as possible about the location of the tourist in the world, country, region, and closest urban areas, as well as the immediate orientation. The intention of this action is to activate the tourist's previous knowledge and make them feel completely oriented around the whole space, particularly analysed from their departure city and country if required. This action aims to keep the tourist in a positive mood regarding the experience that will be provided to them.

Once this action has been completed, it is time to start with the immediate orientation by indicating the four cardinal directions, which can be more illustrative by using a compass in contrast to the topography and geographical position of certain natural elements that can clearly identify the main points of orientation in the covered area.

Another important element is to allow clients to identify the cardinal points in relation to shade and sunlight areas of the mountains, providing the tourist with a limelight sensation and making them feel like they are an active part of the experience. This element is essential since the moment the tour guide realizes that they are more than just a provider of service, but in fact an experience maker and even more, an educator.

Expressions of altitude and latitude of the natural elements present in the area produce enormous interest in the tourist, being the moment of questions about biodiversity, an outstanding moment to generate transformative experiences by the tourist, transmitted from the tour guide, who can invite reflection on environment preservation as well.

It is important to remember that nature tour guides can be agents of change on the planet, contributing by provoking education on minimizing global warming.

Cultural context

Due to the expansion of human population and our constant activities, it is possible to identify anthropogenic influence wherever we go, and wilderness is no exception. While trekking, hiking, kayaking, diving, or even paragliding, it is possible to find human vestiges from thousands of years ago, as well as those left more recently, such as the effects of forbidden actions or incorrect fire management, including old or recent forest fires. These elements, such as rupestrian paintings, pottery, abandoned cabins, and agriculture infrastructure, can be perfect for cultural heritage interpretation in the midst of wilderness. This simple action allows tourists to visualize what the area looked like in the past.

Contingency plan

In this process of orientation and bio-cultural contextualization there is an indispensable element that permits the tourist being more involved in the experience: the possible contingencies. Unexpected situations can occur and in nature guiding the possibilities are much more frequent, however with a correct orientation to the tourist there is an important probability to minimise them.

As previously mentioned, tour guides are nature educators, and their role is essential in the prevention of contingencies. They can demonstrate how to walk on different types of surfaces, such as sand, soil, rocks, grass, and wood, while taking care of the environment and preventing accidents.

Although tour guides can monitor the weather forecast and volcanic activity, unexpected situations can still occur. Therefore, having a risk management plan already in place is essential. This allows tour guides to make quick and efficient decisions, minimizing the possibility of unpleasant experiences for tourists.

Topic 3. Design of ecotourism activities in a natural area carried out by a professional nature guide

The practice of ecotourism involves some premises that must be present in all activities: (1) conservation of natural and cultural heritage; (2) environmental awareness and interpretation as a way of engaging society and generating knowledge; (3) involvement and well-being of local communities (Global Ecotourism Network, 2016). Thus, the nature guide must consider these premises as a basis for the design of activities in the visited environments.

To start planning activities, it is essential to have a deep awareness of the local context, considering historical and cultural aspects relevant to the territory and the natural area. In other words, the design of ecotourism activities depends on the context in which we operate, especially considering the relationship between nature and culture.

From this perspective, new research and practice approaches are emerging to strengthen sustainability in tourism, such as regenerative tourism, for example. Regenerative approaches focus on integrated local development initiatives based on economic models that go beyond the dimension of profit and economic growth and seek to evidence positive outcomes rather than focusing only on how to reduce the damage of the activity (Duxbury et al., 2021; Cave & Dredge, 2020).

As previously mentioned, we can infer the importance of a tour guide in the whole process of ecotourism, particularly when we think of the definition of a "tour guide as an agent of change," involved and acting as an educator. The tour guides possess the great potential to influence visitors' understanding of conservation and preservation of the local bio-cultural heritage, resulting in the sustainable practice of tourism within the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic.

Environmental

We can say that the tour guide is a professional who needs to promote environmental protection through various actions, such as discouraging the use of plastic bottles, straws, and bags, and providing more eco-friendly alternatives instead. These practices should be implemented during the expedition and also after returning home, in order to produce a chain reaction of spreading these new practices to family and friends. Another important

action is to constantly remind tourists to follow the waymarked and allowed trails, adhering to Leave No Trace principles.

Economic

The encouragement of the local economy goes together with tour guide's roles in the sustainability of the visited sites and their inhabitants by actions such as:

- Visitors orientation on the preference of local products and souvenirs.
- The consumption of food in restaurants or markets where there is local production.
- The shopping of products with "fair commerce" seal.

Socio-cultural

The tour guide contributes on the promotion of respect the local culture through the following actions:

- Raising awareness of local culture, traditions, dress code, values, and appropriate behaviours.
- Introducing tourists to the local community to help them feel comfortable with the visitors presence.
- Helping the tourists connect with the local people particularly when language differences are present.
- Asking for permission to locals before particular actions such as taking pictures, and never assuming that it is permitted to do whatever they want.

With these principles and guidelines in mind, some steps can guide the design of activities in natural areas (Noll et al., 2019; ICMBio, 2019):

I- Diagnosis of existing and potential ecotourism activities that can be included in a visitation program. In this diagnosis, the professional should be able to identify contents and themes that can be worked on during the guided tour. Furthermore, the analysis should consider the diversity of opportunities for ecotourism present in the area;

II- Identification of different visitor profiles, motivations, and interests. This information can be found in surveys carried out in natural areas and documents with secondary data;

III- Planning of activities considering aspects such as: duration; visitor profile; appropriate content and techniques; environmental interpretation practices; The planning also includes the analysis of challenges and opportunities for ecotourism activities organised by nature guides.

IV- Monitoring of activities considering the visitor's experience and the impacts on natural and cultural environments (Leung. et al 2018). The visitors guiding in ecotourism must be included in monitoring plans, improving the quality of the service provided and minimising the impacts of the activity.

From these steps, the nature guide will be able to design products, services and experiences that involve the basis of ecotourism.

It is also important to consider the role of nature guides in the management of ecotourism in a natural area. In this sense, some main aspects are highlighted:

- the importance of strengthening the links between natural areas management and visitor guides;
- the role of guide associations in social participation and in supporting ecotourism planning and management in natural areas;
- the effective collaboration of nature guides and in planning ecotourism in natural areas.

In conclusion, the design of ecotourism activities by a nature guide should promote the guided tour as a link between visitors and the natural and cultural aspects of a given territory. In this sense, the tour guides have the capacity to catch and maintain the visitor attention, they should be able to connect, entertain, involve, provoke and inspire the visitors by the interpretation of nature but also culture enriching the tourist experience thereby the client satisfaction. Therefore, the planning of ecotourism activities must consider the identification of tourism market issues (supply and demand) in a participatory way with the different sectors involved and based on sustainability standards that must be respected during the practice of ecotourism.

Topic 4. Target audience: Different tourist segments, needs and expectations

The study of the target audience that seeks ecotourism aims to understand market segmentation as a planning and marketing strategy for the sector, and how tourists should be guided according to their profile. It deals with the different demands related to ecotourism within an ecological perspective, considering the stakeholders (such as tourists, residents, organizations, government, and workers); and the needs, behaviours, and expectations of the different visitors in these segments.

According to Kotler et al. (2011), market segmentation "is the process of dividing a market into independent groups of buyers who have distinctive needs, characteristics, or behaviours and who may require separate products or marketing programs." To segment the market, "customers can be grouped and served in a variety of ways based on geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioural factors" (Kotler et al., 2011: 89).

It's important to understand the concept of market segmentation, the pros and cons of using this technique for planning and management, as well as the understanding of the different criteria for segmentation, considering the supply and demand of the market. The objective is to achieve skills to work with the main practices and concepts involved, understanding the paths and legacies of market guidelines until reaching the main customer, segmenting, and personalizing experiences. Thus,

"(1) Segmentation based on geographic criteria. It refers to the division of the market into different geographic units, such as countries, states, regions, counties, cities, or neighbourhoods.

(2) Segmentation based on demographic criteria. It consists of dividing the market into groups based on demographic variables such as age, gender, family size, cycle family life, income, occupation, education, religion, race, and nationality.

(3) Segmentation based on psychographic criteria. Divide buyers into different groups based on social class, lifestyle, or personal characteristics.

(4) Segmentation based on behavioural criteria of the buyer. Divide the buyers in groups based on knowledge of consumers, their attitude, their use or their response to a product" (Kotler et al., 2011: 282).

When looking at the specific case of ecotourism, we need to pay attention to the different behaviours of consumers in this sector, through an attitudinal and behavioural perspective, considering aspects of cognitive dissonance. From the segment to the niche, we reach the more humanized concept of persona and focus on the segmentation of the offer, based on similar experiences such as community-based tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism, and ecotourism itself, and demand segments. We also analyse the demographic and psychographic profile of the visitor seeking these experiences.

Psychographic segmentation is related to special interests, values, likes and dislikes, beliefs, and purposes with which the person identifies (Kotler et al., 2011). This leads us to the needs and expectations that these consumer/visitor profiles demand from visited places and from companies that operate in these locations, reflecting on the planning of their products, services, and the qualification of workers and partners, providing a more significant experience to consumers and visitors.

According to the Brazilian Tourism Ministry, "ecotourists visit localities to interact with the environment based on previously obtained information, especially from the media. It is interesting to note that the quality of information and activities experienced by ecotourists in natural areas allows them to increase their satisfaction and the possibilities of dissemination and return to the Ecotourism destination" (Brazil, 2010: 37).

Therefore, the target audience plays an important role in delivering the values of ecotourism and the entire tourism production chain to local communities of the territory stakeholders. It is essential to study companies that wish to work with environmental responsibility, as consumers are increasingly aware of these appeals (Souza, 2003).

Topic 5. Materials and equipment

Tour guiding in ecotourism

Activities related to ecotourism mainly involve a close relationship with the natural attributes of tourist destinations. Landscape contemplation and adventure activities are conceived in consideration of the impact that individuals and their actions could produce on the environment. Ecotourism offers an important tool for both mankind and nature. For mankind, ecotourism provides the opportunity for immersion into the natural world in an enjoyable and educational manner, resulting in a greater understanding of nature, compassion, and better stewardship of our natural wonders.

The expertise of a tour guide becomes exceptionally valuable when tourists experience the tourism activities, particularly with regards to organizing the experience, protecting the environment, and providing interpretation of natural elements and memorabilia. The tour guide mediates the storytelling that enriches the visitor's experience and minimizes the negative impacts on the visiting site.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has developed a 2030 agenda in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) covering five principles: Recognize, Maintain, Restore, Support, and Reconnect.

Nature experiences organisation

Organizing nature experiences requires planning and analysis covering the sustainable dimensions or pillars, which include involving the local community, protecting natural resources, and generating quality of life for all participants in tourist developments.

The planification involves analysing the lasting time in hours or even days, weather forecast, climate change and transfers among others.

The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) has generated a program that permits the tour guide to plan the nature excursions by the Leave No Trace (LNT) program. This program has 7 principles:

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find

- Minimise Campfire Impacts
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors
- Respect Wildlife

Basic equipment

A nature experience requires a previous analysis of the site to be visited as well as the meteorological conditions previous to the tour and the client's background of knowledge.

This analysis may help the tour guide to decide which equipment is best. Some elements to consider are:

- Knife
- Magnifying glass
- Laser pointer
- Field Guide
- Binoculars

Specialised equipment

The geographical aspects of the site to be visited and its difficulty level will define some special requirements depending on whether they are ground, high, sea or air activities.

- **Ground Excursion:** poles, cartographic map, or GPS, climbing equipment, light, camp, communication and First Responder equipment.
- **Altitude Excursion:** poles, technical clothes, cartographic map or GPS, climbing and high mountain equipment, light, camp, communication and First Responder equipment.
- **Maritime Excursion:** Nautical charts, diving equipment, vessel, life jackets.

Cartography and meteorology

One of the most frequent challenges of nature excursions is the geography of the environment. In areas where there is a well-planned tourist trail management system, this is practically irrelevant. However, in remote or wilderness areas, difficulties increase, especially when rough topography is present, such as in forests, rocky shorelines, or mountains, or when there are abrupt climate variations that activate contingency protocols.

That is why it is essential for tour guides to be well-trained and up-to-date, not only in storytelling but also in the natural components of the environment that can be represented on maps.

For ground excursions, it is essential to manage geographical charts that allow for the identification of slopes, peaks, and plains, as well as for an adequate interpretation of climate and weather that will enhance the tourist experience while trekking, hiking, climbing, birdwatching, and so on.

For maritime excursions, even though the tour guide is part of the crew, it is still essential to obtain the appropriate certifications and to manage nautical charts, particularly for navigations, whale watching, observing pelagic environments, diving, and other activities

Compass and GPS

The correct location interpretation is crucial in wilderness even for excursions that are very close to urban areas. For that reason,, the tour guide must know how to sue the compass, as well as the Global Positioning System (GPS), instrument that facilitates the location, creation and follow up of the excursion trails or routes.

Basic astronomy

Natural and rural areas are commonly distinguished by the quality of their skies for the observation of the celestial spheres. For that reason, it is important to consider the awareness of the local sky in order to permit the tour guide to generate experiences of identification of stars, constellations and local community cosmovision.

Topic 6. Group dynamics

The nature guide can use group dynamics to seek greater integration between participants, considering groups with different visitor profiles, motivations, background, and interests. The dynamics can also promote a greater connection with the environment, apart from arousing reflection and interest about the context of the place being visited.

According to Ntalakos et al. (2022), group dynamics involve the examination of the below major issues:

- Inclusion and identity: Do humans prefer inclusion to exclusion and group membership to isolation? How do group experiences and memberships influence individuals' identities?
- Formation: Who joins groups, and who remains apart? Why do people deliberately create groups or join existing groups?
- Cohesion and development: What is cohesion and what causes it? How do groups develop over time?
- Structure: What are norms, roles, and networks of intermember relations, and how do they organize groups?
- Influence: When will people conform to a group's standards, and when will they remain independent? How powerful is social influence?
- Power: Why are some members of groups more powerful than others?
- Leadership: Who do groups prefer for leaders? Should a leader be task-focused or relationship-focused?
- Performance: Do people perform tasks more effectively in groups or when they are alone?
- Teams: What is the difference between a group and a team? Does team building improve teamwork? How can leaders intervene to improve the performance of their teams?
- Decision making: What steps do groups take when making decisions?
- Conflict in groups: What causes disputes between group members? Why do groups sometimes splinter into subgroups? How can disputes in groups be resolved?
- Intergroup relations: What causes disputes between groups? How can intergroup conflict be resolved?

As previously mentioned, the tour guide must plan every aspect of the program to ensure a successful operation and understanding the characteristics of each group is no exception.

Each group has a particular dynamic depending on their personal profiles, and by understanding their segmentation, requirements, and needs, tour guides will have a greater chance of ensuring full customer satisfaction.

For this reason, at the beginning of the expedition, it is absolutely necessary to start with a welcome meeting. This meeting is an opportunity to get to know each other, learn names, where people come from, and any previous knowledge or experience they may have in the area (country or region) or in the type of activity being undertaken. This is particularly important in cases where this is the first encounter with the whole group. This action serves as an ice breaker, allowing team leaders to gauge possible client needs, restrictions, etc. that may not have been detected in advance.

After this first approach, it is time to provide a complete briefing about the entire expedition, including day-by-day details, backed up by maps, cartographic charts, etc. The briefing also provides the opportunity to answer every single question from your clients. Special attention is required when explaining risk management and the necessary actions to prevent contingencies during the expedition. The environment should be relaxed, entertaining, and dynamic in order to obtain a cohesive group right from the beginning.

Maintaining the day by day dynamics

Group dynamics are used in different situations to support the planning of activities, group work, and the facilitation of negotiation processes. In the context of guiding activities in nature, they can also be used to raise visitor awareness about a certain topic in the natural environment, arouse curiosity, integrate visitors from the same group, and promote team spirit, among other objectives.

The choice of a specific group dynamic when guiding visitors depends on various aspects and characteristics of the visit, such as the duration of the visit, group size, visitor profile, motivation and purpose of the visit, and group composition (e.g., families, groups of friends, heterogeneous groups).

Guiding visitors in natural environments involves some predefined steps that influence the selection of the most appropriate group dynamics for each moment (Ham, 1992; Vasconcellos, 2006).

- 1- Preparation and introduction to the beginning of the activity. This is the moment when visitors have their first contact with the driver/guide, and it is important to create a

pleasant atmosphere among the group. Playful techniques can be used for the presentation and/or integration of the participants of a group, which facilitate approximation, relaxation, and cooperation. This is an important step in guiding visitors, considering the sequential learning method and the moment of "arousing enthusiasm" (Cornell, 1989).

- 2- Development of activity and exaltation of the senses. This is the stage in which the dynamics must be based on the themes or content that the guide wants to address during the visit. At this time, some activities and dynamics that use the senses of sight, hearing, touch, and smell can be interesting to stimulate different experiences in nature (Mendonça, 2015). During the activities, it can also be useful to challenge and question the group, providing opportunities for individual observation during the visit. At the end, these observations can be shared with the group through testimonials or drawings, for example. Therefore, the professional who is leading the group must be attentive and sensitive to the characteristics of each group. For some visitors, the dynamics can work as a link of approximation and motivation, but for others, the approach during the conduction must be minimal, relying on support tools such as guides and printed manuals, or activities with less interaction between the group.
- 3- Ending the activity. This is the time to "harvest" the experience through a brief retrospective in a group, discussing the main points observed. Participants can say a word or record a statement with the main "message" left from the experience in a natural environment.

The organization of group dynamics prior to the visit can support the activities during guiding, but it's important to consider the unpredictable nature of natural environments and the different variables involved. These aspects may require greater flexibility and the ability to adapt the activity in adverse situations.

Another important aspect to consider is the possibility of disagreements among members of the group and/or conflictive clients and how to deal with them. For that reason, it's crucial for tour guides to have knowledge of conflict resolution strategies and group management, as soft skills such as empathy, leadership, assertiveness, and cooperativeness are particularly important in programs that cover several days where such situations are almost inevitable. In conclusion, it's important to maintain high group energy and complete balance to ensure the success of the operation and to maintain harmony.

Topic 7. Leadership in ecotourism and nature guiding

The planet and humanity are in crisis. We are currently in the third decade of the 21st century, and it is certain that humanity poses a serious threat to its very existence. In this context, we need genuine, enlightened leaders to help guide us in this sometimes chaotic and always unpredictable world. Leadership can be exercised in different environments and situations, including work, family, groups of friends, and moments of leisure. In the context of ecotourism, aspects and processes related to leadership are useful both in guiding a group of tourists and in leading a company or work team, as well as in applying the vision to different partners and stakeholders involved in the productive value chain and the tourism ecosystem.

Contrary to an outdated and inadequate conception that leadership is only for a select few, today we know that anyone can be an inspired and inspiring leader. And there is no mystery behind it. Great leaders are those who can meet their own needs and the needs of others, based on ethical values, an expanded perception and vision, and creativity and a sense of community.

Leadership requires an awareness of the needs of the group, from the most basic needs for food and shelter (security) to more refined needs such as love, self-esteem, and a sense of group belonging. Each need requires answers that need to be fulfilled, from the most basic to the highest levels, following a hierarchy of needs. The levels of need were first identified by the psychologist Abraham Maslow and are commonly known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Leaders who are able to identify and respond to the needs of their group can create a positive and productive work environment, build trust and respect, and ultimately achieve their goals.

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), which we can highlight, adapted to the context of groups, and ordered by importance (Chopra, 2010):

- *Security and Protection*
- *Achievement and Success*
- *Cooperation*
- *Integration, Inclusion*
- *Creativity, Progress*
- *Moral values*
- *Spiritual Realisation*

As a leader, you must respond to the needs of the group, from the most basic to the highest. Although the hierarchy of needs is understood as a ladder, in practical life, people are complex entities, and instead of climbing the rungs of a ladder, one at a time, life, the real situations, even more dealing with practice. Ecotourism, in the field, presents us with a ball of yarn, with multiple tangled needs, at different scales, which must be understood and unravelled.

We can consider that leadership development is an evolutionary journey, in search of an expansion of consciousness. A leader must be aware and attentive to the hierarchy of needs and responses, so that he can effectively meet the needs of the group.

In this journey, it can be useful to identify some steps, as suggested by Chopra (2010):

Remember to observe and listen. Seek to be an impartial observer, use all your senses, be impartial, do not judge anything in advance. Perceive the group and the situations with your body, mind, heart and soul. Respond to the needs of the group, not skipping levels in the hierarchy of needs, but with your deeper vision and intuition and profound values. For this, it is important to reflect on your life purpose and your worldview. This reflection must consider not only the rational aspect, but mainly feelings, intuition, and wisdom, seeking its own essence. Then, as a leader, you can share your vision with enthusiasm and inspiration.

Strengthen emotional bonds. Work with positive emotions, seek to establish real connections and relationships, you must lead and serve at the same time. It's not about excessive intimacy, physical contact, or letting everyone know how you feel, but being emotionally lucid and effective. Be aware of your body, observe and express your feelings (but seeking to relate in a productive way, with yourself, particularly with negative emotions), take responsibility for what you feel, realise the influence of beliefs, egos, and past conditioning, in you and in the people around you. Seek to build a shared enthusiasm about the experience and nobler values at stake, genuinely care for others, be willing to build connections, reinforce the strengths and self-esteem of others, and also use nonviolent communication and conflict resolution techniques, when necessary.

Expanding Consciousness. Consciousness is synonymous with awareness. At every moment many paths lead forward, consciousness tells us which the right path to follow is. When we are in a state of expanded consciousness, our awareness, and whatever else is around us, will also be expanded. Consciousness is not the same as thinking, although

reason and logic claim to dominate, our decisions are mostly made intuitively. The thinking mind is just the tip of the iceberg. Expanded awareness involves the development of different personal attributes, such as: *emotional stability*, being prepared to alleviate the anxiety of others; *self-motivation*, with confidence and internal energy for achievement; *coherence* – based on values and senses, inspiring people to gathering around your vision ; *intuition, insight*, from the observation of oneself and others, seeking to understand the environment and people, without personal distortions, without having to think too much; *creativity*, from the intersection of the known and the unknown, being comfortable even in uncertainty, knowing that unpredictability is part of reality; *inspiration*, seeking the roots of consciousness in love, compassion, virtue, stimulating personal transformation in ourselves and in the people around us; *transcendence*, ultimately expanded consciousness has no limits, we can experience and exemplify wholeness, being united with everyone and everything around you, being who you are and helping others get there.

Be action-oriented. Vision and action must be aligned and walk together. Only then will you be able to energize others around you to follow your path. Every situation evokes a right action, and as a leader, you must identify the role that is expected of you. Being conscious, this role will be evoked and performed naturally. The leader must be action-oriented in a dynamic atmosphere, energizing those around him/her. He/she must be a model to be followed, serving as an example and giving of himself/herself. It's important to give feedback pleasantly, honestly, frankly, and positively, emphasizing people's contributions. It is often important to be persistent, particularly when there are setbacks and obstacles. Also, seek to celebrate the achievements, the strengths of the group's trajectory, and create a subtle atmosphere of celebration. Celebrate each step conquered, anticipating a little the celebration that will be achieved in the success at the end of the process.

Empowerment or Strengthening of Power. It is the fruit of successful actions. It is related to doing and being able to walk together, sustaining your vision. It is important to note that we are not talking about the power of the ego, but the strengthening of the power of the people around you, while this feeds your own empowerment. Personal power must give way to transpersonal power, based on empathy, compassion, and impartiality. Seek to extract the maximum benefit in any situation for everyone around you, both in favourable conditions and in adverse situations. Seek to emancipate and activate the source of power in other people, empowering others by showing that they are just like you, that we are all exceptional, not just a few.

Responsibility. Fully leading means assuming greater responsibility than meeting the needs of the group; it means being concerned with the personal growth of each and everyone involved in their surroundings. It starts with your own evolution. Our behaviour influences everyone around us. Our responsibility and personal evolution are built from our thoughts, emotions, perceptions, personal relationships, social roles, the environment in which we live, our speech, and our body. All these aspects influence us and influence those around us. Leading in a profound way means that we assume co-responsibility for our evolution and the evolution of those who are with us. Thus, we never act in a way that lowers people's self-esteem. Cultivate good mental habits, be responsible for what you feel, for how you perceive the world, for your relationships, for your role in society, in the world, and in your immediate environment.

We realize that the leadership aspects highlighted above challenge the old view of leadership and success. We are not talking about a leadership or business model based on authoritarianism, on the subjugation and exploitation of people and natural resources, aiming at ego power and financial profit. We are talking about leadership that seeks to inspire people for a better world, based on noble values, for a society in which we want to live. The leadership principles listed here serve for different contexts, including ecotourism dynamics for professionals leading groups of tourists in the field, as well as for tourism planners, working with an expanded view of all those directly and indirectly involved in activities and productive chains.

Topic 8. Risk and conflict management techniques for effective group management

Conflicts are normal occurrences in both personal and professional life. When several people are involved in an activity, it is almost inevitable that different opinions, needs, interests, or assessments will arise. Conflicts can arise both within our own organizations and in our work with target groups. Generally, conflicts are resolved through seeking consensus, reconciling differences, or compromising on positions. If those involved fail to manage a conflict during its initial phase, it can escalate into a problem that will affect each member, absorb energy, and even completely block work (Beunza, 2013; Navarro et al., 2018).

The strategies for addressing a conflict that has already escalated are usually limited. We often perceive conflict as something negative and take a passive role, seeing it as a personal problem without knowing how to act. We may interpret the conflict as an attack on our personality, leading to defensive reactions and a focus on winning or losing the conflict. For this reason, it is essential to broaden our understanding of conflicts by analysing their possible causes and phases, detecting their first signs, and defining the best strategy to transform them.

How the conflict has been defined:

We find multiple definitions; but perhaps the one that can bring together all the conceptual approaches is: "a tension that arises when the aspirations, goals, values, opinions, interests, etc., of two or more people or groups, oppose or exclude each other" (Maya et al., 2009).

It could be said that for a given situation to qualify it as a conflict or not, it should meet the following features:

- An interaction between two or more participants, the participants being individuals, small groups, or large groups.
- Predominance of antagonistic interactions.
- Intention to harm the other or attribution of such intention.
- Direct or indirect use of power.
- Regulatory inefficiency (lack of rules and clear agreements agreed upon and informed in advance).

Most common types of conflict

We are going to review the types of conflicts that most frequently arise in social and group interactions; and some questions, which help us identify the cause of these conflicts. It is important to clarify that, in the expression of a conflict, several of these types may be interacting at the same time (adapted from Grundmann & Stahl, 2002):

Power conflict: Struggle to secure power, influence, and advantage over resources.

- Is there a struggle for power or influence?
- Is there a tendency to form alliances?
- Are competencies or attributions questioned at work?
- Is there disagreement about who makes the decisions and how is the flow of information?

Role conflict: Inconsistencies and contradictions between the expectations and interpretations that both parties have of their own roles.

- Is there an organisation chart that defines the tasks, responsibilities, and decision-making power of each one?
- Do those involved know their tasks and responsibilities?
- Do those involved share their perception of their respective roles?
- Are competencies or attributions questioned at work?

Conflict of objectives, ways to achieve them and procedure: When opposing or even harmful objectives are pursued for the other party, and when there is disagreement about the methods and procedures to achieve the objectives.

- Is there a shared plan on the objectives, results, and procedures of the organisation?
- Is there monitoring for such planning?
- Are there different interpretations of the objectives, results, and procedures?
- Is there a transparent agreement on how the day-to-day work is organised (dates, sequence of steps, locations, etc.)?

Cultural or value conflict: This type of conflict occurs when there are different interpretations of events, due both to the respective value systems of those involved and to the various cultural belongings.

- Is there awareness of the possibility of various interpretations based on values and cultural roots?
- Is there intercultural sensitivity?

- Is there openness and acceptance regarding different cultural values or interpretations?
- Is there exchange of perceptions?

Information conflict: Those involved mutually hinder the access and flow of information, disqualify the sources of information, and deny the reliability of the information received.

- Is the flow of information transparent and satisfactory?
- Does anyone feel left out of important information?
- Does anyone take advantage of having more information than others?

We can realise that many of the conflicts can be prevented if our ecotourism and guiding activity has had good planning, has clear rules and prior agreements; knows the characteristics, experience, and expectations of the group and as guides, we have an open attitude to learning, dialogue and listening.

Now, it is important to know some conflict resolution or transformation strategies and to differentiate them according to the situation, to implement it as a strategy.

- **Conciliation:** A third party communicates separately with the disputing parties to reduce tensions and create an acceptable atmosphere for conflict resolution.
- **Unassisted negotiation/direct arrangement:** a voluntary process in which groups meet face to face without mediators or facilitators to reach mutual agreement.
- **Facilitation:** A third party supports a voluntary negotiation process between two or more groups, this is used when there are several interest groups involved in the conflict. The facilitator concentrates on the organisation of the process and the logistics to bring the stakeholders to the negotiating table. When he oversees moderating the negotiation meetings, his role is focused on facilitating communications between the groups and the exchange of different points of view. Rarely does he offer ideas to facilitate the discussion or engage in the discussion beyond synthesising or outlining the views of each stakeholder group.
- **Mediation:** It is a process of assisted negotiation between two or more conflicting groups supported by a third party. In addition to ensuring that all stakeholders agree to the process and logistics, the mediator can have considerable influence in bringing groups together and providing solutions. Unlike facilitators, they can express their own views on the acceptability of proposed solutions. However, mediators cannot make decisions. Its main role is to support the confidential exchange of views and information between the stakeholders involved (Means & Josayma, 2002).

As tourist guides, we must train ourselves as facilitators of group processes and bear in mind that interpersonal and group conflicts are a natural part of social relationships, but they must be addressed to prevent the conflict from escalating to dimensions that make it impossible to carry out activities and achieve goals. As a final reflection, we will remind that sentence from Phyllis Beck Kritek: "Not to seek the creative and constructive resolution of human conflict is to consciously and deliberately increase divisions and the damage these divisions cause".

Topic 9. First aid techniques and basic evacuation techniques. Health and safety procedures

The nature tourism guide must be trained in first aid and emergency response. This aspect may be the most important responsibility of a guide since, in nature tourism, there are many situations and risks that need to be identified and prevented as a first step. Some situations may not be foreseeable, and that is why the guide must be able to act as a leader, having the basic knowledge of immediate actions that can reduce the impact of unforeseen events (Schimelpfenig, 2012).

This aspect must be addressed in a serious and responsible manner, seeking quality training, where the guides must be aware of the importance of knowing how to respond in an emergency. Since it is only a matter of time when a guide has to use these skills in the workplace (Ortovox Safety Academy Lab Rock, 2022). The following topics are those ones that any nature guide must take into consideration when he/she is working:

1. **First aid:** Wilderness first aid has concepts, skills, and attitudes specific to the conditions of nature tourism. Accessibility to communication becomes difficult, and the different scenarios typical of rural areas can become adverse in the event of a medical emergency. Training in first aid techniques is necessary to extend the care and delivery times of the first contacts with a patient, usually from one or two hours to a few days. Today, this competency is not only essential in wilderness areas but also during natural disasters, which have increased in our times, and which can turn a city into a remote area, with all the challenges of a wilderness area.
2. **Scene evaluation:** This skill is one of the main skills required when facing an emergency. It involves considering and recognizing the objective dangers that caused the accident as well as the subjective dangers faced by the rescuers, guides, or participants of the experience, tourists, and others who may be present at the scene. This content includes the ability to approach an injured person, perform all necessary treatment and stabilization procedures, and develop the necessary skills for patient evacuation.
3. **Evacuation of patients:** This content includes stabilization and immobilization of different traumas, as well as the transport of the injured person to safe areas, considering some short stretches, to reach inhabited places or highways where extractions can occur. This skill is necessary for all those who carry out functions of organization, coordination, and execution

of tourist, educational, and recreational experiences in contact with the different types of environments, in each of the corners of our planet.

4. **Injuries and trauma:** Sprains, tears, and minor cuts are the most common injuries experienced in wilderness areas. Serious injuries are rare. However, it is advisable to be prepared for all of them, including broken bones, dislocations, head, spine and chest injuries, until the patient can be delivered to a rescue service. This content ranges from controlling bleeding to helping a person in shock.
5. **Health and safety procedures:** This skill set encompasses all those skills and procedures that are applied when we do not have the advantages of modern or common hospital medicine and when we do not have access to medicines, diagnostic technological equipment or procedures, and cannot quickly transport an injured person. Technical training is required to deal with a medical emergency in nature, such as allergies, anaphylaxis, respiratory and cardiac situations, abdominal pain, diabetes, seizures, among others. Each and every one of them must be faced as a serious situation.
6. **Expedition medicine:** It is the ability to prevent and treat all kinds of emergencies typical of a trip or long stay in nature, such as water hygiene and disinfection, dental emergencies, and common non-urgent medical problems.
7. **Leadership in the management of medical emergencies:** This content corresponds to all the attitudes that must be present in various situations, which are transformed into another technical element typical of the facilitators of experiences in nature and must be considered as one of the guiding elements of our actions. Leadership training is one of the most important elements to consider, not just in first aid, but across the entire spectrum of outdoor activities.

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Complementary resources

- Contemplan, Comprender, Conservar: Manual ilustrado para guías de turismo de naturaleza en Colombia: <https://guianaturaleza.colombia.travel/>
- Tiempos de Cambio ¿Una oportunidad para mejorar como guías? (conferencia de Evarist March): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9o2rfqxBQPI>
- Técnicas de interpretación para guías de turismo (conferencia de Jean-Claude Razel): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofhKp34S-CU>
- Conflict negotiation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgtVce1gWeM>
- Harvard's negotiation model <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sl3JttZVysE>
- Conflict resolution trainers manual: <https://www.crnhq.org/cr-trainer-manual/>
- Wilderness Medicine / Patient assessment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXQAmx2AYIk>
- Mountain rescue / FD Real Show: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K75x0Qcabt4>



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