RESEARCH NOTE

WHALE WATCHING IN NORWAY CAUGHT BETWEEN MORE TRADITIONAL HUNTING CANONS AND THE LUCRATIVE PROMISE OF SEISMIC AIRGUNS

GIOVANNA BERTELLA* AND HEIKE IRIS VESTER†‡§

*School of Business and Economics, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway
†Georg-August University of Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany
‡Max Planck Institute for Dynamics and Self-Organization, Göttingen, Germany
§Faculty of Aquaculture and Biosciences, University of Nordland, Bodø, Norway

This research note concerns the role of whale-watching tourism providers in the debate over protection of the marine environment. The case reported is about northern Norwegian whale-watching organizations. Based on the analysis of local newspapers and on the direct experience of one member of our research team, this research note concludes that the whale-watching companies, and more in general the wildlife tourism companies, engage only marginally in the debate. This can be explained referring to the companies’ limited availability of resources and experience in the field, and to the existence of different perspectives relative to the way humans can use and impact the marine environment and its inhabitants.

Key words: Whale watching; Environmental protection; Sustainability

Introduction

The aim of this Research Note is to reflect on the role of whale-watching tourism providers as active participants in the debate over protection of the marine environment.

Whale-watching tourism has often been presented by academicians and environmentalists as an attractive economic activity, and, in some cases, as a good alternative to whaling (Cunningham, Huijbens, & Wearing, 2012; Hoyt & Hvenegaard, 2002; Higham & Lusseau, 2008; Kuo, Chen, & McAleer, 2012; Neves, 2010; Parsons & Draheim, 2009).

Recently, several scholars from various disciplines have problematized the beneficial aspect and...
2 BERTELLA AND VESTER

the sustainability of tourism, with some attention also
paid to whale watching (Fennel & Weaver, 2005;
Higham, Bejeder, & Williams, 2014; Moscardo &
Murphy, 2014; Scarpace & Parsons, 2014). They
raise the question of whether whale-watching tour-
ism can live up to expectations in terms of its poten-
tial and beneficial effects.

Although recognizing the importance of discourse
and trends at the macrolevel, this article focuses on
the local level, viewing local discourse and actions
as main drivers of the development and practice
of whale-watching tourism (Lawrence & Phillips,
2004).

This article investigates which role the northern
Norwegian whale-watching organizations play in
the protection of the marine environment and its
inhabitants. This issue has acquired particular rele-

Table 1 shows a list of the whale-watching compa-
}
As shown in Table 2 (see topic Whales and the relative main themes and actors), there is no univocal way by the locals to view the whales. Whales are seen as prey, food, and a tourist attraction, appreciated also by the locals who, in some cases, seem to recognize the individuality of specific animals and care about their welfare.

As shown in Table 2 (see topic Whales the relative main themes and actors), there is no univocal way by the locals to view the whales. Whales are seen as prey, food, and a tourist attraction, appreciated also by the locals who, in some cases, seem to recognize the individuality of specific animals and care about their welfare.

Considering the total amount of articles (144), the issue of the effects of oil and gas exploitation and marine-life safaris and the whale-related research and education organizations in northern Norway.

The data from the press are significant for the understanding of the view of whales held by locals, and the identification of those especially active in discussions of recent oil and gas exploitation and the marine environment—particularly the local presence of whales. Table 2 summarizes the findings in relation to these aspects.

Table 2
The Main Topics, Themes, and Actors Discussed and Mentioned in the Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Topic</th>
<th>No. of Articles</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Main Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oil and gas</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Opportunities (especially in terms of local jobs), skepticism and criticism (concerning the natural environment and fisheries)</td>
<td>Local and national politicians, local municipalities, Norwegian Oil and Gas Association, Norwegian Petroleum Directorate, Statoil, Eni, Geology Governmental Agency, Institute of Marine Research, University of Bergen, Directorate of Fisheries, Norwegian Fishermans Association, Local nonprofit association against oil, Bellona, Greenpeace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whales</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Tourism resources, whaling and food, amenity for the locals, interest and care shown towards individual animals</td>
<td>Whalesafari Andenes, local community, Ocean Sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil and gas + whales</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Possible negative effects of seismic to whales</td>
<td>Whalesafari Andenes, Marefa, Ocean Sounds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the whales has a marginal role (7 articles, see the topic Oil and gas + whales in Table 2) but, simultaneously, seems to be the most discussed (6 articles, see the most commented topics in Table 3).

The analysis of the content of the articles about oil and gas and whales (see the topic Oil and gas + whales and the main actors in Table 2) shows that Whalesafari Andenes is the only wildlife-watching tourism company joining these discussions, with its leader being interviewed and expressing explicitly his point of view. Whalesafari Andenes is the biggest and oldest whale-watching tourism company of the area and is also active in research and educational activities as well as collaboration with some research groups. In the past such collaboration included also the local organization Marefa.

Although not a tourism company, Ocean Sounds has worked in whale-watching tourism from 2006 to 2011 and also appears as an active participant to the discussions, along with Marefa (see the topics Oil and gas + whales and the relative main actors in Table 2).

The analysis of the six articles that have received many comments by the readers (see Table 3) shows that although Whalesafari Andenes, Ocean Sounds, and Marefa are explicitly concerned about the welfare of the animals and engaged in research and educational activities relative to the marine environment and in particular the whales, there is no agreement among them on the dimensions or hazardous aspect of the oil and gas activities. From the articles it appears that the whale-watching company is skeptical of the research organizations’ position in indicating a high probability of short and long-term damage to the animals such as hearing damage, behavioral changes, movement out of the fjord, and changes in whales’ feeding area. Such skepticism by the whale-watching tourism company leader is expressed in the interview reported in the articles and more openly in the posts, where some doubts on the competence of the specific researchers and the research environment in general are raised.

Although not directly involved in the debate on the newspapers, the other local whale-watching company, Sea Safari Andenes (see Table 1), has been observed as engaged in discussing the issue of the potential effects of the seismic activities on the whales, being supportive of the scientific studies and their concerns. Such engagement and support have been explicitly manifested during a seminar about whales and seismic activity held in July in the village of Henningsvær.

Conclusion

This Research Note concludes by highlighting the following aspects:

- The representation of locals’ perception of whales exclusively as prey and food has not been confirmed (see the topic Whales and the relative themes and actors in Table 2).
- The vision according to which whale watchers, and more in general wildlife watchers, are particularly concerned about the environment in comparison to other categories has not been confirmed (see the topics Oil and gas and Oil and gas + whales and the relative main actors in Table 2 in comparison with the wildlife watchers identified in Table 1).
- Some whale-watching companies, and more in general wildlife-watching companies, engage in research and educational activities and also in environmental debates more than others (see the identified wildlife-watching companies presented in Table 1 and those mentioned in Table 2). This might depend on years of experience and available resources.
- Although the inclusion of research activities in whale-watching tourism is desirable, the skeptical

Table 3

The Articles and the Topics That Had Received the Highest Number of Posts by the Readers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Most Commented Articles and Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six articles on two newspapers about the possible negative effects of seismic to whales (147 posts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One article about the municipalities’ position against the oil and gas exploitation (43 posts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One article about the request by a local nonprofit association to stop the seismic activities (33 posts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
position that some whale-watching providers can have towards science can lead to a climate of mistrust and confusion (as emerged in the analysis of the content of the most commented articles about the possible negative effects of seismic to whales and the relative posts, Table 3).

• The perception of the sustainability platform as the “right” approach to environmental issues and the related view of the whales as a resource are dominant. Alternative and less-anthropocentric worldviews are almost absent (note such an absence among the main themes about the topic Oil and gas in Table 2).

Biographical Notes
Giovanna Bertella is an Associate Professor at the School of Business and Economics, The Arctic University of Norway. Her research interests are: small-scale tourism, food tourism, rural tourism, nature-based tourism, active tourism, event management, tourism entrepreneurship, knowledge, and networks. Since 2014 she has been a member of the research program Northern InSights.

Heike Iris Vester is a Ph.D. Candidate at Georg-August University of Göttingen and Max Planck Institute for Dynamics and Self-Organization, Germany, and University Lecturer at the Faculty of Aquaculture and Biosciences, University of Nordland in Bodø, Norway. She is the founder and manager of Ocean Sounds e.V., Hemningsvær, Norway. Her research interests are: social and vocal behavior of social matrilinies, and adaptation to changing environments.

Acknowledgment
The authors would like to thank Irene Barnard for proofreading the manuscript.

References


Mosegaard, G., & Murphy, L. (2014). There is no such thing as sustainable tourism: Re-conceptualising tourism as a tool for sustainability. Sustainability, 6, 2538–2561.


