

Austrian Professional Association of Sports and Leisure Enterprises

Arguments for a regulated tourist guide industry



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Argumentation for the regulation of the tourist guide industry

Background

With a total of 1,780¹ members in all of Austria, tourist guides -identifiable by the common brand “austriaguides” - represent one of the largest professional groups registered with the Austrian Professional Association of Sports and Leisure Enterprises at the Austrian Economic Chambers. Commercial freelance tourist guides practice a regulated trade as defined by the provisions of §§ 94 fig. 21 and 108 of the Austrian Trade, Commerce and Industry Regulation Act (*GewO*) 1994. The range of activities carried out by tourist guides in Austria includes: showing and explaining guests from Austria as well as from abroad the historical riches, the artistic and cultural heritage, the social and political context as well as the sports and social events that Austria has to offer.

The European Standard EN13809 defines a tourist guide as a person who not only guides visitors in the language of their choice and interprets the cultural and natural heritage of an area but also usually has qualifications in a specific area which has been issued and/or recognised by the appropriate authority. Tourist guides are representatives of countries, regions, and cities; and the job they do usually determines whether visitors feel welcome and want to stay longer or decide to revisit Austria. Tourist guides not only play an important role in communicating the cultural and natural heritage of Austria to visitors but also help to ensure the sustainability of that heritage by making visitors aware of its importance.

Tourist guides are very often the first and sometimes even the only contact persons that visitors have. As such, they add considerably to the destination’s reputation. As key personalities between guests and hosts, they are “living advertising mediums” and, thus, at the same time also serve as a marketing tool for domestic advertising. Tourist guides substantially contribute to the understanding of a country, a region, and its self-perception. Their technical expertise; their special knowledge of local

¹ Member statistics; Austrian Professional Association of Sports and Leisure Enterprises, Retrieved: 31st December 2012

conditions; and their personal, individually adapted tours enhance the guest's experience.

The regulation of the tourist guide industry is justified because of the following reasons:

1. Tour guide activity is mostly regionally specific and dependent on location with comparatively little European mobility. Thus, professional qualification in this field also has far fewer points of contact with freedom of establishment and services as compared to qualifications for other professions.
2. Consumer protection: Only an appropriately trained tourist guide can give the client authentic and correct information and, thus, render reliable service in return for a fee.
3. Tourist guides are of utmost, indispensable significance for the transmission of the cultural heritage of countries and regions. The remarks and explanations of well-trained tourist guides considerably contribute to cultural understanding in Europe and to the impressions that non-European guests get of Europe. They are among the closest contacts tourists have, which is why special responsibility is attached to their actions as well as to their remarks. Even the EU itself - in statements it has issued - continues to stress the importance of Europe's common cultural heritage, which is substantially communicated by qualified tourist guides. Therefore, it should be a top-priority for public authorities to ensure communication on this level for the sake of their own cultural identity.
4. A tourist guide's only resource is his or her knowledge and the quality of his or her communication of that knowledge - both require technical competency. Statistics show that the number of tourist guides in all of Europe is steadily increasing, which proves that a regulation would not be a restraint for the development of the profession. On the contrary: "You get what you pay for." The sufficient number of providers guarantees consumers a stable, justified, and fair price.
5. Tour managers and museums/church/etc. guides already carry out free commercial activity which is not regulated throughout Europe. They, thereby, cover part of the activities of a tourist guide. There is even an increasing trend towards further training to be qualified as a tourist guide.

6. A tourist guide's field of activities is so very full of responsibilities that extensive training constitutes a concern in the overall (educational) interest of the state, especially when it comes to accompanying and informing school children. In the European Union this suggestion has already been taken up and an EN standard has been developed to define a consistent, European training standard. The EN 15565 standard has established a minimum framework for the qualified training of tourist guides in Europe. Regulated training providers, such as WIFI (Institute for Economic Development) in Vienna, have already been certified by this standard. An abolition of the legal regulation would
 - a. devalue the profession in general and
 - b. be a hardship that could hardly be communicated to all those hundreds of micro-entrepreneurs who invested up to two years and many thousands of Euros in their training and whose professional qualifications would thereby be devalued.

Tourist guides - in contrast to most other regulated trades - are actually exclusively sole proprietors who do not run a physically existing business but whose entrepreneurship consists exclusively of their personal, qualified service. If this service is deprived of its basis by deregulating it, the profession will be completely devalued, and the market will be swamped with unqualified providers and the quality of service will suffer. Thereby, the EU would thwart its own explicit objective of fostering lifelong learning, as tourist guides currently continuously undergo further professional development as offered by occupational interest groups. Moreover, the training and qualification systems established in years gone by would be questioned - given that, upon deregulation, they would probably no longer be financially viable due to the lack of demand. A considerable amount of added value would, thereby, cease to exist. Additionally, training providers, publishing companies and editors/distributors of technical literature, etc. would also experience negative effects on employment.

7. Generally, it can be noted that the EU - with its tendency towards further deregulation - calls its own Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (including the pan-Europe recognition system) increasingly into question. It is not to be expected that a general decrease in quality produced by a "liberalisation" will economically help the European market in competition.

Overall, Europe is a high-standard region that unnecessarily challenges its acquired status by means of objectively unjustified deregulations.

8. Thanks to their professional and, more importantly, regional knowledge, Tourist guides know immediately what measures to take in case of health or security problems. Well-trained, professional behaviour in emergencies; precise knowledge of local conditions (emergency numbers, etc.); first aid; knowledge of the on-site traffic regulations and traffic organisations as well as the national language are integrated components of regulated training and, therefore, naturally part of tourist guides' knowledge. An unqualified guide is not able to react appropriately quickly in emergencies.
9. Generally, it can be noted that the World Tourism Organization of the United Nations demands a facilitation/liberalisation of visas because it sees tourism as a means of peaceful international communication. By taking care of their visitors and informing them about culture, religion, politics, history and people's behaviour, qualified local tourist guides foster mutual understanding and iron out prejudices. In doing so, tourist guides make contributions to fostering peaceful cooperation as well as to improving intercultural understanding. Deficiencies in quality can be detrimental here.

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