



Experiencing nature in animal-based tourism



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ABSTRACT

This study concerns animal-based outdoor tourist activities. It adopts an experiential approach and uses the concept of *friluftsliv* (outdoor life) to thematise the specific experiencescape and develop a conceptual model. This model aims to contribute to a better understanding of animal-based outdoor experiences. The research question is: How do animal encounters influence the way nature is experienced? Data are collected through consultation of online promotional and tourist generated texts about three outdoor activities in Norway. The findings indicate that the presence of animals contributes to profiling nature reinforcing one or more dimensions of *friluftsliv*. Influential elements are: 1) the perception of the animals, presumably dependent on pre-visit factors, 2) the possible human-animals interactions and 3) the presence of a guide. These findings highlight the potentials of designing outdoor animal-based experiences based on engaging narrative frames through a deep understanding of the target segment and coherent promotional and staging activities.

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1. Introduction

This study concerns animal-based outdoor tourism. The different way nature is experienced depends on numerous factors and this study focuses on the presence of animals as one of these factors.

Several studies investigate wildlife tourism focusing on its beneficial effects on humans and its challenges in terms of sustainability (Shackley, 1996; Bulbeck, 2005; Newsome, Dowling, & Moore, 2005;). An aspect that has received scant attention concerns the possible link between how the nature and the animals are perceived. With regard to this issue, some studies suggest a close relation between the perception of the animals and the perception of the environment (Brandin, 2009; Cohen, 2010; Tremblay, 2002). Focusing on domesticated animals and outdoor activities, some studies suggest that human-animal interactions are extremely important components of the overall experience (Eide & Mossberg, 2013; Bertella, 2014). Common for these studies is the rejection of viewing the animals as marginal and passive elements of the tourism experience.

With this background, this study poses the question: How do animal encounters influence the way the nature is experienced? Answering this question can contribute to a better understanding of the complex way humans view and use the natural environment and how this is influenced by the presence of non-human animals.

The research question is investigated using the concepts of experiencescape and *friluftsliv* and conducting an explorative case study.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The experiencescape of nature-based tourism

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to service experiences and settings (Helkkula, 2011). It uses the concept of experiencescape to describe the setting where animal-based experiences occur. Such concept originates from the concept of servicescape used in the literature to indicate the context where the service encounter takes place (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Tourists experience a place through environmental and social encounters that provoke both cognitive and emotional responses (Clarke & Schmidt, 1995). The tourist experiencescape can then be described as a scape consisting of different inputs that act as the building blocks of the stage where the tourism experience occurs (Mossberg, 2007).

In the case of nature-based activities, the experiencescape includes natural phenomena, geological formations, vegetation, and animals (Fredman, Wall-Reinius, & Grunden, 2012). The animal component is investigated by a few studies focusing on the ethical aspect and identifying some main approaches: from a total dismissal of any moral consideration of animals, to utilitarianism, animal rights and eco-feminism (Fennell, 2012). The social

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dimension of the experiencescape of outdoor tourism is also commented in the literature, with particular attention paid to the central role of the guides (Haig & McIntyre, 2002).

The experiencescape does not exist in an objective way: it depends on how it is perceived, interpreted, and communicated (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998; Cloke & Perkins, 2002; Reis, 2012). From the perspective of the tourists, it can be said that the tourism experience is created by the tourists interacting with all the components of the experiencescape (Prebensen, Chen, & Uysal, 2014). The same considerations can be applied to the providers whose contribution in the creation of the experiencescape is also influenced by their commercial interest.

Central to this process of joint-creation of the experiencescape are the themes that, more or less explicitly, frame the experiencescape (Arnould et al., 1998; Eide & Mossberg, 2013, pp. 248–268; Picard & Zuev, 2014). The narrative frame chosen in this study is the one of *friluftsliv*. This choice is influenced by the context of the investigated case study and the potential that this concept has with regard to the description of the nature as an arena for various activities and the related experiential and ethical aspects.

2.2. Thematizing the experiencescape of nature-based tourism

The Norwegian term *friluftsliv* means outdoor life and indicates a way of viewing and living with nature (Faarlund, Dahle, & Jensen, 2007, pp. 393–396). Based on the various types of *friluftsliv* identified in the literature, this study refers to three types of *friluftsliv*: the original, the genuine, and the artificial.

The concept of original *friluftsliv*, sometimes associated with the Norwegian explorer and scientist Fridtjof Nansen, can be described as an experience characterized by courage, spirit of adventure, and independence (Repp, 2004). In this perspective, nature can be described as a place for discoveries and conquering.

The term *friluftsliv* is also used to indicate low-tech physical activities in nature, sometimes performed alone or in small groups such as families. Within this understanding, usually qualified as genuine *friluftsliv*, the outdoors is perceived as a sort of “home” (Faarlund et al., 2007, pp. 393–396; Gelter, 2007, 2010). Genuine *friluftsliv* is about connecting with nature in a contemplative way, living in harmony with it, and feeling strong emotions that can be related to a sort of spiritual search for our natural roots. Genuine *friluftsliv* is sometimes associated with the thoughts of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss and the deep ecology movement (Gelter, 2007). According to this perspective, nature has an intrinsic value and is a place to respect and protect.

A third way to understand the concept of *friluftsliv*, here indicated by the term artificial *friluftsliv*, is related to the commercialization of nature. In this perspective, nature is a place for extraordinary recreational experiences (Gelter, 2010). The challenging heroic aspect dominating the original form of *friluftsliv* and the harmonic aspect characterizing the genuine one are here replaced by the pure enjoyment of being outdoors.

It can be noted that these types of *friluftsliv* can be related to different environmental ethical positions (Macbeth, 2005). The original and artificial *friluftsliv* can be placed close to a position where the humans and their desires for knowledge, adventure and fun are given the priority, while the genuine *friluftsliv* is closer to a less ego- and anthropocentric position. Such ethical positions are also commented in the tourism literature with regard to the role of the animals and the four main approaches to animal ethics mentioned above (Fennell & Nowaczek, 2010). In Table 1 the main approaches to animal ethics as explained by Bertella (2013) are illustrated together with the related worldviews and types of *friluftsliv*.

Table 1
The different animal ethics positions and worldviews in relation to the concept of *friluftsliv*. Adapted from Bertella (2013).

	Position in relation to animal ethics	Main concerns	Short description
Eco-/anthropo-/egocentric worldview	Absolute dismissal Utilitarianism Animal rights	Benefits for humans. Benefits for humans and animals' welfare. The right of animals to live according to their nature and the human responsibility to preserve the habitat.	No ethical consideration of animals. Animals as commodities. Animals as sentient beings. The use of animals is acceptable. Animals have an intrinsic value. Human-animal encounters are acceptable if they involve no interference in the animal's life. No human interest can justify the use of animals.
	Eco-feminism	The dignity of the individual animal and the human responsibility in terms of care and respect	Relevant characteristics recognized in animals: sentience, consciousness, intentionality, emotions. Human-animal encounters as relationships.
			Genuine <i>friluftsliv</i> , artificial <i>friluftsliv</i> , original <i>friluftsliv</i>

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