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### Guide-Entrepreneurs Developing Urban Ecotourism

Jane Widtfeldt Meged Mrs  
*Roskilde University, janewm@ruc.dk*

Berit Charlotte Kaae Mrs  
*Copenhagen University, bck@ign.ku.dk*

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## Guide-Entrepreneurs Developing Urban Ecotourism

### Cover Page Footnote

We would like to thank the Danish Innovation Foundation for providing funding for the INUT project. Also, we greatly appreciate the enthusiastic participation of the guides and students in the INUT course and excursions as well as the knowledge sharing and hospitality of local entrepreneurs and the two case areas.

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# Guide-Entrepreneurs Developing Urban Ecotourism

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## Jane Widtfeldt Meged

Roskilde University  
[janevm@ruc.dk](mailto:janevm@ruc.dk)

## Berit C. Kaae

University of Copenhagen  
[bck@ign.ku.dk](mailto:bck@ign.ku.dk)

This paper analyses experiences with initiatives to stimulate a transition in urban tourist guides from ‘traditional urban guides’ to a new type of ‘entrepreneurial urban ecotourism guide’ in a Danish context, based on results of a three-year Innovation and Development of Urban Ecotourism (INUT) innovation project. The results of two guide surveys are analysed and discussed through the lenses of transition theory and theories on knowledge entrepreneurs in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Results based on surveys and researchers’ observations indicate that a small but growing niche of urban ecotourism tours was established, as a result of the project guide training programme – mostly by experienced guide entrepreneurs. Guides experienced a transformation where sustainability became integrated into their mindset and tour products. In addition, they acquired a more normative and transformational style of guiding to educate the traveller and more confidence in their role as guide entrepreneurs. Sustainability has now been adopted into the regular tour guide training programme. The effect of the INUT niche formation, trying to influence the tourism regime from below, is now facilitated by a 2019 national paradigm shift towards sustainable tourism, creating top-down pressure for industry transformation. The guides may now be functioning as catalysts, facilitating the transformation towards sustainability in tourism.

**Key Words:** guide entrepreneurs, urban ecotourism, tour guiding, transformative guiding, sustainable tourism, Denmark, transition theory

## Introduction

Before Covid-19 brought the entire tourism industry to a temporary halt, Copenhagen, like many other destinations, faced two interlinked problems: a rapid growth in tourist arrivals with symptoms of over-tourism in the old town (Peeters *et al.*, 2018; Husted, 2019; Radio 24/7, 2019) and an emergent climate crisis. Both problems call for solutions on how to conduct sustainable tourism in popular urban spaces. The municipality has ambitious plans to turn Copenhagen into a sustainable pioneer city and carbon-neutral capital by 2025 (City of Copenhagen, 2020). However, most sustainability initiatives have until recently been outside the tourism industry, as

Danish national tourism policies have traditionally focused on the growth of tourism in terms of numbers and economic performance. But in mid-2019, a change of government resulted in a paradigm shift towards sustainability in tourism which is now being operationalised. Since the late 1980s, a number of uncoordinated sustainability initiatives have been taken using a bottom-up approach by individual tourism actors in the tourism industry, resulting in e.g. environmentally friendly facilities, innovative practices by SMEs and the Green Key labelling of tourism facilities (Holm & Kaae, 2018; Green Key, 2020).

In this context, guides are perceived primarily as interpreters and mediators who enhance tourists' understanding and sustainable behaviour in face-to-face meetings on guided tours. Weiler and Black (2014:72) argue that tour guiding's contribution to making the travel and tourism industry more sustainable is rarely given more than lip service because key factors are viewed as being controlled by other stakeholders and largely beyond the influence of guides. This paper will challenge that statement and propose a new type of guide who, as dynamic knowledge entrepreneurs in the wake of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Johannessen, 2019), not only shape their own working life, but also the tourism industry (Meged, 2017, 2020), and thus may exert more profound influence on the sustainable tourism agenda.

In 2017, 21 professionals with small guiding businesses were invited to take part in the Danish Innovation Fund project titled 'Innovation and Development of Urban Ecotourism' (hereafter INUT) that ran until the beginning of 2020. The INUT assumes that ecotourism is not confined to remote or pristine nature, but may in fact be performed in urban or peri-urban nature, e.g. in areas restored from earlier human exploitation (Higham & Lück, 2002; Kaae *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, as an action-oriented project it tests the concepts of transition theory to see if it is possible to create a transition arena of change agents that experiment with innovative sustainable solutions in a bottom-up process, with the end goal that, hopefully, some of these might eventually enter and influence the current tourism regime.

Product development was the core of the project, in which the 21 hand-picked guide entrepreneurs, together with 34 tour guide students and a host of other actors, would not only drive the development of urban ecotours and experiences but also bring the innovations into the current tourism regime.

The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the process and the results of the INUT project, focusing on the transformation of guides into urban ecotourism guides. It addresses the following questions:

How do guides experience the workshop initiatives on innovation and urban ecotourism?

How does this affect their practices in tour guiding?

Are guide entrepreneurs suitable for leading product development in urban ecotourism and are they able to transfer sustainable solutions to the current tourism regime?

### State of the art

In a literature review on urban ecotourism and the role of guiding, Ebbesen and Holm (2019) apply the three-dimensional frame suggested by Weiler and Black (2014). The **first dimension** is *how guides and guided tours 'enhance visitors' understanding and valuing of site, communities, cultures and environments'*. Ebbesen and Holm (2019) support Weiler and Black's conclusion that

*tour guides contribute in some degree through learning and understanding in manners congruent with the aims of sustainable tourism. However, scholarly conclusions in this area must be approached with caution due to the methodological shortcomings arising from research traditions predominately employing visitor reporting and factual recall as indicators of learning* (Weiler & Black, 2014:79).

The **second dimension** is *'influencing and monitoring visitors' behaviour, en route, on-site and at destinations'*. Here, Weiler and Black (2014:75) conclude that guides act as authority figures who influence visitors' behaviour through instruction and role-modelling, and the research confirms this mainly through studies of self-reporting by guides and visitors. However, Ebbesen and Holm (2019:11) point to the low degree of scholarly attention to affective, emotional and sensory pathways to influence visitors' behaviour. The **third dimension** is *'fostering visitors' post-visit, pro-environmental and pro-heritage conservation attitudes and behaviours'*. Despite little empirical research, 'the sparse literature suggests the potential for positive correlation between tour guiding/interpretation and visitors' post-visit behaviours contributing to increased sustainability of tourism' (Weiler & Black,

2014:85; Zeppel & Muloin, 2008a cited in Ebbesen & Holm, 2019:12). Ebbesen and Holm conclude that research focus is on the guide as mediator

*preeminently influencing the visitors, rather than entrepreneurial involvement in sustaining urban eco-tourism in the business trade or the destination as such (2019:12).*

The research on guides as entrepreneurs is very much in its infancy, while research on guides' working life has centred on its precarity and vulnerability, where guides are typecast as pink-collar workers low in the hierarchies (Guerrier & Adib, 2003, 2004; Veijola, 2009b; Valkonen, 2010). At the same time, guides are termed 'lifestyle workers', where research focuses on their strong motivation and the joys they find in the profession (Carnicello-Filho, 2013; Valkonen, 2010; Veijola, 2009a; Adib, 2003). A study on the working life of certified guides in Denmark, Italy and France explains how guides are very proactive in crafting their own job and hence improving their employability, and it concludes:

*The guides are heterogeneous and have different interests in the labour market, but their status between casual labourers and self-employed enhances the entrepreneurial and competitive aspects (Meged, 2017:11).*

Meged (2020) argues that certified guides in Copenhagen are caught between growing liberalisation of the tourist guide trade and increased competition from low or unskilled guides on the standard market. As highly skilled and motivated professionals, they belong to the part of the precariat that may be termed 'knowledge entrepreneurs'; as such, a growing number of certified guides innovate and craft niches and many set up small businesses by registering for VAT (Meged, 2020).

In tourism there is always a constant development of new niches (Novelli, 2015) and one new niche is urban ecotourism. The ethno-botanist, guide and owner Evarist March Sarlat explains how his company Naturewalks undertakes

*ecotours at emblematic yet natural locations in Barcelona like Parque Güell and Montana de Montjuïc, and nocturnal walks. He seeks*

*to draw an image of a territory though the connection of its nature, architecture, cuisine, and the traveller themselves (Sarlat, García and Wood, 2013:189).*

We find a few other companies offering urban ecotours around the world such as Urban Nature Walk in the city of Aarhus in Denmark, Helsinki Urban Nature in Finland and Fresh Kills Park in New York City (Ebbesen & Holm, 2019; Kaae *et al.*, 2019).

According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism is defined as

*responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education. Education is meant to be inclusive of both staff and guests (TIES, 2020).*

Urban ecotourism adheres to the same definition and principles as ecotourism, but it also displays its own characteristics. First,

*urban ecotourism in urban environments takes place in areas that offer some degree of naturalness in settings that have otherwise been heavily modified by previous human activities (Higham & Lück, 2002:45).*

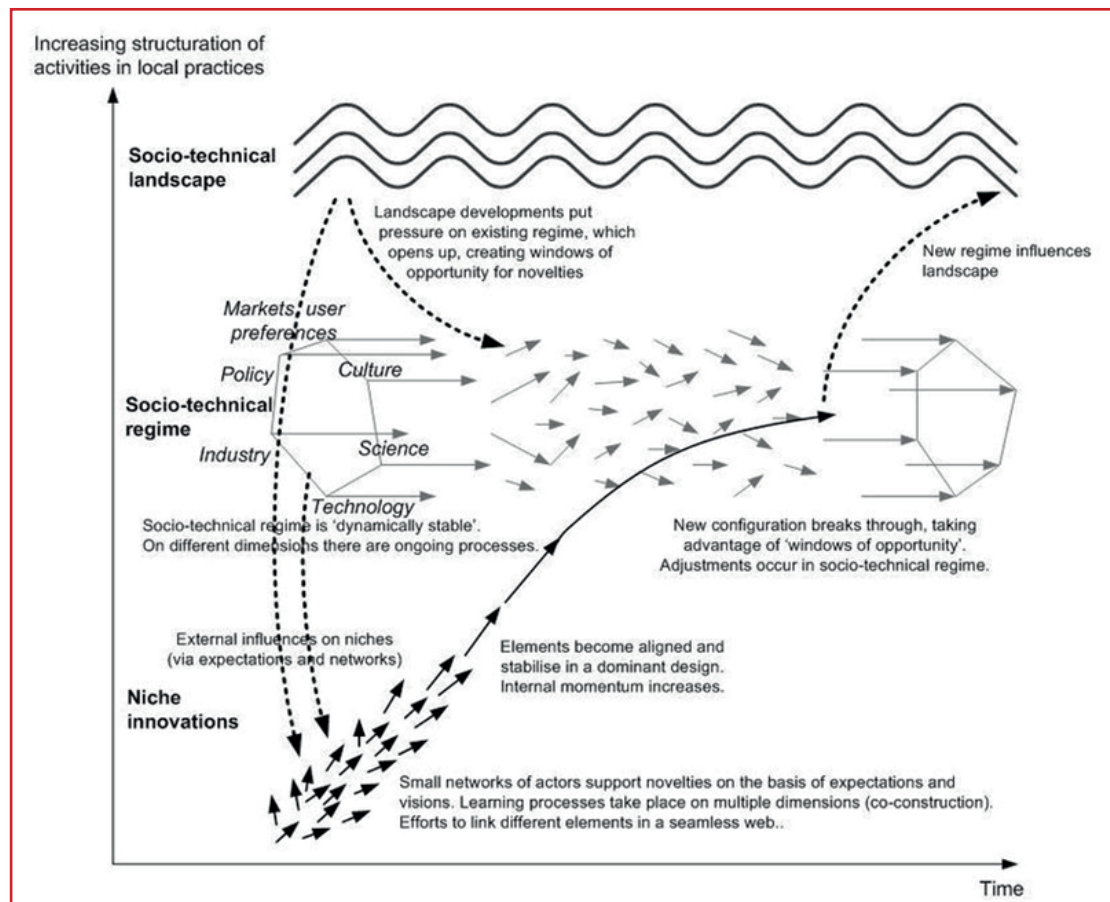
Second,

*tourists participating in urban ecotours may use existing infrastructure including public transport to and from departure point (Higham and Lück, 2002:47).*

This points to the low environmental impact of urban ecotourism, compared to ecotourism in remote areas. Third, urban ecotourism may attract a more 'generalist' visitor type and hence be communicated to a wider audience. Fourth, the scale of urban tourism, both in time and in numbers, may lead to financial viability and enhance the chance of permanent employment and year-round operations (Higham & Lück, 2002:48). Fifth, urban ecotourism is less likely to produce a negative social impact, compared to ecotourism in remote areas, as cities may be more robust and developed.



Figure 1: Transition Theory



According to Geels (2004)

How urban ecotourism should be developed in the INUT project may be explained by transition theory, the knowledge entrepreneur in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the transformation economy, which have been the theoretical underpinnings of the INUT project.

### Transition theory, the knowledge entrepreneur and transformative guiding

According to Geels (2004), transition theory builds on the idea that innovations may start bottom-up with experimenting and visionary niche platforms (Figure 1). Some innovations die, while others may journey to the established socio-technical tourism regimes which consist of the acclaimed norms, practices and policies performed by the industry as a whole at the present time. Above the regime we find the socio technical 'landscape', which is made up of global forces, governmental policies and

changes, technological breakthroughs, which extend beyond the industry but may produce windows of opportunity for novelties to enter the regime.

In a bottom-up process it is possible to build a transition arena of change agents working with niche innovations.

At the centre of this transition arena we placed guide entrepreneurs, who represent a variant of the classic precarious worker. Johannessen (2019) explains that the Fourth Industrial Revolution causes a complete transformation in the nature of income-generating work (Gans, 2016 cited in Johannessen, 2019). The driving forces behind the Fourth Industrial Revolution are robotization, informatization, artificial intelligence and extreme focus on cost-efficiency due to growing globalization and individualization (Savage, 2015; Wilson, 2017 cited in Johannessen, 2019:3). As a consequence, we see a

growing precariat, with ever fewer salaried workers (Standing, 2014). However, the precariat is a diverse group of people in terms of level of education and self-determination, and hence also level of job satisfaction. The most advantageous and satisfied group in the precariat are knowledge entrepreneurs, who both have a high level of education and choose to enter their precarious profession 'because they cannot get or do not wish for permanent employment' (Johannessen, 2019:19). Knowledge entrepreneurs who, at the same time, work on the front line with consumers are particularly suited to working with experience design, which is central to wealth creation in the current economic paradigm (Johannessen, 2019:46). Johannessen foresees that, in future, work will be characterised by extreme specialisation and cascades of innovation, but

*only a few can make a living out of working as a knowledge entrepreneur. Therefore, they alternate between their own business and temporary contract jobs in large companies (Johannessen, 2019:9).*

Innovation is also at the core of the experience economy, which now has been revised (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) and expanded to include a new level of 'transformation'. Experiences do not just stage an interesting experience but also influence / transform participants' perceptions and / or actions. This fits well with the intent behind the INUT guided tours to 'educate the travellers', open their eyes to sustainability, increase their awareness and improve their travel behaviour.

Christie and Mason (2003:1) describe 'transformative tour guiding' as

*a more reflective approach to tourist guide training, which involves values education, the development of cultural sensitivity and the skills of critical self-assessment.*

Good guide training should lead guides to change their knowledge and skills as well as attitudes and behaviour and enable them to offer their clients / tourists deeper, transformative experiences. Walker and Weiler (2017) highlight the key role of guides in stimulating tourists' pro-environmental perceptions and propose a new model for guide training and transformative outcomes linked to ecotourism. The

importance of education is supported by Mondino and Beery (2019) who, in a case study in Monviso Transboundary Biosphere Reserve in Northwest Italy, explain how lack of environmental education from primary schools to university level is a critical barrier to fully exploiting the potentials of ecotourism. Locals may be suspicious of tourism and have limited knowledge of their own role and the area they live in, while the tourism industry may have difficulty merging commercial activities with conservation goals.

### Process and Methodology

The INUT project was founded on action-based research, where the project organised and participated in the generation of a transition arena of change agents in urban ecotourism, while the researchers simultaneously reflected on and analysed the process and results. A small number of registered tour guide entrepreneurs were recruited from the Tourist Guide Diploma Programme (TGDP) at Roskilde University network. In addition, a handful of nature guides and artists working with guided tours were invited. Together they made up a core of 21 guide entrepreneurs who could develop new urban ecotourism tours and experiences in Amager Nature Park / Copenhagen and Skjoldungernes Land National Park / Roskilde city. The guide entrepreneurs had been working as tour guides for between 3 and 30 years. Furthermore, 14 students from the TGDP and 20 nature and culture interpretation (NAKU) students from the Danish Forestry School participated in the theoretical parts of the course, while excursions and tour development were optional parts of their curriculum. The whole group constituted a mix of age, gender and experience. The TGDP in Denmark is part of the adult educational system, and students are aged between 30 and 68 years. They all have one or more degrees, as well as work-life experience upon entry; they are drawn from many different professions such as teaching, interpreting, acting, journalism, etc., and this is their second or third shift in their career. There is always a majority of women on the TGDP, and amongst the guide entrepreneurs, only three were men. The NAKU students counteract gender and age bias by

**Figure 2: The group of actors included in the 10 workshops for product development in INUT**

being in the ordinary educational system and hence recruited from a younger generation, and more evenly distributed by gender.

All guide entrepreneurs participated in 10 one-day workshops during the spring of 2018, alternating between theoretical lectures and experimental experience labs, such as reflective philosophical walks, work in darkness, or walking backwards in nature. Furthermore, case area excursions and stakeholder visits provided key insight to facilitate product development sessions, concluding in a final session where the guide entrepreneurs presented their tour products to industry representatives for evaluation, drawing on the format from the worldwide popular TV show *Dragons' Den*, also named *Lions' Den* in Denmark, Germany and Kenya or *Shark Tank* in the US.

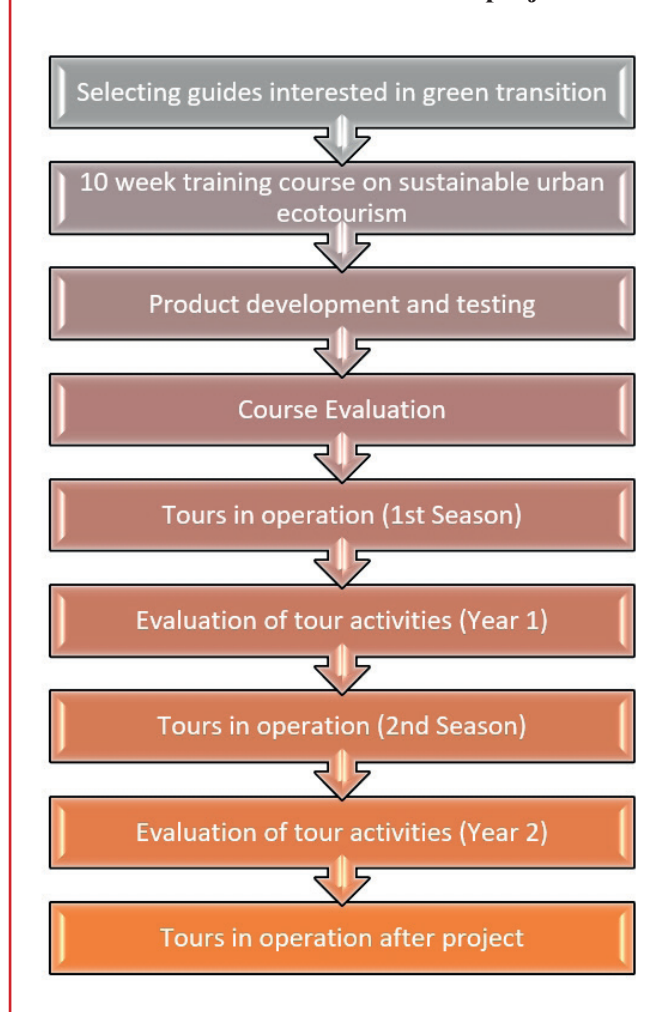
As illustrated in Figure 2, 100 actors were actively involved in the 10 workshops. The most important were guide entrepreneurs, followed by students along with social and lifestyle entrepreneurs within and outside the two parks. Public and private partners such as the DMO's Wonderful Copenhagen (WoCo) and VisitDenmark, the municipality, conventional actors from the tourism industry, museums and other attractions, and special interest groups were all involved sporadically either making presentations or receiving visits from us, and not least, by providing the lions for *Lion's Den*.

The educational process of transforming guides into urban ecotourism guides trained to educate the traveller involved a number of steps (Figure 3).

Three types of evaluations were conducted: course evaluations by each educational institution,



**Figure 3: The process of preparing course participants to become urban ecotourism guides with actual tours in the INUT project**



which were very course-content-specific and not reported here; a survey-based evaluation of guide perceptions of the overall outcome after the first season (Autumn 2018); and a follow-up survey of guides after the second season (Autumn 2019). The two latter surveys were conducted by the University of Copenhagen – a partner not responsible for the tour guide module (Kaae *et al.*, 2018; Kaae, 2019). After the first season, 22 responses were received from the 55 participants, representing an overall 40% response rate. However, 10 responses were received from the trained guide entrepreneurs (48% response rate but representing 10 companies, often with several guides in each one), 10 from tour guide students (71% response rate) who had developed conceptual tour products. Only two NAKU students replied (10% response rate), as these students only

participated in the theoretical coursework, whereas excursions and tour development were optional. After the second season, 16 guides representing 12 companies with active INUT-related products were surveyed and all companies responded. The responses represent the entire core group of guides from the INUT process and the received responses (closed and open-ended questions) are used in a primarily qualitative evaluation of the process of converting the course training into actual tour products ‘educating the traveller’. Activities in 2020 following the project were assessed by contacting the key entrepreneurs; these were heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, but did reveal new alternatives being developed.

### **Results and analysis - A transition arena at work**

The transitions and formation of niche products work at different levels and relate to different parts / steps of the overall process in the project (Figure 3). First is a selection process to identify guides with potential for being front runners in the transformation of tour guiding. Second, the preparation and conduct of a 10-week guide course on sustainable tourism. Third, the guides establishing a range of tour products, and fourth, operation of these tour products within the guide business on a commercial basis. Fifth, the viability of transformation and tour products and the spreading of the concept to other parts of the country and industry. Although described as a linear process, in reality many of these transitions were taking place at the same time.

The first step was to select the front runners for changes in tour guiding. Selecting the right guides willing to undertake the challenge and risk was highly important, as sustainability was not at that time (2017) part of the overall Danish tourism industry paradigm of growth in numbers and economy. The 21 key participants were hand-picked by the educators based on their networks and knowledge of the front runners among the guide entrepreneurs.

The second step was to set up and run a training course for guides based on 10 workshops by the TGDP at Roskilde University with a diverse curriculum of both theory and practice. A theoretical frame (Holm & Kaae, 2018) was used as course material, and different partners such as DMOs, Copenhagen Municipality and special interest groups, including disability organisations, gave lectures, and external guest lecturers were invited including Hansi Gelter from Northern Sweden lecturing on transmodern tourism and sharing his many years of tour guiding experience. Excursions were a key learning tools in linking theory to practice, getting to know the case areas and local entrepreneurs, most of them with a focus on environmental and social sustainability.

The key objective of the course was to educate guides in sustainability and thereby influence their mindset to ‘think sustainably’ and prepare them to transfer this into actual tour products as well as their tour guiding practice. To assess the results of this process, evaluations of guides’ perceptions of the course and tour development were undertaken to understand the outcome and provide feedback for future course adjustments.

The results of the first season survey with guide entrepreneurs and students indicate that the *main motives for participating in the INUT course* (open question in survey) were primarily related to learning about sustainability, gaining insight and more theoretical knowledge, and secondly, to get new inspiration for developing sustainable tours, including learning how to market and sell sustainable tours. A third motive centred on knowledge sharing and experience exchange with peers and across institutions.

*As a small company, it is part of surviving to follow and network with people who may become future cooperation partners. Sustainability thinking is the future and it is important to communicate this and ensure that all tour operators have this in mind as a mission disguised as part of entertainment (INUT-course participant).*

Preparing guides to educate travellers requires a *transfer of knowledge* on sustainability to increase

their understanding and allow this to be integrated into their guide products and tours. To assess the knowledge transfer, course participants were asked to self-assess their knowledge of sustainable tourism before and after the course on a scale from 0 to 10 (no knowledge – very high knowledge). The average knowledge level before the course was 5 and increased to 8.2 after the course. Participants with an existing high knowledge level advanced up to 2 points, while participants with limited pre-existing knowledge of sustainability advanced up to 8 points. Although self-assessment is a subjective measure, it illustrates a perceived progress in knowledge of sustainability acquired from the course by its participants.

The knowledge transfer involved many aspects. The *types of knowledge* acquired through the course were related to nature and environmental sustainability (73%), cooperation and networking (55%), social and cultural sustainability (50%), tour development (50%), economic sustainability (41%), target groups / tourists (32%), marketing of tours (18%) and additional knowledge of tour guiding (14%). ‘Other’ (14%) types of knowledge included learning practices from the actual tours during the course, and the complicated dynamics between guides and small local actors. Of specific importance was the guest lecture on transmodern tourism that greatly challenged the conventional thinking of tour guiding.

When asked to state the *three most important things learned* from the course, participants provided a wide range of responses, illustrating the diversity of the participants and their perceptions. Key learning centred on gaining further insight into concepts and the many perceptions of sustainability. Another key aspect was the change in guiding from the traditional to a transformative guide role of ‘educating the traveller’. One respondent pointed to ‘the need for developing new types of tours for urban tourists’, while another had gained ‘inspiration to expand beyond the boundaries for guided tours through the sustainability theme and finding new ways of accessing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.’ A third had learned that ‘the role as guide / interpreter may be normative’, in contrast to a more neutral

style in traditional guiding. A fourth highlighted ‘the key role of the interpretation / story in creating the experience for the guest and consequently influencing the guest’s actual experience and learning.’

The course also ‘increased the awareness of hidden potentials beyond the popular sights, and the need for distributing the tourists to new areas’. The excursions contributed by encouraging expansion into new territory by getting to know the case areas well and widening horizons by reconsidering re-wilded areas as interesting tour sites and by seeing the potential of including social projects in tour concepts.

Furthermore, the course also resulted in some rethinking of the role as ‘knowledge entrepreneur’ and a change from just being a practical supplier of a service to becoming a development partner in the tour guide business – from a feeling of ‘being at the end of the ‘food chain’ delivering offers developed by others at higher levels’ to emerging as a new guide entrepreneur and having gained insight and key contacts to support this change. ‘Some think and act in innovative ways and it is worth following their development and ideas.’

For future adjustments to the course, participants suggested a deeper discussion on sustainability, more networking and exchange, and a higher focus on how to get tour products into the market (reflecting the challenge of marketing new products from niche formation). As one participant said:

*More knowledge on sale and marketing of sustainable tour products. Increased involvement of the Incoming Sector would be very useful to ensure development of sellable tour products.*

A third step in the process was tour development. The INUT course was intended to stimulate development of new urban ecotour concepts and products. Participants had to adapt sustainability into their tour development, planning, and marketing of new urban ecotourism tour products. In the first season (2018), 7 participants developed new ecotours offered to the market, 7 developed conceptual tour concepts, while

6 participants integrated sustainability into existing tours. In the second season (2019), 10 tours developed in the INUT course operated commercially.

When asked about their *key learning* from the course that facilitated their tour development, responses centred around the integration of sustainability into their urban tour products and establishing new innovative tours. The course, the excursions, the increased knowledge of the case areas, and new contacts also provided key learning. To some, the integration of sensory aspects and normative guiding were seen as ways to create tours that would both entertain and educate the traveller. Others reflected on the tours, creating a framework of communal sharing and memory for tour participants where individual tour elements fit into an overall memorable tour-guiding experience. One expressed

*the thought of being sustainable in details – people notice this. To show them contrasts so it becomes visually clear what sustainability is and then the explanations do not have to be so extensive and ‘educational’.*

Learning from other parts of the INUT project included assessing the use of narratives in tour development. In the first project year, Norrøn Architects analysed and developed narratives characterising the two case parks. The narrative for Skjoldungernes Land National Park was ‘A Legend Alive’, representing the legend of the two Beowulf Viking brothers ruling the land and the sea. For Amager Nature Park, the narrative ‘The Man-made Land’ points to the diking and conversion of sea to land and stresses the perspectives of human influence on nature in the past, present and future related to climate change and rising sea levels.

Most of the respondents integrated the narratives either directly or indirectly into their tour products. Several mentioned how the narratives were a conceptual frame and mindset that gave direction and a starting point for their tour development. As one of them stated:

*[The narratives] gave me a higher awareness of the imaginary as part of tour development – what story I want to tell about this place.*

*It sharpened my tour development and what to include / exclude in the final tour product.*

Also, connecting the urban with the surrounding nature represented a new approach for several guides, as did the novelty of including ‘The Man-made Land’ and its’ drainage channels in tours.

The INUT project planned to initially develop tours within the two case areas and later to expand to other areas. In 2018, 11 tour or experience products were developed, primarily in the two parks and adjacent cities Amager Nature Park / Copenhagen and Skjoldungernes Land National Park / Roskilde, but they also included one tour in Greater Copenhagen and one on the island of Funen. Other tours were subsequently developed as spin-offs in North Zealand, South Zealand and the Wadden Sea in Southern Jutland. Three of the 11 tours ran commercially in 2018, and an additional four in 2019.

The choice of areas was mainly related to good pre-existing knowledge of the area, closeness to the city, accessibility, including easy public transport, and the opportunity to integrate specific elements into the tour and combine them with other tour activities. Also, closeness to the market (interested tourists) influenced the area choice, while a few wanted to support areas in need of economic development currently receiving few tourists.

The evaluations also identified some barriers and difficulties in developing new types of tours. The participants pointed out difficulties in marketing, pricing of the tours, innovation perspectives, finding the right local actors, cooperation across different levels of experience, and the transition from practical delivery person to becoming a development agent. One participant discussed the barriers:

*The economic aspect – evaluating what the guest is willing to pay. I could see that all my fine ideas were both sustainable and in line with the INUT thinking but – after talking to the experienced tour guides – I could see they were not viable business ideas.*

Also, the changing of traditional thinking was a barrier:

*Cooperation between the different actors. Many with long-time experience are set in their own ways. I felt overwhelmed. I did not feel the others were open to listening.*

This points to the fact that not all participants felt embraced or listened to by others. The competition is hard and guides are at the same time colleagues and competitors (Meged, 2016); however, they recognise networking as crucial to their survival.

The fourth step was the actual tours. Since the 10 workshops ended in May 2018, the transition arena has produced considerable spin-offs with 11 new urban ecotours that were to be tested on a commercial basis. By 2018, three of the tour products had already become commercial tours taken by tourists and in 2019 this increased to seven of the tours. In addition, as a spin-off from the INUT project, sustainability, entrepreneurship and innovation have been integrated into guide training. On the one hand, a compulsory module was rescheduled with a new title, ‘Tour design and sustainable tourism’, while two new optional modules were launched with the titles ‘Innovative tour and experience design’ and ‘Entrepreneurship within tour and experience design’. The latter two are simultaneously offered to actors outside the TGDP as continuing education, and yielded another 10 new tour products / concepts in 2019 and 18 in 2020. This indicates an effect of the INUT project beyond the project itself. However, the intention is that all modules should incorporate sustainability when it makes sense to do so.

Not all ideas and products were matured and reached the market, particularly the ones from the less experienced students, while the active entrepreneurs already in the market are more successful – such as the Copenhagen This Way company (Copenhagen This Way, 2020), which launched the tour ‘Green is the New Black and sometimes Blue’. They advertise:

*Jump on the metro and join us on a tour with emphasis on green urban planning, cutting edge architecture and sustainability’ (Copenhagen This Way, 2020).*



The tour runs along the edge of the futuristic neighbourhood Ørestad that borders Amager Nature Park, and one stop is inside the park. They have sold more than 10 tours in 2018 and 2019, most of them with 10 to 20 participants, but on one tour they had a corporate client with 200 participants. Another example is 'Hike through Danish Unesco World Heritage' by Slow Tours Copenhagen, which is

*a private guided hike in the footsteps of the kings through Jægersborg Deer Park close to Copenhagen, Denmark (Slow Tours Copenhagen, 2020).*

The tour was launched on the company website and on Airbnb Experience, which yielded 15 commercial tours in English during the summer in 2018.

Even for experienced guides, marketing and visibility to the larger incoming bureaus were challenging, including in the second season, and most of them procured clients directly through their own marketing channels. Several guide entrepreneurs who participated in the INUT project have since strengthened their profile on sustainability and expanded their product portfolio. Another example is the owner of Tisvilde Walking Tours, in North Zealand, who has developed no less than nine new tour products drawing on the principles of urban ecotourism (Tisvilde Walking Tours, 2020). Thus the concepts expand to other areas in Denmark.

All in all, the niche formation initiated in the INUT project is slowly becoming more diverse and starting to influence mainstream tour guiding and tourism industry practices from the bottom up.

Finally, when looking at the current status and adaptability, there was continued interest and growth in the development of new urban ecotourism products in the 2020 season, both by tour guide students and guide entrepreneurs, indicating that guides convert the learning and transformation from the course into their tour products to educate travellers on sustainability. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has naturally caused a number of restrictions, and the guides had most of their tours cancelled in 2020, but Covid-19 has also led to innovation and new ways

of conducting guided tours which will be addressed in the discussion below.

The INUT project has influenced 'traditional' tour guide education at Roskilde University, as the TGDP has developed two continuing education modules in innovation and entrepreneurship in tour and experience design with a focus on sustainability, geared towards both active tourism entrepreneurs and TGDP students. The principles of urban ecotourism have been integrated into the new TGDP curriculum from 2019, adhering to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the INUT project continues to give lectures at the Forest School and sustainability has been integrated into the curriculum of the nature and culture interpretation programme as well.

Finally, the network of Tour and Experience Designers has migrated into other public / private projects such as INVIO (Innovation network for the experience economy) (INVIO, 2020), where they grow and continue working following the INUT format, with a mix of networking, excursions, lectures and product development sessions, based on the values of sustainability. INVIO currently has some 70 members (INVIO, 2020), many of them guide entrepreneurs with a Diploma degree from the TGDP, but a host of other entrepreneurs are joining such as young ethnic Danes producing digital tours in neighbourhoods away from the tourist centres, nature tour guides from Southern Denmark, and entrepreneurs working with alternative pop-up beds in national parks, to name a few.

### **Discussion - A project in a time of big changes**

While the principles of ecotourism and sustainability are well integrated in nature guiding in Denmark, guiding in the city and peri-urban areas has so far lagged behind in these parameters. A project like INUT assists in bridging the two by developing urban ecotourism, where tours not only take place in urban nature but also inside the cities, applying the principles of ecotourism through practice and mediation.



The INUT course was an exciting but also challenging process for the course participants. The careful selection of potential guide entrepreneurs to join the INUT training helped to identify the most motivated guides and many of them succeeded in getting actual tour products into the market on a commercial basis. Their existing knowledge of tour guiding, networks, marketing and customers was already in place and allowed them to integrate sustainability into their tour content (e.g., the 17 Sustainable Development Goals) and operations (e.g., change in transport to zero / low emissions). For many of the less experienced students, their conceptual development never turned into actual tours as they lacked experience of tour guiding practices. However, sustainability is now being integrated into standard guide education, which is why new guides will already have this focus in the future and thus bring the ethos of urban ecotourism into the wider tourism regime. This aligns with Mondini and Beery (2009), who argue that environmental education is crucial to bridge the commercial potential of ecotourism and conservation, and with Christie and Mason (2003) and Walker and Weiler (2017), who highlight how guides are the most important actors to bring this about.

The INUT outcome enters the tourism regime from the bottom up through education and new sustainable practices by supporting certified guides as knowledge entrepreneurs in their new role as urban ecotourism guides. This has created an arena of change agents working from the bottom up, but simultaneously there have been disruptions in the socio-technical landscape which create windows of opportunities for innovations emerging from the INUT project to enter the main tourism regime, thus confirming the working of a positive outcome according to transition theory (Geels, 2004). While this may appear to be a golden opportunity for guides, it is important to notice that it takes place in a very competitive market that is being deregulated and is undergoing rapid changes. While the standard market for guided tours is being captured by less-educated, lower-paid guides, certified guides are forced to specialise and create niches for themselves in order to maintain a decent income (Meged, 2020). However, to be

a knowledge entrepreneur in a time with cascades of innovations (Johannessen, 2019) may not be for all certified guides, as success depends on people's willingness to take risks and, as entrepreneurs, their ability to see opportunities for profit where others see problems and limitations. This places growing demands on certified guides, whose work has never been more precarious, especially during the current Covid-19 crisis.

Covid-19 is a disruption to the socio-technical landscape. The World Tourism Organization predicts that in 2020, international arrivals will have dropped by 70%, which is by far the largest drop ever registered, and only on an optimistic note that things really should start to get better from the middle of 2021; they predict it will take 2½–4 years to get back to the 2019 levels (UNWTO and ITF, 2020). One may argue that Covid-19 is environmentally beneficial, as it has lowered CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from tourism activities, but it also leaves people out of jobs and deprives countries of vital income, which is less socially sustainable.

However, Covid-19 restrictions may also spur the development of urban ecotourism. The Danish Nature Agency (Naturstyrelsen, 2020) has registered an increase in the use of urban nature in Copenhagen by 70%-160% from March 15 to May 1, and it is an eye-opener particularly for the younger generation aged 18–35. Italian scholar Burini (2020) predicts that urban nature is going to frame still more tourism activities, and in fact already now guide entrepreneurs in Copenhagen have been quick to innovate, finding new public spaces, new themes, conducting tours with fewer guests or simply making virtual tours in order to stay alive and sharpen their competitive edge, until the day international tourists return. Positive connections may be forged between the Covid-19 restrictions and the development of urban ecotourism, but it is not automatic; Covid-19 may counteract sustainability if the industry reclaims lost profit in a fast and unsustainable way. However, if we look at pre-Covid-19 trends, the forecast for urban ecotourism may look rather optimistic.

Urban ecotourism requires the right conditions

and good examples to showcase for tourists. Many initiatives in Danish society, together with national goals of a 70% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050, have contributed to positioning the country at the forefront of sustainability. Denmark is number one among 180 countries in the 2020 Environmental Performance Index (Yale University, 2020) and Copenhagen ranks second in 2018 and 2019 in the Global Destination Sustainability Index (GDS Movement, 2018, 2019). Most sustainability initiatives have until recently been outside the tourism industry, but in 2019 the national tourism authorities made a paradigm shift towards sustainability goals and are at present establishing action plans to support this. In 2019 the national tourism organisation VisitDenmark (2019) also examined our five main markets and identified a potential customer type which they labelled the 'green idealist' who takes a keen interest in sustainable destinations and sustainable tourism practices. They found that these constitute 20% of British tourists, 21% of Norwegian, 22% of Dutch, 36% of Swedish and 38% of German tourists. The 'green idealists' see Denmark as a desirable destination, and they constitute the base for urban ecotourism from a demand perspective.

The timing has been right for INUT. The niche of urban ecotourism as a novelty at the forefront of green transformations appears to have a promising future, when sustainability becomes implemented into the tourism regime. Urban ecotourism increases awareness and educates travellers; guide entrepreneurs may play a pivotal role as catalysts in this overall transformation towards general sustainable practices in tourism.

### **Conclusion**

The INUT project has established a transitions arena of urban ecotourism by using tour guide training to transform a selected group of guide entrepreneurs into urban ecotourism guides and by integrating sustainability, innovation and entrepreneurship into the overall tour guide training curriculum.

For most of the guides, the workshop initiatives on innovation and urban ecotourism were received positively and have affected their tour guiding practices both through the creation of new niche products and by integrating sustainability into existing tour products. The INUT project has also stimulated transformation towards a more independent type of guide entrepreneur suited to leading product development in urban ecotourism. This is led by a small and selected group of urban ecotourism guides who have been able to 'get a foot in the door' and establish a range of niche products on a commercial basis in the tourism market. The INUT urban ecotourism guides and educational changes towards sustainability are likely to influence the current tourism regime from below in the field of tour guiding and add to transformations at a time when major shifts towards more sustainable tourism practices are taking place in Denmark. Quite suddenly, the INUT project coincided with major top-down changes towards sustainability in tourism and the combined effects are likely to influence the current tourism regime.

The timing is good and a tourist market of 'green idealists' has been identified, but Covid-19 creates a temporary disruption. However, guide entrepreneurs responded to the current situation by launching innovative and sustainable tours into the market during Covid-19, and together with the tourism industry they may lead product development post-Covid-19, in their capacity as knowledge entrepreneurs undertaking their new role as urban ecotourism guides.

The novelty of sustainability may decline over time as it becomes an embedded part of tourism practices in Denmark and elsewhere, which was exactly the aim of INUT. INUT initiatives can be seen as handprints that may inspire the reduction of footprints in tourism using tour guiding and guided tours as a tool.

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