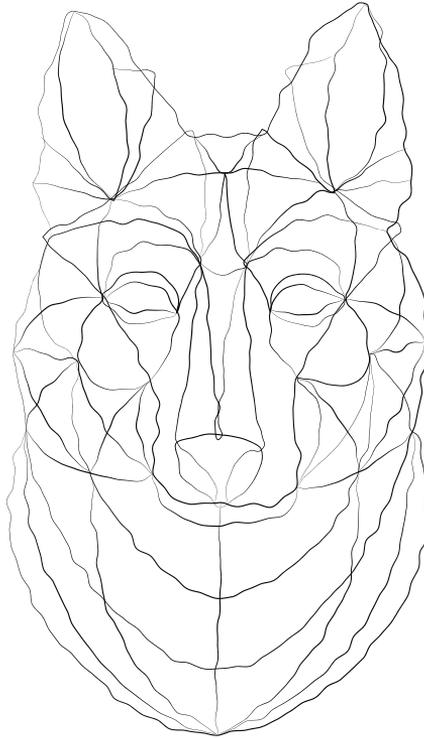


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10 Designing Future Wildlife Tourism Experiences: On Agency in Human– Sled Dog Encounters

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This chapter argues that the acknowledgement of agency contributes to more meaningful human–animal encounters in the context of wildlife tourism. We explore the agency of sled dogs in touristic mushing in order to create a space for re-examining the concept of wildlife tourism, which is often recognised as a subset of activities within nature-based tourism. These activities may be categorised according to impacts (consumptive/non-consumptive), venue (e.g. natural area, wildlife sanctuary or zoo/aquarium) or type of animals encountered (e.g. domesticated/non-domesticated). In addition to the commercialised visitor–wildlife encounters, the core of wildlife tourism comprises unintentional wildlife tourism experiences (Higginbottom, 2004). Due to the wide range of possible activities, venues and encounters, it has been challenging to develop a common definition for wildlife tourism (Skibbins, 2015). Nonetheless, wildlife tourism is founded upon the categorisation of certain animal species as ‘wild’ and as placed in ‘wilderness’ by human orderings (Buller, 2014).

Commonly, sled dogs are not associated with the category of wild, and mushing does not fall under the category of wildlife tourism. Mushing refers to a transport method or sport in which a dog or a team of dogs pulls a sled in snowy conditions, or a rig if there is no snow cover. Historically, sled dogs have represented the utopian ideal of trusted companions conquering the wilderness with ‘a wolfish ancestry’ (Onion, 2009: 154). Mushing as a touristic activity has a rather short history especially in Fennoscandia, but it has become one of the most popular touristic activities in some areas, such as Finnish Lapland (García-Rosell

& Äijälä, 2018). In the tourism context, mushing is a commercialised encounter between dogs, humans and the environment in order to create outdoor experiences. It is mainly based on encountering the charisma of a certain species of domesticated animal – specifically sled dogs – combined with the experience of an environment considered to be semi-wild or even tame (Bertella, 2016). Tourists' expectations of encountering almost wolf-looking dogs do not always meet reality, as individual dogs can differ from wolves by their looks. Despite their tameness, several of sled dogs' behaviour and social interactions are those of wolves, which are seldom reported in other dog breeds (Fiszdon & Czarkowska, 2008). Mushing might also involve encountering species of animals, such as elk, reindeer and fox, which are categorised as (semi-)wild. These encounters contribute to the overall outdoor experience (Curtin, 2009).

The experiences relate to individual human perception of sled dogs, and to the ways in which animals' environments are corporeally sensed and engaged with by the tourist through various activities and multiple senses (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, wilderness and experiencing it through encountering certain species of animals is a human perception (Vannini & Vannini, 2016), which is not necessarily made up of the exotic but, instead, can take place through animal encounters in mundane settings (Curtin, 2010). In the future, tourists may be driven to seek out such experiences through an understanding of animals and their environment, and through engagement with non-human 'others' (Curtin, 2009). The experiences may also emerge through meaningful engagement with animals that are categorised as domesticated, but possess characteristics of wildness as a system that produces wilderness and wild things depending on the quality of the interaction from and among its components (Cookson, 2011). In the context of touristic mushing, sled dogs bridge the boundary between wild and artificial living, as tourists are caught between the security of readily provided resources and the temptation of wildness (Bertella, 2016).

Along with a desire to seek meaningful encounters with animals, there is a growing critical assertion that understanding the value of the human–animal encounters only through business-oriented terms neglects the ethics, agency and, at worst, the welfare of animals working in tourism (Fennell, 2012). Within the context of neglecting animal agency in wildlife tourism, we ask: How can the agency of sled dogs be evoked in a wildlife tourism context? How can the use of technology support the evoking of agency? How can design that acknowledges animal agency create new types of service value in the future? All the dogs (and humans) are individuals, who bring their own life history and experiences to the encounters and through their motile presence effect change on the institutional structures of tourism (Bertella, 2014; Notzke, 2019). Accordingly, we acknowledge that sled dogs working in tourism have agency (Buller, 2012; Koski & Bäcklund, 2017; Philo & Wilbert, 2000). Through

recognition of sled-dog agency, we consider changes to critically examine the wildlife tourism concept in relation to the wildness of a particular environment.

We focus on the experiential aspect by adopting a speculative design approach (Dunne & Raby, 2013) to touristic mushing. Speculative design has been used as a tool for defining the design challenge and for ideating possible future scenarios. By exploring touristic mushing as a practice of interspecies relationship, we argue that sled dogs shape the wildness of a particular environment, which is an important factor of wildlife tourism. The study presents a narrative of potential futures and makes explanatory, but not truth, claims; this approach resonates with the critical use of science fiction as an ontological framework for tourism futures (Yeoman & Postma, 2014). The narrative suggests that the lack of mutual understanding may hinder more meaningful human–animal encounters. Rather than seeing sled dogs merely as objects of human desires to experience nature, however, our speculative concept illustrates what wildlife tourism could be like in the future if the animal with its practices is considered as a crucial agent. In doing so, the study contributes to envisioning future wildlife tourism as a space where collaborative encounters with animals are acknowledged (Lulka, 2004; Picken, 2018).

Experiencing the Environment Through Human–Sled Dog Encounters

Animal charisma is an essential asset in wildlife tourism, thus animals, such as polar bears, big cats and orcas, are appealing for tourists (Skibbins, 2015). For Lorimer (2007: 915), non-human charisma is the ‘distinguishing properties of a non-human entity or process that determine its perception by humans and its subsequent evaluation’. Non-human charisma is partly a result of human perception, which means that the appeal of particular animals for particular tourists is based not only on the animals’ natural characteristics, but also on the subjective expectations of a tourist. In addition to animal charisma, the environment, objects such as housing systems for animals and subjects such as the guiding musher all play a part in making a memorable experience (Bertella, 2014). However mundane an encounter with wildlife in someone’s backyard or in a remote destination might be, it can contribute to an individual’s experience of ‘the wild’ (Curtin, 2009).

Memorable experiences can be produced through multiple senses such as sight, sound, smell and touch (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2011). When animal charisma is accompanied by perceived natural settings and factors, such as an emotional connection, the human–animal encounter may lead to a memorable experience (Hughes, 2013). When encounters are directly ‘in nature itself’, such connections may be amplified (Bentrup-perbäumer, 2005: 88). The attractiveness of mushing is partly based on

representations of exotic environments, which are produced in tourism marketing that commodifies nature as wild (Vannini & Vannini, 2016). Touristic mushing activities could emphasise connections to the entire ecology of wildness, as mushing and the presence of sled dogs contribute to the profiling of nature as an accessible and welcoming ‘natural’ space (Bertella, 2016). However, non-humans are usually excluded from being considered as subjects contributing to the touristic experience (Bertella, 2014).

Tourism consists not only of the consumption and production of experiences happening in isolation from other elements of life, but is also ‘enacted in combination with many other “non-touristic” practices’ (Ren *et al.*, 2019: 4), involving practices of non-human beings as components (Granås, 2018). Practices of non-humans, such as habitual behaviours of animals, often conflict with human categorisations of spaces, objects and ideas, in order to protect their own safety and spatial boundaries (Buller, 2014; Lulka, 2004). Mushing as a touristic activity exists to produce experiences, but as a practice it is inseparable from the embodied nature of movement in human–sled dog encounters. Like walking, mushing is an embodied practice; it is not only about journeying from place to place but also about an open-ended movement ‘having neither a point of origin nor any final destination’ (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008: 2). As an interspecies practice, mushing has to be learned by dogs, mushers and, at least to some extent, tourists. It is the human’s responsibility to adapt to the dogs’ embodied presence in order to understand the dogs, to respect and trust their abilities and, ultimately, to comprehend the dogs and communicate with them in a way they can understand (Kuhl, 2011).

In addition to dog sledding, mushing comprises of versatile practices related to taking care of the dogs. Developing and maintaining the housing systems require a huge amount of work. The dogs live in tethers or kennels. For a tourist, a tether is usually the worst option as it seems more restrictive of the dogs’ freedom of movement. These are ‘sites where the material reality of the housing system itself combines the practices of human and nonhuman agents, with science, and with politics’ (Bjørkdahl & Druglitrø, 2016: 1). Dogs and tourists may not be fully aware of each other’s modalities, nor of human policies allowing or restricting these modalities, which may lead to unpleasant encounters for one or both parties. Sled dog and human participants in touristic mushing activities have to be able to adapt to each other’s bodily presence in order to develop shared practices; otherwise, positive encounters between them would be impossible. Therefore, there is the potential for both participants to make a difference in the encounter in versatile and unexpected ways (Koski & Bäcklund, 2017). Coping under these conditions requires that each party copies all the possible modalities of movement employed by the other and, as a result, both parties come to perceive the environment in similar ways (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008: 11).

Sled-Dog Agency in Tourism

Within the framework of tourism, we might think that animals are forcibly involved in tourism activities without the opportunity to consent to their involvement. Animals may be both unable to fully understand the regulations of engagement in such activities and vulnerable to human desires (Dashper, 2019). Even if they are aware of these complexities, they lack the equal freedom to choose; this is because animals are subject to human values, and human values are likely to be self-interested under commercial pressure (Dashper, 2014). This is particularly significant in a global industry such as tourism. Tourism as a social institution is not meaningful to animals as such, but it nevertheless fundamentally influences their lives. In turn, tourists are increasingly aware of the issues pertaining to animal-based tourism. Through client pressure, animals affect both the institutional structures and the people working in tourism (Notzke, 2019).

Agency is often understood as a manifestation of free will and moral behaviour possessed exclusively by human beings. This understanding becomes troublesome, however, as beings, including non-human animals, can adapt to the behavioural standards of their groups. These encounters can even be broadened to include an interspecies sense of morality (McFarland & Hediger, 2009: 6). Despite the shared and reciprocal nature of interspecies agency, however, animals' capacity to act and co-habit with humans is usually asymmetric and unequal (Haraway, 2003). Nevertheless, animal agency can have effects beyond the bounds of the spaces where they are immediately present, as human–animal relations operate beyond the boundaries of physical proximity and animals 'are able to have an effect on humans at-a-distance' (Philo & Wilbert, 2000: 2). The ability to act, effect change or make a difference is multi-directional and does not come from individuals alone, but 'is engaged in relations' (Urbanik, 2012: 43).

Dog agency is difficult to define, as the social space of dogs is both inside and outside of human society and our understanding of dogs' consciousness and self-fulfilment is limited (Koski & Bäcklund, 2017). Dogs are seen as both 'man's best friend' with the capability for rational thought, and as objects for human values. Sled dogs in particular occupy a liminal position, as they reside on the boundaries of the domestic and the wild (Onion, 2009). However, the shared interspecies agency of dogs and humans can blur the status of the sled dog as hovering between that of a pet, a working animal and even a (semi-)wild animal (Jones, 2003). Agency is relational and situational and varies depending on the conditions of time, space, materiality, embodiment and relations to other agents and their positions (Buller, 2012; Philo & Wilbert, 2000). Dogs cannot manifest agency by engaging in two-way verbal communication with humans about their housing conditions or their lives in general. However, mutual understanding can occur in an embodied way through

dogs and humans engaging in non-verbal communication and collaboration (Danby & Hannam, 2016). Through movement, animals enact, develop and communicate their agency to others, just as humans do. This creates new co-assemblages of movement (Buller, 2012). Hence, to recognise the agency of sled dogs it is more important to pay attention to the emerging set of knowledges and practices shared through body movement, than it is to consider the mutual intentionality or sense of a broader ontological construction between the human and non-human actors (Buller, 2012).

Sled dogs adapt to the conditions of touristic mushing but their presence reveals a contradictory space; these contradictions include questions of self-fulfilment, forms of interaction, political possibilities and restrictions in structural and everyday power relations (Koski & Bäcklund, 2017; Philo & Wilbert, 2000). The interspecies agency between humans and sled dogs shapes touristic practices materially and socially with innovative outcomes, and accordingly produces material impacts, which disrupt the touristic representations of places (Granås, 2018). As a result, the sometimes-unexpected visibility of animals creates shared spaces, where new meanings are created by both humans and animals (Lulka, 2004). These new meanings can disrupt the representation of wilderness as a pristine place for wildlife tourism (Vannini & Vannini, 2016), which can have effects on our understanding of wildlife tourism. In the next section, we introduce a future scenario, which proposes how sled dogs as agents could contribute to experiencing wildness in the context of wildlife tourism.

Designing Future Wildlife Tourism Experiences with Sled Dogs

Our aim in creating a future scenario for wildlife tourism is to find alternative means of experiencing and developing the human–sled dog encounter. For our design approach, we have combined two different design methods: service design to provide a process structure and framework for our design activities, and speculative design to provide us with future-oriented design tools.

Service design

Service design is a holistic field that looks at service systems in terms of the core principles of human centeredness and co-creation (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). In examining the needs of all agents in a service system, service design aims to provide value through creating service solutions that may contain both digital and physical elements (Miettinen & Koivisto, 2009). In multichannel service systems, the service environment itself also plays a significant role in creating a service experience. Designers can implement solutions inspired by nature by highlighting animal practices and spatial perceptions as components of wildness at different service stages.

By definition, a service is produced and consumed simultaneously. This is one basis for the view of value co-creation in a service encounter (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Shostack, 1985), whether as human–human interaction or as an encounter between humans and non-humans. As the human-centred approach is dominant in service design, the views of non-human agents are often neglected. Nevertheless, many service encounters also include non-human agents such as machines or living entities such as animals; these agents should be considered in the value co-creation process of tourism services (García-Rosell *et al.*, 2019).

Our design activities take inspiration from studies concerning the service encounters between non-human and human agents in which animals are considered as active subjects in creating touristic experiences (Bertella, 2014). As a basis for our design process, we use the double diamond design process model (Design Council UK, 2015; Stickdorn *et al.*, 2018), a commonly used framework in service design. The process model is divided into four phases. The discovery phase (1) aims to collect information and to observe the conditions, activities and agents in the service in order to find out the needs and challenges that exist. The definition phase (2) is based on the findings from the previous phase and aims to define the design challenge that is then taken into the (3) ideation phase. The delivery phase (4) includes the final design of the service solution and its implementation in the service practice.

Speculative design

Speculative design is the practice of using creative methods to develop conceptual alternative futures and to imagine possible solutions, in order to identify design challenges. The approach aims to provide better understanding of current issues and to generate dialogue for future solutions and desires. Speculative design does not make predictions or forecasts. It instead provides alternatives without stating claims of truth (Dunne & Raby, 2013), thereby giving space for creativity without the boundaries of the current world. Speculative design can be used as a tool to explore futures that help us reflect on, understand and possibly alter current situations (Barbrook, 2007). Additionally, it incorporates elements of critical design such as questioning the underlying assumptions of life, avoiding taking ideas for granted and exploring alternatives (Dunne & Raby, 2013). As a design tool, speculative design is inspired by science fiction and allows designers the freedom of being detached from the world’s current boundaries (Yeoman & Postma, 2014).

Design process

Based on the service design double diamond process model, a series of design activities were conducted by the authors. In the discovery phase, several video recordings of touristic mushing activities were used

as empirical material for observation. The videos recorded a touristic summertime mushing experience that occurred in Finnish Lapland in 2019. The authors focused on observing the following: sled dog behaviour, interactions between sled dogs and mushers, the environment and the interactions between sled dogs and tourists. As a result, four main themes for ideation were defined: (1) the agency of sled dogs, (2) bodily movement, (3) the use of technology and (4) trends in wildlife tourism.

Using speculative design as a tool, ‘what-if’ speculation was geared towards ascertaining scenario drivers, needs and possible emotional aspects concerning a future scenario in which the sled dog is the centre of human–animal interaction in a wildlife tourism context. By applying this animal-centred approach, the following design drivers were chosen to guide the creation of the final future scenario:

- What if, in the future, the dog’s needs and free will came before the customer’s and service provider’s perspective in mushing?
- What if tourism operators based their activities significantly on scientific research on sled-dog agency (e.g. movement in sled dog–human encounters)?
- What if dogs had the power to decide whether they want to interact with humans, or even to decide not to work at all?
- What if technological devices, such as cameras and phones, were not permitted at all on the sites where dog sledding activities take place?
- What if mushers and tourists were able to comprehend the emotions, vital statistics and preferences of dogs through human- and animal-embedded technology?
- What if only a limited group of people were able to participate in sled-dog activities?
- What if it was mandatory that tourism agencies educate tourists before permitting them to participate in sled-dog activities?

The design drivers were used as inspiration for ideating possible solutions that could exist in the kind of future that the drivers frame. Contradicting the usual human-centred approach, we tried to remain animal centred throughout the exercise in order to be free from our human assumptions as much as possible. Thus, we were able to create an alternative and speculative scenario for wildlife tourism. The resulting scenario is introduced in the following section.

Future Scenario: A Day in the Life of Alanis

In addition to the defined design drivers, we assumed a future in which the structure of the touristic mushing activities would not have changed drastically. Therefore, we were able to use the structure of an existing full-day sled-dog safari as the basis for our scenario, which

represents a 24-hour period from the perspective of a sled dog. Through the utilisation of technology and the recognition of the importance of movement in the environment, the scenario was built to communicate a possible multisensory wildlife tourism experience (Wohlwill, 1966).

The character presented in the scenario is called Alanis, an alias for one of the dogs observed in the first design phase. Alanis is a female Alaskan husky who lives in Finnish Lapland, in a kennel together with another dog. At birth, a chip was inserted under her skin, allowing her vitals to be monitored and stored, including information on her moods, needs and preferences. Without making any claims about how the technology might work, we assume that it plays an important role in translating the needs of the dog towards humans, thereby amplifying her exercise of agency.

During her day, Alanis interacts with other dogs in her surroundings. In our scenario, we recognise that dog-to-dog communication is an important part of Alanis's life. Because this is a natural part of her behaviour as a dog, we do not want to intervene with this interaction by introducing any technological solution to this issue.

Other agents around Alanis are the mushers and the tourists who are participating in the mushing activity. During our observation, we realised that the tourists are often unable to form a personal connection with the dogs. The use of technologies such as phones is acting as a barrier between the humans and animals, preventing the tourists from being fully immersed in the moment. Therefore, in our scenario all technological devices from the tourists are banned. Instead, they are provided on their arrival with a small earpiece, which allows them to access the transmission of one dog's data and real-time information during the mushing activity. Through this technology, the tourist is able to better understand the behaviour and mood of Alanis, thereby forging a more personal connection with her.

Currently, mushers probably have the greatest knowledge of dogs' behaviours and needs. In our scenario, an earpiece and a technological contact lens provide real-time information pertaining to the dog's vitals, emotions and needs. The earpiece functions as a transmitter of the dog's data through voice. The lens adds augmented reality to the vision of the musher, showing alerts based on the vitals of an individual dog. Such technology pieces can also be used for receiving real-time weather information and navigation road maps, as well as alerts about the environment. Mushers are then able to use this information in their interactions with and guidance of the dogs. These fictional technological tools have been utilised in this study to create a scenario concerning a typical day in the life of Alanis during the tourist season. Figure 10.1 places Alanis as the key actor in a scenario for future wildlife tourism, illustrating clockwise the various activities she is involved in, as well as her interactions with other dogs and human participants (i.e. mushers and tourists).

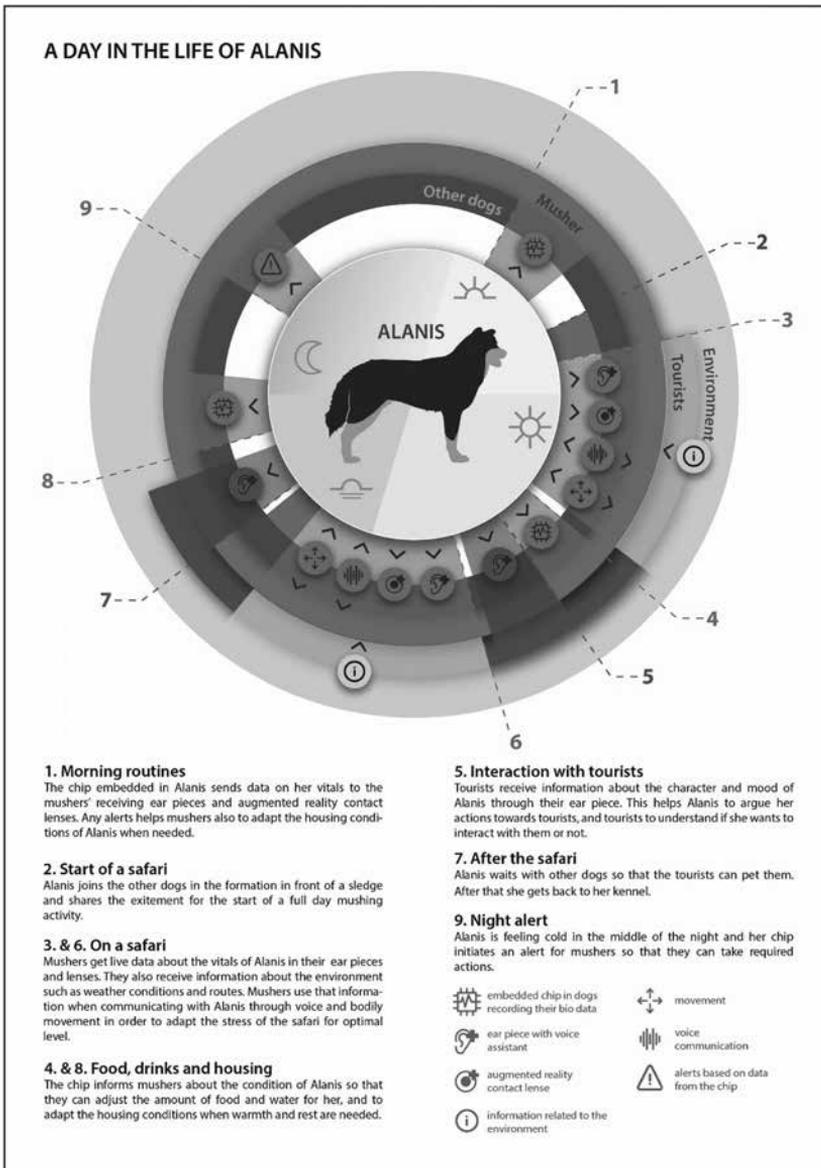


Figure 10.1 'A day in the life of Alanis': Future wildlife tourism experience from a sled dog's point of view

Discussion

Through the speculative scenario, we explored how sled dogs could be better acknowledged as agents in the interaction of components of wildness through the use of technological solutions that better enable the interspecies encounter to be experienced and interpreted.

The information generated by the future scenario is primarily based on the assumption that the role of the animal can be put in the centre of the value co-creation (García-Rosell *et al.*, 2019). By designing services in a way that moves beyond the limiting abstract symbols and icons of human language, and the overestimation of our mastery and agency, we can leave room for acknowledging the agency of other beings. In our scenario, we have demonstrated how utilisation of human- and animal-embedded technology can offer a better chance for animals to manifest their agency in tourism. Through technology, humans are better able to understand the needs and emotions of animals. Therefore, a service design supported by future technology could enable the interpretation of human–animal interactions and eventually make them more meaningful.

We have discussed that in the future humans may have more accurate and versatile means of engaging in mutual understanding with sled dogs, which will help with the acknowledgement of animal agency in tourism. We have also imagined that this possibility will impact how tourism experiences will be designed and lived. Recognising animals as agents and creating more possibilities to engage in mutual meaningful interaction also entails ethical implications, as the agency of animals impacts their own fate which oftentimes depends on human actions and desires (Notzke, 2019). If animals are to be considered as co-creators of experiences, we have to move away from a human-centred approach which neglects the capability of animals for agency. Future technologies might be a solution but they also offer the possibility of further complexity, as technological devices have agency and may themselves shape the human–animal encounter (Brown & Banks, 2015). The continuous presence of technology and engagement with complex information might therefore disrupt the unique embodied encounter between non-human animals and humans (Webber *et al.*, 2017). Still, technological advances create a compelling possible future for re-scaled, embodied interspecies encounters (Hodgetts & Lorimer, 2015: 289). As a result, we may have to radically change the ways in which we practice animal-based tourism – or even suspend them altogether.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have explored how touristic mushing might contribute to envisioning wildlife tourism futures when sled-dog agency is acknowledged. In our speculative scenario, we placed a particular dog in the centre of a fictional future service and explored the moving encounters this dog generated with other agents during a typical day. These speculative encounters were made more meaningful through the use of future technology, which enabled non-human and human agents to better interpret and understand each other. In the context of touristic mushing, sled dogs are important agents since they contribute to the quality of the interaction among the components of wildness including humans

and the environment. Indeed, components of wildness might include not only encounters with wildlife but also the embodied experience of our own animality (Curtin, 2010). The embodied experience is enabled by the close encounter with sled dogs and mediated by technological devices. Meaningful encounters can also lead to an educational experience if a tourist is able to sense the needs and emotions of the dog. As a result, shared spaces and new meanings can be co-created through human–animal interactions; this is of particular significance to the ethical dimension of animal-based tourism.

Through discussion of the concept of agency, we have drawn attention to encounters between humans and sled dogs in tourism and, more importantly, to the capacities of animals to be co-creators of tourism experiences. Non-human animals shape such encounters through their actions by bringing their own life histories and experiences to the encounters. We recognise that our future scenario does not erase the issue of human interpretation in terms of animal’s actions, but we hope that it is a step forward in creating possibilities for more meaningful ways for animals and humans to interact in the context of tourism. In our view, the design of services should be concerned with finding ways to extend the mutual capacities of humans and non-human animals. More collaborative human–animal encounters might also contribute to a mutual development of tourism knowledge (Picken, 2018). Through concern for sled-dog agency in relation to wildlife tourism, we call for a closer investigation of differing spaces and practices of particular animalities in particular spaces of tourism. Notwithstanding that agency is a highly complex concept, it can bring new insights through the acknowledgement of animals as co-creators in the future planning of (wildlife) tourism.

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