

From experience to stewardship: Guideability as a structural condition for cultural succession in tourism

Megumi Masuda (Musubi Ltd., Japan)

INTRODUCTION

In high-value tourism discourse, attention has largely focused on the design of exclusive experiences, service quality, and economic outcomes. While such approaches contribute to destination branding and revenue generation, they remain insufficient for explaining how tourism supports the long-term succession of culture, skills, and responsibility, particularly in regional contexts.

Recent discussions on sustainable and community-based tourism emphasize local participation and cultural preservation; however, they often conceptualize cultural practices as assets to be showcased or consumed. Less attention has been paid to the conditions under which cultural judgment itself is sustained, exercised, and transmitted. This omission is especially critical in contexts where cultural practices involve irreversible production processes, tacit knowledge, and ethical responsibility.

Existing tourism scholarship offers several influential ways of understanding value creation. Tourism research has extensively theorized the experience economy, in which tourism is conceptualized as the staged production of memorable experiences for visitor consumption (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This orientation is complemented by Urry's (2002) account of the tourist gaze, which frames tourism as a visually and symbolically organized encounter with difference, and by subsequent elaborations of co-created and embodied experiences (Uriely, 2005). Discussions of high-value tourism have extended these frameworks by emphasizing exclusivity, personalization, and experiential depth (UNWTO, 2017). Parallel discussions in sustainable and community-based tourism emphasize participation, empowerment, and cultural preservation (Murphy, 1985; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). While these frameworks offer important insights, they share a common analytical focus on the visitor experience as the unit of value, and provide limited understanding of how judgment-based cultural responsibility is institutionally supported and transmitted beyond individual actors.

Research on tour guides highlights their interpretive and mediating roles (Cohen, 1985; Weiler & Black, 2015), yet guides are often positioned as individual service providers whose competence resides in personal knowledge or ethics. Similarly, regional destination management companies are commonly discussed in terms of marketing, coordination, or governance (Bornhorst et al., 2010), with little attention to their role in sustaining judgment-based cultural mediation.

Across these strands of literature, a structural gap persists: the absence of analytical frameworks that account for how responsibility, judgment, and cultural decision-making are distributed and maintained institutionally.

This study proposes a shift from experience-centered tourism models toward a framework of cultural stewardship, in which tourism is understood as a relational process that enables culture to be inherited rather than merely experienced. Central to this reframing is the concept of guideability, defined as the structural capacity of a destination to support judgment-based cultural mediation through coordinated institutional roles.

Within this framework, *responsibility* denotes the shared institutional obligation to sustain cultural practices across generations; *judgment* refers to the situated capacity to mediate between visitors and cultural custodians under uncertainty; and *cultural decision-making* names the enactment of that judgment in practice. These dimensions are mutually constitutive: judgment requires institutionally distributed responsibility, and cultural decision-making is its observable trace in coordinated action.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative, practice-based research approach informed by reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and grounded theorizing (Charmaz, 2006). The concept of guideability was not posited

a priori; it emerged inductively through more than two decades of embedded professional practice in guiding and regional tourism coordination in Japan. This orientation treats concepts as products of sustained engagement with phenomena rather than as hypotheses derived from prior literature, and is consistent with practice-based inquiry in tourism and service contexts where tacit knowledge and situated judgment are central (Polanyi, 1966). The study is conceptual in orientation and draws on continuous, practice-based observation rather than hypothesis testing or statistical generalization.

The empirical basis consists of sustained engagement with heritage production sites and craft education institutions, where visitor access is negotiated situationally rather than being standardized. The researcher, acting as a regional coordinator embedded in destination-level facilitation, enables direct observation of coordination processes among guides, regional destination management companies, and cultural custodians. Descriptions of institutional roles are based on ongoing, practice-based coordination rather than retrospective documentation.

The cases are examined sequentially, moving from production-driven judgment contexts to formalized systems of skill transmission. This sequencing allows analysis of how judgment emerges in practice and how it is subsequently stabilized and transmitted through institutional structures.

FINDINGS

The following cases illustrate how responsibility, judgment, and cultural decision-making operate interdependently within tourism coordination. Case 1 emphasizes situated judgment under conditions of irreversible production; Case 2 emphasizes the institutional stabilization of judgment through formal evaluative structures. Both cases show that cultural decision-making is sustainable only where responsibility is structurally distributed among guides, regional destination management companies, and cultural custodians, rather than held by any individual actor alone.

Case 1: Situational Judgment in Sake Production

The first case concerns the coordination of visitor access to a long-established sake brewery embedded within a regional production system. Decisions regarding visitor entry, timing, and explanatory scope are made situationally, depending on fermentation stages, workforce capacity, and quality control priorities. These judgments are inherently non-standardizable and require continuous coordination rather than predefined rules to prevent cultural exposure from compromising production integrity. Responsibility is distributed among brewers, guides, and regional destination management companies, enabling openness without undermining product quality.

Case 2: Formalized Succession in Craft Education

The second case involves a vocational craft college specializing in traditional Japanese dressmaking (wasai), a form of dressmaking practiced exclusively within Japan, where domestic evaluative standards therefore function as the only—and effectively global—benchmarks. The institution is led by a nationally recognized master artisan who serves on the governing body of Japan's Skills Competition system, positioning the college within a formal framework of national evaluation and skill succession.

In contrast to the brewery, where judgment emerges through situational decision-making, the craft college represents a context in which judgment-based criteria are explicitly defined, evaluated, and transmitted. Here, judgment is stabilized and transmitted through formal evaluative structures rather than personal discretion. Visitor access and explanation are mediated not only by immediate conditions but also by institutional responsibility to maintain nationally—and effectively globally—recognized standards.

Together, these cases illustrate two complementary dimensions of guideability: the capacity to support real-time judgment in production contexts, and the capacity to stabilize and transmit judgment through formal institutional structures. In both settings, cultural mediation depends on structurally shared responsibility among guides, regional destination management companies, and cultural custodians.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate that prevailing tourism models do not adequately address the structural conditions required for cultural succession. By framing responsibility and judgment primarily as individual competencies, existing approaches risk overexposing practitioners and reducing culturally embedded decision-making to a consumable performance.

The concept of guideability foregrounds the institutional arrangements through which judgment is supported, shared, and transmitted. In production-oriented contexts such as sake brewing, guideability enables real-time negotiation that balances openness with responsibility. In craft education systems, it reaches a formalized stage, where standards of judgment are stabilized and transmitted through nationally recognized evaluative frameworks. This structural framing aligns with broader moves in heritage research to reconceptualize cultural value as sustained through ongoing practice rather than preserved as artifact (Smith, 2006).

These observations carry implications beyond tourism management. In cases where cultural skills are institutionally defined at the national level—particularly when those skills exist exclusively within a single country—domestic systems of evaluation effectively function as global standards. Tourism, in such contexts, interfaces not only with individual artisans but with nationally embedded mechanisms of cultural governance.

For tourism research, this study suggests a shift from evaluating experiential outcomes toward examining how responsibility is structurally organized and sustained. For policy and destination planning, it highlights the importance of investing not only in human resource development but also in institutional designs that protect judgment-based practices from overexposure and erosion.

While grounded in regional Japanese contexts, the framework of guideability offers broader relevance for community-embedded, place-based tourism systems globally, where cultural stewardship must take precedence over scalability.

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