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To cite this article: Jayni Gudka , Ilaria Pappalepore & Claudia Dolezal (27 Jan 2026): Marginalisation revisited: bottom-up perspectives on co-creating socially just walking tours, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, DOI: [10.1080/09669582.2026.2614544](https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2026.2614544)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2026.2614544>



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Published online: 27 Jan 2026.



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Marginalisation revisited: bottom-up perspectives on co-creating socially just walking tours

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ABSTRACT

The past 15 years have seen a rise in initiatives set up to enable marginalised groups to create walking tours of their own communities, thus also creating alternative destination experiences. This research investigates the level of control marginalised communities have on the content and narratives of walking tours they deliver, the extent to which tour guides include or exclude aspects of their marginalisation, and how these factors affect their agency and self-empowerment. The qualitative analysis draws on semi-structured interviews with senior leadership and tour guides from 11 tour organisations who engage marginalised people in walking tours. The analysis reveals that by amplifying peoples' voices and giving them a platform, tour guiding increases the guides' sense of agency and belonging, can transform public opinion and increase the visibility of marginalised individuals – particularly when guides are able to shape the narrative and content of the tours. Consequently, tours delivered and designed by marginalised individuals contribute to making urban destinations more socially inclusive, thus forming an essential part of the justice tourism and sustainability agenda.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 October 2024

Accepted 23 December 2025

KEYWORDS

Marginalisation; justice tourism; walking tours; sustainable tourism; advocacy; empowerment

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Bora Kim

Introduction

The tourism industry has often been criticised for exacerbating injustice and inequality, particularly due to unequal power relations (Tomassini & Cavagnaro, 2020). At the same time, this criticism is increasingly challenged by consumers and businesses that value diversity and equity principles (Im et al., 2023). Though power centralization in the global tourism supply chain, often focused on the most powerful players and businesses, prevents those who are most marginalised from leveraging the benefits of tourism (Bellato & Cheer, 2021), these groups and communities also have a role to play in the industry. Cultural tourism products such as guided tours, homestays and culinary experiences with minority groups often appeal to visitors seeking out

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more locally-rooted, sustainable, and immersive ways to experience destinations. In this article, we focus specifically on urban walking tours working with marginalised groups such as vulnerable migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, people affected by homelessness, indigenous communities, and LGBTQIA+ communities. In this context, marginalisation “describes both a process and a condition that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life” (Mannion, 2020, p. 1). Marginalisation refers not only to the exclusion of individuals or groups from a particular ecosystem, but also to the negative emotions they experience from not being welcome within it (Thakur et al., 2023). This is often visible in discrimination when accessing basic infrastructure, identification documents, employment opportunities and education, which reinforces the barriers to realising their full potential. It can also manifest in violence as a result of being different, with consequences including unconscious bias (Moule, 2009); microaggressions (Freeman & Stewart, 2021); physical, psychological and sexual harassment and assault; and even homicide (Diehl et al., 2017). Representing these marginalised communities in a way that does justice to their stories, memories, cultures and histories while also distancing the product from poverty-tourism and voyeurism - i.e. creating more socially sustainable and just walking tours - proves to be, however, challenging.

The past 15 years have seen a rise in community-led initiatives set up to enable marginalised groups to create their own walking tours of their communities (Dolezal & Gudka, 2019). This stems from a greater drive to create a more equitable, just and sustainable tourism industry, as propounded by Agenda 2030 (UN, 2024). This article is devoted to understanding this social change on the ground by embracing a critical theory approach in that we endeavour to deconstruct power and privilege and co-create through research an “emancipatory praxis”, working with those people experiencing oppression (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2013, p. 429) to ensure equal opportunities, rights and privileges (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2024). We agree that as professionals, researchers, and educators, we must recognise existing privileges and structural injustice, aiming to dismantle oppressions and abuses of power as opposed to trying to assimilate diverse others into the mainstream (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2024). While two authors of this paper are academics, one of them is a tourism professional who has been working closely with communities that experience marginalisation and disadvantage for over fifteen years. The present research thus responds to a growing call for collaboration with those who experience marginalisation, which “would illuminate perspectives not offered by other stakeholders and would lead to better understandings of their exclusion from knowledge creation” (Bellato & Cheer, 2021, p. 958).

Situating this study within an urban environment is important for two reasons. First, while community-based tourism scholarship has often centred on rural communities, urban areas, especially in the global north, are most affected by persistent socio-economic disparities and structural barriers that disadvantage marginalised groups (UN-HABITAT, 2022). Secondly, in cities where branding strategies aim to project images of cosmopolitanism and inclusivity (Tsavdaroglou & Kaika, 2022), while simultaneously producing tourist bubbles that conceal inequalities from public view (Fainstein & Judd, 1999), tours led by marginalised individuals offer a new narrative that challenges these contradictions. As Harvey (2012) argues, cities are a product of capitalism as urbanisation is fed by surplus product and, as such, they are inherently

a class phenomenon that reproduces inequality. In this context, discussions about power dynamics within the urban realm intersect with calls for the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968), the idea that urban dwellers should not only be entitled to inhabit the city but also to participate in and shape its symbolic and material life. Walking tours led by marginalised individuals become a particularly valuable medium in this context by allowing guides to reclaim public spaces and narrate histories that have often been made invisible. Failing to understand strategies of how to include those marginalised in the development of their own narratives might, however, turn walking tours of marginalised communities into a voyeuristic and exploitative practice (Dolezal & Gudka, 2019). Realising the value that these communities and their stories bring to destinations, this paper's purpose is to explore how the marginalisation experienced by guides can be more authentically represented in walking tours, meaning 'authentic' for marginalised individuals, rather than the tourist 'spectator'.

With the help of 14 in-depth interviews with tour guides and tour-guiding organisations working specifically with marginalised communities, this paper explores how these groups and individuals can have control over which aspects of their marginalisation are included in the content of walking tours. It subsequently seeks to understand whether that content can be instrumental in improving public understanding of, and attitudes towards, their communities. Three key questions guide the research:

1. What level of control do marginalised communities have on the content and narratives of the walking tours they deliver?
2. To what extent do walking tour guides include or exclude aspects of their marginalisation in walking tours of their communities, and why?
3. How does this affect the development of agency and self-empowerment of the marginalised people involved, thus contributing to social justice?

Theoretical background

Social inclusion and justice in urban tourism

Justice tourism, an ethical and equitable form of tourism that fosters solidarity, mutual understanding, and local self-sufficiency (Scheyvens, 2002), has the potential to positively contribute to the social dimension of the sustainability agenda. Sustainable and justice tourism are closely intertwined in the way they both emphasise people's agency (i.e. "an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices" (Alsop et al., 2006, p. 10)) and empowerment ("a process of change by which individuals or groups [...] with limited choice, freedom, and power are enabled to gain and leverage power that enhances their ability to exercise choice and freedom in ways that positively contribute to their well-being" (Ganle et al., 2015, p. 336). Definitions of justice tourism vary, but the involvement of multiple stakeholders, the emphasis on residents' well-being, and the recognition and empowerment of disadvantaged communities in tourism development are common features (Isaac & Farkic, 2024). Justice tourism and solidarity tourism are related concepts sometimes used interchangeably by tourism scholars. Higgins-Desbiolles and Russell-Mundine (2008), define solidarity tourism, in the context of volunteering, as "organised visits to communities in need of

understanding and external support in the face of negative circumstances such as occupation, poverty, colonisation, trade sanctions and conflict” (pp. 187–188). As example, a specific solidarity tourism product, as described by Isaac (2022) in the Palestinian context, involves tours where local guides in the occupied territories share stories of their life under occupation, thereby fostering solidarity. Guia (2021) notes that solidarity efforts imply social empathy, awareness of structural barriers and power imbalances, and a commitment to support the vulnerable and oppressed.

For the purposes of this research, following Higgins-Desbiolles (2018) and Scheyvens (2002), we conceptualise justice tourism as any form of tourism that specifically aims to foster transformation towards a more just, equitable, and positive future for local communities. Justice tourism involves the development of “more meaningful encounters with dissimilar people, and learning about different paths to new ways of being” (Guia, 2021, p. 505). This research, therefore, aims to further unpack this concept by looking at the role of walking tours in the development of a more just and equitable future for marginalised local communities, with a specific focus on urban contexts.

Higgins-Desbiolles and Bigby (2022) push for greater embeddedness of tourism in the localities where it takes place, i.e. a ‘local turn’ in tourism studies and a deeper engagement with places. This perspective is aligned with the regenerative tourism paradigm, whereby well-being and social sustainability are prioritised over economic growth, and destinations become enriched by tourism. Koens (2021) champions ‘new urban tourism’ - the exploration of off-the-beaten-track, everyday locations in cities - as a regenerative form of tourism that can provide local stakeholders with “collective ownership over what they want to share” (p. 36). Many of those new urban tourism experiences - such as off-the-beaten-track walking tours, street-food markets or artists’ open studios - can potentially be regarded as a form of urban community-based tourism (CBT) as they are usually run and managed by local community actors. While a wealth of literature on CBT in rural areas in the Global South exists (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022; Manyara & Jones, 2007; Nugroho & Numata, 2022), research that focuses on community-based initiatives aimed at empowering marginalised or impoverished communities specifically in urban areas is still limited. However, urban poverty and socio-economic inequalities have been growing problems in the Global North and urban contexts too. UN data shows that, in Europe, there are often higher levels of poverty and socio-cultural inequalities in cities than in rural areas, and minority groups such as migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples and those affected by homelessness experience structural barriers that perpetuate their marginalisation (UN-HABITAT, 2022).

Understanding the complexity of urban inequalities invites attention to the overlapping factors that shape marginalisation, particularly as this research seeks to explore how urban walking tours led by marginalised people can contribute to their empowerment and wider social justice. The concept of intersectionality, the idea that a person’s individual experiences are shaped by the intersection of multiple social identities (Makhanya, 2024), helps explain why the interconnectedness of social characteristics such as gender, race, class and disability produces compounded forms of marginalisation. This is particularly important in a context where individuals face discrimination on multiple fronts simultaneously, resulting in significant inequalities in their life opportunities and experiences. Evidence also shows that intersectionality has a significant impact on worsening socioeconomic inequities (Makhanya, 2024).

Intersectional approaches to research thus involve considering all factors that oppress and empower people rather than focusing on one single aspect (McArdle, 2021).

Empowerment goes hand in hand with understanding power as such, which, in contrast to traditional views of power as a resource over somebody, Walters et al. (2021) conceptualise as 'positive power', an ever-changing positive force to produce something new, where each actor is part of a wider network of relationships that can create power by developing one's capacity. The effectiveness of CBT is dependent on the extent to which the venture is a genuine local effort embedded in the locality and the local communities can reap shared benefits of tourism, as opposed to benefitting external parties (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2020). CBT has seen much criticism for being over-romanticised, built on Western notions of democracy and not critical enough of 'community' itself (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). It differs from other forms of tourism to communities given that in CBT they are seen as *active* subjects rather than an object of tourism (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). Abdullah et al. (2023) argue that many empowerment programmes aimed at developing well-being for marginalised communities fail to achieve their objectives because they perceive empowerment as an act of charity or control (i.e. imposing their views). For this reason, while we are critical of the terminology of CBT, also in an urban context, one of the objectives of the present study is to assess the level of control marginalised communities have on the content and narratives of the walking tours they have developed. This approach will contribute to an in-depth understanding of the process of self-empowerment taking place in the context of walking tours led by marginalised individuals, and, ultimately, to making urban tourism more just and sustainable.

Walking tours for social inclusion

Walking tours have long been an essential component of the tourism industry, educating the tourist while also playing with notions of authenticity to sell places and people. Increasingly, walking tours create space for marginalised people to share their own stories and shape the narrative of tours (Burrai et al., 2023; Dolezal & Gudka, 2019). One reason for including these marginalised narratives is that it adds a new layer of excitement and perceived authenticity for tourists - to discover places off the beaten track, while, on the other hand, it helps to genuinely amplify peoples' voices and reduce social stigmas (Dolezal & Gudka, 2019).

Over the years, various ways to understand authenticity have emerged (Moore et al., 2021, Wang, 1999). For the present analysis, according to Moore et al. (2021) an important aspect of authenticity is the reciprocal connection between people and the place visited or the people encountered, i.e. a "sense of place": "The place is experienced as real (...) when a way of encountering it and interacting with it reciprocally presents itself" (Moore et al., 2021, p. 7). In this paper, we take this line of reasoning further by proposing that the opportunities for reciprocal encounters afforded by walking tours, combined with the opportunity for marginalised individuals to represent themselves authentically, may create a stronger connectedness to the place and experience not only for the tourists but also guides. This is significant as it contributes not only to the literature and practice of justice tourism, but also to academic discourses on authenticity, which, to date, have focused more on

authentic experiences from the tourist and less on host or reciprocal perspectives.

Another highly debated question is whether marginalised communities involved in the provision of tourism experiences give consent to and benefit from being the objects of the tourist gaze. Much literature has claimed that when tourism uses 'difference' as an attraction, 'othering' becomes a major issue, with people being presented as attraction and 'othered' through the power relations and dynamics of the tourism industry and encounter (Hollinshead, 1998; McLennan & Thomas-Maude, 2023). In this way, they are not only portrayed as static and unchanging in their cultural characteristics but also stereotyped by those who benefit from creating this knowledge and narrative (Said, 1978). This power imbalance can also be witnessed when outsiders lead tours of communities without their previous consultation, going to the extent of describing these activities as a temporary colonisation or encroachment of a "local space by non-local visitors" (Diekmann & Smith, 2015, p. 30), thus often leading to misinterpretation (Robinson, 2013). Part of the process is an unequal power relation between those being represented and those in charge of the representation, as well as those consuming it (i.e. tourists) (Yang, 2011). These problems prevail, of course, beyond times of colonisation, including contemporary tourism experiences such as visits to the slums of Mumbai (Burgold & Rolfes, 2013).

Increasingly, over the years, more literature has begun to understand how these tourism encounters can empower individuals, particularly those in situations of marginalisation (Dolezal, 2015; Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021) and therefore contribute to social justice. Tour guides are seen as holding a special position of power through the narratives they construct, thus shaping visitor perceptions of destinations and attractions and playing a role in (dis)empowering particular groups (Albrecht et al., 2022). It is certain that tourism, and walking tours in particular, if developed and managed by those constituting the 'attraction', can lead to various forms of empowerment, including the generation of pride and self-esteem (psychological empowerment), social cohesion (social empowerment) and, direct financial benefits (economic empowerment) (Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021). However, what remains under-researched to date are the processes of creating narratives for walking tours, including which aspects of marginalisation should be included and how it should be communicated to the tourist.

Narratives of marginalisation and storytelling

The tour guide plays an essential role in shaping the reality of what the tourist perceives as 'authentic knowledge' (Ong et al., 2014). While originally, tour guides' involvement focused on planning and managerial roles (Weiler & Black, 2015), nowadays, their role is understood to include curating and delivering tours, as well as the mediating function of the cultural broker (Diekmann & Cloquet, 2015). An emerging body of research on tour guiding has emphasised the value of guides drawing on their personal experiences to offer more authentic and diverse narratives (Albrecht et al., 2022). Storytelling is central to tour guiding, transforming factual information into engaging narratives that emotionally connect tourists with the places they visit as well as enhance visitors' understanding of local culture through personal anecdotes (Kusumah & Andrianto, 2023). As Khater et al. (2025) show, storytelling facilitates

transformative learning by challenging preconceived ideas and encouraging new perspectives, as well as evoking emotional responses, thus allowing tourists to empathise with the struggles or triumphs of the guide. This perspective challenges dominant approaches that prioritise formal training, standardization, and certifications for guides as these are typically controlled by those in power, who determine how places and people are portrayed and risk silencing marginalised groups (Albrecht et al., 2022). In the case of Macao, for example, Ong et al. (2014, p. 231) highlight how guide training historically reinforced capital-driven norms aimed at producing “malleable and cooperative workers for the dominant and dominating tourism industry”. Similarly, Mian (2014) warns that certifying indigenous guides can be problematic when decisions about training content are made by non-indigenous actors, leading to further disempowerment.

It is therefore problematic that communities experiencing the most discrimination, marginalisation and poverty are given such few opportunities to meaningfully participate in developing walking tours (Diekmann & Smith, 2015), despite their vast local knowledge and first-hand experience in this subject matter, thus further exacerbating marginalisation and misrepresentation. Notable exceptions to this, do, however, exist, including social enterprises like Unseen Tours in London or Refugee Voices Tours in Berlin. Similarly, the Europe-based Migrantours network has been successful in engaging with marginalised migrant communities across Europe, using the tours to introduce locals and visitors to the ‘Other’ in an attempt to reduce stigmas (Ormond & Vietti, 2022). These initiatives provide opportunities for people with experience of homelessness or refugees to curate and lead their own tours of the city, placing emphasis on guides deciding which stories to share from their own experiences and how they navigate urban spaces (Dolezal & Gudka, 2019), thereby helping them “make their voices heard” (Walters et al., 2021, p. 2393).

When the themes of a walking tour are centred around topics of marginalisation, the tour guide’s role becomes essential, consisting largely of “selecting and de-selecting, highlighting and glossing over, inflating and downplaying, as well as interpreting” (Quinn & Ryan, 2016, p. 324) sites, artefacts and local narratives. This requires tour guides to talk about and, at times, avoid difficult and uncomfortable topics, acknowledging the risk of further marginalisation if certain topics are inadequately addressed. Currently there are no studies that could help tour guides from marginalised backgrounds to incorporate sensitive stories in walking tours. It is paramount to understand the decision-making behind the content and narrative of tours, particularly to enable these guides not only a truthful and authentic representation but also to increase their chances to articulate their own agency on the tours, thus moving from non-participation or tokenism up the ladder of participation towards citizen control and true empowerment (Tosun, 2006). This also means that what is authentic or not becomes less important than understanding who has the power to define authenticity as part of the tour, thereby focusing more on the process of authentication (Wall & Xie, 2005). Decision-making about which content is included and excluded is therefore about who has decision-making authority, given that ultimately “it is no one’s business to decide what constitutes authenticity except the local residents” (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p. 312). Rather, when involving marginalised people as tour guides, they should be able to choose how they want to tell their story, in line with their own identity

(Burrai et al., 2023). This can challenge the wider socio-political environment of the place where tours happen, for example by putting people (such as people with experience of homelessness) on the map through participation in the tourism industry (Dolezal & Gudka, 2019) or “deconstructing the socio-political order” of the city by involving refugees in guided tours (Burrai et al., 2023, p. 2693).

Research design and methods

The present research design embraces a critical qualitative research approach and is informed by a constructivist-interpretive paradigm (Denzin et al., 2008). This is mirrored particularly in the way interviews were conducted, with reality regarded as socially constructed by each individual interviewed, hence the researchers being unable to unravel one finite ‘truth’. Rather, the analysis paid attention to the various subjectivities that make up people’s stories and experiences of marginalisation. A critical studies perspective influenced every stage of the research process, starting from the choice of topic and objectives through to the chosen method, research subjects, and analysis techniques (Ateljevic et al., 2007). Ultimately, this research is motivated by a desire to advocate for, and facilitate transformation in the form of empowerment and emancipation of marginalised communities through participation in the tourism industry.

The qualitative data collection consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with core staff and tour guides from walking tour organisations working in urban areas with marginalised people. Groups regarded as marginalised usually include vulnerable migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, sex workers, people experiencing homelessness, women, and some minority ethnic communities (Fluit et al., 2024). Although definitions of marginalisation differ between countries and cultures (e.g. with women or LGBTQIA+ people being marginalised to different extents), this paper regards the concept as “a context-dependent social process of “othering” - where certain individuals or groups are systematically excluded based on societal norms and values - and the resulting experience of disadvantage” (Fluit et al., 2024). In some countries, this is also extended to include disabled people, LGBTQIA+ communities, slum and indigenous communities. For the present study, the sample comprised walking tour companies working with vulnerable migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, people affected by homelessness, indigenous communities, people living in slums, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

As the lead researcher (who collected the data) is a tourism professional who has worked with marginalised communities for many years, her role as an ‘insider’ provided direct access to a wealth of potential interviewees as well as in-depth knowledge and understanding of their context and lived experiences of marginalisation. It also meant that the interviewing process showed sensitivity to participants’ social skills, vocabulary, education levels and socio-economic backgrounds (Smith, 2021). Smith (2021) stresses that, although critical research approaches have made the insider methodology much more acceptable in qualitative research, “insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research” (p. 158). In this case, the person who collected the data, while an ‘insider’ in some respects, is at the same time also an ‘outsider’, as she holds a leadership role within one of these organisations but is not part of a marginalised group herself. The notion of insider/outsider in the context of researching minority groups is a complex and multifaceted one (Smith, 2021). In the

context of this study, the qualitative analysis, the development of a conceptual framework, the discussion, as well as the generation of recommendations were jointly produced by the lead (insider-outsider) researcher and two senior academics, thus enhancing the descriptive validity of the results (Maxwell, 1992) through researcher triangulation, as well as the critical and theoretical underpinning of the study. While the lead researcher's professional role facilitated access to a wide range of tour organisations internationally thus enhancing reach and depth of the data collection, the associated possible bias was mitigated by the co-production of data analysis, discussion and recommendations with the two other researchers, who are external to this specific sector. The danger of social desirability biases was reduced by building rapport, framing questions neutrally and ensuring anonymity to ultimately make interviewees feel comfortable and open to share their honest views. In addition, potential further biases were overcome by having open ended questions, using the interviewees actual words from the transcripts and not the researcher's own interpretations for the coding and data analysis process, and avoiding influencing the conversation by sharing her own experiences working for a similar organisation. To mitigate the potential problems associated with the researchers' position as outsiders (i.e. not belonging to a marginalised community) we also prioritised a focus on respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility to the marginalised communities in the research process (Stanton, 2014).

The data collection took place in 2022 and consisted of 14 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with members of the senior leadership team or tour guides from 11 tour organisations located in cities who actively engage marginalised people in tour development (see Table 1 for details). When it was not possible to speak to guides directly (mainly due to language barriers), the senior leadership teams were approached, also due to the fact that most tours are co-developed in close cooperation between the two. Participants' names are anonymised throughout this paper using interviewee identifiers assigned to them based on whether the interviewees are lead members of a tourism organisation featuring tours of marginalised communities (TO) or tour guides featuring marginalised communities on their tours (TG). As shown in Table 1, all tour guides included in the study self-identify as members of a marginalised group, which was based on a conversation with participants about whether they felt they were part of a community (or working with communities) that faced social, economic or political barriers to participate in society. No definition of marginalisation was shared in advance with the participants.

Research participants, who generously donated their time for this research, were purposively selected to ensure that they had relevant knowledge and that different marginalised groups and geographic locations were adequately represented. This initial sampling method was followed by a snowballing technique to expand the sample from the initial seed that was the primary researcher's network and reach more tour guides from marginalised communities (as opposed to only managers of these organisations). Cross-checks before recruiting interview participants were conducted based on personal knowledge of the organisations' work and an assessment based on their online presence, e.g. how communities were portrayed or whether clear indications were given as to how much the communities were actively involved. Overall, final participants recruited are mostly UK/Europe based, with one interviewee from Australia and one from Kenya, signifying a strong representation from the Global North. Avoiding a focus on one

Table 1. List of interviewees.

Pseudonym	Type of marginalisation represented in the tours	Is the interviewee from a marginalised community	City	Sole trader (tour guide) or tour guide from a social impact organisation / collective	Mission or primary focus (as stated on their website)	Type of scripting
TO1	Refugee	no	Leeds, UK	Collective	Empowerment	Skeleton script developed with guides
TG2	Slum	yes	Nairobi, Kenya	Sole trader	Economic	Created own script
TO3	Homelessness	no	London, UK	Collective	Empowerment	Created own script
TG4	Migrant ethnic minority	yes	London, UK	Sole trader	Alternative history	Created own script
TG5	Homelessness	yes	London, UK	Collective	Empowerment	Created own script
TG6	Homelessness	yes	London, UK	Collective	Empowerment	Created own script
TO7	Migrant ethnic minority	no	Utrecht, Netherlands	Collective	Increase understanding	Skeleton script developed with guides
TG7	Refugee	yes	Berlin, Germany	Collective	Increase understanding	Skeleton script provided to guides with opportunities for own interpretation
TO8	Homelessness	no	Edinburgh, UK	Collective	Empowerment	Created own script
TG8	Homelessness	yes	London, UK	Collective	Empowerment	Created own script
TG9	Migrant ethnic minority	yes	London, UK	Sole trader	Alternative history	Created own script
TG10	Migrant ethnic minority	yes	London, UK	Sole trader	Alternative history	Created own script
TG11	LGBTQIA+	yes	London, UK	Collective	(Fun) alternative experience	Skeleton script provided to guides with opportunities for own interpretation
TG12	LGBTQIA+	yes	Canberra, Australia	Collective	Alternative history	Skeleton script provided to guides with opportunities for own interpretation

Source: the authors.

single country helped the researchers to understand whether differences in communities existed. In order to recruit the largest variety of types of marginalised communities possible, it was necessary to venture outside of the UK (e.g. indigenous communities are not marginalised within the UK).

Interviews were piloted on one tour guide first and then slightly amended further and they were conducted until a saturation point was reached and no new findings emerged through the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were conducted online via video call, and each lasted between 1 and 2 hours. They were auto-transcribed with the participants' permission, with the transcript later checked for accuracy by the interviewer (the lead researcher). The qualitative data was analysed separately by the three authors of this paper using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis technique (Higgins-Desbiolles et al 2013, p. 429). The analysis was done manually, with coding conducted by the three researchers. A visual thematic map was developed (see Figure 1), portraying both a-priori themes (identified through the literature review and research objectives, shown as round shapes) and emerging themes (emerged during the analysis and shown as rectangular shapes).

Findings

Content and narrative of tours

One of the key aims of this research is to explore the extent to which tour guides include or exclude aspects of their marginalisation in walking tours of their communities, and to what degree they participate in the design of these tours. Previous

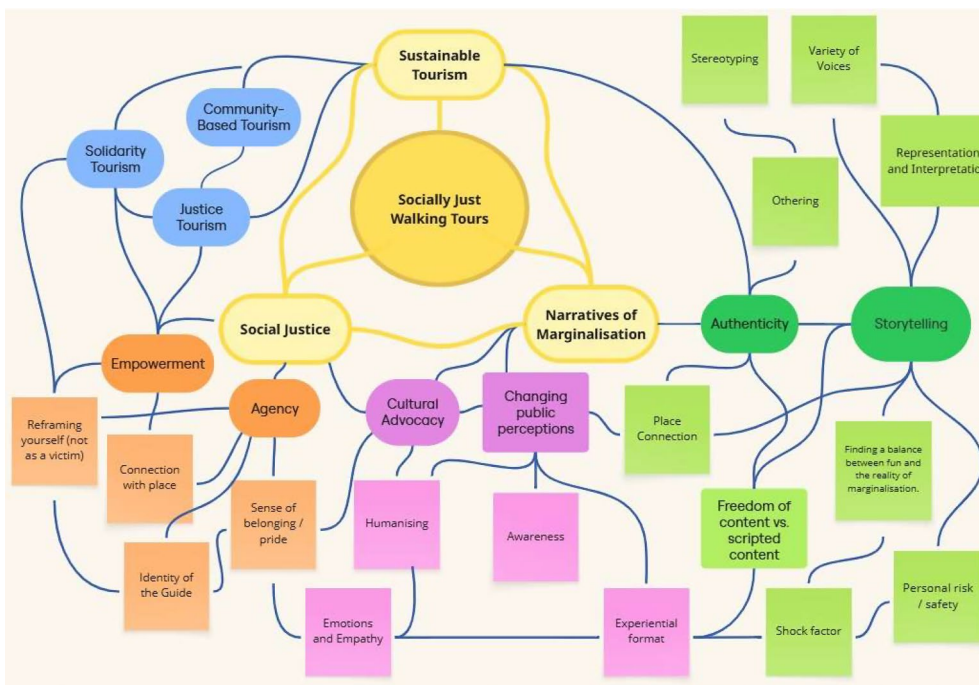


Figure 1. Visual thematic map portraying both a-priori and emerging themes.

research has stressed the importance of guides, and particularly guides from vulnerable and marginalised groups, drawing on their own lived experiences to provide tour guiding with a political dimension (Albrecht et al., 2022), challenge existing power structures (Ong et al. 2014), and deliver a more authentic tourism experience (Rätz, 2017). As Burrai et al. note (2023), choosing which parts of their life experiences they wish to share puts marginalised guides in charge of asserting and reforming their own identity. It is, therefore, crucial to explore the level of ownership and freedom over the content and narratives of tours to further understand the role that this type of tourist product plays in fostering the agency of marginalised individuals. In the case of the 11 organisations involved in our study, as shown in Table 1, we found three slightly different approaches to the development of content for the walking tours, reflecting differing levels of control and ownership of the script: Most organisations (TG2, TO3, TG4, TG5, TG6, TO8, TG8, TG9, TG10) encourage their guides from marginalised communities to have full control of the script, routes, narratives and points of interest that were included in the tours. A smaller number of organisations (TO1, TO7) co-create a skeleton script with the guides or provide a suggested route and script (TG7, TG11, TG12) while also leaving scope for individual experiences to be added in certain parts of the narrative. In some instances, subject experts help curate some of the narratives in the tours, particularly linked to historical accuracy or the use of inclusive language. While the small qualitative sample prevents us from generalising, we can see a connection between the main mission of the touring organisation and the type of scripting (as listed in Table 1): often, those organisations whose primary focus is empowerment/skills development of the guides (TO3, TG5, TG6, TO8, TG8) give more freedom to develop their own tour, while organisations whose primary focus is education/increasing public understanding or providing an alternative perspective on history (TO7, TG7, TG11, TG12) prefer the co-creation or provision of a skeleton script. There are, however, exceptions in our sample (TO1, TG2, TG4, TG9 and TG10) where the two factors are not linked.

Abdullah et al. (2023) specifically warn against what they term ‘mediated empowerment’ (Rocha, 1997), where expert professionals mediate the programme as a top-down form of empowerment, risking treating the people to be empowered as objects who are unable to achieve their well-being independently, meaning they end up complying with the ideas of the programme managers. According to other authors’ understanding of empowerment, true empowerment “is a conscious self-inducement controlled by an individual. It comes from within; it cannot be “given” to [anyone]” (Taliaferro, 1991, p. 1). Only when individuals turn into subjects rather than objects in shaping their own destiny, can one speak of empowerment (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022). Active participation, ownership, and power over decision-making are fundamental aspects of how to achieve empowerment through tourism (Smith, 2021). However, and while recognising that the limited sample of this research does not allow for generalisations, we did not find that guides who received a skeleton script to work with reported fewer benefits from tour guiding. Perhaps the most important benefit for them is the tour’s potential to increase public understanding of or changing attitudes towards the marginalised community rather than having full freedom regarding the content. According to our respondents, some tour customers do indeed place importance on the accuracy of the tour (such

as historical facts), while others are more interested in the perceived authenticity of how the tour is delivered, including anecdotes and personal experiences recounted by a 'genuine' member of the marginalised community the tour aims to support (TG7). Getting some assistance in phrasing a script or planning a tour may therefore not necessarily contradict the potential of tour guiding to cast great personal benefits for marginalised communities. For example, among the interviewed organisations who co-create or provide a skeleton script to the guides, interviewees TO1, TG7, TG11 and TO7 all stressed the impact of the tour on public perceptions and empathy, as discussed in later sections.

Our analysis of the interviews reveals that a number of factors affect the personal decision to include or exclude personal stories and anecdotes that reflect the guide's experience of marginalisation. A key finding that emerged is that guides find themselves navigating the delicate balance between providing a fun and entertaining leisure activity for the tourist and exposing the reality of their experience of marginalisation. Guia (2021) points to the role of creating "well-crafted narratives of shame addressed to ethically empathetic visitors" (p. 517) to foster political responsibility and solidarity. These narratives of shame can be transformative, in Guia's (2021) view, as they help counteract the dominant worldview of tourists by highlighting their privileged situation and creating a clear contrast to the marginalised tour guide. In contrast with this account, the majority of tour guides interviewed in the context of the present study, seem to actively avoid stressing their marginalisation, but rather try to keep the tour fun and let the stories talk for themselves: *"I want to make it an enjoyable experience. I don't want the whole thing to be depressing so I will always keep a balance between painful difficult stories and moments of triumph"* (TG4). Keeping the tour as light and upbeat as possible is thus a conscious decision that some guides take. Similarly, another guide mentioned how they include anecdotes, but *"only positive ones (...) I talk about how people could change their lives and I don't like to talk about negative things"* (TG8). Another reason why some tour guides keep the tour entertaining rather than linked to too much content on marginalisation, is the guide's own safety, as experiences of physical attacks (TG4) and verbal abuse (TG11) were mentioned by our interviewees. In contrast with this perspective, some interviewees noted that certain guides (i.e. not themselves) may exaggerate stories for dramatic effect, as a 'shock factor' for customers, but this is typically discouraged and frowned upon by those who were interviewed. As one interviewee pointed out it is not necessary to inflate the stories because *"you have enough to tell you don't need to bring up the most victimizing and the most dire story"* (TG7).

Changing public perceptions and empathy

Many of our interviewees (TG4, TG5, TG6, TO8, TO1, T03, TG11) stressed the role that their tour plays in challenging public perceptions of their marginalised group. This is important because promoting a greater public understanding of marginalisation can contribute to a form of urban tourism fostering social justice, inclusion and equity (Dolezal & Gudka, 2019). Through narratives of personal experiences and relatable anecdotes, tourists have a chance to understand differences whilst being exposed to difficult truths that are presented in a fun and engaging way that is *"not terrifying"*

(TG11). As one of the interviewed guides describes the role of personal stories in creating empathy:

Sharing personal stories and anecdotes humanizes you, so [the customers] understand who you are as a person (...) the idea is not about information but about empathy, so I do include my personal anecdotes. I encourage conversation (...) to make that human connection, Um, but at the same time, I also decide what stories [to include] based on the audience as well. (TG4)

Another guide made a connection between raising awareness of experiences of marginalisation (in their case, homelessness) and the development of empathy and inclusion, in the way that they point out hostile architecture such as spikes, put in place in cities to deter homeless people. Such practical examples of marginalisation, and first-hand anecdotes, help “*humanize it [homelessness], primarily to make it less abstract*” (TG6).

Another guide referred to this process as the development of emotional connection:

What walking tours can do, because of the human narrator and the social experience, more than books (...) is build this emotional connection, and make that time come alive. So I think that's how authenticity is really important because (...) It brings people into your story (...) and I think that's the beauty of walking tours because you kind of connect with the person as well as their story, even if you have different backgrounds and world views and experiences. (TG4)

The development of empathy through *emotional connection* with the audience and *experiential learning* links to what Guia (2021) terms ‘cultural advocacy’. Advocacy, in its wider sense, involves various forms of communication aimed at pleading the cause or speaking out in support of those whose voices may not be heard (Guia, 2021). Following Guia’s idea of advocacy in justice tourism, walking tours led by or related to the experiences of marginalised people represent a form of ‘cultural advocacy’ by enabling their voice to be amplified, in doing so, facilitating visitors’ experiential understanding of marginalised communities through emotional connection and empathy creation. The experiential format of the walking tour is, according to our interviewees, particularly effective in developing empathy and emotional connection, because

The tour format makes it easy for people to try to understand it [information about refugees] and dissect it a bit too, like make it swallowable (...) Gives it a more... not intimate, but more personal and experiential. (TG7)

Experiential understanding can, according to our interviewees, be a very powerful tool to transform public opinion:

When you hear a first-hand story (...) especially when it's a personal story, there's emotion and real people's lives so it is likely to leave a longer lasting impression on you. And potentially change your way of thinking about people that you've been very different from. (TO1)

One of our interviewees talked about how interactions between tourists and guides contribute to strengthening a ‘*sense of belonging to a community*’, thus a form of ‘social solidarity’ (Guia, 2021) for the guides. The same interviewee stressed the importance

of increasing the visibility of marginalised individuals by having their voices represented:

With the awareness comes, (.) empathy and understanding..... I think, and so tolerance towards different groups that have their voices represented, and also creates the sense of who you are, if you do belong to one of these groups (...) It's important to see people from different communities, be represented and be visible and hear their stories (...) by having those voices heard, you just feel that everybody is valid within that. So that sense acceptance as well. (TO8)

These forms of advocacy produced through walking tours can be very powerful. However, two interviewees (TO1, TG7) recognise that the tours themselves tend to attract people who are already sympathetic to the cause, thus, in a way, *"preaching to the converted"* (TO1). *"By design the tour wouldn't reach the people that it should reach"* (TG7). The kind of tourists who attend these tours tend to be repeat visitors who are looking for alternative experiences and new ways to learn about the destination: *"they have done most of the touristy stuff and they want something with a spin on it. And our tour in a way provided that aspect to it"* (TG8). For them, these walking tours represent a way to develop a deeper connection to the place they are visiting, and a better understanding of the world, as illustrated by one of our interviewees: *"I found that a lot of people who come on my tour are people who are looking for a connection, for a link to the place (...) you know. It's just a way to understand the world"* (TG4). It, therefore, becomes obvious that the sphere where these tours operate, due to the customers they attract, is already one of understanding and openness to learn. This seems to be a precondition amongst visitors choosing a marginalised tour in the first place, thus making it more difficult to reach those with a complete misunderstanding and misjudgement towards marginalisation.

Self-representation for societal change

Some of the guides go beyond this more intangible form of advocacy towards fostering actual change and advancing the cause of their group, suggesting a political advocacy ambition. TG8, for example, stressed the importance of sharing stories and facts that can contribute to actual societal change, i.e. stories *"about how people could change their lives (...) the facts of figures and how to change the law and the system to get answers to those problems"*.

The strongest example of this was the perspective of tour guides with experience of homelessness who demonstrated strong opinions about representing their group realistically, with the hope that it would challenge stereotypes:

A tour allows customers to have conversations about homelessness in a way that they wouldn't normally and that helps them understand negative stereotypes. Is it just enough for them to want to increase understanding at this moment in time? Because it's not necessarily in their hands to be able to make the changes... But at least if we increase understanding with enough people then it's enough to make change happen, right? (TG8)

The guide here makes clear that tourists have limited ability to influence long-term societal and political changes but feels that tourism offers a useful space to start a dialogue which can reduce social stigmas. As shown in an earlier research by Dolezal

& Gudka (2019), homelessness tours have immense potential to challenge stereotypes about what it means to be homeless or vulnerably housed, given the power that a group of marginalised people have in telling their own story from their point of view and hence representing themselves. One of the guides particularly emphasised this resistance to dominant narratives when asked about why they share their own stories and experiences of being an ethnic minority migrant on their tour:

One reason is a way of fighting back. So we're kind of having an anti-racist practice. That me telling these stories is challenging the predominant narrative of black dysfunctionality of Black history, of being us. So if the government's deporting black people to their deaths in the Windrush Scandal and me doing these stories about how interesting came to be, is, we're (.) resisting that behaviour. (TG9)

Tourism therefore turns into a space of resistance—a playing field for those who seem to have little other chance to challenge the dominant power relations in society. At the same time, integrating sensitive topics in a tourism context might potentially have the opposite effect, if it does not involve the community:

Well, I think you just [run the risk of] reinforc[ing] whatever stigma there is if you're not careful. Say the stigma around homelessness is that Homeless people are drunks and alcoholics or drug addicts, or whatever. And then you just reinforce that idea without involving the community to decide which stories are shared, and then the stories that are shared don't have a positive intent, but further stigmatize the group instead. Then this only perpetuates, whatever [the stigma is]. (TO8)

In addition to this, participants TO2, TO3, TO5, TG5 and TG7, believed that tours of marginalised communities carry the risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the community through the process of oversimplifying complex concepts during the tours (TG4, TG5) or providing customers with a homogenised overview of the marginalised community (TO10). Similar concerns were implied through Diekmann and Smith's (2015) description of visitors only witnessing sanitised versions of the community, and Reisinger and Moufakkir's (2015) observations of such tours stigmatising the community further by reducing community experience to their "marginal-identity-based signifiers" (p. 91). Hence, self-representation as well as the plurality of voices that contribute to the discourse is key for authentic representation:

[what does it mean to authentically represent a community]? I think it means to have as many different voices as possible, for as many different cases as possible (...) having as many different stories as possible with as little influence on them as possible. Yeah, that would be an authentic representation of homelessness. (TO8)

To me, it is to try to provide a vast array of perspectives around an experience that's referred to as migration. And people who are referred to as you know, people with migration backgrounds to talk about the multiplicity of experience within that. To me, that's about as authentic as it can be. (TO7)

Given that experiences of marginalisation are as diverse as the experience of the guides themselves, organisations unanimously emphasised that diversity of voices is necessary for the most authentic representation of marginalised communities and their stories. This requires the possibility of honest and truthful self-representation as

well as the creation of discourse from multiple sources, rather than from only a few people:

You can't really say that I represent the entire community (...). So anything where you are saying you'll be authentic or that you're representing the community needs to always come with the caveat that there will be people who disagree with my representation of this community. (...) So, I think that's where you're representing the community and being authentic means very much personalizing what you're saying and not generalizing over the whole community. (TG10)

The extent to which diverse representation is feasible in a tour-guiding context that relies on a single guide to convey this information therefore makes its implementation questionable. In contested territories or locations with a history of political tensions, some tour guiding companies, such as Mejdi Tours (which operates in 40 destinations including Palestine, Northern Ireland and Cuba) use a two-guide model to offer a more nuanced representation from multiple perspectives. While this dual narrative approach, which was not explored as part of the present study, might be worthwhile, it also presents a risk of neutralising the contested content, thus silencing rather than amplifying the voices of minority groups, as noted by a Mejdi Tours Palestinian guide interviewed by Strömbom (2019).

Another issue that arises when talking about representation for marginalised communities is self-victimisation:

When people experience homelessness, there's a sense that nobody knows what they went through - like a sense of self-victimisation... it's the idea that "I've experienced this and you haven't, so only I hold the power of stories that you want to hear" which causes further Othering, and creates a divide between the guide and customer (...) So if we want to break down the stigma of homelessness and express the fact that it can happen to everyone, that means tour guides need to acknowledge that their customers can have shared experience of homelessness, even if it doesn't appear that way. (TO8)

Therefore, at times, marginalisation becomes self-imposed by the guides, which can result in Othering themselves, or even their customers. By dismissing the idea that customers can have similar experiences of marginalisation or difference, it is possible that guides might 'elevate' themselves into marginalised positions characterised by self-pity.

Agency of marginalised tour guides

It was unanimously agreed by all interviewees that an increase in agency and self-worth was one of the biggest positive impacts of including stories of one's own marginalisation in the walking tours:

The opportunity to dig into your own experiences, your own life experiences and to value those experiences as something that are worth sharing. This is of enormous value. And this is an opportunity. And several frequently say that this is one of the few places, the few moments, in which they can really fully be themselves. (TO7)

The chance to authentically represent yourself therefore leads to a sense of pride in one's own life experiences, which in the context of a tour, becomes worth sharing,

and occurs when guides are able to also shape the narrative and content that is offered through the tours. In doing so, the stories and content become *“relevant to whoever is the teller, the speaker or the person delivering”* (TO8). While a sense of agency and personal ownership of the tour is crucial for an authentic representation, it also emerged that *sense of place* plays a role too, as explained by TG6: *“I think it’s very important to share some personal anecdotes. Because I think it’s important to explain why one feels love for a particular area”*. This also echoes research conducted by Burrai et al. (2023), who found that becoming a tour guide offered refugees the opportunity to connect and enhance their sense of belonging to their receiving country. Though having a sense of place is a pre-condition for the tours, the process of curating and leading tours of places also strengthens the connection and sense of belonging: *“I think that’s the value that it gives ... the effect of feeling like I belong here, has increased for me because of doing the tours and I hope that that kind of happens with people who come on my tour as well”* (TG4). This sense of connection to place contributes to an authentic experience both for the guide and the tourist. In this sense, the inclusion of a guide’s own life stories and experiences linked to a particular place enhance the reciprocal connection between guide and location, and, in turn, with the tourist and their experience (Moore et al., 2021). Most importantly, this personal connection of the guide to both place and the script also increases their own feelings of representing themselves authentically.

However, a sense of belonging is not sufficient to also feel agency in shaping the tours and the narrative. The development of skills and competences, ranging from public speaking and research or literacy skills, to time management and health and safety, is equally important. A number of interviewees (TO7, TO8, TG8) noted how this builds confidence in one’s abilities in the long run: *“people start very shy but then become more confident by doing the tours and sharing their stories”* (TG8). Some even talk about empowerment: *“I think empowering is the word. (...) Brings confidence to do whatever you want to do”* (TO8). This interviewee’s view of empowerment resonates with Scheyvens’s (2019) definition, who believes that confidence and capabilities are key for greater control in one’s life (p. 115). Skills and confidence in one’s abilities are greatly connected to empowerment processes, particularly an absence of skills or training can create obstacles to empowerment (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022).

However, there is also a more negative side to this debate. Constantly sharing narratives of marginalisation can also re-traumatise tour guides (TG5), causing emotional labour (TO1), and keeping the person stuck within the stereotype (TO8):

Sometimes all you want is just to move on you know, you just want to get out and no longer be associated with homelessness or that which marginalised you. I think that one of the negative effects is being stuck in that cycle and association to that stereotype. (TO8)

This layer of complexity brought to the walking tours is comparable to the case study Tomlinson and Egan (2002) use to understand the (dis)empowerment of refugee communities. In their study, they explain how continuously identifying marginalised groups as distinct categories creates a tension between wanting to dissolve the difference and allowing them to become part of the ‘majority’. This emphasises and hence reinforces notions of difference in the way that the marginalised identity

becomes the perspective through which a new place is discovered through a walking tour. It is, therefore, the very notion of 'difference' that marginalised guides often play with for their own empowerment, while, at the same time, ever remaining in a marginalised, maybe less powerful, position.

While the interviewees mostly discussed the immediate impacts of tour guiding, such as empowerment and visibility for their community, there is also evidence that these walking tours led by marginalised communities contribute to long-term personal, societal and policy change. For example, the London based social enterprise Unseen Tours is a member of the steering group for the all-party parliamentary group to end homelessness and works in collaboration with homelessness charities and organisations to support systemic changes (Parallel Parliament, 2025). Their guides, who have experience of homelessness, including survivors of human trafficking, have reported long-term benefits of working with the organisation, such as being able to secure permanent housing (Unseen Tours, 2025), or learning context and UK history as required to pass the UK citizenship test (personal communication, 2025). A key to long term impacts is that the social enterprise does not see current homelessness as a precondition to being a guide, meaning that the guides can continue to work even after having successfully lifted themselves out of homelessness (which all current guides have). In this case, while homelessness is used as a way to differentiate tours for tourists who want to escape the tourist bubble, the enterprise does not romanticise marginalisation or celebrate it as an asset without a chance for people to escape from it.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to discuss how aspects of marginalisation feature in walking tours led by those experiencing it. It demonstrated how marginalisation can be represented in walking tours to make them authentic for the communities whose stories are being told to maximise the possibilities for social inclusion whilst minimising the risk of voyeurism. Interviews with tour guides and walking tour organisations revealed insights about how the agency of those experiencing marginalisation and them shaping the content and narrative of tours led to the tours' ability in challenging public perceptions and the societal transformation that followed.

As Tsavdaroglou and Kaika (2022) observe, neoliberal city-branding strategies increasingly highlight the superdiverse, tolerant and cosmopolitan character of urban destinations to attract creative talent, tourists, high-income residents and investors. These narratives often seek to position cities as competitive, open and culturally vibrant. However, to be genuine and socially sustainable, this process of place-making must be co-created by residents themselves, including minorities and marginalised groups, in line with 'right to the city' principles (Lefebvre 1968) which emphasise every urban resident's right to participate in the city's political and cultural life and to shape the city's future. Walking tours and other tourism products developed and led by marginalised individuals take these ideas a step further, ensuring that these groups are not only visible in public space but that their stories are embedded in the narratives about the city, and thus contribute to the production of urban identity.

This paper emphasized the role that tour guiding plays in changing public discourse around marginalisation. By amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and

giving them the autonomy to shape the script for tour guiding, it not only increased people's sense of agency, but also their sense of belonging to a community and a place. This sense of connection to place enhances the reciprocal connection between guide and location. Having that chance to authentically represent one's self not only increases one's self-worth and skillset, both of which are key preconditions for empowerment, but also leads to a form of *positive power*, as it represents a positive force where power is created by developing one's capacity within a wider network of relationships (Walters et al., 2021), as opposed to an act of charity or control (Abdullah et al., 2023). Those experiencing marginalisation also often feel a greater attachment and sense of belonging to the places they call home, which becomes a feature of the tours, and is particularly crucial when considering, for example, marginalised groups such as refugees as they settle into a new 'home'.

What emerged through the research was the variety of ways that marginalisation featured in walking tours organised by those experiencing it. While some emphasised the educational element of their tour, others tried to downplay the negative aspects of their marginalisation to make the experience more entertaining. The predominant aim of the walking tour organisation also played a role in the decision to provide a script or not: when empowerment of the guides and skills development were the main objectives, then greater freedom of expression was recommended. However, when the main mission related to educating the public, increasing understanding and developing cultural empathy, then content co-creation or a skeleton script was considered to also be appropriate. This choice strongly depended on the specific context: there was no one-size-fits-all framework to producing these tours or including aspects of marginalisation in tour guiding. Each context, whether geographical or social (i.e. the type of marginalisation), required a tailored approach to the specific level of discrimination experienced and the impact of this discrimination on the person involved.

The findings further revealed that some guides refrained from talking too much or too in-depth about the aspects of their marginalisation, given the risk of intensified stigmatisation by over-simplifying problems or the emotional toll on guides. In practice, it meant that a plurality of voices is included to strengthen a deeper and more accurate engagement with the topic through multiple different perspectives. It is also important to connect guiding organisations to NGOs specialising in addressing trauma to assist guides with these challenges and avoiding their re-traumatisation. Great care is taken to ensure that those delivering tours are not stuck with a label that only associated them with their marginalisation, e.g. if a person with experience of homelessness, was no longer homeless, but was still associated with their prior experience of homelessness through delivering these tours, this had the potential to lead to further marginalisation. In practice, much of whether a tour re-traumatises or further stigmatises a guide or group of people or whether it could really de-stigmatise depends on the marketing of the tours and what customers expect of the tours as a result.

The problem often is that tours do not reach those where a shift in thinking would be required to truly challenge wider societal stereotypes. In a way, as one of our interviewees noted, it is like preaching to the converted, thus making it difficult to ascertain societal or political transformation. While the tours can be seen as a form of what Guia (2021) terms 'cultural advocacy', i.e. stimulating empathy and affection

for marginalised groups, they largely take place in a de-politicised space. As a practical implication of the research, tour organisations could consider inviting politicians on tours, using them as an opportunity to start an open dialogue on issues with people with lived experience of marginalisation. Our research found that the overall intention or mission of the walking tour organisations, as found on their websites and marketing materials - whether they focus on personal growth of the tour guides, or societal change more broadly as their main mission - play a role in how much of the guides' experience features on their tour. As a consequence, while more intangible forms of empowerment, such as visibility and connection with place are clear benefits, the extent to which they lead to political and societal change remains unclear until they reach a broader audience with differing world views.

These insights highlight the paper's distinctive contribution to tourism scholarship and to ongoing debates on social justice and sustainability. By analysing the role of tour guides from marginalised communities in shaping their own tour narratives, this study advances our understanding of how justice tourism can be realised in practice within urban contexts. Our results show that narrative ownership is central to fostering agency and a sense of belonging for the marginalised individuals involved. The findings provide evidence of how community-led justice tourism experiences can contribute to challenging stereotypes, strengthening local capacities and offering more meaningful and authentic experiences, not only for tourists but also for tour guides. They highlight that challenging traditional urban tourism images by offering an alternative, too often hidden, perspective on the city can contribute to the co-creation of socially just and authentic place-making. These findings expand the sustainability debate by providing more nuanced evidence on the role of urban tourism experiences in advancing the transition to more just and sustainable cities.

Future research will need to explore how these tours with marginalised communities tangibly influence societal and political change and the extent to which these organisations' intentions can be considered justice tourism. Given that the majority of our respondents were based in Europe, which was a consequence of the researchers' own location and the sampling methods used, further research should be conducted in other world regions and, ideally, be co-created with marginalised individuals who work in tourism. This would allow a more nuanced understanding of geographical variations and would strengthen research validity. To date, research on sustainable tourism, particularly focused on social inclusion, social justice and agency, has largely focused on rural rather than urban contexts. While this is slowly changing (Bellato & Cheer, 2021), more research is still needed particularly on grassroots initiatives and on those that are often excluded from urban planning, tourism or society as a whole. This paper constitutes another step in this direction by illustrating how tours delivered and designed by marginalised individuals contribute to making urban destinations more socially inclusive, thus forming an essential part of destinations' justice tourism and sustainability agenda.

Author contributions

CRedit: **Jayni Gudka**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review &

editing; **Ilaria Pappalepore**: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Claudia Dolezal**: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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