

183 Between a rock and a hard place: How nature guides in Arctic Svalbard navigate conflicting norms

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Wildlife tourism is a powerful tool to create transformative experiences, which may lead to improved environmental behaviors and promote conservation efforts (Ballantyne et al., 2011). Increased capacity and affordable prices allow a growing number of people to participate in wildlife tourism in remote and vulnerable destinations. Although tourism can benefit the human and economic dimensions, the industry generally affects the environment, ecosystems, biodiversity, and animal welfare negatively (Winter, 2020). Despite this, conservation has traditionally been an important justification of wildlife tourism. However, a common understanding of the sustainability concept is to ensure development that preserves natural resources for future generations. This perception continues the anthropocentric world view and does not recognize nature and non-human species' intrinsic value.

Human-wildlife interactions in the context of tourism have received significant attention in the academic literature. However, non-consumptive wildlife watching tourism taking place in animals' natural habitats has received less attention than hunting and fishing tourism and human interactions with captive wildlife. Meanwhile, increasing global pressure to visit remote places with unique fauna requires an improved focus on wildlife viewing tourism in animals' natural habitat. Tourism's interest in exotic and endangered species is growing and poses a considerable challenge, particularly evident in the Arctic. Polar bear tourism exemplifies the paradox where a vulnerable species is synonymous with both attractive tourism experiences as well as being a symbol of climate change (Lemelin & Dyck, 2008). Also, the demand for close interactions with wildlife has been stimulated and reinforced by marketing and behavioral trends, which poses new challenges to the niche. Therefore, wildlife destinations must strive for comprehensive and interdisciplinary management strategies taking into account both conservation and animal welfare concerns (Winter, 2020).

This study explores nature guides' norms, attitudes and behaviors related to polar bear interactions in the context of wildlife watching tourism in Arctic Svalbard. Svalbard is one of five international destinations for polar bear tourism despite current management policies and regulations that do not encourage active polar bear tourism. The archipelago largely consists of protected areas and the region is subject to strict environmental regulations. A formal provision that specifically challenges polar bear experiences is the prohibition against actively seeking for polar bears: "It is prohibited to lure, pursue or otherwise seek out polar bears in such a way as to disturb them or expose either bears or humans to danger" (Svalbard Environmental Protection Act, 2001, Section 30). The rule is considered to both protect bears and avoid that they pose a danger to humans, and thereby also to the animals themselves.

The main objective of this study is to understand how norms regulate nature guides' behaviors during polar bear interactions. We also investigate what influences these norms and how awareness and knowledge of norms may improve behaviors among actors in the Arctic wildlife tourism industry. Data was gathered through 10 semi-structured interviews with nature guides, corporate interest groups and the local government in Svalbard. Findings suggest that moral standards, guidelines, and legislation protecting wildlife are challenged when meeting conflicting goals and interests. Furthermore, improved human-wildlife interactions can be achieved through addressing negative behaviors towards ecosystems, biodiversity, and animal welfare, in combination with structural fixes such as wildlife tourism standards and formal norms.

Informal norms may be influenced and can contribute to mitigating negative behaviors by the tourism industry, by establishing personal and socially acceptable standards for conduct. Results indicate that strong injunctive norms related to polar bears and loyalty towards the official legislation,

support nature guides from giving in to possible pressure from tourists' expectations and employers. Meanwhile, tourists seem highly capable of adjusting their expectations, while guides have high expectations towards each other. Their strong sense of responsibility towards wildlife is motivated by education and common standards as well as direct experience with guiding in Arctic Svalbard. However, guides can be stuck between rocks when dealing with a variety of sanctions and other people's subjective interpretation of observed polar bear events. For example, personal, social, and formal sanctions may be drivers for behavior. Personal sanctions may be bad conscience due to an unfortunate situation getting too close and stressing

a polar bear. Social sanctions often occur through negative attention in social media or losing reputation and job opportunities by being accused of misconduct. Formal sanctions may be a penalty in the form of fines or imprisonment not exceeding one year. Thus, land-based winter activities seem easier to monitor and regulate than summer voyages. A better understanding of nature guides' norms and behaviors as well as including ethical aspects to planning and management, hold potential to benefit endangered species roaming in vulnerable habitats.

References

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