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Human dimensions of whale-watching

What it means to people to see whales in the wild?

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Foreword

I would like to thank Whale Safari Andenes for kindly letting me to do research on their tours and my supervisor Britt Kramvig for helping me to navigate through the process of writing this Master's thesis.

The instinct of capitalism and communism is to ignore loss, to assume that change will bring improvement, to cover over death with expanded consumption. Such modernist visions are telescopic: from the present each leaps into a distant world, a future plays of freedom and plenty. The present must accelerate to reach that far country. Speed is quantified in what can be converted to material value for sale or the state. What exist in between, the mess of lives lived in shifting concert with tides and winds and the never-fixed mark of ecological complexity, slides from focus. these ideological habits make thinking in terms of generation, both human and nonhuman, difficult. But as walruses show, it is not impossible. (Demuth, 2019, p.134).

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Abstract

Globally, and, in Northern Norway, whale-watching is growing rapidly. In Norway, the growth can be partially explained by the increased number of whales near the coast. Furthermore, the popularity of nature and nature-based experiences has been reflected in increasing demand for such experiences by tourists coupled with an increasing emphasis being placed on the value of animals in the wild as opposed to those in captivity. The aim of this thesis is to explore the human side of this phenomenon and gain better understanding for the apparent increased need or desire to seek these encounters through the activity of whale-watching.

Empirical part of this thesis was gathered through ethnographic methods in Andenes, Norway. This study suggests that there is more to whale-watching than getting close to them. It seems that for some, the whale-watching tour is a place to reflect on stories fostered by 'spectacular environmentalism' about whales and humans and whales. The possible encounter then is highly anticipated and rewarding, sometimes emotional due to the moral nature of these stories. Whales have intrinsic value both as part of biodiversity and as nonhuman beings. Furthermore, encountering whales in the wild is exciting as it enables us to be sensible attuned with more than a human nature.

KEYWORDS: Whale-watching, Wildlife encounters, Northern Norway

1 Introduction

Globally, and, in Northern Norway, whale-watching is growing rapidly. In Norway, the growth can be partially explained by the increased number of whales near the coast. Following the migration routes of Norwegian Spring-Spawning herring, there is an abundant number of killer and humpback whales in the northern narrow fjords where dense aggregations of herring overwinter (Mul, 2020). Since 2011, the herring have overwintered in the fjords around Tromsø (Mul, 2020). Then, in 2017, the herring moved to fjord areas at Kvænangen around 100 km northeast of Tromsø (Institute of Marine research, 2020; Mul, 2020). The whale-watching industry that is based on Spring Spawning Herring is highly seasonal focusing on winter months roughly from November to January and also turbulent as the herring migration pattern is unknown and the herring together with the whales can be found from different locations each winter. So far the herring has overwintered several winters in a row in the same area before moving to next location which in recent years has been consistently north bound. The phenomenon is well known in Europe and attracts tourists in increasing numbers from all around Europe.

While many whale-watchers are willing to travel far to see whales in their natural habitat, it seems that not much research has been conducted to determine why people seek these kinds of encounters. And more precisely, what are the benefits of such encounters to humans. Most of the research associated with human-wildlife interaction has focused on behavioral aspects of wildlife with limited understanding of how whale-watching affects the watchers themselves (Orams, 2000). A deeper dimension of wildlife interactions, in terms of ultimate benefits of the experience, remain largely unexplored in extant research (Muloin, 1998). The basic assumption in whale-watching tourism is that people are fascinated by the animals and getting close to the whales is what attracts tourists to whale-watching (Orams, 2000). This assumption appears quite simplistic and ignores the complexity of human nature, the complexity of our engagement with whales, and the volume of literature, which purports that we seldom participate in recreational activities for simplistic reasons (Orams, 2000).

Understanding better what it means to people to see whales in the wild also contributes to a better understanding of how whale-watching tours should be designed to provide the best possible experience for guests. The simple assumption that whale-watching is all about

getting close to whales can lead to unwanted behavior where whales are put under too much pressure and even chased. This occurs in the course of trying to provide the ‘best possible experience’ for tourists. This issue has become exacerbated especially in Northern Norway where new operators have emerged in the field coupled with growing tourist demand (Kramvig, Kristoffersen & Førde, 2016; Skjelvik, 2021). Relatedly, existing regulations for running a whale-watching tour in Norway (Fiskeridirektoratet, 2019) are quite vague. Many people have questioned how ethical it actually is to go on a whale-watching tour (Skjelvik, 2021). Given this background, I want to broaden our understanding of what whale-watching is about from a tourist’s perspective. In addition, there is a growing concern among whale-watching tourists that they are able to secure tour bookings with companies that hold a high standard in regard to ethical whale-watching. To run such tours successfully in the future, we need to understand the complex relationships between such concerns; the whales, and their right to roam; and a knowledge based and sustainable whale-watching industry.

I should make it clear at this point that when I use the word whale in this Master’s thesis, I refer to all species of cetaceans. At some point, however, it might be necessary to talk about whales and dolphins separately. My aim is not to produce a conclusive idea of what draws people to whale-watching. Instead, this thesis contributes to the building of scientific-based knowledge of tourist motivations for whale-watching, that can be helpful in planning for the future. Furthermore, I recognize that my findings are largely defined by each step and decision that I make in the process of writing my thesis. Nevertheless, I do hope to be able to bring new perspectives to the field of whale-watching tourism, to provoke new thoughts and conversations among industry participants as such ever-ongoing conversations are a necessary condition for improvement.

1.1 Background

The interest for this topic naturally arose from my own interest in whales and wildlife. I took part in a whale-watching tour for the very first time in Tromsø in Winter 2017. Following summer I had a chance to participate in several more tours further south. Enjoying the tours myself, meeting people who also enjoyed these tours, and realizing how timely and dynamic this industry is in Norway, made me decide to write my thesis about whale-watching tourism.

When whale-watching still took place in the fjords around Tromsø, the ethical considerations of running these tours were already raised on the table by public engagement. A guideline for whale-watching was created (Visit Tromsø, 2022) which had to be signed and followed by all companies who wanted to sell their products through Visit Tromsø. When the whales moved further north, these guidelines were no longer relevant. The year I started planning my thesis was also the year when the Spring Spawning Herring overwintered in the fjords of Kvænangen for the first time. I followed discussions on a Facebook page called 'Hvaler i Nord' (Whales in the North) and saw how different tour operators in Tromsø tried to adjust to this new situation. At that time the companies were located in Tromsø and having hard times to plan trips so that they could reach the whales that were now 100 km northeast. Some companies had fast boats that made the trips just significantly longer, some came up with a bus-boat combination when others had to skip the season completely. I had initially planned to collect the data in Tromsø, but since the situation up north was just adjusting to new circumstances, I ended up looking for a more stable place for data collection. In the early days of January 2018, I found myself in the picturesque village of Andenes on the island of Andøya.

I spent roughly a month in Andenes observing and talking with tourists during whale-watching tours. This research material forms an important basis for the whole thesis project. I left for Andenes after I had defined my overarching research question with an intention to let people talk before digging too deeply into existing theories. I had informal interviews with whale-watching tourists on board the boat. The questions were informally introduced, and the resulting discussions did not follow any strict guidelines. Each discussion evolved in its own unique way. The main themes people talked about were the admiration of the aesthetic qualities such as size and beauty; the admiration of other qualities such as being monsters of the ocean, intelligent, compassionate, mysterious, and the social communities they have; the fact that they live in the ocean and seeing them is not guaranteed and certainly not easy; and, a desire to see whales swimming free in contrast to captivity. Encountering whales was also expressed as a level of companionship, similar but different to us, and the encounter was quite often emotional. Some people expressed worry regarding humans polluting oceans and emphasized the need to respect whales. Sometimes, travelers talked about how whale encounters gave a deeper perspective of what matters in life in the sense that daily worries felt meaningless by comparison. Many mentioned the movies and documentaries as the source of their fascination. The collected data from Andenes together with existing literature helped me

to build the theoretical framework for this thesis and to define my more specific research questions.

1.2 Research questions

In my research, I aim to explore what it means to people to see whales in the wild? This question was formulated by reading whale-watching related research and the subsequent identification of an information gap that generated what I felt was a really interesting question to try to answer. The aim of this research question was to articulate the need for understanding the human-side of the whale encounters and specifically the apparent increased need or desire to seek this encounters through the activity of whale-watching. The more specific question found their form by identifying main themes from the stories whale-watching tourists told me when they narrated the whales and encounters with them in Andenes. Besides reflecting the encounters in Andenes, many told stories of previous encounters and having seen multiple films before the trip. Whale watchers are concerned with what they consider to be their responsibilities towards whales, in addition many of them are reflecting upon the beauty of whales as central within the experience of encountering whales in the wild. I will discuss how do whale-watchers in the Arctic narrate whales and our relationships with them. And whether the beauty of whales, as mentioned by many, could be a metaphor for other qualities of whales. For these reasons I have decided to address these two topics in my thesis. My overarching research question was divided into two smaller parts as follow:

1) How do whale-watchers in the Arctic narrate our moral duties to whales and their habitat on a whale-watching tour?

and

2) What is a 'beautiful whale' in a metaphorical sense?

The identified themes ethics and aesthetics made also sense when looked through the lens of the literature review about human-wildlife relationships. The need to interact with other than human world seems to be connected to the development in human societies, increased

knowledge of whales as species, and seeing intrinsic value in them in contrary to instrumental value. By adapting that view, comes the responsibility of thinking what is morally right or wrong in a sense how we can consume whales and how our lifestyles can deteriorate the ocean they live in. Aesthetics, or beauty of nature and whales, again is an inherent part of environmental ethics as to be beautiful is to have intrinsic value as argued by Moore (Cited in Thompson, 2014).

1.3 Thesis structure

In chapter 1 I present the rapidly growing industry of whale-watching in Norwegian context which partly prompted my interest towards this topic together with my own interest towards whales and wildlife and experiences on several whale-watching tours. I also presented my research question, and how those were formed based on the discussions with whale-watching tourists.

In chapter 2 I present the context where the empirical part of this research was conducted, the town of Andenes and the company Whale Safari Andenes. The town as a hub of whale-watching is quite unique both in Norway and globally and certainly different to the whale-watching that is based on Norwegian Spring Spawning Herring. In 2025, there is expected to be a completely new whale center which aims to educate about the marine environments, the whales, and our relationships with them through science and art. Whale Safari Andenes is the first company in Norway offering whale-watching tours.

In chapter 3 I introduce the practice of whale-watching tourism within the broader concept of wildlife tourism. I engage with the transformation of whale tourism from dominated by aquariums to whales being watched in their natural habitat. The popularity of nature and nature-based experiences has been reflected in increasing demand for such experiences by tourists coupled with an increasing emphasis being placed on the value of animals in the wild as opposed to those in captivity. Furthermore, tourism experiences that provide opportunities for direct contact with nature provide opportunities to deliver a positive educational message to visitors and increase particular kind of sensitivity that in today's societies are particularly important in navigating through the era of Anthropocene.

In chapter 4 I go through the literature review about human-wildlife relationships & human-whale relationships. The aim of this chapter is to present the existing literature of these relationships from the past to this day. Anthropologists have long observed a linkage between human-human relationships and human-wildlife relationships within societies and now it seems that we are returning back to mutualism views with respect to wildlife after long seeking to dominate it. This transformation have prompted new narrations that question the old ways of relating with more than a human nature. Similarly whales have undergone a dramatic social transformation, from a hunted natural resource to an almost divine agent of empathy, protection and compassion.

In chapter 5 I explains my research methodology. Here I present my research philosophy, methods used and reflect on several issues that are relevant for putting this study into a context. This study is theoretically and philosophically rooted in constructivism. It is based on the idea that people both understand and participate in the construction of the social world in which they live. Empirical part of this thesis is gathered through ethnographic methods. Ethnography is often used in the early stages of understanding a phenomenon as it encourages the formulation of research questions that are grounded in field observation. I will also describe how the field work was done and discuss my position as a researcher, ethical consideration of data collection and limitations of this study.

In chapter 6 I analyze the data through environmental ethics and the aesthetics of nature. The analysis is built on creating ideas through the discussion between theories and gathered data together with making connection to identified narratives. Our moral duties to whales explained by whale-watcher in the Andenes is to let them flourish in their natural habitat and keep the ocean clean for plastic for them to live. In terms of encounters they should not be disturbed although seeing them too far might be a disappointment. It seems that so called spectacular environmentalism may play big part in facilitating this ideas. The beauty of the whales is not only about the visual beauty in a form of perfect shapes and colours, but about the moral beauty of the whales and the beauty of the whales as part of biodiversity, and as nonhuman beings. The beauty of whales and encountering them in the wild also lies in the possibility of having conversations with our surrounding, being sensible attuned with other beings. Still, the other part of the beauty lies in the ocean which still to large extent presents a place to escape humanity.

Chapter 7 wraps up the whole study. Here I present the main ideas from the analysis and put them into bigger context based on the literature review at whole and what is known about human-wildlife relationships. It seems that for some, the whale-watching provides a place to think about these mainly moral stories of whales and whales and humans. The possible encounter then feels extra rewarding in realizing our capacity on building better. Sometimes it provokes the urgent need to do more. Whale-watching is exiting as it provides possibilities to be sensible attuned with more than a human nature. Being so, my study suggests that there is more to whale-watching than getting close to them and hence it should get more attention from the fields that are currently missing from whale-watching related research.

2 Andenes



Figure 1: The town of Andenes seen from the lighthouse, author's own photograph

This chapter introduces the scene where the data was gathered with ethnographic methods. Since I spent roughly a month in the field, within a small community that lives for the most part by whales and whale-tourists, it is important for the reader to get familiar with this community and the company I collaborated with. The town as a hub of whale-watching is quite unique and certainly very different to the whale-watching that is based on Norwegian Spring Spawning Herring.

Andenes is a small rather peripheral town in the northernmost tip of Andøya, Vesterålen. The town has a population of approximately 2500 inhabitants (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2021) and it can be accessed by car driving from south until the very end of the island. In the summer there is also a ferry between Andenes and Senja further north. The town has an airport. Flying from Oslo airport to Andenes, though, requires at least one layover, often two. While fishing is still the main economy in the island of Andøya and agriculture practiced, tourism is

increasing mainly due to the optimal location for observing sperm whales in the area (Thorsnæs & Engerengen, 2022). In addition to whales, there is an operating lighthouse by the harbor, museum and a space center. The road around the island is scenic with sharp mountains rising from the white sandy beaches. Ocean is all around. Even the town of Andenes is surrounded by the ocean from three sides. Windy weather gets a whole new meaning in Andenes. My own experience is that in winter independent travelers arrive to Andenes for specific reasons by plane like do tourist groups while summer attracts lots of people who are on the move by car and Andenes might be just one stop on a long road trip around the area. Lofoten being perhaps the most famous south from Andenes, and Senja increasing in popularity north of Andenes.

I spent a month in the town and felt the cozy atmosphere of a small village. When I headed towards the harbor in the mornings, it was not uncommon to spot group of people on wetsuits in front of Andrikken Hotel ready to go on a whale-watching tour or come across with tourists walking on the town streets in the afternoon exhausted by the long day out in the sea. There is a dance bar in the Whale Center where locals and tourists alike spend evenings. There are two companies that offer whale-watching tours in Andenes. Whale2Sea which operates tours on rib boats and also offers snorkeling with whales, and Whalesafari Andenes (Hvalsafari AS) with whom I collaborated with for my data collection.

Whale-watching tourism in Norway started in 1989 when Whalesafari Andenes began its operations from the island of Andøya (Hvalsafari As, n.d.-c). It all started in 1987 when a group of Swedish biologists were doing research on sperm whales outside of Andøya and came to the conclusion that the area had potential for whale-watching tourism. In Andenes, whales can be observed year around. Here the dominant species is sperm whales, but other species are also observed such as killer whales, humpback whales, fin whales, pilot whales and minke whales (Hvalsafari As, n.d.-b). It is an ideal place for whale watching due to its close proximity to Bleik canyon. The canyon is highly productive as it creates upwelling in the coastal current attracting larger fish, squids, sea birds and marine mammals that prey on fish and squid (Strandbråten Rødland & Bjørge, 2015). Whale Safari Andenes has a strong focus on responsible whale-watching in terms of how to behave around the whales and how to lessen the unwanted environmental impacts of their activities. The company also has a long history in research collaboration to constantly learn more about whales and marine life in Andenes and these publications can be found from their website. They also welcomed me as a

master student which enabled me to spend the required time with whale-watching tourists in order to get insight of what whale-watching is all about.

Before heading out to sea on a boat, a tour in a whale museum built in the basement of the Whale Center is part of the whale-watching tour in Andenes. Visitors receive a good introduction to the local seas and whales presented often by a guide who has a degree in biology. There is also a real sperm whale skeleton on display. The boat tour takes two to four hours depending on the location of the whales and the tours are taken either with an older boat that was initially planned to use for seal hunting or a newer one with indoor facilities (Hvalsafari As, n.d.-a). In the winter 2018 we were always on the move with the bigger boat which has a capacity to have 80 pax on board. The captain of the boat first and foremost keeps an eye on the weather forecast and decides whether it is ok to depart for the tour each day. He knows where the whales are likely to be found and listens with a hydrophone the sound of echolocation clicks sperm whales use for communication and finding prey. Unlike further north, sperm whales around Andenes are found year around while other species are also frequently spotted. Therefore, the company provides a whale guarantee concept. In case whales are not found, one can take part on next available tour or get money back if that is not possible. Since the captain takes care of the navigation of the boat and finding whales for the most part, guides have the full focus on tourist on board. On board interpretation is done through the trip, often with several different languages. Taking care of seasick tourists is essential part of being a whale-watching guide. Everyone on board including tourist alike keep an eye on the sea to spot a fin or a fluke or a blow that can be seen from long distances. In all the 12 tours I took part, we saw whales on each trip and overall were quite lucky to spot several different species during one single trip. Each trip is wrapped up by an illustrative presentation of different species spotted during the trip including the estimated locations in a map while sipping warm soup en route back to harbor.

In 2025, there is expected to be a completely new whale center in Andenes with a following vision: “The Whale is a world class attraction celebrating whales and their relationship with man through science and art” , and a mission: “To create awareness and inspire learning and conservation of whales and their environment through an unforgettable and extraordinary experience” (The Whales As, 2020). An architectural competition was held for the design of the center which was won by Danish architecture studio Dorte Mandrup A/S (The Whales As, 2020). This photo of the new center has been circulating in medias around the world. The

location of the new center is right by the current Whale Center next to Andenes lighthouse and with views to sea.



Figure 2: An illustration of The Whale by Dorte Mandrup A/S (Dorte Mandrup A/S n.d.)

According to The Whales As (2020), the center is going to combine the best qualities of a natural history museum, art museum, visitor center and research institution. The Whale, is among others, expected to tell stories of whales reflecting the similarities we share with them, the evolution of the whales from land to sea and the ocean as a habitat and source of life. The exhibition is going to activate all senses. Whales and the ocean are not only presented through stories and knowledge but also through art and sounds. The center will also have a section of human-whale relationships within times which is currently missing from the exhibition in Whale Center for the most part. In ‘the library of relations’ visitor will learn about the complex relationships between humans and whales within times and hear stories about conflicts, worshipping, exploitation and coexistence. Through the stories the major issues of biodiversity, resource management and climate change are also made relevant to the public. (The Whales As, 2020).

3 Whale-watching tourism

In this chapter, I introduce the practice of whale-watching tourism within the broader concept of wildlife tourism. I briefly discuss how whale-watching started from whales being admired in aquariums to whales being watched in their natural habitat. Finally, I consider research that has been conducted around the latter both in global and Norwegian contexts.

Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001) sees that tourism based on interactions with wildlife have increased in popularity around the world. Specifically, the popularity of nature and nature-based experiences has been reflected in increasing demand for such experiences by tourists coupled with an increasing emphasis being placed on the value of animals in the wild as opposed to those in captivity (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). Tourism experiences that provide opportunities for direct contact with nature provide opportunities to deliver positive educational messages to visitors (Ballantyne, Packer & Sutherland, 2011). In today's societies, such experiences are particularly important. The impact of global urbanization has led to situations where many people feel disconnected from nature leading many to be unable to understand the pressure that we put on natural resources and ecosystems (Forestell, 1993).

Such alienation is largely due to the process of commodification embedded in capitalism. It is hard to imagine how much of earth's resources are used when things are turned into monetary value. Since the extracted resources are not consumed immediately after extraction but turned into commodities for later use where the value of the item is determined by the global trade, the real value of the resources lies often in producing more for sales and increased human consumption. According to living Planet Report 2020 by WWF (2020) our ecological footprint has exceeded the Earth's rate of regeneration since 1970s. This footprint is not globally equal as the resource availability varies often in terms of economic wealth and the capacity to buy. The industrial revolution has already altered big parts of land by turning native habitats into agricultural systems and oceans by overfishing. Loss of biodiversity until today is largely due to altering lands and seas while climate change is anticipated to become the main driver for biodiversity loss in the future (WWF, 2020).

This extensive usage of natural resources is currently framed by the concept of Anthropocene. Anthropocene is the name of new geological epoch in which humanity is recognized as a geological force intimately entangled with the forces of the Earth and the Earth today seems

unstable and filled with uncertainty (Huijbens & Gren, 2016). The practices of natural science have revealed that the Earth is not just an object but a subject with an ability ‘to talk back’. The current ideas suggest that the 6th mass extinction might be on its way, and this has been mainly faced with either a complete denial or ultimate sense of powerlessness in a sense what a single individual can do to change things. While modernity emancipated the future of plenty, Anthropocene calls for urgent action for political and environmental reorientation. Tourism plays important role in this reorientation as it is heavily relying on using fossil fuels. But also can help developing a particular kind of sensitivity based on reciprocity which is seen important in navigating through the Anthropocene. (Huijbens & Gren, 2016).

The experiencing of wildlife by tourists has become the business of wildlife tourism (WT) which essentially is about increasing the probability of positive encounters with wildlife for visitors whilst protecting the wildlife resource (Reynolds & Braithwaite, 2001). INTOSAI Working Group on Environmental Auditing (2014) distinguishes further wildlife watching to describe activity that is based on observing rather than fishing or hunting for instance. According to Muloin (1998), wildlife-based tourism is usually defined as a nonconsumptive means of utilizing wildlife resources to benefit human populations. However, it is not the same as zero impact as any close proximity to wildlife and its habitat will lead to some sort of impact (Muloin, 1998). Most wildlife watching guidelines are based on attempting to mitigate the most visible stresses that can be caused to animals such as feeding, too many tourists, contact with tourists and disturbance during breeding periods (INTOSAI WGEA, 2014). Still we do not fully understand all the possible negative impacts which are also species specific in nature (INTOSAI WGEA, 2014). Following guidelines can be difficult while trying to fulfill the seemingly important touristic need to get close to animals. Training of guides and their ability to interpret encounters helps to enhance the tourist’s experience and raise their awareness of conversation issues, but also negotiate through situation where closer interaction than allowed is desired. Like INTOSAI WGEA (2014, p.7) suggest, “interpretation is a way of putting a wider context into what the tourist is seeing before them”. In addition to raising conversation awareness, many studies report the importance of seeing wildlife, seeing signs of wildlife in an area and the psychological benefits of expecting to see wildlife during an activity (Muloin, 1998).

Whale-watching has seen a rapid growth over the past decades. When whale-watching took place in 12 countries in 1983, it expanded to 119 countries and over 13 million participants by 2008 (Hoyt cited in Orams, 2000; O’ Connor, Campbell, Cortez & Knowles, 2009). The

viewing of whales started from a captive situation (Hughes, 2000). The International Whaling Commission estimates that 4500 whales of various kinds have been displayed in captivity. Due to a growing environmental awareness in societies, the opposition for viewing whales in captivity has emerged. It started in the late 1980s in the UK with The Brighton Dolphin Campaign, which created a national debate and resulted in the closure of all UK dolphinariums. This is a clear example of an ethical argument gaining public support and changing the nature of tourism provision (Hughes, 2000). Although dolphins are still kept and gazed upon in captivity around the world, the debate over the ethicality of such action remains present (Callaway, 2016). Several critics says that the health and wellbeing of whales are compromised when held in captivity (Wearing & Jobberns, 2015), but the displays of these animals are justified as a necessary educational and conservation act (Rose, Parsons & Farinato, 2009). In 2013, the release of the 'Blackfish' documentary propelled the cruelty of marine mammal captivity into public eyes worldwide (Jamieson, 2016). *The Blackfish* documentary bears a strong message against keeping killer whales in captivity as it points out many negative impacts that the North American orca industry had upon the whales and the consequences that lead to several incidents and death of trainers. The billion-dollar SeaWorld franchise created a brand around its first captive killer whale Shamu which was captured in 1965 (Hargrove cited by Huggan, 2018). Ever since then all the whales at the center of the SeaWorld spectacle have been called Shamu (Hargrove cited by Huggan 2018). For Huggan (2018) this represents Disneyfication of the ocean. In 2016, SeaWorld decided to end its killer whale breeding program (Jamieson, 2016) meaning that this generation of the whales will be the last in SeaWorld.

Whale-watching tourism represents a clear case of a branch of the tourism industry which has been structurally transformed by responding to concern about the welfare and rights of individual animals (Hughes, 2000). However, the concern for individual animal welfare and rights remains present. There is widespread concern about the impacts that whale-watching activities have on whales (Hughes, 2000; Orams, 2000). Short-term effects of whale watching are usually related to change in swimming behavior such as deeper and more frequent dives or an abrupt change of direction apparently to get rid of the whale-watching boat (IWC, 2022-b). Whether the same whales are under observation frequently, this impacts may have long-term effects especially if they are constantly interrupted during important activities such as feeding and resting. Long-term effects are harder to observe due to the long life-span of the whales. Some studies have linked whale-watching to population decrease

while others indicate no such long-term harm (IWC, 2022-b). As a result of research like this and concerns about the influence of boats, divers, swimmers and aircrafts close to whales, many nations have adopted a regulatory approach to managing this industry (Orams, 2000). Typical regulations restrict the number of vessels in close proximity to whales and specify minimum approach distances (Orams, 2000).

Recent whale-watching related research conducted in a Norwegian context comes from both social science and biology. Cosentino (2016) researched how whale-watching vessels affect the behavior of sperm whales off the coast in Andenes. Her results show that the whales are more likely to shallow dive in the presence of boats but concludes, that with the current level of exposure it is unlikely to have any biological consequences for the individual whales (Cosentino, 2016). Bertella and Vester (2015) investigated how actively local whale-watching companies in Northern Norway participate in the debates regarding protection of marine environments. They found out that participation is only marginal most likely due to limited resources, the different perspectives people have on marine environments and the role of humans in it. The research is timely as the search for oil and gas using seismic air guns took place close to Andenes in Andfjorden in 2014. Such activity is seen to affect the whales negatively (Bertella & Vester, 2005). Bertella (2011) has also studied a wildlife tourism company in Northern Norway with a science led approach and identified the main challenges related to running such a business. She identified that the main difficulties are finding competent employees in a small rather peripheral area. Also networking in the local context was identified as a challenge which in this case meant being a foreigner and having a product that was quite different from the traditional ways of making a living (Bertella 2011). The most recent research on human aspects of whale watching globally have investigated consumer preferences for sustainable whale-watching (Suárez-Rojas, González Hernández & León, 2021), visitor satisfaction (Buultjens, Ratnayake, Gnanapala & Nedelea, 2017; Vieira, Santos, Silvas & Lopes, 2018), and attitudes regarding keeping whales in captivity (Naylor & Parsons, 2019).

This chapter briefly presented the development of whale-watching industry and the research that has been done around the topic. Although there are more current publications about human dimension of whale-watching since the publication of Orams (2000) and (Muloin 1999), both of which have largely inspired my research topic, I also came into conclusion that there still is very little human-specific understanding of the phenomenon in a sense that would

try to explain what it means to people to see whales in the wild. Therefore, I concluded that I should approach the topic from the broader perspective by reading human-wildlife literature. Next chapter takes a step back from the whales first and proceeds to the most current research done about human-whale relationships.

4 Literature review on human- wildlife relationships & human- whale relationships

This chapter sets the scene regarding theories of human-wildlife relationships in the sense of what is known already and how relationships have evolved over time. It also specifically introduces existing research regarding human-whale relationships. To understand the meanings people place on whales in wild, it is necessary to reflect on how meanings are created at individual and social levels.

Human-wildlife relationships are based on a complex mix of emotions and cognitions (Manfredo, 2008). Emotions are believed to be inherited human responses that provided evolutionary advantage for our species although cognitions, learning in different forms, are seen to direct these emotions. The cognitive domain is built from basic values with a strong influence from social group involvement as a form of norms, that is, the ideas that constitute what is correct or incorrect behavior. At a societal level, the cognitive makeup of individuals has material associations with ever changing environments (Manfredo, 2008).

Anthropologists have long observed a linkage between human-human relationships and human-wildlife relationships within societies (Franklin, 1999; Manfredo, 2008). They have argued that the transition from hunter gatherer to agriculturally based societies sifted these two relationships from mutualism to domination (Manfredo, 2008). However, now it is proposed that we are returning back to more mutualism views with respect to wildlife (Franklin, 1999; Manfredo, 2008). Today, we do not only use animals to reflect what it is to be a human but see them as a role model of the social (Franklin, 1999). A compelling argument could be made to show that the warm, compassionate, caring relationships expressed towards animals by humans is a result of longing for such relations to be re-established between humans. Such close identification with animals about the similarities of existence weaken the notion of difference (Franklin, 1999). The research world is even debating the existence of nonhuman cultures and whale cultures (Whitehead and Rendell 2015). Whitehead and Rendell (2015) see that much of the learning processes in whale communities are social, a form of cultural learning, rather than a result of genetic determination with some remarkable similarities to human culture. However, there are also significant differences as they operate in a radically different environment, the ocean (Whitehead & Rendell, 2015).

Franklin (1999) argues that although humans place an essentially socially constructed set of meanings and understandings on the animal community, we are not aware how social constructions form our notion of animals (Franklin, 1999). Franklin (1999) further explains the connection between human-human relationships and human-wildlife relationships by looking into the different periods of humanity and how those have reflected our relationship with wildlife. Back in time, the comforts of religion and the limits on human control over nature were rejected in favor of human progress solely seeking the wellbeing of humans, although sometimes perhaps unsuccessfully. This is also the time when we humans sought to dominate nature. Today, this view is looking extremely unstable as people are beginning to question their faith in solely human-orientated development seeing it as a source for all human ills. This new view resulted in countercultures and social movements that have grown in strength with new sets of values and more mutual human-wildlife relationships (Franklin, 1999). Inglehart (cited in Manfredi, 2008) connects the shift in values to the shift in our need states. Inglehart sees (as cited in Manfredi, 2008) the economic growth as a primary reason for replacing the basic material needs with self-expressive values adopting Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is based on the idea that human needs have a hierarchical order with the physiological need being the most urgent, followed by a need for safety, belongingness, love and self-actualization in this order (Maslow as cited in Manfredi, 2008). The basic idea is that when a more urgent need is met the next one in the hierarchy becomes important although this is not to say that pursuing several needs at the same time would be impossible (Maslow, 1954, as cited in Manfredi, 2008). The bottom line of the model, in my opinion, is that people without stable livelihoods do not experience ontological insecurity, but poverty as Bulbeck (2005) points it out. Maslow's model has been criticized (Witt & Wright as cited in Hsu & Huang, 2008) as an oversimplification of the motivation of tourists; a model which does not take culture, gender, class et cetera into consideration. Still, I do think it is helpful as it gives one explanation for broader social change in Western societies, rather than trying to explain a change in individuals, from one that is solely focusing on economic growth to something that also spends significant amount of time trying to make sense of self and others allowing nonhuman beings in the discourse of what is meaningful and important.

Taking this to an individual level, we need to address how human make sense of the world and how meaning is made and negotiated. This theoretical perspective focuses on the person as meaning-seeking and meaning-making creatures, capitalizing on the human capacity and

need for reflection and awakening (Wong, 2012). According to Holland (2012), we frequently underestimate the strength of our quest for meaning. Within every situation meaning is added on objects, animal or action – that reflect the visions, experience and culture of the viewers and participants. For that reason, every experience or object can have different meaning to those that are within a situation and these meanings can also often be negotiated, dependent upon the situation. The process of developing meaning also arises from people's desire to create the coherence that allows experiences to fit into place with one another providing a sense of purpose and direction, rather than separateness or lack of purpose or ideals (Weinstein, Ryan & Deci, 2012). The creation of a new world order and a more cooperative and humane society brings meaning midst perceived chaos (Wong 2012). The discovery of meaning needs to be based on the principles of authenticity and timely universal values. What is positive and negative are shaped by cultural norms. Therefore, it is not possible to understand the good life apart from various contextual factors such as culture (Wong, 2012). McAdams (2012) further explains the role of culture in human meaning making. When we make sense of our lives, we narrate our own story, in a cultural context. In constructing a life story, we make meaning within the millions of meanings provided by culture (McAdams, 2012). In other words, we choose the meanings that make most sense to us, or that our culture and background offer us to see and understand. Iwasaki (2008) suggests that we gain meanings through leisure-like activities in several different ways. These themes are categorized based on their role in facilitating (a) positive emotions and well-being; (b) positive identities, self-esteem, and spirituality; (c) social and cultural connections and harmony; (d) human strengths and resilience; and (e) learning and human development across the lifespan. He also argues that recognizing the cultural context is important as engagement in leisure within a particular cultural context both facilitates and is influenced by culturally grounded meaning-making. What he sees as global phenomenon in his theory, is that whatever the cultural context, all the themes are aiming to enhance the 'good' either by directly positive experiences or by transforming the perception of the circumstances from being unfortunate to fortunate (Iwasaki, 2008).

Increased concern towards destruction of the environment and the perceived need to interact meaningfully with animals are both timely concepts (Franklin, 1999). And, there have been some attempts to understand them socially (Franklin, 1999). The literature by Franklin (1999) and Manfredi (2008) suggest that the basis for these concepts lies in a shift in our need states towards more self-expressive values such as belongingness and self-actualization in modern

cultures. But what are the conditions of a modern culture that make wildlife a source of belongingness and self-actualization? Fenske and Norkunas (2017) see that it is the environmental crisis that has profoundly changed human-nonhuman relationships. When we humans try to understand new situations and figure out how to move forward, we re-narrate these relationships in social and cultural contexts (Fenske & Norkunas, 2017). As we learn that we are just one actor in an entangled world rather than the dominant being in a human-entered world, the familiar concepts of nature and culture, civilization and wilderness, humans and nonhumans become shaky (Fenske & Norkunas, 2017). In other words, it is not only about the things changing around us but rather it is a new perspective we receive which makes us perceive the things around us differently. Fenske and Norkunas (2017) give an example of honeybees:

The swarming of honeybees, for example, which was for a long time narrated as a negative sign of a lack of human control over wilderness, has recently changed to a positive story. If contemporary Western honeybees still follow their drive to swarm despite all of their severe health problems, humans are slowly learning to conceptualize swarming as a sign of renewal and hope. (p. 107).

Subjected to relentless over-exploitation of nature, 'saving the whale' has become a powerful cry for environmental organizations like Greenpeace (Blok, 2007). A whale has come to signify all that is beautiful and sacred about pristine, 'wild' nature (Blok, 2007). But it has not been like that for all times. In most western societies whales were, in the past, perceived as dangerous for humans and competitors for fishermen that were both killed for exploitation and actively culled (Mazzoldi et al., 2019). Within a relatively short time period, whales have undergone a dramatic social transformation, from a hunted natural resource to an almost divine agent of empathy, protection and compassion (Blok, 2007). While humans have been killing whales for probably several thousand years, commercial whaling is intimately tied to a history of industrialization, ocean exploration, and imperial power. When whale numbers dropped to the endangered level in 1960s, their potential as symbols for the wider environmental movement rose notably (Blok, 2007). From the 1970s onwards, the perception of whales has been changing as part of a general increase in curiosity towards wildlife stimulated by documentaries, and environmental campaigns which since the 1990s have increasingly taken place on the World Wide Web (Mazzoldi et al., 2019). Goodman, Littler, Brockington, and Boykoff (2016) add in spectacular environmentalism which essentially is

about multiple environmental meanings that are mediated through large-scale spectacles such as Live Earth concerts, Vanity Fair's Green Issues, and celebrity environmental activity.

Today, the whaling industry is almost non-existent (Blok, 2007). There is some subsistence whaling conducted by indigenous people in areas such as Canada and Greenland, some commercial whaling in Island and Japan (Blok, 2007) and research whaling in Norway. This is not to say that whales are now safe from other threats. While many populations have recovered from extensive hunting, they are now facing new threats including plastic pollution, sound pollution, loss of habitat and prey, climate change, collisions with ships and becoming accidentally captured in fishing equipment and nets as bycatch (Briggs, 2020). More than 350 scientists and conservationists say that more than half of all species of cetacean are of conservation concern with two being on the brink of extinction (Briggs, 2020). In Norway, whales are within different networks of interests (Kramvig, Kristoffersen & Førde, 2016). In addition to the whales that are watched by tourists, the whales are still hunted and eaten, they are co-hunters for local fishermen as well as something to be protected and given territorial rights. Last but not least, there is also the invisibility of whales in governmental white papers and management plans of the Northern Barents Sea, where also oil and gas extractions are a major economic interest (Kramvig, Kristoffersen & Førde, 2016).

Whales fascinate humans for many different reasons, among them; they are mammals giving birth to living calves that stay with the mother for many years, many whales live in family groups, they communicate through sound in complex ways, they have "culture" and learn language and hunting practices of different territories. they are much larger and more powerful than us, because we see whales as our kin, and because the whales are in their own environment, wild and free (Bulbeck, 2005). Some people also feel close to nature (Bulbeck, 2005; Kramvig, Kristoffersen & Førde, 2016) and are spiritually uplifted when they encounter whales (Bulbeck, 2005). Whales are often seen as conscious beings with emotions and individualities and with capabilities to decide how the encounter evolves with tourists whether it happens at all (Kramvig, Kristoffersen & Førde, 2016). According to Bulbeck (2005), our human desire for inter-species communication is more acute in the case of dolphins. Since the mid-1900s, dolphins have occupied the cultural imaginary as bearers of alternative values such as collectivity, compassion, friendliness, creativity, joyful sexuality, androgyny, spiritual wisdom and intuitive intelligence. This image, however, is increasingly contested with evidence that killer whales (also a species of dolphin) are 'wolves of the sea', apex predators of the ocean. Bulbeck (2005) proposes that we see dolphins how we like to see

ourselves: they kill to eat, and they fight each other for dominance making them more complex than suggested by the perpetually sweet stereotype. Many are not satisfied merely to know the dolphins but want the dolphins also to know that we are there, assuming that the pleasure of the encounter is mutual for both. Another explanation is that dolphins are the liminal creatures at the borderland of our classification system. They are both similar and mysterious at the same time allowing them into discourses of similarity and differences with us, both mammals but now living in radically different environments (Bulbeck, 2005). The aspect of similarity is sometimes enhanced by whale-watching companies by naming identified individuals such as the sperm whale, Glenn, which has been spotted near Andenes since the early 1990s (Kramvig, Kristoffersen & Førde, 2016).

Huggan (2018) provides a view that is intimately tied with the long history of human-whale relationships as we know. He suggests that the whales are so compelling and able to move us because they are compound figures for melancholy. He sees that it is not that much about the behavioral qualities of the whales but rather the knowledge of human exploitation of whales across time. In melancholia, the lost object is not precisely identified, and it is also unclear whether something was already lost or will be lost in the future. The practice of whale-watching then functions as a filter to see the return of those that were once oppressed, and the limited visibility of the whales to human eyes allows speculation on the scale of the losses that surround them. His idea extends to the dimension where this melancholic feeling towards whales turns into the paralyzing notion of separation from ourselves and the destructive thing called humanity (Huggan, 2018). Huggan's theory is alluring in many ways as it is able to connect the history of the human-whale relationship with the physical environment in which they live, which is an essential part of the fascination. But I also find his theory extremely melancholic so to say. When you observe people who have just been on a whale-watching tour and have managed to get a glimpse of a whale of any kind, it is a bunch of extremely content people that arrives back to the harbor. However, when I had discussions with tourists about their reasons for coming to see the whales, and what they found fascinating in whales, the answers quite often evolved into narrating the whales in a light that tells a story of the unfair treatment of the whales over time and the threat our actions still have upon the ocean in which they live.

Kristoffersen, Norum and Kramvig (2016) were prompted to research human-whale relationships in the arctic after following several discussion with an ethical ethos in medias. In their research of the transformed whale in the Arctic, they see that the whales are perceived as

companions to humans with rights to exist and roam free in their territories rather than something to consume for human needs. But even though whales as companions demonstrates human-nonhuman relationships in practice, the concept of nature that sees nature and humanity as being mutually exclusive is still prevalent among whale-watchers and actively nurtured by the tourist operators. As an activity though encounters with the whales have the ability to foster sensitivity in the spirit of Anthropocene. (Kristoffersen, Norum & Kramvig, 2016).

It seems to me that while it is extremely satisfying to just see the whales and be present, there is often lots of thoughts behind the affection which then can lead to very emotional encounters. The source of the affection and thoughts are found from the most current narrations of the whales, humans and whales and humans and environments at large. Recognizing that we are always entangled with the Earth, have the capacity to be a collective geological force while the Earth and other beings have the same yet unknown capacity to talk back has altered the ways we narrate our relationships with more than a human world and whales. Some of this new narrations are in a stark contrast with the ways we live today making it difficult to imagine how we can take responsibility of these action. Some are easier to act upon which is also apparent in terms of humans and whales. As we learn more about the whales and their social bonds, we start to question how we can treat individual animals and alter the ways we ‘consume’ the whales. As we learn that the whole populations are on threat due to our action and recognize the value of biodiversity either for its own shake or as a necessity to sustain human life, we can stop killing them but the other less direct ways of making the life in the ocean unbearable remains present and hard to grasp as individual tourists. Based on discussions with tourists, In chapter 6, I will discuss how do whale-watchers in the Arctic narrate our moral duties to whales and their habitat on a whale-watching tour. And whether the beauty of whales, as mentioned by many, could be a metaphor for other qualities of whales. The discussion is theoretically built around environmental ethics and aesthetics of the nature.

5 Methodology

This chapter outlines and discusses the research design and methodological concerns relevant to this thesis. I also describe my own position as a researcher in the field and reflect upon how this affected my data. In addition to participating in whale-watching tours and interviewing travelers, during my research, I stayed a month at the whale-watching site and took part in the everyday life of the community. Plows (2018) suggest that we should be bolder and more creative with the stories we tell about the research process, including both field work and the writing process. I have kept this idea in my mind while writing this chapter and the analysis.

Firstly, I start by defining my research philosophy. I explain why I have done things as I have and why I thought this was the way to go in order to answer my defined research questions. Then, I reflect on how the data collection was conducted in Andenes and how the data was handled afterwards. Lastly, I explain how I see my position as a researcher in this study and present some ethical considerations related to the conduct of this study.

5.1 Qualitative ethnography

To open space for the indefinite...to imagine what research methods might be if they were adapted to a world that included and knew itself as tide, flux and general unpredictability... (Law cited by Plows, 2018, xv)

The style of my research was largely defined by my overarching research question, the question I was eager to shed some light on. Ethnography is often used in the early stages of understanding a phenomenon or design problem as it encourages the formulation of research questions that are grounded in field observation as a result of increasing familiarity of the context (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011). What I learned during those early stages was to narrow down the study which I also did after I developed a better idea of the nature of my study phenomenon. By spending time in the actual research settings, I was able to access a rather large group of tourists I could ask my very open-ended questions rather than conducting long interviews without knowing what to ask since I had only a vague idea about the nature of the

phenomenon I was studying. Through these conversations a pattern of interest, and some specific stories emerged as important. This further guided my research interests.

This study is theoretically and philosophically rooted in constructivism. It is based on the idea that people both understand and participate in the construction of the social world in which they live (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Central to constructivism is the idea that meanings cannot be discovered but that meanings are made and constructed within a specific situation. “The only thing we can really observe are our perceptions of the world: how the world appears to us” (Moses & Knutsen 2012, p. 176-177). Since reality is socially constructed, it is important to understand the nature of constructions and the multiple perspectives of social realities. Rather than observing the world, we often obtain our knowledge by interacting with other people, reading text written by others so fundamental part of our knowledge is impersonal (Moses & Knutsen, 2012). Furthermore, our knowledge accumulates in a unique way that makes us different from other beings (Whitehead & Rendell, 2015).

Specifically, in my research, I aimed to shed light on the phenomenon related to new and existing narrations about humans and whales. In order to understand meanings people place on whales, I need to interpret their thoughts through existing narrations that also are social constructions. There are multiple social realities rather than just one objective social reality that can be found by researchers external to their own participation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). There are many different ideas about whales, and their position in the ocean as well as how we best can encounter and protect them. In addition, what is better and more responsible tourism involving whales and what that can be is not one united idea and perspective. Still, even though perspectives differ they do have some similarities.

By the time I went to the field, I only had an overarching research question in my mind from which I developed a set of more easily approachable questions for people to answer. The initial idea was to possibly gather more data through longer interviews later. I started reading and writing my literature review only after data collection and this helped me to form more specific research questions as well as to view my own research material through interesting theoretical concepts. I found a connection between the data and the literature review and decided to follow that. The research questions found their final forms only at the very end of the process. From Andenes I gathered some quite rich reflections, but since the discussions were short many lacks on ‘thickness’, the analysis leans on my pondering of interpretations of the words tourists shared. I could have gone further and conducted semi-structured interviews

afterwards with a new set of more specific questions in my mind related to the connections I had found and possibly with better ability to lead the discussions further. That would have allowed me to explore the meanings beyond the tourists' words more accurately. But I would have been only ready for that quite late in the process, and since there was also value on getting things done within a certain timeframe, I decided to build my analysis based on the data I collected in Andenes. That being said, it would be interesting to follow up with semi-structured interviews in a new project.

In addition to my own position as a researcher which will be reflected on later in this chapter, there are other things that have affected how this thesis came to be. I had two supervisors who have supported my work with this thesis. Both of them have made available different routes both methodological and theoretical that were possible to take on. Their contributions and backgrounds as researchers within the field also affected how this thesis came together. While there definitely were readings that did not help to interpret the data or to build literature view at all, there certainly were many that did and depending on what I ended up reading affected the ways in which I related to the collected data or the literature review. This does not make the interpretation any less real, just different from what someone else might extract from the data using different theories. From all the available academic readings, it was good to have someone who is more familiar with existing literature and concepts in the fields.

5.1.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is the core practice of ethnographic research which forces us to question our theoretical assumptions about the world and produce knowledge that is new or obscured (Shah, 2017). The idea is that one as a researcher observe the subject of the research either by participating directly to the action or by staying as a pure observer (Spradley, 1980). The field work often last years at time yielding thick descriptions of the studied phenomenon and thus is ideal for understanding human behavior (Spradley, 1980). Since I was only in the field for a month, the descriptions is not as in-depth as it often is in ethnographic studies but serves as a fair starting point to understand the nature of whale-watching.

I would describe my research position in the field as a 'participant as observer', meaning that I was open about doing research on the tours, but participated actively to all activities of the

crew except onboard interpretation or any kind of formal guiding. This allowed me to immerse fully in the group and building rapport which is seen to be the only basis for obtaining reliable information (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011). Since the people on the tour were always different, it was not possible to bond with the studied group in a sense that ethnographers often do by spending long time with the same group of people. But in my study the study group was also very different in a sense that I was not going to study some distant and strange group of people but fellow whale-watchers. I felt that by choosing to be immersed in the crew, I was able to create somewhat empathetic grounds to talk with people on the tours. Furthermore, I chose to write my notes in a private place after each discussion. This allowed me to fully focus to the conversations, to pay attention what is happening in the field and to create distance to my position as a researcher as suggested by Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (2001). Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (2001, p. 357) furthermore argues that by taking notes in the very presence of the people “participants tend to see those who act in this way as proclaiming strong outside commitments and to react to such writing as efforts to turn intimate and cherished experiences in to objects of scientific inquiry”.

5.1.2 Informal interviews

The interview is a significant tool for an ethnographer to gather data (Fetterman, 1998). Interviews explain the context of the research through verbal interaction where the language is the commodity of discourse. Informal interviews are the most common in ethnographic studies. They seem like casual conversations but have an intention (Fetterman, 1998). I very much felt that I was having conversations with the tourists rather than interviews although I had a specific set of questions to start the conversation in order to direct the discussion to whales rather than the weather for instance. Buy asking tourists what they found fascinating in whales I assumed that the informants were fascinated by them. Obviously this was not the case with all. The design of this question though allowed people to explain the possible fascination by their own terms. The basic rule of interviewing during participant observation is to let the informants talk with minimal influence by the researcher (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011).

Informal interviews are great on identifying shared values within a community to inform a behavior (Fetterman, 1998) and that was exactly the aim of my overarching research question. While informal interview is different from conversation it often merges with one creating a mix of embedded questions and questions that naturally emerge from the flow of conversation (Fetterman, 1998). Dewalt and Dewalt (2011) sees that this does not mean that the researcher is directing the topic of discussion but rather following up points raised by another person. Even the best interviewers, though, tends to direct the content to some extent (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011).

5.2 Notes from the field

The data for this study was collected in January 2018 in Andenes. I contacted the Whalesafari Andenes, and they kindly welcomed me to do research on their boat. The idea was to observe and above all to talk with people mainly on board the tour, but I also spent some time in the reception area. Although my only role was to do research, I was very much immersed in the crew. The crew was introduced at the beginning of each trip, and I was introduced as a researcher with whom everyone was welcome to talk. I approached people, explained what I was doing and asked consent for asking a few questions for my thesis. In addition to that I was also glad to help on tours by serving the soup and I also engaged with the tourists in a way that did not end up in my field notes. I was open about being a researcher on the boat, but also wanted to be part of a team and create a laid-back atmosphere with possible respondents. People seemed generally to be glad to talk as people usually do on holidays. January was not the busiest month, but I was able to take part in 12 tours and wrote down 43 conversations with individual whale-watchers or couples in addition to observations undertaken on board the boat.

The casual conversations on the boat followed loosely this set of questions: What made you come to see the whales? Are you able to describe what is so fascinating about whales? Are you looking forward to seeing some specific type of whale? If so, why? Initially there were more questions but some of them were not suitable for asking before the tour or on the tour. Also, sometimes the discussion evolved, and other questions were asked that naturally followed the discussion. All in all, the idea was to let people explain the nature of whale-

watching and hence questions were broadly designed. I did not feel good about bringing a recorder into casual conversations with tourists on the boat, but notes were written down straight after each discussion. I felt confident about memorizing the flow of discussions as they were kept relatively short.

The settings to collect data were both in flavor and in contrast of what I wanted to do. I was able to indulge to the heart of the action for relatively long time and have several discussion with people about the whales. On the other hand it was not a place to have a long conversations even if the discussion would have naturally flowed longer. At least it would have been difficult to write down them afterwards. Though writing them down while talking or recording in a moving boat hardly would have made it any easier. I was lucky not to suffer from seasickness but most of the tourist did as the whales are generally found further from the open seas. Especially during the winter months, the sea can be rough. According to my field diary, there was rather harsh weather condition on several days and more or less seasick people on the board. The following quote is an extract from my field diary:

We had quite a few people on tour with a big group of French on board. The weather wasn't the best and we were also expecting the sea to be a bit rough. By the end of the day lots of people were seasick and the mood wasn't as cheerful as in the previous tours. We saw several sperm whales but most of the tourist I talked to wished to see some other species.

Already before the last trips, I felt that the data was saturated in a way that there was not much new content emerging from discussions with tourists. Field notes were written down from a notebook into one Word document including talks, observation, photos and my own thoughts during the process of data gathering. The next step was to see what I had and by using interpretative analysis I found themes that could be further reflected upon.

5.3 Interpretative analysis

In the light of my topic which itself leans on to a new ways of understanding things, I wanted to be in a more playful ground with this thesis and build the analytical part of this thesis around ideas rather than arguments. Whewell (cited by Moses and Knutsen, 2012) sees that ideas play important role in creating scientific knowledge capitalizing on individual inspiration and scientific knowledge. "For the constructivist foreknowledge is both necessary

and integral to any research project” (Moses and Knutsen 2012, p. 186). Law (cited by Blows, 2018) takes a step further by speaking for the importance of creative academic writing. He sees that ethnographic writing should be enjoyable to read, to find distinct ways of representing reality.

While Chapter 6.1 is built around data that has more texture and context around it, chapter 6.2 seeks to interpret single words or very short reflections. The analysis follows the idea of hermeneutical circle which according to Gadamer (cited by Debesay, 2007) is an approach to reveal conditions that facilitates our understanding, the idea that understanding is achieved by interpretations in circular process. The work of interpreting smaller parts through bigger entities and vice versa (Debesay, 2007). The bottom line here is the context through which one interprets the data, and this context is also dependable on the presumptions and the abilities on acquiring new knowledge of the researcher. While the circle suggest an endless interpretation process, Gadamer (cited by Debesay, 2007) sees that in the circle one does not remain in the same place but seeks constantly new knowledge avoiding self-evident assumptions. In hermeneutical understanding the interpretation can never be final, but we can be aware whether the interpretation is sound (Debesay, 2007). According to Gadamer (cited by Debesay, 2007) to build a coherent interpretation is a criterion for proper understanding.

When the data is rich there are fewer potential contexts through which the data can be interpreted but when one tries to make a sense of a single word or very short sentences, the possible interpretations are endless. The concept of beauty that is analyzed in chapter 6.2 also follows the hermeneutic logic. The word beauty to me chimes with aesthetics. While becoming more familiar with the literature of the aesthetics of nature the scope of analysis was narrowed down in a way that resonates with other gathered data, to create coherence.

5.4 My position as a researcher

Since I am the author of this thesis, who I am, has a major impact on how this thesis came to be. My abilities to do research, my motivations and research design matter. I do identify myself as an eager whale-watcher to some extent and hence am part of the group I studied. Accordingly, I am part of the phenomenon I am trying to study. It is said that acknowledging one’s position as a researcher and trying to mitigate the possible bias one’s own views might

bring into the process of interpretation is important especially in ethnographic studies (Spradley, 1980). But as I am in a way trying to explain a phenomenon which essentially, in my opinion, is based on social constructions, how different can my own views be from the ones studied?

I see that my role as a researcher and as a part of the phenomenon being studied can bring valuable insights which do not make my results any less reliable. I understand that being reflective through the process in order to attain some kind of objectivity is important and also possible to some extent like Dewalt and Dewalt (2011) suggest. I have tried to be aware and reflective of my position as part of the studied group in a sense that I would not force things out of the data. Still:

As interpretive anthropology makes clear, all of us bring biases, predisposition, and hang-ups to the field with us and we cannot completely escape these...Our reporting, however, should attempt to make these biases as explicit as possible so that others may use these in judging our work (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2011, p.88).

I have not avoided making connections and creating ideas using my own background and knowledge from the field. For instance, I do not think that plastic belongs to ocean, nor I like that whales are held in pools. But I also do not think that because I held this ideas, it's a valid reason to assume that these opinion only belong to me.

5.5 Ethical considerations

Like much of the content in this thesis, ethical considerations of the research project is an essential part on conducting research. To think about how the relationships between the researcher and those involved in the research should be handled with respect for individual rights. Research ethics are defined in various different levels. There are legal requirements, scholarly principles, and philosophical problems which are not always universal (Hopf, 2004). Most common concerns to think about are, how voluntary was the participation and the question of guaranteeing anonymity (Hopf, 2004).

The first ethical considerations of my research project comes from the data collection and interacting with tourists on the whale-watching tours. The question of voluntary participation

was controversial in my way of collecting data. On the other hand I was open about my position of being a researcher, informed and asked consent for asking question before conversations. On the other hand I was a researcher on the boat where people had come to do whale-watching, not to participate on a research project. This I kept in my mind when I found my way through the participant observation. As stated by Murphy and Dingwall (2001) ethnographers can harm the participants by making them feel anxious and distressed during the field work. I certainly did not want anybody to feel anxious because of my research project. The general rule in Kantian terms is to avoid treating people as a means to an end, rather than as an end in themselves (Kelman & Macklin cited in Murphy & Dingwall, 2001). My potential informants had come to see the whales, to enjoy the day spent outside in the ocean. Thus trying to recruit people for conversations aggressively was not the way to go. There was plenty of time in the seas to have talks with people. Quite often I might have started conversation very casually and then feel my way if it was good to ask question related to my research. I always asked consent first bearing in mind that it could be also difficult to say no to me even if they wanted. I certainly did not want people spend their tour trying to avoid me on the boat which was also why being part of the 'crew' worked. The other concern arises from the discussions with informants. The questions were not easy to answer for all and hence the ability to continue the conversation to other directions or to sign somehow that it is fine not to know what to reply was important. Some might also feel embarrassed about the opinion they hold (Kelman and Macklin cited in Murphy and Dingwall 2001). As I received quite personal reflection from informants, I wanted to be the one that is interested in hearing what they had to say, to be there to listen not to judge. And most of these were communicated in non-verbal level.

The other main concern comes from guaranteeing the anonymity. Large interview transcripts or observation reports may contain many leads to the identity of the informants (Hopf, 2004). I did not record the discussion, nor I asked many identifying questions as I did not see it necessary for my study. I wrote down to fieldnotes with whom I had talked referring to them as she or he and which country they came from. Only the gender ended up to this paper for some quotes. The fieldnotes were stored in my personal computer at all times. The geographical context is revealed but since the group of whale-watchers is not a defined identifiable group of people but people who have travelled to certain location at certain time, revealing the location does not give specific clues of identities. Although I think that my data overall holds very little clues on identities Murphy and Dingwall (2001) sees that

ethnographic studies are rarely able to give absolute guarantees that the identities will remain hidden.

5.6 Limitations

There are certainly limitations to this study which are good to bear in mind while reading this paper. The first limitation arises from my own competence in the field and experience as a researcher. I was very much guided by my defined research question and the stories tourists told me. This led me to write a thesis that is built around literature I was not very familiar with before starting this project. This proved to be rewarding but also time consuming. That being said, the planning of the project was not ideal in terms of scheduling and recognizing available resources. I also carried out ethnographic research for the very first time. I have capitalized on every change to learn throughout this thesis project,

Some of the limitations were also conscious decisions. I decided not to gather more data, and hence the analysis is built around broader research questions instead of narrowing down the study more and making it more focused. It simply did not make any sense to do that with the data I had gathered. On the other hand my initial idea was to bring new perspectives in the field, and I see this as a kind of pre-study although not the only one in the field. It was hard to narrow down the research at first as there were so few studies upon which to reflect on, yet I felt I found an interesting topic which I am glad I chose to follow.

Furthermore, the study group is limited so it by all means does not present what whale-watching is to all. By choosing to focus on the main themes, I narrowed down the study and the studied group in a sense that leaves out some whale-watching tourists. There were also people who had come to a whale-watching tour to see whales as a bucket list kind of an activity and did not have any particular interest in them or much to say about them. Hence, the focus in this study is on somewhat eager whale-enthusiasts.

6 Analysis



Figure 3: Where the whales at? Author's own photograph

In this chapter, I present my main findings based on discussions conducted in January 2018 in Andenes. My aim was to identify what it means to people to see whales in the wild by letting people talk about what whale-watching is for them. Needless to say, there were several different narratives, and sometimes visitors had difficulties in explaining themselves. Also, there were clearly different levels of fascination detected as people participated in whale-watching tours for different reasons. Winter whale-watching in Andenes attracts both people who specifically travel there to see the whales, and groups who spend a longer time in the Arctic to experience the North and its iconic attributes such as the northern lights, polar nights, snow, coldness with whales being only one of many activities on travel agendas. It is notable though that many independent travelers find their way north to specifically see whales, and often a particular whale species. Those tourists do their research on where to go and when.

I came here to see the humpbacks. It started when I was 15 and I saw a documentary about humpbacks and ever since it's been my dream to see them. Years went past before I finally did my first whale-watching trip in Alaska where I saw them in addition to other wildlife. Then second time was in Iceland and now I came here.

I decided to follow the main themes that arose from discussions with whale-tourists I talked to. One theme resonates with both environmental and more specifically animal ethics. Many discussions led to different levels of ethical considerations which parallels the idea of whale-watching as a response to a general concern about the welfare and rights of individual animals and animals as a species. It is good to bear in mind though that the tourists in Andenes receive a guided tour in the museum before going out to sea. This tour mainly focused on presenting the local ecosystem, the different species of whales that can be spotted in the area, and the biology of whales but there is also a section that explains the plastic in the ocean. Other than that, the tour does not specifically narrate human-whale relationships regarding times related to whaling and the captivity industry. However, the content of the tour can slightly vary depending on the guide. I discuss further how our moral duties towards whales and their habitat are expressed by whale-watching tourists in section 6.1.

The other main theme is the admiration of aesthetic and behavioral qualities of whales. Behavioral qualities explain both the incredible ways of foraging and the social bonds some species have. Both themes were narrated by tourists by comparing them with humans which has been identified in earlier studies as part of the fascinating things in whales (Franklin, 1999; Bulbeck, 2005). In the discourse of the social, whales can be seen as human-like having families and communities as explained by many tourists. On the other hand, the discourse of differences emphasized the radically different environment in which whales live and the radically different but equally 'genius' ways of surviving in life.

It's the size and the fact that they are still able to swim so smoothly and the sonar thing they have, that's like sci-fi! It would take ages for humans to create something like that. And I was amazed to learn that they had developed from mammals living on land. But when you run out of food on land it makes sense to move to the ocean, that's evolution.

The beauty of whales is a trickier concept. While there are plenty of insights regarding the concept of the aesthetics of the natural environment to reflect on, I focused on the aesthetics

of whales from a perspective that also resonates with ethics. In section 6.2., I delve into what a ‘beautiful’ whale possibly means to whale-watchers in a metaphorical sense.

6.1 From environmental ethics to animal ethics

Not surprisingly, when I took a closer look at my data, I found stories which told the different ways humans have consumed whales and how we interact today with them in different ways. Hughes (2000) suggested that whale-watching is a continuum regarding the ethical development of animal ethics. Initially, whales were consumed as food by some communities or to make commodities such as oil for illumination from the blubber and corsets from the baleen (Demuth, 2019). When the over hunting of whales was acknowledged, and commercial whaling forbidden as a result of a moratorium in 1982 (IWC, 2022-a), the commercial consumption of whales (different species of dolphins really such as bottlenose, belugas and killer whales) moved to aquariums. As a result, the whales as a species were safer but with time, and again as a consequence of new knowledge acquired, people started to worry about the well-being of individuals animals. Relatedly, from a public perspective, the captivity industry diminished as an alluring way to consume whales (Naylor & Parsons, 2019). This did not happen in strictly a chronological sense, but the trend was obvious. Albeit that whales are still hunted as mentioned before but in significantly smaller numbers. Internationally, they are still kept in captivity in different places (BBC, 2019). However, whales are also consumed by many in growing numbers in their own habitat through the business of whale-watching. But as the following discussion demonstrates, the question of the ethical use of whales remains and is reflected upon in various ways by the whale-watchers themselves. Subsequently, this might just be part of the whole experience. It seems to me that the so called ‘spectacular environmentalism’ plays a role in this as the tourists, who participated in my research, were mainly talking about issues that can be found on big media platforms. Next, I describe how whale watchers express environmental ethics and animal ethics in different ways off the coast of Andenes.

Boylan (2014) connects the practise of ethics to our decision making which is guided by the chosen world view or the passively accepted word view as we grow up in particular culture. In western world the common world views are the celebrity fantasy where being celebrity is

everything. The other is practical competence which is based on the cost-benefit analysis in order to gain the greatest pleasure for oneself negotiated often in monetary terms but also as being a good person. While this kind of utilitarian ethics is based on the idea of “the greatest good for the greatest number” (Boylan, 2014, p. 6), deontology emphasis doing things because it is inherently good rather than calculating consequences. In addition to what is morally good, one also has to wonder whether something is doable in opposed to what is utopian. All this is done within a context. We have a moral duty towards the community we live in. Due to the increased knowledge, this community extends to people we have never met. In terms of environmental ethics, it extends to the beyond human community and the idea that we are always entangled with other beings in the Earth. (Boylan, 2014).

When it comes to environmental ethics and species conservation, surprisingly it is not whaling that is a worry but the plastic in the ocean that is known to be a threat for every species in the ocean. One of the tourists told me he came to Andenes to see the killer whales. He had seen them before in Vancouver and when I asked if the encounter had changed something in him, he told me that afterwards he started to be more cautious towards his own actions and the possible consequences it might have on nature. “I’ve been trying to reduce using plastic and tell my mates to do so as well. It’s so easy to throw everything into ocean where nobody sees it.” Another visitor pointed out the same issue:

I think we are responsible of taking care of them [whales] and the ocean they live in. They matter as much as we do. You know the problem with plastic in the ocean which has been a problem for quite a while I suppose. We should really keep the ocean clean from plastic.

The issue of plastic in the ocean has captured the public’s attention through several high-profile films such as *Blue Planet 2* and *The Plastic Ocean* leading many to make small changes in everyday lives such as using reusable water bottles and refusing plastic straws (Stafford & Jones, 2019). Although Stafford and Jones (2019) argue that the attention plastic has received has come at the expense of hiding more serious threats to the ocean such as changing climate and overfishing, and that the issue of plastic has been made a consumer problem rather than a production issue. The whale-watchers in Andenes were eager to feel the weight of this responsibility. I also think that it is a lot easier to see the problem of plastic when dead whales are found with stomachs full of plastic or other sea creatures getting

tangled in plastic objects. It is a lot harder to imagine the suffering or loss that raising sea water temperatures might do. Plastic is more tangible.

Commercial whaling was almost absent from the talks in Andenes. Only one tourist talk about whale meat knowing that whales are still food for some in Norway. It is also perhaps less presented in media these days. I do not remember seeing any whaling-related documents myself except the few that raised concern about the ethicality of indigenous whaling that happens in Taiji, Japan and in Faroe Island. Whaling seemed to be more of an acute issue in the second half of the twentieth century when the moratorium was also established. It was a theme for instance in the movie *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986) where the Starfleet officers save a pair of humpback whales from whalers, not so much for the sake of the whales themselves, but because of the vital function of the whales for ecosystems as a whole (Jørgensen 2019). The ethics through ecosystem thinking sees something important as it supports directly or indirectly a quality of human life (Jørgensen 2019).

The captivity industry was a much more present topic among whale watchers in Andenes. Specifically, the topic was related to animal ethics and the rights of individual animals instead of seeing whales only as a function of an ecosystem service. Animal ethics as a concept relies on the notion that humans are moral agents in a way animals cannot be (Linzey & Linzey, 2018). It rejects the idea that human needs have a top priority in our moral understanding, that animals exist for human beings, and that moral obligations to animals can be ignored because nature is all about survival of the fittest. Animal ethics is based on the idea that animals have intrinsic value, that there is no rational ground for not taking animal sentients into account, and that it would require strong moral justification (if that is possible at all) to harm individual sentients. The idea of animal ethics sees that there has to be some kind of moral limits on what humans can rightfully do to animals and that these limits are subject to situations that are defined through the practice of animal ethics (Linzey & Linzey, 2018).

Killer whales were definitely the most desired species to see among the whale-watchers in Andenes. Be it the pure appearance that fascinates or the species-specific behavioral attributes as dolphins, there are also stories that refer to the captivity industry and how seeing them 'swimming free' is then extra rewarding:

It was absolutely wonderful. I was waiting to see the orcas most because they are so intelligent, and the family bonds they have. They certainly shouldn't be held in

captivity. They need their own family. It's so wonderful to see the whole family with a small calf here swimming free like they should be.

Well you know everybody loves whales. They are so big and live in the ocean. I think I want to see sperm whales since they are so huge. I've seen orcas before in SeaWorld but now that I know more, I wouldn't go there anymore. They need to be here free. Especially orcas shouldn't be in captivity. They are not happy in captivity.

Quite a few mentioned having seen the *Free Willy* movies, no one mentioned the *Blackfish* documentary although SeaWorld was mentioned by the former informant. Whatever the source, tourists seem to follow the idea of animal ethics that connects certain attributes of whales such as the social family bonds they have as an indicator that keeping them in captivity is morally wrong. The recent scientific findings support the idea that at least some species of whales and dolphins are nonhuman persons that have advanced cognitive and affective capabilities (White, 2018). With the notion of personhood then comes the quality of having moral standing setting firm boundaries on what is ethically acceptable and ethically unacceptable treatment of individual whales. By combining two different philosophical approaches to ethics together with scientific knowledge of whales, White (2018) argues that keeping a whale in captivity is cruel. Seen from one perspective, as autonomous beings, any interference with a person's free choice is seen as ethically unacceptable. Thus, no tangible benefit be it research, education, entertainment, jobs, or profit can justify treating whales as property and keeping them in captivity. The other perspective outlines the moral rights of persons referring to the conditions that members of a species require in order to grow and develop so that they have a reasonable chance of success, to flourish. As human and whales have very different evolutionary histories, it is only reasonable to think that there are differences in our basic needs. However, the importance of these needs are equal for both as autonomous beings. As for whales, they cannot flourish in captivity based on what is known about their cognitive and affectual capabilities and hence no amount of good produced can outweigh the quality of harm done for an individual whale (White, 2018). According to Marino (2018) cetaceans need social opportunities to bond and to learn from each other, to be challenged by their physical and social environment, and as autonomous beings they need to exercise control over their lives (Marino, 2018).



Figure 4: We were not the only ones in search of whales, author's own photograph

While others talked about plastic, or captivity, others also reflected on the ethical issue of whale-watching itself. These people say that they do not want to disturb or harm them, but it remains somewhat unclear what is considered as a disturbance by them and upon what such ideas are based. Logically though it is mainly about distance but could also mean the number of boats around the whales and how these boats act around whales in terms of speed and duration. The following respondent reflects on a good experience she had had before:

I think it's because of the movie *Free Willy*. I'm not so interested in how they live etc. but I find them beautiful. For me it's like 'oh, it's a whale' moment...but I'm concerned about tourism and how it affects wildlife. I definitely wouldn't want to harm whales. I once considered going to an aquarium to see the orcas but then I decided no...it's no good for them. If I don't see them here, I will feel a bit sad but it's okay. Also, I was in NZ a few years ago and we booked a 'snorkeling with dolphins' trip. I think it was well organized. Dolphins like to interact with the boat not the people. So, there were lots of interesting stuff hanging from the boat with which they

could play. And the idea was to go into the waters to observe how they play with the boat. We did not get into the water after all as they had a small baby dolphin. Of course, I would have wanted to go but I really appreciate that companies are acting in a responsible way.

It is unclear here whether she knew that it might not be possible to get into the water with the dolphins. But she seemed to appreciate that the experience of snorkeling with dolphins was not pursued so as not to compromise the rights of the dolphins by as yet undetermined harmful impacts. Close interaction is desired by almost everyone, but not all are willing to have close interactions by all means. This dilemma with wildlife encounters has been investigated by many studies (Orams, 2008; Verbos, Zajchowski, Brownlee & Skibins, 2018) and it was also present in Andenes:

They are so beautiful. That's the reason why I want to see them. We saw them already in Tromsø, but they were quite far. We were a bit disappointed. I like all the animals that live in ocean.

We saw our first whales a few years ago and that was such an emotional experience that we have been travelling around the world just to see the whales. They are such gentle creatures swimming in the ocean. The first time was the humpback whales. We saw some documentaries that you can swim with them, and that experience was just amazing. My wife got really emotional, and she cried with joy. You know when you look at the eyes of them and see that they also see you, it's an amazing feeling. Before I wasn't thinking that we as tourists could go so close to the whales, we thought it's something you only see in magazines. We feel very privileged to see them in the wild. And we definitely do not want to disturb them but it's nice when they approach you. And we were surprised that you can actually eat whale here. We don't really understand that...

These ethical considerations expressed by whale-watchers seems to be mainly concerned about well-being of whales specifically in a sense that they have intrinsic value as individuals and species, and no harm should be caused for them by humans. Plastic in the ocean was also seen a problem that eventually will affect the quality of human life. I suggest that in terms of captivity industry, seeing whales during a whale-watching trip is rewarding in recognizing our capability on building better through learning. In terms of plastic, the trip may function more

as an eye-opener, that more should be done, as the issue of plastic is far from being solved. It seems to me that so called spectacular environmentalism and big media platforms may play big part in facilitating this ideas. *Free Willy* and the *Blackfish* certainly qualify as large-scale spectacles which speak against marine mammal captivity. *Blackfish* also having attracted celebrity advocates (Huggan, 2018). *Free Willy* being the first that raised the issue of captivity through a fictional story of a whale being released from marine park and reunited to its family. Likewise plastic has been the main theme in several high-profile documentaries. In terms of ethics, whale -watching seems to be a place to consider what is morally acceptable behavior in terms of whale-human relationships but also and foremost it is about enjoying and anticipating of seeing a sight of them. Our moral duties to whales explained by whale-watcher in the Andenes is to let them flourish in their natural habitat and keep the ocean clean for plastic for them to live. In terms of encounters they should not be disturbed although seeing them too far might be a disappointment.

6.2 The beauty of the whales

“Well, you know everybody loves whales” replied one of the tourists, who I interviewed on the boat in Andenes when I asked what is fascinating about whales. It led me to think why indeed do people love whales. If I were to sum up the most common answer to that question among the people I talked to, it would refer most likely to the size and attractiveness in one way or another: beautiful, majestic but also as often to the goodness of the whales: gentle, sweet soul, harmless. It seems to me that not many had Melville’s *Moby Dick* in their mind when they were thinking about the whale. But what makes a whale beautiful when ‘the whale’ can look significantly different depending on its species?

While some think that the beauty of nature, and whales, lies strictly in the perceptual array of pure lines, shapes and colours, others see that the concept of beauty can be applied to almost everything that is pleasing (Parsons, 2008). The word beauty has the most vague and extensive meaning quite often expressing feelings of tenderness and affection instead of pure appearance (Parsons, 2008). Parson (2008) sees that aesthetic quality is built on a visual or auditory appearance that is pleasing or displeasing. While it is constituted of sensory elements such as looks and sounds it also has an affective element in the form of thoughts. Most

obvious sources of thoughts are belief and imagination but also biology, natural history, cultural myths, legends, poems and novels provide us with a rich source of thought about the natural world (Parsons, 2008). I would also add here all the media that are available for people these days. Many of the tourists mentioned having seeing documentaries and movies about whales. In the most current narration, whales are presented as gentle beings, or realistically as the top predators of the ocean. But even that top predator, the killer whale, is considered to be a role model of social life and capable of empathy beyond family ties excluding the species upon which they prey. The following respondent describes the moral beauty of whales in a more literate sense while others could say “it’s just their beauty and the majesty they have.”:

It’s not only humans that matter. We should care about nature and the wildlife around us. If we keep contaminating the waters in the end its us that drinks the contaminated water. People say that nature is rough, but I don’t think it’s like that. These animals take only what they need to survive. People are greedier.

Only one of the interviewed people was somewhat capable of expressing the aesthetic affection towards the whales he wanted to see in a more visual sense:

It’s been like that ever since I was little. I think it started with the way they look. They are like pandas, black and white and all cute. Everybody loves pandas. I think I saw a picture of orcas and thought they looked beautiful. Then later I learned more about them and the social structure they have. It’s such an awe-inspiring moment when you see them surfacing out of nowhere.

There is more to it on the concept of beauty. Scruton (2009) suggests that the source of beauty lies in all natural things. When we indulge in nature and encounter its fauna, and other living beings, we experience an enhanced sense of belonging. And this experience has an ontological resonance. The true source of the beauty here, is that the world contains things other than us, which are just as interesting as we are (Scruton, 2009). In other words, it is the diversity of beings that is valuable and beautiful. From a whale perspective, it resonates with the history of whales once being hunted near to extinction and are now valued for the sake of themselves or as an important part of the entanglement of different form of lives around us.

Amazed. It isn’t just with whales but also when you see other animals in the wild, it makes you realize that we don’t really matter. When you see apes in a jungle and go

back home in the gym and you realize that you are just like them. Apes in the gym. It's not only humans that matter.

Well, I like nature. You know it's part of us and they are part of the world in which we live. We should learn how they live and respect them. I am also fascinated how different species can adapt to the Arctic climate.

The first concern in the concept of natural beauty arises from the English word 'nature', often used to contrast human civilization with the uninhabited regions of the Earth (Parsons, 2008). Sciences of evolutionary biology and ecology have taught us that humans and human activities are a part of the natural world, not something separate from it. This implies that humanity is part of the concept of 'nature' which makes the whole concept of 'nature' out of date if not mythological. Abandoning the concept of nature, however, would take away an extremely useful concept from us (Parsons, 2008). Given the fact that there hardly is any place left on the planet that is unmodified by humanity, there simply would not be any nature or natural beauty left. Parsons (2008) reminds us that even though many things happen because of our presence, many things do not. There are still plenty of natural processes that we humans have no control over such as the fall of rain—even in the age of the Anthropocene (Parsons, 2008). I think the beauty of nature herein is that it has the capacity to expand the idea of 'there are other valuable things around us' into the realisation that 'there are other subjects in this world in addition to us'.

I agree with Parsons (2008) that the concept of nature is useful and see that it does not have to imply a strong nature-humanity dualism. Nature can also be a place where we can interact with other beings in real-time in a world where most do not. A place that enables us to see that humanity and nature are the same, and have the same capability to be actors. When this connection is often hidden in urbanized lives in a way that we see how others response only a few decades later. Lund and Benediktsson (2010) talks about having conversations with landscapes, metaphorically. They see that landscapes implies a more than a human materiality and refuses to be disciplined even though we often like to see it as a static object. If having a conversations with natural world seem too radical we can also think that all life is an exchange of signs, and by paying attention to these signs we can discuss with more than a human world (Lund and Benediktsson, 2010). When we observe the whales we can see that they perhaps approach to us and interpret what that means. We can also see when a whole pod

suddenly dives together next to a boat and is nowhere to be seen after that, and again make conclusions of our own what that sign means.

In whale-watching, the beauty of having other agents is often experienced by the uncertainty of sighting the whales. They have the capacity to surprise. Such comments that talk about nature as being uncontrollable speak to me more about the idea of having others that are equally capable of acting. Quite a few reflected on the difficulty and the uncertainty of sighting the whales in a positive sense. Rather than strongly embracing nature-humanity dualism, I think it can also tell a story of the realization of human beings and non-human beings to some extent:

it's really difficult to say...why did I actually come here to see the whales. Don't know what it is but for example once we were on a regular boat trip and we happened to encounter groups of dolphins feeding and it was amazing, nature just happened!

While I see that 'nature' in whale-watching is expressed more in the way that sees it part of us rather than out of our realm, the ocean definitely represents the more romantic idea of wilderness where our cultures are perhaps the least obvious, and hence a place to escape humanity. I do not think that whale-watching in the arctic is that much about travelling to see the arctic nature, but to see the certain species of whales that happens to live in Arctic in European context. Although the snow capped mountains that rises steeply from the sea and the beautiful light of the polar night hardly diminishes the experience. If Arctic land was the last frontier few decades ago, it is the ocean, or to be more precise the deep ocean that seemingly represents the last wilderness today. The deep ocean is also the place where the sperm whales of Andenes spend most of their lives foraging food. To access these whales, one has to tolerate the very likely seasickness and the uncertainty of the encounter.

The beauty of the whales is hence not necessarily only about the visual beauty in a form of perfect shapes and colours, but about the moral beauty of the whales and the beauty of the whales as part of biodiversity, and as nonhuman beings. And when something has intrinsic value it becomes our moral duty like discussed in previous chapter. The beauty in here lies also in the possibility of having conversations with our surrounding, being sensible attuned with other beings. Still, the other part of the beauty lies in the ocean which still to large extent presents a place to escape humanity. Therefore, I think that a beautiful whales is another way

of expressing these ideas when you miss the context that helps you to articulate the real beauty of the whales in other words.

7 To whales and beyond

When I started this project, I was hoping to be able to bring new perspectives to the field of whale-watching tourism in a sense that broadens the understanding of the phenomenon from a human perspective. It seemed to me that whale-watching attracts lots of visitors that travel long distances almost exclusively to see whales, yet it was difficult to find any research that had tried to explain this phenomenon. I did not even know where to start in trying to obtain some answers for this, and that is why I decided to approach the issue by letting people explain why whales fascinate them.

When I started reading and writing my literature review, it became obvious to me that I needed to start reading literature about human-wildlife relationships. Whale-watching, in its very literal sense, is about people seeking encounters with whales, where whale-watching as an industry acts as a mere tool to access whales. The literature review pointed strongly towards a new perspective that humans have developed towards wildlife as a combined consequence of an ideal need state and available narrations that encourage if not urge for reflections. The ethical and aesthetic dimensions were identified as two main themes among the whale-watchers in Andenes, which were further reflected upon during my analysis of data. Subsequently, this study became a multidisciplinary study. While I hesitated on going through the aesthetics, I thought it was only reasonable to give it a try and interpret the aesthetic qualities according to my best abilities rather than choosing not to and thereby ignore the data I had.

I understand that this study is sort of snapshot of whale-watchers in the Arctic and cannot be generalized to all of them. I mentioned earlier that there have been ethical concerns around whale-watching that operates around Norwegian spring spawning herring further north in the Arctic. Given those concerns, I was hoping to contribute to a better understanding of whale-watching tourists. While my data suggest that people do not want to get close to whales by all means, that dilemma of wanting to be close enough but not disturbing was also present in Andenes. This study did not focus on that issue particularly, and hence does not provide any particular insights into that. Generally, visitors in Andenes seemed to accept the possibility of not seeing whales and respecting their need to roam freely. I am afraid, however, that these narrations could be significantly different further north. Swimming with the whales is a

highly desired activity there which makes the encounter profoundly different. Indeed, it would be interesting to talk with people, who swim with whales, and listen to how they reflect on their experience and how they narrate the whales. I wonder how many of them would understand and accept not getting into the water with the whales despite them being in sight. The general rule as I have understood it is to let people in the water only when the whales are feeding and relatively static.

Although there certainly are differences on what people are willing to accept in whale-watching, the amount of ethical consideration at any level is substantial and seems to be part of the experience for an undetermined number of whale-watchers. Some people have already made an ethical decision by traveling far and taking a chance of leaving 'empty handed'. So, it seems only reasonable that they might feel unease if they witness situations that do not resonate with their ethical understandings. The ethical concerns overall seem to be the kind that can closely be connected to the harm done to whales rather than climate change for instance. But more than anything, I think this study suggests that the nature of whale-watching is indeed about all these narrations that exist about whales and about humans and whales. Today, these narrations happen to be profoundly ethical. Over time, whales have been narrated using different stories and have had profoundly different relationships with humans. Whales are filled with meanings, mainly in form of moral stories, which tourists consume partly through whale-watching. I do think that the whale-watching acts as sort of filter with respect to that. There is plenty to dwell on before the trip in the form of documentaries and films, during the trip to the far North and in the end when what they see is perhaps a dorsal fin or a fluke that breaks the surface of the ocean. Yet, the encounter is sometimes deeply emotional and anticipated. Whale-watching can be both, immediately satisfying by being in the moment, but also function as a filter on our capability on building better and turning unfortunate things into fortunate ones. I suggest that to enhance whale-watchers' positive experiences, it is vital that operators are able to foster these narrations about humans and whales. It seems to me that people do not travel far to see a particular set of DNAs that dives deep, but whales that go by different names in different times. Nonhuman beings just ideal to reflect on what it means to be a human in the age of the Anthropocene.

I see that whale-watching is not solely about people getting close to whales , and hence more research should be done in order to understand better the human side of the whale-watching. I agree with Curtin and Kragh (2014) that:

Rather than only focusing attention on the negative impacts of tourism on species and habitats, the study of wildlife tourism needs to stop perpetuating the assumption that tourists' presence in the natural environment is an inherently bad thing. As by doing so, it merely maintains the common mantra of trying to keep humanity out, which may, in the long term, do more damage to conservation and nature preservation as it will sever the opportunity to increase personal connection to nature and to develop political support for conservation. (p.551).

This is not to say that it is not important to understand and aim to improve the industry's practices in a way that fits the understanding of a good practice but also widen the horizon of what is perceived good. In addition to our accumulative culture, our moral agency is seen to be one of the key attributes of what makes us human beings (Whitehead & Rendell, 2015). Our moral agency towards whales and the environments they live in, and also co-habit, has also been in the center of this thesis due to stories whale-watchers told me in Andenes. The stories tell that we do not want to harm individual whales nor make their lives tough in the ocean. They also suggest that we see the moral duties through the lens of mediated knowledge and express them in a way where we as individual can make a difference. We can refuse a plastic straw and like that at least lessen the amount of plastic that end up in the ocean. Without really having to change our lifestyles radically. We can choose where we go to see the whales and not participate in cruelty caused for individual whales. We do not want to participate in causing direct harm but are less able or willing to see what this avoidance in general might partly do at large. Flying to far countries to see whales contributes in one way to that harm done. But I think it is a serious underestimation of people to say that they don't understand what flying does to climate, although it is easier to negotiate out of this responsibility as the harm is mainly done by humans as collective geological force, which is also disputed by many and partly still on its way as some of the consequences are yet to anticipated. The question of ethics is also central to the political reorientation in the Anthropocene. Zylinska (cited in Kristoffersen, Norum & Kramvig, 2016) sees that we need a new set of ethics in order to take responsibility for occurrences in the earth that is based on the idea that we are not the only beings capable of relating and reacting to others. She defines the minimal ethics then as a willingness to admit that we are always somehow entangled with other forms of life in the earth (cited in Kristoffersen, Norum & Kramvig, 2016). This minimal ethics were expressed by the whale-watchers in Kristoffersen, Norum and Kramvig (2016) study in the arctic and also by my informants. The bigger thinking in terms of climate

change is less obvious perhaps because it may feel like a utopian thing for an individual to make a difference. I agree with Zylynska that ethics or our moral duties lies at the core of the Anthropocene, but the questions is what is the ideal mode of living then and relating with other beings. I agree that since we do have moral agency we have to consider what is good and bad instead of thinking life as survival of the fittest. At the same time I guess many historian would argue that this denial of us not being dependent on other things and hiding death for most part is the core problem. To traverse to a more positive side from here I conclude that if we are to change things instead of falling into desperation, we must embrace our humanity and conversations with nature is a good starting point. “It is not enough to hate humanity and seek solace in unspoiled nature” (Gerber, 2002, p. 55), because the hatred hasn’t got us far for the time being. I see that in the spirit of Anthropocene, whale-watching creates opportunities for positive and meaningful encounters and conversations with more than a human nature and it should get more attention from scholars of different fields.

In this thesis I have explored the human dimensions of whale-watching by trying to understand the apparent increased need or desire to seek this encounters through the activity of whale-watching. The ethical and aesthetic dimensions were identified as two main themes among the whale-watchers in Andenes, which were further reflected upon guided by following research questions: How do whale-watchers in the Arctic narrate our moral duties to whales and their habitat on a whale-watching tour? and what is a ‘beautiful whale’ in a metaphorical sense? The stories tell that we do not want to harm individual whales nor make their lives tough in the ocean by throwing plastic in the ocean. In terms of aesthetics, the beauty of whales possibly lies in the moral beauty of the whales and the beauty of them as part of biodiversity, and as nonhuman beings. The beauty of encountering them in the wild is to be sensible attuned with other than human world while the day out in the ocean also provides a place to escape humanity. It seems that for some, the whale-watching tour is a place to reflect on these stories fostered by ‘spectacular environmentalism’ about whales and human and whales. The possible encounter then is highly anticipated and rewarding, sometimes emotional due to the moral nature of these stories in realizing our capacity on building better. Sometimes it provokes the urgent need to do more. Therefore, this study suggests that there is more to whale-watching than getting close to them and hence it should get more attention from the fields that are currently missing from whale-watching related research. As an activity co-created by whales and humans alike it has potential for fostering

stories which are seen important in navigating through Anthropocene. Assuming we adapt the view that wildlife encounters are not inherently bad thing.

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