



# Making kin and making sense of human-animal relations in tourism

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore how tourism operators make sense of the abilities and needs of working animals during the co-creation of a tourism experience in order to make kin across species. We refer to sense-making as the process in which tourism actors interpret the context, plans, actions and outcomes relating to animal-based tourism. We examine this phenomenon through the eco-feminist lens of making kin and staying with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) by exploring reflections upon the practices in which tourists, animals, and guides are entangled. Qualitative data from Iceland, Norway and the USA reveal that multiple aspects of the relationships during co-creation are “made sense of” including values, knowledge, relationships, abilities and needs. Tensions arise around the differences in values and knowledge between actors bounded in co-creational practices. The study adds to the conversation on “staying with the trouble” of ethics and agency in animal based tourism and contributes to our understanding of the role of empathetic sense-making in animal based tourism, illuminating key issues that contribute to co-creating value for animals, tourists, and providers. We aim to contribute to the field of feminist ecological economics that combines social justice, and ecological perspective, while emphasizing that the services of other-than-humans are essential for wellbeing of all species.

## 1. Introduction

This article presents an in-depth, phenomenological study conducted with eleven tourism providers who are offering animal-based tourism experiences in Iceland, Norway and the USA. Our findings provide an empirical and theoretical analysis of how empathetic sensemaking of needs and abilities paves the way for making kin during animal-based tourism experiences. By doing so, we address the call of [Spencer et al. \(2018\)](#) to re-establishing justice and bringing feminist insights into Ecological Economics. We offer insight into the relationship between humans and other-than-humans in the tourism economic system, and focus on how cooperative, egalitarian, life-centred social arrangements are formed between species by practicing sense-making and kin-making ([Miles, 1996](#)). Making kin is rooted in ecofeminist theory and is the opposite of the alienating neoclassical economic practice of monetising, pricing and commodifying nature and animals in tourism, leading to formalizing and legitimizing exploitation of other-than-humans working for tourism. The interrelatedness of nature and society raises issues of non-monetary valuation, plural values, incommensurability and alternative meta-ethical systems ([O’Neill et al., 2008](#)). We argue that an understanding of the establishment of connection and empathy between

humans and non-humans is necessary to move from an exploitative to a kinship type of relationship.

The premise for this study stems from our concerns about the tourism industry’s “more is better” approach to development ([Patterson et al., 2007](#)) and our desire to see non-human animals - and natural ecosystems more broadly - protected from Western domination and commodification approaches to tourism ([Dengler and Seebacher, 2019](#)). We intend to ‘make kin’ with tourism by offering ways to reconfigure the existing models of power to listen to all stakeholders within the tourism praxis. Relevant to this particular study, this means we must understand (to the best of our ability) the needs of our non-human counterparts. This transdisciplinary study focusing on animal-based tourism acknowledges that the touristic economic system is embedded within many social systems, which are encompassed by a wide range of ecological settings and systems; hence our conclusions address these three realms.

Animal-based tourism is typically defined as a direct encounter with a non-human animal; these encounters can occur in wild, semi-wild settings, or captive settings ([Orams, 2002](#)) and include performative, educational, transportative, sporting, companion, and culinary activities ([Kline and Fischer, 2021](#)). Animals can be an instrumental part of co-creating valuable experiences in the contexts of tourism, leisure,

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sport, and environmental education and it is predicted that animal-based tourism will continue to grow (Carr and Broom, 2018). While it is difficult to estimate the volume of tourism activity that relates to animals; the estimates we have are fragmented and outdated. Moorhouse et al. (2017) estimate that wildlife tourism accounts for 20%–40% of all international tourism, however this estimate is based on data from the 90s, only accounts for one type of animal experience, and does not offer a clear definition of what types of wildlife tourism encounters were included. World Animal Protection (n.d.) estimates more sophisticated and nuanced with attention focused on contextual elements as well as animal welfare violations and a range of ethical dimensions of tourism activities. Kline and Fischer (2021, para. 13) elaborate: “From here, the animal welfare agenda picks up steam within the tourism literature with many additional contributions... Edited volumes devoted to a broadening range of animal ethics and animal welfare subtleties [were published]... the discussion stretched beyond the Western zoo or ‘exotic’ ecotourism settings... [and] researchers tease out the nuanced complexities and multiple connections of animals within our broader economies, societal norms, cultural heritage, and environmental practices.”

The presence of animals - live or dead - in the tourism experience has largely been taken for granted in the tourism literature; however scholarly attention has been increasing within the last ten years with the publication of David Fennell’s seminal book *Tourism and Animal Ethics* (2012). Since that time, scholarly work has become more sophisticated and nuanced with attention focused on contextual elements as well as animal welfare violations and a range of ethical dimensions of tourism activities. Kline and Fischer (2021, para. 13) elaborate: “From here, the animal welfare agenda picks up steam within the tourism literature with many additional contributions... Edited volumes devoted to a broadening range of animal ethics and animal welfare subtleties [were published]... the discussion stretched beyond the Western zoo or ‘exotic’ ecotourism settings... [and] researchers tease out the nuanced complexities and multiple connections of animals within our broader economies, societal norms, cultural heritage, and environmental practices.”

Animal welfare is affected by the ethical positions and behavior of those interacting with animals including both tour operators and tourists (Winter, 2020). Earlier studies regarding welfare generally focus on measures of behavior or physiological function (e.g. health, reproduction, stress), expression of natural behaviors, and what living conditions animals prefer (Bansiddhi et al., 2020). Many have called for research to understand the relationship between tourism and animal welfare by focusing on the perceptions of those who interact with animals in tourism (Carr and Broom, 2018; Fennell, 2014; Hughes, 2001; Winter, 2020); this desired understanding is based on an implicit motivation to enact social change toward more ethical interactions with animals. To address these calls, we use sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) to explore how operators are making sense of the abilities and needs of working animals during the co-creation of a tourism experience. Specifically, *how do tourism providers make sense of tourist-animal interactions in animal-based experiences?* and *How does sense-making influence making kin among species as well as the consideration for the interests of animals within animal-based tourism experiences?*

Within this study, we focus on the interpretation of an array of abilities and needs of non-humans co-creating the tourism experience. By focusing on how tourism actors make sense of their animals, we advance the understanding of how animals are pivotal to the tourism experience, and to what degree the tourism activities take into account the agency and welfare (as interpreted through their abilities and needs) of the animals. Hence, we address the call of Johansson-Stenman (2018) for incorporating non-anthropocentric ethical assumptions in the economy of tourism.

Different backgrounds can influence values regarding animals as well as shape normative views on the human-animal relationship. For example, animals can be seen as objects or as subjects (Bertella, 2014) and animals may be regarded by humans through various value systems and ethical lenses based on anthropocentrism, utilitarianism, welfare vs. rights, environmental ethics, and ecofeminism (Winter, 2020; Yudina and Fennell, 2013). Sensemaking is the primary process during which these value-laden meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity and action (Helms-Mills, 2003). The contribution of our work is that we examine sensemaking through the eco-feministic lens of making kin (Haraway, 2015), by exploring reflections upon the practices in which tourists, animals, and guides are entangled. We offer insight into

empathetic sensemaking processes of people interacting with animals, and suggest that the human capacity for emotion, empathy and compassion for other beings also comes with responsibility. Further, we demonstrate the “balancing act” of interactions between tourism actors. And while each actor within a co-created experience is constantly sifting through their own values and knowledge base to adapt and understand and experience the outcome of others’ values and knowledge presented, it is the guide that we focus on here.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Co-creating with animals in tourism

The tourism industry is rife with examples where animals are the focus or a key part of the experience: wildlife-watching, hunting, fishing, working animals, captive and performing animals, animals in racing or fighting, shows or rodeos, animals as food, animals used as “props” for selfie opportunities (Pearce and Moscardo, 2015; Rickly and Kline, 2021). Within each of these types of tourism experiences, ethical quandaries exist relative to animal exploitation and abuse, environmental degradation, social appropriation, commercialism and economic greed. Our study spans these examples to focus on animals who have a co-creation role within the tourism experience. While we do not explicitly focus on the ethical practices of the operators within our study, we gain a better understanding of how animals are viewed from the operator’s perspective, providing insight into why various ethical stances (e.g. a utilitarian ethic or an ethic of care) are taken.

Before continuing, it is necessary to elaborate on the ways animals are actors in co-creative experiences. Live animals serve as a conduit for environmental education as an enticing “ambassador” to engage audiences and facilitate the delivery of pro-environment messages (Walker and Moscardo, 2016). Moon (2018, p. 30) notes that “not only is the use of live animals more captivating for audiences, but also ... these animals are more effective educational instruments of behavioral change; that is, people are more likely to complete pro-environmental actions after they have seen live animal programs than they are after a presentation without live animals.” In instances such as these, animals are mediating change when they co-create tourism experiences; they act as brokers between different living worlds or contexts, for example nature and the city, or the farm and the restaurant, or very different cultures such as in the case of Taiwanese tourists visiting a heritage attraction in Norway. Born (2018), Haraway (2016), and others insist that greater environmental and interspecies connectedness is more important now than ever before.

Likewise, captive wild animals are sometimes made to interact with tourists such as dolphin swimming programs or animal selfie experiences, demonstrating a darker side of co-creation with animals (Bertella et al., 2019; Hughes, 2001; Pearce and Moscardo, 2015). Animals also have physical contact with tourists through sporting activities, such as long-range dog sledding expeditions (Hoarau-Heemstra and Nazarova, 2021) or even in combat with humans (Malchrowicz-Moško et al., 2020). Additionally, animals that carry gear or tourists - such as horses, mules, llamas, or elephants - can shape the tourists’ experience and express their personality as well as limited forms of agency (Dashper, 2017; Notzke, 2019; Rickly and Kline, 2021). For example, Dashper (2017) highlighted the practice of listening to animals, acknowledging that they are sentient moral beings apart from the label we give them as our pet. In doing this “human and horse can become something other, and perhaps more, than they can be individually” (Ibid, p. 22). She encourages us to make kin with animals’ individuality and stay with the trouble of our tendency to assign value to other sentient beings. Within this study, through collecting narratives from operators, we examine in what ways providers assign value to the animals within the co-created experience and how providers assess the needs and abilities of individual creatures.

Bertella et al. (2019) suggest an approach of entangled empathy,

whereby tourism providers, tourists, scholars, and policy makers critically consider and explore alternative ways to view, frame, and engage with animal kingdoms. We respond to their call for entangled empathy by evaluating how providers make sense of their animals within the tourism practice. Campos et al. (2017) found that co-creation with dolphins at a water park increased tourist attention and involvement, which in turn enhanced memorability. They noted that some animals are greater “attention-capturers” than others. Similar to our study, the Campos study focused on guides or “trainers” as attention-capturers, and the relationship being explored is triadic. Campos et al. (2018) noted three elements of the experiencescape: the environment, the social elements between participants, and the organizational dynamics and features of service. It is our premise that within certain types of animal-based tourism experiences, the animal involved is part of the physical and natural environment, provides social interactions with the tourists and guide, and simultaneously provides service to tourists while representing the operator’s business. We elevate the animal’s status within the experiencescape by becoming the epicenter of the experience - facilitating a potential “meeting space” of host and guest - where the animal transforms into a singular personality (e.g. Sombra) from an abstract notion (a llama). This aligns with Bertella’s notion regarding the “active and central role that animals can play in the tourism experience” (2014, p. 117).

Bertella (2014) formally introduced the concept of co-creation *with an animal*, adapting the network model from Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) to examine a case of dog sledding in Norway, and ultimately including in the network model the huskies as well as the tourists’ knowledge of their own companion animals “back home.” She calls for additional research embodying multi-species ethnography, which we attempt to apply here. As such, we execute our study from the point of view of the subjects (animals) as narrated by the guide who serves as a facilitator of multi-species encounters (Bertella, 2014). Certainly, our ethical view of animals is embedded within the culture we reside in, which has only begun to be addressed within the literature (Malchrowicz-Moško et al., 2020). Culture is steeped in neoliberal baggage (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) which adds complexity to interactions between people of different backgrounds, and is often the case in tourism, between host and guest from different regions. Within this paper we adopt a triadic framework of co-creation that emphasizes the role of the animal as mediator. The non-human animals in each of the various tourism contexts studied helps the other parties make sense of and navigate cultural differences while finding common ground within the given tourism experiencescape.

## 2.2. Making kin

The eco-feministic scholarship of Donna Haraway is surprisingly underrepresented in organizational and tourism studies, with a few exceptions and a growing interest (Ren, 2021). Within the heart of Haraway’s work (2016) is the concept of connectivities. By providing a range of disparate examples, she weaves an argument as to why we should “make kin” with beings seemingly unlike ourselves. Haraway (2008) refers to the connections between kin as being messmates, with whom actors, humans and non-human mortal critters, form close ties. Ren and Jóhannesson (2017) urge tourism scholars to tend to messmates, to include them into the stories of tourism. Consequently, tourism experiences are seen as tense, messy, distributed and collaborative achievements and a process of making-with, becoming with and thinking with (Ren, 2021). The very messiness of these relationships in tourism provides an offering of survival, enrichment, and middle-ground hope in a time in history where she declares that it is easy to be too pessimistic of the Earth’s fate or too optimistic about humanity’s technological ability to reason our way out of impending climate doom.

For Haraway, making kin means realizing, sensing, and embracing the imperfection of connections between nature, animals, and humans; between science, art, and resistance; between technology, animals, and

societies. Connectivities will save us, physically and metaphorically, and the more we are comfortable getting our hands messy in them, the better off we are, individually and as a species because we are able to connect to our world again on multiple levels. Haraway (2016, p. 30) rejects the “old saws of Western philosophy and political economics” and bids us to remember biological knowledges and to grieve the pain we have inflicted and continue to inflict upon the natural world and each other throughout the age of the Anthropocene. By grieving, she says, we are staying with the trouble and on a path to understanding. Without “sustained remembrance” (Ibid, p. 39) of our grief and our connectivities, we will choose to live our mistakes again. Within tourism, the connectivities we examine here are interactions between actors, and between outsiders and local cultures, but also between humans and the rest of the (forgotten) natural world.

The idea of connections also underpins the concept of co-creation. Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) define co-creation as the interaction of an individual at a specific place and time (the tourism-scape) and within the context of a specific act. The theoretical underpinnings of this definition are rooted in the experience economy, co-creation theory (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004), and the tourism network approach. Dimensions of the concept are the active participation of the tourists, interpersonal interaction, and contribution to experience design (Campos et al., 2018). In order to truly connect and make kin with others, we make sense of them first. Sensemaking is the tool that helps us to find common ground, or overcome our differences by assessing others and reflection upon ourselves.

## 2.3. Making sense

Sensemaking originates from cognitive psychology, social psychology, communication theorists and organizational studies. Weick (1995) offers a seminal treatment on sensemaking that has been extended to the interpretation of tourism strategy and behavior (Woodside and Martin, 2008) and tourism experiences (Woodside, 2011). According to Weick (1995), we are inextricably related to the world through our ongoing sensemaking, which is the process through which individuals give meaning to experiences. Sensemaking refers to how we structure the unknown (known as bracketing) so as to be able to act in it; it involves coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world; testing this map with others through data collection, action, and conversation; and then refining or abandoning the map depending on how credible it is. In other words, sensemaking is a way to obtain knowledge about the environment by the ongoing interplay of (collective) action and interpretation (Jensen et al., 2009) hence engagement with the world is both personal and shared with others (Klein et al., 2006). Communication theorist Brenda Dervin’s view of sensemaking (2003) adds that sensemaking is a process that is personal and contingent on experience, that substantiates learning, that takes place continually and forever, and is fundamentally based on each participant’s perspective or point of view.

Weick’s view of sensemaking is a process that is highly collaborative, effective for organizational growth and planning in both the short and long term, and highly dependent on interpretation. In this paper, we adopt a Weickian understanding where sensemaking is understood as a language-mediated process of interpreting others’ accounts and negotiating shared understandings (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020). It enables people to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict. Sensemaking takes place when individuals are faced with ambiguity and complexity (Weick, 1995) and creates a point of view that directs interpretations and subsequent actions. During the animal-based tourism experience, tourism providers, guides, and tourists are faced with ambiguity and complexity due to their different value-systems.

Values are an integrative part of the understanding and experience of customers and an important sense making factor because they are a fundamental source of meaningfulness (Rosso et al., 2010). Not only are customers interpreting their experience, providers are also interpreting

the experience of their customers, and their animals, and the engagement of their customers with the animals. Following this sensemaking process, they can decide to change specific elements or interactions for practices to be performed more successfully (Rihova et al., 2018).

Sensemaking and making kin are practices that happen during co-creation of the experience in which human and non-human animals are involved in value-sharing. As Herrmann-Pillath (2020) argues, ecological economics would ground the notion of value in a co-creative process that would result in shared values within humanity and even beyond. The co-creation of values during a tourism experience in which multiple species are involved, can be done by recognizing the central role of minimizing suffering and to respect the integrity of all forms of life (Sayer, 2011; Herrmann-Pillath, 2020). The empathic practice of making sense of the needs and abilities of all beings involved in the co-creational experience paves the way for making kin collectively, and for creating value for everybody involved.

### 3. Methods

“The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (Haraway, 1988, p. 590). We have chosen to be with (metaphorically speaking) animal-based tourism providers, in order to develop a larger vision and understanding of their experiences of sensemaking and kinmaking during animal-based tourism experiences. As such, our research is bridging the gap between real life occurrences and the theoretical concepts of sense- and kinmaking. This exploratory research was carried out through a series of loosely-structured interviews based in varying geographic regions selected to provide different contexts; in essence, to provide varying experiencescapes. Each region was also accessible to the researchers, and within each destination, tour companies were purposively chosen because of the animals embedded within the animal-based tourism experience. When possible, we visited the tourism providers physically, in other cases we conducted the interviews via video-calls or phone calls. The interviews allowed for the emergence of stories and anecdotes because the flow of the conversations were more important than the order of our predefined topics; the participants set the course of the dialogue. Before ending the interviews, we checked to see if we had discussed all topics that we identified beforehand. In order to develop a background understanding of the businesses and the animal-based tourism experiences offered, we looked at their virtual presence on websites and social media. Even though we did not analyze pictures or text in online sources, we got a better understanding of the context and background of the level of experience of the providers. Our empirical interest and stance toward sense-making is that language has a reflexive function in sensemaking, as is reflected in interviews as our source of data. As we have oriented sensemaking to studying the empirical phenomenon of animal-based tourism, we assume that when operators and guides are making sense of their activities, this involves engaged abstraction that generates conceptual sense of the activity. Our informants reviewed the key features of the animal-based tourism activity, reflecting on, and looking for, patterns of relationships (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2020). Hence, we applied an interpretive phenomenological analysis of process and content dimensions of making sense and making kin as experienced by tourism providers. We base our approach on Dervin (2003) on sensemaking methodology, developed from the phenomenological tradition. Dervin’s sensemaking methodology focuses on better understanding the ways people make sense out of information toward the goal of informing the development of better information and communication systems (Naumer et al., 2008).

Our epistemological view is that knowledge is an attainable goal, and within the current study, knowledge is grounded in the subjective worldviews of one specific stakeholder: the guide. A critical-interpretivist approach was adopted in order to understand the animal-tourist encounter from the perspectives of the informants (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004), understanding individual interpretations of their situation. This approach aligns with ecofeminist

critiques of traditional forms of research in that we acknowledge humans are embedded within nature and entangled with the lives of our non-human counterparts (Bertella, 2014; Yudina and Fennell, 2013). We place less value on “fixing” and more on understanding a situation. Additionally, we “placing more value on the passionate and emotional aspects of consumers’ connection with the earth, 3) emphasizing the interdependency of nature and humans, and 4) allowing for a more contextual and deeper analysis of the behaviors that comprise environmentally-related consumption” (Dobscha, 1993, p. 38). Themes addressed during the interviews were: co-creation of the animal-based tourism experience, values of the tourism operators, sustainability, animal well being and knowledge sharing, themes that embody care and cooperation over domination and aggression (Buckingham and Kina, 2015). Jamal and Hollinshead (2001) and McGehee (2012) call for qualitative approaches to inquiry because it is dynamic and reflexive, and accounts for power and context. We valued reflexivity in this study, and designed the research approach in a way that assured trustworthiness as opposed to the post-positivist perspective of reliability and validity (McGehee, 2012). We value the voices of guides as they interpret the experience of the animals in their care, employ a pluralistic methodology, and approach gender and culture with sensitivity (Stephens, 2009). As such, the interview questions, structure, and protocol were developed in accordance with the literature on sensemaking, values, co-creation, ecofeminist approaches, and learning, and the best practices of animal-based tourism experiences.

Our research design included parameters for validity, credibility, and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility was protected using techniques of engagement and observation and by verification of findings between the authors. Transferability was accounted for through purposive sampling. Our research plan included an audit trail of the transcripts and research process, as well as engaged ongoing discussion of the findings safeguarded dependability and confirmability, and neutrality of the findings. We enforced confirmability through excerpts from interview transcripts to support the findings; interviews lasted from 40 to 75 min. We coded the material in three phases: categorization of the data, creation of interconnecting categories, and selective coding where both researchers created the final set of codes and nodes. Our final codes and nodes are represented in the findings; sensemaking of 1) physical, 2) intellectual and emotional and 3) relational (values, knowledge and bonds) abilities and needs. Throughout the research stages we have worked with the big-tent criteria for qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). For example, to address data and time in the field/triangulation, we employed interview data, observation when possible (only in the case of Norway and Iceland where interviews were conducted face to face), and website analysis for the tourism operators. For transparency about methods and challenges, we outlined the technological problems with two recordings and shortcomings in the research design. We recognize that using qualitative research techniques and small samples inhibits generalizability. However, our approach allows for fine-grained, contextual and processual accounts of sensemaking in animal-based tourism. In the appendix, we have included the “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research that we used as a guide in the current study (Tracy, 2010).

We conducted 11 interviews from March 2017 to January 2018 (Table 1); informant and company names used are pseudonyms. We asked permission to record, transcribe and use the interviews for research purposes. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min, were transcribed, and data were coded. Two recordings - Rachel with Raptor Education Center and Frank with American Journeys - were of poor quality and were employed for thematic analysis only.

### 4. Findings

We coded our data inductively, to allow the story to emerge from the data. Here we present the findings while staying with the trouble of entangled relationships between tourists, guides, and animals, where



**Table 1**  
Fieldwork locations and informants.

Country	Company (Pseudonym)	Informant (Pseudonym)
Iceland	Icelandic Lava Horse	Eva
	The Sleepy Sheep	Freya
	Icelandic Goat Art	Heidi
	Northern Valley Horse	Runa
Norway	Nordic Husky Tracking	Tor
	Nordic Mountain Horse	Aurora
U.S.A.	Working Raptors Rehabilitation	Lisa
	Western Hikes	Robert
	American Journeys	Frank
	USTreks	Joe
	Raptor Education Center	Rachel

the animal-based tourism experience is “becoming with” practices that are tied in multispecies knots. We present how tourism providers make sense of needs and abilities that are brought into the experience by the tourist, guides, and animal actors: physical, emotional and intellectual, and relational abilities and needs. We further discuss how guides make sense of bonding, of making kin, during the experience co-creation process.

4.1. Sensemaking of physical abilities and needs

Tourism operators make sense of animals in the light of the purpose they have for customers. This relates to their physical appearance, their character, or purpose of their lives.

“We like to buy a lot of big horses that bigger people can ride as well.” (Eva)

“If a nice pet is not giving any lambs unfortunately I have to kill it ...” (Freya)

There is a tension between recognizing the subjectivity of animals involved in the tourism experience and the oppressive animal-human dynamic that is expressed in breeding and eating these same tourism companions. Care for working animals in tourism has instrumental origins – the animals are provided with what they need in order to be the best tourism companion they can be (Carr and Broom, 2018). Therefore, tourism providers make sense of the animals’ abilities (and the limits thereof).

“There are horses that are much more sensitive, especially maybe the horses that we get into the business, the younger horses. I’m always afraid that something is happening to destroy the horse, because once they have a really bad experience, it will be almost impossible to get that experience out of them. So I take really good care to get them into the business [as gently] as possible”

(Eva)

The tourism providers have to know their animals and their abilities very well because the quality of the experience depends on the connection between the animal and the humans interacting with them. Therefore, tourists’ abilities and personality must also be assessed. When making sense of tourists and horses, these two partners in the tourism experience are considered equal subjects. However, even if both horse and human are matched well, the relationship is one of domination.

“I have learned how different [the horses’] characters are and [how] to match them with the right riders for them. Some of them are headstrong, and then you give them to strong men. Some of them are really nice and gentle, and then you give them to little kids” (Eva)

Animals are also assessed by the types of needs they have and what these needs mean for humans. However, caring for an animal comes with a financial cost. The following quote about the use of llamas illustrates how responsibility toward animal companions is assessed.

“Compared to a horse, they’re extremely sure footed, so you can go over some pretty questionable trails that a horse couldn’t do. Then the bigger thing is, they’re super low maintenance. They don’t eat or drink a lot. So ... we’ll take them down to the lake, get them water, and let them graze a little bit. Bring a little grain along but they eat very little. It’s not like a horse, you’d have to pack in a bunch of food. Hay and stuff. You don’t have to do that with llamas”

(Joe)

Working with animals means knowing what they can and cannot do and accepting the limitations of both animals and tourists. Even though Joe knows some kids would like to ride on the llama, he is not allowing it. The role of the tourism provider is to communicate and translate animal abilities to tourists.

“There’s no way we’re going to put a kid on the back of that thing. That’s really important, because ... they will throw a fit. It’s weird, it’s not the weight. It’s just some of them, they can tell the difference between like a kid moving, and just a static bag on their back. They don’t mind the bag, but like having a kid moving on there, it freaks them out, some of them.... So ... it’s just getting them used to what the llama likes, and what a llama doesn’t like”

(Joe)

Animals have to learn to deal with particularities of tourists, like different riding skills or unusual “accessories”; tourism providers make sense of their animals as creatures that can and should adjust to tourists wants, needs, and abilities.

“If you have little balance, then the horse is carrying your balance. They get used to it with the muscles just like with any exercise. They also get used to people sitting on them differently. They get used to the selfie sticks too”

(Runa)

Because of the hard work, animals in tourism are in need of practice and training. The tourism providers are responsible for making sure that the animal stays fit enough to do the job. Joe explains how they train llamas for their activities.

“It’s like taking your dog for a walk. I literally [take them] for a six to seven mile hike, just to get them into shape. Because if we just threw packs on them day one and started to go up the hill, they would all ... conk out on us, you know. We have to... read their body language. They can’t let you know, “Hey, I’m hot and tired,” or “I’m worn out,” or whatever...so you kind of have to pay attention to their breathing. Once they’re too tired, and I say, if they lay down in the middle of the trail, they’re done. They’re done for hours. And that’s not good”

4.2. Sensemaking of intellectual and emotional needs

Thinking about animals in tourism as unique individuals, capable of complex thoughts and emotion is a prerequisite of making sense of their psychological needs and wants. It implies acknowledging that animals have needs and wants that go beyond physiological wellbeing. Animals working for tourism have varying personalities and qualities, something that must be taken into account when matching animals with tourists. For example, in order to make kin with both llama and tourists, the provider has to be able to think like a llama, and understand how llama society works and what it means to be a lead-llama in order to provide a good experience for all participants.

“When we’re doing a trip out, we take three or four llamas out together. Walking up the trail matters. Some are my major leaders, and some are followers. Some move a little faster. So, we kind of have to know your llamas ... Because if you put the small one in front, and

you put the one that's a natural leader in the back, it's not going to go well. You're going to have them all tangled up in about 10 minutes, because the one's going to try to be passing everybody else" (Joe).

Additionally, an animal needs adequate stimulation, or its mental health will suffer as well:

We don't have a riding arena because I am not passionate about riding lessons. I think it is boring for the horses to go around in a sand arena and I don't have the heart to ask them to do that"

(Aurora)

Through their behavior, animals communicate what they want, expressing their agency. Some animals don't want to co-create with certain tourists, or vice versa. It is the role of the guide to make sense of the interaction and intervene when necessary.

"We know they are not happy if you're letting them out and they're not excited to go out. They start playing with the fence or just stand there. Of course, we always try to give them vacation before it comes to that"

(Eva)

If the tourists get frustrated with the animal, the challenge for the guide is to balance the needs of the animal with the needs of the customer. Runa explains:

"Tourists can get angry for something. This happens sometimes with riders that think they can ride. However, you have to be very, very sensitive with how you tell people. Tell them, 'Try to do it like this. Or maybe try it like this.' so that you [aren't] negative to your customers. But you still have to take care of your horses"

Animals communicate when a threshold is passed - when they have worked too much, are not treated properly, are too bored or tired. Based on this, human handlers in tourism make sense of how much they like their work and what they are able to do and how to read signals to prevent crisis situations. Animals in tourism have to work hard, especially during short seasons where tourism peaks. And in Nordic regions, people and animals have to earn their living for the whole year in three to four short months. Tor explains:

"The dogs work, I think they had maybe four, max five days off during the season. They worked a lot and they are tough in their head as long as they go around and around day by day. And then they need a lot of food".

In the US, a similar way of thinking can be found with llama trips. It is considered to be the responsibility of the human handler to take care of the animal so it can do its work.

"Most of the guides that do the llama trips are kind of select ... either they have experience with animals, or we think they're being good with the animals. Some guys ... they're not going to take good care of them. They're not going to be patient with them. If there's a llama and you over pack it, or you over work it, it's just going to lay down. Once it lays down, it's not getting up. It's kind of like a mule in that way, or a donkey. You aren't going to get it up" (Joe).

Joe refers to multi-species communication and the role of body-language. In order to know what the animal needs, humans need empathy and the ability to understand the animal's communication. In animal-based tourism experience, animals can express a preference for a human handler as well.

"Sometimes (the tourists) they ride a horse and they fall in love with the horse, and buy the horse. We never force people to buy a horse. It's their own choice. I think sometimes it's the horses' choice. Sometimes the horses go to the people and tell them, 'I want you'"

(Runa)

Tor explains how dogs also consider the humans they encounter:

"They feel it, especially the difference between people who are good with animals and those who are not. They know it if you like them. But they see so many people that they can handle it when people are uncomfortable with them".

Abilities and needs are part of sensemaking within this triadic relationship between animals, tourism providers, and tourists themselves. But each actor comes to a co-creating opportunity with a history of experiences as well as a worldview.

#### 4.3. Sensemaking of relational needs: values, knowledge and bonds

Haraways' understanding of making kin assumes an interconnected, relational world where tentacles of beings are woven together in the fabric of everyday experiences. Making sense of these relationships means understanding one's own place in the world and how it relates to others we are interacting with. Understanding what is important for the other is at the basis of forming relationships. We looked into how multi-species relationships are understood and forged and the role of spending time together. When meeting customers in animal-based tourism, the tourism provider has to understand their expectations and preferences. Especially when meeting companion animals like horses and dogs, people have ideas about the type of experience these animals can give them. For example, horses are known for running, racing and providing high adrenaline experiences. However, this is hardly a responsible practice to promote from a tourism provider perspective, especially when the terrain and climate are challenging, or when riders are not experienced.

"I am strict and I don't take any chances and there are no fast-running trips with me. There are a few who ask about running fast with the horses but when they see the terrain and I explain, they understand"

(Aurora)

Certainly, not all tourists have the same values considering animal-based tourism experience. Runa recalls guests with different values than their own:

"One time a woman came here with her daughter, and they were supposed to be some horse trainers in Germany. But they wouldn't ride faster than a walk. They wouldn't ride over rocks. They wouldn't ride horses that are shod. They wouldn't ride with the bit, and they wouldn't ride with a saddle. But why did they come to Iceland? And they were vegetarians, and they could just not be with us eating with us when we had the last evening eating with lamb and foal meat. They would just not come"

In this case the values of tourists and tourism providers clashed and resulted in a tense relationship without much mutual understanding. The tourists focused on the intrinsic value of the working animals, while the tourism provider was focusing on the utility of animals, while at the same time understanding the animal's individuality (Wilkie, 2005). Making sense of others' values also means deciding to what extent you go along with it. Making kin and staying with the trouble means sifting through frustrations with the clashing values of others. What is allowed, what is tolerable, what is okay? What do you share and what do you keep for yourself? It means knowing your own values and principles and deciding how far you can wander off. For Northern Valley Horse, a farm as well as a breeding operation, they had a very different understanding of the role of the animal-human relationship than their guests from Germany who were vegetarian. In Iceland, horse-based operators often encounter tourists with different values than their own, because of their agrarian, Nordic lifestyle.

“I present everything politely. I don’t talk much about slaughtering horses to nations where that’s a very sensitive matter. I don’t hide it, but I don’t have to make it very visible either. I don’t draw negative attention to it”

(Freya)

The theme of farm tourism operators meeting vegetarian tourists is recurring. Heidi tells the story where she met two tourists who had different value systems than her own. She reflected upon her own story when she saw the reaction of one of her guests:

“Two girls came here and I didn’t know they were vegetarian and like always I start to tell people about my goats. They were asking what I am doing with the goats. And I told them I use them for producing milk, meat, and skins. I took some skin and I threw it over the table and one of them reacted shocked and just went to the fence and looked out into the field the rest of the tour”

(Heidi)

In animal-based tourism, interpretation of local culture is an important part of the experience. Staying with the trouble in the case of intercultural, animal-based meetings means being open for alternative points of view while staying true to one’s own values. These meetings within tourism can then be a genuine exchange of ideas where people are willing to learn by stepping away from previous values and ideas. Runa explains that she talks about her habits and life, even though she knows it clashes with the values of her customers, because in the differences between people, there is space for learning.

“For me that is part of the culture. I always tell the people ... If I have people in a group that have been before, they’ll ask me “Will we get foal meat at the end of the week?” I said, “Yes, of course,” and then the others are, “What? Foal meat?” But in most cases the people really take it, because then I have the possibility to describe to them why we eat foal meat. Why you don’t have to think about bringing it up, putting money into it, and figure out when they are five years old that they’re crazy in the head. That’s part of the work I am doing”

There are also similarities within the value-systems between tourism hosts and tourists, for example that the animals should be happy and healthy. Although there is room for interpretation of what that means.

“The horses] need to be a little bit chubby, otherwise I will get comments, even if they’re in good shape. Our horses like to eat so it’s no problem”

(Eva)

Another similar value is that animals working in tourism should be treated well, both by tourists and handlers.

“If somebody’s mistreating one of my animals, they’re down the road. Employee or guest or whatever, that’s one thing I won’t take. Yeah I’ve had a little trouble with [tourists] and I’ve made ‘em get off and hike out. I say “you ain’t gonna abuse my animal like that”

(Robert)

#### 4.4. Making sense of making kin: bonding between multi-species actors

The bond between animals and tourists is an important part of the animal-based tourism experience. Being engaged in a practice together creates a bond because social mechanisms like trust, understanding and making kin happen. Bonding between customers and animals during the experience can be strong and meaningful.

“Typically, each person stays with an animal the whole entire trip. And once they kind of have that first day of bonding, almost never switch ”

(Frank)

The tourism provider has to choose the amount of social interaction between tourists and animals. Sometimes they decide to reduce co-creation because of safety or risks. For example, when knowledge and experience are needed to drive a sledge in winter, the tourism provider may opt to take control instead of letting the tourists engage with the animals. Tourism providers also know that the relationship between animals and tourists depend on how the animal is perceived by the tourists.

“Some of [the tourists] adore dogs while others see them as machines.... most people get a relationship with them and love animals. But there are exceptions that don’t respect the dogs. We ... notice it with the dogs, they don’t run so well with people that don’t like them”

Matchmaking is an important skill for tourism providers. They have to know which tourists to couple to which animal, and this often happens within the first minutes tourists and animals meet.

“You gotta size a person up for the animal ... for the animal’s safety and for the person’s safety”

(Robert)

What happens during first contact, seems to be crucial for how bonding is made sense of. In horse riding tourism, experience and skills matter, but what matters more are tacit clues that tell the tourism providers which horse to give to which tourist.

“I decide which horse to give to a tourist when I see them. But when [a tourist books] online, we don’t have much time to decide [once they] arrive. We have done this for 20 years and it has become automatic. We understand who is standing in front of us. It is about experience you get over the years, little things and it is hard to explain how it works”

(Aurora)

Sensemaking can lead to paradigm-shifting experiences for both tourists and providers. Tourism providers have been working with their animals for a long time and are often locked into a paradigm or relationship. Sometimes, tourists can make tourism providers see their animals differently. Heidi, who owns a few horses, explains her experience with a guest from Asia.

“I told him, look at the horse in the eye. And he asked ...can I touch it. It was so touching... I will never forget it. Because it had so much meaning for him. And then I started to think differently about meeting the animals”

Increasing a bond between the tourist and the animal is a reason for interpretation. This underpins studies that report that well designed interpretation can change the behavior of tourists after they have returned home (Maher, 2012). Additionally, the bond between the provider and animal grows through repeated and prolonged co-creation contexts.

“I love to be able to share the feeling we have about these birds with visitors. To see visitors leaving with more inspiration to protect nature and to learn about raptors in general, it’s incredible. Personally, the most important thing is just the relationship we develop with the birds. They are like our family. A lot of them grow up in my house, and we watch them grow and become these amazing birds. We’re just there to bring out their potential and be their partners, and that

relationship is so profound. I'm getting a little teary-eyed talking about it" (Lisa).

Engaging in practice over time is an important bonding factor. Eva refers to love, acceptance, and respect between tourists and animals. With extended time together, the tourist can "listen" to the horses better (Dashper, 2017).

"To see them sitting on the horses leaving the paddock and see them sitting on the horses coming home, it's like a different group. They have adapted to each other when they come home"

Animals are also the reason to return to a destination or company. The bond tourists have forged or want to forge with animals, is an important incentive to visit a place (Campos et al., 2017). These bonds are valuable for both the tourists and provider.

"... there's a lot of people you know, come back a couple years ... "Have you still got Tin Man?" Or ... "can we bring some carrots down to feed him?" ... and it's funny that people that's come back, 30 years you know, ago, and they ask me about a certain horse or a mule, and I let 'em know, he's up there with the good horses and mules up in heaven now. You know they just ... they always ... a lot of people remember animals, I mean it's a once in a lifetime experience for 'em I guess" (Robert).

The experience with the animal is the reason to come back, and even for adoption. One informant speaks about finding your soulmate, probably the strongest and most special type of bond between living beings, one that acknowledges equality and a sense of true understanding between animals and humans.

"Sometimes we get people who originally just wanted to come here for one day and they wind up coming here for most of their vacation again and again asking for the same horse. We even sold horses outside of Iceland after people coming here riding them once. It doesn't happen often but we can really ... find your soulmate anywhere"

(Eva)

Joe also talks about the emotional bond between animal and tourist - sensemaking of this bond as an incentive for engaging with animals:

"The emotional incentive, I think ... even people that say they don't care, there's something that happens when you hang around animals. It makes you a little bit more ... sensitive. It's just like ... you know, you can't help it"

While operators have an interest in this relationship for commercial purposes, they also show interest in what the bond means for the animals involved. Freya sees a change in some sheep that have learned to like the attention and physical contact.

"Sometimes they become more attached to people.... in general, the sheep is very skittish and wild and runs away and doesn't want to be touched. But once they get into it they are like dogs. They come very happy, and they wag their tails. They get to be stroked, and they find it so pleasant"

Animals working in Nordic tourism often live a wilder life than their fellow species-members elsewhere. Sheep in Iceland and Norway spend a big part of their lives wild and free in the forest. Icelandic horses are born on pastures in the mountains and are often not handled or ridden before the age of five to six years old. Not all of these animals get used to humans cuddling them and some are fonder of attention than others. The same has been demonstrated in Norwegian reindeer tourism where the reindeer that liked people were selected to work in tourism because there was a mutual emotional benefit for the animals, visitors and providers to see that all parties enjoyed the company (Hoarau-Heemstra,

2018).

## 5. Discussion

In the findings we have presented instances of tourism providers making sense of inter-species entanglements - relationships played out within a certain frame of time and space: the animal-based tourism experience. Haraway (1988, p. 590) argued that "the only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular" and we therefore have presented a situated understanding of animal based tourism by revealing the way operators are making sense of animals and tourists. We addressed our research questions *How do tourism providers make sense of tourist-animal interactions in animal-based experiences?* and *How does sense-making influence the consideration for the interests of animals within animal-based tourism experiences?* by outlining the various needs and abilities of animals and of tourists that the operators ascertain. We demonstrated the tourism providers make sense of the interplay and tensions between all three actors as they make kin with one another.

The physiological and psychological needs of animals can be studied from the perspective of health or behavior (Bansiddhi et al., 2020), and the organizational and tourism literature is beginning to make headway on that front (Dashper, 2017; Hoarau-Heemstra, 2018; Fennell, 2012; Winter, 2020). Here we focus on the sensemaking of tourism providers relative to the needs and abilities of animals and tourists that are co-creating. We have demonstrated that providers often switch between recognizing the subjectivity of animals and objectifying them, depending on the role they need them to play in tourism interactions. It is a form of entangled empathy (Bertella et al., 2019; Wilkie, 2005) however the entanglements are layered with utilitarian values.

As objects, animals are typically manipulated for instrumental purposes; as such, their value is in their ability to generate pleasure in tourists (reflected in profits), rather than embedded within a notion of intrinsic value (Dashper, 2017; Fennell and Nowaczek, 2010). Fennell and Sheppard (2011) write about sledge dogs in Canada that are killed when they don't have a purpose in tourism anymore. To move away from this utilitarian perspective, Bertella (2014) argued for inter-species understanding and empathy, following an ecofeminist approach (Yudina and Fennell, 2013). She suggests that ecofeminism in practice means providing the animals with what they need in order to have a meaningful life, and to evaluate whether and how these actions can be integrated in a context that hosts tourism activities. Our findings are in line with studies by Dashper (2017) and Bertella (2014) in that they show that the providers are concerned with a meaningful life for animals, but that the overall lens for sensemaking is one of domination. Sensemaking of animal needs occurs while trying to find a balance of needs of tourists and tourism providers as well; sensemaking is about awareness and reflection on what you observe (Woodside, 2011) and following this, understanding and balancing values is the sense-making process. What was previously unknown and under-explored are those factors that providers use to continuously make sense of the co-creation phenomenon unfolding, and how they address conflicting values of the tourist and animal. Bond (2015) proposes sense-making theory to understand human-elephant interactions and argues that the embeddedness of actors in their environment will influence their sensemaking processes of interspecies' interactions. Similarly, Dashper (2017) denotes the attentive relationships between humans and horses within her study of amateur riding. These articles support the argument for the inclusion of social and ecological materiality within sensemaking studies. Our respondents balanced their own embeddedness and the embeddedness of tourists when making sense of interactions with animals. Interacting with animals in tourism contexts allows different materialities to come together with the animal as mediator. While our study focuses on the inner processes of the operator within their interactions and navigation of the animal-tourist-operator tridactic, future studies might focus on sensemaking on the part of the tourist within these three-way relationships. Additional research might also leverage sensemaking of suppliers



and operators - in tandem with direct accounts from tourists regarding their experiences - to design and deliver co-created transformational experiences that inspire tourists to give more than they consume (Sheldon, 2020; Walker and Moscardo, 2016).

Sensemaking of animals varies according to the species as well as the individual animal, and the role of the animal in society. Many people see dogs as pets while mushers see them as working animals, and others see them as food; this affects how the animals are made sense of by both tourists and their handlers. Sensemaking of farm animals also relies on tensions between their role as food and tourism entertainer. Once they cannot fulfill their role in tourism, the alternative is to be eaten. Especially in the context of Icelandic farm tourism, vegetarianism was a value that was hard to relate to from the perspective of the operators. Making sense of tourists who do not share their ideas about farming animals is challenging for some providers. Through education and learning, the operator and the tourist can make kin, by becoming closer together, and influencing the tourist experience. This finding is supported in the study of Aboriginal wildlife interpretation (Walker and Moscardo, 2016) where benefits for wildlife, indigenous cultures, and tourists are identified when efforts are made to increase sensemaking and understanding.

## 6. Conclusion

This article contributes to the field of feminist ecological economics that combines social justice and ecological perspective, while emphasizing that nature's services are essential for wellbeing of all species (Kuijper and Perkins, 2005; Veuthey and Gerber, 2010) by showing that the practice of emphatic and value-based sensemaking paves the way for making kin between species. Making sense of what the other is, needs and can do is an operationalization of practiced empathy. In this study we argue that empathic sensemaking can pave the way for entanglements, connections and understandings across species.

The contribution of our article lies in our portrayal of sensemaking as a tool used to stay with the trouble and to make kin in human-animal interactions. As such, we develop and expand the feminist perspectives in the ecological economic paradigm by assuming and acknowledging the role of other-than-humans in the tourism economy, by offering insight sensemaking and kin-making of practitioners. By making sense of others, actors engage in a balancing act of bringing their own values, knowledge, needs, and abilities to the tourism practice while simultaneously making sense of the others' values, needs, knowledge, and abilities. Our conceptual framework for understanding how individuals make sense of making kin across species relies on empathetic sensemaking as an underlying and unifying mechanism. This framework provides valuable new insights in human-animal relations in an organizational setting, the role animals play in co-creation of tourism experiences, and what considerations are given to their wellbeing.

Donna Haraway (2016) tells us to stay with the troubles of our times. She mandates our task to become capable of "response-ability," to make kin, and to learn to be truly present. In this paper we have explored what that means for the entangled, messy relationships that are enacted during animal-based tourism experience. By expanding our worldview to see that animals are change agents, that they can do things humans cannot, and that they are critical stakeholders, bearing the cost and the benefit of decisions made on a daily basis, we can start to make kin. Animals provide us services of all kinds: hidden labor of ecosystems, symbolic value of destinations, being an educational portal to foreign places, supplying personal emotional care, transporting of goods within recreation, or becoming food on the plate (Cousquer and Allison, 2012; Dashper, 2017; Fennell, 2012; Rickly and Kline, 2021). However, there is still much dispute over their sentience, moral standing, importance, and rights as individuals. Staying with the dissonance, fear, and anger among the varying human perspectives on animals takes focus and energy. Staying with the continual study of and learning about animals and the rest of the natural world takes dedication. And staying with the

continual setbacks in animal welfare policy and environmental programs takes resilience. But rather than this being an overwhelming prospect, we can use human-animal interactions as an opportunity for finding each other and for building empathy.

Our study was limited to the perspective of tourism providers and the balancing act they undergo to make kin; the same perspective must be investigated from the tourist side, including their perception of animal needs and abilities, the animal as mediators, the operator's knowledge and values, and of themselves within the tourism context. Variations between animal species - and the role of the animal in human-animal interactions, and within the cultural context - must also be explored as cultural interpretations of animals vary widely.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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