

CHAPTER 3

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS FOR ECOTOUR GUIDES' INTERPRETIVE EFFECTIVENESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The implementation of effective interpretation in nature-based tourism is not without its problems and it is for this reason that appropriate monitoring and evaluation measures should be taken by the management of protected areas in order to ensure quality (Wearing & Neil, 1999:69). This chapter aims to give a broad overview of some of the quality assurance mechanisms that are used to minimise the challenges in tour guiding, and specifically in interpretive guiding in the context of national parks in South Africa, and to discuss management support to ensure quality in interpretive guiding.

Quality assurance mechanisms such as professional associations, codes of conduct, certification, licensing and training are explained. This chapter gives more details of training, particularly, of continuing education and training as one of the quality assurance mechanisms. A discussion of continuing education and training in ecotour guiding is preceded by a brief history of continuing education and training, in order to highlight the underlying basic reasons for the emergence of continuing education and training throughout the world. Then follows a brief explanation of the quality assurance mechanisms that are employed in tour guiding, with special attention to those used in tour guiding in South Africa, the aim being to give guidance on what can be done to ensure quality in interpretive guiding in national parks. This chapter ends by explaining the role of evaluation in ecotour guiding, with the intention of revealing what can be done to assess quality in interpretive guiding in national parks.

To begin with, a brief explanation will be given of constraints that are encountered in interpretive guiding in nature-based tourism.

3.2 DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROVISION OF EFFECTIVE INTERPRETATION IN NATURE-BASED TOURISM

Constraints in the delivery of quality interpretation by tour guides in nature-based tourism have been highlighted in the literature. It is necessary here to begin by stating that the difficulties explained in this section are not the only difficulties that tour guides face in being effective in interpretation. However, it is the common difficulties that are overviewed in this section, with suggestions on how they may be overcome. Highlighting these constraints reveals the need for more managerial support for guides, where interpretive guided activities are provided (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2008:293).

One of the constraints is the lack of planning of interpretation. Planning is one of the key considerations of interpretation. This helps a tour guide to be well organised and confident in his/her approach and content. McArthur & Hall (1996:92) are of the view that while the art of delivering interpretation has been around long enough for some very clever techniques to have developed, there has been considerable resistance to more formal planning of interpretation by tour guides. Furthermore, time and resource constraints have forced more interpretive planning to be somewhat ad hoc. The findings of the study that was conducted by Manohar, *et al.* (2005:12) at Malaysian Recreation Forests, indicate that one of the problems that staff complained about is being burdened by routine maintenance chores that occupied most of their time, and thus reduced their time for interpretive contacts with the visitors. They seemed to have a good understanding of what was needed for good interpretation, but surprisingly, that their superiors might not share their views on the benefits of interpretation.

It is crucial to understand the professional environmental interpretation and education capabilities that are needed for each different level of park interpreters (Chou, Tsai & Wang (2002). Therefore the relevant park manager or protected area manager should remain centrally involved in guide training (Wallace, 1993:75). However, in certain instances, a lack of training or inadequate training in guiding, and particularly in continuing education and training has been identified as a constraint in the provision of quality interpretation. The literature indicates that there is little incentive for practising guides to actively upgrade their interpretive skills or qualifications or to try to improve the quality of their tours (Weiler & Ham, 2001:559). Despite the evidence that interpretation is key to delivering a quality guided ecotourism experience, neither tour operators nor tour guides are likely to initiate dramatic changes in the amount of time or financial resources they allocate to improving the interpretive competence of their guides. In some instances, tour guides argue that theory or academic work has little value for them (Pond, 1993), a perception which may discourage them from up-grading their interpretive qualifications.

In some cases, there is inappropriate and insufficient infrastructure for training and continuous learning for tourist guides. This is evident from the research conducted by Chowdhary and Prakash (2008:293) to examine challenges facing tourist guides in India. Specifically, tourist guides mentioned the following:

- There are insufficient numbers and varieties of training courses / seminars / conferences for the guides who want to learn more as tourist guides;
- The duration of the training programmes are too long;
- Content is often not relevant and does not add value from the point of view of tourists guides;
- There are few options in terms of location and timing of the courses;
- There is no provision for internship/on-the-job training for trainees without previous work experience;
- There is no identified system/content provider that offers authentic information on destinations and monuments;
- There are inadequate facilities for learning foreign languages; and

- There is a paucity of resource centres (such as libraries) offering information on travel, tourism, hospitality and related industries.

Some of the difficulties and factors that contribute to ineffective interpretation and the solutions are explained by Kuo (2002:99) in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Factors that need to be considered for a successful interpretation programme and the techniques proposed to tackle the difficulties

Factors that need to be considered for a successful visitor interpretation	Difficulties	Techniques to tackle the difficulties
Visitors are non-captive.	Visitors are not forced to pay attention to interpretation; they are not prepared to be 'taught'; they expect leisure and fun experience.	Entertaining and thematically organised interpretation, with information that relates to their life and concerns, to capture and retain visitors' attention.
The features and the locations of resources.	The shyness, mobility, nocturnal and hibernating activities, etc. of wildlife; geographical location might be remote and difficult to reach; and historical buildings may already suffer from high tourism pressure, etc.	Visitor safety and comfort concerns should be addressed in interpretation. Appropriate visitor activity should be communicated to visitors in order to sustain long-term tourism development.
Sufficient and accurate knowledge of resources and the possible human impacts upon them.	A lack of knowledge will result in unsatisfactory interpretation contents.	Detailed research into resources at the site, and evaluate human impacts cautiously.
Well-trained staff to manage visitor activity and deliver interpretation.	High percentage of seasonal employees and high cost of human resource training.	Applying various media to deliver interpretation information in order to prolong the opening time while personal interpretation is not available.
Be aware not to over interpret.	Interpretation may be perceived as instructive or preaching to the converted; and interpretation signs to be a visual intrusion, which leads to a diminution of visitor enjoyment.	Carefully select interpretation contents to reveal the value of the resources and encourage visitors to adopt more responsible behaviour to contribute to resource conservation.

Source: Kuo (2002:99).

Table 3.1 underscores the importance of the following for successful interpretation in nature-based tourism.

- The importance of knowing and applying interpretive delivery technique in a proper manner, bearing in mind that tourists are “noncaptive”.
- The importance of appropriate communication for tourists’ safety;
- The importance of knowledge about the park (conservation/cultural aspects); and
- The importance of employing well-trained tour guides.

In order to achieve what is stressed in Table 3.1, it is apparent that the role of management in enhancing effective interpretation is crucial, as explained in the following section (3.3).

3.3 THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT IN ENHANCING EFFECTIVE INTERPRETATION

Management in any organisation is key to the fulfilment of its objectives. Management in this section refers to park management, i.e. park managers and tourism managers.

National park managers/managements have traditionally provided information and interpretive services for park visitors, ranging from basic signage and brochures to sophisticated displays and guided activities (Hockings, 1994:17).

According to Buckley (2004:7), until recently commercial tour operators were not significant stakeholders in protected area management, and in most of the world this is still the case. This is contrary to the claim that nature-based tour operators are important mouthpieces for protected area agencies through the messages they deliver to their clients (Armstrong & Weiler, 2002:104).

If promotion of a conservation ethic through interpretation is an appropriate and necessary role for commercial ecotour operators and their guides, it is imperative that such operators should be required to provide quality interpretation (Markwell & Weiler, 1998:106). Operators and protected area managers must ensure furthermore that the

tour itinerary and operating conditions are conducive to excellent interpretation (Weiler & Ham, 2001:558). This calls for cooperation and understanding between these two groups (park managers and tour operators) for the benefit of tourists and the sustainability of the tourist destinations concerned. Tour operators licensed to operate in protected areas are a potential vehicle for delivering messages to visitors about minimal-impact behaviour, heritage values, conservation and protected area management (Armstrong & Weiler, 2002:194).

Sharing a similar sentiment, Choegyal, in Wearing and Neil (1999:55), asserts that ecotour operators in wilderness and other protected areas must assume responsibility for minimising the impact of their operations on the destination region. Furthermore, according to Budeanu (2005), tour operators can use their influence to trigger positive changes in attitudes and practices regarding sustainable tourism.

According to Ham and Weiler (2002:35), for the most part tourism operators see interpretation as a means of adding value to wildlife tourism, while managers of protected areas appreciate its value in both managing on-site visitor behaviour and contributing to long-term wildlife conservation.

However, Weiler *et al.*, in Weiler and Ham (2001:551), state that many operators have little idea what interpretation is. Weiler and Ham (2001:551) assert that many operators have no idea whether their clients' understanding and appreciation of nature and culture are enhanced as a result of their guided tour experience. Since most tour operators in Australia and elsewhere have only a rudimentary understanding of interpretation, it is unlikely that they will recruit guides for their expertise as interpreters, or increase their pay if they upgrade their interpretive skills or qualifications (Weiler & Ham, 2001:559). In Taiwan, according to Chou, Tsai and Wang (2002:599), many negative effects that occur due to the operators' and consumers' ignorance of the fragility of nature and/or misconception of the real essence of ecotourism.

3.4 ENHANCING TOUR GUIDES' INTERPRETIVE EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

3.4.1 Broad overview of the quality assurance mechanisms

An indication has been given in the previous chapters of challenges that are encountered in the employment of interpretation for visitors to protected areas (Staiff *et al.*, 2002:98). It is evident that some ecotour guides may not be performing all the interpretive roles as expected. To assist in improving guides' performance, and to raise guiding standards, a number of quality assurance mechanisms can be used (Black, 2007:316). Appropriate management of quality in tour guiding is very important for tour guides to be able to provide a quality tourist experience. Certainly, for any market that makes extensive use of tour guides, sustainable quality assurance in tour guiding is arguably a high priority focus (Huang & Weiler, 2010:847).

Several management mechanisms have been developed to guide, regulate, monitor or even control tour guides and their guiding performance, but there are great variations across the world in the strategies employed as the standards and qualifications required (Hu, 2007:45). However, little research has been directed to the mechanisms used to regulate and control the quality of tour guiding and their implication for sustainable tourism (Huang & Weiler, 2010:847).

In the literature, some of the mechanisms that can be used to improve guiding standards include support from professional associations, codes of conduct, awards for excellence, formal training programmes, licensing and professional associations (Black, 2007:321), evaluation (Black, 2007:321; Munro *et al.*, 2008:2; Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:223), and on-the-site inspections (Ap & Wong, 2001:559). Some countries such as Australia and China use them already (Huang & Weiler, 2010:846; Maunder & McIntyre, 2006:34). The possible outcomes of implementing some or all of these mechanisms are improved individual guide performance, improved industry-wide performance, and an

enhanced visitor experience (Black & Weiler, 2005:27). While tour guiding and interpretation can prove to be significant in the tourism sector and promote sustainable tourism, little research has been directed to the mechanisms used to regulate and control the quality of tour guiding (Huang & Weiler, 2010:847).

3.4.1.1 Professional associations and codes of conduct

Professional associations and codes of conduct were the earliest forms of quality control (Weiler & Ham, 2001:559) used to enhance quality for nature-based guides (Maunder & McIntyre, 2006:34). Professional associations have the greatest potential to facilitate guides' fulfilling their various roles by providing professional support as well as a number of benefits that can assist in improving guiding standards. One unfortunate aspect of professional associations is that their influence is generally limited to their members, and is largely non-enforceable, often depending on the enthusiasm and interest of their members (Black & Weiler, 2005:29; Hu, 2007:45).

However professional associations are often instrumental in introducing or supporting other mechanisms such as codes of conduct, awards of excellence, training, and certification programmes. Through these mechanisms, either individually or in combination, a professional association may contribute to improving professional standards and performance (Black & Weiler, 2005:28).

Codes of conduct are a set of expectations, behaviours or rules written by industry members, government or non-government organisations (Jurdana, 2009:272). They can also play a part in ensuring quality and professionalism in tour guiding; consequently numerous behavioural guidelines have been developed for nature-based tourism (Weiler & Ham, 2001:559) in many countries, including South Africa. Hu (2007:45), however, argues that codes of conduct can be used as a tool for awareness-raising rather than quality control.

3.4.1.2 Professional certification and licensing and individual awards for excellence

Certification in the tourism industry is a fairly recent phenomenon, originating in the development of certification schemes that measured tourism quality standards. (Black & Weiler, 2005:31). Countries like Australia and the United States of America use professional certification and licensing as a tool to enhance quality assurance for nature-based tour guides (Maunder & McIntyre, 2006:34).

The terms certification and accreditation are frequently used interchangeably and are applied differently in different parts of the world. They are used as a means of assisting tourism industry members to act responsibly. They involve an agency or an organization evaluating and recognising a programme of study or recognising an institution as meeting certain predetermined standards or qualifications. Certification requires the testing of each individual to determine his/her mastery of a specific body of knowledge (Mahony, 2007:394), but the requirements of a professional certification programmes vary, depending on a number of factors including the aims of the programme concerned, forms of assessment and levels of certification. Most tour guide certification programmes are based on generic core competencies that are in turn based on analysis of the roles that guides are meant to perform (Black & Weiler, 2005:31).

With licensing, a certificate or document gives the holder official permission to undertake an activity (Jurdana, 2009). This is one of the mechanisms that may improve guides' performance. Many countries around the world require a person to be licensed in order license to practise as a guide. The advantages of licensing are that it enforces, through law or regulation, a minimum standard that must be met by all tour guides, and it provides an element of consumer protection. The skills, knowledge and understanding that a guide must have before she/he obtains a license vary from country to country (Black & Weiler, 2005:32).

Individual awards of excellence target the individual and focus on recognising and rewarding excellence in guiding. They are recognised by the United Nations as a way of implementing environmental codes of conduct in the tourism industry (Black & Weiler, 2005:29).

3.4.1.3 Training

Training may be an effective mechanism for enhancing a wide range of guides' roles and achieving at least minimum standards of performance, to ensure professionalism and competence (Hu, 2007:45).

To begin with, it is important to indicate that the type of training that this section deals with is "continuing education and training". It is for this reason that a brief explanation of continuing education and training is given below.

In the past, the standard training format was "front-end loaded", meaning that people were trained at the beginning of their working lives for a particular job and rarely received any further training. That trend has changed in the modern world and training has moved from "front-end" models towards the notion of "continuous development", which perceives training as a process that takes place throughout life (Carter, 1989:225). The notion of continuous development is also becoming popular because learning acquired during early full-time education has increasingly been accepted as inadequate to serve vocational needs, and is also considered to require periodic updates (Reid & Barrington, 1997:15). Apart from training people that are new to the industry, a continual process of training the experienced people is needed (Lan, 2000:32).

Adult and continuing education has arisen in response to particular needs of employees worldwide, including tourism employees. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2002) defines the concept of continuing education and training as including all kinds of general and job-related education and training that are

organised, financed or sponsored by authorities, provided by employers or self-financed. This definition by the OECD encompasses training and education, vocational and non-vocational, study for qualifications and for its own sake, outside expressly educational institutions as well as within (Tight, 1996: 20). However, a leading motivation for continuing education is to keep up to date with developments in knowledge and skills (Cervero, 1989:519).

Training is a vital investment in staff in any protected area organisation. It should be strategically planned in order to provide a meaningful learning experience for new or current employees. Training and development should be focused on developing the individual employee's fundamental competencies, so that he or she can perform current and future jobs to the highest standard. The outcome of training should be the development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of protected area personnel (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002:149). Training must be implemented continuously to maintain the same level of trainees' motivation on the job. Training activities provide opportunities for trainees to improve their performance on current and future jobs (Lan, 2000:31). This view on continuous training is shared by Eagles, McCool and Haynes (2002:149) who assert that training is not only necessary at the beginning of an employment contract, but must accompany the job throughout. They further assert that developing employees' skills not only helps to improve performance but also increases the likelihood that jobs remain interesting and challenging.

In this study continuing education and training are considered to involve the upgrading of the skills and knowledge of interpretation, as well as the attitudes to interpretation, of those who are already working as tour guides in national parks.

Some guides receive formal training before they are hired to be tour guides, but some receive on-the-job training. Whatever the case may be, the role of continuing education should be considered essential in the further development of knowledge and skills for tour guides. It is an excellent means of increasing interpreter effectiveness, particularly for inexperienced or untrained personnel (Roggenbuck, Williams & Robinski, 1992:43,

in citing Hodgson). However, training content and methods should be informed by literature on what constitutes good or best practice in ecotour guiding, as well as adult training literature (Ham & Weiler, 2000:4).

Training of guides helps to raise standards and improve the quality of the tourism product and thus the competitive advantage of regions and destinations (Black, Ham & Weiler, 2001:151). Training enables tour guides to do their job competently; they often need extensive training to provide them with the necessary skills (Weiler & Ham, 2000).

Ecotour training in particular, enables guides to apply the appropriate techniques to the various settings they may work in, so as to ensure the satisfaction of the tourists with the respective eco-experience. These techniques should aim at maximising learning about nature as well as helping to motivate ecotourists towards environmentally friendly behaviour (Haig & McIntyre, 2002:45; Goh, 2008:10; Skanavis & Giannoulis, 2010:59). Good guide training and good interpretive materials can have the effect of greatly expanding the number of what are considered desirable visitor sites, and thereby lessen the pressure on overused sites (Wallace, 1993:75). Most importantly, training is essential in developing countries because local people can become excellent nature guides, and can thus competently fulfil the demanding roles of tour guides as interpreters through training (Kimmel, 1999; Black, Ham & Weiler, 2001:147; Goh, 2008:10). Training of local people to be interpretive guides is important because it helps to achieve not only ecological sustainability but also economic sustainability (Skanavis & Giannoulis, 2010:51). There is a perception that most of the local guides have lived in their regions for a long time and may therefore have extensive practical knowledge of the local natural environment and local traditions (Goh, 2008:10). The gaps between what local guides know and can do, and what they need to know and do, define their training needs. A significant gap that outside trainers can fill is to deliver interpretive guiding knowledge and skills (Weiler & Ham, 2002:54).

Training has the capacity to increase a guide's awareness of environmental and socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism. This awareness may enable the guide to assist in the

management of protected areas by promoting minimal-impact behaviour and helping to enforce park regulations. Once trained, guides may encourage conservation action among both tourists and the local community (Black, Ham & Weiler, 2001:150). Furthermore, Black, Ham and Weiler.(2001) assert that tour guides specially trained in heritage tourism can help both visitors and local residents in conservation, preservation, and proper interpretation of the sites, ensuring that such interpretative activities promote respect for and appreciation of the sites' authenticity and historical significance.

In the study conducted by Roggenbuck, Williams and Robinski (1992:41) to assess the effectiveness of a National Park Service training workshop designed to increase commercial river guides' knowledge of the natural and cultural history of the New River Gorge National River, and to increase the quality of the interpretation the guides provided, customers reported that guides who had attended a training session spent more time discussing the river's natural and cultural history than guides who had not, and that this had a positive impact on knowledge of the area and trip enjoyment.

It is also assumed by Mason and Christie (2003:29) that the right sort of training can help to prepare guides who can satisfy their customers' basic needs while at the same time offering them the opportunity to change the way they think and act. Thus they may become "mindful" tourists, who develop a better understanding about, and positive attitudes towards, a location.

The benefits of training in ecotour guiding therefore emphasise the need for tour guides in general to be exposed to continuing professional development, such as in-service training, that will directly address, for instance, the gaps in their training and their professional needs in the field. However, Kimmel (1999:41) in his article on "Ecotourism as Environmental Learning", states that the quality of interpretation varies widely, but that disparity in quality is not necessarily directly related to qualifications.

Furthermore, Aiello (1998:60) in summarising lessons learnt in the process of developing, implementing and evaluating an interpretive training programme for staff in

a specific reef tour operation, indicates that there are major constraints in the development of a single standard training package to suit all types of staff across a destination region. It seems that the development of modules which can be used as part of an operation or a site-specific training programme may be a more efficient approach. Also staffs in interpretive guiding need help not just with the content, but also with the methods of interpretation. Weiler and Ham (2002:54) are of the opinion that in order for training to meet the needs of a country or region and contribute to sustainable development, the impetus for training must originate in the host country. They believe that this is true of any kind of human capacity building, and in the context of tour guiding there needs to be recognition from the various in-country stakeholders that guides are key players in meeting the needs of visitors, operators, host communities and protected area managers.

In an effort to develop a tour guide training programme for Tortuguero National Park (Costa Rica), Jacobson and Robles (1992:702) obtained input from groups involved with, and affected by, ecotourism and the potential tour guide programme in Tortuguero. They assert that participation by these groups – residents, hotel owners, resource managers, and the tourists themselves – was essential for the long-term sustainability of the industry and the natural resource base, in order to integrate economic development with the conservation of Tortuguero's natural resources. They came up with a model of target audiences and goals related to Tortuguero's ecotourism guide programme. In their model, the targeted audiences are resource managers (park managers and scientists), the community sector (hoteliers and tour guides) and tourists (domestic and international). The goals which they suggested for the ecotourism guide programme are:

- Natural resource conservation;
- Sustainable development;
- Community environmental education; and
- Tourists' environmental education.

The lesson learned from the research that was conducted by Ham and Weiler (2000:8) to outline the design, delivery and evaluation of Panama's first tour guide training programmes was *inter alia* that delivering cost-effective guide training is an important sustainable development strategy. It emerged from the research that one of the challenges of interpretive guide training is making it affordable to those who have the most to gain from it.

It is necessary, for nature-based tourism, to determine what skills are needed by practising guides in general and for interpretation, in order to cater for relevant interpretive training as well as continuing education and training (Chou, Tsai & Wang: 2002).

3.4.2 Quality assurance and the South African situation

The tourism industry in South Africa is guided by a range of different tourism standards that include codes of conduct, independently reviewed certification, and awards schemes (Mahony, 2007:397). However, it is inevitable that the issue of quality in tour guiding in South Africa cannot be discussed without associating it with the history of politics, with transformation in the tourism and conservation sectors, and tour guiding in particular, playing a central role. The percentage increase of women and blacks in the nature guiding industry can be directly attributed to the process of transformation (Paton, 2007:230).

According to Paton (2007:246), in 2007 the majority of nature guides were still white and male, although they were probably already a declining majority. Paton (2007:246) indicates that it is difficult to obtain empirical evidence about this because an ongoing demographic analysis including information on nature guides had not been done anywhere in the country at that time.

In South Africa, the need for quality assurance in tour guiding is recognised because tour guiding is a very critical component of the tourism value chain in South Africa.

Moreover, there is evidence that there is illegal guiding conducted by unregistered tour guides. Such practices have a negative impact on South African tourism as a result of inaccurate information and sub-standard service provided by illegal tour guides (Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, 2008:1). The need to ensure quality in guiding in South Africa is reflected in the recent “strategy to professionalise tourist guiding” that was developed by the Department of Tourism (DET, 2009). This report, which was based on in-depth research on the current status of the tourist guiding sector in South Africa, includes a critical analysis of the quality of current education, training and development in the sector.

3.4.2.1 Training

South African needs in terms of training are vastly different from those of the rest of the world because of the unique composition of diverse cultures (Smal, 1997:27) and also because of South Africa’s political history of discrimination. For instance, Braack (2004:305) asserts that there is a relative dearth of appropriately skilled blacks to recruit from because black people were deprived of quality jobs for decades and centuries, and had no incentives to train for wildlife positions.

The South African White Paper on tourism Development and Promotion (DEAT, 1996) attests to this by identifying “Lack of expertise and training” as some of the problem areas in South African tourism. Thus, the skill-based learning, literacy and adult education are regarded as key areas of neglect (Paton, 2007:218). It is important to say that individuals with outstanding guiding skills were in demand in South Africa as early as in the 1980’s (Paton, 2007:233-234).

Thus, training and skills development in South Africa has a dual mandate: redressing the past and assuring quality in tourism, specifically in tour guiding. The creation of a series of Sector Education and Training Authorities (known as SETA’s) in March 2000 was the fulfillment of this mandate (Kaplan, 2004:224). The SETAs have to facilitate development and implementation of aspects such as the Recognition of Prior Learning

(RPL) process for the workforce in their sectors, and assure the quality of the processes (Heyns, 2004:19). The SETA for the Tourism and Hospitality Sector and Sport Education and Training Authority is known as THETA. THETA which was established by the Skills Development Act (No 97 of 1998) (Kaplan, 2004:224) was tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that training programmes and qualifications are of a high standard throughout the country by accrediting education and training providers, monitoring provision and registering assessors (Paton, 2007:219). Currently the Training Framework has only two qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and these are:

- National Certificate in Tourism: Guiding (NQF 2); and
- National Certificate in Tourism: Guiding (NQF 4). (DEAT, 2009:23).

Interpretation is reflected in the training. For instance, in the exit level outcomes for National Certificate: Tourism Guiding, NQF 4, it is indicated that at the end of the programme learners should:

- Conduct, reflect on and improve a guided experience within a specific area that entertains and educates tourists by interpreting cultural and natural environments; and
- Present authentic, balanced interpretation of general aspects of South African Society as well as specific sites and resources.
- (Government Gazette, 2004:53).

SANParks' participation in THETA is recognised. For instance, THETA granted SANParks a total of 139 learnerships, and consequently 86 unemployed and 53 employed learners were enrolled in three programmes, one of which was a "Certificate Programme in Tourism Guiding" (SANParks, 2008:42).

3.4.2.2 Registration and licensing

In South Africa tourist guiding is regulated by the Tourism Second Amendment Act, No. 70 of 2000. In terms of this Act, the Minister appoints a National Registrar of Tourist Guides whose responsibilities include facilitating the growth and development of the tourist guiding sector; and improving and maintaining standards in the tourist guiding sector. This Act stipulates that any person who wishes to be registered as a tourist guide must apply to a provincial registrar. The provincial registrar registers a tourist guide once she/he is satisfied that the applicant complies with the competence for registration as a tourist guide in terms of the Act (Government Gazette, 2000). All nine provinces have registrars who have the role of dissemination of information about tourists' guides, establishing associations of tourist guides and providing any other information to promote and develop the tourist guiding sector (Seti, 2006:2).

After registration as a tourist guide, a badge is received. The badge has to be displayed at all times while guiding. Tourist guides are also issued with an identification card, which indicates for which province the tourist guide is qualified (Van der Merwe, 2003:9).

One of the requirements for a tour guide to be registered as such by a provincial registrar and to operate in specific areas is that they have to have certain qualifications and knowledge. Prospective tour guides must complete the National Certificate in Tourism: Guiding at Level 2 and/or 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (Van der Merwe, 2003:9).

3.4.2.3 Awards and professional organisations

SANParks has over the past three financial years formalised the process of recognising all staff inputs at national level through the Chief Executive Award. The award is now

fully entrenched within the organisation, and all sectors of SANParks activities participate (SANParks, 2008:47), including guides. This is one way of recognising excellence in guiding in SANParks. Some field guides and senior guides in some parks such as Marakele National Parks and Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site have won the awards (Park managers, Pers. Com.2011). In South Africa, including SANParks, guides are not compelled to be members of an association, hence one of the recommendations of the research on the current status of the tourists guiding sector in South Africa (Department of Tourism, 2009:6) is that tour guides should be compelled to be members of an association.

3.4.2.4 Code of conduct

In South Africa, the application for tour guides must be accompanied among others by a declaration to comply with laws and regulations applicable to tourists' guides, including the tourist guide of conduct and ethics (Government Gazette, 2000). According to the Tourism Act no 70, 2000, a draft code of conduct and ethics must be drafted by the National Registrar, after consultation with the registrars, tour guide trainers and THETA. The final code of conduct and ethics must be forwarded to the provincial registrars, to be signed by all registered guides in South Africa as confirmation of their commitment to abide by the code. This applies to all types of tour guides in South Africa, including those in the national parks.

To conclude this section about quality assurance measures in tour guiding, it is important to highlight that it is advisable to use a combination of all the measures that are recommended for quality assurance in tour guiding. However, the other concern in tour guiding is "how is quality of interpretation assessed?" This concern leads to the following discussion on the role of evaluation in interpretation. It is important to note that not much research has been conducted on the topic of quality assurance in tour guiding in South Africa, but there is evidence that concerns regarding quality, not necessarily

interpretive quality, are always there and some measures have been taken to assure quality.

3.5 EVALUATION OF INTERPRETATION

Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of any management process, for without these components, managers may not have adequate knowledge about progress towards the objectives they have set themselves (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002:151). A need for the adoption of effective monitoring and evaluation of the service performance of tour guides, and specifically an evaluation system for the periodical measuring of interpretive effectiveness, has been realised (Ap & Wong, 2001:559; 1977; Kimmel, 1999; Tsang, Yeung & Cheung, 2011:136).

Evaluation is a fundamental and essential tool for ensuring and improving programme quality. It involves identifying the important elements of an activity such as a tour. Evaluation establishes if expectations about the programme are fulfilled during the activity, so that appropriate reinforcement or changes are executed if necessary (Wheeler, 2005:1). Evaluation is the key to the survival and development of interpretation, although sometimes it can be a controversial issue for national parks (Ortiz, 2007:19). It is a challenging and sensitive issue, more especially since it may bring an element of discomfort to those who receive feedback when their performance is evaluated (Wheeler, 2005:1). It provides the measurement and assessment of whether or not goals and objectives are met. It sets the direction and helps establish what interpretation should do. It is a crucial and a worthwhile procedure in that it can produce constructive and reliable feedback that can assist in improving management decisions about how best to accomplish interpretive objectives and promote effectiveness (Munro *et al.*, 2008:2; Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:223).

Evaluation of an interpreter can be done by the audience (tourists), supervisor or manager, peer (colleague), expert (a professional evaluator), or the interpreter (self-evaluation). Evaluation of the interpreter should consist of verbal and non-verbal communication techniques and skills, interpersonal interactions with the audience (tourists), and expertise in and ability to address visitor needs and meet programme goals and objectives (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:226). A self-evaluation is a simple and informal method. Interpreters (tour guides) do self-assessment by reflecting on their performance after an interpretive activity. Most people are comfortable with self-assessment but they often do not do it regularly. With frequent encouragement, self-evaluation can be made a regular habit (Wheeler, 2005:2). Peer evaluation can also be used. This involves observation and assessment by other tour guides who accompany a tour (Wheeler, 2005:2). This type of evaluation is useful on many levels and is highly recommended. It can assist in increasing overall effectiveness and building programmes. An evaluation that is conducted by a supervisor or manager is very beneficial. It can provide insights into the programme's effectiveness, the interpreter's skills and abilities, the audience's reactions, and how well the programme meets agency and programme goals and objectives. The feedback received from supervisors should be used to help improve the guide's interpretive techniques, skills, and abilities (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:228).

Audience (tourists) evaluation identifies significant strengths and weaknesses in tour guides strictly from the audience's perspective (Wheeler, 2005:6). This type of evaluation is effective because it indicates if programme goals are being met, if the needs of the tourists are met, if the programme itself is effective, and what the level of tourists' satisfaction is.

Expert evaluation is a further method that is one of the most objective forms of evaluation. The advantage of using expert evaluators is that they are neutral and are often more able to recognise problems or issues that may be overlooked by peers and

supervisors. The disadvantage of using expert evaluation is that it can be costly and time consuming (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:229).

A general problem is that most heritage sites have neither the time nor money to conduct extensive and consistent audience evaluation, even if it would be acceptable to management and visitors (Ryan & Dewar, 1995:295). In some cases evaluation of interpretation programmes is sporadic in natural resource management organisations. The sporadic evaluation of interpretation may be because of the apparent diversity of evaluative techniques and the subsequent complexity of selecting and applying evaluation to an interpretive programme (Munro *et al.*, 2008:3). That is why McDonough (1986:104) emphasised that interpreters have to assess more carefully the methods of evaluation they intend using. This should involve more training in the use of evaluative methods.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Many authors in the literature have shown concerns about the quality of interpretation in nature-based tourism. Some have suggested the use of quality assurance mechanisms such as a professional certificate, awards, licensing, codes of conduct or training, as some of the responsive strategies to the problems of interpretive guiding. Some of these have been used in the South African situation, and specifically in SANParks. Besides concerns about ensuring quality, there is a dire need for the assessment of the quality of interpretation. That is why there is a strong belief that evaluation of interpretation should be done in national parks, an exercise which can help to expose the existing problems and decide how they can best be tackled.

The following chapter (Chapter 4) provides details of the methods used to conduct this study.