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Prace i Studia Geograficzne

ISSN: 0208-4589; ISSN (*online*): 2543-7313

2024, t. 69.2, s. 89-104

DOI: 10.48128/pisg/2024-69.2-06

COMPARING PROFESSIONAL PROBLEMS OF TRAVEL AGENCIES AND TOURIST GUIDES OPERATING IN ISTANBUL

Abstract: This study aimed to compare and analyze the professional problems between travel agencies and tourist guides operating in the tourism sector in Istanbul. The research was conducted with a total of 26 participants, including 13 tourist guides and 13 representatives from travel agencies, using a semi-structured interview technique. The data obtained were analyzed under the headings of “mutual problems of travel agencies and tourist guides”, “problems related to guests”, “problems related to accommodation enterprises”, “other problems”, “illegal and shadow guiding problem”, and “base fees and adequacy”. It has been determined that the main problem that tourist guides experience with the travel agencies they work with is tour fees. Tourist guides underlined that travel agencies are very sales-oriented and this situation negatively affects the guides. In addition, it has been determined that intensive tour programs also cause significant problems for tourist guides. Agency representatives, on the other hand, stated that they had problems with inadequacies in the individual characteristics of tourist guides. In addition, non-compliance with the tour program, demanding high prices, and discrimination of guests were among the problems experienced by travel agencies with tourist guides. When the problems encountered by the two important stakeholders of the tourism sector other than the problems encountered with each other are taken into consideration, tourist guides stated that they encountered the problem of delays with their guests, the

Wpłynęło: 24.10.2023

Zaakceptowano: 17.05.2024

Zalecany sposób cytowania / Cite as: Inan R., Ciki K.D., Vergul A.M., 2024, Comparing professional problems of travel agencies and tourist guides operating in Istanbul, *Prace i Studia Geograficzne*, 69.2, Wydział Geografii i Studiów Regionalnych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa, 89-104, DOI: 10.48128/pisg/2024-69.2-06.

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problem of insufficient personnel with accommodation establishments, and the problem of traffic in Istanbul. Travel agency representatives, on the other hand, emphasized the problems caused by high and different expectations with their guests, the problems experienced by accommodation businesses when purchasing rooms, and the traffic problems in Istanbul. Both stakeholders agree that the illegal and shadow guiding problem should be inspected and sanctions should be imposed. Stakeholders who evaluate the base wages of tourist guides have different opinions on this issue. While a significant portion of tourist guides think that the wages are adequate, agency representatives think that the base wage is high.

Key words: Tourist Guidance, Travel Agency, Professional Issues, Istanbul, Content Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the investments and incentives provided, Istanbul is a city whose tourism potential is constantly being developed. With major projects such as Galata Port and Istanbul Airport, as well as all other historical and touristic areas, Istanbul offers different options to tourists who want to visit the city and attracts more visitors and transit passengers to the city. After Galata Port was commissioned, 143 cruise ships hosted 220,082 passengers in Istanbul in 2022 (UAB 2023). Istanbul Airport welcomed approximately 49 million international passengers in 2022, while Sabiha Gokcen Airport welcomed approximately 16 million passengers (General Directorate of State Airports Authority 2023). Galata Port visitor statistics and Istanbul airports' international passenger statistics show that the demand for visiting the city continues to grow steadily.

Before traveling to Istanbul, tourists first deal with travel agencies. From the moment they arrive in Istanbul until the moment they leave, they are accompanied by tourist guides. It is inevitable for travel agencies and tourist guides to work in harmony for tourists to leave Istanbul satisfied.

As of 1 March 2024, 13,456 professional tourist guides in Turkey have a work card. A significant portion of this number, 5,620 professional tourist guides are affiliated with the Istanbul Chamber of Guides (İRO) (TUREB 2024). Considering that many guides affiliated with other chambers also come to Istanbul as part of their Anatolian tours, it can be predicted that almost half of the members of the profession use Istanbul as their working area.

When the domestic literature is examined, it is possible to find studies on the problems of tourist guides (Akbulut 2006; Buyuktepe et al. 2019; Eser, Sahin 2020; Demirdelen Alrawadieh 2021; Karacaoglu, Sert 2018; Karamustafa, Cesmeci 2006; Turkmen, Deniz 2022) and travel agencies (Buzcu, Oguz 2015; Cakmak, Akyurt Kurnaz 2020). Some studies evaluate the problems in the tourist guiding profession in terms of the parties (Pelit, Katircioglu 2018), but no study has been found that comparatively examines the problems of tourist guides and travel agencies. In this context, this study aims to comparatively analyze the professional problems of travel agencies operating in Istanbul and tourist guides registered with İRO.

The study started with a literature review on the concepts of tourist guiding and travel agency. In the following section, the methodology and related processes of the research were mentioned. In the findings section of the study, the data obtained were analyzed and interpreted by the researchers. In the last part of the study, conclusions and recommendations are given.

THE CONCEPT OF TOURIST GUIDANCE

In the 19th century, when guided tours began to be organized by T. Cook, the tourist guiding profession began to take shape in the modern sense and became an important part of the global tourism

industry (Khattab et al. 2018). Since then, tourist guiding has developed as a professional service to inform, educate, and entertain individuals and groups about the places they visit, and has assumed a central role in efforts to build bridges between cultures and preserve world heritage (Cetin, Kizilirmak 2013).

The tourist guiding profession has evolved significantly over the years and this evolution has been a multifaceted process influenced by a variety of factors (Ciki et al. 2023). Over the years, the role of tourist guides has evolved from being mere guides to active participants in shaping tourists' experiences (Weiler, Black 2015). This shift has been driven by the changing demands and expectations of tourists and has required tourist guides to adapt and develop their skills to meet these wide-ranging expectations.

In the modern era, tourist guiding is the profession that guides travelers around the world as a living narrator of the cultural and natural heritage of the regions they specialize in. By sharing knowledge and stories, professionals in this field are instrumental in engaging visitors in a one-to-one interaction with a destination (Salazar 2006).

Although tourist guide training and practices vary around the world, it is clear that most countries recognize the critical importance of continuously updating the professional competencies and training of tourist guides (El-Sharkawy 2007). In Turkey, the regulations regarding the training and practices of the tourist guiding profession date back to the Ottoman Empire.

Guiding activities, which started in the Ottoman period with the guiding of Western tourists coming to Istanbul by non-Muslim citizens in the first place, reached a dimension that damaged the image of the state over time. For this reason, the conditions required to be able to work as a guide within the Ottoman territory were regulated by Regulation No. 190 published in 1890 (Degirmencioglu 2001).

After the proclamation of the Republic, some decrees and regulations regulating the tourist guide profession were published. These regulations regulated important issues such as who could practice the profession, which institutions could organize vocational courses, and the courses to be given in the courses. Within this framework, in 1925, Decree No. 2730 on Interpreting and Guiding Foreign Travelers was published. In 1971, the first regulation was published under the name of Interpreter Guide Courses and Interpreter Guide Regulation. This regulation was frequently updated in the following years. The regulation, which was updated in 1974, 1981, 1983, and 1986, was renamed the Professional Tourist Guidance Regulation in 2005 (Istanbul Chamber of Guide – İRO 2023). With Law No. 6326 on Tourist Guiding Profession enacted in 2012, the tourist guiding profession has reached its current form.

Today, there are several steps to becoming a tourist guide in Turkey. First of all, graduating from the tourist guidance departments of universities or completing the certificate program opened by the Association of Chambers of Tourist Guides (TUREB). Along with this qualification, it is necessary to get enough points from the language exam opened by the association or from the "Foreign Language Knowledge Level Assessment Exam" of the state. Finally, it is necessary to complete a domestic practice trip organized under the supervision of the ministry. Turkish citizens who complete these steps have the right to become tourist guides (TUREB 2024). As of 2024, there are almost 13.5 thousand tourist guides in Turkey (TUREB 2024).

LITERATURE ON PROBLEMS FACED BY TOURIST GUIDES

Tourist guides play an important role in shaping tourists' destination experiences and perceptions. However, they often face various challenges that affect their performance and the quality of the service they provide. In this context, the problems faced by tourist guides have created an interesting

research area for researchers. In the literature, it is possible to find studies that examine the problems experienced by tourist guides and their effects on the tourism industry.

In a study published by A.H. Mak et al. (2011), the challenges faced by tourist guides in Hong Kong and Macau are listed under six main themes. These themes can be summarized as harmful business methods practiced by travel agencies, shortcomings in the developing Chinese tourism market, exploitative attitudes of local tour operators towards tourist guides, obstacles related to human resources, role conflicts, and the impact of insurance policies on service quality.

The research conducted by S. Eser and S. Sahin (2020) shed light on the challenges faced by tourist guides in Turkey. The results of the study showed that the inability to prevent illegal guiding activities, the tendency of travel agencies not to pay minimum guide fees, the inadequacy of guide training programs, and shadow guiding services provided by unauthorized persons are among the main problems faced by the tourist guiding profession. These findings reveal the scale and diversity of the current problems in the sector and provide an in-depth understanding of the challenges facing the profession.

A. Ababneh (2017) grouped the obstacles faced by professionals working as tourist guides in Jordan under three main categories. These obstacles are defined as the lack of institutionalization of the profession, the lack of seasonal job security, and the physical and social difficulties encountered.

In a study conducted by B. Zengin et al. (2014), it was investigated whether women tourist guides in Turkey face difficulties arising from their gender while fulfilling their profession. The results of the study revealed that women guides face various problems such as sexual harassment, gender discrimination in the sector, unacceptable behaviors, and family and social pressure. However, women guides stated that being a woman in the tourist guiding profession is not an obstacle, but the profession is more challenging for women and requires additional struggles.

In the research conducted by J. Ap and K.K. Wong in 2001, the difficulties in the tourist guiding profession were grouped under eight different problem groups. These groups are detailed as inadequate professional standards, negative feedback from tourists, regulatory problems within the sector, gaps in training, unfair remuneration, the social image of the profession, difficulties in certification and licensing processes, and deficiencies in the roles of tourist guide associations.

On the other hand, there are studies conducted in line with various perspectives on the family problems faced by tourist guides due to the profession (Demirbulat 2014), the problem of illegal guiding (Cakmak 2019), the problems faced by women tourist guides (Sahin, 2019), the problems encountered with other stakeholders (Pelit, Katircioglu 2018), other obstacles arising from the profession (Guzel et al. 2014), administrative problems (Karamustafa, Cesmecici 2006), and the problems encountered in the profession (Batman 2003). This study aims to address the mutual problems and other problems experienced by tourist guides operating in Istanbul, one of the most important touristic destinations of Turkey, with travel agencies operating in the region.

THE CONCEPT OF TRAVEL AGENCY

Human beings' travel adventures, which started with non-touristic movements, have diversified over time. Technological developments in transportation and all other related fields have led to an increase in people's interest in pleasure-oriented travel. Especially in the modernizing and developing world, the number of travels carried out by people has gradually increased and in this context, there is a need for guides and travel organizers to accompany the travels.

It is known that the first attempt to provide services to people who wanted to travel was made by R. Smart as a steamship agency in Bristol in 1822 (Goeldner, Ritchie 2006). One of the most important initiatives that influenced modern travel was realized by T. Cook. Cook's tour between Leicester and

Loughborough was appreciated by travelers and became increasingly famous (Page ed. 2007). After this tour, Cook expanded his field of activity and established a travel business called *Thomas Cook*. Following Cook's progress, the number of initiatives for travel businesses gradually increased and began to spread to various parts of the world. Travel flows, which stagnated during the Second World War, showed a great increase after the end of the war (Oppermann, Cooper 1999).

Initiatives and developments in travel businesses were also reflected in Turkey and the first Turkish travel agency initiative in the Republican Era was realized with "Milli Türk Seyahat Acentesi Ziya ve Sürekasi" (TURSAB 2010). However, this enterprise, which was involved in various activities, closed down in 1940. Businesses such as TUTTA, Le Globe Vapur, and Buleks served in the 1920s. Another travel company that contributed to the Turkish travel agency is PASPARID (Ardilli 2006). The number of travel agencies increased over the years and by the 1950s, around 100 travel agencies were operating (Pekoz, Yercan 1998). TUSTAC, the first organization that brought travel agencies together as a union, started its activities in 1955. In 1972, TURSAB was established with the Law No. 1618 on Travel Agencies and Association of Travel Agencies and travel agencies were given legal status (Icoz 2000).

Law No. 1618 dated 1972 also officially demarcated and defined the travel agency. According to this law, which is still valid today, a travel business is defined as "a commercial organization that is authorized to provide information about tourism to tourists for profit, to create package tours and tours, to provide accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, sports, and entertainment services for tourism purposes, and to market the product it creates through its own or other travel agencies" (TURSAB 1972).

Travel agencies operate primarily as intermediaries between travel service providers such as airlines, hotels, and customers (Buzcu, Oguz 2015). Unlike businesses in many other sectors, travel agencies are more interested in services and information rather than physical products (Dolnicar, Laesser 2007). The main role of a travel agency can generally be summarized as follows: information, distribution, reservations, and services (Tsaur, Lin 2014). In addition, travel businesses make significant contributions to national economies through the marketing and promotion of potential destinations.

LITERATURE ON PROBLEMS FACED BY TRAVEL AGENCIES

Travel agencies play a pivotal role in facilitating travel experiences for individuals and groups, yet they encounter various challenges that impact their operations and the tourism industry at large. Several studies have delved into the problems faced by travel agencies, shedding light on the complexities of the sector.

O. Bardakoglu et al. (2014) examined the effect of conflicts between work and family life among travel agency employees on their emotional exhaustion levels and tendency to quit their jobs. The findings of the study show that work-family and family-work conflicts cause employees to become emotionally exhausted and more inclined to think of quitting their jobs.

In the study conducted by Z. Buzcu and S. Oguz (2015), the problems of travel agencies providing services in Adana, Turkey were tried to be determined. A survey was conducted in line with the purpose of the study. As a result, it was determined that problems such as illegal travel agency activities, difficulties in visa and passport procedures, and the inability to find qualified personnel stand out.

Carvalho (2022) discussed the difficulties faced by travel agencies and tourist guides in Portugal in times of crisis. In addition, in this study, changes in the tourism sector after the pandemic and adaptation processes to these changes were discussed. The findings obtained as a result of interviews with representatives of the two stakeholders were categorized to guide the tourism sector. The idea

that tourism professionals can adapt to this new era by developing innovative cooperation models and working methodologies is emphasized.

On the other hand, it is possible to come across various studies on the problems faced by travel agencies in the tourism sector. For example, there are studies on the problems faced by travel agencies with hotels (Sen, Aksoy Yilmaz 2020), customer complaints about tours (Unur et al. 2010), ethical problems (Atınc et al. 2018), problems encountered in a niche market (Sahin, Sen 2017), problems faced by travel agency representatives (Kiykac, Colakoglu 2023), seasonality problem (Kaya, Batman 2021), complaints of travel agents about tourist guides (Cakmak, Akyurt Kurnaz 2020), unethical behaviors (Turkmen, Deniz 2022), and similar studies. However, these studies are limited in identifying the problems of travel agencies.

METHODOLOGY

Travel agencies and tourist guides play important roles in shaping visitor experiences (Randall, Rollins 2009) and it is very important to reveal the professional problems faced by these stakeholders to provide better service and to be better understood. It can help identify areas for improvement in the sector, leading to increased operational efficiency and service quality. Addressing these challenges can contribute to the development of better cooperation between stakeholders and ultimately benefit both the industry and tourists. In this context, a comparative analysis has been conducted by examining the professional problems of travel agencies operating in Istanbul and tourist guides on Istanbul tours. On the other hand, the research also aimed to reveal other problems of these two stakeholders.

Semi-structured interview technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was used because it was deemed appropriate for the research (Yildirim, Simsek 2008). The semi-structured interview technique was chosen as a more appropriate data collection technique for this study due to its flexibility and ability to capture rich, detailed insights from participants (Ruslin et al. 2022). This approach provides a balance between structured questions and open-ended discussions, enabling researchers to delve deeper into the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by travel agents and tourist guides (Kallio et al. 2016).

Before collecting the data for the research, ethics committee permission numbered 2023-03 was obtained from Istanbul Gelisim University. After ethics committee permission was obtained, the interviews were conducted between 10 June 2023 and 15 July 2023. The data obtained from face-to-face interviews were analyzed by content analysis, which is used to systematically and objectively examine communication in written, visual, or oral materials (Ciki, Tanriverdi 2023; Ogretmenoglu et al. 2023). The data were analyzed without using any software.

According to D. Bertaux (1981), a sample size of 15 is sufficient for qualitative research. Accordingly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 tourist guides and 13 travel agency representatives, 26 participants in total, who were reached by convenience sampling method. Tourist guides participating in the study were coded as T1, T2, T3, and T14, T15, while travel agency representatives were coded as S1, S2, S3, and S14, S15.

In the interview form, in addition to questions to determine the demographic characteristics of the participants, there are six questions each for tourist guides and travel agency employees. To determine these questions in the interview form, the related literature was analyzed and the questions to be addressed to the participants were determined (Ababneh 2017; Akbulut 2006; Buyuktepe et al. 2019; Karacaoglu, Sert 2018; Karakas 2018; Köroğlu et al. 2020; Pelit et al. 2016; Tsaur, Lin 2014; Yenipinar et al. 2014). Opinions were obtained from two experts about the questions and then interviews were conducted. The questions asked to tourist guides and travel agency representatives are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Questions

Questions directed to travel agency representatives	Questions for tourist guides
1. What are the most important problems you experience with tourist guides?	1. What are the most important problems you face with travel companies while working as a tourist guide in Istanbul?
2. What are the most important problems you experience with customers?	2. What are the problems you face with the groups you manage while working as a tourist guide in Istanbul?
3. What are the most important problems you face with accommodation companies?	3. What are the problems you face with accommodation businesses while working as a tourist guide in Istanbul?
4. What are the other problems you encounter?	4. What are the other problems you face while working as a tourist guide in Istanbul?
5. What are your thoughts on illegal guiding ^a and shadow guiding ^b ?	5. What are your thoughts on illegal guidance and shadow guidance?
6. What are your thoughts on base wages and their adequacy?	6. What are your thoughts on base fees and their adequacy?

Source: prepared by the authors.

^a Pursuant to the Law No. 6326 on the Profession of Tourist Guiding, individuals who are not registered with an official chamber and who provide tour guiding services through agencies or individually, despite not having the qualifications to be a tourist guide, are called illegal guides (Cakmak 2019).

^b On the other hand, when there is no guide in any language in Turkey, the process of conveying the narratives of guides who are competent in common languages such as English to tour participants through an interpreter who speaks that language as his/her mother tongue is called shadow guiding. Unlike illegal guiding, in this practice, the persons who undertake the task of guiding through an interpreter are tourist guides who are citizens of the Republic of Turkey and hold an official license and work card issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Duzgun 2020).

RESULTS

Within the scope of this study, interviews were conducted with 13 tourist guides and 13 agency managers, which was prepared to comparatively examine the problems experienced by travel agencies operating in Istanbul and tourist guides on Istanbul tours with other stakeholders. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the tourist guides interviewed within the scope of the study.

All of the guides interviewed within the scope of the study have at least a bachelor's degree and the majority of them are male (10). The most common language of specialization among the 13 interviewed tourist guides was English (11). The other languages written on the work cards of the interviewed tourist guides are: Spanish (3), German (2), Italian (1), and Arabic (1). 11 of the 13 tourist guides who participated in the study go on national tours and two of them go on regional tours. The monthly income level of three participants is between 8,500–20,000 TL, five participants have a monthly income of 21,000–31,000 TL, and five participants have a monthly income of 32,000 TL and above.

Table 3 presents information on the age groups, education levels, and marital status of the interviewed agency representatives along with their length of working experience, duties in the agency, and the types of customers served by the agency. The longest professional experience among the participants belongs to a 51-year-old participant with 30 years.

Mutual Problems of Travel Agencies and Tourist Guides

The first question posed to travel agency representatives and tourist guides within the scope of the research is aimed at determining the problems they experience with each other. A significant number

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Tourist Guides

Personal Characteristics	f		f
Gender		Marital Status	
Male	10	Single	6
Female	3	Married	7
Total	13	Total	13
Age Group		Length of Experience in the Profession	
18–38	1	<i>Between 1–9 years</i>	6
39–48	6	<i>10–19</i>	2
49 and above	6	<i>20–29</i>	5
Total	13	Total	13
Education		Guest Type	
Bachelor's degree	9	Local	2
Postgraduate	4	Foreigner	5
Total	13	Both local and foreign	6
Way of working		Total	13
Independent	10		
With agency	3		
Total	13		

Source: prepared by the authors.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Agency Representatives

Personal Characteristics	f		f
Gender		Education	
Male	12	High School	1
Female	1	Associate degree	1
Total	13	Bachelor's degree	6
Age Group		Postgraduate	5
18–38	4	Total	13
39–48	7	Customer Type	
49 and above	2	Local	3
Total	13	Foreigner	5
Marital Status		Both local and foreign	5
Single	3	Total	13
Married	10	Length of Experience in the Profession	
Total	13	Between 1–9 years	2
Role in Agency		10–19	5
Agency owner/partner	7	20–29	5
Operation Officer	6	30 years and over	1
Total	13	Total	13

Source: prepared by the authors.

of the tourist guides who participated in the research stated that the problems related to tour fees are among the most important problems with the travel agencies they work with (10). One of the participants expressed this situation as follows: "Some agencies can be very troublesome in terms of payment. There are agencies that offer payment below the base fee, as well as agencies that delay the payment of the agreed fee... (T2)".

Sales expectation is one of the prominent problems that the interviewed tourist guides have with travel agencies (6). One participant emphasized the problem he/she experienced in this regard as follows: "... another problem we have with agencies is that travel agencies focus on »sales« instead of their primary duty of »preparing and making tour programs« and our colleagues are put under pressure because of this focus... (T5)". Another prominent problem is intensive tour programs. In this context, the participant's comment supporting this problem is as follows: "...Traffic is a serious problem in Istanbul. Since the program in Istanbul is intense, the guests get very tired from traffic and waiting. They complain about this to us. The best solution is to plan the time to be spent in Istanbul well (T6)".

Other problems encountered by tourist guides while cooperating with travel agencies can be listed as follows: misrepresentation or over-explanation of tour content by guests (4), not providing insurance (2), looking for cheap guides (2), looking for the cheapest to reduce costs by sacrificing quality (2), poor preparation of tour design (2), not supporting guide transportation for tours that end or start late (2), and tour bus captains not knowing the location and direction (2).

The agency representatives were asked about the problems they experienced with tourist guides and the answer was that they mainly encountered problems related to the inadequacies of the individual characteristics of tourist guides. Some of these problems are an insufficient level of knowledge (3) and foreign language (3), looking down on guests (2), giving little narration, inadequate communication with guests (2), indifferent (3), and rude (2) behaviors towards guests. In addition to these problems, agency representatives state that there are problems related to being sales-oriented (6), non-compliance with the tour program (3), disturbing the guests by discussing political issues during the tour (2), demanding high prices during high periods (2), discriminating against guests (2), sudden tour cancellations, attempts to eliminate the agency in various ways for future tours, negative advertising about the agency, choosing the tour that suits them (5), and so on.

Problems with Guests

The guests that travel agencies and tourist guides serve constitute the basis of the tourism sector. In this context, tourist guides and agency representatives, who are in the position of service providers, were asked to evaluate the problems they experience with guests, who are the focal point of the tourism sector. The tourist guides who participated in the interview emphasized that guest delays (7), which also cause delays in the tour program, are among the most important problems they experience with their guests. The opinion of a participant who expressed his opinion on delays is as follows: "We cannot say that it is specific to Istanbul, but there may be problems in general in terms of groups keeping the hours. Of course, since we work with people, these should be taken for granted, but delays, especially in Istanbul, can bring big problems. Some people get caught up in shopping, some exceed the time given for meals, some wake up late, some get lost, and I have encountered similar timing problems... (T9)".

Guests' having different expectations (4), their desire to act separately (3), not liking the tour program after purchasing the tour, touching historical artifacts, having small problems that can be encountered in the ordinary flow of life, asking personal questions, constantly complaining about prices and Istanbul crowds are among the other problems encountered by tourist guides and highlighted in this context.

When the problems encountered by agency representatives with customers are analyzed, it is seen that they differ from the problems encountered by tourist guides. First of all, agency representatives

highlight the issues of guests expecting different things for free (2), the style used against the staff (2), and being dissatisfied with everything (3) as the most important problems despite the tour program being explained. In addition, issues such as not liking the tour fees and payment terms, and trying to get discounts by comparing with different businesses are other customer-related problems faced by agency representatives.

Problems Related to Accommodation Businesses

Accommodation establishments are the stakeholders with which the interviewed agency representatives and especially tourist guides have the least problems. A significant number of tourist guides (9) stated that they do not have major problems with accommodation establishments and that they are generally satisfied. One of the main problems encountered is that the personnel working in accommodation establishments do not have a sufficient level of foreign language (especially English) (4). A comment supporting the problems encountered in terms of language was as follows: "Unfortunately, in a cosmopolitan city like Istanbul, there are still serious problems with knowing foreign languages and being able to understand and meet the demands of the guests. Although it depends on the quality of the business and the price of the tour, the personnel working in the tourism sector should have sufficient language and communication skills and should be certified for this... (T2)". Similarly, tourist guides stated that they faced problems in terms of the behavior of the staff working in accommodation establishments (2) their communication with the guests staying in the establishment within the scope of the tour (2) their efforts to sell to the guests. Other problems encountered by tourist guides with accommodation establishments are food quality (2), cleanliness/hygiene (3), and long waiting times at the entrance and exit of hotels.

When the opinions of the agency representatives were analyzed, it was observed that they had the most problems with accommodation businesses when purchasing rooms (4). One participant made the following comment on the subject: "Many hotels do not want to give rooms to agencies. Selling from the online market, they usually tell us that there are no rooms... (S9)". Other prominent problems are cleanliness/hygiene (3), food quality (3), lack of skilled staff (2), location of the hotel, comfort of the rooms, charging fees for tourist guides and other agency staff (2), keeping prices too high during high periods (3), trying to sell various products, especially sightseeing tours, to the guests who come to the hotel with the tour (2) and not finding an interlocutor in the business.

Other Problems

The other question asked to the respondents was aimed at identifying other problems encountered in the sector. It was determined that the biggest problem encountered by the interviewed tourist guides while on tours in Istanbul was traffic (7). Regarding this issue, one participant used the following statements: "The most important problem is traffic. I cannot explain this to a guest coming from Europe, especially from the United States. It is a deplorable situation to stay in traffic for hours in a place where you come for vacation... (T10)". In addition, one of the most difficult issues for tourist guides is the long queues that form in all tourist areas. A tourist guide said: "The queues we have to wait, or rather the queues we have to wait, especially in the places we visit in Istanbul constitute a big problem for me and my guests. I feel ashamed when I see the queues we face especially at Topkapı Palace, Hagia Sophia, and Museums during the tours we do with foreign guests. Most of my guests do not want to enter when they see the queues because they do not want to wait. I am talking about queues lasting 1.5–2 hours. I think guided groups should have priority (T9)". Parking problems (3), peddlers (2), refugee problems, sale of counterfeit products, exorbitant prices for foreign guests, lack of attention to city cleanliness, language problems of the staff working in touristic areas, and long restoration processes are among the problems encountered by tourist guides in Istanbul.

Like tourist guides, agency representatives also stated that Istanbul traffic is an important problem (3). In addition to Istanbul traffic, other prominent challenging problems include not being able to find taxis (2), unlicensed and illegal agencies (2), not being able to find qualified staff (2), forgetfulness of guests, last-minute tour cancellations (2), drivers' expectation of type for every tour, accommodation fees, lack of supervision, staff wages, car rental fees, and increasing tour costs.

Illegal and Shadow Guidance Issue

It was seen that the interviewed tourist guides agreed that illegal guiding is a very big problem. In addition, the emphasis that shadow guiding is no different from illegal guiding was repeated by many participants. The participants (11) stated that deterrent penalties and heavy sanctions should be applied to solve this problem, and emphasized that professional organizations should also contribute to inspections. Some participants emphasized that travel agencies also have a duty in this regard and that illegal and shadow guides should not be compromised.

Interviewees representing travel agencies also agreed with tourist guides that illegal guides should be monitored and sanctions should be imposed (9). The point where agency representatives differ from the participants who are tourist guides is shadow guiding. Agency representatives do not characterize shadow guides as a problem (only one agency representative stated shadow guides as a problem). One of the agency representatives who expressed this opinion used the following statements: "Shadow guiding is practiced in every country and I don't think shadow guiding will be a problem. It is quite reasonable, especially for some foreign agencies to bring their guides in their language and use shadow guides" (S4).

Base Fees and Adequacy of Fees

Finally, the interviewees were asked about the base wage of tourist guides, which is an issue that concerns both professional groups. In response to the question, a significant number of tourist guides (10) stated that their base salaries are sufficient. The remaining participants stated that the current base wage level is insufficient and should be improved (3). The most important problem pointed out by the tour guides who evaluated the base wage is that they frequently encounter offers below the base wage (5).

When the agency representatives were asked about the base fees, there was not a similar concentration of opinions. While seven of the respondents stated that the base fee is high, only two of them stated that the base fee is reasonable. While 1 participant emphasized that the base fee should be increased, three participants stated that the base fee should be determined according to a certain foreign currency.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to address the mutual problems of travel agencies and tourist guides and other problems comparatively. The findings obtained as a result of the research support the literature. The findings of the study prepared by K. Karamustafa and N. Cesmeçi (2006) revealed that tourist guides faced managerial difficulties primarily because agency representatives provided insufficient information about tours and tour groups and were excluded from the tour planning process. In addition, it was found that tourist guides had problems with drivers and souvenir sellers. In this context, the findings of the present study are in parallel with the findings of Karamustafa and Cesmeçi (2006). Similarly, inadequate information about tours and tour groups, problems with tour plans, and problems with drivers were also identified in this study.

According to O. Batman's (2003) study, tourist guides face various problems divided into four main categories, one of which is the problems related to travel agencies. According to the findings of the study, the problems related to travel agencies include financial problems, social rights, and the perception of tourist guiding as an insignificant profession, except for financial problems, which are not similar to the findings of this study.

Buzcu and Oguz (2015) addressed the problems of travel agencies operating in Adana in their study. As a result of the research, it was determined that the most common problem faced by travel agencies is finding qualified and foreign language-speaking employees. Similar findings were found in this study, which deals with the problems of travel agencies operating in Istanbul. Some of the interviewed participants stated that they had problems in finding qualified personnel.

Ababneh (2017) conducted a study with well-known tourist guides in Jordan and categorized the professional problems of the participants into three main groups: the lack of recognition of guiding as a professional profession, the need for seasonal employment, and the existence of physical and social difficulties. Similarly, the findings of this study are similar to the professional problems highlighted by Ababneh (2017). Although the tourist guide participants of the current study did not mention seasonal employment, they underlined the lack of full recognition and physical and social challenges of their profession.

It is a well-known fact that the tourist guiding profession has peak periods and that it is not fully spread across the country in general in Turkey and the world. However, unlike previous studies in the literature (Buyuktepe et al. 2019; Guzel et al. 2014), the seasonality of the profession was not seen as a problem in this study. One of the most important reasons underlying this is that Istanbul is not dependent on sea-sand-sun tourism and is home to many types of tourism.

When the problems experienced by guides are examined, it is seen that the attitudes and behaviors of travel agency operators, which are far from displaying an institutional approach, are effective. Offering prices below the official base wage to guides to reduce the costs of tours or not paying guides on time, not insuring guides, organizing cultural tours in a sales-oriented manner, and not employing qualified captains with tourism culture show that there is no corporate business culture. These attempts to reduce costs may also be the result of fierce competition among agencies. At this point, the control of some expenses by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism or another institution may help to solve the problems.

Based on the interviews, it is possible to state that there is a lack of communication or miscommunication between travel agencies and tourist guides. The inability of the guides to convey accurate information to the customers or the inability of the agencies to convey the necessary information to the guides incompletely or inaccurately are the main communication problems. At this point, regular and effective communication channels between travel agencies and tourist guides should be increased and strengthened. This can be achieved through methods such as regular meetings, communication tools (e-mail, instant messaging, etc.), and sharing platforms.

In terms of the problems experienced by agencies, it is seen that guides' behaviors that do not comply with business ethics are emphasized. Some guides' low level of knowledge, insufficient foreign language skills, being rude and indifferent in their relations with guests, being sales-oriented on tours, not complying with tour programs, and canceling tours at the last minute bring ethical problems to the surface. Professional chambers can be considered as a solution for such situations. The regulation and implementation of the disciplinary regulation in a way to respond to these situations may help to eliminate the problem.

On the other hand, one of the problems most emphasized by travel agency representatives in the current research is related to the inadequacies of guides. Tourist guides start to work professionally because they have certain qualifications. It can be stated that one of the most important factors in their being seen as incompetent is behaviors contrary to business ethics. The introduction of innovations such as tour cancelations except for force majeure, high number of complaints or the number of tours

departed with provable factors such as tour cancelations, high number of complaints or the number of tours departed, and the introduction of innovations such as the official title of tourist guides in the profession or the scoring system are likely to affect both sides positively. Additional elements (e.g. increased remuneration) should be identified to make the title earned through the developed system more useful. This will lead to improved service quality.

It is a positive situation that both guides and agencies agree on the issue of illegal guiding. There is a common opinion that inspections should be increased and no concessions should be made on this issue. It is seen that most of the agencies have a neutral attitude towards shadow guiding. Most of the guides consider shadow guiding as equally harmful as illegal guiding. Continuous inspections at more locations would be a deterrent for illegal and shadow-guiding activities. The obstacle to more inspections is the limited budget of the professional chambers for inspections. A large part of the income of the chambers consists of the dues of their members. There is a need for solutions to reduce the dependence of the chambers on dues revenues.

With the rapid advancement of technology, travel agencies and tourist guides face new challenges of digital transformation. Utilizing digital tools such as online booking platforms, mobile applications, and digital marketing strategies is important to gain a competitive advantage. Both travel agencies and tourist guides should take into account the rapidly evolving technology and collaborate.

In conclusion, to solve the problems in the tourism sector, there is a need for closer cooperation and communication among the stakeholders of the sector. A better understanding and cooperation between guides, travel agencies, tourists, and government officials can contribute to solving the problems in the sector. In addition, regular renewal of the professional training of guides, improvement of their foreign language skills, and more emphasis on tourism culture can help to raise quality and ethical standards in the sector. In addition, to protect the rights of tourists, it is important to raise consumer awareness and to ensure the effective operation of complaint mechanisms regarding tours. Finally, more investment in the tourism sector and consideration of environmental and social factors for the sustainability of tourism are important for the long-term success of the sector.

This study has some limitations. The first of these is that the study only deals with businesses and tourist guides operating in Istanbul. In addition, the study was prepared by utilizing a semi-structured interview technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods. The current number of tourist guides registered with İRO is 5320 (TUREB 2024), and therefore, the findings of this study can be supported by conducting more comprehensive research in the future. In addition, in future studies, the current situation in different countries and the current situation in Turkey can be examined comparatively in terms of both travel agencies and tourist guides.

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