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Tourist Guides as Cultural Heritage Interpreters: Belgrade Experience with Municipality-sponsored Guided Walks for Local Residents

The Proceedings Book of the International Tourism Conference
'Cultural and Event Tourism: Issues & Debates' (Alanya, Turkey), p. 213-233, 2008

ABSTRACT

Tourist guides are professionals who present the sights and explain the characteristics of a geographically and culturally defined area (tourist destination) to groups and individual visitors. A lot of people view guided group tour as an appealing experience, because it offers knowledge, fun and an opportunity for socializing. Informality of this setting makes it an efficient medium for conveying important messages to participants, not only to tourists but also to local people. The interpretive tour enables residents to get to know certain areas in their town better and become deeply interested in monuments of history with the help of an experienced and educated guide. Generally, it is important for the local community, and especially for the development of cultural tourism: the residents' treatment of their own tradition and cultural heritage define to a great extent the tourists' perception of the site they visit as well as their behavior. This paper analyses one of Europe's first projects of cultural heritage mass interpretation, set up in Serbia in 1998. The sponsor of the free of charge, interpretive guided walks for the citizens of Belgrade is the city's central municipality "Stari Grad" (Old Town).

Key words: tourist guide, interpretation, cultural heritage, Belgrade Fortress

INTRODUCTION

Historically, tourist guiding is one of the oldest human activities. Guides existed even two and a half millennia ago, but along with the beginning of modern mass tourism they have become an important factor of the travel industry ever since. Today, it is difficult to perceive the organized tourism without the service of guides, both *tour managers/tour leaders* (who accompany the group during the travel) and *tourist guides* (who welcome the group at the destination).

The role of tourist guides is complex and it consists of numerous "sub-roles" (Holloway, 1981:385-386).¹ Analyzing some relevant studies Zhang and Chow (2004:83) recorded even 16 different roles that are now attributed to guides by certain authors. "Tour guides are the essential interface between the host destination and its visitors" Ap and Wong claim, adding that it is about "the key front-line players in the tourism industry", who are largely responsible for the customers' satisfaction with the services of a tourist destination (Ap; Wong, 2001:551). Boyle and Arnott (2004:75) think that the main task of a guide is to make the tourists' experience most enjoyable providing the information in an interesting and culturally-sensitive way. Weiler and Ham (2001), also, underline the influence of a high-quality presentation to tourist satisfaction. However, tourist guides still "...represent a largely

¹ As sub-roles, Holloway lists: "information-giver and fount of knowledge", "teacher or instructor", "motivator and initiator into the rites of touristic experience", "missionary or ambassador for one's country", "entertainer or catalyst for the group", "confidant, shepherd or ministering angel", as well as "group leader and disciplinarian".

underrated, undervalued and under utilized human resource despite the widely acknowledged benefits and significant roles they assume in the tourism system“ (Dioko; Unakul, 2005:16).

The origin and evolution of the role of a guide was expounded by Cohen (1985), who was a pioneer of making tourist guiding a matter of scientific attention. In his opinion, the role of professional guides consists of four components, marking the communicative role as the most important (the selection of interesting points, presenting correct information and interpreting all that tourists do not seem to understand). Cohen especially emphasizes the significance of interpretation identifying that term with intercultural mediation, explaining it as “translation” of foreign and unknown elements of a host’s culture into a cultural “idiom” which is close to the guest (1985:15-16).

Such “translation“ is often necessary, since the majority of tourists spend only a short time at a destination, do not possess any local knowledge and view their temporary surrounding from a leisure perspective of tourist activity. Therefore, most of them cannot comprehend the local values, beliefs, tradition and everyday life of incoming tourist regions (Ooi, 2002:20-22).

Interpretation is a form of mediation. To Tilden (1977:14), it is “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.” On the other hand, American National Association for Interpretation (NAI) says: “Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource”.²

Moscardo (in: Jafari, 2000:327) emphasizes that all similar definitions have in common three features. Firstly, interpretation is more often viewed as a form of communication whose aim is to stimulate with the public an interest in self-learning and the ability of observation. Secondly, helping people to understand a place or culture, interpretation generates support for the preservation of that place and culture. Thirdly, interpretation can be seen as a management strategy of tourism, recreation, natural and cultural resources.

Interpretation can have different forms. Personal interpretation “...refers to programs in the form of talks, demonstrations, puppet shows, living history, storytelling, nature walks, and tours“, whereas “non-personal interpretation encompasses everything from Traveler Information Station (TIS)... to signs and exhibits, self-guided trails, and interactive computers“ (Beck; Cable, 2002:4-5).

Although it is primarily meant for tourists, interpretation of natural and cultural heritage can have the destination residents as its public. In that case it can be related to public education or even to campaigns organized within local communities with a view to improving life quality (reduction in air pollution, waste control, water supply and the like). Such interpretation, especially the personal one in the form of a guided tour (curators, guides) the public regards as an appealing form of environmental free-choice education whose aim is, according to Ballantyne and Packer “to facilitate adoption of sustainable practice by... the general public”.³ The abovementioned authors think that “desired learning outcomes” can be: “...encouraging curiosity and exploration, changing attitudes, evoking feelings, developing a sense of personal, cultural and community identity, and making decisions about moral and ethical issues” (Ibid.).

The interpretation of cultural heritage evokes a feeling of national identity and pride. In that respect, there is an interesting example of Israeli “teacher-guide” mentioned by Katz (1985:49-72). Such a guide takes his compatriots for special walks, which are more cultural-educational than tourist-oriented. “Teacher-guide“ accomplishes his function *tiyulim* (travel),

² <http://www.interpnet.com/>, accessed 20/5/08

³ http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv/UQ:8868/promoting_enviro.pdf, accessed 20/5/08

because he helps the participants to make a spiritual connection with some parts of their own country, at the same time satisfying their interest in archaeological sites and ancient history. The phenomenon *tiyulim* can be viewed as a type of secular pilgrimage (or “civil religion“), with the guide being a kind of civil religion “mentor“ and “encourager of faith“.

Brochu and Merriman (2007:3) say that “interpreters or guides help audiences make connections with history, culture, science, and the special places on the planet“ claiming that they “...handle a very sacred trust – the stories of where humankind has been, who we are, and what we have learned.“

Interpretive messages “must be interesting to capture attention, meaningful so that people care, and compelling so that people no longer think or act the same after hearing them“ (Beck; Cable, 2002:13). Participants take part in a guided tour of their own will (with exception of school groups), not because they have been forced into it, having every right to expect a pleasant and enjoyable experience. Although fun and leisure are not the primary objective of interpretation, the guide’s commentary must be interesting, not a matter of pure fact enumeration – names, dates and the like. A successful interpretation is “...a balancing of juggling act, a graceful and smooth ballet of interaction between your interpretive presentation and the mind of the listener” (Sharpe, 1982; cited in: Pond, 1993:138). This hint is not a matter of chance: interpretation is an act of creativity, similar to art or even a play – like the one found with jugglers, dancers or actors. Every act of artistic creativity takes certain “resources“ and their transformation into “product“ is a result of integration of intuition, sensitivity, skill and passion.

Tilden (1977:94) makes a point when, writing about interpretation principles, emphasizes: “...I feel certain that the single principle must be Love.”

It is questionable whether tourist guides are, despite being given a license by local authorities, ready to assume the role of the interpreter of history and cultural heritage presenting it to their fellow-citizens. Such role and mission involve the knowledge that is beyond the usual level of guides’ education, which mostly satisfy the needs and expectations of the tourists: the thing that is new and “revealing“ to foreigners is not new to the domestic audience, especially to the locals. The citizens who live next to cultural monuments passing by them every day and get information about them through media must be offered something new, an insight into generally unavailable facts and details that are commonly neglected or access to non-public areas and facilities.

McGrath (2003:16) has a right claiming the following: “The role of the guide then in a post-modern context is to bring something extra, something that the visitors cannot get through any other media and to extend the traditional pathfinders aim of providing, ‘access to an otherwise non-public terrain’ to the encompass the intellectual terrain locked and otherwise inaccessible.”

BACKGROUND

Belgrade is one of the oldest capitals in Europe, but it has few monuments testifying about its long-lasting, eventful and tempestuous history.

BELGRADE FORTRESS

Over the Sava-into-Danube confluence there is a cliff on which Belgrade Fortress stands, with its individual fortifications lying just along or above the rivers. The fortress is, in fact, a fortification complex consisting of the upper and lower sections (total area of 30 ha), and the military architecture remains belong to different historical periods, from the 1st century AD to the 18th century: the Roman and Byzantine times, Serbian medieval times (15th century), the period of Austrian occupation at the end of the 17th century and in the first half of the 18th century, and finally, a Turkish bastion fortress dating back to the mid-18th century. Since the

fortifications have been destroyed and restored several times so far, during various wars and sometimes as a result of a political decision, the today's complex (which also includes other monuments, two small Orthodox churches, two galleries and the Military museum) represents a complex whole of interwoven layers of history. Unlike the Turkish fortress which is well-preserved, the medieval monuments are not so well preserved and are to a large extent restored, whereas the remains of the Roman *castrum* are fragmentary and therefore more attractive to archaeologists than to tourists. Nevertheless, the Fortress is visited by all Belgrade guests, and there is an initiative to make it a candidate for the UNESCO world heritage list.

In front of the upper part of the Fortress there is the oldest city park Kalemegdan, which is the most popular destination of all-age Belgrade citizens. Since the whole area is a public park, the entrance into the Fortress (beside certain facilities) is free of charge, so there are many people who go for a walk next to the ramparts every day enjoying the view of the Sava and the Danube confluence and of New Belgrade situated on the left river bank.

The Belgrade Fortress as a monument had not been regarded as an institution. Only in 2002 a public company (named: The Belgrade Fortress) was established, but neither the Visitor Center has been opened yet, nor there have been interpretive tools ("interpretation environment") to give detailed explanation to visitors: plain brochures, signs, electronic displays of information, multi-vision-shows etc. The three big fortress models representing the complex in different periods of history are displayed at the small gallery inside one of the embankments, but most visitors can hardly see its entrance, neither know what there is to be found in it, nor do they want to pay a cheap ticket.

The fortress presentation in the form of a guided tour was available only to the tourist in groups escorted by a previously hired tourist guide. Other visitors, including Belgrade citizens, did not have such pleasure.

IDEA OF FORTRESS TOURS

The idea of free of charge tours for Belgrade citizens came up in 1998 and it was a result of a chance.

Due to the break-up of former Yugoslavia followed by political, economic and social crisis in Serbia in the 1990s along with international economic sanctions, the foreign tourist arrivals were entirely decimated. Belgrade, which was the main congressional and transit tourist centre and the usual pick-up point to various tours all over the country, became a destination of political delegations, negotiators and "businesspeople". Such a situation affected the Serbian tourist guides, whose association with 400 members was the largest in Yugoslavia. In such conditions, the Association stopped its activities, the guides qualified for other jobs and some people who had an excellent command of foreign languages temporarily lived of translating activities for various foreign journalists, especially during the war in Bosnia (1992-1995).

Although there was no inbound tourism, in the second half of the 1990s, a group of enthusiastic guides reestablished the Tourist Guides Association of Serbia. The most of work originated from outbound tourism, so local licensed guides worked as escort to tour groups from Serbia to Greece, Turkey, Hungary and other destinations. Sightseeing tours in a foreign language in Belgrade were rare, mainly organized for individual visitors.

Two experienced guides (Mrs. Maja Stamenković and Mr. Branislav Rabotić) came up with the idea of free of charge Fortress sightseeing tours in the spring of 1998. The project *Belgrade Fortress Sightseeing*, accepted by the Tourist Guides Association and supported by Tourism Organization of Belgrade, involved four guided tours in June, with a view to notifying the public that tourist guiding as a profession still existed.

The first walking tour grasped the attention of the citizens as well as of the media.

Despite the positive response of both citizens and the media (some of them accompanied the whole tour recording the participants' impressions), the thing offered by the guides was a standard tourist sightseeing, similar to the one organized for Belgrade visitors: neither the contents were adapted to the specific audience (local community members), nor was the commentary in the form of interpretation. Indeed, the new thing was the fact that the tour involved two guides, who gave a joint presentation enabling the visitors to listen to both guides in turn who displayed two different guiding styles.

INTERPRETIVE GUIDED WALKS

Since the planned series of four sightseeing tours was over, the further existence of the project depended on the potential sponsors. The well-established companies, which were funding various cultural events at the time, showed no interest in financial support of *Belgrade Fortress Sightseeing* project, although the amount needed was very small, only for the guiding expenses. By coincidence, the guides got in touch with the president of the Stari grad municipality to which the Fortress belongs and who liked the idea very much. Shortly the municipality authorities decided to sponsor the sightseeing, which were to be organized every Sunday at noon⁴.

The municipality advertised in the biggest daily newspaper the Fortress walks, and during the first tour over 200 Belgrade people came.

Following the first tour, the guides analyzed it concluding that some interventions regarding the itinerary, the stopping points, the scale, the contents and presentation data schedule were needed. The media promotion encouraged them to look up the books on the Fortress even more (scientific and technical papers, archaeological reports, historical persons biographies, myths and legends), and they got in contact with experts – archaeologists, historians and architects. Simultaneously, they did the field work, noticed various details, measured certain passages, exchanged ideas regarding the best possible itinerary.

At that point, the guides did not have the slightest idea they were starting a new and specific way of guiding: the interpretation of cultural heritage. Nevertheless, they intuitively felt, that this project was not a temporary matter and that their tour could become a regular form of informing citizens about Kalemegdan monuments.

THE STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERISTICS

Changing the tour concept, its authors started from the assumption that potential participants:

- knew at least the basic history of their city and the history of the Fortress (basic periods, certain historical events and people)
- were not capable of identifying certain historical layers and archaeological excavations, nor were familiar with the function of certain fortified facilities.

So, the interpretive tour was primarily devised to help Belgrade citizens to identify the mixed historical layers of the Fortress and to point out to the time and conditions of its construction, the builders, the original function/role and historical fate of certain parts. The

⁴ The support by Stari grad municipality can, in part, be attributed to political reasons. After several months long civil protests in Serbia in 1996-97, which were a result of the attempt of Slobodan Milosevic (Serbian Socialist Party) to rig the local elections (the winning side of these election in most Serbian towns, as well as in Belgrade was the democratic opposition called 'Together'), the towns and municipalities finally got the new political leaders. The changed political situation caused a "game" between the republic and local authorities: the former opposition had to show in concrete steps that it cared for people's needs, organizing various events. By sponsoring free of charge tours the local authorities showed they were taking care of cultural heritage and its popularization with the people. Although the project was not as big as some other popular activities, the republic authorities frowned upon it very much, because the newspaper editors controlled by them, initially avoided mentioning who the sponsor was.

guides brought the audience's attention to concrete facilities, applying the *attention structure* concept. Namely, some authors regard attention as one of the basic elements of experience construction. The proponents of this approach point out that people are not able to notice all the things around them at the same time, that their behavior and experience can be directed, that is, can be affected by diverging their attention.⁵

Interpretation was achieved through "classic" guide-audience relationship, carried out in the third person. In some countries, *first person interpretation* or *living history* tours are very popular, with costume-wearing guide who pretending to be some historical person (a ruler, knight, warrior) addresses the public in the first person. Some people think that such a form of interpretation is suitable for conjuring up the air of history, bringing the past closer to the audience, but not so efficient in terms of learning (Reisinger; Steiner, 2006:481–498). Anyway, there are different attitudes to these two techniques of personal presentation.⁶

Special attention in their performance the guides bestowed upon the selection and accuracy of the data bearing in mind that the interpretation of a historically layered archaeological and monument site may lead to (un)intentional manipulation. Ashworth et al. (2007:104) cautiously warn about it: "...archaeology can have important political dimensions, being used to assert or deny the previous occupation of an area by a particular group. Evidence supporting occupation by one group is assiduously sought and propagated and that of another is either not sought or, if found, ignored..." The Fortress interpretation gives an opportunity for such type of data "selection", because, during its history Belgrade belonged to many peoples, and it became Serbian town only in 1284, and the Serbian capital in 1404.

The way of interpreting was based on the so-called constructivist approach, because the guides made the participant take an active role in the tour, usually in the form of questions. Some information surprised the audience, sometimes caused disbelief, coming to grips with the knowledge they had already possessed (*cognitive dissonance*). Since the guides became familiar with new results of the scientific research of the Fortress, they could point out some unfounded and obsolete opinions based on out of date books and former research.⁷

In order to bridge the gap between the message and the visual input and to present the visited site as it once was, the guides employed not only the three fortress models exhibited in the gallery and a small open-air bronze model of the castle, but also some useful "props" such as plans, drawings or other illustrations showing the scientifically proved or presumed original appearance of the main monuments.

During presentations some technical terms of military architecture were used, especially when it was necessary to explain the function of some parts of the Fortress (*glacis, bastion, ravelin, escarpment, donjon, machicolation, barbican*), which enabled the interested participants to learn several specific terms and their meaning, and guides to express their "specialist" knowledge and expertise.

⁵ Ooi (2007:72-80) also claims that one of the general features of attention is the lack of attention (attention can be focused only on one thing at one time, so there is a sort of "competition" among the potential centers of attention making the role of go-between very important), and that there are different reasons for which a person pays attention to one thing.

⁶ Hems and Blockley (2006:47) point out that many sites argue that the interpreters have to know more to be convincing in first person and can never say they don't know the answer for a question, concluding: "This is an interesting argument that presupposes that other non-first person interpreters do not have to be as knowledgeable and can say they don't know. Ultimately the selection of the specific technique depends upon the skill of the performer and what information is expected to be conveyed." However, one should never forget about the sensitivity of the audience: There is no doubt that Belgrade people would experience first person interpretation as a play, as something although interesting not serious enough.

⁷ Few people were familiar with the new results of Fortress research. Many people heard and saw for the first time that there were archaeological remains of the castle of a Serbian 15th century ruler. The fact that the bastion fortress, that exists today, was built by the Turks in 18th century, not by the Austrians as the old books claimed, was a surprise too. The Austrian fortress existed at the beginning of the same century, but the builders themselves pulled it down before they surrendered Belgrade to the Turks due to the peace treaty in 1739.

Structurally, the interpretation is carried out in layers: beside the primary interpretation of archaeological/historical/architectural facts about certain buildings (metonymic dimension), the secondary interpretation included symbolic associations with the building (metaphoric dimension) through tales about historical periods, events or people, comparisons with other similar buildings, legends and the like. Finally, the tertiary interpretation pointed out to the contemporary context of the Fortress (archaeological research, conservation problems, heritage carelessness, disagreement between experts on some issues), as well as its presentation, revitalization and valuation).⁸ The audience found this dimension of interpretation very interesting, because the guides' commentary often caused certain reactions (laughter, comments, questions and so on).

Various aspects of the presentation contents enabled the discourse between the guide and the participants display several functions, which were singled out by Fine and Speer (1985:77) based on Jacobson's multi-functional model of verbal communication: expressive, referential, conative, poetic, metalingual and phatic. Alongside with the basic, referential function, the guides expressed (directly or not) their feelings and attitudes to the Fortress or towards specific subjects and persons ("*It is noticeable that you are talking about... with special affection in your voice*"). More formal discourse was achieved through fictitious genres, such as a tale, were often punctuated by phatic chit-chat, when guides, after some time, "got to know better" the participants, especially if the group was small. There were cases of what Fine and Speer call *metalingual discourse*, when guides commented on their own interpretation, their experience from a previous tour or when they asked some of the participants to express their opinion.

Since the members of the group were walking, some unexpected encounters might have happened, as Wynn (2005:407) points out: "One of the most wonderful things about a walking tour is that, unlike a bus tour, there is the potential of tapping into unexpected urban interactions". So, one group encountered a Belgrade archaeologist who was digging up on one of the sites and who, at the guide's request, briefly explained the excavation procedure on that site. This brief encounter made a big impression on the group providing the whole tour with a touch of "authentic" experience.

The program of the "first comprehensive Fortress sightseeing" included relatively big area and a considerable number of monuments. Alongside with the gallery visit, the whole tour had to last at least for three hours, sometimes even more, significantly longer than what is recommended for guided walks (1,5-2 hours). The duration can also be attributed to the fact that there were two guides, who went deeper and deeper into the matter wanting to express their knowledge. Three years after the beginning of the project, the duration was limited to 90 minutes, by excluding the Lower town visit. Consequently, the tour was done by only one guide¹⁰.

PARTICIPANTS

Despite the lack of data about the structure of the sightseeing participants, in guides' opinion the groups had people from all walks of life, people of all ages (except for teenagers) and of different levels of education.

⁸ Staiff and Bushell (2003:102-104) presented this multi-layered approach exemplified by presenting Botticelli's painting *Primavera* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) in different guidebooks in English.

⁹ A verbal comment made by a participant.

¹⁰ Another interpretive tour, this one involving the sightseeing of the old town part close to the Fortress, was launched in 1999. This walk was also sponsored by the municipality, and was led by the same guides in twos. Some time later, in a changed political and economic situation, it was agreed that both tours should take place once a month, that the program should be revised, and the tasks should be divided: consequently, Maja Stamenković was in charge of an Old town tour and the author of this paper was in charge of the Fortress tour. After the death of Maja Stamenković both tours were taken over by B. Rabotić.

The vast majority of the participants listened to the interpretation from its beginning to the very end, although the tour involved certain physical effort: the terrain was partially uneven, somewhere involving going up or down. Sometimes it happened that someone decided to give it up after the first part of the tour (the Upper town), knowing they could join the next tour the following week.

The sightseeing "ritual" was filled with positive air of expecting and experiencing the new "discoveries" in a setting more or less familiar to everybody, and yet not enough known. Even the 6-to-10-year-olds together with their parents enjoyed the group tour; they found it to be something unusual and interesting.

Passers-by, with no prior knowledge about the tour, joined in, and getting interested by the things they had heard and seen, took part in the tour next week from its very beginning. Some of them appeared several weeks in a row probably expecting the guides to say and show something new to the following groups. There were some people who wrote down the interpretation in great detail or (discretely, without the guides' permission) recorded it using a tape recorder. On several occasions, people wanted to record it using a video camera, but the guides would not allow them to do so.

The members of the newly-formed group, silent and reserved in the beginning, especially the ones that had no company, would "defrost" during the tour. Walking from one to other stopping points they would start talking to one another, comment on what they had heard or seen, exchange impressions. The mutual interest in history and archaeology contributed to certain cohesion among the members of a heterogeneous group.

In certain people a guided walk aroused some nostalgic memories of tours abroad, which they had taken part in, and which they could not afford at the moment due to bad economic situation. A guided tour in a city they permanently lived, provided an illusionary traveling, which can be supported by one participant's comment (*"After the Valley of the Kings in Luxor and Petra of Jordan this is the most pleasant experience. This is as if I have traveled to my own country"*).¹¹

That the group walk had evoked pleasant emotions in the participants was supported by the fact that they went home reluctantly and slowly, continuing to chat to each other or to the guides for another 5 to 10 minutes, as if they wished to postpone the end of the pleasant experience. The individuals, who had not known each other prior to the tour, would end up talking about going together to a museum or visiting a cultural event. The walk enabled the people who had similar affiliation to make friends, which was a chance not frequently given to those living in a 2-million-people city.

Some Belgraders occasionally took on tours their guests from other countries in order to translate the interpretation to them. However, even when the host had an excellent command of a foreign language and was successful at translating the guides' words, foreigners were frequently quitting tours before the end because it was difficult (and not interesting enough) to listen the commentary with no elementary knowledge of local history. It proved that the tour concept emphasizing the buildings, their function and certain people with little focus on general history context (well-known to the locals), was not suitable for foreign tourists. The moment the tour lost its "tourist" contents, it became more popular with the local people than with tourists.

This experience showed that effective personal interpretation could not be "standardized", but adapted to the concrete segment of users.¹² A similar thing happened to two students groups, taken on a regular tour by their teachers, with no previous notification, believing that

¹¹ A comment on the tour written in the guestbook (1999).

¹² When the audience consists of foreign tourists, especially the ones that know little about the local area or a wider region, the significance of the interpretation context is extremely dominant. When interpreting the past or certain monuments or sites, it is necessary to use historical parallels, forcing the guide to be aware of *timeline* history of the area the tourists come from as well as of the cultural idiom that is close to them.

they would find the same interpretation equally interesting. Obviously, the goal of personal interpretation is achieved only when the commentary connects tangible (the place, objects, people) with intangible aspects (ideas, concepts, meanings), the thing that the audience finds to be new with what has been familiar or sensed. It is well-known that people respond better to the information adapted to their knowledge and experience.¹³

INTERPRETATION IN INCIDENT CONDITIONS

The NATO bombardment of Serbia in the spring of 1999 gave a completely new dimension to the interpretation of the Fortress.

In practically warlike conditions (there was a martial law imposed over the whole Serbia) everyday life in the city had changed a lot. Belgrade was a target and was usually attacked from the air at night. During the day, between the air attack emergency sirens, the citizens tried to lead a more or less normal life. After the talks with the sponsor and, without any doubt, along with the approval given by high authorities, the tour continued to take place every Sunday. The first “war condition sightseeing tour“ of the Fortress on April 4th, 1999 (although the sirens announced air attacks on Belgrade) was attended by more than a hundred people. There were a lot of children with their parents.

The tale of the Fortress, its sieges over the centuries, its attackers and defenders was given a touch of personal experience that the participant were having in the new conditions, because they were eyewitnesses to, and some of them maybe participants in yet another battle for Belgrade: at that time history was unfolding. Actually, what had by that time been “pure history” which most people consider to be “...dry, impersonal, and serious-something remote and distant from their lives” (Beck; Cable, 2002:19), suddenly became “personalized past” (Tilden, 1977:9), because of the conditions in which the interpretation was taking place. It could be argued whether the guides imbued the tour with their own emotional or even patriotic feelings by “dramatize[ing] the scholarly ‘stories’... the scenes and heroes of the past, as if they were taking place here and now” (Katz, 1985:62). Anyhow, certain parts of their narration relating to the events of an old, bygone era got a new meaning causing a larger amount of emotion in the audience than usually, which is supported by their comments written in the guestbook.¹⁴ The tales every time narrated by the guides, the audience now recognized as “their own” (viewing themselves as figures of the stories), not as something that happened to somebody else some time in the past.¹⁵

It was interesting to see that people who did not know each other looked like a more homogeneous group than previously, they were more communicative and especially considerate and kind to one another. There were no nudging other people in order to come closer to the guides to hear them better, at the entrance into the gallery the people let other participants in front of them, the young were kind to the elderly...¹⁶

¹³ “Tour guide's enthusiasm, skillfulness, desire, and willingness to share information can help visitors, young and old, make connections between their own lives and valued artifacts, art objects, and history as represented by museum collections” (Grinder; McCoy, 1985, cited in: Knudson et al., 2003:10).

¹⁴ “*At these sad moments I have experienced something nice and humane...*”, “*I'm touched. It seems that history is repeating itself*”, “*This sightseeing tour... showed the historical grandeur of this invincible city, which has been attacked by the many trying to submit*”, “*At these for our people hard times, your tales are medicinal...*”

¹⁵ Here is yet another characteristic example: during the Turkish siege of Belgrade in 1456, the defense organized the announcement of “air-strike alert” to the Turkish cannons, when look-outs reported the moments when the attackers were about to fire cannon balls, warning Belgrade citizens by ringing bells. This ancient tale became credible when the participants lived in a similar situation with everyday siren sounding. Because it was “up to date”, the story came to the fore and was published in a daily newspaper entitled “Church bells instead of the siren” by a journalist who had attended the tour (*Danas*, May 24th, 1999.)

¹⁶ The phenomenon of an intense civil tolerance, solidarity, understanding and generosity, during the common distress, was noticed in Belgrade during the NATO bombardment: the residents of multi-storey buildings, who hardly knew each other, never saying hello to each other, socialized and spent time during the air-strike alert,

After the end of a two-and-a-half-month NATO aggression on Serbia, the interpretive tour resumed its regular form, but for some time there still was an air of the experienced war.

ACCOMPANYING ACTIVITIES

Web site

In order to promote their project, the guides designed a special web site in 1998. The first version was made by using one of the templates available on the Internet, and the following ones using Microsoft Front Page program. The site *Belgrade Fortress Sightseeing*¹⁷ was put on the international free of charge server, because all the local providers wanted their service to be paid. Beside basic information (time, departure point, duration, itinerary, contents), as a form of illustration there were several tales narrated by the guides. For several years this had been the only site about the Fortress, having a version of it in the English language.

Leaflet

For some time, the guides were giving the “leaflet“ of the tour (which they produced themselves) to the participants. The leaflet in the form of a flyer (format A4, double folded) was made in CorelDRAW with the necessary number of copies. Belgraders could get the leaflet at the end of the tour, paying only for the photocopying expenses. The leaflet contained the general plan of the Fortress together with the marks of the specific buildings and the basic information about them. The leaflet, whose role was to serve as memory of the tour, represents “mechanical reproduction“ of the Fortress.¹⁸ The project mission is contained in an underlined message in the leaflet: “Belgraders, take special care of the Fortress. It is the most beautiful decoration in Belgrade and the symbol of its history!”

Guestbook

At the very beginning the guides introduced the book of the participants’ impressions. Belgraders were asked to write their impression about the interpretation at the end of the tour. It was a notebook of standard format, 100 pages, the first words were written on January 17th, 1999, and the last words on December 18th, 1999.

The guestbook is a testimony of the way some people experienced the tour (“*cultural and cognitive experience*”, “*the adventure through history*”, “*full speed time machine*”), as well as of the motives for taking part in this walk. Although the comments may undergo more thorough analyses, it is immediately obvious that the audience fully supported this project.¹⁹ Most of them expressed their gratitude to the “organizers”, especially to the guides for the way they had guided it (“*Inspiring, not boring at all*”, “*Interesting, funny, innovative...*”, “*You are excellent narrators, knowledgeable and modern presenters*”).

Besides, there were many different suggestions and advice (“*Such tours should be organized somewhere else too*”, “*The tour is great, it takes a lot more advertising*”) criticism of the authorities (“*Such tour should take the people who are responsible for all the people of this country, in order to learn something*”, “*I suggest that the minister of education attend these “classes”, in order to include the history of the city in the school curriculum, so that the classes should be taught in the Fortress*”), emotional outbursts, philosophical comments and

going back to their previous habits after the war was over.

¹⁷ <http://razgledanje.tripod.com/tvr/java/>, accessed 20/5/08

¹⁸ According to MacCannell (1999:43), there are five stages of what he calls *sight sacralization* process (naming, framing, enshrinement, mechanical reproduction and social reproduction). By the way, Fine and Speer (1985) proved, exemplified with a curator in a historical building in Texas, that *sight sacralization* could also have “spoken and behavioral correlates... in the tour guides performances” (1985:75).

¹⁹ “*After numerous empty walks this is the first time I have learned something...*”; “*I am ashamed of my As in history, today I have understood they were fake marks...*”; “*A paradise to my eyes and my soul...*”; “*Thank you for this wonderful cultural experience...*”; “*Superb, if only history classes were like this...*”

so on. This short sentence may be the encompassing: “*A nice and cool time and a lot of knowledge*”.

Interpretive guidebook

Eight years after the tour had begun, a book *Belgrade Fortress in Your Hands* was published by Komshe (Belgrade, 2006) as a complete record of the field interpretations, adapted to the form of printed material. The schedule of interpretation is the same as the one during the tour, and along with the main text there is an additional text, visually distinct in the form of a separate column on the side, describing certain details, events, people, legends and the like. As this guidebook was primarily meant for Belgraders, it was only published in Serbian. The circulation of 1,000 copies was sold out in less than two years.

EFFECTS

During the first year, some 2,300 people attended the interpretive tours.²⁰ Although there are no exact data, no record was kept about the number of participants, it is only estimated that in the period 1998-2008 some 30,000 Belgrade citizens went on sightseeing tours of the Fortress and the Old town part.

A significant number of articles were published in daily newspapers and periodicals. The Serbian National TV recorded and on several occasions broadcast two different programs on the tours, each lasting for 45 minutes. The first private Serbian TV station, BK, recorded in cooperation with the guides and broadcast it in its morning show a series of short reportages about certain Fortress monuments, asking the audience to go on a tour. A lot of local radio stations also followed this event.

However, it was indicative that in almost none of the texts the educational feature of the project had not been spotted or pointed out. Instead of reporting about the interpretive tour in terms of a cultural mission (analyzing the tour and the participants' motives), the journalists used it in order to tell “their own” story about the Fortress (often misinterpreting the guides' data and information). For the majority of journalists it was “a tourist sightseeing meant for Belgraders”: the fact that Belgrade residents could not be tourists in their own city was neglected as well as that one form of organized tourism (*guided tour*) was used as a formal framework for heritage interpretation.²¹ The editors mostly entrusted trainee journalists, who report on various events in town (everyday life, municipal service, green market prices and so on) or, the ones specializing in tourism. The cultural section editors showed no interest resulting in the project not getting the media support it deserved.

The similar thing happened with educational institutions. Although a number of Belgrade high schools were directly offered an adapted tour meant for students (the project was recommended by the Ministry of Education²²), the principals were not interested in it. As an exception, there had been several tours for small groups of students (some grades) at a special time, initiated by their teachers. On the whole, the cultural heritage interpretation project did not reach the teenagers, although they were most to be blamed for monument devastation

²⁰ <http://razgledanje.tripod.com/tvrddjava/jubilej.htm>, accessed 20/5/08

²¹ “*Belgrade people as tourists*”, “*Organized sightseeing*“, “*Reminder of history*“ are some of the articles in the daily newspapers, that accompanied the Fortress tours and recorded the participants' impressions in 1998-99.

²² In its Report on the interpretive tour project, No. 620-00-1/97-07, October, 20th, 1999, the department on the Syllabus and Curriculum of the Ministry of Education thought that “...this program is useful for the schools in the Republic of Serbia. By sightseeing the Fortress and the old city section, students will learn about the history of Belgrade, its most significant cultural monuments, architectural buildings: through interesting stories they will get to know the residents of the past, and the creators of the monuments and buildings they are visiting. The authors enable schools to decide which other buildings and monuments they would like their students to visit, apart from this program.”

(graffiti inscription, damage, etc.) The chance of presenting the historical monuments of the city to high school students in a new and attractive way was not seized.

Belgrade Fortress Sightseeing had a direct effect on the making of a new “tourist product”, the one that had not existed before as part of local sightseeing offer. Except for the standard three-hour bus city tour, with a short visit to the Fortress, prior to 1998 there had not been any walking tours, nor had the Fortress been offered as a separate tour. Today, such a tour is organized regularly or on request by several local travel agencies and sightseeing companies as well as by the Tourism Organization of Belgrade.

Probably, the greatest contribution of the interpretive tours was in the area of the quality and general standards of tourist guiding in Belgrade. Not only had the two guides become specialists in the most important historical sight, but they also, using their interpretation (that was listened to by the majority of their colleagues) contributed to other people’s skill to show and interpret Belgrade monuments to tourists, especially the Fortress, in a more responsible and better way than before.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Belgrade Fortress Sightseeing presents an example of Serbia’s first organized, mass and free of charge interpretation of the cultural heritage in the form of a guided tour. A large number of Belgrade citizens and some city guests have participated in these walks for the last ten years.

The initial idea of “tourist visits” along with the guides soon spontaneously became guided interpretive tours, whose concept, principles and realization are in accord with the recommendations from ‘Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites’ (ICOMOS, *International Council on Monuments and Sites*).

The experience of Belgrade interpretive tours and of some similar activities that were initiated later (*European Heritage Days, International Tourist Guide Day*) shows that there is a great and stable interest among citizens in this way of getting familiar with the local heritage. There is no need to explain the fact that the way the local community takes care of its cultural heritage (the attitudes and behavior of the residents) has a direct influence on cultural tourism at a certain destination. The extent to which one’s own heritage is respected largely determines the behavior of tourists, their perception of the sites they are visiting. Consequently, every resident makes an “ambassador” to a tourist destination, which is the role frequently attributed to local tourist guides.

Apart from the sponsor, who obliged themselves to pay the guides, in this case there was no support from other relevant institutions. No expert organization (association) in the field of culture, archaeology, history, heritage conservation did not officially support the project. School institutions showed no interest despite the recommendation given by the Ministry of Education. It seems that the real mission of the project was not recognized (heritage interpretation and free-choice education) or it was perceived that tourist guides, despite the knowledge and skills they had publicly displayed, were not “experts” to work as interpreters. In her statement to a popular Belgrade daily newspaper, an associate at the “Belgrade Fortress” public company said: “The guides who are hired in such tours are not qualified enough, because it is about universal tourist guides. They cannot at the same time be qualified for archaeological sites and the fortress monuments...”²³ It was yet again proven that cultural institutions were generally suspicious of everything using the attribute *tourist*, that is, that they have an ambiguous attitude towards tourism.

In many countries tourist guides have a low status, probably due to sloppy training and education, low licensing criteria, and primarily due to the unwillingness of these professionals

²³ She also pointed out that her institution had hired as guides senior students of archaeology, history, the history of arts with GPA above 9,00, what caused the tourism inspectorate to react since the students did not have the required tourist guide license (“A Walk through History”, *Blic*, March 15th, 2008).

to receive advanced training. Although among guides there are many high education professionals possessing great knowledge and experience, it seems that the dominant opinion in some expert circles (such as archaeologists or historians) is that cultural heritage can be better interpreted by an expert on that field.

However, the interpretation of heritage sites in the form of a guided tour is not meant for the expert audience: it is crucial that an interpreter possesses not only knowledge, but also the ability to put it across as well as the “Art of guiding”,²⁴ which includes specific skills such as navigation, positioning of the group, assessing group’s abilities, pointing out precisely, timing commentary, storytelling, voice projection (audibility), non-verbal presentation and the like. Cherem (cited in: Christie; Mason, 2003:5) stresses the importance of the skills of delivery over actual knowledge in guiding and he claims all guides are interpreters first, and subject specialists second.

The Belgrade experience shows that individuals, even they are “only” tourist guides can initiate and in a high-quality way realize certain heritage interpretation activities for the local people, but the real achievement of such projects depends on institutional and interest groups’ support.

Interpretation certainly requires tour guides to gain various knowledge from different fields, which can be achieved by creating special training programs and by certifying “cultural heritage interpreters”.

IN MEMORIAM

The author dedicates this paper to the memory of his deceased workmate, Mrs. Maja Stamenković (1947-2006) with whom he had, for years with joy and thrill, put across the secrets of the Belgrade Fortress.

“One day, some other Belgraders will be proud of you!”
(A comment on the guides written in the guestbook, 1999)

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²⁴ This term was first used by Katrine Prince (1939-2004), a long-standing *Blue Badge* guide and instructor in Great Britain.

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