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Including the "voices" of Animals in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure research

Abstract

In recent decades, our knowledge and perceptions of animals have changed considerably. An increasing number of scholars are interested in exploring animals and their roles in the context of tourism, hospitality and leisure. Recent studies have covered both practical and theoretical aspects of this topic, sometimes including considerations of animal ethics. This chapter argues that it is time to reflect on the research ethics and methodological implications of such emerging perspectives. The chapter presents a literature review addressing the shift in tourism, hospitality and leisure studies from a human/animal dualism and anthropocentrism focus to a recognition and inclusion of animals' perspectives. It develops a set of guidelines for a methodology intended to underpin research about and involving animals, inspired by the ecofeminist care tradition and elaborated on in light of the reviewed literature and the author's personal experience. Three main approaches are identified: fictional, multispecies ethnography and multispecies technology-based approaches.

Keywords: research ethics, animals in tourism/hospitality/leisure, animal ethics, multispecies ethnography, fiction, technology-based research methods

Introduction

The way we – humans – view non-human animals (hereafter referred to as animals) and the roles they play in our lives differ greatly according to the animal species and the specific historical and cultural context (Dhont & Hodson, 2019; Herzog, 2010; Joy, 2011; Serpell, 1996). An increasing number of scholars are engaging in debate about animals in tourism, hospitality and leisure (e.g. Carr, 2009; Fennell, 2011; Markwell, 2015), discussing issues from various perspectives and with different approaches, such as animal ethics and actor network theory (Danby et al., 2019). These studies all share the position that human–animal relations are central to our experience of the world and, some scholars argue, to our self-perceptions and views and treatment of others (Bertella, 2018; Yudina & Grimwood, 2016).

As the debate about animals in tourism, hospitality and leisure is developing relatively rapidly, this chapter argues that the time has come to consider the methodological implications of such a debate. To date, some studies have focused on practical issues relating to animals in tourism, hospitality and leisure, such as the case of travelling pets (Carr & Cohen, 2009; Taillon et al., 2015). Other scholars have noted that it is scientifically correct – and ethically important – to recognise animals as sentient beings with an intrinsic value (e.g.

urns, 2015; Fennell, 2011; Kline, 2018). In line with this position and the consequent view of animals as subjects, some recent studies have attempted to address animals' perspectives by, for instance, investigating swim-with-dolphins tourism from the dolphins' perspectives (Bertella et al., 2019).

The understanding of animals as subjects with an intrinsic value, who are entitled to views and opinions about the activities they are involved in (e.g. travel and wildlife tours), has clear implications for how research about such activities should be conducted. Ethically speaking, conducting research about animals as subjects should align with principles and values similar to those required for scientists investigating social phenomena. This position implies going beyond respecting the five animal welfare freedoms, which include freedom from hunger/thirst, discomfort, pain/injury/disease and fear/distress, as well as freedom to express normal behaviour (Fennell, 2011). Rather, the principles that Israel and Hay (2006) outlined for researching humans can be advanced to apply to research practices that help protect individual animals, groups of animals and their environments, as well as minimise possible harm and increase the good in the animals' world. To date, only a few studies have reflected on these methodological considerations (Dashper & Brymer, 2019).

This chapter focuses on the following question: how can animals' 'voices' be included in research practice? Animals' voices refer to the animals' perceptions and points of view about the tourism-related activities they are involved in, such as staying in hotels, living in zoos and participating in outdoor activities. This chapter aims to explore how animals might experience such activities and to provide the reader with a set of guidelines for conducting research about and with animals.

Researchers' conceptualisation of animals and consideration of the ways we can and should interact with them is the premise for reflection on methodological aspects of research about animals in tourism, hospitality and leisure. Therefore, I begin this chapter by describing my own philosophical position with regard to animals and human—animal relations. The reason for including this section is the importance of openness when dealing with potentially controversial issues. The chapter then goes on to review the literature concerning the inclusion of the animals' perspectives in tourism, hospitality and leisure studies, focusing in particular on the studies' methodological choices. The next section presents the guidelines developed by the author regarding the inclusion of animals' perspectives in tourism, hospitality and leisure research. These guidelines are exemplified by the studies presented in the literature review and my first-hand experience, with the latter being viewed as a possible source of valuable suggestions. The conclusion briefly summarises the main contributions of the chapter and offers some reflections on the future of research about and with animals.

An ecofeminist perspective on animals

The position presented here regarding the conceptualisation of animals was inspired by the philosophical perspective of ecofeminism, which acknowledges the sentience of animals and their complex cognitive and emotional lives, rejecting human/animal dualisms (Adams & Gruen, 2014; Gaard, 1993; Gruen, 2011). Ecofeminists following the care tradition have highlighted humans' moral obligation to care for and act responsibly and compassionately towards animals (Donovan & Adams, 2007). The attentiveness that humans should extend to

animals refers not only to animals at the species level but also to individual animals, each of whom is viewed as a unique member of a network of individuals (Gruen, 2015). In this network, humans can be included as potential 'friends' in the case of domesticated animals and 'stewards' in the case of wildlife. Ecofeminists have noted that animal—human interactions can vary according to context and the type of animals involved and should be based on respect for such differences, including the peculiarities of individual animals. In this way, relationships that are meaningful to both parties — humans and animals — can be developed (Gruen, 2015).

In contrast to other animal ethics traditions (utilitarianism, animal rights), ecofeminism has been critical of the exclusive use of rationality in our reflections about ethical issues (Adams & Gruen, 2014). Ecofeminism encourages the adoption of relational and affective, as well as intellectual, reasoning. Such a multifaceted form of intelligence should be applied to the consideration of any human activity, including those involving one or more animals, which aligns with the ecofeminist notion that values and actions are inseparable (Birkeland, 1993). Respect and care for animals can be declared verbally, but, more importantly, it should also be demonstrated in the way we choose to perform ordinary and extraordinary activities. This approach is relevant to tourism, hospitality and leisure activities, as briefly outlined in the introduction, as well as to research practices about such activities, as explained in the following pages.

Researching animals in tourism, hospitality and leisure

From human/animal dualism and anthropocentrism towards multispeciesism and the emergence of animals' voices

Studies investigating animals in tourism and leisure contexts have long used traditional research methods and adopted an anthropocentric standpoint (Haanpää et al., 2019). Quite often, research about interactions between humans and animals has focused on the effects of the former on the latter or vice versa. Typically, these studies have adopted methods such as surveys and interviews for humans and observations of animals, as is the case in a study by Curtin (2006) on the effects of close encounters with dolphins on humans and another by Parsons (2012) on the effects of whale-watching tourism on the animals. The choice to focus on either humans or animals tends to confirm, and perhaps reinforce, human/animal dualisms. The prevalence of an anthropocentric approach is exemplified by Campos et al. (2016), who, while discussing co-creation, exclusively explored tourists' perspectives through in-depth interviews and in no way problematised animals as co-creators.

However, a shift is currently occurring from such human/animal dualistic and anthropocentric perspectives towards a recognition of the relational aspect of human–animal encounters and, in some cases, animal agency. A 2019 special issue of *Leisure Studies*, entitled 'Multispecies Leisure', was dedicated to leisure activities involving humans and other animal species. This special issue provided an excellent source for learning about recent advances in methodologies applied to investigating experiences involving animals. These experiences were often explored by applying autoethnography – more precisely, by relying on multispecies research teams consisting of researchers and some animals. This approach was

referred to as *multispecies ethnography* or *ethnography after humanism* (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017; Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010).

Regarding the animals involved in the relevant articles from the special issue of *Leisure Studies*, it is important to note that the researchers had a close relationship with them and/or possessed good theoretical and practical knowledge of the species to which they belonged. This was also the case with the reflections of Carr (2014) concerning dogs in leisure activities. Dashper and Brymer (2019) stated that the researcher 'needs to have knowledge and experience of the individual(s) involved, and preferably be intimately connected to the experience under consideration' (p. 404). Dashper and Brymer (2019) further noted that phenomenological approaches are preferred for gaining a deep and holistic understanding of the contexts and nuances of human and animal experiences.

A phenomenological approach was employed effectively by Nottle and Young (2019), who used *autoethnography* to explore the leisure activities of their respective dogs. The data for this study derived mainly from six years of conversations, photo sharing and social media postings. In this case, it was evident how the selection of the multispecies team members and methods of data collection were influenced by, and influenced, the philosophy underpinning the research in terms of ontology (animals as the subjects, not the objects, of research) and epistemology (animals as co-creators of knowledge about shared experiences). With regard to the study's methodological contributions, Nottle and Young (2019) noted how their approach gave them the opportunity to highlight the risk of generalising and overlooking important individual differences and peculiarities of animals when investigating experiences involving humans and animals.

Autoethnography was also adopted by Wilkinson (2018) in combination with *egomorphism*. Egomorphism perceives others' inner worlds through the adoption of a 'like me' approach, which differs from the 'human-like' approach of anthropomorphism by focusing on the selfhood of sentient beings, regardless of which species they belong to, and departing from the view of animals as objects. Wilkinson (2018) described a captive chameleon's experience of everyday activities at a vivarium and concluded by suggesting a reconsideration of leisure spaces in more empathetic terms.

With regard to animals as knowledge co-creators, Harmon (2019) used a methodological approach in which the data emerged from a person's story as told to the researcher's dog. Harmon (2019) defined his study's methodology as a derivative of narrative ethnography as it involved meetings between a person and a dog facilitated and witnessed by the researcher. In this approach, the animal acted not only as a facilitator but also as a co-creator of the data. Importantly, the researcher observed how the connection between the dog and the person was not a 'given' but emerged from the unique traits of the dog and the human in the specific context.

Narratives, this time fictional, were also used by Dashper and Brymer (2019) in the *Leisure Studies* special issue, as well as by Äijälä et al. (2021). Dashper and Brymer (2019) elaborated on their reflections about multispecies leisure based on a fictional horse-riding event, while Äijälä et al. (2021) were inspired by technological changes and imagined a futuristic scenario in which it was possible to experience a dog sledding tour from the perspective of a dog.

In a similar way to Äijälä et al. (2021), technology played an important role in the study by Haanpää et al. (2019) concerning Arctic animal-based experiences. However, rather than a futuristic type of technology, Haanpää et al. (2019) drew on a well-developed, relatively accessible one, using videography to interpret and theorise animal-based tourism as a context for multispecies relationships. The authors discussed the methodological challenges of capturing the non-linguistic, sensuous and embodied qualities of such relationships, emphasising that their approach could contribute to the development of more inclusive tourism and future.

Animals' voices: Challenges and possibilities

A few scholars have attempted to report on animals' perspectives in the tourism, hospitality and leisure literature: the study about swim-with-dolphins tourism mentioned above, a study on the thoughts of a pig rescued from slaughter at a rural event, and a study in which orcas tell the scientific and tourism community what they think about whale-watching (Bertella et al., 2019; Bertella, 2020, 2021). The approaches used in these studies rely on fiction and, in one case, on developing potential future scenarios (Banks & Banks, 1998; Reinhold, 2018; Yeoman & Postma, 2014). The authors of these works attempted to convey the animals' voices and highlight the considerable challenges stemming from our circumscribed view of the animal world. These challenges can be addressed through an interdisciplinary approach to research, as suggested by Dashper and Brymer (2019). Accordingly, Bertella et al. (2019) combined their theoretical and practical knowledge from academia and the non-profit sector to develop a fictional dolphin—tourist dialogue. Another means of approaching these challenges is to gain knowledge about animals by consulting the available literature; for example, Bertella (2020) used various sources to learn about pigs and their cognitive and emotional capacities.

Another challenge in investigating animals' perspectives concerns the imbalance of power when writing in someone else's name, as discussed by Bertella et al. (2019) and Bertella (2020) with reference to the 2013 book *Speaking for animals: Animal autobiographical writing* by animal studies scholar Margo DeMello. The complexities of a situation in which a human 'holds the pen' and claims to represent the voice of an animal echo some arguments about the need to overcome traditional methods of qualitative research that may reinforce power mechanisms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hollinshead, 2013; Höckert & Grimwood, 2019). In particular, the risk of 'epistemic violence' when research is conducted 'on or about' instead of 'with or by' is highly relevant to studies about animals. Bertella et al. (2019) and Bertella (2020) have argued that instead of claiming to speak *for* animals, scholars writing fictional narratives in which animals express their views should aim to develop plausible stories based on explicitly described sources of information and inspiration.

Bertella et al. (2019) and Bertella (2020) related this latter aspect to creative writing criteria – namely, to creative analytic practice (CAP) (Parry & Johnson, 2007; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). One criterion concerns the development of plausible stories, as mentioned above. The CAP approach invites researchers not to underestimate the aesthetic aspects of narratives, highlighting the engagement and curiosity that fictional narratives should provoke in readers. In particular, the narratives should aim to trigger new ideas and perspectives.

Guidelines for researching animals' perspectives

Table 1 presents a set of guidelines developed to assist students and scholars interested in exploring the perspectives of animals involved in tourism, hospitality and leisure.

Table 1. Methodological guidelines for researching animals' perspectives

1. Reflexivity and philosophical and practical clarifications

Reflect on your conceptualisation of animals and the type of researcher—animal interactions that will occur during the research.

2. Theoretical and practical knowledge

Evaluate whether you have the knowledge, competence, skills and experience to understand the perspectives of the investigated animal(s).

3a. Fictional approach

Use creativity and develop thought-provoking narratives.

3b. Multispecies ethnographic approach

Consider whether it is possible and opportune to directly involve one or more animals in the research.

3c. Multispecies mixed method

Combine traditional methods with the use of technology to collect relevant animal and human data.

4. Research practical implications and impact on animals

Reflect on the possible effects of your research on the animals and how to make the research valuable for the animals themselves.

The first guideline concerns the ontological and epistemological dimensions of researching animals' perspectives on tourism and leisure activities. Guidelines 3a, 3b and 3c present three main approaches that can be adopted to investigate such perspectives and are exemplified in the following text by my personal experience. The final guideline derives from my belief, inspired by ecofeminist thinking, about the moral obligation to encourage practices that contribute to the respectful and caring inclusion of animals in our lives.

Reflexivity and philosophical and practical clarifications: Reflect on your conceptualisation of animals and the type of researcher—animal interactions that will occur during the research.

Before engaging in research that aims to investigate animals' perspectives, it is important for the researcher to reflect on and clarify how they view the animals involved. As noted in the introduction, openness in this regard is crucial due to potentially conflicting views about the conceptualisation of animals. If working within a research team, these views should be clarified when the team is first established. As various individuals involved in the research might perceive animals differently, this is an opportune time to consider whether and how these differences might influence the research. The conceptualisation of animals underlying the research should also be presented to other subjects potentially involved in some phases of the research (e.g. practitioners from the tourism and hospitality industry) and the final recipients (e.g. readers of scientific journals, undergraduate students and the general public).

Practical considerations regarding the animals should also be in focus at an early stage of any research concerning one or more animals, especially with regard to empirical data collection; for example, the researcher(s) should reflect on what types of interactions with the animal(s) will occur during the research. Reflections and discussions about the ethical rules to follow and what will/will not be acceptable should occur before a collaborative research project begins.

My own experience of reflecting on my personal thoughts and values regarding the differences and similarities between animals and humans, as well as among various animal species, may be helpful to researchers considering this part of the research process. During this process, I read some literature about animal ethics (in particular, the care tradition within eco-feminism), and although I found this practice interesting and useful, feelings of frustration and powerlessness were quite common. These feelings occurred particularly when I attempted to deeply understand and communicate animals' perspectives on activities that could be potentially or undoubtedly harmful (e.g. close encounters with wild animals or the use of animals as food). It is important that researchers aiming to explore animals' voices are aware of and prepared for this potential outcome. When I worked with other authors on a study about the animals' perspectives on specific leisure and tourism experiences, I found my collaborators largely through my personal network, after having read some of their work; hence, my selection was based on their concern, interest and sensibility regarding animal issues, among other factors.

Theoretical and practical knowledge: Evaluate whether you have the knowledge, competence, skills and experience to understand the perspectives of the investigated animal(s).

Scholars aiming to investigate the perspectives of one or more animals should have relatively good theoretical and practical knowledge of that specific animal species and, when relevant and possible, the individual animal(s) that the research focuses on. Possible limitations might be overcome by the involvement of other people in the research (e.g. the recruitment of coresearchers or assistants or assistance from experienced people and practitioners, such as pet owners, veterinarians and animal keepers) and through a literature review (e.g. scientific and grey literature).

I have adopted both strategies to overcome limits in my knowledge about certain animal species involved in the tourism and leisure experiences that I have investigated. For one study, I relied on the input and assistance of two co-authors: a biologist and a representative of a non-governmental animal protection and conservation organisation. The co-authorship resulted in a fruitful collaboration from which I gained new knowledge and inspiration for future projects. For another study, unable to identify appropriate co-researchers, I consulted the literature about the animal species I intended to research. My passion for the animal world was a good starting point for identifying relevant authors and publications to further investigate the scientific literature and reports about the specific animal species.

Fictional approach: Use creativity and develop thought-provoking narratives.

As presented in the previous section about the CAP approach, fictional narratives should be engaging and generate curiosity and new questions. Narratives developed for scientific inquiry should be able to provide material for discussions about theoretical advances and practical implications. It is important to be aware that fictional stories presenting animals' thoughts and emotions may be criticised and accused of, for example, anthropomorphism. The researcher should, therefore, make sure to properly reflect on Guidelines 1 and 2 and act accordingly.

In the fictional narratives that I developed, I adopted several writing techniques to engage readers and provoke curiosity and reflection. These techniques include first-person narrative, the use of terms intended to reflect sounds and concepts in animal language, reverse chronology, visual techniques, irony and the use of citations from popular works (novels and films). Creative writing blogs have been important sources for learning about these techniques, while novels and poetry have also served as major sources of inspiration. While developing these narratives, I clearly found that the main messages emerging from them conflicted with the dominant view of the investigated activities; consequently, I paid particular attention to developing stories that suggested alternative views without directly criticising the dominant one and people holding different views from mine.

Multispecies ethnographic approach: Consider whether it is possible and opportune to directly involve one or more animals in the research.

As presented in the literature review, multispecies research teams comprising the researchers and their pets are a possibility for conducting research about and with animals. Multispecies research teams in which the animal members belong to a wild species are almost impossible, excluding cases of domesticated wild animals. An example of such cases acceptable from an ecofeminist perspective might involve rescued wild animals cared for in human settings that are open to visitors (e.g. sanctuaries). These cases might be relevant to the exploration of human—animal encounters and the inclusion of the animals' perspectives. Another example might be an investigation of the potential mutual value of such encounters. The possibility of involving one or more animals as knowledge 'co-creators' depends on whether and to what extent the specific animals are suitable for this task. It is important that the researcher is aware that the animal(s) may be unwilling to be involved in the research activities.

My personal experience of this aspect derived from two studies, one of which concerned dog walking. The methodology for this study was similar to that used by the multispecies teams (researchers and researchers' pets) presented in the previous section. Although an attempt was made to involve the dog as a knowledge co-creator, rather than merely a co-protagonist in the investigated experience, I recognised that the perspective of the study was quite anthropocentric. The second study concerned pet-friendly vacation experiences. For this study, I identified and made contact with a company selected as a relevant case, but the fieldwork did not proceed. I had planned to carry out the fieldwork with my dog. In contrast to the dog-walking study, the period of data collection would be relatively short (one week), and the planned activities differed from my dog's usual routines. After some reflection, however, I realised that the dog would have become stressed by the fieldwork activities thus; the fieldwork was cancelled, and the study did not proceed.

Multispecies mixed method: Combine traditional methods with the use of technology to collect relevant animal and human data.

By focusing on the relational aspects of animal encounters, both humans' and animals' perspectives on specific experiences can be investigated. This might be possible with technological devices that record relevant data about the animals and humans involved. The latter could be combined with more traditional methods, such as observations, interviews and surveys. The use of technological solutions might require following specific ethical research practices and rules. In addition, the use of technological devices on animals should be considered in light of the research's philosophical position (Guideline 1) as some practices that apply such devices can be invasive.

I have no experience with this type of multispecies mixed methods using technology. To my knowledge, no study in the tourism, hospitality and leisure literature has applied such an approach, which in some respects recalls the futuristic scenario imagined by Äijälä et al. (2021) and the videography study by Haanpää et al. (2019). Based on such studies, I propose that it might be possible to investigate animal-based experiences, such as dog-sledding tours, by collecting data from the animals (mainly through video and wearable technological devices) and tourists (through video, wearable technological devices and interviews). Such an approach would require multidisciplinary collaboration, including tourists and individuals who have knowledge of and experience working with the specific animals and technologies.

Research practical implications and impact on animals: Reflect on the possible effects of your research on the animals and how to make the research valuable for the animals themselves.

As researchers, we are usually asked to reflect on the practical implications and impact of our studies. We should reflect on what our research, the way we have conducted it, its results and their dissemination practically implies for the animals involved in the study as well as animals in general. It is my belief that we should strive to make our research valuable to animals, aiming to improve, or contribute to improving, their lives at the species and individual levels. This objective aligns with the main tenets of ecofeminism and the ethical considerations for research presented in the introduction. When entering the animal world to investigate it, principles and values derived from the view of animals as subjects should be respected with the aim not only of advancing human knowledge but also of protecting the animals and their environments and improving their well-being.

In my experience, while conducted with the best intentions, some studies about animal-based leisure and tourism activities may be used (for example, by the industry) to present in a better light practices that are not necessarily beneficial or harmless to the animals. This risk could be reduced by committing ourselves to making animals' voices more explicit in our studies. Through their engagement, and perhaps by adopting some of the methodologies presented in this chapter, scholars expressing animals' perspectives can develop, communicate and promote best practices. Eventually, such researchers may contribute to important improvements in animal conditions in tourism, hospitality and leisure. Two examples might be the transportation of pets via air travel and hotel policies regarding how rooms and common areas are designed. Improvements in animal welfare for captive wildlife, such as in

zoos and aquaria, and wildlife encounters in nature, such as whale watching, might also be achievable in the not-too-distant future. More challenging are improvements in those contexts where animals are killed or abused (fishing and hunting, animal-based food experiences and certain events and festivals). Realistically, considering the animals' perspectives in these contexts and what they might want us to do could only lead to the abolition of such activities. We should ask whether we, as researchers (but not only as researchers), are willing to listen to animals' voices in situations that conflict with some of our most deeply rooted traditions and habits.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the numerous and varied roles that animals play in our lives, and on growing scholarly interest in exploring animal issues in tourism, hospitality and leisure, this chapter has reflected on the methodological implications, challenges and possibilities of research. The focus has been on studies aiming to represent the animals' perspectives on the activities in which they are involved. Based on a literature review and my personal experiences, this chapter has developed some guidelines for a methodology intended to underpin research about and with animals. More precisely, these guidelines concern reflexivity, philosophical and practical clarifications about the research, the researchers' knowledge of animals and the possible impact of the research on the animals. The guidelines include three main research approaches: fictional, multispecies ethnography and multispecies technology-based.

The chapter demonstrates that few scholars to date have adopted methodological approaches in line with the growing recognition of animals, of at least some species, as sentient beings with an intrinsic value. Therefore, this chapter closes with an invitation to scholars who share such a recognition to act consistently in their research practices. The set of guidelines presented here may be a good point of departure for such engagement, which might bring us closer to understanding the animal world as well as our own. From an ecofeminist perspective, the final recommendation of this chapter is not to fear the cognitive and emotional engagement that might emerge from a compassionate inclusion of animals in our studies. Such inclusion will neither obscure our thinking nor limit our possibilities to research and influence human practices involving animals, as this chapter has strived to show.

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