

Helena Eichner

**Exploring Animal Welfare and Wellbeing of Working Sled Dogs through  
Autoethnography**

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Author: Helena Eichner

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, animal-based tourism has developed to be the number one tourism activity in Finnish Lapland, especially dog sledding. With this development, the number of reported incidents around animal wellbeing within the industry increased, while talks about animal welfare and wellbeing and the need for changes emerged. As a result, the interest of both scholars as well as the public shifted towards concern for animals working in the tourism industry.

Previous studies about animal welfare and wellbeing are, for example, focusing on exploring animal welfare and good cases. However, all previous research has in common that the researcher comes from outside the industry. Therefore, my research explores the animal wellbeing of huskies at work from an insider perspective. The study aims to examine how different practices among kennels are constructed and impact the wellbeing of the dogs, as well as taking human-animal relations and their impacts into account.

Mellor's Five Domains are used as the main theoretical concept and provide insight into different factors influencing welfare and wellbeing. This is then connected to human-animal relations to examine how wellbeing and welfare are constructed.

To do so, autoethnography is used, and log entries are created about observations and experiences while working in different kennels. This method provides the opportunity to explore a multidimensional setting while at the same time challenges the researcher to include animals in the picture. It is expected that the outcome will show how practices, as well as human-animal interactions, influence the wellbeing and welfare of working sled dogs. In addition, it will provide a new insight into the field due to the insider role of the author.

**Keywords:** Animal Wellbeing, Human-Animal Relations, Mellor's Five Domains, Animal Welfare, Autoethnography

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research phenomenon & Background

The use of animals in tourism is not a recent phenomenon, instead it has been practised for many centuries. However, only in rather recent years has the interest in exploring the multifaceted relations between humans and animals emerged in tourism research (Hooper & Kline, 2024). Within the field, there are many different studies with different aims but also different animals, but all with the same or similar result of the need to rethink animal use in tourism in order to improve the wellbeing and welfare standards (Sheldon, 2024).

Winter (2020), for example, studied the variety of literature focusing on animal ethics in tourism. In her findings, the studied animals vary from animals in captive environments, such as Giraffes living in zoos and the ethical reasoning of euthanasia as studied by Cohen and Fennell in 2016 (as cited in Winter, 2020, p. 13). Other research has been focusing on pet dogs, as Carr in 2017, with the focus on how they are included and taking part in travelling (as cited in Winter, 2020, p. 13). Besides the moral and ethical questions, there are also studies aiming to understand tourism experiences in animal-based tourism, focusing on sled dogs, as undertaken by Haanpää and García-Rosell (2020). Not all studies are directly researching how to increase animal welfare; however, the motivation to understand animal use in tourism and its challenges and opportunities is just as much a part of it.

Besides scholars, tourists as well as some travel agencies show increasing interest in the animal wellbeing of working animals, resulting in a more discussed field and actions needed to improve and communicate those (García-Rosell et al., 2018). Especially in areas like Finnish Lapland, the tourism industry includes many working animals, such as Huskies, Reindeer and Horses. To improve their wellbeing, there are several ways companies can include and improve animal welfare in their organisation, as found in a guide by Bohn et al. (2018). Ensuring the wellbeing of working animals is mainly done by human workers who are acting according to instructions or rules given by their employer (Coulter, 2016a). Those human workers perform a complex job of learning about characteristics and usually are the ones who know the working animals the best (Coulter, 2016a).

In Finnish Lapland, there are different animal-based tourism offers. However, husky farms are the most common ones (Bohn et al., 2018). According to the research from Bohn et al. (2018), there were 42 husky kennels in Finnish Lapland in 2018. Since then, the number of tourists increased and so did the number of husky kennels (Mäkila, 2025, October 29). However, the actual number of dogs or kennels is currently not known, with estimations suggesting there to be over 50 husky kennels in Finnish Lapland (Warda & Tallberg, 2025, February 14). Over the last few years, the interest of the public, tourists, as well as locals and others, in the wellbeing of the huskies working in the business has increased (Bertella, 2016; Bohn et al., 2018). Just recently, an article in SEY, Animal Welfare Finland, published a report about the lack of welfare and wellbeing in the industry (Mäkila, 2025, October 29). According to the report, there is a long list of issues found in kennels, such as too short chains the dogs live on, or the lack of medical care for the dogs (Mäkila, 2025, October 29). Especially the worst cases bring a lot of attention to animal welfare and wellbeing in husky kennels, but also show the need and importance of exploring the huskies' wellbeing.

For this study, I will focus my research on how animal wellbeing is constructed through human-animal interactions based on my lived experiences. Since wellbeing and welfare are closely related and connected topics, both terms are used to distinguish between factors which are strongly influenced by humans, welfare, and factors which influence the animal's mental state and therefore, wellbeing.

In October 2020, I first started to work at a husky kennel in Finnish Lapland. Since then, I spent every winter season, and most summers too, working at different husky kennels, including the time of my studies. Therefore, my experience and knowledge gained over the years is used to explore and understand several practices observed at work from November 2024 until January 2026. During the working days, I collected the data used for this study while working at three different kennels during that time. The overall aim of this work is to gain insight into the topic of animal welfare and wellbeing, based on my experiences and observations.

## 1.2 Previous research

When aiming to provide a bigger picture of where to place research about human-animal relations and animal welfare, it makes sense to start with nature-based tourism studies and research, in which animal-based tourism is a subcategory. According to Fredman and Margaryan (2021), nature-based tourism is defined to include activities undertaken when travelling to and visiting nature areas which are not to be found in one's direct surroundings. Within the field of nature-based tourism, there is a variety of subcategories, such as outdoor tourism, wilderness tourism, or animal-based tourism (Fredman & Margaryan, 2021).

Within the field of animal-based tourism, there are several forms of tourism and human-animal interactions, such as those found in zoo visits, travels into nature and possible human-animal interactions, just to name a few (Tomassini & Bertella, 2024). Just as many possible forms of animal-based tourism there are, there are about as many different fields and approaches to studying human-animal interactions. For example, Tallberg et al. (2022) focuses on an interpretation of the stakeholder theory in human-animal relations, while Løken and Lyngstad (2019) focus on the experiences and relations between dogs and humans when being outside in Nature.

The researched topics concerning human-animal relations have experienced an increase in interest over the last few decades. This includes studies about how the use of animals influences and shapes a tourist's experience, as studied, for example, by Bertella (2014) or Haanpää and García-Rosell (2020). Both articles focus on how huskies shape the perception of the environment and, therefore, have an influence on the whole experience. Studies to create more inclusion of animals in research are studies around the 'animal gaze', such as a study from Tomassini and Bertella (2024), where they point out the missing inclusion of animals in research methods, as well as the need for more in-depth human-animal studies within tourism research. According to Tomassini and Bertella (2024), the concept of a gaze is defined to be "an individual's (or group's) awareness and perception of other individuals or groups" (Tomassini & Bertella, 2024, p. 351). The 'human gaze' in tourism is defined as how one experiences and perceives the surrounding spaces. In addition, the human gaze is also strongly connected to the power imbalance between animals and humans and can also be used

to explore those power structures and relations (Tomassini & Bertella, 2024). The ‘animal gaze’, on the other hand, focuses on how animals would perceive their surroundings and space (Tomassini & Bertella, 2024). As the human gaze as well, the animal gaze focuses on the power structures and imbalances within it (Tomassini & Bertella, 2024). However, Tomassini and Bertella (2024) concluded that there is a great lack in literature and research about the animal gaze.

Tourism offers a great chance to study human-animal relations, as there are numerous types of animal use, such as working animals or captivity. Rickly and Kline (2021) published a book in order to explore the different forms of tourism which make use of working animals.

According to Rickly and Kline (2021), there are three main research streams when looking at animal labour. Those are animal welfare, agency and rights. First off, animal agency is a stream in multispecies studies with the aim of exploring how animals cope and respond to their surroundings and the conditions they are kept in. Therefore, in a tourism setting, animals cannot choose their own work or conditions. The second stream is about animal rights, exploring legal requirements as well as the need to change those (Rickly & Kline, 2021).

Lastly, animal welfare research is focused on the quality of life, which is based on the basic needs of animals, which can be measured by applying, for example, the concept of five freedoms. The five aspects here are freedom from pain or injury, hunger or thirst, distress or fear, discomfort and freedom to express their typical behaviour. As research about animal welfare increased, the model was updated several times, and new ones got created. One model, that got created by Mellor and Reid in 1994, is the so-called five domains model (Hampton et al., 2023). The initial idea behind the model was to offer a way to assess animal welfare, which includes both negative and positive aspects and influences. The five domains here are nutrition, health, behavioural interactions, physical environment and mental state. However, using models in order to identify animal welfare standards has great limitations. The greatest one to be the issue is that humans assess animals based on their subjective opinion. Psychological indicators cannot be put into objective terms and cannot be easily measured. Therefore, the part of assessing the mental state can be challenging. It can be concluded that applying models to assess animal welfare standards is rather human-centred (Hampton et al., 2023).

Animal welfare is a concept which has been studied across several fields, such as veterinary care, farmers and animal transporters (Fennell & Markwell, 2015; Fennell et al., 2023). Fennell (2013) describes animal welfare as “a family of perspectives that deal with scientific and moral questions regarding the use of animals” (cited from Fennell & Markwell, 2015, p. 1). Within the field of animal welfare, one of the most mentioned points is the perception that the usage of animals to benefit companies and humans is legit as long as their lives and needs (such as hunger, thirst, and health) are met (Fennell & Markwell, 2015). The development of this field in the last few decades is based on several reasons. Tourists are more aware of possible negative welfare standards (García-Rosell et al., 2018), while others challenge the human-centric approach of animals used in tourism (Fennell et al., 2023). Therefore, companies started to create and apply improved animal welfare standards, such as improving safety measures, training of animals and aiming for transparency (García-Rosell et al., 2018). Those efforts are not solely concerning companies, but also scholars have conducted research about it. García-Rosell et al. (2018) created a guide for good practices among animal-based companies in Finnish Lapland, but also aimed to explore current situations.

When talking about animal welfare and how to improve it, it does not solely focus on the effort from companies and scholars, but also needs to educate tourists about it (von Essen et al., 2020). This can either be done by companies themselves or by travel agencies selling the products. Educating about animal welfare for working dogs can be done through different channels, with the most common one being social media. As von Essen et al. (2020) discuss, social media can be used to educate tourists about working animal welfare standards, just as the use of technology can do. However, on the other hand, social media can also be used to post about experiences or pictures of working animal encounters. Those posts can create an expectation for others of specific encounters or even promote practices which are against working animal welfare (von Essen et al., 2020). Fennell (2023), on the other hand, suggests that the use of warning labels can help tourists to identify the offered working animal-based activity’s welfare standards as well as possible conservation standards.

As more travel agencies and companies are emphasising working with companies focusing on animal welfare, there has been an increase in creating guides for animal welfare (Fennell et al., 2023). With the focus of tourists shifting towards choosing good animal welfare standards, companies need to communicate their efforts in order to keep their guests. In their study, Font

et al. (2019) found that animal welfare is often not one of the main goals of improvement for tourism associations, which means that animal welfare is often left out when creating sustainable development strategies. As a result, animal welfare is often lacking in official development strategies (Font et al., 2019).

Moving forward, the focus of this study is the welfare and wellbeing of huskies living in tourism kennels. In this more specific field, a variety of research has been conducted. A similar study undertaken as a Master's thesis by Beuttner (2022) focuses on the topic of positive framing in the case of Husky Farms. In her study, she explored whether tourists are aware of positive animal welfare framing and what they understand it to be. The focus here is on exploring animal welfare from the perspective of tourists and their understanding by analysing interviews, and therefore, analysing from an outsider perspective (Beuttner, 2022). Pajunen (2025) also focused on the perception of tourists but focused on exploring how tourists perceive animal ethics in dog sledding activities, also through the use of interviews and from an outsider perspective. Kruuse (2019) explored the legal requirements for sled dogs and animal welfare in Norway, with the aim of examining existing guidelines and making use of the latest knowledge to increase the animal welfare standards. However, a limitation to her study is, first of all, the year it was conducted, which is almost ten years ago. Additionally, the study focuses only on Norway and the regulations and guidelines there. A limitation almost all the studies about sled dogs share is the issue of studies and research being conducted by people outside the industry who can observe and conduct interviews, but they are missing an insider perspective. Having an inside role and working in the field adds to the knowledge and provides a deeper insight into the topic.

When studying working animals and their wellbeing and welfare in the tourism industry, research about the role of animals and the missing label of animals to be 'workers' comes up (Dashper, 2021). As a result of the missing perception of animals to be workers, there are not sufficient legal or political implications protecting those working animals (Dashper, 2021; Coulter, 2016b). Therefore, Dashper (2021) argues that classifying animals as workers is necessary to move towards creating regulations and protections for working animals. On the other hand, by doing so, working animals would get their own space within the tourism industry but also within research (Markwell, 2015). Besides that, by recognising animals as workers, legal regulations would need to be changed and adapted as well (Dashper, 2021).

This change should also influence the welfare and wellbeing of working animals. However, seen as a limitation or at least as an additional difficulty is the variety of working animals in the tourism industry. Wild animals, for example, leopards who are living in zoos, are put in an environment far away from their natural surroundings, which results in more stressful situations for them (Coulter, 2016b). On the other hand, domesticated animals, such as sled dogs, are already used to human interactions, and therefore, the level of stress is lower when treated according to their needs (Coulter, 2016b; Dashper, 2021). According to Coulter (2016b), working animals can be divided into three different groups. Coulter (2016b) identified those types to be either voluntary work, mandated by humans or subsistence types of work. The case of sled dogs can be sorted into the type of mandate by humans, as they are crucial for profit, and humans are training and using sled dogs to pull sleds with tourists.

As sled dogs can be classified as workers, other researchers then argue that the stakeholder theory should also be applied to animals (Smart, 2022). Traditionally, stakeholders are perceived to be humans, as they are the ones actively or intentionally participating in business activities or are influenced by those (Smart, 2022). Therefore, animals are not intentionally participating in business activities, which results and therefore, they are not being seen as stakeholders in the traditional approach. Smart (2022) focuses his research on the overall question of animals as stakeholders. Focusing on the tourism industry directly, García-Rosell and Tallberg (2021) argue that animals working in the industry are affected by business activities and contribute to them.

### **1.3 Exploring animal welfare and wellbeing through Mellor's Five Domains**

As the aim is to explore how animal wellbeing and welfare are constructed through human-animal relations, it is crucial to understand influences on welfare and wellbeing. Therefore, the Five Domains Model, by Mellor (2016), is used to create a theoretical framework which allows the examination of animal welfare at husky kennels. When applying the model, it is worth mentioning that it is not designed to do a complete animal welfare assessment, but rather a device to examine the main areas that influence the overall animal welfare state (Mellor, 2017). The first four domains are used to explore the physical and functional influences on animal welfare (Mellor, 2016). The last domain, mental state, is strongly

influenced by the first four domains and is used to explore the animals' wellbeing (Mellor, 2016). Therefore, in this study, animal welfare is defined to be the influences of humans as well as the human-sled dog relations on the wellbeing of huskies, while the huskies' wellbeing is defined to be the mental state. To provide a better understanding of the model, Figure 1 below shows the Five Domains in a simple version based on the first model from 1994 (as shown in Mellor et al., 2020, p. 3).

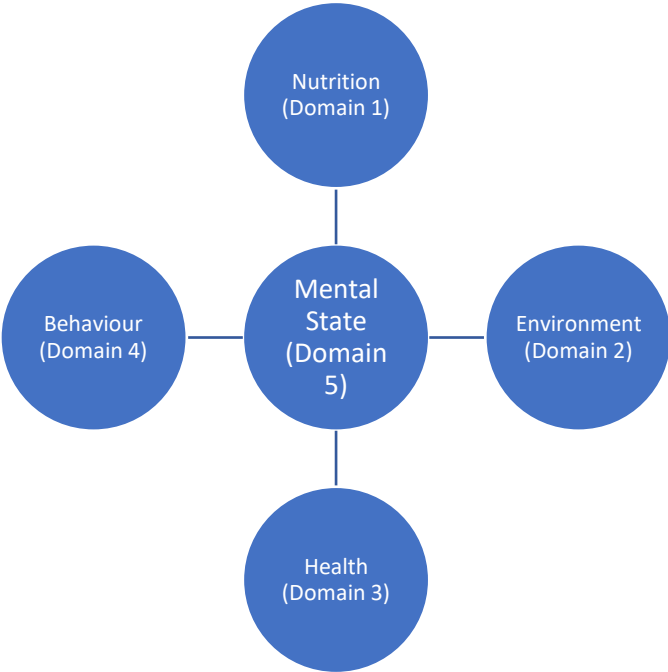


Figure 1: Simple Version of Mellor's Five Domains based on the 1994 model. Source: adapted from Mellor et al., 2020, p. 3.

Mellor's Five Domains theory has its main focus on the examination of an animal's welfare and wellbeing state. However, when aiming to apply this to huskies living in kennels, the model lacks insight into how human workers are influencing the huskies' welfare and wellbeing. This can be done, for example, by humans managing feeding schedules or designing dog houses. Therefore, in this study, the human-animal relations are used to explore in more detail how humans are influencing the welfare and wellbeing of huskies at work.

Mellor et al. (2020) first included human-animal relations in domain four, behavioural domain, in 2020, in addition to renaming it to "Behavioural Interactions" (Mellor et al., 2020, p. 12). In this updated version, Mellor et al. (2020) define the fourth domain to be influenced by three main factors: nonhumans, humans and the environment. In this case, an example of

how humans influence animal welfare can be the level of experience of the person handling dogs. The more experienced, the more likely a person is to be able to understand and act according to the husky's needs, while a rather inexperienced person might not see or understand the husky's needs.

Therefore, to sum it up, this research uses the Five Domains Model in order to identify the main factors influencing the huskies' welfare and wellbeing at tourism kennels. As human workers also have a great influence on those factors, the human-animal relations and human impact on the huskies' welfare and wellbeing are used to create a deeper understanding. Hence, human-animal relations are strongly related and influence the huskies' welfare in tourism kennels.

Therefore, the author of this research uses Mellor's Five Domains as a tool to identify factors influencing animal welfare and wellbeing in husky kennels. As this research is an autoethnography and based on my own experiences, Mellor's Five Domains will include human-animal relations, which are strongly influencing animal welfare, too. To do so, there are two research questions guiding the research as follows:

RQ1: How do daily practices and routines impact the dogs' wellbeing and welfare?

RQ2: How do human-animal interactions influence the dogs' welfare and wellbeing?

#### **1.4 Conducting the study**

In order to explore animal welfare and the influence of human-animal relations on it, a qualitative research approach with an interpretivist paradigm is applied. Therefore, doing an autoethnography is used to collect the data and to provide a method which allows to interpret experiences and observations.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method which can either be placed within narrative methods or within the field of ethnographic research (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). It is a method

which focuses on one's experiences and the meaning of those (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). By doing so, the focus is on analysing experiences in order to understand cultural settings, practices and experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). Therefore, doing autoethnography is not just a research method and therefore a product; instead, it is about the process, too (Ellis et al., 2011).

Doing research which includes animals ultimately ends in the question of how to include them and how to put them into focus (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017a). After all, it is I, a human, collecting data and analysing it. As Hamilton and Taylor (2017a) state, "animals cannot participate through traditional methods." (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017a, p. 2). Hence, an inclusive method needs to be applied. Autoethnography offers the possibility to observe from unique points of view and to question given cultural and societal constructs (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017b). Choosing autoethnography is therefore done as it is a method which can be used when aiming to include animals in research, especially focusing on human-animal relationships (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017c), in my case, the huskies and me. One of the main motivations of applying autoethnography to human-animal studies is solely to make animals more visible and to aim for a deeper understanding of the impact humans have on them (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017b).

The data for this autoethnography were collected at three different kennels from November 2024 until January 2025. During wintertime, I worked for a company that runs tours at two different sites, one as a contractor. There, I worked as a guide at both sites. During summertime, I worked at a kennel which did not offer any activities to tourists and solely focused on taking care of the dogs. There, my main task was taking care of the dogs, taking them out for playtime in groups, and building new kennels. All three kennels are situated in Finnish Lapland, in and around the Rovaniemi area. Some common characteristics among all three are the number of dogs, which is between 80 and 120 at each site, all kennels are mainly tourism kennels, and they all have kennels where the dogs live together in groups of 2 to 4 dogs per kennel. Besides the common characteristics, there are also some differences between the kennels. Even though they all have between 80 to 120 dogs, each kennel has a different size of property, depending on how close to the city and other industries are. Another difference are the tours offered, which range from short to half-day tours and from guide-driven to guest-driven tours.

The data collection took place during work hours, where I observed the huskies' behaviour, mood and response to different situations. I interacted with them during morning and evening feeding times, during sledding and cart tours, free run and kennel cleaning times, but also during kennel tours. Not all of those situations always occurred every day, depending on my main task, as well as the kennel and the time of the year. The notes were written down at the latest the day after a workday. Those notes are mainly observations and experiences, but also some informal conversations with colleagues.

For the research of this project, Artificial Intelligence (Grammarly in the free version) was used to double-check this work for grammar mistakes. No AI has been used to write texts.

### **1.5 Structure of thesis**

This thesis has 7 chapters. In the first, an introduction to the topic, including a short introduction of previous literature, as well as an overview of the theory applied later on, and a short overview of how the research was conducted.

In the second chapter, literature has been reviewed focusing on sled dog tourism, its history and what it is nowadays. Followed by literature and studies about animal welfare, animal ethics and agency. This also includes a short overview of current guidelines for sled dog kennels, both tourism and racing kennels. Another topic in the literature review is studies about working animals, as this study focuses on working sled dogs in the tourism industry. And last, a subchapter focusing on human-animal relations, as this autoethnography is based on my work with sled dogs and our relations.

Chapter three is the theoretical Framework chapter, which introduces Mellor's Five Domains and adds human-animal relations as influences on Mellor's Domains. This chapter also includes limitations of the model as well as its use in other studies.

Chapter four provides an overview of autoethnography, the chosen methodology. This also includes the data collection process, as well as analysis of the data and a short overview of the analysis process. Besides, reflexivity and research ethics and ethical considerations for this study are also found here.

Chapter 5 is the analysis of this study. For this, themes based on the first three domains were chosen. Domain four can be found in the previous three domains, as it focuses on different forms of interactions. Therefore, there were too many overcuts of the data for domain four compared to the other domains. Chosen were the themes of feeding, kennel layout and love for running. Each theme has its own subchapter for analysis.

Last, chapter 6 provides the conclusion of this master's thesis, including the contribution to the tourism research field. Followed by chapter 7 as a discussion.

## 2. ANIMALS IN TOURISM RESEARCH

### 2.1 Sled dog tourism

One of the main pull factors for tourists to travel to the Nordic countries is their nature and landscapes (Fredman & Margaryan, 2021). The tourism industry also recognises the possibilities and offers a variety of activities taking place in nature (Fredman & Margaryan, 2021). One subgroup of nature-based tourism is animal-based tourism, which is an important form of tourism in the Nordics, with the biggest attractions being Reindeer and Huskies (Bohn et al., 2018). Based on the number of animals per group, huskies are the largest group found in animal-based tourism in Finnish Lapland (Bohn et al., 2018). Since 2017, husky tours have been the number one activity to do in Finnish Lapland, surpassing snowmobiles, keeping the first place before (García-Rosell et al., 2018).

Even though nowadays dog sledding is of high importance for the tourism industry in Finnish Lapland, it is not traditional for the place and the people here. With the start of explorations of Antarctica and the Arctic, the first sled dogs were brought back with their mushers to Norway (Knudsen, 2019). This marks the beginning of dog sledding in Northern Europe. From there onwards, mushing developed first to be a recreational activity for Norwegians, followed by being used as a means of transport for injured skiers in Norwegian ski centres (Knudsen, 2019). Dog sledding gained popularity and interest steadily over the years from the 1960s on, with a change in mushing style to the nowadays most popular one, the Nome style (Knudsen, 2019). Over the last decades, dog sledding has developed several fields, such as racing, private recreational sport, and tourism (Waalder & Skjesol, 2019).

When looking at dog sledding in the tourism industry, most often it is not identified with wildlife tourism (Äijälä et al., 2020). One of the reasons for that can be that dog sledding is a form of transportation or a sport and adventurous activity (Äijälä et al., 2020). It is an activity which is characterised by the human-animal relation which is created in a controlled and commercialised environment (Äijälä et al., 2020). As the activity is taking place outdoors with

domesticated animals, sled dogs, it can be classified as a semi-wild activity (Bertella, 2016; Äijälä, et al, 2020).

Getting numbers about tourism kennels in Finnish Lapland is rather challenging. The most up-to-date ones are from 2016, where it showed that there are about 42 sled dog kennels all over Finnish Lapland (García-Rosell et al., 2018). However, in recent years, the number of tourism kennels has grown rapidly, without knowing how many tourism kennels there are currently (Mäkilä, 2025, October 29). Even though the Finnish Food Agency introduced a new dog register in recent years, many companies do not register their dogs, making it more difficult to get actual numbers (Mäkilä, 2025, October 29). Besides that, during peak season in wintertime, there are contractors and mushers coming to Finland from other European countries, making it even more difficult to keep track of kennel numbers (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). Tourism kennels also vary in the number of dogs, starting with a dozen up to several hundred (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021).

Huskies living in tourism kennels live all year round outdoors, either on chains or in kennels. When living on chains, the most common are chains either in the middle of the circle attached to a pole and a doghouse standing on the outer line of the circle, or the chain is attached directly to the doghouse. When living in kennels, it is most common to have two dogs living together. However, some kennels in Finland have up to 6 dogs living in one kennel, but more common are two to four dogs as it is easier to find only a few dogs capable of living together. Most of the dogs in tourism kennels are Alaskan Huskies; some also own purebred Siberian Huskies, hounds, or even Alaskan Malamutes and Greenlandic dogs (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). The tourism kennels usually vary in their layout; for example, some have no free run fences, some have one, and some have several free runs. Common among kennels are the tours offered. Here, there are two main differences: guest-driven tours or guide-driven tours. Guide-driven tours can nowadays vary in length; however, the most common are so-called ‘charter rides’, which are short distances between 500m and 7km. In those tours, up to four guests sit inside a bigger sled driven by a guide and pulled by eight to twelve dogs. Guest-driven tours, on the other hand, can also vary in length, from short distances of up to five kilometres, also called tasters, to half-day tours up to 20 kilometres. Full-day tours can be up to 40 kilometres, followed by multiday trips ranging from one night to two weeklong excursions. Besides the sled ride, the products usually include a farm visit (guided or alone)

and a picture stop on the trail during which the drivers can change roles and have additional time to take pictures after the ride.

## **2.2 Animal Welfare**

Fennell (2013) describes animal welfare as “a family of perspectives that deal with scientific and moral questions regarding the use of animals” (cited from Fennell & Markwell, 2015, p. 44). Within the field of animal welfare, one of the most mentioned points is the perception that the usage of animals to benefit companies and humans is legit as long as their lives and needs (such as hunger, rest and medical care) are met (Fennell & Markwell, 2015).

With the increase in tourism over the last few decades, animal-based tourism has also experienced an increase in visitors. As a result, ethical concerns about animal wellbeing in tourism settings have arisen (Fennell et al., 2023). In the tourism industry, there is a variety of animal use, and those experiences are usually sold as authentic interactions offering to escape everyday life (von Essen et al., 2020). They can be found in different settings, such as part of means of transportation, as part of a local cuisine or as a main attraction (Markwell, 2015). As a result, animals, which are part of the tourism industry, are a labour force without having contracts and therefore, are put in a vulnerable and risky position (von Essen et al., 2020).

As the interest in animal welfare increases, organisations such as the World Animal Protection have increased research about animal welfare (von Essen et al., 2020). In their conclusion, they found that animal welfare is often lacking for animals working in the tourism industry due to the focus on the business and, especially, financial side (von Essen et al., 2020). Most often lacking are the fields of environment, which limit the animals in their natural behaviour, as well as the fields of feeding high-quality food and providing medical care (von Essen et al., 2020). Winter (2020) adds that the lack of animal welfare is also caused by the human view on welfare standards, and those being based on how well animal welfare is handled by humans using animals as workers in tourism. In addition to that, financial decisions of companies also tend to cause compromises in animal welfare (Winter, 2020).

There are several ways to communicate and educate tourists about working animal welfare. The most common ones are social media, as well as technology, which can be used to tackle the lack of knowledge among tourists. As von Essen et al. (2020) discuss, social media can be used to educate tourists about working animal welfare standards. However, social media can also be used to post about experiences or pictures of working animal encounters. Those posts can create an expectation for others of specific encounters or even promote practices which are against working animal welfare (von Essen et al., 2020). Fennell (2023), on the other hand, suggests that the use of warning labels can help tourists to identify the offered working animal-based activity's welfare standards as well as possible conservation standards.

When searching for more specific research about animal welfare and wellbeing for sled dogs, the research is rather lacking. More recently, several newspapers and whistleblowers reported on bad cases of animal welfare and wellbeing at some kennels (Warda & Tallberg, 2025, February 14). One of the main reasons for those issues lies in the lack of regulations and laws about keeping and working with sled dogs (Warda & Tallberg, 2025, February 14). However, the issues of lacking animal welfare have been around for much longer already, as the research by Fennell and Sheppard (2011) in Canada shows. They investigated the case of Howling Dog Tours Whistler Inc. in British Columbia, Canada (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011). After overestimating the need for sled dogs in the Winter of 2010, which hosted the Winter Olympics in Canada, the sled dog company ended up with too many dogs (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011). As a result, they contacted a vet to take care of euthanasia, but she refused and requested help from official organs (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011). As those did not respond to the request, the kennel gave the task to one of the employees to start with the so-called 'pack control' (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011). At the end, around 100 sled dogs were shot (Fennell & Sheppard, 2011). This case shows how strongly financial decisions can influence animal welfare in the industry, which also then results in an ethical question. How can financial decisions be ethically justified?

### 2.2.1 Animal Ethics

Animal ethics are defined to be “the moral position of individual animals and their sentience and interests” (Winter, 2020, p. 1). Humans working with animals, should therefore take into considerations the results and influenced of their actions when working and interacting with animals (Winter, 2020). Within tourism research, one of the main questions regarding animal ethics, is focusing on the justification of the use of animals in tourism (Winter, 2020; von Essen et al., 2020).

Especially in the tourism industry, animals are often found in a risky and vulnerable position (Danby et al., 2019). This is because working animals do not have contracts or regulated conditions (Winter, 2020). Winter (2020) states, that in addition to the legal issues, animals cannot impact whether they would like to work in tourism.

Animal ethics is often and researched in the context of wild animals (Winter, 2020). As a reason for this, Carr (2018, as cited in Winter, 2020, p. 13) suggests that domesticated working animals are perceived as common among tourists and are not as exotic as some wild animals. Additionally, the power relation between domesticated working animals and humans is in favour of humans as they hold control over domesticated working animals (Winter, 2020).

To be able to improve working animals’ ethics, it is also crucial to understand why and how it is tolerated in the first place. A main reason is that most tourists do not know better and lack knowledge about appropriate working animal practices and their needs (Moorhouse et al., 2017; von Essen et al., 2020). Another reason can be that tourists may put their own entertainment over the working animal welfare (von Essen, 2020). However, Font et al. (2019) as well as Moorhouse et al. (2017) add that another issue is that some companies tend to use working animal ethics and welfare in a utilitarian style, emphasising their practices to increase their own turnover instead of putting the working animals’ needs into focus.

Butz and Mosgaard (2019) focused on the ethical question of dog sledding and the use of sled dogs in races and tourism. One of their main concerns when talking about ethics in dog sledding is to which extent the practices influence the dogs' health and wellbeing (Butz & Mosgaard, 2019). Especially in recent years, with the increase in tourism kennels, one of the main ethical concerns is the number of sled dogs, as they influence the business's financial success and tourism kennels tend to have bigger amounts of dogs than, for example, race kennels (Butz & Mosgaard, 2019). Especially during COVID-19, when there was barely any tourism, many tourism kennels struggled with financial situations.

### **2.2.2 Animal Agency**

In 2009, McFarland and Hediger (2009) focused on the question of whether animals also have agency; however, nowadays, there is less of a question of whether there is animal agency, and more focus on what it means. Animal agency focuses on the question of how animals are given the ability to make decisions as well as act according to their natural behaviour and influence their environment (Littlewood et al., 2023).

Within animal agency, there are several qualities influencing it, such as competence. Competence is achieved, when an animal has the knowledge and tools needed to deal with be able to cope and deal with possible challenges (Littlewood et al., 2023). Therefore, competence means that an animal is given the chance to act according to its agency (Littlewood et al., 2020). Competence is influenced by previous agency and impacts the future agency (Webber et al., 2022). It is impacted by chances to learn from its environment and through interactions, as well as to improve its physical condition (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022).

Providing animals with a choice is also part of animal agency. To be able to offer appropriate choices, it is crucial to understand the animal and its needs (Englund & Cronin, 2023). Giving a choice is not always possible; however, for example, when training sled dogs, they can show whether they would like to join a run or not.

Strongly connected to choice is control, as control give the animal the power to actively make a choice (Webber et al., 2022). Control is given, when an animal can make decisions about interactions or their environment (Englund & Cronin, 2023). For example, when an animal can actively decide whether he or she wants to interact with its environment (Englund & Cronin, 2023; Webber et al., 2022). In the case of sled dog kennels, for example, a doghouse is a safe space which should not be invaded by humans. Therefore, the dogs have control over whether they would like to interact with us or other dogs or not.

Offering challenges to animals can improve their problem-solving skills (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022). By being confronted with challenges, animals learn to deal and handle different situations (Webber et al., 2022). Besides the mental challenges, offering physical challenges can improve the animal's health and shape, as well as offer entertainment (Littlewood et al., 2023). However, it is crucial not to offer too challenging tasks and not to push the limits too far (Webber et al., 2022; Littlewood et al., 2023). At the same time, keeping the overall animal's agency in mind without limiting it also needs to be done (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022).

Lastly, environment and affordances as Littlewood et al. (2023) names them. The environment does not solely include the physical environment, but also the animal's mental and inner state (Littlewood et al., 2023). This also includes sensory input from the environment on the animal (Littlewood et al., 2023). For example, offering daily playtime to huskies affects both, mental and physical state of the dog. They get the chance to exercise and run as much as they want, as well as getting the chance to interact with dogs and humans which impacts their mental state. Affordance, on the other hand, is defined to be the relationship between the environment and animal (Littlewood et al., 2023). This is specifically complex, as it differs for each animal, depending on how they perceive their environment (Littlewood et al., 2023). An example for affordance is, that not every dog perceives and enjoys the playtime in the same way. Some prefer to interact more with other dogs and the humans, while others prefer to sniff around and again others prefer to go crazy and just run around the whole time.

### **2.2.3 Current guidelines**

Currently, sled dog husbandry does not have its own laws and regulations (Warda & Tallberg, 2025, February 14). Instead, they are part of the Animal Welfare Act 2024 (693/2023), which includes several animals (Finnish Food Authority, 2025). According to this welfare act, dogs have to be treated with respect and trained according to their abilities (Finnish Food Authority, 2025). In addition, points such as dogs should not be harmed are part of it, as well as the prohibition of equipment which results in pain or activities with the same outcome (Finnish Food Authority, 2025). Besides the handling, the Animal Welfare Act 2024 also includes, for example, free access to water unless there are no extreme conditions, in which the dogs then need to be offered water 3 times a day (Finnish Food Authority, 2025).

When looking up requirements and steps for opening a new husky kennel, the Finnish Food Authority (2026, March 3) states that first, one needs to register oneself as an animal keeper as well as the kennel, including the location. In the next step, one needs to register their dogs in the dog registry (Finnish Food Authority, 2026, March 3). Once the kennel is established, the kennel can be visited by vets in official controls, as well as to inspect the new kennel (Finnish Food Authority, 2026, March 3). However, once the kennel is set up and registered, there are no required yearly vet visits. The Finnish Food Authority (2026, March 3) only states that each kennel can be visited by officials in case of diseases or other reasons. A vet, however, needs to be contacted in case of diseases or injuries, as well as when needed (Finnish Food Authority, 2026, March 3). However, the fact, that there are no statistics and known numbers of the number of sled dog kennels in Finnish Lapland, as well as all of Finland, shows that the guidelines are often not followed.

## **2.3 Human-animal relations**

Animal-based tourism is based on human-animal relations. Those can either be between human employees and working animals, as well as between tourists and working animals (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). The type of relations depends on the setting; for zoo animals, those can look different, as, for example, sled dogs (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline,

2022). Therefore, there is a wider variety, as mentioned; however, the focus here is on relations between sled dogs and human workers or tourists. As a result of those relations, there is a co-creation of the experience between working animals and tourists as well as human employees (Bertella, 2014).

### **2.3.1 Experience co-creation**

In animal-based tourism, the relations and interactions between humans and animals are the basis for creating the experience (Bertella, 2016). This is due to the experience being created through interactions and encounters with the environment, as well as the humans and animals in it during the experience (Bertella, 2016).

The co-creation of experiences is based on Vargo and Lusch's (2004) research about service-dominant logic and the consumption of experiences. Vargo and Lusch (2004) suggest that through value co-creation, the experience is more memorable and increases participation during the experience. This co-creation is of significant importance in the tourism industry (Bertella, 2014). Including animals in the co-creation process is rather new (Bertella, 2014). In the traditional networks of tourism experience, the tourist is the centre while other humans, such as locals or tourism workers, are influencing the tourist's experience (Bertella, 2014). Besides Bertella (2014), Løken and Lyngstad (2019) also focused on including animals in the co-creation process of tourism experiences. Løken and Lyngstad (2019) found that dogs are an enriching factor for the experience and that they can shift the tourists' focus more strongly on the environment as well as the interactions with the dogs.

### **2.3.2 Human-animal relations in tourism**

Throughout a tourist's travels, there are several points of interactions with animals (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Once at the destination, there are different forms of human-animal relations which are shaped and influenced by different factors. First of all, the relationship between humans and animals is shaped by the animals' needs and physical abilities (Hoarau-

Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Tourism operators provide their working animals with care to fulfil their needs and, in return, have working animals which can perform their work (Carr & Broom, 2018). However, especially among working animals and their human partners, this relation goes deeper in most cases. In order to respond to the working animals' needs, human workers have to pay attention to their behaviour and changes in it (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Paying attention to details is especially important in order to improve and provide a high-quality experience to tourists (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Knowing their animals' limits is also crucial not just for work but also for understanding the limits animals might have with tourists, such as shyness (Markwell, 2015).

Another factor shaping human-animal interactions in tourism is the psychological needs of animals (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Those are related to both tourist-animal relations and human worker and their animals (Bertella, 2016). Guides are needed in order to translate and teach tourists about the animals' needs during the experience (Bertella, 2016). The main task for the human workers here is, again, knowing each individual working animal and their characteristics (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Especially in the Nordic countries, where a year's income needs to be generated in only a few months, often animal welfare and wellbeing are dependent on the success of a season (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Besides that, psychological needs and wellbeing throughout the year can be connected to the human-animal relations (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Being aware of possible preferred human handlers, an animal's wellbeing can be improved (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). For example, lead dogs for sled dog tours do not respond the same for each guide, and therefore, each guide has preferred lead dogs.

Values and knowledge can also influence the human-animal relationship in tourism encounters. Tourism operators and their human employees usually have shared values about treating their animals and how to do their tours (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Tourists, on the other hand, might have unrealistic expectations or different values (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). One of the main tasks for human workers is to ensure that tourists understand and follow given rules (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). For example, tourists visiting sled dog tours often expect fast and fun rides and might stop and go in order to let their team of dogs run as fast as possible. In those situations, human workers have the task of communicating the needs of their animal workers in order to create a pleasant experience for

both tourists and animal workers (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). However, on the other hand, most tourists share the same values regarding animal welfare with the tourism operators (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). This also includes that working animals should be treated well by tourists as well as handlers (Bertella, 2016).

However, when a tourist-animal interaction is successfully created, the working animals can be the reason why tourists return to a destination or a specific company (Markwell, 2015). This is often seen after creating a strong bond between tourists and their working animals. Therefore, the bond between the different actors is also of importance in human-animal relations. Tourism operators and their human employees work with their animal colleagues closely and can often offer insights into their relationships to tourists to help them see the working animals the way they do (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). In most cases, those meaningful interactions between the tour operator, tourist and the working animals are the main reason for tourists to visit a destination or company (Markwell, 2015; Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022).

## **2.4 Working animals**

According to Coulter (2016b), there are differences when looking at working animals. For example, dogs working for the police or service dogs are perceived as working animals; other animals working in the tourism industry might not have this clear perception of being a worker. However, when taking a closer look at animals in work settings, animals are found in means of transportation, the military, tourism and many other settings. Within those different fields, the work which animals do can vary a lot, as do the ways of classifying or organising different animals as workers (Dashper, 2021).

One approach is, for example, to divide working animals into three different types of work. Coulter (2016b) identified those types to be either voluntary work, mandated by humans or subsistence types of work. The case of sled dogs can be sorted into the type of mandate by humans, as they are crucial for profit, and humans are training and using sled dogs to pull sleds with tourists. However, it is worth mentioning that not every animal in the tourism industry can be classified as a working animal or a 'worker' (Dashper, 2021). An animal

which, for example, is watched or hunted in a natural environment is not a working animal. Differing between working and non-working animals is therefore crucial to understand the role of each within the tourism industry. In the case of sled dogs, they are working animals as they are provided food, shelter and are part of tourist encounters.

When comparing sled dog workers to human workers, it shows that there is a lack of laws and regulations for sled dogs, which, on the other hand, are given to humans. Even though sled dogs living in kennels each have one or several roles within a team of dogs or even in their living arrangements with other dogs. Which means, sled dog workers have a variety of roles and jobs, just like human workers do. Even outside the company they work for, working animals can have a role in marketing a destination (Rickly & Kline, 2021). Therefore, Rickly and Kline (2021), as well as Fennell and Sheppard (2011), found that working animals can become the main destination image, just like sled dogs for Finnish Lapland.

A subfield of animals as workers, which is gaining popularity, is the field of animals as stakeholders. Working animals cannot tell about their needs, but they do have interest in their living conditions as well as working conditions.

The original stakeholder theory was first introduced and created by Freeman in 1984 (as cited in Smart, 2022, p. 1). The core idea of this theory is that a company should make decisions not solely based on its own interests; instead, a company should keep in mind stakeholders who are possibly impacted (Smart, 2022). A stakeholder is defined as, for example, employees, competitors or locals who might be affected by a company and its decisions, morals, or values (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). However, most definitions of stakeholders only include human beings (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). When looking at husky kennels, the main reason for tourists to come is the dogs themselves. However, in a traditional stakeholder theory, the working huskies would not be considered (Tallberg et al., 2022). However, as this study focuses on exploring how wellbeing and welfare are constructed through relations, huskies are perceived as stakeholders.

Besides extending the definition of a worker to animals, other researchers, such as García-Rosell and Tallberg (2021) or Smart (2022), extend the stakeholder theory towards animals, showing that working animals, to some degree, have a stakeholder status. Working animals have their own interests, for example, in their food, training, etc. As a result, research has been undertaken in order to examine whether working animals are stakeholders and what makes them one (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021).

The stakeholder status of animals can, for example, be found in human-animal relations and social bonds (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). Especially for human workers and their relationship with their animal co-workers, working animals are viewed as co-workers or partners (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). This status is reached through bonding between animal workers and human workers and the resulting trust and cooperation.

The discussion of whether animals can be seen as stakeholders can influence animal welfare (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021). By recognising working animals' interests, these would need to be translated into laws and regulations, which in turn would positively influence working animal welfare and wellbeing (Smart, 2022; Tallberg et al., 2022).

### **3. MELLOR'S FIVE DOMAINS AND HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS**

When talking about animal welfare, Garner 1993, as cited in Fennell and Markwell (2015, p.46), defined animal welfare as being achieved when the animal's needs are met. For this study, the needs are as given in Mellor's Five Domains model, the most current model from 2020 and can therefore be categorised in the five domains (Mellor et al., 2020). Other than animal welfare, animal wellbeing is a term often used in correlation of combination with animal welfare, however, not often defined. In this study, animal wellbeing is defined as the mental state of the huskies, which is a result of the effort towards animal welfare, as also stated in Mellor (2016).

#### **3.1 Mellor's Five Domains**

In 1965, Bramwell et al. introduced the model of Freedoms with the focus on animal welfare in agriculture (as cited in van der Staay et al., 2025, p. 4). The Five Freedoms were developed based on Bramwell's work by the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) and adapted to the Five Freedoms model (McCulloch, 2013). After the adaptation of the FAWC, the Five Freedoms were used to assess the outcomes of animal welfare (McCulloch, 2013). However, this model does not take into account the complexity of wellbeing in animals, nor the complex behaviours, nor differences in animals (McCulloch, 2013; van der Staay et al., 2025). Part of the issue here is the absence of negative influences and emotions in the Five Freedoms model (van der Staay et al., 2025). The Five Freedoms included the freedom from thirst and hunger, discomfort, pain, distress and fear, and lastly the freedom to act according to their normal behaviour (McCulloch, 2013).

Different sources describe Mellor's Five Domains as being based on the Five Freedoms and to be adapted in more detail including some of the critique of the Freedoms (Mellor, 2016; Mellor et al., 2020; McCulloch, 2013; van der Staay et al., 2025). The Five Domains were first introduced in 1994 by Reid and Mellor, but have been further developed over the years and more adapted over time to be more accurate (van der Staay et al., 2025). However, this model was not created with the aim of offering an assessment tool but rather to offer insight

into influencing factors of animal welfare and wellbeing (van der Staay et al., 2025; Mellor et al., 2020). Mellor’s Five Domains include the mental state of animals; on the other hand, this model does not emphasise the importance of harm, both direct and unintentional harm (van der Staay et al., 2025).

### 3.1.1 The Five Domains

Mellor’s Five Domains got upgraded several times after they were created. However, it was not the first one to be introduced as a tool to assess influencing factors of animal welfare. Over the years, Mellor’s Five Domains has been applied many times, but also as an assessment tool. To provide a better understanding of the model, Figure 2 below provides an overview of Mellor’s Five Domains based on Mellor (2016), adapted for sled dogs working in tourism kennels. The first four domains are found at the top, while domain 5, the mental state is the result of the first four domains.

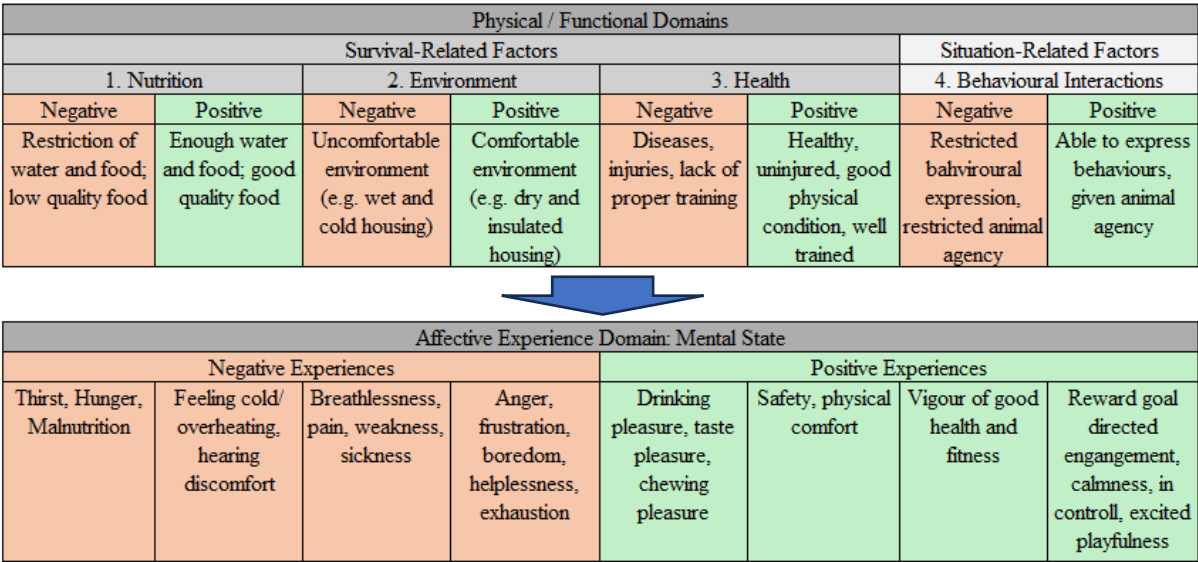


Figure 2: Mellor's Five Domains. Source: adapted from Mellor, 2016, p. 9; adapted from Mellor et al., 2020, p. 12. Modified regarding sled dogs.

At first glance, the model seems rather simple, but taking a closer look reveals its complexity. Each of the domains has factors influencing them, which, on the other hand, result in either positive or negative behaviour or experience of the animal (Mellor, 2017). By adding both

positive and negative outcomes, the model provides the opportunity to explore domains which need improvement (Mellor, 2016).

The first three domains, nutrition, environment and health are also labelled survival-related factors (Mellor, 2016). All factors influencing animal welfare here are more focused on the internal state of the animal, such as access to water, which can be either restricted access on the negative side or free access to it on the positive side (Mellor, 2017). Continuing with domain number four, behaviour, it is also classified to include situation-related factors (Mellor, 2016). Those factors are rather external and can come from the setting and surroundings (Mellor, 2017). This is often also labelled as animal agency, as the behaviour domain is about the extent to which an animal can make a decision, or influence what is happening with or to them. The last domain, mental state, is more complex and can be seen as the result of the previous domains. That means that there are negative and positive outcomes to each previous domain (Mellor, 2017). For example, as a result of restricted water access, thirst can be a negative outcome, while free water access results in pleasure as water is always accessible. To add to the complexity of the model, each domain's outcome can and might influence other domains' results (Mellor, 2017). For example, restricted access to water can, in the long term, result in negative outcomes in the health domain.

### **3.1.2 Use of Mellor's Five Domains**

According to Mellor (2017), the model is supposed to be used to assess the state of animal welfare and wellbeing for management purposes. It aims to offer a tool to understand which factors are strongly influencing animal welfare in both positive and negative ways (Mellor, 2017). In return, the knowledge gained can be used to improve the animal welfare state.

Mellor's Five Domains have been used in a variety of studies. Some focused on studying wildlife management, such as a study by Harvey et al. (2020), who studied the welfare of wild roaming horses to learn more about appropriate interactions with those and about their natural habitats. Nowadays, there are also more studies focusing on animal welfare for captive animals, such as those at zoos. Ward et al. (2020) focused on the question of whether there are

common welfare standards among different countries' zoos. Grandin (2022), on the other hand, applied the model to assess animal welfare in the commercial supply chain for food animals.

Over time, the tool has developed from being used to understand the complex impacts of animal welfare to being a tool adapted to assess animal welfare (Hampton et al., 2023). As a key criticism, Hampton et al. (2023) identified the issue of aiming to make animal welfare, a subjective issue, into an objective scoring system. Even though Mellor (2016) already noted that animal welfare is a subjective issue due to the differences in characters and individuality of animals. When using the Five Domains as a tool for assessment, humans have to make decisions about the mental state and subjective issues such as health, based on human knowledge and observations (Browning, 2022). However, this results in the issue of different assessments among different people and the question of who should do the assessment (Browning, 2022).

### **3.1.3 Limitations of Mellor's Five Domains**

Besides the issue of missing subjectivity in the application of the tool for assessment, there are several other limiting factors. When applying the tool for assessment, one of the first steps is to decide on a panel team (Hampton et al., 2023). Every panel member has their own perception and ideas which influences his or hers opinions (Hampton et al., 2023). Additionally, the choice of panel members can also influence the outcome of the assessment. When choosing members who are working with the animals, it is crucial to keep in mind their possible criticism of new proposals to improve animal welfare (Johnson et al., 2019).

Another limitation for most studies using Mellor's Five Domains, is the lack of repeatability. When conducting a study, one of the main validating tests would be the repeatability of the study with the same or closely similar outcomes (Windschnurer et al., 2008). However, up to today, there has not been an attempt to repeat a study using Mellor's Five Domains to test for its repeatability. The main reason for this is most likely the subjectivity of animal welfare and the issues resulting from it, aiming to create objective scores (Hampton et al., 2023).

There are many more limitations to the model, especially when aiming to use it as an assessment tool, such as the misuse of the tool, especially when limiting factors are not presented or taken into account properly (Hampton et al., 2023).

Another limitation, especially for this research, is the lack of human-animal inclusion among all domains. Mellor et al. (2020) changed the name of the fourth domain to “Behavioural interactions” (Mellor et al., 2020, p. 9). The focus of this domain, according to Mellor et al. (2020), is on the animal’s agency, especially regarding its environment. However, this means, that the agency and the relations with the environment are not directly impacted by human-animal relations. The other two factors for this updated domain, are human-animal interactions and animal-animal interactions (Mellor et al., 2020). Working with animals is strongly dependent on the interactions between humans and animals, a part which is not considered when assessing the animal welfare and wellbeing using Mellor’s Five Domains.

### **3.2 Human-animal relations and Mellor’s Five Domains**

With adaptations over the years, the model got more and more detailed, with the latest additions added in Mellor et al.’s 2020 model. With the latest additions, domain 4 also takes into account human-animal relations.

Domain 1, the nutrition domain, focuses on the quality and quantity of food as well as on the water intake and accessibility for animals (Mellor et al., 2020). Mellor et al. (2020) describe how those factors can positively and negatively influence other domains, such as domain 5. A limitation here is the assumption that nutrition is solely influenced by quality and quantity. Not taken into account here is how human-animal relations impact domain 1. Focusing on tourism kennels, a possible impact, for example, is that new human workers can influence the food intake of shy dogs during feeding times. As a result, a shy dog might not eat at all or eat less than usual due to the new human worker around. On the other hand, when offering dogs soup or water after running in the presence of tourists after their tour, shy dogs might not drink as much due to too many strangers around. For better understanding, Figure 3 below provides a short insight into how human-animal relations can influence Domain 1, Nutrition.

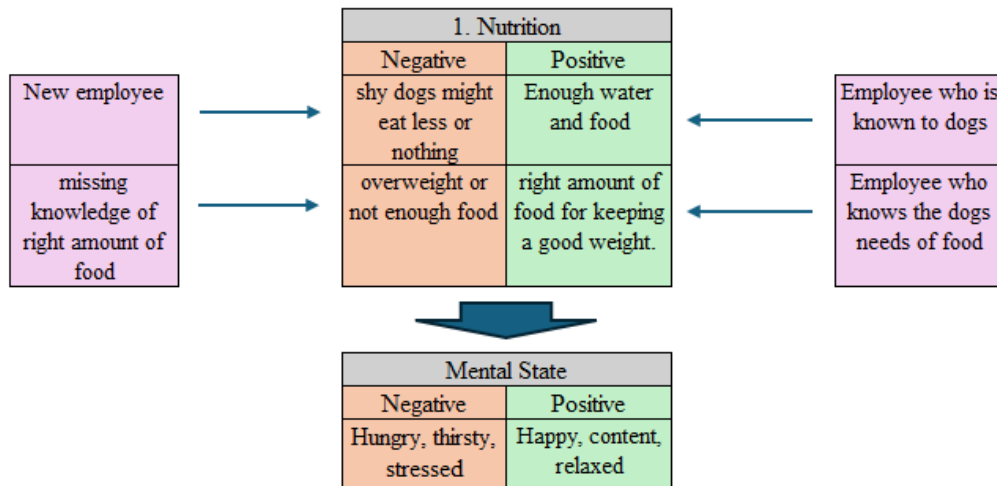


Figure 3: Human-animal relations influencing Nutrition Domain. Source: adapted from Mellor, 2016, p. 9; modified regarding the human-animal influences.

Domain 2, the environment, focuses on impacts from the animal's environment, including physical as well as atmospheric impacts (Mellor et al., 2020). An example for this domain is the housing situation for the animal and its characteristics (Mellor et al., 2020). The housing is impacted by the insulation or space available (Mellor et al., 2020). According to Mellor et al. (2020), the outcomes are, as domain 1, mainly influencing domain 5. This domain does not take into account the impacts of human-animal interactions and relations. One of the influencing factors, according to Mellor et al. (2020) are predictable events. In the case of tourism kennels, such can be, for example, daily routines. Daily routines are human-made, as well as ensuring they are executed daily. When organised so that every dog is getting play time in a fenced area every day, keeping the same routines can give the dogs stability. At the same time, giving stability through changing orders of play groups, the dogs can also learn stability.

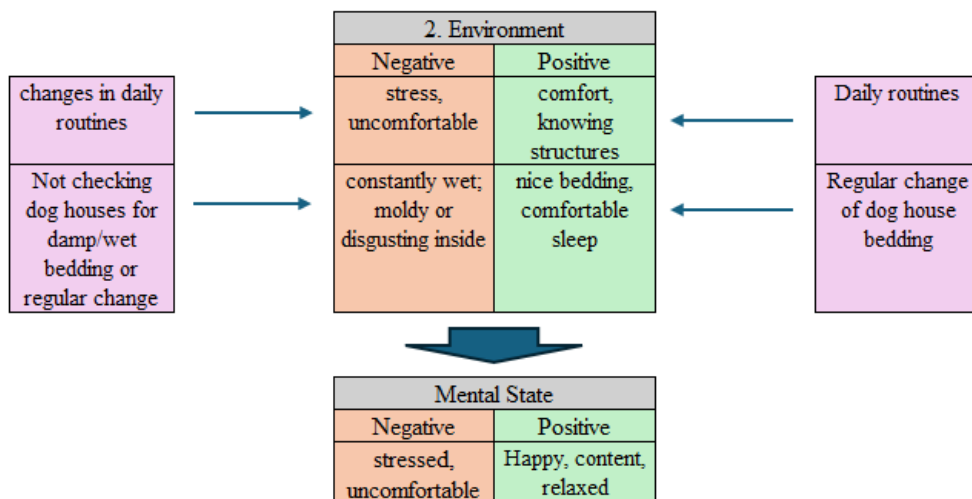


Figure 4: Human-animal relations influencing the Environment Domain. Source: adapted from Mellor, 2016, p. 9; modified regarding the human-animal influences.

The health domain, number 3, focuses on impacts due to diseases, injuries and physical practices (Mellor et al., 2020). According to Mellor et al. (2020), this is the domain with the most impacts due to the variety in training, diseases and injuries. Again, not taken into account are how human-animal relations are impacting this domain. For working sled dogs in tourism kennels, training schedules are human-made and adjusted based on performance, weather conditions, safety concerns and other factors. Especially, the adjustments based on performance are only possible through training supervised by humans and observations, which is a form of human-animal relations.

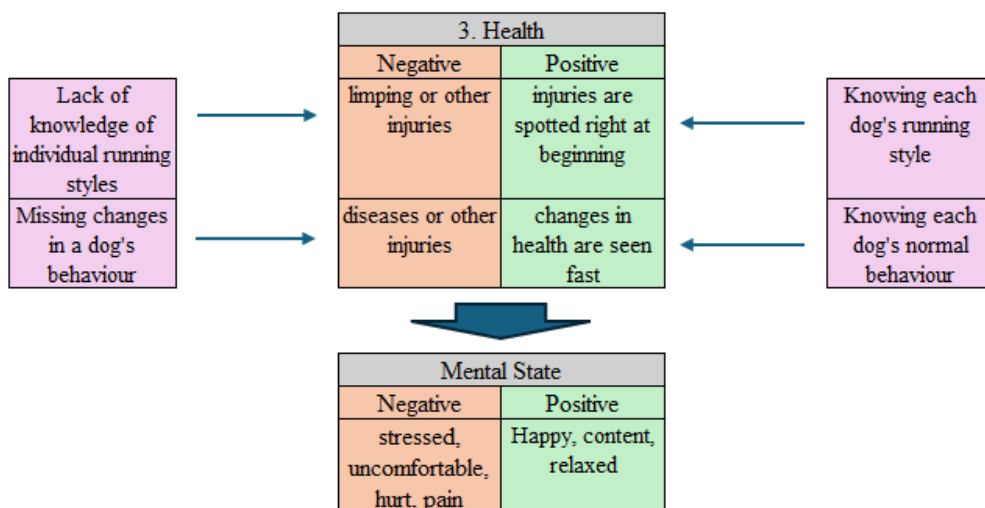


Figure 5: Human-animal relations influencing Health Domain. Source: adapted from Mellor, 2016, p. 9; modified regarding the human-animal influences.

In the 2020 adaptation of the Five Domains, Mellor et al. (2020) add the human-animal interactions in domain 4, as well as change the name from behaviour to behavioural interactions. Other than domains 1 to 3, which are focused on inputs of animal-care to welfare, domain 4 focuses on the outputs of the animal’s perception of its situation (Mellor et al., 2020). Domain 4 is strongly based on animal agency, as the domain focuses on the animal’s interactions and outcomes based on its environment and conditions (Littlewood et al, 2023; Mellor et al., 2020). This domain has three main groups of interactions: animal-environment interactions, animal-animal interactions, and animal-human interactions (Mellor et al., 2020). Resulting from those interactions, animals show different behaviours and responses based on their agency (Mellor et al., 2020). This domain can be shown in all daily interactions with dogs in tourism kennels. From interactions during feeding time, over cuddle and play time, to training sessions.

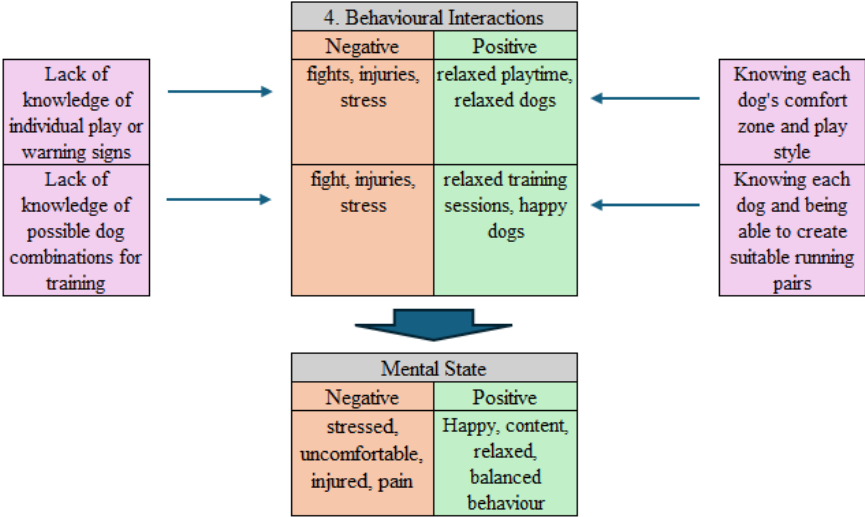


Figure 6: Human-animal relations influencing Behavioural Interactions Domain. Source: adapted from Mellor, 2016, p. 9; modified regarding the human-animal influences.

Domain 5 is the mental result of the previous four domains (Mellor et al., 2020). The mental state and happiness of animals are therefore based on the first four domains, as shown in Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative study based on its characteristic of aiming to understand issues and practices in a social context (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p. 22). Two of the main characteristics of qualitative research, according to Phillimore and Goodson (2004), are, to understand social context and practices from the participants' perspectives, and second, to focus on social settings, meanings of processes and phenomena. As my study is focused on understanding how animal welfare and wellbeing are constructed in tourism kennels through practices and human-animal interactions, it is therefore a qualitative study.

Qualitative research methods are often applied to research in which the data is given or collected in the form of verbal expressions or other texts. Therefore, qualitative research is the chosen method for this study. According to Have (2004, p. 5), the goal of qualitative research is to explore meanings and interpret findings. In this case, to explore the lives of huskies living in tourism kennels and how the human interactions are influencing their welfare and wellbeing. As this is a natural setting, and the data collection is done by observing and keeping a diary, this study is therefore classified as a qualitative research study, more precisely an autoethnography.

In qualitative research, data from events, activities or other events are collected, which are aiming to understand both opportunities and issues in a social setting (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p.22). In most cases, the qualitative research is perceived to be rather a process than an activity (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p.23). The focus is often put on social settings with an emphasise of relations and interactions and how they influence the social structures and life (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p.23). Therefore, it can be concluded that qualitative research is often done in natural environments to explore phenomena and examine those from an insider's point of view (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p.24). In this study, the natural environment is the different workplaces where the data was collected, which provides a natural insider perspective as I worked there as a part of the team while collecting data for an autoethnography. From the start, the idea of writing about animal welfare and wellbeing was what I aimed for and kept in mind when noting down my observations. However, those were

not the only observations noted, but also generally interesting interactions and conversations as well. Occasionally, pictures were taken during work hours.

Choosing and introducing a paradigm is needed to provide the reader with information about the beliefs and actions on which the researcher's view is based (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004, p.53). The chosen paradigm for this research is of an interpretative nature, the interpretivism approach. Therefore, the aim is to explore patterns within the observations and data by means (Hall, 2011, p.47). Data is analysed and viewed from a point of view to understand and challenge findings and realities, and is therefore often used in autoethnographic research (Hall, 2011, p.47). Interpretivism can help broaden and challenge assumptions by focusing on an "Intersubjective world" (Hall, 2011, p.47). As this research is using autoethnography to explore animal wellbeing in tourism kennels, the interpretivism paradigm is applied, aiming to understand animal wellbeing through my observations and interactions at work.

#### **4.1 Human-animal relations in research**

Traditionally, ethnographies and autoethnographies were focused on human experiences and sense-making and if animals appear in those, most often as part of the environment and landscapes (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). Only in the early 2000s, the number of studies with a focus on including multispecies in research start to grow rapidly (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). Since then, ethnographic studies have developed into a tool for researchers who aim to include animals in research and studies (Hamilton & Taylor, 2013). In 2013, Hamilton and Taylor (2013) published their first book, 'Animals at Work: Identity, Politics and Culture in Work with Animals', with the focus on multispecies inclusivity in research studies.

Ethnographic studies, including autoethnographies, provide the opportunity to include animals in research as well as human-animal relations (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017b). It is a research method which supports including relations and emotions, and the focus on complex relations between humans and animals (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017b). Therefore, including animals in ethnographic and autoethnographic research is done by focusing, for example, on the animal's body language, which provides the opportunity to include animals without aiming to understand the animal's thoughts based on the limitation that animals cannot speak and

explain themselves (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017c). Besides that, ethnographic studies also aim to understand how experiences, societal structures and practices are perceived by the people and individuals in them (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017b). Therefore, specifically, autoethnographies are used when aiming to understand social practices of a group from the inside (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017b). Based on those characteristics, ethnographic and autoethnographic work can be applied when aiming to push boundaries, for example, when including animals in research (Hamilton & Taylor, 2017c).

## **4.2 Autoethnography**

Ellis et al. (2011) define autoethnography in a short sentence as a methodology which aims to analyse and examine the researcher's experience. Therefore, autoethnography is about studying and learning about cultural and social practices and context (Ellis et al., 2011). As a result, it is said that autoethnography is both the process and the resulting product (Ellis et al., 2011; Sikes, 2021). Compared to other methodological approaches, autoethnography is also characterised by a personal writing style and one's experiences being the focus of the analysis (Wall, 2006).

As autoethnography is focused on analysing and exploring oneself (Ellis et al., 2011; Sikes, 2021), the focus is on exploring insider roles (Sikes, 2021). Having an insider role often results in blurred lines between the researcher, the community which is researched and its practices (Sikes, 2021; Ellis et al., 2011). This is due to the researcher being part of the researched community and the latter happening analysis of the lived experiences (Sikes, 2021). To ensure the validity of the research, reflexivity is a crucial part of the research process (Sikes, 2021; Ellis, 2007). Reflexivity means to question and challenge the experience in order to examine the practices and/or cultural and social aspects of it (Sikes, 2021).

For this research, exploring animal welfare and wellbeing at tourism kennels means to examine practices at work which are influenced by the knowledge and abilities of human workers (see Coulter, 2016a), and in my case, specifically me. Exploring how animal welfare and wellbeing are constructed in this environment and through daily practices is ideal for

doing an autoethnography. Autoethnographies are often chosen when researching communities or groups and their social practices and beliefs (Sikes, 2021), as is the case in this study.

### **4.3 Data collection**

During the data collection period from November 2024 until January 2026, I was employed by two different companies and worked in three different kennels. Except for a couple of weeks between jobs, I have been working all year round in different companies. However, both companies and all three locations had between 80 and 120 dogs throughout my time there.

At company 1, I was employed during the winter season from November 2024 until the beginning of April and again from November 2025 until the end of the winter season in March 2026. Therefore, in this company, I only experienced the winter season. However, working for this company meant working at two different tourism kennels due to contract work at a different location. At the main kennel, self-driven guest tours are offered, besides other activities. The husky tours here included a kennel visit and Kota talk, where guests got a chance to ask any questions, and I answered everything and told some more stories, depending on the guests' interests. This kennel is set up in a rather common style among tourism kennels. All dogs live in dog kennels in pairs of two dogs. In addition, there is a fenced free run area which can be used to offer puppies playtime while guests are visiting, as well as a general playtime area for summer.

Working for company 1 meant also working at a second location. There, the offered tours are guide-driven, also known as charter rides. The main activity here is the husky rides offered during wintertime. Working here also meant bringing our dogs to work with us and taking care of our teams here. Throughout the winter, the dogs working at both locations were changed a few times to ensure breaks from the charter rides when needed by the dogs.

At company 2, I spent the summer full-time and worked part-time during autumn training. During summertime, the main tasks were daily chores such as feeding and letting dog groups in the free run area for playtime. Besides, building new dog yards and taking care of puppies was also part of the tasks. The kennel has all dogs divided into three dog yards, which are all fenced off to provide a free run area for every dog yard. During my time there, there were no tourists around or any products or tours offered. From September until the first week of November, I worked part-time besides my studies and mainly helped out during training by joining the training, driving teams, or staying back and taking dogs out into the play area, which were having a day off.

I collected data by writing down diary entries of each day, at least two days after the workday. When nothing special happened, I did not note anything. In total there are 149 entries. In those entries, I mainly focused on not everyday events and practices and events about animal welfare. Less written down are daily chores, as they are usually the same every day. Before starting the data collection, the goal of writing something about animal welfare and wellbeing was already known to me, and therefore, the focus on those events. However, after finishing the collection, I realised some areas were still missing entries, mainly the feeding and nutrition one, and added some entries to get a broader topic according to Mellor's Five Domains. Pictures were only taken for personal memories and only after completing the analysis used to have a nice visual.

#### **4.4 Reflexivity**

When doing an autoethnography, the knowledge is based on lived experiences and the following writing-down process (Ellis et al., 2011). Therefore, writing about experiences provides the opportunity to explore social settings and possible issues within them (Ellis et al., 2011; Dashper, 2016). Reflexivity is based on the self-awareness of the researcher, his or her writing and the vulnerability coming with the form of research (Ellis et al., 2011).

Ensuring the validity and quality of autoethnographic research follows different criteria than in other research methods (Dashper, 2016). First, does the analysis reach the reader, and does

it affect the reader (Dashper, 2016)? This is based on the analysis to be both analytical and evocative through creating a story of the lived experience (Dashper, 2016). This criterion also goes along with the next one, about whether the analysis is well written (Bochner, 2000). This aims at creating a flow within the text while maintaining a structure providing analysis and lived experiences going hand in hand (Bochner, 2000; Dashper, 2016). Believability of the written analysis and its truth, or different aspects which make up the meaning of the experience, is also crucial for the research's validity (Bochner, 2000; Dashper, 2016). Additionally, are ethical considerations found in the research (Bochner, 2000; Dashper, 2016)? This includes possible ethical dilemmas, reflexive self-awareness, as well as considering how oneself is presented in the research (Dashper, 2016). The ethical considerations do not need to be present in the analysis part, but should be discussed in other chapters of the study, for example, methodology (Dashper, 2016). And lastly, how does the study contribute to the already existing knowledge and field in which it is placed (Dashper, 2016)? Here, it is not crucial to have a rich theory connection throughout the whole analysis; it is crucial to connect the theory and understanding of the lived experiences to create meaning from the data (Dashper, 2016).

Less studied among autoethnography as well as ethnographic studies are the influences of emotions and opinions (Witte et al., 2023; Hall, 2011). As in autoethnography, the researcher analyses their experiences, and different emotions can have an influence on those (Witte et al., 2023). This, on the other hand, can result in a dilemma about how emotions influence the process, as they are present during the data collection process as well as the interpretation of it (Witte et al., 2023). Part of the emotional impact can also be seen in the post-fieldwork relationship management. As Hall (2011, p. 378) acknowledged, deciding whether to keep in contact or to cut off can be an emotional decision. Both have positive and negative impacts. Keeping in contact during the writing part can result in questions about what is written down, or new insight can come up, which might alter the previous findings (Hall, 2011, 378-379).

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations and positionality**

Doing an autoethnography means to study myself and relations with others, such as friends or colleagues (Ellis, 2007). Therefore, taking into consideration their role in my research and the relational ethics coming with it is needed (Ellis, 2007). One of the main questions for me is the question of being friends with my colleagues at work. Some researchers, such as Ellis (2007), were confronted by this question while studying two fisherman communities.

However, in her case, she came there as an outsider and has been perceived as a friend by the community over time. However, in my case, I have already been working at different husky kennels since autumn 2020. Therefore, becoming an insider was not an issue, since I am already part of the community and gaining trust or gaining access to the community has not been an issue. Due to that, especially in industries which are ethically debated, it can be difficult to do research as an outsider. For myself, I decided to only work and support kennels which are emphasizing animal welfare and wellbeing in their practices. When realising that a kennel does not care as much about the dogs, I left.

Having worked in the field for six seasons and almost as many summers means, on the one side, that I have gained and developed some knowledge about the industry, practices and training working huskies. However, this knowledge and experience can also be a limitation. I might not see and perceive things as important as someone new to the industry would. For example, I did not write down observations regarding feeding, as it is one of the few daily routines which happen every day. After going through the data entries, I added entries about missing topics.

#### **4.6 Research ethics**

This study is aligned with the research ethics and integrity provided by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). Before starting the data collection, my employees signed a letter of consent after being informed about my research. In addition, all three companies are staying anonymous. To keep the information confidential, the data was stored password-protected on my computer.

Besides the human participants of this study, the majority of participants are Siberian and Alaskan Huskies. So far, there are guidelines for research including animals in other fields; however, there are no laws or other regulations for animal work in social sciences. As this study is focusing on animal wellbeing at husky kennels, it is therefore important to also extend ethical considerations of research ethics from humans to animals. Since I cannot ask the huskies for their consent to my research, the same considerations are applied as for infants or other human being which cannot do so either, as Martin (2022) explored in her work. Therefore, this study aims to respect each individual participating in my study and is designed to generate new knowledge. Respecting the animals also requires paying close attention to their wellbeing and to determine whether they are suffering, comfortable or even in pain (Martin, 2022).

#### **4.7 Data Analysis**

In qualitative research and analysis, the focus is on data which is descriptive and is analysed based on making sense of the lived and observed experiences (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015). In this case, the interpretivism paradigm is the applied philosophy. The analytical approach for this research is a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an approach which aims to identify themes and patterns in a given set of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The advantage of thematic analysis is that it can be applied to any theoretical framework and does not limit the choices of it (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Before starting the analysis process, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest making a few decisions based on the data and approach before starting the analysis. This step aims to provide a clearer picture to the researcher as well as the reader about the approach and analysis. First of all, defining what a theme is. The term 'theme' aims to capture a pattern throughout the data which is related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, a theme does not need to occur in every data set, nor does it need to appear in many sets of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Naeem et al., 2023). One should also consider whether the aim is to describe and analyse the whole data set or to focus on a theme and subthemes for a more detailed analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this analysis, the aim is a more detailed analysis rather than a superficial one, including the whole data set. Therefore, the analysis is a theoretical

thematic analysis, which is characterised by its focus on one or a few themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

When familiarising oneself with the thematic analysis process, Naeem et al. (2023), as well as Braun and Clarke (2006) and Riger and Sigurvinsdottir (2015), suggest a six-step approach, which is applied for this study; however, the stronger focus is here on the steps of Braun and Clarke (2006). After familiarising myself with the whole set of data, the first initial codes were created. Creating the codes is based on Saldana's (2013) definition of a code being either one word or a short phrase, which is aimed to summarise or define the meaning of the data. Those first codes are created to get a better overview of possible themes. And followed in the next step by being grouped into themes. In this step, themes, subthemes and codes were taken a closer look at to get an overview of possible relations and how they work together or provide a point of conflict. In the next step, reviewing the codes and themes and reviewing whether the themes and the actual data provide enough content for the analysis. This also includes examining whether the codes suit the theme or if the written data does not suit a theme. Once the themes and codes work together, creating names for the themes and defining their scope is the next step. Lastly, analysing the data in the analysis chapter.

After coding the first two rounds, including adapting codes which are the same but have a different word for it, I ended up with 132 different codes. For the coding, descriptive coding has been applied, which aims to summarise the data entries' topic and themes (Saldana, 2013). In the next step, to get a better overview of the different codes, they were grouped into the first four domains of Mellor's Five Domain model. The mental outcomes were also put in the domains which impact those to keep a better overview for the beginning. After that, the first categories were identified and the codes grouped into those categories as shown in Figure 7 below.

Along with grouping the codes into different themes, the data entries were also grouped and reorganised in a new Word file for a better overview and checking for whether the codes and data sets fit into a theme. However, some themes, such as 'Trails' in the 'Environment' themes and 'Running rotation' in the 'Health' themes, have some shared codes and data sets. After organising, readjusting and grouping the themes, one category with its subthemes was chosen for the analysis based on the richness of the data and whether there was enough data for a

proper analysis. Themes of domain four, the behavioural interactions, are either, interactions with the dogs’ environment, interactions with other dogs or humans. Therefore, in most cases, they are overlapping with other domains and do not leave enough data for domain four. For example, the code ‘dog-dog relations’ can be both, part of the nutrition domain, as well as the behavioural domain.

<b>Nutrition</b>	Feeding as daily practice	Human impact	Neutral (e.g. changes in feeding)
			Negative (e.g. wrong knowledge)
	Water intake through the year	Feeding practices	
		Dog-dog relations	
		Water intake	
	Restricted access		
<b>Environment</b>	Dog centred kennel layout	Kennel Layout	
		Dog yard routines	
		Puppy centred constructions	
	Trails	Variety	
		Risk management	
<b>Health</b>	Running and training	Running rotation	Training schedule
			Trail changes
		Capabilities	
	Prevention	Preventative medical care	
		Free run for prevention	
Medical treatment	Medical care for dogs		
	Vet related topics		
<b>Behavioural interactions</b>	Dog-dog interaction		
	Dog-human interactions		
	Tourist-dog interaction		

Figure 7: Themes and subthemes.

## 5. EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTION OF WELLBEING FOR SLED DOGS

Three themes were chosen to analyse, one each of the first three domains. In Figure 7, those are the feeding as daily practice, dog centred kennel layout, and running and training. Those themes were chosen, as they are not yet researched more in depth in previous studies, such as Bohn et al. (2018).

Before starting the analysis, explaining some of the vocabulary and words used during work can be an advantage. A kennel has two different meanings. It can be either used to describe the whole farm (e.g. a tourism kennel) or it is used to describe a single enclosure in which the dogs live (e.g. Risto and Kato share a kennel). A dog yard is a set of single kennels. Here, a kennel (farm) can have several dog yards when they are in distance from each other. When there are several dog yards, each dog yard can have their own free run area. This is an area which is fenced off and is designed for the dogs to run around freely. A free run area does not need to be included in the dog yard; it can also be a fenced-off area at a different part of the kennel (farm). During autumn and wintertime, the dogs are trained either in front of a vehicle with or without an engine, as long as there is not enough snow, or in front of a sled once there is enough snow. Therefore, a team of dogs is the group which runs in front of the sled or vehicle. Those teams can be of any size, in the wintertime most often between 3 and 6 dogs when guests drive the sled, or 8 to 12 dogs when a guide is driving the sled and guests are sitting in the sled. Most often, when a 'team' is mentioned, it refers to the dogs and not to the human co-workers (e.g. Let's get the teams ready!). Once the teams are ready to go, one can also say that the dogs are in 'line', meaning they are in the team and attached to the line, which goes from the sled all the way to the very first dogs in the team.

## 5.1 Feeding as a daily routine



Picture 1: Dogs waiting for food.



Picture 2: Dogs eating together.

*The goal of our feeding system is to open the door, put the empty bowls inside, while the dogs wait inside without jumping out. Once we start filling soup in the bowls, the dogs are not allowed to touch them anymore. Then we add dry food, and when all bowls are ready, we move them a bit away from each other but still keep them closer. When we say the name of the dog, they are allowed to start eating. This way, the dogs learn that even when there is food around, and they are eating close to each other, not to steal and leave others alone. Besides that, after running when they get their food in line, they have to eat close to other dogs. Of course, some dogs never learn not to steal, but those are known, and we need to watch them. But the majority is really good with the food around.*

07.01.2026, Company 2, reflections about feeding practices

One of the daily tasks for me and everybody else working in a husky kennel is the feeding, for which each kennel having their own unique feeding practices and routines. The focus of these feeding routines is to create a calm and relaxed environment around food, which ensures that each dog is getting the right amount of food and each portion is put together based on the needs of each dog. This way of feeding is training the dogs in not jumping out of the door

when opening it, as well as waiting in front of the bowls and most importantly, that there is no need for jealousy over food.

In Mellor's Five Domains, feeding is part of the nutrition domain and impacts the feeling of hunger and thirst and therefore, comfort or malnutrition (Mellor, 2016). This aligns with animal welfare to be focused on fulfilling needs, such as hunger and thirst of animals (Fennell & Markwell, 2015). In this case, training the dogs on the feeding routine and rules can be placed in the concept of animal agency's competence, in which learning and acting on it is one of its characteristics (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022). Creating this feeding environment with known structures and rules according to the animal's agency of environment provides the dogs with comfort (Littlewood et al., 2023) and, as a result, creates a positive impact on the wellbeing of the dogs.

*They came from a kennel where they had feeding holes in the kennels, which makes feeding faster and easier for the humans, but doesn't teach the dogs anything. It showed in today's feeding, we had to tackle some of the dogs down to prevent them from stealing, which isn't ideal since they don't know us yet, and it might have scared one or two... I hope they will learn fast.*

13.08.2025, Company 2, feeding newly arrived dogs

Different feeding practices focus on different aspects, such as feeding speed, level of difficulty or teaching manners. A common way to feed among kennels is to use feeding holes. Those are holes cut out of the fence where the dog has to put its head through to reach the bowl. It is often said to make feeding faster, as there is no need to open doors, as one can just walk along the kennels and put the food in the bowls. By using feeding holes, one of the advantages is that dogs cannot steal food from each other that easily, as only one head fits through the hole. However, this form of feeding is rather human-focused, as most advantages are for the workers.

Therefore, when dogs arrive who were taught a different feeding system, the first feeding as well as the first week after arrival is about focusing on teaching the new feeding routine, as part of the competence of animal agency (Englund & Cronin, 2023). Providing clear structures and rules to the dogs also means to provide them with competence (Webber et al., 2022; Littlewood et al., 2023), control (Englund & Cronin, 2023) and a safe environment (Littlewood et al., 2023), which are factors of animal agency. Therefore, giving the dogs clear rules empowers their own agency, which they can then act according to it (Littlewood et al., 2023).

*During the daily free running time, we always give snacks to the dogs by throwing some dry food. After a new experienced worker arrived, she asked if we could do this in all of our groups without trouble. She was surprised to hear a yes, and that there is only one group where she needs to watch a female who can get jealous around food. However, even she (the dog) learned rather fast after arriving that this is nothing to start a fight over. At first, she needed some more space around herself during the snacking, but after some time, she learned it was okay, and she started to relax.*

07.01.2026, Company 2, reflections about snacks in the free run area

Every day, each dog of company 2 either goes for a training run or enjoys some free run and playtime in a fenced area. During the free run time, each group of dogs gets some dry food as a snack, which we throw and spread out on the ground for them to search.

Ensuring to provide each dog with the option to leave their kennel each day can be seen as an act of ethical consideration. As Butz and Mosgaard (2019) stated, ethics regarding sled dogs is also about how practices influence the dogs' health and wellbeing. In this case, providing them with the option to enjoy playtime and snacks is a factor which improves the dogs' wellbeing.

Additionally, from an animal agency point of view, there are several advantages and positive impacts on the dogs' welfare and wellbeing. Competence is taught and developed based on

learning how to behave around other dogs when there is food around and learning about social interactions (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022). Giving them the choice of whether they would like to interact with other dogs or us humans, as well as choosing whether they would like to have a snack (Englund & Cronin, 2023). At the same time, besides giving the dogs a choice, it also puts them in control of what they would like to do and how they would like to interact with other dogs and us during the free run time (Englund & Cronin, 2023; Webber et al., 2022). In addition, to some extent, the playtime can be seen as a challenge, especially for new dogs when they learn the new routines and rules (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022). However, this daily playtime is also offering the dogs entertainment (Webber et al. 2022). And lastly, the snack time during the playtime also offers improved wellbeing based on the environment and affordance of animal agency (Littlewood et al., 2023).

*With the beginning of the winter season, there are always new employees starting to work. Most of them come without any previous experience, and some might have some dogs at home. However, especially when it comes to feeding, it is interesting to see how people do it and what they listen to. One of the new colleagues doesn't seem to listen to instructions nor be able to remember much. According to this person, the dogs should get as much meat as they like during feeding. After he had been feeding most days of the week, another colleague realised that some dogs were getting fat.*

07.01.2026, Company 1, reflections about feeding practices

Other than Mellor's Five Domains suggests, feeding is about more than just providing food and water in the right amounts (Mellor, 2016; Mellor et al., 2020). The other workers and I have a strong influence, especially on the quantity of food given to each dog, as Coulter (2016a) already states, human workers are the ones ensuring the animal's wellbeing. In most cases, feeding and its routines are part of the training when new employees start working with dogs. This ensures that each dog receives the right amount of food, based on their body's metabolism as well as the level of activity and running.

However, as this case demonstrates, the influence of inexperienced employees and their lack of knowledge can also cause a negative impact on the dogs by gaining overweight. Human-animal relations can be found in a variety of settings and forms, as Hoarau-Heemstra and Kline (2022), as well as Coulter (2016a), found. One could argue that giving the dogs as much food as they like means giving them control, which is part of animal agency (Englund & Cronin, 2023). However, in this case, as the dogs are also workers as they are pulling sleds (Dashper, 2021), running with overweight dogs harms their health, no matter whether they are working or not. This, on the other hand, goes against the definition of animal welfare of Fennell and Markwell (2015), as they state that the quality of life needs to be met. Therefore, one of the crucial factors in the relations between employees and working huskies is to know each dog and be able to assess how much food is needed in order to keep the weight and improve their wellbeing.

**5.2 Dog-centred kennel layout**



Picture 3: A dog enjoying the free run area. Picture 4: Dogs enjoying their new homes.

*Compared to the wintertime when there are guests and sledding happening, there is not that much happening here at the moment. Usually, kennel days are quite calm and*

*relaxed, as are the dogs, and they enjoy their daily play and free running time. I think having this is rather rare among tourism husky kennels as it requires more employees, and most kennels are not set up in a way to make this easily possible. But it is definitely something that makes the dogs happy and keeps the energy level low during summertime.*

24.05.2025, Company 2, Daily free running time

Working at six different husky kennels throughout the years, only two of those companies made sure every dog got the chance to come out of their kennels daily. Both had one thing in common: their dog yard layout. In most cases, the kennels are set up focused on efficiency when getting the dogs ready for training and having a free run area fenced off somewhere on the side. Those layouts are more designed for the human workers and offer easier and faster daily routines for them, excluding play times. However, company 2 took a different approach to the kennel layout when they were planning their new dog yards.

When including animal welfare in the planning of a dog kennel, it should be set up in a way which benefits the daily routines for the dogs, and, therefore, ensures that the dogs needs are taken care of. In most cases, animal welfare is defined as ensuring the needs and lives of the animals are met (e.g. Fennell & Markwell, 2015). However, looking at current recommendations, of, for example, the Animal Welfare Act (Finnish Food Authority, 2025), there are no recommendations regarding the kennel set up, it is, however, stated that kennels have to fulfil behavioural needs, such as movements. This can be seen as a recommendation to have a free run area for dogs, especially for summer time, when there are no tours and no training due to the warm weather.

*After finishing free run with the dogs, we started building the first kennels of the new dog yard. They decided to have a system I haven't seen before for the grounds of the kennels. First, they take out the top layer carefully because that's where a lot of water can be stored. After that, they add bigger rocks to make sure that water can flow into*

*the ground. On top of that, a layer of wooden chips. As a result, the dogs shouldn't dig too deep, and the water can flow through the different layers, and the kennel should not be too wet after snow melting or rain falls. (This is done for the individual kennels in which the dogs live, but not for the free run area.)*

16.05.2025, Company 2

During the summer, one of the main tasks besides taking care of the dogs was to build the new dog yards. For the old ones, all trees were taken down, and sand was used to create even ground. Here, the kennels were built in rows, with the only possibility for free runs between the rows. It is my second time helping with building a new dog yard from scratch. However, this time, the layout is adjusted to the dogs' needs as well as to make life for us human workers easier.

Looking at Mellor's Five Domains (2016), as shown in chapter 3.1 in figure 2, one of the factors for the dogs' welfare and wellbeing is to provide a dry and comfortable environment. Starting with the groundwork to create a good basis for dry kennels is supporting a comfortable and dry environment for the dogs. Besides the impact on the environment, putting in the work also impacts the health domain (Mellor, 2016), as a wet environment can cause health issues to the dogs, for example, in the form of skin issues.

*When setting up the new kennels, we decided against feeding holes for several reasons. First, since they would face the free run areas, it increases the danger of fights between dogs through feeding holes. Especially since most dogs here are not used to those. Second, using feeding wholes doesn't really teach the dogs how to behave when there is food around, as only one head should fit through the hole.*

07.01.2026, Company 2, reflections

In chapter 5.1, the way feeding holes work for feeding has already been explained. Besides the impact on factors within animal agency, such as competence, feeding holes can also influence the environmental domain of Mellor's Five Domains (2016). When planning the dog yard with an integrated free run area, feeding holes provide a risk for the dogs during the free run and play time, as the dogs can reach each other through the holes. Feeding holes are therefore not a direct negative influence on the dogs' wellbeing and welfare; however, they do impact the environmental domain by creating a risk, as well as the health domain by possible injuries.

*We built the puppy kennel for the current litter. There will be two different ones for puppies of different ages. For now, the one for when they are little is in a spot which might not seem like a good choice at first because it is right next to the main building, and a lot of traffic is happening there. However, because many cars and people pass by every day, we hope the puppies get used to different sounds and don't get stressed later in their lives when they hear those noises. Once they grow bigger and are too big for the kindergarten, we will build a new kennel for the puppies closer to the adult dog yards for them to be included in the daily routines and see their new dog yards before moving in with other dogs other than their litter mates.*

01.06.2025, Company 2, Puppy kennel

Focusing on dog-centred kennel set up and layout does not mean that it cannot be beneficial for human workers at the same time. The place of the puppy kennel is ideal for both the puppies and their mom, as well as for human workers.

Growing up in a place which has a variety of sounds and offers as many different interactions as possible, and experiences helps the puppies to get used to the environment. By offering this learning opportunity, the puppies learn from a young age how to relax and interact with different influences, which should result in more relaxed adult dogs later. In Mellor's Five Domains (2016), this is reflected in the environmental domain, with the focus on feeling

comfortable in the environment, as well as in the fourth domain, the behavioural interactions. The fourth domain focuses on behaviour and interactions, and therefore, also on handling different emotions, such as fear, anger, or frustration (Mellor, 2016; Mellor et al., 2020).

Being in a place which is therefore challenging for puppies also impacts the puppies' agency already (see Littlewood et al, 2023; Webber et al., 2022). They learn competence from a young age on, to learn from their environment and through interacting with humans, siblings, as well as their mom. Besides competence, they also learn how to handle challenges (Littlewood et al., 2023) due to the different influences, sounds and experiences.

*Two males got castrated today and were moved into the dog hospital afterwards. There is space for two dogs in two separate kennels with an indoor sleeping area and a wooden floor outdoor area. The outdoor access can get closed, for example, in the wintertime when only one side is in use, and it is cold outside because the inside of the cabin can get warmed up with a heater. So far, this has been the nicest arrangement I have seen for a sick dog kennel. Also, the place right in front of the main building allows regular checking in with the dogs because they are so close, and people are walking past all the time.*

05.06.2025, Company 2, Sick dog kennel

Right next to the puppy kennel, there is the 'Dogspital', the kennel for injured dogs or other issues. Most often, sick dog kennels like this are used for dogs after surgeries or dogs with injuries which should not get dirty. Sometimes, also for dogs with paw issues, as this kennel has a wood floor. Therefore, the location right next to the main building is ideal, as medical storage is close by, and people who walk past regularly can check in with the dogs.

Offering appropriate medical care for the dogs is part of the need to meet the needs and lives of animals as part of animal welfare (Fennell & Markwell, 2015). However, as Fennell and Sheppard (2011) already stated, animal welfare is strongly connected to the financial situation of a company. In my experience, specifically medical bills can be influenced by a company's

financial situation and treatments for older dogs or surgeries are often not necessary, as they only cost money, but the dogs cannot work anymore. Cases like those show what the lack of regulations and requirements for working dogs in tourism settings can look like. At the same time, the issue is not entirely on the system, but it is also an ethical question to ask how it can be justified to make decisions over a dog's wellbeing based on finances.

Going back to the overall topic of this chapter, about dog-centred kennel layouts. Above, the kennel and how it is set up were described and analysed. Which leaves the question, is it really worth it?

*One of the dogs who didn't enjoy the old free run before is super happy about the new one. The old one was a small one between the kennel rows, with all the dogs being super close to each other. Now in the new one, which is set up in a U shape, there is more space between the kennels and the free run, and he really likes it. It's nice to see how some dogs change because of a better and calmer free run area.*

14.07.2025, Company 2, new dog yard.

Building a dog yard, including a free run area for playtime, can make a difference to the dogs. Most dogs were also happy in the small and crowded free run area in the old dog yard, but not all dogs. Some prefer a calmer environment with more space and would not come out of their kennel in the old, small free run area. This shows how the efforts towards a dog-centred dog yard can positively influence the dogs' wellbeing and mental state. As Mellor's Five Domains (2016) show, the environment of the dogs and the kennel, which is built by us, can have a strong positive impact on the dogs.

However, it is worth mentioning that every company has a different layout of their kennels and dog yards. In most cases, the kennels are all built in a similar style, easily accessible, with short walking paths and easy to get the dogs ready for training. A set-up as described above does have several negative aspects too, mainly for the human workers. It takes more employees to take care of the dogs when every dog has to get out of their kennel every day,

which in return require more financial input in daily routines. In addition, daily routines, such as feeding without the feeding holes, take longer.

### 5.3 Love for running



Picture 5: Charter rides.



Picture 6: Self-driven rides.

Part of Domain three (Mellor, 2016), the health domain, is the running and training part for sled dogs. As written in Figure 2, health is influenced by training, as it either results in good physical fitness or in injuries due to a lack of proper training. Those outcomes also strongly reflect in the mental outcome of either a happy dog who is in great shape and loves his job, or a dog who does not enjoy running as much or gets bored.

*After I got my team ready, one of the colleagues walked over and warned me about slippery trails. However, I already thought the same and was careful with my choice of dogs and started with all the not-as-strong dogs and only 10 dogs in my team. After lunch break, I see that some colleagues have up to 12 dogs. I decide to just swap one stronger dog into the team, as the team has been resting the day before and is*

*performing great. Interestingly, even though I am driving with one or two dogs less than all the other drivers, I am not the slowest team.*

19.01.2025, Company 1, charter rides

Huskies are bred for running and born with a love for it. However, as human workers, we are responsible for keeping it that way. One of the possibilities we have is to ensure that each dog gets enough rest days and to only let them run according to their abilities.

The key to knowing a dog's abilities and preferences is to observe them and learn about their behaviour, as wellbeing is ensured based on the human worker (Coulter, 2016a). Those human-dog relations are crucial for training not just for us humans but also for the dogs. As Hoarau-Heemstra and Kline (2022) state, there are different forms of human-animal relations depending on the setting. In this case, the factor of taking care of the physical abilities of the dogs shapes the human-dog relationship (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022), as well as the wellbeing as a result of the human-animal relationship (Coulter, 2016a).

Taking care of the dogs and ensuring to train them during autumn, according to the tours driven later on during wintertime, also means learning about their limitations and capabilities. As written in the vignette above, each team has a set of dogs to choose from. In the company I worked at, each team has 12 dogs, and it is up to the driver of that team, the human, to change dogs as needed or to give them additional rest days. Especially for dogs working in the tourism industry, it is crucial for the human workers to learn about their capabilities (Markwell, 2015; Coulter, 2016a) to be able to offer a great experience to both tourists and dogs (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022).

*Today I took the dogs that weren't running yesterday. Most teams seemed already tired after yesterday, I guess most dogs already run the day before. Our system includes running a team for two days, then the team is one day off, and then again 2 days' work. My team was super excited to go.*

05.12.2024, Company 1, charter rides

*I learned that the whole dog yard is divided into five teams, with always four running. In my calculation, this means they have four days running, one day off and so on. I am wondering if the performance difference, therefore, is not just because of the breeding line difference, but also because of the rest days. Or maybe also because the dogs here do not get to see anything else, while our dogs get swapped out with the main farm's dogs regularly to see other trails and tours.*

19.01.2025, Company 2, charter rides main company

How to do the rest day management and running schedule is up to each company to decide without any direct recommendations found in the Animal Welfare Act 2024 (Finnish Food Authority, 2025). How do those different ways of creating running schedules for the dogs show their results in the two vignettes above? Both were observed at the same place with dog teams from different companies, with different outcomes in performance.

However, besides the running and day off schedule, there are also other factors influencing the running performance, such as trail variety. One of the characteristics of charter rides is a limited trail variety in most cases, in addition to rather shorter rounds. As a result, there are not many challenges or entertaining factors (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022) about those rounds which can result in lower performance. Just as for us humans, dogs also respond to having repetitive routines, such as repetitive trails, which can lower the work motivation due to a lack of challenge (Littlewood et al., 2023; Webber et al., 2022).

*I can see that my lead dogs are starting to get bored running the same loops all day long, and they needed help from my colleagues to push them to the longer trails after half of the day. Usually, it was enough for someone to stand there, but not today. My leaders still tried to get around the people standing there, and they had a tough time pushing them the right way. It is clear to me that they love the running part, but they would prefer to run other trails more regularly. I can understand it; it must be boring.*

22.03.2025, Company 1, charter rides

Having the same trails over and over again is a mental challenge for both humans and dogs. Especially that first winter working for that company was difficult for me to keep a good mood during repetitive work routines. And it felt like the dogs could feel that mood too, due to the connection between me and the dogs (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Most dogs are easily accustomed to change with dogs from the main kennel; however, the lead dogs are especially difficult. They need to be able to listen to our direction commands and follow them, while having a strong head to keep going on those trails.

This leaves us with the question, why do companies offer those short charter rides, if it can be less fun for the dogs to run? As Hoarau-Heemstra and Kline (2022) write, one of the main challenges in seasonal tourism is to generate enough income for the whole year in a few months only. Therefore, offering shorter tours means being able to welcome more guests, and more guests mean more income. A strategy which is applied by some companies to generate enough income in return to being able to offer a better quality of life to the dogs. Other companies offer those short rides, however, do it solely for the financial reason. Even though it might seem like the main reason for many companies, this is not necessarily always the case. Especially smaller kennels use short-term contracting work at those companies to be able to generate enough income in two to three months before going back to offer either longer tours, or even to just focus on training their own dogs. Either way, it is also crucial to keep in mind that the work conditions for the dogs in wintertime should be according to their needs.

*When entering the room, I see a worker massaging a dog. Later, through conversations, I figure out that he is a trained dog masseuse and takes care of all the dogs working at that company (also contractors). Every week, one of his workdays is reserved to do this all day long to ensure all dogs who need it can have a turn. He also asked me not to bring a dog from the kennel to this place the next day, because due to her massage, it is better to make sure the dogs have a couple of rest days.*

11.12.2024, Company 1, preventative care

*Besides the training, there are still two dog yards which need to get into the free run. There are a few things which need to be done daily, and one of them is getting every dog out of their kennel either by training or by free running. While a dog team is out training, there is at least one person staying back to run some dogs. The reason for putting the effort in is that the free run is beneficial for all dogs by socialising them with other dogs and humans, but also to stretch their bodies, especially during working season, as it can help to prevent injuries and help with the recovery.*

21.08.2025, Company 2, playtime for prevention

There are several ways to ensure good work conditions for the dogs during wintertime, of which I observed two possibilities. One way to do so is by using preventative measures, such as massages for dogs or offering free run time on days off for the dogs to stretch their muscles.

Offering massages to dogs who are stiff or limping due to some injuries is a great way to offer preventative care, but it also requires the human workers to know their dogs really well. When working with the dogs, each human worker must know their dogs' running styles. If that is the case, changes in their running style can be a first indicator for bigger issues later on if not treated immediately. Therefore, preventative care is strongly dependent on each human's knowledge and the relationship between the dogs and humans (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022).

Another way to prevent injuries is to offer free run to dogs on their days off, as done by company 2. In this company, free run for the dogs is done as a daily routine throughout the year, which has advantages not just outside the winter season. Especially during training season in autumn and sledding season in winter, offering the dogs the chance to stretch their muscles is of great advantage to the dogs. Just as with the massage, the issue here is that the person being in the free run with the dogs that day needs to be able to see changes in the running style in order to spot possible small issues (Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Besides, the dogs are stakeholders in the company they work for (García-Rosell & Tallberg, 2021), which in turn means that the free run is not just in the humans' interests, but also in the

interest of the dogs. Therefore, having a free run and using it as part of every dogs daily routine is highly beneficial for the dogs.

## 6. DISCUSSION

With the growing popularity of dog sledding tours in Finnish Lapland, the number of reported incidents of a lack of animal welfare and wellbeing is rising. (Mäkilä, 2025, October 29). So is the interest of tourism scholars in the topic of animal welfare and wellbeing in tourism (Winter, 2020). Even though there is a variety of research done focusing on several topics within the field of sled dogs in tourism (Bertella, 2016; Bohn et al., 2018), none of the researchers has been working in the field or has an insider perspective.

Feeding is more than what is shown in Mellor's Five Domains. Depending on the way of feeding, the dogs learn and improve their agency through gaining competence (Webber et al., 2022) about how to behave around food and the rules. As a result, the dogs' environment, the physical and psychological (Littlewood et al., 2023) ones improve, as the dogs learn to follow the rules, they create a calm and relaxed environment for all, dogs and humans. Providing dogs with the opportunity to enjoy a snack during their free run time gives them control and choice over how much they would like to snack and if they want to snack at all. However, the results in chapter 5.1 show that one of the strongest influences on feeding and snacking is the human workers. Their knowledge is crucial and the basis of feeding and giving snacks, as they are deciding on the quantity of the food. Therefore, the human-animal interactions in this case are more about knowing each dog (Coulter, 2016a; Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022) to provide the right amount of food, which in turn impacts the animal welfare and wellbeing. The welfare in this case is about knowing each dog's needed quantity of food to prevent being overweight or underweight, while well-being is constructed through competence and a calm and relaxed feeding environment with daily routines known to the dogs.

When reading the different studies of animal welfare and wellbeing, some mentioned feeding, while most did not. Mellor's Five Domains (2016; Mellor et al., 2020) do take nutrition into account, but it only focuses on the nutrition intake. Even though in reality, feeding is a daily practice and one of the main tasks every human working with dogs and other animals performs. And when it is taken into account and written about, it solely focuses on the nutrition intake and quality of food (e.g. Mellor, 2016; Mellor et al., 2020; Bohn et al., 2018). Carr and Broom (2018) state that animals working in tourism need to have their needs

fulfilled to be able to perform their work, as also stated by Hoarau-Heemstra and Kline (2022) or Markwell (2015). Couter (2016a) states that the animals' wellbeing is impacted and created through the human workers and the relations between humans and animals. However, in all of those cases, the focus on human-animal interactions and relations is lacking, especially regarding the feeding. Therefore, chapter 5.1 offers an insight into this topic and provides new knowledge.

Analysing the kennel layout and its impacts on animal welfare and wellbeing showed that the human-animal relations are rather objective here. When designing a kennel layout, focusing on the dogs' needs impacts the welfare and wellbeing of the dogs indirectly. In addition, focusing on the dogs' needs means that the dogs are stakeholders in the construction, due to their interest in their environment. There are different ways to set up a kennel, and, in most cases, it is also the greatest limitation. A kennel which has been designed focusing on human needs and routines is most often not able to be changed to a more dog-centred approach. This shows, for example, whether a free run is included or how many free runs are built, as the more dogs, the more groups there are that would like to enjoy some play time.

Mellor's Five Domains include the environment domain, which focuses on the physical environment and its comfort for the animals living in it (Mellor, 2016; Mellor et al., 2020). A missing factor here is how decisions made by humans when deciding on a layout are later influenced by the daily routines and potentially limit daily routines. Bohn et al. (2018) focused on offering a guide for animal-based tourism services and made suggestions about housing, drainage systems, kennel shapes, as well as tethering areas. The study focuses on physical elements already built, which influence the animal welfare (Bohn et al., 2018), but lacks focus on how to improve the dogs' wellbeing and to include daily routines in the planning. A kennel layout and set-up is mainly focused on animal welfare, for example, insulating dog houses to keep the dogs warm during winter. As a result, there is an impact on the dogs' wellbeing, because a dry and warm dog is usually content. However, going a step further and exploring how daily routines, such as free running every day, improve the wellbeing of the dogs and how to build a kennel designed for it, is not yet found in any other study.

The results of the chapter on love for running show that huskies love running when managed properly and given enough entertainment and variety. Out of all three themes, this is the one with the strongest human-animal relations and interactions. Running and training dogs means for the dogs to trust the human and for the human to manage their days off, distance and observing for possible changes in their running style, which could be the start of an injury. There are no direct regulations about those; however, when it comes to the running part, there are different views influencing it. From an ethical perspective, each kennel should offer a variety of trails to keep the motivation of the dogs up, and the longer the trails, the nicer for the dogs. Both are often limited by financial decisions (see Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Short tours generate more income, which is needed as the winter season is short and the income needs to be for the whole year. In most cases, the financial advantages which short tours offer are the main reason for companies to offer those to tourists.

Hoarau-Heemstra and Kline (2022) already stated that the short season can be challenging as it requires companies to generate enough income for the whole year. This also shows in the fact that company 1 took the contract to work at charter rides besides the other kennel as financial support. In cases like this, the main income is generated through the contracting work on the charter rides, while the self-driven tours do not generate as much income for the year. This results in an ethical dilemma: should a company offer shorter tours which are boring for the dogs, or should they focus on longer tours but more expensive? Whichever decision is made, both require ensuring proper work conditions for the dogs. Hoarau-Heemstra and Kline (2022) suggest that income generation is a known issue; however, in their results, it only affects the running schedule, with, for example, fewer rest days for the dogs due to the amount of work. Not taken into account is how those financial situations are also influencing the trails and the trail variety as well as the dogs' agency, especially the challenges and entertainment, as shown in research by Littlewood et al. (2023) and Webber et al. (2022).

To come to a conclusion of this chapter, the analysis and research have been guided by two research questions.

RQ 1: How do daily practices and routines impact the dogs' wellbeing and welfare?

RQ 2: How do human-animal interactions influence the dogs' welfare and wellbeing?

To answer the first one, the main impacting factor is the kennel layout and set-up. The dogs' welfare and wellbeing are limited or improved depending on the kennel layout, especially the opportunity for offering free run daily and in a safe environment, which has a great positive impact on the dogs' physical and mental health. Besides that, running also has positive and negative impacts on the dogs' welfare, but mainly wellbeing, dependent on the outcome based on the trails and running schedule. Feeding routines also impact the wellbeing and welfare; however, the main impact of feeding seems to be on the different forms of expressing agency and improving the dogs' agency.

Regarding the second RQ, about the human-animal interactions and their impacts on the welfare and wellbeing of the dogs, in some themes the influence is rather indirect, while in others the interactions are strongly influencing the wellbeing and welfare. For the kennel layout, there is a rather indirect connection, but a stronger focus on seeing dogs as stakeholders due to the efforts of building dog yards according to their needs. For feeding, the impact of the human-animal relationship is more important, as the human workers need to know the dogs to feed the right amounts. The strongest connection is found in running and training. Here, humans need to know each dog's running style and capabilities to provide the dogs a good experience.

In the existing literature, animal welfare and well-being have been explored, especially by Bohn et al. (2018) and Hoarau-Heemstra and Kline (2022) with regard to sled dogs. However, both are missing the insider role, as in both studies, the researchers do not have experience working in the dog sledding industry. Therefore, this work offers new insights into the themes of feeding, kennel layout and running from an insider perspective. However, there are limitations to this study. During Wintertime, there was always less time for talks as most of the time it was busy, and everybody was focused on getting the work done. A clear limitation to me as the researcher in this case is that due to my experience, I might not pay attention to the same things as someone else would who is new in the field. Due to that, sometimes I only realised days later, when there was something noticeable to put down in my data. Therefore, some entries are put in a later day, when I realised. Besides that, my experience is also influencing my opinions and feelings. Over the years, I saw enough kennels and got enough experience that I made up an "ideal" version of how a kennel should operate and treat the

dogs. However, I am also aware that due to different set-ups, layouts and practices, it is not possible to adapt all kennels to be the same.

Therefore, it would be interesting to see more research in the field from people with an insider perspective, either people who have worked in the field for a while or researchers conducting field work in the form of an autoethnography. To understand the dog sledding industry better, offering actual insight would be more beneficial than conducting ethnographies without working in the field. It would also offer a new perspective, having people conducting autoethnographies who have not been working in this specific field before. Their insight could offer new perspectives on the matter. However, this study only scratches the surface of the welfare and wellbeing of sled dogs and would need to be researched more in depth.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how wellbeing and welfare in husky kennels are influenced by different practices, as well as how human-animal relations impact the wellbeing and welfare of the dogs. To do so, Mellor's Five Domains were used to identify influencing factors, and human-animal relations were examined and included in Mellor's Five Domains.

As the analysis showed, all three analysed themes are influenced by human-animal relations and as Coulter (2016a) already found, those relations impact the wellbeing of the dogs. The feeding relies on the knowledge and experience of the human who is feeding, which in turn impacts the dog's wellbeing and welfare in regard to the amount of food and the quality. The feeding is strongly connected to the dogs' agency, regarding the competence (Webber et al., 2022; Littlewood et al., 2023), control (Englund & Cronin, 2023), choice (Englund & Cronin) and environment (Littlewood et al., 2023). The kennel layout is mainly an either a limiting factor or a supporting factor of the dogs' wellbeing. In most cases, the layout is focused on the human workers' needs and advantages and not always takes into account daily routines which would be of advantage for the dogs. Therefore, this shows the ethical dilemma, whether to focus on the dogs' needs or the humans' needs. However, building a dog yard according to possible daily routines, such as free running, offers new possibilities and improves the wellbeing of the dogs. Looking at the running, there seemed to be a similar dilemma about the trails and tours offered. On one side, offering longer tours is more entertaining for the dogs, but offering shorter guide-driven tours generates more income, which is needed as sledding is only possible in the wintertime. Besides that, the analysis showed that the wellbeing and welfare of the dogs are impacted by the trail variety, the running schedule and preventative measures.

Regarding previous literature and studies, this one offers a new insight into the topic from an insider perspective. Like similar studies, such as Bohn et al. (2018), this study focused on the factors impacting welfare and wellbeing. However, this study uses the insider perspective to offer a new point of view on the theme. As much of an advantage as the insider perspective is, it is also these studies' greatest limitation. Due to my knowledge and being used to the work, I

have most likely not written down all interesting or important observations, which seemed too ordinary to me.

As for future research, I only offered a superficial insight into the issue, which would require more research, and most importantly, fieldwork. One could argue, that I offer an indepth research here due to the long-time of data collection and the insider role I have. However, working in the field, and looking at it myself, the three themes analysed are important factors for the dogs wellbeing and welfare, however, there are more topics which require more research. Additionally, in fields like business studies, researchers are most likely to have some kind of experience or even a lot of experience working in the field. However, when looking at studies and research about animal-based tourism, there seems to be a lack of experience.

Therefore, as a takeaway, the focus of future research about animal welfare and wellbeing should be more focused on autoethnographic work. So far, research has been done, mainly in form of ethnographies without working and gaining experience in the field.

Autoethnographies do not solely improve the visibility of animals in research, but also provides new possibilities and insights into the matter from an insider perspective, which cannot be learned or experienced otherwise and so far is lacking.

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