

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION AND GENERAL BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that interpretation plays an important role in tourism, especially at cultural heritage sites and in the natural environment, as in national parks (Lück, 2003:1; Moscardo, 1999:7). Interpretation is an environmental education activity which examines and reveals in an attractive way the characteristics of an area, and its biophysical and cultural relationships, through direct experiences which generate enjoyment, sensitivity, knowledge and commitment to what is interpreted (Project Coordinating Unit, 2005:i).

Tour guides, who play vital roles in general tourism as well as in its more specific forms such as nature-based and heritage tourism (Dioko & Unakul, 2005:14), are regarded as key figures in the implementation of effective, quality interpretation (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001; Christie & Mason, 2003; Markwell & Weiler, 1998:109; Weiler & Ham, 2000) in national parks. Hence the acute need for tour guides in both South Africa and abroad to deliver effective interpretation (Queiros, 2003a:93). This study focuses on the interpretive effectiveness of tour guides in the selected South African national parks.

As a major component of the tourist's experience, offered for instance in guided walks, tours, self-guided trails, ecotours, art galleries, fauna sanctuaries and zoos, interpretation creates or shapes the experience for the tourist (Ap & Wong, 2001; Moscardo, 1999:7). It can help to enrich visitors' experience and knowledge of the features of the site, as well as their awareness of inappropriate activities they should avoid. It is also used to enhance the enjoyment of a place, to convey symbolic meaning, and to facilitate attitudinal and behavioural change. Furthermore, it stimulates, facilitates and extends people's understanding of places so that empathy towards conservation,

heritage, culture and landscape can develop (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001:2; Chou, Tsai & Wang, 2002:600; Hu, 2007:33; Kuo, 2002:94; Markwell & Weiler, 1998:109; Walker & Moscardo, 2006:105).

Interpretation, which a number of writers consider to be an integral part of “best practice” ecotourism (Newsome, Moore & Dowling, 2002:239), is also regarded as an important strategy in reaching the goals of sustainable tourism development (Moscardo, 1999:7; Tubb, 2003:478). While the concept of sustainability is a complex and contested one, there is general consensus that, for tourism, it involves at least three dimensions: the minimization or elimination of negative impacts; the provision of positive contributions to the destination and host community; and the provision of a quality experience for the participating tourists (Walker & Moscardo, 2006:105). Therefore, effective interpretation can contribute to the sustainability of tourism in many ways (Moscardo, 2000:12).

All the aspects of interpretation mentioned above therefore form the foundation for concluding that interpretation is significant, and should be widely adopted in protected areas such as national parks (Kuo, 2002:94). Tourist resorts have recognised the importance of interpretation in responding to the needs of nature-oriented tourists as well as protecting the attractions they wish to visit (Orams, 1996:84). As a result, there is an expanding literature on interpretation following a slow but increasing recognition of its significance (Newsome, Moore & Dowling, 2002: 239).

The significance of interpretation in ecotourism, cultural tourism, wildlife tourism, heritage tourism and adventure tourism, gives rise to the need to examine how effective guides are in interpretive delivery. In other words, one may ask what makes them effective or ineffective in interpretive delivery; and following on this, ask what continuing education and training they require specifically in interpretive delivery skills.

There is a strong view that in order to improve the effectiveness of interpretation at cultural and natural tour sites, it is essential for interpreters and educators to look

constantly at ways to determine quality, and to identify individual strengths and weaknesses around the underlying question of effectiveness (Medlin & Ham, in Cheng, 2005:17). Doing so helps to ascertain whether management goals with regard to interpretation are being met (Munro, Morrison-Saunders & Hughes, 2008:1). When it is evident that there is a strong preference for guide-delivered rather than sign-delivered interpretation, this raises issues about the extent to which parks' agencies should guide, influence or monitor the quality, content or mode of interpretive material that is delivered (Griffin & Vacaflares, 2004: 36).

This study addresses the concerns about interpretive effectiveness with the overall purpose of designing a model for effective interpretation by tour guides who are employed by SANParks and operate in national parks that have guided activities.

However, what constitutes quality interpretation has been a core of debate in the field of interpretive guiding (Tilden, 1977; Beck & Cable, 1998; Ham, 1992; Ham & Weiler, 2005; Veverka, 2005), because interpretation involves both communication and entertainment (Moscardo, 1999; Munro & Morrison-Saunders, 2008:1; Hu, 2007: 33). As a result, a number of writers such as Tilden (1977), Moscardo (1999:11), Ham (1992:8), Wearing and Neil (1999:62), and Weiler and Ham (2001), have come up with some rules for presenting effective interpretation that are drawn from relevant theories of learning and communication.

Basically, for the communicator (guide) to be effective during interpretation, she/he should organise and convey information in ways that capture and maintain (Ham & Weiler, 2005:43) the audience's attention, while at the same time entertaining and inspiring them. It is precisely the communicative manner in which guides convey the significance of cultural and natural resources that is crucial; and that makes all the difference to the tourists concerned (Queiros, 2003a:93; Hu, 2007:33), as it highlights the critical elements of the guides' knowledge and their effective application of interpretive delivery techniques .

There has been limited research on the roles and attributes of tour guides in general, and on the elements of effective nature tour guiding in particular (Ham & Weiler, 2005:31). Researchers have only to a limited extent drawn on guides' own experiences. Even the tour guiding literature rarely takes into account the guides' own "voices", in particular in regard to the client-guide relationship and the constraints placed upon guides in delivering a tour (Davidson & Black, 2007:30). McDonnell (2001) maintains that little has been written on the role of the tour guide in transferring cultural understanding, and Beeton (1998: 31) says that only limited research is available to assess how ecotourists feel about interpretation and learning about nature.

Likewise, Marion and Reid (2007:8) contend that there is little published research outside the United States of America on the broader topic of evaluating the effectiveness of park-related interpretation. The limited research in this field is further acknowledged by Armstrong and Weiler (2003:4), who indicate that there is no published research examining what factors are associated with the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of interpretation. Also, the few related studies that have been identified have also been conducted abroad and not in South Africa. For example:

- The research by Armstrong and Weiler (2003), which evaluated the content and delivery of interpretive experiences offered by a sample of licensed tour operators in Victorian National Parks, in Australia;
- The study conducted by Wearing, Edinborough, Hodgson and Frew (2008:1V) in Australia to review the role of interpretation in national parks and the links between effective interpretation and visitor satisfaction, and also to identify interpretation variables that could be used in a satisfaction survey and applied to various interpretation programmes; and
- The study by Ham and Weiler (2005:31) in Alaska and the Galapagos, which examined visitors' perspectives on the qualities essential in a good interpretive guide as well as on the guides' performance, and in particular the quality of the actual interpretive guiding.
- The study by Oschell (2009:17) that examined what predicts guided customers' perceptions of the communication in a rafting company (in America), used the

framework of relational competence, and not necessarily the EROT model which this study is using.

- The study by Ortiz (2007) that investigated what motivates visitors to come on a tour with ranger-led interpretive services in Yosemite National Park.

The existing research in ecotourism has been largely confined to examining tourists' views and evaluating guiding performance rather than guides' own perceptions of their roles and effectiveness (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001:33). There is a call from authors in the field of guided interpretation for research that explores how guides view their role, and the range of techniques guides use to interpret the natural and cultural environment, what guides perceive as their strengths and weaknesses, as well as how familiar they are with the principles of best practice in guiding and interpretation (Davidson & Black, 2007:39; Ballantyne & Hughes, 2001:3).

This study heeds this call by going beyond tourists' perspectives on the quality of tour guiding to examine the tour guides' own perspectives regarding their own application of interpretive delivery techniques as well as those of park officials. The overall purpose of following this approach is to identify guides' continuing education and training needs in interpretive delivery in the context of selected parks of SANParks.

1.2 THE CONTEXT

The continuing and dramatic increase in both international and domestic travel poses significant opportunities for many managers of the globe's over 100 000 protected areas. Many of these areas hold promises and opportunities for visitors to learn about, appreciate and enjoy the cultural and natural heritage preserved within them (McCool, 2006:3) through interpretation. That is why many national parks and protected area agencies reflect the importance of interpretation in their organisational mission and vision statements, and most of these agencies have a clear understanding of the benefits of interpretation throughout their organisations at all levels of management

(Wearing, Archer, Moscardo and Schweinsberg in Wearing, Edinborough, Hodgson & Frew, 2008:1).

However, it would be naïve to consider it as a flawless field (Wearing & Neil, 1999:69). There is a problem in protected areas of guides who lack professional communication skills; who lack knowledge about the area; whose language skills need strengthening; and who are unable to convey scientific messages in a simple and interesting way (Carbone, 2006:57); all of these defects are attributed to guides' interpretive ineffectiveness. This problem of inefficiencies in the delivery of interpretation generates interest in the researcher to examine what the situation is in selected parks of SANParks where guided activities are provided for tourists.

The interest is further based on the fact that there was a time in SANParks when, for various reasons, skilled staff trickled away from the services of SANParks. Although in some cases the departing workers were replaced by staff of excellent quality, often there was no replacement or the replacements were of poor quality, a situation which may have had a negative influence on the interpretive guiding. The reasons for leaving SANParks varied from socio-political reasons to financial pressures that the organisation was facing (Braack, 2004:304).

The socio-political reasons were attributed to the economic and political transformation in South Africa in general since 1994. The transformation had very serious consequences for the South African national parks and the tourism industry as a whole. Before the new political dispensation in South Africa, the environmental legislation was so structured as to exclude local communities from decision-making as well as the chance of deriving economic benefits from nature conservation resources (Sebola & Fourie, 2007:33), while in the tourism industry there was limited integration of local communities and previously neglected groups into the industry (Magi, 2010:125).

Introducing transformation into South African national parks and the tourism sector was seen as a way of redressing the past socio-economic imbalances, to empower communities and to create opportunities for economic development, poverty alleviation and community participation. Various policies and strategies such as the White Paper on the Promotion and the Development of Tourism in South Africa (DEAT, 1996); the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Report (BBBEE) (DTI, 2004), and the Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa (2002), were some of the initiatives used by government to ensure transformation in the tourism industry and in the national parks.

The Responsible Tourism Manual for South Africa (2002:51), for instance, stipulates that local guides should be employed and empowered wherever and whenever possible, for both cultural and nature-based tours. The South African Tourist Guide Bill stipulates that people are allowed to use indigenous knowledge, rather than formal education, as the basis for becoming a field guide. The Bill further states that the gap in tour guides' professionalism (knowledge, communication competence, etc.) should be filled by affording the previously disadvantaged individuals access to training opportunities as tourist guides (Spenceley, 2003:23). Hence the current approach is to employ black candidates with basic qualifications and potential and to provide on-the-job training (Braack, 2004:304). Moreover, in South Africa, the introduction of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) responds to the call for widening of access of many adults to education and training; many of whom were prevented from accessing education and training as a result of the past unjust educational policies. Thus people who have achieved learning through experience may be given access to education, not on the basis of preceding qualifications, but on the basis of what they can demonstrate in terms of their learning (Heyns, 2004:8).

In responding to transformation imperatives, SANParks commits to promoting a different concept of conservation; that is, one linked to issues of development and human needs. The key to the new concept of conservation is that it attempts to link the protection of

biodiversity to human benefits ranging from employment of local people to their access to the sustainable use of resources within the parks (Cock & Fig, 2002:135).

However, such stipulations in regard to the employment of blacks and/or women, especially in state-run projects, seem to raise concerns among guides about whether standards (particularly of knowledge and skills, but to a certain extent attitude as well) will not be compromised by “demographic transformation” (Paton, 2007:256). It is important to say that the strategy which has recently been finalised by the Department of Tourism is one way of responding to the urgent need to address such issues and concerns in South African tour guiding as well as to improve the performance of tour guiding and professionalism (Department of Tourism: 2009). One of the issues that is stated in the final draft of this strategy is the issue of quality assurance; evaluation in tour guiding and how tourist guides are monitored and managed; and hence the need to benchmark what other countries are doing regarding this issue (Department of Tourism, 2009:13).

Authors such as Knudson *et al.* (in Mason & Christie, 2003:26) and Pereira (2000:10) assert that good interpreters and tour guides usually develop slowly through careful study, experience gained from practice and continuing education and training because these help them to stay abreast of current trends in interpretation.

Formal education and training, coupled with the continuing education and training of tour guides, are the keys to delivering effective interpretation. In South Africa, the new political dispensation perceived that skills-based learning, literacy and adult education were key areas of neglect. An urgent remedy was called for, which included the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The SAQA Act (No 58 of 1995) establishes a National Qualification Framework (NQF) that affords national recognition for learning achievements in both formal and non-formal learning environments. This is based on the recognition that under apartheid many people were denied access to formal, accredited training, and that they need an opportunity to gain

important competencies and experiences through workplace training and through other non-formal avenues such as NGO-run training at community centres. The result of this was the creation of a series of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). The SETA for the Tourism and Hospitality Sector is the Tourism and Sports Education and Training Authority (THETA) (Kaplan, 2004:223; Paton, 2007:219). THETA, which caters for conservation and guiding *inter alia*, is responsible for ensuring that training programmes and qualifications are of a high standard throughout the country by accrediting education and training providers, monitoring the provision thereof and registering assessors (Department of Tourism, 2009:23). However, research on how successful these programmes are has been limited (Visser & Rogerson, 2004:210).

The unique and complex situation in South African tourism and in SANParks, as has been indicated in this section, may involve more dimensions in establishing, managing and evaluating effective interpretation in South Africa's protected areas such as those controlled by SANParks. These dimensions should be captured in the development of a model, or the adaptation of existing models, for effective interpretation for SANParks.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Tourism is one of South Africa's most important and fastest growing sectors. Protected areas, including national parks, are one of the major attractions for tourists that visit South Africa and they contribute to the growth of tourism in South African (Saayman & Saayman, 2010:1057; Turpie, 2003:35). For example, 4 374 739 people visited a SANParks protected area in 2008/2009, contributing ZAR664.14 million in revenue (Strickland-Munro, Moore & Freitag-Ronaldson, 2010:664).

In particular, tourism in national parks provides nature-based tourism, which comes with a variety of opportunities for tourists that include interpretation of natural and cultural phenomena (Orams, 1996:9; Staiff, Bushell & Kennedy, 2002:97), and makes communication competence essential in interpretation. Communication competence is essential for the interaction of guides and tourists in nature-based tourism in national

parks in particular, because it enables tour guides to fulfill the purpose of persuasion, education, resource protection strategies and entertainment (Goh, 2008:12; Hu, 2007:33; Oschell, 2009:8; Queiros, 2003a:93). Whether these purposes are achieved or not depends largely on the communication skills which the guides employ to interact with the tourists (Oschell, 2009:8).

However, the literature indicates that it often occurs that guides in protected areas lack the professional communication skills which could enhance the conveying of scientific messages in a simple and interesting way that matches the educational and interest level of visitors (Carbone, 2006:57), an indication that tour guides do not pay enough attention to interpretive techniques (Rabotić, 2010). This situation may arise as a result of the quality of tour guides that are employed in national parks. For instance, in the South African situation, tour guides join the industry from diverse educational backgrounds, and this has resulted in a concern that guides in South African protected areas need to improve their communication skills (Paton, 2007:218). This situation raises the question of how the performance of tour guides in South African National Parks is managed to ensure effectiveness and consistency.

Besides the concerns raised in the previous paragraphs, it is evident that there have always been concerns about the criteria used for employment as a tourist guide in South Africa even before the 1994 political transition. The mode of evaluation (oral examinations) that was used by South African Tourism (SATOUR) in terms of The Tourist Guide Act of 1981 was subjective and casual, and the majority of candidates passed as tourist guides without consideration of whether or not they were really capable (Smal, 1997:35). Such anomalies and concerns, which may have a negative impact on the delivery of interpretation, have generated interest about what determines interpretive effectiveness in ecotour guides, specifically in selected national parks in South Africa.

What constitutes effective interpretation has intensified into a serious debate in the field of interpretive guiding in national parks worldwide (Tilden, 1977; Beck & Cable, 1998;

Ham, 1992; Ham & Weiler, 2005); a clear indication of how important this topic is. In the South African national parks setting and in SANParks, it should be highlighted that there is very little research, if any, on ecotour guides' knowledge and the application of interpretive delivery techniques.

This study examines factors that determine the interpretive effectiveness of ecotour guides by looking at existing models in this regard as well as the policies or strategies that SANParks applies as a guideline for guides in their national parks. One study that can be regarded as foundational to effective interpretation is that of Ham (1992), termed the EROT model of interpretive communication (an acronym meaning that interpretation should be Enjoyable/pleasurable, Relevant and Organised, and should have a Theme). This model serves as the underlying approach for the measurement of guides' interpretive effectiveness in selected South African national parks that provide guided interpretive activities.

This model is preferred largely because:

- The model encompasses principles of “good practice” in personal interpretation for quality and effectiveness that have been widely adopted by researchers in the field of interpretation (such as Armstrong & Weiler, 2003; Beck & Cable, 1998; Ham, 1992) and interpretive trainers, including the National Association for Interpretation in its institutional training of interpreters and tour guides (Ham & Weiler, 2005:30);
- It has influenced interpreters' notion of what successful interpretation should entail; and
- It also highlights “qualities” which are essential for success in almost every personal interpretation programme (Knapp & Benton, 2004).

Apart from the EROT model there are various other models that conceptualise the roles of tour guides in nature-based tourism (Cohen, 1985; Pond, 1993; Weiler & Davis, 1993; Oschell, 2009), and these must also be considered in answering the following research questions:

- Do tour guides in SANParks effectively apply interpretive delivery techniques?
- Do tour guides in SANParks recognise the need for continuing education and training in interpretive delivery techniques?
- What are the tour guides' continuing education and training needs in interpretive delivery techniques?
- What does management (park managers or tourism managers) perceive as issues critical to the delivery of effective interpretation?
- Does management (park managers or tourism managers) have any role in ensuring effective application of interpretive delivery techniques?
- What does management perceive as the training needs of tour guides in national parks of SANParks?

These research questions have guided the formulation of the overall aim of the study and the research objectives.

1.4 OVERALL AIM AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the study is to develop a conceptual model for effective interpretation by tour guides employed in South African national parks, based on their strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of interpretation and continuing education and training needs with regard to interpretive delivery techniques.

In order to realise the aim of the study, the following research objectives have been formulated.

Objective 1: To examine the place and nature of interpretation in national parks.

Objective 2: To identify the factors constituting effective interpretation for tour guides in South African national parks.

Objective 3: To determine whether tour guides appropriately apply interpretive delivery techniques.

Objective 4: To identify tour guides' continuing education and training needs regarding interpretive delivery techniques.

Objective 5: To assess the role of management within the context of South Africa's situation in supporting effective interpretation in SANParks national parks.

Objective 6: To conceptualise a model for effective interpretation for tour guides in SANParks' national parks.

1.5 HYPOTHESES

In order to appropriately guide the empirical stage of the research the hypotheses formulated for this study are:

H1: Within the South African context tour guides do not effectively apply interpretive techniques in national parks.

H2: Tour guides perceive the provision of continuing education and training in interpretive techniques as essential in improving their effectiveness in interpretive techniques.

H3: Perceived lack of support from management has a strong impact on tour guides' effective application of interpretive delivery techniques.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Literature study

The literature review was conducted by collecting data from primary and secondary sources. Literature was reviewed to develop the theoretical framework of the anticipated model for effective interpretation for ecotour guides in SANParks. The information that was gathered included the concept "interpretation", its role in nature-based tourism and quality assurance in tour guiding.

1.6.2 Empirical investigation

This research used a mixed-method approach. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were followed in conducting this research. Interviews, which were conducted in two phases (i.e. 1st phase and 2nd phase), were used as qualitative approach for six park officials/park managers from the six selected parks of SANParks which formed part of the study area.

The quantitative research method that was used was a survey involving tourists and tour guides who completed a structured questionnaire. One hundred and sixty-nine (n=169) tourists and forty-six (n=46) tour guides were selected through a convenience sampling technique.

1.6.3 Data analysis

The data collected from the interviews was analysed through the description, classification and connection of statements (Kitchin & Tate, 2000:231). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.0, (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias,1996:503) was used to analyse the quantitative data from the tourists and tour guides.

1.7 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is expected that this study will contribute towards tourism and interpretive guiding in various ways.

1.7.1 Significance in the academic world

The topic of “interpretation” is under-represented in tourism journals. 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 a 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 national parks context.

Limited research has been conducted to investigate challenges facing ecotour guides, particularly their urgent professional development needs in regard to continuing training in skills for conducting effective interpretation 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 enhance academic continuing education and training programmes in tour guiding in South Africa.

This thesis will add to the existing body of knowledge on “interpretation in national parks” by providing a conceptual 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. Given the uniqueness of the South African situation, research in this area is lacking. The provision of a South African model of interpretation drawn from existing literature and empirical results should contribute to filling this void in the literature.

1.7.2 Significance in the industry

This thesis 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 visitor’s 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 guides to better understand guides' needs for further training skills in interpretation in South Africa, an issue which has not been adequately researched in this country.

1.8 DEFINITION AND CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS USED IN THIS RESEARCH

The following terms are key concepts in this study and are described in the following paragraphs to show the context in which they are used throughout the study.

1.8.1 Ecotour guide

The term ecotour guide is a relatively new term and has been derived from the term "ecotourism" (Black, 2007:317). An ecotour guide is defined as someone employed on a paid or voluntary basis who conducts paying or non-paying tours around an area or site of natural and/or cultural importance while utilising ecotourism and interpretation principles. In other words, s/he communicates and interprets the significance of the environment, promotes minimal impact practices, promotes the sustainability of the natural and cultural environment and motivates those tourists to consider their lives in relation to larger ecological or cultural concerns (Black, Ham & Weiler, 2001:149).

The term ecotour guide will be used interchangeably with tour guide, tourist guide and guide, based on Pond's (1993:17) view that synonyms for tour guide used within the tourism industry include tourist guide, local guide and city guide. Depending on the kind of employer, the term tour guide may include a wide range of guides such as government guides, business or industry guides, community guides and self-employed guides (Hu, 2007:24).

The meaning of "tour guide" in this research is the one given by the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG), i.e. a person who guides groups or individual visitors from abroad or from the guide's own country around the buildings, sites and landscapes of a city or a region; to interpret, inspiringly and entertainingly, the cultural and natural heritage and environment in the language of the visitor's choice (Hu,

2007:24). Therefore, in this research, a guide is a site-based guide whose duties come to an end when the visitors leave the site (Hu, 2007:24).

1.8.2 Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is defined as tourism that emphasises contemporary or past cultures or history (Weaver, 2008:19 & 309) as a primary component.

1.8.3 Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that fosters learning experiences in and an appreciation of the natural environment, or some component thereof, within its associated cultural context. In the context of best practice, ecotourism appears to be environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable, preferably in a way that enhances the natural and cultural base of the area concerned and promotes the viability of the operation. While the primary focus of ecotourism is on the natural environment, ecotourism definitions usually allow a secondary role for related cultural attractions (Weaver, 2008:11 & 310).

1.8.4 Effectiveness

It is common knowledge that effectiveness is the degree to which the purpose of a programme has been realised. In this study, effectiveness is measured against the knowledge and application of the interpretive delivery techniques that are based on the basic principles of effective interpretation, i.e. that interpretation should be enjoyable, relevant and organised, and have a theme (EROT).

1.8.5 Environment

The word “environment” refers to all external conditions and factors, living and non-living (chemicals and energy), that affect an organism or other specified system during its lifetime (Miller, 1995:A29). The meaning of the concept “environment” in this study is

adopted from the White Paper on Environmental Management Policy, which regards the environment in a broader sense that includes the natural environment as well as social and cultural aspects (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1997).

Therefore, environmental interpretation encompasses both the cultural and the natural aspects of interpretation.

1.8.6 Heritage

Heritage is a broad concept and includes the natural as well as the cultural environment. It encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences. It records and expresses the long processes of historical development forming the essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities, and is an integral part of modern life (International Council on Monuments and sites (ICOMOS), 1999).

In this study, cultural heritage refers to monuments, groups of buildings, or sites of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological, or anthropological value, whereas natural heritage designates outstanding physical, biological and geological features, habitats of threatened plant or animal species and areas of value on scientific or aesthetic grounds or from the point of view of conservation (Richards, 2000:9-10).

1.8.7 Interpretation

In this study, interpretation is concerned with providing information to tourists in an educative, stimulating and entertaining manner about the places (natural and cultural) they visit, in order to promote the economic development, environmental quality and conservation and socio-cultural sustenance of such places (Hu, 2007:34). Both cultural and natural aspects of interpretation are referred to in this study.

1.8.8 National park

A national park is an extraordinary and unusual natural area that is managed by a nationally recognised conservation body for the specific purpose of protecting the ecological integrity and biodiversity of the area for the benefit of both present and future generations, and preventing overutilisation and excessive human encroachment. Furthermore, a national park is managed to enhance tourism, and visitors are allowed to make use of it for spiritual, scientific, cultural, recreative and educational opportunities and purposes (Du Toit, 2002:22; Osten in Lubbe, 2003:82).

1.8.9 Protected area

According to Lawton (2001:287), a protected area is defined by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) as an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means. He states furthermore that with their emphasis on preserving the natural environment, protected areas have obvious appeal to the ecotourism sector, which is based primarily on natural attractions.

1.8.10 Tourists and visitors

The words visitors, tourists, ecotourists and clients are used interchangeably in this study. They refer to people who travel away from their normal places of residence or work for leisure or to visit friends and family. This definition includes both people who stay away for the day only and people who stay away overnight (Weiler & Ham, 2001:551), regardless of whether they are local residents, domestic tourists or international visitors (Weiler & Ham, 2001:551). It also includes those who specifically visit national parks and heritage sites.

1.9 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to environmental and cultural heritage interpretation in selected South African national parks (SANParks), with particular reference to interpretive delivery techniques of personal interpretation. Both natural and cultural aspects of interpretation are included, based on the fact that interpretation in SANParks focuses on both cultural and natural (environmental) heritage, as evident in the following statement on the SANParks Website (n.d.):

National parks are often hotspots of cultural heritage and play a major role in reviving indigenous knowledge and oral history. Cultural sites draw tourism, but can also enhance SANParks relationship with communities outside the parks. Rock art, Iron Age sites, traditional sacred grounds or an old colonial building: Conservation and management of cultural heritage is an equal counterpart of nature conservation.

This study further investigates factors that determine the interpretive effectiveness of tour guides in personal interpretation, particularly in the guided activities (guided walks and drives). The study therefore does not concern itself directly with non-personal or “static” interpretation such as printed material, signs, exhibits, self-guided walks, pre-recorded tour commentaries on cassettes or videos, virtual tours, or other electronic media (Weiler & Ham, 2001:550).

1.10 THESIS STRUCTURE

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 provides the rationale for the study. It specifically discusses the background, statement of the problem, aim, objectives, methodology, the significance of the study, and definition of key concepts used in the study. This chapter lays the foundation for a better understanding of the related literature, which is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 2 focuses on the place and nature of interpretation in nature-based and cultural tourism, with a view to putting interpretation in the clear context of tourism and highlighting its significance in tourism. Prior to the said discussion, is a brief explanation of the concept “interpretation” which is to give a better understanding of the concept as used throughout the document, and of its historical perspective to show how interpretation has evolved over the years. Furthermore, the roles of tourist guides in nature-based tourism are explained with further emphasis on their interpretive role. Finally, in this chapter, an explanation of the EROT model of interpretive communication is given as a significant part of the conceptual foundation of the study.

Chapter 3 gives a broad overview of management support and quality assurance systems for ecotour guides’ interpretive effectiveness. The emphasis is placed on the role of continuing education and training as one of the quality assurance mechanisms. This chapter also explains the role of evaluation in ecotour guiding in nature-based tourism. Discussions in this chapter aim to highlight what can be done to enhance ecotour guides’ interpretive effectiveness and how interpretation can be monitored and evaluated. This lays the foundation for the empirical investigation of the interpretive effectiveness of tour guides in interpretive delivery.

Chapter 4 describes the research methodology used that is deemed applicable to achieve the research objectives. The qualitative and quantitative methods that are used in this study are clearly delineated and motivated. This chapter further discusses the sampling methods, data collection and data analysis used in this study.

Chapter 5 gives an overview of the results of the empirical research, their analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the results, conclusions drawn from the results, a proposed model of interpretation, recommendations drawn in this study, contributions of the thesis, limitations of the study and the direction for future research.

1.11 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the rationale of this study by providing some background to the concept of interpretation and some of the studies already conducted on this concept. The background and the rationale as discussed in this chapter highlight the important role that tour guides play in interpretation, and problems with providing effective interpretation in tourism in national parks.

This chapter also highlights gaps in the research on this phenomenon and where previous studies have focused their attention. For instance, the literature states that research in guiding has been restricted to guides' performance as viewed by tourists, without further checking how tour guides perceive their own effectiveness and the factors that determine their effectiveness.

The statement of the problem that is presented in this chapter provides the foundation for formulating the aims and objectives of the study, with the overall objective being the construction of a model of environmental interpretation of tour guides operating in South African national parks. This chapter also outlines the hypotheses formulated in this study and the definition of the key concepts used throughout the study.