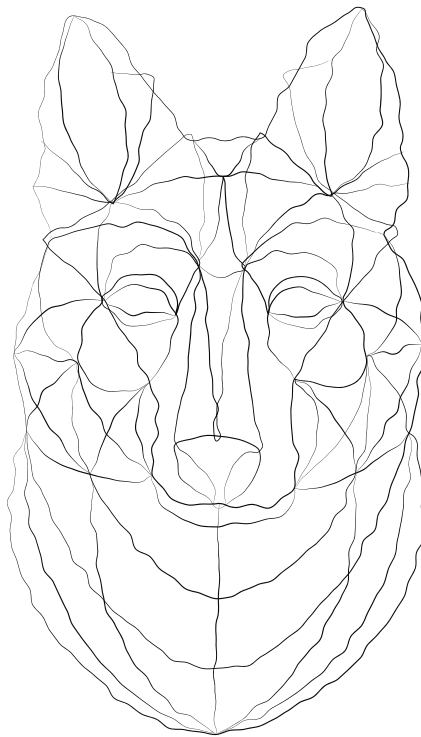


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## Mobile video ethnography for evoking animals in tourism

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## ABSTRACT

Methodologies to account for animal agency in tourism are still in their infancy. This paper extends developments that seek to enrich methodologies for studying the role of animals in tourism by arguing that methods relying solely on talk- and text-based accounts struggle to appreciate the moving encounters between human and non-human animals. Hence, the paper embraces the opportunities afforded through moving image methodologies by exploring mobile video ethnography as a way to account for and understand how tourism emerges through encounters between living agents. Whilst recognising the need for caution, the paper demonstrates how mobile multispecies video ethnography contributes to gaining access to the intimate spaces of human-animal encounters in tourism.

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## Introduction

The concerns of agency, ethics, and their spatial dimensions are always present in human-animal encounters (Whatmore, 2002). However, a special concern is whose agency and subjectivity is acknowledged in the encounters. Much of the discussion among tourism scholars focuses on the role and agency of customers as active co-creators of tourism experiences, thus acknowledging their ability to manipulate and transform service encounters through their responses (Campos et al., 2018; Lugosi, 2018). In such co-creation processes, front-line employees, guides, other tourists, and local populations are usually considered as the agents with which customers interact (Bertella, 2014). Tourism scholars also consider the roles of the natural environment and everyday working practices in the process of creating tourism experiences, arguing that versatile engagements between human agents and the environment are crucially important in the processes of giving meaning to experiences (Rantala, 2010; Valkonen, 2009). However, these studies tend to overlook one important group of agents, namely animals, by often placing them under the all-encompassing category of nature.

Despite the growing number of studies that acknowledge human-animal relations as important to our understanding of tourism (Fennell, 2012; Markwell, 2015), methodological endeavours to better address the interactions and interrelations of human and non-human animals are very much in their infancy. To date, scholars have generally failed to acknowledge that human relations with non-human animals in tourism could be recognised as constitutive of the agency of both humans and non-humans. Overall, they exclude the possibility of non-human participants contributing to tourism practices and thus neglect the impact of the lively presence of animals in commercial, nature-based tourism activities (Chakraborty, 2020). Hence, the practices, ways of collaboration, and sense of knowing between humans and animals in the tourism industry are largely unknown (Haanpää et al., 2019).

Drawing on and interrelating the methodological developments in animal geography (Buller, 2015; Lorimer, 2010) and mobile ethnography (Urry, 2007), I explore mobile video ethnography (Brown & Banks, 2015; Spinney, 2011; Vannini, 2017) as a way of

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evoking the lively presence of animals in tourism. Mobile video ethnography is a potential route to accessing the embodied, non-representational spaces of the relational and fluid encounters of humans and animals (Brown & Banks, 2015). As a methodologically-oriented paper, it focuses on data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings to advance an argument about the methodological procedures of mobile multispecies video ethnography, its practical techniques, and its epistemological underpinnings. The exploration takes place in a context of touristic mushing (i.e., dog sledding for commercial purposes) in an Arctic destination. As such, the purpose of the paper is not to pursue a philosophical argument about the subjectivity or personhood of a sled dog as a “tourism animal”. However, conceptualisations about animal agency and working sled dogs are presented, as they have epistemological consequences (Coulter, 2016; Higgin, 2012).

With these aims in mind, the paper extends recent tourism contributions that have sought to enrich the methodological repertoire in terms of accounting for animal presence and agency in tourism encounters (Chakraborty, 2020; Haanpää et al., 2019; Valtonen et al., 2020). Contributing to this critical research on multispecies encounters in tourism, it is contended here that the prevailing interpretations of animal agency in tourism can be further developed through methodologies that appreciate “the ways in which dynamic and changing worlds are lived with and performed through the interactions of living and lively beings” (Greenhough, 2010, p. 41; Ingold, 2011). Hence, the study opens up avenues towards understanding tourism as a relational and multispecies phenomenon that comes about and develops when agents often considered as “non-touristic” contribute to the development of tourism spaces and events in the performance of their roles.

### Accounting for and understanding agency in tourism

#### *Animal agency as relational and plural*

Debate surrounds the incapacity of animals to possess consciousness, self-awareness, intentions, and thought, as well as their inability to develop complex language, all factors which are often considered as preconditions for agency (Philo & Wilbert, 2000). At the other end of the spectrum, advocates of the actor-network theory attribute agency to anything that has an effect, whether animate or inanimate, thus associating agency with action and effect (van der Duim et al., 2017). Carter and Charles (2013) argue that agency is often regarded as causal power invested in singular entities, such as individual animals, and thus is a universal property of sentient beings. This implies that all individual animals have equal capacities to exercise agency despite their position in the social relations of power. Such a claim, however, restricts efforts towards examining how agency is structured, how individual options are shaped by social relations, and how the actions of some animals are more effective than others. This becomes especially important in accounting for, and giving recognition to, the impact of anthropocentric social and cultural relations upon non-human animals, as well as their involvement in the constitution of these relations (Carter & Charles, 2013).

This paper adopts the position that agents, whether human or animal, are enmeshed within particular social and cultural relations and that they can modify their behaviour within those relations according to changing circumstances and choose between alternatives, as well as benefit or suffer as a result of such decisions. Agents are differentiated with regard to their place within the social relations formed in a particular environment (Carter & Charles, 2013). Agency is thus multidirectional in that it does not come from entities alone but is essentially involved in the relations between subjects—human and animal—within specific environments (Pearson, 2017; Philo & Wilbert, 2000; Urbanik, 2012). The possibilities of action for non-human animals are conditioned by their involvement in social relations with other animals. Thus, agency can be considered as a continuum along which all animals, including humans, are positioned (Haraway, 2008; Pearson, 2013). If agency is approached from this relational perspective, it becomes clear that non-human animals are agents entangled in human-dominated structures, which are quite enduring in tourism.

Although animal agency is embedded within diverse and uneven relations of power, this does not disable the chances of action for any particular animal (Carter & Charles, 2013). Ingold (2011) points out that all action is skilled; it does not come ready-made but develops in relation to an organism’s own growth and development in a particular environment. The ability to develop through embodying skill, and the connection of movement in one’s perception, distinguishes animals from inanimate objects as agents. In other words, it is through sensing each other, through movement and emotion, that animate beings develop their agency (Ingold, 2011). We may not share a spoken language with non-human animals, but we do share movement, practices, and embodied life and, thereby, biologically and socially related ways of inhabiting the world (Buller, 2012; Steward, 2009). Hence, animal agency is very much present in the bodily rhythms and routines of everyday life that is shared with animals (Fletcher & Platt, 2018; Higgin, 2012). As such, animal agency is also present in tourism encounters. The stance here is not based on a belief in the mutual and symmetrical intentionality and development of humans and animals to produce tourism experiences but rather a belief in the possible emergence of shared knowledge, practices, and, ultimately, culture (Buller, 2012).

#### *Gaining knowledge about tourism encounters*

Tourism encounters can be considered as events entailing assemblages of social interaction, customer service, production of experience, being in nature, and operating technical gear (Valkonen, 2009). These events largely result from tourism practices involving organised structures which direct staff and tourists to act in particular ways in interpreting the world. Certain practices work as a foundation for routine action in the events, but creative action conducted by staff and tourists is always possible, which indicates that they possess agency (Rantala, 2011). The prevailing studies mainly conceptualise the production and consumption of tourism spaces and experiences as complex bodily practices within a performative process involving human and

non-human factors (Lugosi, 2018). Indeed, the particular practices might be disrupted and reordered when a non-human factor, such as a snowmobile (Valkonen, 2009) or cheese (Ren, 2011) engages with tourism. Hence, versatile entanglements between humans and the environment are crucial in the processes of giving meaning to experiences.

The practice-based approach to tourism contributes to the understanding of how humans and non-humans play a relevant role in what is known as the social life (de Souza Bispo, 2016). Recognising the limits of the purely representational accounts of tourism encounters requires an awareness that to obtain knowledge about these situated, embodied, and moving encounters, one needs methods that allow both the observation of situated practices of tourism and participation in them (Rantala, 2011). As Rantala argues, ethnographic approaches and actual participation are the only ways for researchers to gain practice-related knowledge about the tacit dimensions of tourism encounters in order to evaluate the management of the industry. This notion is crucial in relation to the encounters between humans and the non-human world (Rantala, 2019; see Jæger & Viken, 2014).

The previous studies mainly concentrate on understanding the complex ways humans perceive, use, and develop the natural environment, including animals, to meet the requirements of tourism. From this perspective, the popularity of many animal-based tourism activities is based on the bodily difference between humans and animals, which has to be managed in order to make the encounter “authentic” for the visitor and, at the same time, minimise human impact on the animals (Bulbeck, 2005; Desmond, 2002). The studies acknowledge the practices of commercial tourism activities and the routine and creative actions of humans, both of which set the “agential conditions” (Carter & Charles, 2013) for the animals (and other humans) to exercise their agency. The agential conditions for animals emerge as suitable tourism environments are produced in connection with tourism culture and the motivations and expectations within it (Rantala, 2010).

However, animals impact and even contribute to the production of human practices and spaces (Buller, 2015). Recognising that this also relates to tourism, scholars are shifting towards the view that the presence of non-human animals, as different from non-human factors, matters in tourism. Studies demonstrate that animals are not merely passive objects without any capacity to shape the agential conditions through their actions—whether routine or creative. Indeed, the existing research on tourism and animals indicates that a variety of non-human animals, including dogs (Bertella, 2014; Granäs, 2018), horses (Notzke, 2019), whales (Clove & Perkins, 2005), head lice (Benali & Ren, 2019), and mosquitoes (Valtonen et al., 2020) engage with, interfere with, and inhabit tourism spaces and experiences in multiple ways. Benali and Ren (2019) argue that such non-human agents possess some kind of agency, a view which destabilises the established binaries and emphasises that tourism practices are complex and materially distributed efforts. Hence, tourism scholars have explored human-animal-environment relationships, but they have generally concentrated on developing a theoretical background for human-animal relations in tourism (Cohen, 2009; Fennell, 2012; Markwell, 2015).

The methodological development on evoking the complex, deeply embodied, usually non-verbal interactions that constitute multispecies encounters in tourism has received far less attention. To date, tourism scholars have tended to rely on traditional research methods, such as interviews, dialogue, and observation, thus privileging human agents (Bertella, 2014; Clove & Perkins, 2005; Notzke, 2019). However, recent tourism studies have applied ethnographic approaches to demonstrate the embodied and meaningful interactions between human and animal bodies taking place in contexts such as dog sledding (Granäs, 2018; Haanpää & García-Rosell, 2020) and swamp tours (Keul, 2013). In close relation to tourism, leisure scholars have explored creative methodological approaches on multispecies leisure aimed at bringing animals into the research (Danby et al., 2019). Besides interview techniques, they have relied on the ethnographic and autoethnographic traditions to explore the various lived experiences of being with non-human animals within various contexts, including end of life (Harmon, 2019), match fishing (Markuksela & Valtonen, 2019), and multispecies holidays (Dashper, 2020).

These studies emphasise that animals are capable agents in the experience of tourism spaces and represent attempts to provide more innovative modes of inquiry. However, they lean solely on human language, and thus struggle to appreciate the moving encounters of humans and non-human animals taking place through gestures, spaces, events, and vocal expressions, which imply intricate forms of engagement (Danby et al., 2019; Ingold, 2011). Lorimer (2010, p. 251) states that these multifaceted encounters often “escape talk and text based methods”. However, some kind of “voice” can be given to animals in tourism encounters through affective, speculative, and fluid inquiries (Chakraborty, 2020). Following this line of inquiry, Haanpää et al. (2019) employed videography as a means of accessing the non-representational qualities of multispecies relations in tourism. Indeed, the embodied and often unpredictable forms of engagement in this industry imply that moving image methodologies afford opportunities to embrace the lively and moving encounters between animals and humans.

The ontological manoeuvring of drawing attention to these moving encounters has epistemological consequences in the form of turning attention to the issues of “embodiment, performance, skill and affect as relational and distributed forces and competencies” (Lorimer, 2010, p. 238). In terms of researching the lively encounters, using video as a research tool holds potential in many situations in which traditional methods have struggled (Brown & Banks, 2015; Haanpää et al., 2019; Lorimer, 2010). Thus, the understanding of, appreciation of, and engagement with multispecies encounters in tourism spaces can be further enriched by applying existing moving image approaches that embrace the vitality and movement of animals in order to account for animal agency. Therefore, the application of moving image methods in ethnographic research is discussed next.

### Mobile multispecies video ethnography with minicam

Accessing the intangible spaces of multispecies encounters requires that the researcher be present in the pace and mode of relating, which unfolds through the embodied practice. As Ingold (2011, p. 97) argues, “to regain the currents of life, and of sensory awareness, we need to join in the movements that give rise to things rather than casting our attention back upon their

objective and objectified forms". In relation to this, mobile video ethnography involves the use of a video as a "go along" method consisting of "systematic procedures of accompanying and following research participants as they go about their ordinary mobile routines [...] simultaneously observing how they engage with, and reflect on, their practices, experiences, relations, and surroundings" (Vannini, 2017, p. 156). Within mobile video ethnography, video is not only a way of "seeing there" (Laurier, 2010) but also a way of "feeling there" (Spinney, 2011) or even "making there" (Jungnickel, 2015) as a means of gaining and creating understandings of social worlds emerging through the interactions of living agents.

One crucial problem in grasping human-animal interactions is that they are always on the move, and it is therefore difficult to capture and analyse their multiple and transient contexts (Lorimer, 2010). As Laurier et al. (2006) demonstrate, talk alone is insufficient for understanding highly mobile practices even between humans and their best non-human friends, i.e., dogs. Moreover, despite their many strengths, handheld and especially cameras mounted in a fixed position have their limitations of being too distant and too static when studying the fleeting moments and manoeuvres of humans and animals relating to one another and their environment. Instead of being fixed phenomena, the encounters are tentative events in the sense that they emerge through the movement of bodies in relation to other bodies and materialities, an understanding of which requires engagement with the flow and spaces of that fluid "becoming" (Brown & Banks, 2015). These mobile interspecies practices require that the ethnographer is able to cultivate the lively, bodily, and performative dimensions of lifeworlds through methodological strategies that animate the qualities of the relationships between humans, animals, and their natural and built environments (Vannini, 2015).

The minicam is at the heart of the mobile video ethnography approaches currently gaining a foothold within many interdisciplinary fields, including mobilities research (Spinney, 2011; Spinney, 2015), animal geography (Brown & Banks, 2015; Brown & Dilley, 2012), and tourism studies (Haanpää et al., 2019). A minicam is a compact and rugged digital video camera recording device that is easily worn on the human body, creating unprecedented scenes in go along research (Vannini & Stewart, 2017). A crucial feature of the minicam's ease of physical embodiment is the ability to follow the action and go with the flow of unfolding micro and macro movements. The minicam also has the benefit of repositioning participants and researchers in a continuum of (non)events and material encounters to aid recollection, rather than relying on memory alone, which tends to prefer specific events (Spinney, 2015). Hence, it pushes the frontiers of video technology further as it opens up previously inaccessible more-than-human spaces for inquiry (Brown & Banks, 2015).

To date, the minicam has mostly been used attached to human bodies to evoke the perspective of the wearer attempting to "see" the world as another person sees it (Spinney, 2011). In video-based research that involves animals, the camera is typically mounted in a fixed position or sometimes as a form of "crittercam", i.e., cameras strapped to the bodies of animals, as in wildlife documentaries (Haraway, 2008), with the researcher absent or as unobtrusive as possible in order to minimise the influence of humans and to deploy video in a realist, unreflexive, and uncritical way. In fact, humans and their practices are usually downplayed in terms of both their absence in the video recordings and their roles in the planning, filming, and editing that make the recordings possible. By contrast, ethnographic video engagements that study human-animal relations aim to understand animal lives as they are intertwined with the lives of humans, and thus intentionally bring people into the picture along with the animals in order to create space for a relational understanding (Brown & Banks, 2015; Lorimer, 2010). Some ethnographic work has even used a dog-cam, i.e., a camera strapped to a dog's body, which allows for new, more-than-human ways of seeing and attending events (Brown & Lackova, 2020).

To go beyond the limits of purely representational accounts, I explore mobile multispecies video ethnography drawn mainly from the work of human geographer Katrina M. Brown and her colleagues (e.g., Brown & Banks, 2015) in order to evoke the intimate and intangible spaces of multispecies encounters in tourism. Hence, I draw on vitalist geographies, emphasising that our understanding of the world emerges only through our interactions with that contingent and relational world and the living agents inhabiting it (Greenhough, 2010; Whatmore, 2002). To demonstrate how such an exploration is engaged within actual practice, the context and methodological procedures underpinning this study will be described next.

### Spaces of "sled dog work"

Herein, the broad context is the practice of touristic mushing, which involves using a tailor-made sled on snow cover or a mushing cart on snowless land, pulled by dogs. Although it has become a very popular tourist activity in the Arctic, mushing is not embedded in the local culture of many Arctic destinations (Jæger & Viken, 2014). In touristic perceptions, sled dogs occupy a liminal position, residing on the boundary between the domestic and the wild, and they are associated with the charisma of wolfish ancestry and adventure histories (Granås, 2018; Onion, 2009). Touristic mushing implies that versatile practices are learned, from social interactions and being in nature to taking care of the dogs. Touristic representations and practices tend to commodify the dogs, thus setting strict agential conditions for "being a sled dog" and submissive to human control. As such, touristic practices obscure their presence as living beings engaging in tourism.

The sled dog represents a very broad cross-section of non-human beings, who have similarities as well as considerable differences. A clear characteristic is that sled dogs are trained to be working dogs. The human-sled dog encounters take place in spaces of work in which the most extreme examples of violence against animals can occur (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011). Indeed, musher-sled dog relations and intersections with touristic mushing represent such an instrumental relationship that it can be argued that using the dogs in this way can be abusive. After all, the dogs do not choose to work for the tourism industry, and they cannot necessarily prevent a specific practice. Hence, touristic mushing may rightly be called exploitive. However, every interaction is not necessarily unpleasant and meaningless, either for the dogs or the humans, as specific feelings, and even small actions,

can contest the patterns of exploitation. Accordingly, there is the potential for daily, specific acts to be interwoven with more profound attempts to bring about change in the industry (Coulter, 2016).

Despite the asymmetry in power relations, the working relationship of humans and sled dogs often involves partnership, trust, and increased respect for the abilities of another species (Granäs, 2018; Kuhl, 2011). In the working relationship, the dog's value—or even life—depends largely on their skill in the work they do. Individual dogs will continue to behave in ways that can be considered as expressions of their natural behaviour and/or agency. The idea of choice, however, is linked to the agency of the dogs in their work situation. In this sense, they may be collaborative, form strong bonds and partnerships, and embrace the breadth of the tasks involved in their work (Kuhl, 2011). As such, the working relationship is more complex than a master-slave dynamic, as the dogs shape the encounters through their actions and reactions (Coulter, 2016; Haraway, 2003; Notzke, 2019).

As working animals, sled dogs can be considered both companions and ultimate strangers (Haraway, 2003). Simultaneously, they are animate beings. As all animate beings are fundamentally relational, every being is what it is and does what it does because of its positioning within a community and its reciprocal responses to the lives of other beings. Animate beings, including humans, are, at any moment, what they have become, and what they have become depends on with whom they associate (Haraway, 2008; Ingold, 2013). Similarly, each dog is different, but these differences are constituted in and through its involvement in the productive processes of social life—i.e., a sled dog does not exist without the working relationship with the musher and vice versa. Thus, rather than looking at sled dogs as though they are similar beings to humans, what is needed are ways of accounting for social life that appreciates their differences (Buller, 2015; Ingold, 2013).

Next, I discuss the protocol and practicalities of mobile video ethnography to make the spaces of sled dog work available for reflection. The discussion draws on an ethnographic fieldwork which took place in a sled dog kennel situated in Finnish Lapland. The fieldwork was conducted between summer 2019 and spring 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, which heavily affected the whole industry in the area, including this kennel. The kennel activities occur in conditions varying from multi-day safaris in the cold and darkness of January to short rounds in the heat of July. The high season takes place between early December and mid-April. The great majority of the kennel's dogs are Alaskan Huskies, who work with humans (i.e., staff members and tourists) from all over the world. Although the Siberian Husky and the Alaskan Malamute are breeds that also work in the tourism industry in many Arctic destinations, the Alaskan Husky is most often considered to be the "real husky" despite it not being an officially recognised breed. In this kennel, as in many others, the mushers especially appreciate the breed's physical and mental features (Jæger & Viken, 2014). The staff do not live right next to the kennel, so usually they are present only when they are at work. The video recordings were only one, yet an important, part of the fieldwork, which also included traditional participant observations, discussions with the staff and tourists, and taking fieldnotes.

### Mobile video ethnography in touristic mushing setting

When exploring sled dog-human relations, it is not adequate to essentialise dog actions to factors related to their wild ancestry, as this might obscure the ways in which dogs and humans have come to know each other and their environments and the actual events at hand. Reducing all the actions of the dogs to animal instincts would ignore their agency and individual interactions within the relationships (Brown & Dilley, 2012). Moreover, it is not enough to consider how the roles and characteristics of sled dogs (and humans) become constituted through the norms and existing cultural representations of the tourism industry. Instead, one has to interrogate the everyday spaces and practices of moving sled dog-human encounters.

It is very unlikely that the use of a fixed-position or a handheld video camera—let alone interviewing only the human participants—would make it possible to keep up with and be involved in the intensity of touristic mushing. I felt they were too static and too distant to make accessible the diverse scales of highly mobile and situated practices within sled dog-human encounters (Brown & Banks, 2015). Instead, I chose the GoPro micro camera to be the main device for accessing the moving encounters, due to its overall versatility. The GoPro models are easily wearable on the human body and its extensions. Hence, they conveniently capture point-of-view action to a degree that a normal camera cannot. The GoPro's advantage over other small video cameras comes from its qualities of built-in stability and a fixed wide-angle lens, which allow for a compelling perception of mediated movement (Vannini & Stewart, 2017). Moreover, not only human bodies can wear it; a dog harness called GoPro Fetch allows the micro camera to be mounted either on the chest or the back of a dog.

Three separate GoPro devices were used in this study. The Dog GoPro was attached to the back mount of the GoPro Fetch harness, which was placed on either of the two dogs working as the pair of reliable leader dogs. These particular dogs were chosen by the company staff for their experience and calm temper. The human informants were two mushers working at the kennel, with both a working and leisure background with dogs. The Musher GoPro was mounted to the chest harness of either one of the human informants, depending on the activity in focus, as the working tasks at the kennel are specified for certain people on certain days. A chest-mount was chosen as it was more unobtrusive compared to a head-mount. A third GoPro was attached to my chest harness to enable my going along with the informants, in order to mitigate the problem of not being able to follow up immediately on issues arising from actions, events or the environment (Brown & Banks, 2015) and to assist my recollection by connecting me with the participants in the "the materialities of doing" (Spinney, 2015).

The three GoPro devices were employed to record sled dog-human interactions as the dogs and humans went about their everyday practices at the kennel. Due to the resource-intensiveness of video-based research and some constraints generated when using a camera, it was not intended to cover everything. The practices at the kennel vary in relation to the time of year, so the GoPro was employed during every season, from the intense tourist season during the Christmas holidays to the training season in October. All three devices were mainly employed simultaneously. However, they were not synchronised. They were employed

to record the actual encounters in the activity, such as a tourist safari or training. Hence, neither the humans nor the dogs were wearing the GoPro during the night, for example.

The following insights illustrate how a mobile video ethnography of touristic mushing unfolds. The insights are based on the researcher watching the uncut footage and counting the “happenings” or notable instances. A foundation for the watching process was to focus on scenes which could not be created without the participant becoming “a mobile hybrid-camera” (Brown & Banks, 2015). Hence, the happenings mainly emerged in micro-spaces and micro-events that would be more difficult to comprehend through traditional video ethnography, let alone talk- and text-based methods. I turn next to the insights of how, through go alongs, using a minicam extends the capacities of ethnographic approaches in researching animal agency in tourism.

### Emerging insights

I contend that mobile multispecies video ethnography can contribute to the ethnographic repertoire for researching animal agency in tourism in the following ways.

#### *Brings forth the bodily presence and movement of agents*

Through practices that are not exclusively related to tourism, such as domestication, selective breeding, and goal-oriented training, the dogs are expected to develop and embody the criteria for a *sound* sled dog: strong, hardworking, friendly, and ready for the cold. Sled dogs work with and through their bodies. As such, their bodies are physical instruments of strength and mobility, but, coincidentally, their bodies are also fetishised, as their mere presence in the touristic mushing setting provides wonder and charm for human audiences, and thus has symbolic capital. Their bodies, or parts thereof, are both their make-up and essential instruments (or tools) of/for their labour (Coulter, 2016; Keul, 2013). Hence, the qualities of the dogs' bodies are not the ontological properties of the dogs themselves, but rather become comprehensible within the lived context of working with them (Higgin, 2012).

Understanding each other over species boundaries is crucial in sled dog work. Dogs in general—and sled dogs in particular—are moving creatures that have co-evolved to use expressive bodily movements that humans can understand, develop, benefit from, and be affected by (Haraway, 2008; Kuhl, 2011). Touristic mushing, with its speed, changing terrain and weather, and constantly changing groups of tourists, is produced through multiple scales of highly active and interactive movements of dogs and humans articulating with each other through motion—from the attentive movement of ears and fast loping through the changing terrain to enthusiastic barking and the provision of directions by voice. The interaction also takes place when little or almost nothing seems to be happening other than a tourist petting a dog, which is quite an ordinary thing to do. These are not necessarily moving encounters in a physical sense, but in an emotional sense, they can be highly so.

Through engaging in the action at a proximate distance, the minicam brings forth those events, relations, and happenings which often are challenging for the researcher to see, or at least go unnoticed or unremarked on, which makes them difficult to articulate back into the research (Higgin, 2012). Interestingly, the bodily presence of the agents, including the dogs, becomes more appreciable when the footage of the action camera goes messy, such as when the agent wearing the camera is close to another body. Occasionally, the footage becomes blurred with dog saliva or a dog's breath condenses on the camera screen in certain practices, such as petting the dogs after the safari (Fig. 1). The dogs are performing their “dogness”, and, consequently, the researcher or the musher informant has to clean up the camera screen. This kind of entanglements between a mobile hybrid-camera and the environment, might even make the minicam footage hard to analyse and comprehend.

Set in the context of touristic mushing, the use of the minicam offers up and brings forth corporeal proximities, movements, communication, and bodily traces of dogs and humans to be reflected upon. As such, it allows for opportunities to evoke the continuities, contingencies, and development of embodied sled dog-human interactions as an ongoing process of animal work in which both the dogs and humans engage, inhabit, and create the spaces of tourism in multiple ways.

#### *Makes available the micro-spaces and micro-events of sled dog work*

For touristic mushing, the manoeuvrings of canine-human partnerships are performed through the fluid linking of spaces, such as pen to starting place, safari trails to starting place, and back to the pen. Through mobile video ethnography, touristic mushing becomes understood as a space comprised of these kinds of micro-spaces and micro-events. The micro-spaces include events such as harnessing, the actual sledding, and petting the dogs after the safari before taking them back to their pens (Fig. 2). The events are comprised of the particular closeness of bodily practices, such as a human putting the harness on a dog and the dog licking the human's face. These events cannot be fully comprehended from a fixed and/or distant location or from a series of separate locations.

The minicam brings the spaces and routine practices—and their disruptions—more directly and intimately into the filming process, enabling versatile and novel angles, proximities, and engagement in the action, which are difficult to achieve with a fixed-position or handheld video (Brown & Banks, 2015). The minicam also makes the auditory micro-spaces available; the dog-cam especially registers sound that consists mostly of dogs gasping, barking, whining, and other forms of canine vocal communication, which usually is so loud that humans have to yell if they want to communicate.

Naturally, the vocal communication of different agents intermingles with the sounds from the surroundings. By using a minicam, the sounds of the micro-spaces can be collected as flowing, formed more by a circular movement around than by a fixed



**Fig. 1.** Bodily presence of the agents: A tourist petting the dogs. The blurriness derives from a dog's breath fogging the action camera screen.

location within. As the bodies gasp, bark, and speak, they can be considered as *ensounded* (Ingold, 2011, emphasis in original). In the micro-spaces and micro-events of touristic mushing, the mixture and volume of sounds is so thick that the minicam recordings are even hard to watch afterwards. Through the proximate go along, with its intense visual and auditory repertoires, the minicam enables the researcher to access and comprehend the micro-spaces and micro-events of sled dog work that are shared



**Fig. 2.** A micro-space of sled dog work: Checking the gear before the safari.



across species boundaries. As the dogs' agency is embedded in their entanglement within human-dominated structures of tourism and, hence, uneven relations of power, accessing these micro-spaces and micro-events is crucial in terms of evoking sled dog agency.

#### *Focusing on sled dog work as spatially situated*

Humans and dogs have to adapt both to the norms of the tourism industry and to the conditions of the local environment. These include a high season that takes place during snowy and cold winter weather, followed by a low season of hot summer days when the dogs get to rest. Facing these conditions entails a versatile and often unpredictable array of interspecies social interactions and requires the dogs to be socialised to the norms of the tourism industry. Along with the actual tourist encounters, touristic mushing entails countless hours of work and dedication from the trainers and the dogs behind the scenes to make the tourist-sled dog encounter successful. Humans have to understand the dogs, respect and trust their abilities, and ultimately comprehend them and communicate with them in a way the dogs can understand (Kuhl, 2011).

Despite this socialisation, the encounters do not take place without any unpredictability and disruptions, which often emerge when the dogs carry out their dogness, or humans carry out their practices of being a human, which cannot be erased through socialisation and training. In addition, the partnership can be disrupted by difficulties in interpretation and communication in relation to the environment. For example, in the training, the musher and the leader dogs might have different understandings of the directions or which route to take. If the leader dogs do not understand or do not take seriously the directions given by the musher, the whole team may have to slow down or even stop before a mutual understanding about how to proceed is obtained. In the tourism context, the musher is often a tourist, who is inexperienced and does not necessarily always have the means to understand the dogs' actions.

The tourist musher needs the guidance of the staff and oftentimes of the dogs, especially the team leader dogs that are trained to know the trails, lead the way, and avoid possible difficult parts of the trail. The trails are ready-made, by and through movement, but factors such as weather conditions change the trails constantly, and the tourist musher may not necessarily recognise that certain parts of the trails are potentially dangerous. However, the dogs often do recognise them as such, and therefore the musher does not have to guide the dogs in this respect (Fig. 3). The musher that stands on the sledge adapts to the modalities of movement employed by the dogs and, as a result, both parties come to perceive the environment in similar ways in order to avoid the danger (Fletcher & Platt, 2018). However, this does not mean that accidents never happen.

Mushing as a tourism activity is developed and consumed through the creative actions of the dogs and humans. The dogs participate in the events as more than mere objects that can be placed into relational categories, such as cute and strong. The unpredictable encounters define animals and humans not as subjects and objects but rather as "agentive individuals", contributing to the human-animal-environment relationship (Maurstad et al., 2016). Through the minicam, these constantly changing spaces



**Fig. 3.** On a safari: The dog team spontaneously avoiding an icy patch on the trail.

and events of human and dog agents developing and embodying skill in the surrounding environment can be evoked both for reflection and for audiencing.

### *Ethical implications*

Adopting a minicam video has some significant ethical implications related to consent and mutual benefit. The choices open to dogs, if they can be construed in such anthropocentric terms, are often only open with respect to the actions of humans. Touristic mushing, or sled dog work, requires that the dog wears a pulling harness and, in this study, the camera harness was put on the top of the pulling harness. It was the staff members who decided which dogs would wear the camera. Experience and a fairly calm temper of the dog were the main characteristics used as the rationale for their decisions. This rationale became evident for the researcher, as some of the dogs were not shy in expressing their disapproval of a suggested course of action, which usually resulted in their sitting, turning around, or otherwise avoiding the attachment of the pulling harness, especially when the researcher tried to do it. It became evident that the GoPro Fetch harness could not be used in these kinds of occasions.

Most often, one of the human informants put both the pulling and the camera harness on the dog, with the researcher setting up the dog-cam and adjusting it if necessary. In this way, the procedure went more smoothly, probably because the staff members and dogs knew each other. Although the dogs seemed not to worry much about the presence of the researcher, the attachment of the camera harness and the cameras, the relatively trouble-free actions of setting up the dog-cam, and the filming of the dogs can hardly be taken as their consent. Indeed, it is difficult to trace the ways in which the dogs' actions and reactions might be considered as "informed consent". Thus, in questioning the extent to which the dogs consented to participate in the research, and, in considering the practices of touristic mushing, the actions of the dogs might be taken as a form of "tacit approval" (Hodgetts & Hester, 2017).

The actions related to the choices made reveal the agential role played by the dogs, whilst, at the same time, they embody the very real unequal relations of power between the researcher and musher towards the dogs. This raises questions about the degree and kinds of agency animals might be able to exert in a (mobile) video-based research process, and how and to what extent we can engage with animals on their own terms through the creation and audiencing of (in this case, mobile) audio-visual material (Brown & Banks, 2015). However, using the minicam did allow for non-human ways of being to affect the research more than the usual talk- and text-based approach. The recordings and playback of the go along video allowed the dogs (and humans) a novel chance to articulate their stances in the encounter through their own ways of communication (Haanpää et al., 2019). Both parties in the encounter did what they did instead of merely responding to somebody telling them what to do and, hence, articulated for themselves.

I am not an expert in dog behaviour or welfare, so, to me, everything looked like a normal thing to do. Nonetheless, tourism remains a human practice in which the dogs have a limited amount of choice. The minicam does not necessarily make the audience care about or empathise more with the dogs and reconsider the ethics of touristic mushing. However, neither is the minicam destined to contribute to the negative commodification of the dogs. The go alongs with the minicam occasionally made the familiar practices of touristic mushing even strange for the mushers. At times, they did not recognise their own behaviour and reflected on whether their own actions generated certain unwanted actions of the dogs. They even requested that some parts of the video material be used in training new kennel staff—parts that included both good and bad examples of how mushers should behave with the dogs. Realising that a "bad dog" might actually be a "bad human" could ultimately contribute to developing more positive outcomes for the dogs. In this sense, the micro-spaces and micro-events evoked through using the minicam could be sites of compassion, devotion, and the possibility to learn to act more ethically (Brown & Banks, 2015; Coulter, 2016).

### **Mobile multispecies video ethnography: opportunities and constraints**

Human-dog encounters are often considered mundane and are even taken for granted, but practices as seemingly mundane as walking a dog can be highly sensual and complex activities (Fletcher & Platt, 2018). This paper set out to explore how we might expand our methodological repertoire to evoke animals in complex human-animal encounters in tourism. It showed how touristic mushing becomes comprehensible through the practices of human-sled dog encounters and exemplified how the lens of animal work contributes to understanding that touristic mushing takes place in mixed-species spaces. These are shared spaces in which the dogs adapt to human demands and needs but still shape the multispecies worksites (Coulter, 2016).

The shared knowledge generated in these worksites implies the close proximity and corporeal mobilities of animal and human agents, which are shaped not only by the humans but also by the animals (Bertella, 2014; Haanpää & García-Rosell, 2020). Mobile video ethnography using a minicam enables the novel capturing of unusual audio-visual angles and proximities in the action; indeed, a sense of "there-ness" (Jungnickel, 2015) with animal and human bodies as they go about their lives is generated. Similar scenes of proximity could not be generated when trying to avoid shaky camera shots (Haanpää et al., 2019). From such a perspective, ordinary actions and apparent meaningless nuances that take place in micro-spaces and micro-events, which possibly make a difference to the whole encounter, can be made available. The minicam footage evokes the continuity, ephemerality, and overflow of (micro-)events that situate touristic mushing and sled dog work "within", as a temporal and spatial practice which is constantly forming and transforming as a result of the dogs and humans acting within the realms of the tourism industry and the local environment (Brown & Banks, 2015).

It should be noted that the process does not come without any limitations, mostly due the reliance on complex technology. For example, the camera battery does not last very long when the temperature is far below zero. Moreover, the quality of the footage is dependent on the lighting conditions, which are very challenging in December. Also, the ease of wearing the GoPro on the human body does not necessarily apply to other bodies (Brown & Lackova, 2020). Albeit the GoPro Fetch harness is designed for a dog's body, it does not adapt very well to the intensiveness of mushing. The dog-cam had to be adjusted constantly, as it often fell to the side of the dog, especially when running. In addition, only one of the lead dogs could wear the camera, or there would have been a risk that the main line attaching to all dogs' harnesses and to the sled would break the camera. As such, a minicam is applicable only on certain kinds of animals working in certain contexts. Overall, even more important than the quality of the footage is the compactness, durability, and ease of use of the camera recording device that it is able to follow the action.

Needless to say, the animals' tacit approval (or disapproval) should be understood and respected. This relates to which animals and humans are chosen to participate in the study. Either the researcher has to "know" the animals through a working relationship, for example, or has to make sure that one can rely on the judgement of the people who work closely with the animals. I feel that the human-animal bond based on "everyday encounters" is important, as without the everydayness, it is difficult to respect the situated, corporeal, and affectual practices through which ethical relations are enacted (Brown & Dilley, 2012). Hence, if the researchers study the background of the tourism actor(s) and can rely on their expertise, they do not necessarily need to have competence in animal behaviour and welfare beyond a basic understanding.

After filming, watching, and reflecting on hours of the minicam footage, the resource-intensiveness of mobile video ethnography became evident. Whilst the camera moves with the body, it is not always a pleasant experience to watch the videos, as the evocation of motion, especially on the dog-cam, can cause dizziness or nausea if watched for a long time. In addition, although the minicam footage evokes certain aspects of movements, the footage itself may be difficult for the researcher to make sense of in terms of what the participants thought they were doing or about to do. Nevertheless, I believe that instead of relying on the detailed monitoring and recording of specific movements and action, a more flexible and open-ended approach can assist in developing richer accounts of the situated practices of animal (and accompanying human) lifeworlds (Hodgetts & Lorimer, 2015).

Importantly, despite the minicam's open-endedness and its allowance for "being there", the effects of anthropocentrism are difficult to escape. The researcher, and partly the mushers, chose the device, their locations, and how the material was used. Therefore, to a great extent, the agency resided with the researcher and the human participants, in conjunction with the video technologies. Hence, there was an asymmetry of agency in that the humans had infinitely more opportunity than the dogs to control how their practices were made visible and monitored. One must also be careful to consider how mobile video ethnography might transform or distort multispecies encounters through its mode of recording and representation. Despite being only an extension of the body the camera as a non-human factor has an effect (Brown & Banks, 2015; Haanpää et al., 2019).

Although Brown and Banks (2015) speculate that the dog-cam is a way to allow for diminishing the privileging of humans, I feel that adopting the dog-cam in this research setting could hardly do that in the sense of expanding the dogs' opportunity and agency to actively co-constitute further layers of knowledge. Instead, the dog-cam added an additional layer of messiness, which could provide a new way to reflect on the process of mobile video ethnography both as a method and an alternate mode of knowledge transfer. Embracing this messiness might expand the repertoire of methodological practice and offer new perspectives into ethnographic fieldwork through reconfigured narratives that acknowledge the disordered aspects of life (Jungnickel, 2015).

Furthermore, the footage implies a great potential for a wider audiencing in order to add further layers of knowledge (Brown & Banks, 2015). For example, the mushers might recognise some undesirable actions, which take place subconsciously, but are evoked through the minicam footage. Moreover, experts such as vets and animal welfare scientists may be involved. In future studies and publications of a similar kind, I think that the audience would benefit from an accompanying video, as the written reflections and still pictures alone cannot fully articulate the moving multispecies encounters (Haanpää et al., 2019). Overall, the researcher in this area of inquiry does not need years of professional training, large crews, and very expensive technology (Vannini, 2017). On the contrary, compared to many polished documentaries, these video ethnographies should retain a layer of messiness which could be lost with too much pre-structured shooting and editing.

## Conclusions

Through increasingly innovative methods, the field of tourism studies is beginning to explore the diverse shared social worlds that humans and animals inhabit. This paper explored mobile video ethnography as a means of accounting for those shared social worlds in tourism. The exploration was centred on the possibility of accessing the intimate and intangible spaces and events of human-sled dog encounters through a mobile video-based research process. Through incorporating the minicam, the corporeal mobilities and bodily traces of the agents were made available for reflection. Through focusing on the scenes which could be evoked through go alongs with the minicam, it was illustrated how the footage can be used to reflect on less easily represented aspects of animal work (Coulter, 2016). The go alongs with the minicam produced a version of events and a form of description which would be difficult to follow through traditional ethnographic video, notes, and interview transcripts. It is worth noting that, undoubtedly, the methodology outlined here favours animals whose size and modes of being permit proximal, intensive, and quite long-term relations (Higgin, 2012).

This paper extends recent contributions on the methods of studying multispecies entanglements in tourism, with its main contribution being the expansion of the ethnographic repertoire to account for and evoke (animal) agency as a relationally developed capacity for social action. As other researchers have acknowledged, it is extremely difficult to move beyond anthropocentric

research paradigms and practices, but it is not an excuse to not even try (Dashper, 2020). Building on the recent interest of scholars to take seriously the challenge of accounting for the moving human-animal encounters in tourism, I propose that mobile multispecies video ethnography opens up a way to critically reflect on these encounters through the process of capturing a sense of there-ness. Hence, mobile video ethnography creates possibilities for bringing the obscure and messy aspects of more-than-human “becoming” in tourism into the realms of tangibility and better sensibility (Brown & Banks, 2015). As such, it establishes ways to reflect on the moving encounters taking place through events that imply multiple and even chaotic pathways of engagement (Chakraborty, 2020; Ingold, 2011).

When used in conjunction with go alongs and interviews, bio-sensing technologies (such as wearable technology for animals for health monitoring purposes) could assist in more in-depth recollection of multispecies encounters by offering up data on intensity and quantity (Spinney, 2015). This opens up avenues for further research on the constitution of multispecies encounters within specific environments. Using different technologies alongside each other within interdisciplinary collaboration could contribute to understanding what matters or what might matter to animals in the context of animal welfare (Buller, 2015; Dashper, 2020). This understanding could, in turn, help us to engage in tourism activities more on animals' own terms and better meet the ethical obligations to the animals and their work. The disruptive influences, such as new technologies and environmental crises, also challenge the tourism industry to think about radically different ways of providing services. Hence, there is a need for research that explores the possibilities of technology in developing real-time tourist-animal encounters (Fennell, 2021). Despite the issues arising from too much reliance on technology, the hope rests in using these technologies sensitively to engage, perform, and unfold different realities to allow for theorisations on the agentic roles of lively animals in a variety of tourism landscapes.

### Declaration of competing interest

There is no financial/personal interest that could affect the objectivity of the study.

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