

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of the study was to develop a conceptual model for effective interpretation by tour guides employed in South African national parks. In order to achieve this purpose, the following overall objectives were formulated:

- To examine the place and nature of interpretation in national parks.
- To identify the factors constituting effective interpretation for tour guides in South African National Parks.
- To determine whether tour guides appropriately apply interpretive delivery techniques.
- To identify tour guides' continuing education and training needs regarding interpretive delivery techniques.
- To assess the role of management within the context of South Africa's situation in supporting effective interpretation in SANParks national parks.
- To conceptualise a model for effective interpretation for tour guides in SANParks' national parks.

A literature survey was undertaken to ascertain what previous research had been conducted in this field and to study the various theories relating to environmental interpretation in nature-based tourism. From the literature, the concept of environmental interpretation was thoroughly analysed and the constructs that form the framework for measuring environmental interpretation were identified. This framework was used to develop the conceptual model as depicted in Figure 6.1. In order to overcome any gaps

in the literature, it was decided to embark on a qualitative study to identify any further constructs from knowledgeable respondents not covered in the literature.

In order to assess the situation in the national parks in South Africa in regard to the effectiveness of tour guides in environmental interpretation on the basis of the identified constructs, hypotheses were formulated to guide the process of the empirical investigation (refer to 1.5). The empirical investigation delivered data against which the hypotheses were tested, and this chapter discusses the results and whether these hypotheses could be validated. From the results, conclusions and recommendations are drawn and applied to the conceptual model. Finally the limitations of the study are presented, against which the results and the interpretation thereof should be circumspectly viewed, and recommendations for future research are made.

6.2 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE RESULTS

This section deals with the discussion and the conclusions that emerged from the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) as well as from the results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis (as presented in Chapter 5) which provide an anchor for the development of a model of effective interpretation. The proposed model as depicted in Figure 6.1 comprises the following components:

- Park policies and requirements.
- Park managers' support for effective interpretation.
- Knowledge and application of interpretive delivery techniques.
- Evaluation.
- Continuing education and training.
- The role of effective interpretation in regard to ecotourists.

The paths that are reflected in the model show the influences that affect the elements of the model. These elements are discussed fully in the ensuing section.

6.2.1 Effective interpretation

The role of tour guiding in South Africa and specifically in South African national parks has been highlighted time and again in the previous chapters. The discussions on tour guiding further incorporated explanations on the place of interpretation in nature-based tourism. The role of interpretation in nature-based tourism is commonly seen as that of enhancing tourists' experience (recreational role) and of minimising the negative impact of tourists on the environment (conservation role). That is why many authors regard environmental interpretation as a management tool in national parks, a tool that needs to be carefully managed and evaluated. This means that, for environmental interpretation to be effective, there need to be appropriate management and evaluation mechanisms in place.

Achieving the level of effectiveness in interpretation and managing it in national parks in South Africa and abroad means ensuring that key players in its delivery, that is, tour guides, should have a clear understanding that their guiding roles in nature-based settings go beyond the traditional roles (pathfinders and mentors) and incorporate that of being interpreters. In South African national parks, the importance of the interpretive role of tour guides is recognised especially because it is evident that a large number of tourists, who are interested in visiting the national parks to experience both the cultural and the environmental heritage (refer to 1.3 & 2.4.2), have high expectations of interpretive guiding. There is evidence that many tourists join the guided activities in SANParks. Literature indicates that there have been concerns with regard to the quality of tour guiding in South Africa that emanate partly from the political transformation in South African tourism and in the conservation agencies (refer to 1.2). These concerns are evident in the recent research which led to the South African document on the "strategy to professionalise tourist guiding and legislative review" (Department of Tourism, 2009).

However, tour guides' effectiveness in interpretation depends on many factors. The following crucial factors that contribute to tour guides' interpretive effectiveness are part of the proposed model.

6.2.1.1 Parks' policies and requirements for interpretation

The first factor that is shown in the model is "the policies and the requirements for tour guides' employment". From the literature and the empirical results, it became clear that SANParks is guided and influenced in its operation by the broader South African national policies and the policies of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, including the employment of tour guides.

For instance it emerged from the literature that tour guides in South Africa have to follow procedures laid down by the Tourism Second Amendment Act, No. 70 of 2000 (Tourism Act, 2000). According to this Act no one is supposed to practise as a guide unless that person is registered in the relevant provincial registrar as a tourist guide. The provincial registrar considers whether a person qualifies to practise as a guide after having looked at a number of aspects, including the training qualification. The results of the interviews indicate that park management holds the view that tour guides should comply with the regulations laid down by the South African government, through the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) or the newly established Department of Tourism. Tour guides have to register with the department and must have a required qualification such as the National Certificate in Tourism: Guiding (NQF 2 or NQF4) in order to work as tour guides in the national parks. It is believed that this will promote effective interpretation in the parks.

The significance of such qualifications is seen in the conclusions drawn from the study by Armstrong and Weiler (2003:38), who assert that it is sensible in tour guiding to recruit staff specifically trained for the field. These requirements in some parks seemed to surpass and overlook the stipulations in the Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa (2002:51), which calls for local people to be employed as tour guides. In addition

these requirements seem to surpass the requirements of the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, which SANParks recognises. These national legislative frameworks seem to be overlooked because tour guiding needs special communication skills and knowledge of aspects of conservation and culture. This was the view that was stated during the interviews.

The analysis of the tour guides' responses confirmed that the majority of tour guides had formal training before they started working as tour guides.

6.2.1.2 Application of interpretive delivery techniques

The second factor in the model is the ability to apply the interpretive delivery techniques. The ability to apply interpretive delivery techniques is one of the core fundamentals of effective interpretation. Interpretive delivery is all about communication. Communication becomes successful if the tour guide is able to capture the attention of the tourists, hold and maintain it by communicating, among other things, what is relevant to them. The attention aspect of interpretation that is stressed is based on the fact that tourists are a “non-captive audience”, and are not obliged to be attentive. Therefore inability to communicate well may not yield the intended positive results of interpretation in national parks (conservation and recreation).

The literature shows that there are debates about what constitutes effective interpretation. Consequently authors have developed the principles that guide effective interpretation. These principles, which often emerge in debates and discussions on interpretation, are believed to have been formulated first by Tilden (1977:9). However, other authors have since provided further inputs and modified Tilden's principles of effective interpretation. Thus what constitutes effective interpretation can be explained by referring to Ham's (1992) suggested model of interpretation, normally called the EROT model of interpretation (refer to 2.7): for tour guides to be effective in interpretation, they have to execute interpretation in such a way that it is Enjoyable, Relevant, Organised and has a Theme.

Effective application of these interpretive techniques together with knowledge of the content of what is being interpreted (interpretive content such as conservation and cultural aspects) is important for guides to be effective in interpretation. However, the literature indicates that there are difficulties associated with the provision of effective interpretation in nature-based tourism. Lack of professional communication skills, lack of knowledge about the area and the inability to transmit simplified and understandable messages to tourists, are some of the concerns that are raised in the literature (refer to 1.2). In many cases, guides provide interpretation of a lower quality (McArthur in Newsome, Moore & Dowling, 2002:239), they lack the knowledge and skills to apply interpretive delivery techniques (Weiler & Ham, 2001:550), and they do not pay sufficient attention to interpretive techniques (Rabotić, 2010). Particularly in SANParks, literature indicates that there has been a situation when many employees with expertise left the organisation for socio-political reasons as a result of transformation in the country (refer to 1.2). It is important, according to Spenceley (2003:23), for people to be allowed to use their indigenous knowledge rather than insisting on formal education as a basis for becoming a tour guide. This situation may have affected the quality of interpretive guiding as well.

However, the depressing picture presented in certain cases in the literature does not apply to this study. The results as presented in Table 5.11 indicate that the majority of the tour guides employed by SANParks have a fair knowledge of how to apply interpretive delivery techniques. The first five highly ranked techniques consist of the crucial ones that have to do with attention and the transmission of information. Those techniques are “gaining the attention of tourists”, “encouraging participation of tourists through questioning them”, and “presenting the content in a simple manner so that it does not take a lot of effort from the tourists to follow the presentation” “addressing tourists by their names” and “using five senses” (refer to Table 5.12). Beside those techniques, they felt that the appropriate method of application would depend on the circumstances (e.g. one would use a different approach in addressing a small group of tourists or a large number travelling in an open van), that is, These results compare well with the result of the study conducted by Armstrong and Weiler (2003:29), which found

that 60 per cent of the guides constantly addressed the visitors by their names, whereas 13 per cent occasionally addressed visitors by their names or knew only the names of some of their tour group. Generally speaking, guides with smaller groups were naturally more successful in using names than those with larger tour groups. Some guides made no effort to learn names even with reasonably small groups. The tour guides who participated in this study held a similar view, that addressing tourists by their names is impossible when dealing with large numbers.

It was interesting to note that the majority of the tour guides do not have problems with entertaining the tourists, especially because fun and entertainment are part of interpretation in national parks. Special note should however be taken of those tour guides who indicated that they had problems with the application of interpretive delivery techniques.

The application of interpretive techniques was further tested using the tourists. The tourists' perceptions indicate that many tour guides followed the example of Ham's EROT model (which, briefly, encompasses enjoyment, relevancy, organisation and a theme). The interpretive delivery techniques that were highly ranked by the tourists (first 3) are "The guide presented clearly and logically", "I was able to gain the guide's attention when needed" and "The tour guide made eye contact with me/us". The questions which received low ratings from the tourists were, "The guide addressed me by my name", "She/he encouraged me/us to use five senses" and "I could relate to things from my daily life through examples and comparisons which she/he gave"

The conclusion drawn from the tour guides' perceptions of problems with interpretive delivery techniques is that the tour guides studied have a fair knowledge of the interpretive delivery techniques. It was only a small proportion of the tour guides who indicated that they had problems with some of the techniques.

The results of this study specified the first three highest-ranked interpretive delivery techniques in terms of problems. The statement which ranked first in the problems with interpretive delivery techniques was “Addressing tourists by their names”. About 47.4 per cent of tour guides felt it was a problem to address tourists by their names, while 52.2 per cent felt it was not a problem.

Getting tourists to use their five senses (by e.g. feeling an interesting texture, smelling a plant etc.), ranked second among the problems with interpretive delivery techniques in this study. About 30 per cent of the tour guides indicated that they had experienced problems with this technique, as opposed to 69.6 per cent who had not. The results of the study conducted by Armstrong and Weiler (2003:28) reported a far lower percentage of those who successfully used all five senses. Encouraging the use of the senses assists in making interpretation lively and enjoyable (Markwell & Weiler, 1998:106).

With regard to gaining the attention of tourists, the results indicated that few of the tour guides had a problem with this technique.

6.2.1.3 Continuing education and training

The other factor in the model is “Continuing education and training”. The literature indicates that training for tour guides working in nature-based settings must be continuous in order to improve their interpretive effectiveness (refer to 3.4.1.3). In South Africa continuing education and training for tour guides is recognised as a tool that can help to address gaps in the tour guides’ training and also address the problem of inadequate training in certain cases.

There is always a debate about the type and amount of training that is required for tour guides. Also highlighted is the attitude of many commercial tour guides, who doubt whether theory or academic work adds much value to interpretive effectiveness (Pond, 1993), an attitude which could easily discourage them from furthering their training.

Such an attitude was not observed in this study. The park managers believe it is the responsibility of the park management and the tour guides themselves to improve the tour guides' interpretive competence.

The view in favour of the need for continuing education and training in communication skills dominated during the interviews. This view undoubtedly supports training in interpretive delivery skills, since, according to the literature, interpretation is communication. The interviews that were conducted with park/tourism managers brought insights into the need for tour guides to acquire further good communication/interpretive skills (such as gaining and maintaining of tourists' attention) and improve their knowledge of the content of interpretation (such as conservation/cultural heritage themes) as part of their continuing education and training. The managers saw this as critical for effective interpretation.

In recognising the need for continuing education and training for tour guides in SANParks, some of the parks have gone to the extent of producing reading and training manuals to enhance both the content and the interpretive skills (refer to 5.2.3, 5.2.4, Table 5.3 & Table 5.5). Some parks sometimes benefit from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's training of tour guides. The Department's involvement in the continuing education and training indicates the government's interest in improving tour guiding in South Africa (refer to 5.2.4).

One of the findings of the study was that there were tour guides in SANParks who needed training in each of the twelve interpretive techniques, as can be inferred from Table 5.13. This is an indication that training in communication skills is always required by tour guides. The aspects of interpretive training which were ranked the highest (the first three) as mainly needed by most tour guides in the study were: "Addressing tourists by their names", "Maintaining the attention of tourists" and "Presenting the content in a simple manner so that it does not take a lot of effort from the tourists to follow the presentation". Guiding and communication emerged again when tour guides listed other

training aspects which they personally felt they needed in order to improve their interpretive delivery techniques (refer to Table 5.14).

The need for continuing education has always been emphasised by authors such as Pereira (2009:9) as a way of helping tour guides to keep abreast of developments in knowledge and skills in interpretation. The demand by tour guides in SANParks for training is evident in the results of the inferential statistics, which seemed to indicate that whether they had a degree, diploma or matric did not make a significant difference in the need for training. It is important to highlight that while some had degrees or diplomas as their highest qualifications, they had not necessarily received any interpretive training in their academic studies; hence the need for more interpretive training, with probably not as much training on the content (conservation and cultural aspects), whereas those who had matric as their highest academic qualification may have had some interpretive training during their guiding training through THETA-accredited institutions (receiving, for example, the National Certificate in Tourism: Guiding). The results regarding the need of SANParks' guides for continuing education and training are consistent with the results of the study conducted by Cheng (2005:66; Hu, 2007:188), which revealed the need for continuing education through professional development.

Furthermore, the literature confirms that staff need help not just with the content, but also with the methods of interpretation (Aiello, 1998:60). Carbone (2006:55) is of the view that local guides often lack knowledge about the specific area where they are working. In this study, the need for training in both methods and content was also indicated in simple terms by tour guides referring to “guiding”, “communication” and “nature conservation”.

6.2.1.4 Evaluation

In this study evaluation was incorporated as part of the literature. This component is viewed in the literature as essential for the interpretive effectiveness of tour guides.

Evaluation follows the quality assurance mechanisms in interpretive guiding (professional associations, codes of conduct, professional certificate, licensing and individual awards for excellence, training and registration), which are viewed as tools to manage quality and enhance tour guides' interpretive effectiveness (refer to 3.4). Some of these tools are used in SANParks in complying with the National Department's regulations, and some as a way of motivating their employees (including tour guides) to be excellent in their jobs. For instance, tour guides in SANParks have to comply with the code of conduct as outlined by the National Department (Department of Tourism, which used to be part of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism) and to register as tour guides with the provincial registrar. Their employees also receive awards for excellent performance.

To enhance effective interpretation in nature-based tourism, the view frequently surfaces that there always needs to be evaluation of interpretation. Different types of evaluation are identified in the literature (refer to 3.5), such as self-evaluation, peer evaluation, evaluation by staff (senior) and evaluation by tourists. These are further categorised into formal and informal. The quantitative results of this study established that tour guides in SANParks use more than one type of evaluation (refer to 5.4.1.3). However, informal evaluation is predominantly used by most tour guides (refer to Figure 5.9), although the results of this study revealed that informal evaluation is the form least used in SANParks. Diverse opinions about the evaluation of tour guides' performance emerged from the interviews (refer to 5.2.3). It became evident from the results that some of the evaluation forms that are presently used in SANParks need to be improved. For instance the most tried evaluation mechanism is the evaluation through the questionnaire that tourists fill after a guided activity such as a game drive.

There are several concerns about the tourists' questionnaire. Park managers and officials felt that tourists often did not have time to complete it. There was dissatisfaction with the tourists' questionnaire because the form is not only about the evaluation of the guided activities but is a general form which evaluates any other experience which the tourist encountered in the park. Some of the park managers felt that tourists' evaluation

is effective because it gives the managers an idea of their tour guides' performance and accordingly an opportunity to guide tour guides in the event of concerns and complaints that emerge from the tourists' questionnaires.

The results of the interview show that evaluation by a supervisor is not common. Surprisingly, it was only one park official who indicated that in their park, they do have "direct observations" of the tour guides by the supervisors. This gives them an opportunity to identify interpretive problems and if there are, they use corrective measures such as in-house training. The park official concerned felt satisfied with this form of evaluation. The literature indicates that this type of evaluation provides insights into the effectiveness of interpretation and the tour guides' other skills and ability, as well as the tourists' reaction (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:228). However one wonders about the feasibility, the time constraints and the implications and realities of introducing such evaluation, especially in a large park with a big number of tour guides.

One of the interesting types of evaluation used by one park is to establish from the tour guides themselves (through self-evaluation) what problems they have with regard to interpretive guiding. Then the park official organises a workshop based on the areas of concern as indicated by the tour guides. The literature indicates that self-evaluation is a simple method that many people tend to be comfortable with, but tour guides do not regularly use it (refer to 3.5). With regard to peer evaluation, the results of this study indicate that this type of evaluation is used on a rather lower scale at SANParks (refer to Figure 5.9). This type of evaluation is recommended as useful, and therefore needs to be encouraged at SANParks. According to the literature peer evaluation should also be encouraged. For instance, it allows for immediate feedback on one's performance; and also serves as a motivational tool. Since the feedback comes from one's own peers rather than from management, there is a greater likelihood of buy-in than if it was the other way round.

6.2.1.5 Park management support towards effective interpretation

The last factor in the model is “park management support towards effective interpretation”. It is essential that management should support interpretation in the national parks. Management support contributes positively towards guides’ effectiveness in interpretation and particularly in the application and knowledge of interpretive delivery techniques.

To begin with, it is important that besides discussions in the literature review on the SANParks’ management support of quality in interpretive guiding, elucidation of the South African Government’s support for quality in guiding (through government’s requirements and policies), has been reflected in this study (refer to 1.2). To reiterate just a few instances, THETA for instance was established to give access to training for tour guiding even to those who had been previously deprived as a result of the past government policies. Another example is the emphasis on the RPL policy, which enables tour guides to proceed with their training based not only on their previous academic knowledge, but also on their indigenous knowledge and experience. That is evident in the results of this study, which indicates a remarkable number of tour guides who have obtained their qualifications through THETA-accredited institutions (refer to 5.4.1.2).

Various management strategies have been highlighted in the literature (such as giving adequate time to tourist guides to plan their interpretation, making interpretive material/ sources available, supporting tour guides to further their training, ensuring that tour guides are not overloaded with other responsibilities). The conclusion drawn from this study is that tour guides have adequate time to design their interpretive guiding and are not too overloaded with other responsibilities (other than their main interpretive guiding), which may prevent them from providing effective interpretation to tourists (refer to Table 5.15). The issue of time as a problem in interpretive guiding was highlighted by Weaver (2006:186), who said tour guides may be able to devote only a small portion of time to

developing a persuasive interpretation, even if they have the motivation to do so, because of other roles that they are expected to play (such as coordinating logistics). What should be highlighted is the number of tour guides (47.8%) who are of the view that “there is a lack of support from park management for further training”, and (50%) who feel that there is a lack of materials to improve their interpretation”. These results compare well to those of the interviews, in that park managers/park officials held the view that the tour guides themselves should be motivated to further their studies in connection with tour guiding. They categorically stated that tour guides should be proactive in improving themselves (refer to Table 5.6). With regard to the issue of the lack of interpretive materials, it was interesting to note that the problem of inadequate materials for interpretation also emerged during the interviews. The findings of the study conducted by Armstrong and Weiler (2003:40) in Victorian Parks showed the same results in regard to the need for adequate materials. Armstrong and Weiler (2003:40) therefore recommended that there was a need to provide materials that would facilitate interpretive delivery.

Some other areas of concern that emerged among tour guides were language problems, not only foreign languages but even local languages that are not their mother tongues. The majority of tour guides considered their lack of knowledge of other languages as a problem that impeded effective interpretation. Language problems were also highlighted by Carbone (2006:55), who stated that most of the time local guides have problems with language skills. Chowdhary and Prakash (2008:293) raised the issue of language in their study by stating that there were inadequate facilities for learning foreign languages.

Following the above-mentioned aspects were issues regarding attendance of upgrading training in interpretation. Asking the tour guides to respond to such questions was a way of checking how supportive management is of effective interpretation.

In the study there were a remarkable number of tour guides who had not attended any upgrading courses since starting work as tour guides. The most prominent reasons that

were given by the tour guides for not attending such courses were, for example, that “Training programmes are scarce” (the same conclusion drawn by Chowdhary and Prakash (2008:293) from their research), “Lack of finance”, and “Lack of encouragement from management to upgrade their interpretive skills”. This confirms the assertion by Pond (1993:27), who states that most guides have little professional or academic support. It should be noted that it was only 50 per cent of the respondents who had said they had not attended any upgrading training course on interpretive guiding since they started working as guides. Lack of encouragement to upgrade their interpretive skills was contrary to the results of the interview, where park managers felt that upgrading interpretive skills through continuing education and training is crucial (refer to 5.2.4).

Support by management for aspects that have been mentioned above will help to improve the quality of interpretation in South African national parks. In particular, encouragement from management to upgrade their skills will enhance the tour guides’ knowledge and application of interpretive delivery techniques.

6.2.2 Tourists’ perceptions of their interpretive experience

It has been reiterated throughout this study that some of the core beneficiaries of the process of interpretation in national parks, if it is done effectively, are the tourists. That is why in SANParks guided activities aim at “creating a unique, holistic and meaningful tourists’ experience” (SANParks, 2008:3). The model depicts that effective interpretation by tour guides has a positive effect on the tourists’ experience. Some studies have shown that there is a connection between the quality of guiding and tourist satisfaction (Weiler & Ham, 2002:551). Some research has specifically indicated that interpretation plays a role in tourists’ experience (Armstrong & Weiler, 2002; Beck & Cable, 1998; Lew, Hall & Timothy, 2008:21).

The results of the qualitative study indicated that park managers in SANParks have a common understanding of the role and purpose of interpretation in the national parks.

It became clear that the role and purpose are two-fold, i.e. to conserve the natural and cultural environment, and to enhance the tourists' experience.

The first purpose of conservation is fulfilled through making tourists aware of the negative impact of inappropriate behaviour. The second purpose is executed through entertaining interpretation and through the increase in environmental/cultural knowledge. These purposes are the driving forces behind effective interpretation in national parks. The park managers' and tourism managers' chances of promoting effective interpretation through the knowledge and the application of interpretive delivery techniques are high. The tourists' expectations can only be met if tour guides are effective in their delivery. This makes the role of tour guides crucial in interpretive guiding in tourism.

6.2.2.1 Tourists' learning

Literature review clarifies the connection between interpretation and tourism. What is reflected and emphasised in the literature is that education, which is one of the key elements in interpretation, has long been a component of tourism (McArthur & Hall, 1996:89). This has not changed, when one considers the growth in general interest tourism that involves learning while travelling (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2004:14). Many reasons, apart from promoting tourists' enjoyment, have fostered this interest in learning, such as the tourists' interest in environmental and cultural issues, including conservation. The tourists' interest in these issues and the realisation of the need to use interpretation as a strategy to minimise the negative impact of tourism are among the reasons for the promotion of interpretation in the tourist destinations such as national parks.

The results of the data obtained from the tourists undoubtedly indicate that tourists had positive perceptions about the interpretive experience. According to the tourists, the experience provided by the tour guides increased their knowledge of environmental issues and/or cultural heritage (refer to Figure 5.16). The increase in visitors' knowledge

was evident in studies conducted by Tubb (2003:477) and Marion and Reid (2007:23). In the current study, the relationship between the increase in knowledge of environmental issues/cultural heritage and tourists' satisfaction with the way the guide presented was evident (refer to 5.5.2). The results indicated a significant association between tourists' views on whether or not the experience provided by the guide had increased their knowledge of environmental issues/cultural heritage, and the view that they were generally satisfied with the way the guide presented ($p < .001$).

6.2.2.2 Tourists' enjoyment and satisfaction

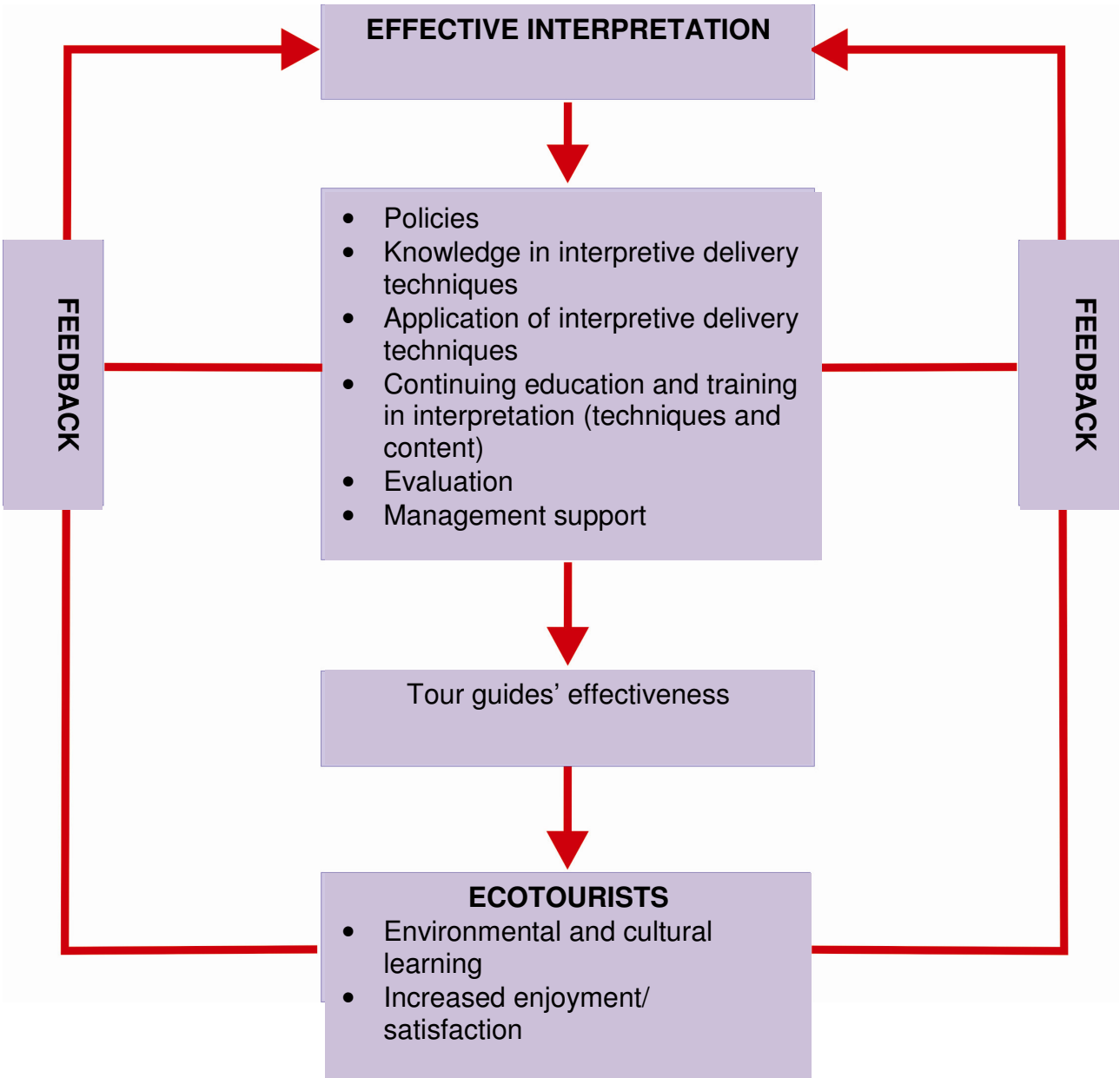
The literature highlights the significance of interpretation in national parks and in tourism by emphasising that it enriches tourists' experience, enhances their enjoyment and facilitates their understanding of conservation, heritage and culture (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001:2; Chou, Tsai & Wang, 2002:600; Ham, Housego & Weiler, 2005:7; Hu, 2007:33; Kuo, 200:94; Markwell & Weiler, 1998:109; Walker & Moscardo, 2006:105). The results of the interviews revealed that park/tourism managers also perceived the purpose of interpretation as educative while at the same time entertaining, views similar to those of most authors (Kuo, 200:95; Weiler & Davis, 1993:9; Tilden, 1977:8). They see the purpose of interpretation as conserving the natural and cultural environments and enhancing tourism experience, and therefore contributing towards tourists' satisfaction. That was in line with what is reflected in the literature.

The majority of the tourists were generally satisfied with the way the guides presented and they enjoyed their experience (refer to Figure 5.16). Noted is the number of tourists who were neutral about the statements and those who did not agree. Neutrality may be perceived as an expression that does not convey full satisfaction. Neutrality and the disagreements about the level of satisfaction may give a bad impression of the overall interpretive experience, which may be conveyed by word of mouth to other potential tourists (Hu, 2007:188).

It was also noted that age, nationality and gender did not have an influence on the tourists' perception of their experience. This was contrary to previous research on tourists' satisfaction, which showed that the level of satisfaction of tourists differed according to their background, such as countries of origin and nationality (Ham & Weiler, 2007:6).

The success of the application of specific interpretive delivery techniques was ascertained through obtaining the tourists' perceptions. Many tour guides were generally successful in applying most techniques. However, the tour guides were least successful in addressing tourists by their names, in encouraging tourists to use their five senses, and in relating their interpretation to things from the tourists' daily lives.

Figure 6.1: Proposed model of environmental interpretation



6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations derived from this study are as follows:

6.3.1 Continuing education and training

The continuing education and training of tour guides to provide skills that will allow the guides to apply appropriate delivery techniques is necessary in order to ensure tourists' satisfaction. Over and above the current training efforts in national parks, emphasis should specifically be directed at training in interpretive delivery techniques and interpretive content. Inasmuch as the findings of the study reveal that most of the tourists were happy with the performance of the tour guides, it might still be prudent on the part of management to maximise their performance, since in business "one client lost is too many". This underscores the need for continuing education and training.

Training in these techniques would also aim at maximising learning about natural and cultural issues as well as helping to motivate ecotourists towards environmentally friendly behaviour (Haig & McIntyre, 2002:46). It is also evident from the literature that using a range of interpretive techniques attracts and maintains tourists' interest (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001:7). The results of this study indicated a need for training in interpretive delivery techniques and interpretive content. This will help to fill the gaps which may have existed, especially in the training on practical implementation of interpretation. The view which emanated from the research by the Department of Tourism (2009:24) supports the notion that there is a need to fill a gap in tour guiding practice. The document categorically states "Tourist guiding cannot be learnt from textbooks alone. There needs to be a substantive practical experiential training. The guidelines set by THETA are not always followed by training providers.

6.3.2 Management support

The training policy should be aggressively driven so that all categories of workers would benefit from the organisational training.

As regards interpretive resources, SANParks needs to invest in interpretive materials/resources and these materials should be made available and easily accessible to all tour guides in order to improve their interpretation. The idea of resource centres or park libraries is recommended in all the parks of SANParks that provide interpretive guiding.

Another recommendation that relates to management support is about a need to design an interpretive framework for SANParks. The researcher is of the view that the interpretive framework will give guidance on various issues regarding what is expected from tour guides in interpretive guiding. It is important to highlight that it was established from the results of the interviews that some of the parks have manuals which may seem to be serving the same purpose.

6.3.3 Evaluation

This study identified some weaknesses and inconsistency in the area of evaluation of interpretation in SANParks. It is recommended that an evaluation system should be put in place in all the national parks of SANParks in order to avoid sporadic evaluation. There should be a proper evaluation strategy which should be carefully monitored by the management of each park. It is recommended that self-evaluation and peer evaluation should be intensified in order to deal with problems encountered in the tourists' feedback forms. Appropriate peer evaluation and self-evaluation forms should be designed to be used during the process of evaluation. Over and above these evaluation forms, there should be periodic feedback that should be given to the management about the evaluation results. Proper feedback serves as a motivation to staff. It is way of quality-assuring their work. Importantly, workshops on evaluation

should be organised from time to time to make sure that all tour guides understand the purpose and the process of evaluation. In addition to the current informal evaluation that is done, peer and formal evaluation of interpretation by tour guides should be encouraged by management as well, since this feedback will help the tour guides to improve their performance. A survey should be conducted in SANParks about the possibility of using evaluation by the supervisors to establish the realities of its implementation in large and small parks.

6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several limitations of this study are identified and discussed in the following:

The first limitation was the cross-sectional design used in this study. Using this design meant that the results for the participants (tourists, tour guides and park/tourism managers) represented only the opinions of the specific time and of the specific participants. The use of a longitudinal approach is suggested in future studies of this nature.

The second limitation is that all the participants were associated with SANParks, i.e. the tourism/park managers and the tour guides were employees of SANParks, and even the tourists were guided by SANParks' tour guides. As a result it would not be prudent to generalise the findings of the study to other national parks because of the varying circumstances, conditions, practices, different organisational cultures and policies. Initially it was part of the researcher's plan to incorporate private tour operators and tour guides employed by private tour operators (i.e. those that have a licence to do tour guiding in SANParks' national parks) to be part of the study. This became difficult to do because they seemed to be less interested. Their lack of participation in a study of this calibre was not a surprise to the researcher because in the study by Armstrong and Weiler (2003:36) that used tour operators, some tour operators saw the research project as too invasive, potentially compromising the client experience, intrusive on intellectual property and consuming valuable business time.

The third limitation concerns the time and budget constraints which prevented the researcher from collecting the anticipated number of tourists' questionnaires and thus from reaching out to a larger target group. Despite the challenges of time and budget constraints, the researcher tried to source some finance and also tried to make as much time as possible available, to avoid compromising the purpose and the objectives of the study.

Lastly, the fourth limitation relates to honesty and objectivity regarding the tour guides' responses. Despite the fact that they were assured of confidentiality, it could have happened that some respondents became suspicious about questions relating to management or those in which they had to indicate their weaknesses in interpretive delivery techniques. However, the incorporation of tourists in this study, with an instrument covering the same techniques that were tested through the tour guides' instrument, was a way of counter-checking the tour guides' honesty. As reflected in the results (Chapter 5), the positive results of tourists were consistent with those of the tour guides. However, it is recommended that in future a participant observation method should be used to establish how honest the tour guides are in implementing interpretation. This method was used by Hu (2007:182), who investigated the tour guides' guiding practice in Hainan, China, by undertaking a typical tour as a participant observer.

It is also suggested that the management of the organisation or of SANParks should be more involved in addressing the tour guides about the aim of the study, emphasising the benefits of the study to both the tour guides and the organisation.

In spite of the limitations of the study, the findings undoubtedly have important contributions and implications for future research, as discussed in the following section (6.5).

6.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THESIS

This thesis will make the following contributions to the world of academia and the tourism industry:

The remarkably inadequate published research on interpretive guiding in South Africa, and particularly in nature-based tourism, undoubtedly makes this study contribute to the body of knowledge on interpretive guiding in South Africa in various ways. There is no evidence of an existing South African model on interpretation in national parks. The provision of a South African model of interpretation emanating from empirical investigation conducted in South Africa, not abroad, will therefore fill that gap in the literature. This thesis contributes to the existing body of knowledge on “interpretation in national parks” by providing a model for interpretation which can be used by academics to test its applicability in other national parks that are administered by other conservation and tourism authorities in South Africa.

One of the most significant contributions of the study is that it unearths the problems in the evaluation of interpretive guiding in SANParks. Especially because this aspect, i.e. evaluation, is considered as one of the most important areas in ensuring quality in interpretation in nature-based tourism.

The role of the South African government in general and in particular the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and the newly established Department of Tourism in tour guiding is highlighted in this study. The South African government has established legislative framework that enhances access to training programmes in tour guiding (NQF, THETA, RPL), and legislation that ensures quality (code of conduct, guides’ registration, minimum requirements for practising as a tour guide), all of which obligates SANParks in its day to day operations. These efforts have been highlighted both in the literature and in the empirical investigation of this study and are considered as one of the contributions of the study.

The study has provided a guideline on the type of measuring instruments that could be used for future research in this area of study in other organisations that are similar to SANParks. Given some of the limitations, the measurement instruments could be expanded, improved and tested on a broader sample to improve their validity. As they stand, the instruments allowed the researcher to determine the training needs in regard to interpretive delivery techniques.

Concern about under-representation in tourism journals of topics related to interpretation in tourism has already been indicated in the earlier discussion (refer to 1.7.1). Articles that specifically deal with interpretation in South Africa will be produced as a result of this thesis. The contents of the research papers (in the form of the discussions and the results of empirical investigation) will provide a basis for academic debates and discussions on interpretive guiding, more especially because not much has been written on interpretive guiding in the South African context.

Previous research in this field of study has been on tourists' views and on evaluating guiding performance rather than guides' own perceptions of their effectiveness (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001:33). This study, which goes beyond the tourists' views, looked at the tour guides' perceptions of their problems and application of the interpretive delivery techniques.

Previous chapters (Chapters 1 & 3) have indicated that limited research has been conducted to establish continuing education and training needs for the professional development of tourist guides, both abroad and in South Africa. Notably, no South African study of this kind has been identified in the literature that focuses on interpretive delivery techniques. This study will provide information that will help academics to improve academic continuing education and training programmes in tour guiding in South Africa.

As regards the contribution of the study to the nature-based tourism industry, it will contribute to a better understanding of interpretive guiding in the South African context.

It will provide research instruments (tourists' and guides' questionnaires) that can be used in the future to evaluate personal interpretation in national parks in South Africa. It should provide clear guidelines for national parks to improve the quality of the visitors' experience and should contribute to the achievement of the goals of sustainability.

It is envisaged that the results of this study will provide information that will assist officials in the national parks and those who provide professional development training for tourist guides to better understand the guides' need for further training skills in interpretation in South Africa, an issue which has not been adequately researched in this country.

It will help to verify to what extent guides adhere to the EROT model of interpretation in the South African context.

6.6 DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Suggestions for future research include the following:

This study revealed the training needs, weaknesses and strengths in regard to the interpretive delivery techniques. It would be interesting if further research could be undertaken to look at how far issues of interpretive delivery techniques are covered by the educational institutions in their guiding training.

The main focus of this study has been on personal interpretation instead of non-personal interpretation. It is recommended that future research focuses on perceptions of tourists regarding the non-personal interpretive activities as well.

This study focused only on issues related to the interpretive delivery techniques and continuing education and training needs, without looking into the interpretive messages (environmental, cultural and conservational) themselves. It is recommended that future research should investigate the messages that are conveyed by tour guides to tourists.

The study established that there is a problem of interpretive evaluation in many parks in SANParks without coming up with a designed and suggested framework for interpretive evaluation. It is recommended that future research could delve deeper into the area of interpretive evaluation in SANParks, and come up with an evaluative strategy for interpretive guiding.

It is suggested that future researchers could use the instruments designed for the present study for comparative studies in other organisations that manage national parks in South Africa.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This study has been able to integrate both theory and practice in order to show the significance of interpretation in nature-based tourism and to identify problems with interpretive delivery techniques as well as training needs. The model of environmental interpretation that has been proposed emanated from both the theoretical (literature review) and the empirical investigations.

The discussion and the conclusions drawn from the results took into account the objectives of the study. The researcher is of the opinion that all the objectives of the study as stated in 6.1 have been fulfilled.

The final implication of this study is that there is a need for continuing education and training in interpretive delivery techniques for tour guides operating in SANParks.