

## **FINAL DRAFT**

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## **Wildlife Tourism Through the Co-creation Lens**

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## **Wildlife tourism through the co-creation lens**

This study reflects on the conceptualization of wild animals as co-creators. Its purpose is to encourage reflection about the role of animals in wildlife tourism. Therefore, to this end - and in the belief that diversity and creativity are important elements in critical thinking - the study was developed by a research team with diverse professional backgrounds. It adopts a fictional methodological approach, employing a fictive dialogue between a tourist joining a swim-with-dolphins tour and a dolphin and draws upon recent scholarly contributions on animals from the perspective of various disciplines, including philosophy, biology and tourism. The study's most important contribution comes in the form of a discussion of the co-creation concept from a critical perspective, based on innovative and explicitly-described ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations.

Keywords: co-creation; wildlife tourism; experiential value; inter-species communication; CAP.

### **Introduction**

The aim of this study is to drive further reflection on the adoption of the co-creation lens to wildlife tourism. The starting point is the observation that the suffix “co-”, that originates from Latin (*cum* = with), is usually used to form words whose meanings emphasize the concepts of togetherness, mutuality and in some cases also similarity, partnership and equality. Consequently, in this study, co-creation is regarded as a joint process involving at least two active actors who may be interested in being partners in the creation process. The study poses the following primary question: How and to what extent may wild animals be viewed as co-creators?

Ind and Coates (2013) observe that the co-creation concept has been adopted by academia in different ways. Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle, and Scott (2018) identify two overall perspectives on co-creation in the tourism literature: a tourist perspective and a supply perspective. Within the first perspective, experiential value is the focus and co-creation is understood mainly as a form of fruitful interaction. Within the second perspective, collaboration and knowledge are identified as the key factors for tourism development and management. In line with these perspectives, this study investigates two meanings of the co-creation concept: experiential value co-creation through interaction and knowledge co-creation through collaboration.

Experiential value can be described as the tourists' perception of some functional, emotional, social, and epistemic value deriving from their experience and evolving in an idiosyncratic and dynamic way (Prebensen, Woo, & Uysal, 2014; Prebensen, Chen, & Uysal, 2017). Some studies associate the concept of experiential value to reciprocity and explore the possibility that tourist-guest relations might facilitate the emergence of value for both parties (Bertella, Cavicchi, &

Bentini, 2017). This study aims to go a step further: namely, to broaden the concept of experiential value, including the perspective of the wild animals with whom the tourists interact.

In wildlife tourism, the typical values discussed in the literature are socio-economic benefits for the local communities; satisfaction, psychological and emotional benefits for the tourists, and educational outcomes (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011; Curtin, 2009; Higginbottom, 2004; Newsome, Dowling, & Moore, 2005). Benefits for the animals are usually included at the species level, in terms of conservation and protection, while possible risks, such as injuries and disturbance, are also referenced at the individual level (Higginbottom, 2004). Experiential value for the animals themselves seems to be overlooked by tourism scholars.

In the light of the above-mentioned considerations, the following sub-question is raised:

Sub-question 1: How can the experiential value that might emerge in wildlife tourism encounters be understood from the perspective of the animals?

With regard to the second meaning of co-creation explored in this study, namely co-creation from the supply side, the classical broad definition of 'stakeholder' provided by Freeman (1984) can be adopted to identify those groups or individuals who can affect, or are affected by, tourism. Relevant stakeholders are usually identified amongst the following: tourism providers, tourists, public agencies at different levels, academia, host communities and NGOs. In the case of wildlife tourism, the critical aspect is the animal's role as stakeholder: animals are obviously affected by tourism, but to what extent can they affect it and, more specifically, its development and management? It can be assumed that if the animals could affect or influence tourism development and management, wildlife tourism might look very different. Presumably, this would include tourist activities which are lethal (eg trophy hunting), sub-lethal (eg catch-and-release fishing) and non-lethal (eg visiting zoos and dolphinariums). As suggested by the environmental ethics literature, the inclusion of wildlife among the tourism stakeholders is problematic, due to our difficulties and maybe unwillingness to fully understand, and eventually represent, the animals' interests (Holden, 2003).

This study raises the question:

Sub-question 2: To what extent can humans and wild animals collaborate to create knowledge relevant to wildlife tourism management?

The article begins by presenting the basic ontological and epistemological assumptions for discussing issues relating to animals. The next section considers recent scholarly reflections on the use of animals in tourism, focusing in particular on the few studies that adopt the co-creation concept. The section on methodology describes the fictional approach used in this study to explore a particular case, i.e. swim-with-dolphins activities (ie tours offered by commercial operators to paying customers seeking in-water interactions with wild dolphins). This is followed by a fictive dialogue between a dolphin and a tourist, preceded by a description of the commercial swim-with-dolphins sector. Finally, the insights gained from the dialogue are

discussed and conclusions are drawn, including reflections on the theoretical contributions of this study and the methodological challenges of researching the animal world.

## **Theoretical background**

There are two underlying assumptions that must be made explicit in order to discuss the role of animals in tourism with reference to the co-creation concept.

### ***First assumption: what/who animals are***

Recently, there has been a shift in the way animals are conceptualized in Western society and this can be noted in the increasing scrutiny of this issue by scholars from various disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology and philosophy (Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2007). Such conceptualizations derive from the application of various animal ethics approaches (Gruen, 2011). The common feature of these approaches is the rejection of a simplistic understanding of animals as undifferentiated objects, as in, for example, the Cartesian view of animals as *automata*: i.e. living beings that cannot feel pain/pleasure and do not have reasoning skills.

This study relies on the approach of ecofeminism, according to which animals are capable both cognitively and emotionally and human-animal relations can be meaningful for both parties (Gaard, 1993). Ecofeminists highlight the possible peculiarities of each species and individual and, in this context, power relations in favour of humans are particularly critically-reviewed and contrasted with attitudes and behaviour demonstrating respect and care (Donovan & Adams, 2007; Adams & Gruen, 2014; Gruen, 2015).

The ecofeminist perspective forms the basis of this study. According to this position, wild animals involved in tourism activities are sentient beings that can have complex and rich lives: they have intrinsic value and they can meaningfully interact with humans. This naturally leads us to a second assumption.

### ***Second assumption: our knowledge about the animal world***

Another relevant assumption refers to our potential to ‘know’ the animal world. In his popular scientific book, *Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?*, the biologist, Frans De Waal, notes that several experiments demonstrate that inter-species communication can occur. At the same time, he reports that it has long been clear to biologists that each animal perceives the environment in his/her own way and this perception can compromise the possibility of reciprocal understanding and communication between different species. In this context, De Waal introduces the term ‘anthropodenial’, defined as “the *a priori* rejection of human-like traits in other animals or animal-like traits in us”. He argues that anthropodenial can be a barrier to our knowledge of the animal world and a better approach could be to recognize that, the closer a species is to humans, the greater the chances of some reciprocal understanding and communication.

This study is predicated upon the belief that, to a certain degree, inter-species understanding and communication can occur on the basis of the common traits that we might share. In the case of

wild animals, this can include for example: sharing evolutionary origins, physiology (mammals) and sociality traits (parental care, organization in societies, etc.). The example of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) is particularly interesting due to the scientific recognition of cetacean 'culture' as an important determinant of their highly-developed social behaviour (Kalof & Fitzgerald, 2007).

Our possibility to understand the animal world can be related to the ecofeminist concept of 'entangled empathy', i.e. a caring perception based on our efforts to understand and attend to the animals' needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities and sensitivities (Gruen, 2015). Entangled empathy is a relational type of attention based on our cognition and the emotions triggered by our interactions with animals. In line with this position, this study argues that our knowledge of animals can derive from connecting with them through our cognition, as well as our emotions.

### **Animals and co-creation in tourism**

Several studies recently focused their attention on the role of animals in tourism. In 2009, a special issue of *Current Issues in Tourism* was published: nine of the articles published in the issue discussed and elaborated conceptual positions related to the relationship between humans and animals in tourism, suggesting management strategies useful to ensure the quality of the experiences for the tourists, whilst ensuring the animals' welfare and rights (Carr, 2009).

Since the publication of that issue and the book *Tourism and Animal Ethics* (Fennell, 2012), the tourism literature on animals, both domesticated and wild, has increased considerably. Several tourism publications have adopted a critical stance on the inclusion of the animals in the tourism industry, some of them adopting the ecofeminism approach (Yudina & Fennell, 2013; Yudina & Grimwood, 2016; Bertella, 2018).

To the authors' knowledge, the adoption of the co-creation lens to wildlife tourism has not yet been specifically discussed. Writing about value co-creation, Bertella (2014) writes about the dog sledding experience and recognizes dogs as subjects who play a crucial role in the emergence of experiential value for the tourists. In her study, the human-animal interactions are pictured as reciprocal, given that the animal species involved - dogs - in addition to being domesticated, are selected by the tourism provider because they are particularly friendly to humans. In this context, the author reports the emergence of value also for the animals, who can have friendly encounters with the tourists and be physically active during non-competitive trips. Nonetheless, no particular focus on the animals' perspective is included, with the result that the predominant perspective is that of the tourists. In her conclusions, Bertella (2014) reflects on the methodological challenges of researching animals and their relationship with humans: an aspect particularly relevant to co-creation. The researcher's respect and empathy for animals are critical factors required to overcome such challenges alongside his/her competence and familiarity with the focal species, as well as with individual animals.

Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle and Scott (2017) also apply the co-creation lens to animal-based tourism. They investigate dolphins in captivity and include activities such as swimming and playing with these animals. This study explicitly adopts the perspective of the tourists, focusing on on-site co-creation, understood as the process through which the tourists' subjectively-lived experience and the related value evolve. The authors discuss neither the underlying understanding of the animals, nor the human-animal interactions and the related ontological and epistemological aspects.

With regard to tourism knowledge and management and the role of animals as actively engaged and influential actors, it is hard to find in the tourism literature any contribution that adopts the co-creation concept. Some tourism studies discuss how animals as stakeholders may benefit from tourism. Some examples specifically relating to cetacean tourism are cited by Higham, Bejder and Williams (2014). Nonetheless, no scholar has ever considered those aspects through the co-creation lens.

In conclusion, the literature on co-creation in animal-based tourism is scant and detailed reflections on the subjectivity of the animals and the possible theoretical, methodological and practical implications, are almost absent.

## **Methodology**

The historical development of qualitative inquiry is extensively discussed in the literature and several scholars note a recent shift toward a more diffused adoption and acceptance of multiple modes of understanding (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001; Riley & Love, 1999; Moses & Knutsen, 2007; Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). This shift implies collaboration across disciplines and among all relevant stakeholders, and includes ontological, epistemological and methodological positions that take into consideration the perspectives of traditionally 'voiceless' actors, such as various minorities.

One such alternative means of understanding, Creative Analytic Practice (CAP), includes various methods of expression such as fiction and poetry and is viewed as a potentially fruitful way to imagine and reflect on the complexity of lived experiences (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Parry & Johnson, 2007). In order to be useful as a method of inquiry, authors using CAP are expected to be particularly open and critical in their role (reflexivity), and their texts are expected to satisfy some criteria such as: aesthetic merit (be engaging), impact (generate curiosity and new questions), and reality (present a credible account of a situation).

When considering the shift in qualitative inquiry toward a more diffused adoption and acceptance of multiple modes of understanding, some limitations can be identified in the tourism literature relating to animals presented in the previous chapter. Although some studies contribute to alternative ways to conceptualize animals, relevant epistemological and methodological issues are not discussed in detail. The methodological approaches adopted are also quite limited in relation to possible ways to explore the animal's perspective. Moreover, the vast majority of

these works, including the two studies utilising co-creation, are authored exclusively by tourism scholars.

In order to meet those challenges, this study utilises a research team comprising individuals with different professional backgrounds, and uses fiction with the intention of enlarging our understanding of a particular situation (swim-with-dolphin tours) including the perspective of a usually ‘voiceless’ actor (a dolphin).

### ***The research team***

Our team includes individuals with different professional backgrounds: two academics (PhD: business management and tourism; PhD: zoology) and a researcher/campaigner at an international non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation and welfare of cetaceans. The team members are passionate about the animal world and have extensive practical experience in wildlife research and tourism, including fieldwork and engagement with all relevant stakeholders (Table 1). The team’s background may be described as a combination of theoretical and practical competence in business, tourism, biology, marine ecology, environmental and wildlife conservation, interpretation and communication.

-----TABLE 1-----

### ***Fiction and the construction of a human-dolphin dialogue***

Several scholars from the field of social sciences argue that complex phenomena can be investigated through the adoption of fiction (Banks and Banks, 1998; Gough, 2008; Reinhold, 2018). Fiction can help us to go beyond reality and explore phenomena in a deeper way, replacing or integrating those more traditional inquiry modes that rely exclusively on reason. Fictional stories have several strengths: they can ably represent the complexity and the particularity of a situation; increase the variety of questions that we ask; engage readers and engender empathy (Eisner, 1997).

In the tourism literature, there is increasing interest in the opportunity to use creativity and, in particular, fiction in research inquiries (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004; Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). Recently, a fictional narrative has been applied to tourism research in relation to the possible representation of future scenarios (Yeoman and Postma, 2014). In the case of wildlife tourism, Mackenzie Wright (2018) adopts science fictional narrative to explore future developments, with reference to the use of cloned animals.

Within this context, creative writing plays an important role. It is interesting to note that creative writing is sometimes commented on with reference to our ‘animality’ (Reinhold 2018). Harraway (2007), McHugh (2011) and Bell (2017) reflect on some methods that might be adopted to investigate the animal world, whilst attempting to take the animals’ perspective.

Based on such considerations, this study develops a fictive tourist-dolphin dialogue occurring during an organized swim-with-dolphins tour in a wild setting. The choice to elaborate a dialogue relies on the potential of screenplays to invite the readers to new interpretations (Berbary, 2011). Moreover, the dialogue approach is inspired by Plato's Socratic dialogues, with particular emphasis on the inquisitive attitude of a character - the dolphin - in an attempt to encourage further reflection in the other character - the tourist.

### ***The Construction of the fictive dialogue***

Rows 2 and 3 in Table 1 present an overview of the authors' practical knowledge and experience that, in addition to their theoretical knowledge, were relevant to the elaboration of the dialogue: in particular, the roles of the tourist and the dolphin.

In addition, insights into the tourist's perspective were gained through consulting scientific literature, in particular: Curtin (2006) and DeMares and Krycka (1998), as well as grey literature; in particular: posts on TripAdvisor. With regard to the latter, a search using the expression 'swim/swimming with dolphins' was conducted and the company with the most reviews (190) was selected. The vast majority of the reviews (179) were very positive, with only 9 being negative. The 20 most recent positive reviews and the 9 negative reviews were analysed in order to identify which aspects of the experience were most commented upon by tourists.

In terms of 'voicing' the dolphin, the authors relied on their practical experience (Table 1, row 3) as well as their creativity and some inspirational sources. The latter were the character Spock from the 1986 movie *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (in particular, his comments on human arrogance) and the 1972 novel *Watership Down*. This latter was used as a model to guide the style and tone of the language spoken by the dolphin.

### **Co-creation in swim-with-dolphins**

#### ***The context where the dialogue occurs***

'Swim-with-dolphins' is a general term used to define any commercial activity offering paying customers in-water interactions with wild dolphins in wild settings (Parsons et al., 2006). This type of tourism has increased in popularity over the last few years and is now offered across all continents (Convention on Migratory Species, 2017; Hoyt, 2000).

Interactions are 'passive' when initiated by dolphins of their own accord, and 'active' when pursued by humans or as the result of invasive approaches (Parsons et al., 2006). In some cases, operations include food provisioning to solicit interaction (Samuels, Bejder, Constantine, & Heinrich, 2003).

While swim-with-dolphins operations inevitably differ from one context to another, the essence of the experience, as well as its associated benefits and risks, have some features which might be



considered similar to any wildlife tourism encounter. Activities are found to raise awareness of conservation (Orams, Forestell, & Spring, 2014), improve physical and spiritual wellbeing in human participants (Bentrupperbäumer, 2005; Cloke & Perkins, 2005; Curtin, 2006; DeMares & Krycka, 1998; Webb & Drummond, 2001) and produce socio-economic benefits to local communities (Cisneros-Montemayor, Sumaila, Kaschner, & Pauly, 2010; Corkeron, 2004; O'Connor, Campbell, Cortez, & Knowles, 2009).

However, some risks are also identified: swimming in proximity to large, powerful marine mammals involves a significant risk of harm, injury or death to humans (Samuels, Bejder, Constantine & Heinrich, 2003; Seideman, 1997; Shane, Tepley, & Costello, 1993; Webb, 1978), or disease transmission (Waltzek, Cortés-Hinojosa, Wellehan, & Gray, 2012).

Dolphins respond to close approaches by changing their behaviour and movements (Machernis, Powell, Engleby, & Spradlin, 2018). Responses are not only species-specific, but can also vary within species and populations (Bejder, Samuels, Whitehead, Finn, & Allen, 2009; Fumagalli et al., 2018; Lusseau 2003; Senigaglia et al., 2016). Even the same individual dolphin may show a different inclination to engage in, or sustain, an in-water interaction at different times or life stages (Convention on Migratory Species, 2017). Further, it is important to acknowledge that basing our understanding of dolphin response to swim-with activities solely upon those responses which are clearly observable, is incomplete, as more subtle responses (eg physiological) may be triggered, but remain undetected (Bejder et al., 2009).

By responding to interactions, the animal's energetic balance is upset (Christiansen & Lusseau, 2015) and this can result in decreased survival or reproduction rates, thus leading, in the longer term, to population decline (Bejder et al., 2006), or to displacement to less disturbed sites (Lusseau, 2004). Precaution is recommended in the sanctioning or management of these interactions, especially when swim-with-dolphin tours target critical habitats; species with little plasticity in their behaviour; or already threatened species or populations (Convention on Migratory Species, 2017).

With regard to regulations, the swim-with-dolphins industry is managed and regulated in different ways around the globe. In some regions, the activity is prohibited outright (e.g. the Canary Islands), whilst in others (e.g. New Zealand) it is legal and regulated. Elsewhere, this type of activity lacks any kind of formal regulation and relies on national or regional guidelines and codes of conduct outlining best practices. These latter may be issued by governments or official agencies, or by the industry itself as, for example, in Japan or Iceland. In other regions, however, the activity may be entirely unmanaged, even lacking informal codes of conduct or advice and these scenarios obviously prompt the greatest concern for the safety and welfare of all stakeholders.

### ***The fictive dialogue***

As strange as it may seem, every now and then, quite inexplicably, inter-species communication occurs. This happened to a tourist joining a swim-with-dolphins tour. The content of the dialogue is reported below.

Tourist: Hello ... I'm so excited to meet you!

Dolphin: Hello to you! What are you doing here? Looking for food? Are you injured? Why are you moving so strangely?

Tourist: What?! I thought it was just beautiful to see you swimming, all your splashy and elegant movements ... and now I can even understand you! And you understand me! This is so awesome! I'm not injured ... it's just that I'm not such a good swimmer as you are!

Dolphin: I see that ... you are indeed rather clumsy! So, what are you doing here?

Tourist: I'm here to see you.

Dolphin: I didn't expect your visit, but since you are here...Have we met before? I can't remember ... I have met others like you before though.

Tourist: You mean other humans...

Dolphin: We call you *Trizzbz*. It means something like 'those-who-move-in-and-out-of-water'.

Tourist: I'm here because I like others like you, we call you dolphins.

Dolphin: Oh ... so I'm a dolphin!

Tourist: What do you call yourselves? I mean your... species... your group...?

Dolphin: *We*.

Tourist: It makes sense... It's amazing ... you have names for us humans and for yourselves... it's like a language, like we have ... I'm so impressed!

Dolphin: You know, you *Trizzbz* might not be so special and unique as you think. You are just one type of life among many others. Only arrogance can put a type of life in the centre and all the rest around ... like ripples in the water, when real life is made of circles, waves, eddies - and sand and rocks and *dbgjd*, and many *jsfdjs*...

Tourist: I get your point. I guess that sometimes we *Trizzbz* are indeed quite... arrogant.

Dolphin: So, what do you like about seeing *We*?

Tourist: You are so cute! You look very happy... and free.

Dolphin: Happy... I guess so... happiness is being healthy, isn't it?

Tourist: More than that actually... it's...um... all about enjoying your time and not worrying.

Dolphin: I worry a lot... the fights, the food to search for, the young ones, the diseases, all the dangers out there... it is so exhausting...so... I guess I'm not as happy as you think...

Tourist: Oh, I see... Our tour guide told us a bit about your life in the ocean. It's not easy to live in the wild... it can be hard to find food and avoid injuries... But when you approached me, you looked like you were smiling!

Dolphin: I'm not sure I understand what you mean. This is just my face. I don't know what you mean by smile. The fact is that I'm curious ... you know? I wanted to see what you were. They say that I'm the most curious in my family, that's also why I got my name!

Tourist: Do you have a name?

Dolphin: Of course I have a name! My name is *Blutsdn*, which means something like 'the-daughter-of-*Blutsjin*-who-is-always-looking-for-something'.

Tourist: So interesting!

Dolphin: They have warned me though... about *Trizzbz*. Some are so pushy! They come too close while *We* are busy doing other things, you know... important things like feeding or sleeping! They can distract our young ones. And then there are those stories about... abduction...and also... murders ...

Tourist: This is sad. Sorry about that, some ... *Trizzbz* can be dangerous. I'm actually here with other humans now ... they are over there, some are in the water and some are still on the boat ... I don't know them personally, I hope none of them are dangerous... pushy, you know... I'm quite sure none of them are.... dolphin murderers ... just maybe a bit over-enthusiastic...

Dolphin: You don't know the members of your own family?

Tourist: I'm not here with my family! The others... well, we just met... we don't know each other.

Dolphin: I see... I'll keep this in mind. *We've* had a tough day today - can you stop them from getting in the water?

Tourist: ... I could try...but I don't think they will listen to me. Also, I don't know how the other humans may behave once in the water. Maybe they will be like me?

Dolphin: Maybe. But *Trizzbz* are unpredictable, *We* often say that.

Tourist: Not me, I'm very predictable... please stay a little longer...

Dolphin: You look clumsy rather than dangerous, so I'll hang around a little longer. So, do you still like to see us, even though you now know that we are not always happy?

Tourist: Mmmhh... I must admit that this does sound a bit strange. To me, you look happy, but of course if you say that you are often worried, perhaps you are not so happy after all...

Dolphin: It's just that there is always so much to do...

Tourist: Yes, but, you know, this is such a beautiful place... and you are free...

Dolphin: You mean free... to worry?

Tourist: No, I mean free to... move, swim and jump. And the noise you make ... your voice sounds so exciting, like children laughing!

Dolphin: Aren't you free to move? I see that in the water you are quite a disaster when it comes to movements, but maybe out of the water...?

Tourist: Oh yes, we are free to move, but it is different... we have to work...

Dolphin: Work? Is it a kind of worry?

Tourist: Well ... you could say so, it is something that we usually must do to support ourselves and our families. It takes a lot of our time and energy and it is sometimes very stressful. It's not something we always choose to do or are happy to do.

Dolphin: *We* do many things and some are... you know, not a real choice. But, I have to admit, it never crosses my mind that getting out of the water and looking at *Trizzbz* could help! Whereas you think that coming here to see us will make you feel better, don't you? You come to have a look at us because you think that we have something you don't have and this can make you feel happy and free too, right?

Tourist: Mmmmhh ... I think that, yes, you could put it like that. Maybe, we humans tend to see what we want to see, in order to feel better?

Dolphin: It sounds a bit strange to me... however, for me, it is ok to meet you and other *Trizzbz*, as long as I am not too tired or busy ... But not the dangerous ones, those I don't want to see...

Tourist: The pushy ones and the other ones... yes, try to stay as far as possible from them!

Dolphin: There are different types of *Trizzbz*... this we have learned! *We* can also be very different. You'll never meet old *Blutsyvdn*, he is so wary!

Tourist: Doesn't he like to meet *Trizzbz*?

Dolphin: It has nothing to do with *Trizzbz*, you know. That's the way he is. And I hope you never meet *Bfkjsoffis*... he is a troublemaker, quite aggressive... Oh! I have to go, they are calling me...

Tourist: Really? I didn't notice, are they calling your name? And what ... wait, wait!... can't you stay a bit longer?

## **Discussion of the sub-questions**

### ***Sub-question 1: How can the experiential value that might emerge in wildlife tourism encounters be understood from the perspective of the animals?***

This study suggests that this value can be related to the animal's degree of curiosity. At the same time, it highlights the possible differences between individual animals: some might be particularly shy or wary, so in some instances, the experience would be lacking in value and the

presence of humans might be experienced only as an annoyance. Other animals might regard it as a threat, due to some previous negative encounter with humans, whether direct or indirect. In well-managed swim-with-dolphin tours for example, the dolphins might have the opportunity to come closer or to move away, but human presence may nonetheless be perceived as intrusive. As reported by *Blutsdn*, no dolphin has ever tried to emerge from the water and impose her/his presence to humans! Curious animals might approach swimmers or poke their head above the surface to look at the boats and people around them. This type of intentional contact is, however, far less invasive than occupying a space in someone else's world, even temporarily. Imagine the sudden appearance of a dolphin in our living room, trying to engage our attention whilst we are busy with our daily life!

It can be noted that *Blutsdn* does not ask the tourist his name. This might indicate that, although dolphins are aware of individual differences among humans, *Blutsdn*, might tend to think about us in collective terms. This implies that the type of relation necessary for the emergence of value in terms of 'friendship' might not be interesting to wild animals. Moreover, the fact that the dolphins refer to themselves as *We* may suggest a way of reasoning in terms of *We* and 'Others'.

*Blutsdn* tells the tourist about *Bfkjsoffjis*, a dolphin described as a troublemaker, who might initiate contact with humans with the intent to cause mischief. For some animals, the encounter with a human might trigger the emergence of this type of value that is almost certainly not reciprocal.

With reference again to the reciprocal aspect of the experiential value deriving from the human-dolphin encounter, the dialogue also highlights how this should be carefully considered with regard to an important aspect raised by *Blutsdn*: namely, the possible different behaviours amongst tourists. Even the most responsible tourism provider usually has only limited control over their clients' behaviour in the water. While some tourists might do their best to create a mutual type of experiential value, others might have a very different attitude, either based upon ignorance or their personality. Troublemakers exist among humans as well as among dolphins!

Further considerations are necessary with regard to the first sub-question relating to the role of wild animals in the value-creation process. The dialogue suggests that *Blutsdn*'s understanding of her role in such a process is very limited. *Blutsdn* appears not to fully understand that the reason the tourist is in the water - an element where he does not feel particularly confident - is to observe the dolphins, based on the perceived belief that they are 'happy'. This latter aspect is relevant also in relation to the second sub-question.

***Sub-question 2: To what extent can humans and wild animals collaborate to create knowledge relevant to wildlife tourism management?***

The dialogue is built on the fictional possibility for humans to communicate relatively easily with dolphins. Nonetheless, some elements suggest that communication is actually somewhat difficult. Some terms and concepts can be translated, but not all. In the same way, we are able to understand some dolphin behaviour (and likely they understand some of ours), but we are far

from deciphering each other's full repertoire, intentions and language. For example, what does *Blutsdn* mean when she says that real life is made of *dbgjd* and *jsfdjs*? Also, the human world remains somewhat obscure to the dolphin: why are humans happy when observing dolphins struggling to survive in the wild? Aren't health and happiness the same? Are humans free in their world? Why are humans so surprised that dolphins have names? Many questions about humans remain unanswered for *Blutsdn* who, in the end, returns to her life in the dolphin realm. Similarly, some questions remain partially unanswered for the tourist and presumably also the reader.

Based on these reflections, we propose that tourist-wild dolphin relationships in the context of commercial swim-with-dolphin tours are necessarily restricted to occasional encounters and cannot develop into any real, long-lasting collaboration.

## Conclusions

Based on the discussion of the two sub-questions, some conclusions may be drawn regarding the main research question, namely the possibility of viewing wildlife tourism through the co-creation lens. Although reciprocal experiential value can emerge - mainly in the form of curiosity - when considering the overall experience, this may be just one of many possibilities, including the potential for unbalanced encounters, whereby only one party experiences value. Moreover, although they are key actors, it can be assumed that wild animals have very limited knowledge of, or are completely ignorant of, their role in such encounters. This considerably limits their ability to participate in knowledge co-creation relevant to tourism management.

Our conclusion is that the possibility of viewing wild animals as co-creators is problematic on several levels. This study suggests that the required understanding and communication processes upon which reciprocal experiential value and collaboration should be based, are hard to obtain. Additionally, problems may not be limited to issues around understanding and communication, as there might also be a lack of interest in interacting and collaborating with humans on the animals' part.

This study's theoretical contribution may be viewed in relation to the two research papers previously identified in the tourism literature relating to co-creation and animals. Campos *et al.* (2017) apply this concept to the case of wild animals but do not discuss this in any detail. By contrast, this study starts with the etymological meaning of the term, discusses several relevant aspects and concludes that its use is not particularly suitable. Bertella (2014) also applies the co-creation concept to animals; but in this instance, her case study is limited to sled dogs. The challenges outlined in the Bertella paper suggest that, whilst the use of the co-creation lens might be reasonable in the case of domesticated animals, a quite different approach may be required in the case of wildlife. We suggest that the concept of 'entangled empathy' might offer a valuable alternative approach to wildlife tourism; in particular, tourism encounters and their management

might usefully adopt as a starting point the importance of respecting individual differences between animals, rather than an idealized human-wildlife relationship.

This study's methodological contribution concerns the use of CAP to investigate animals in tourism. If fully embraced, the recognition of the richness of the animal mind and world has important implications in terms of research methodology. There is a clear gap in the literature in this sense and CAP might offer a viable means of plugging such a gap. The authors found it quite challenging to develop the fictional human-dolphin dialogue but were aided by sharing a perspective on animals and the complexity of their inclusion in tourism. The team also acknowledges the importance of being open with each other, as well as with the reader, about their varying, albeit complementary, backgrounds and experience. In general, the team found the suggestions made by Parry and Johnson (2007) regarding CAP quality criteria - in particular as regards reflexivity - to be useful. The major challenge has been in envisaging and plausibly interpreting the dolphin's thoughts and emotions. In this regard, we feel that Parry and Johnson's use of the term 'reality' can be misleading and could usefully be replaced by a criterion of 'plausibility'.

Despite the possible limitations of the empirical part of this study (fictive and limited to two individuals), this study contributes to the wildlife tourism literature on the challenging topic of human-wild animal relations, adopting an ecofeminist perspective and a creative methodology. Our fictional narrative is a novel and, hopefully, effective first step towards engaging others to approach the animal world and critically consider the way we (scholars, operators, legislators, tourists, etc) enter it. Thus, this study is an invitation to explore alternative ways to view, frame and, finally, to manage wildlife tourism.

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**TABLE 1**

	<b>Practical knowledge and experience</b>
Wildlife tourism operators: their knowledge about wildlife, their attitude and behaviour toward wildlife, how they design and manage wildlife experiences	Internationally gained knowledge and experience. Presenting at training workshops for whale watching operators; interviewing operators on what they need in order to make their business more conservation oriented and responsible; attendance at workshops and seminars and participation in round-table discussions with operators on all aspects of their industry including passenger safety, satisfaction and the risks/concerns around the swim industry; working for commercial operators (as guides).
Wildlife tourists: their knowledge and perception of wildlife, their motivation, what they look for when engaging in wildlife encounters, what they value and remember	Internationally gained knowledge and experience. Volunteering for NGOs: tasks in direct contact with tourists pre, during and post wildlife trips (presentations at hotels, information centres, beach patrols); designing and delivering tourism surveys to whale watch passengers; working as guide on a whale watching boat; answering passenger questions including about swimming with cetaceans; presentations and interpretation to tourists (both onboard and onshore before and after trips); interviewing whale watching passengers (satisfaction surveys etc); providing information to passengers on what to look for in a good whale watching trip; informing tourists through articles, reports, flyers, online articles and blogs, about responsible whale watching and swim with dolphins tours, including related dangers; personal experience as wildlife tourists.
Dolphins: their behaviour in natural settings and in relation to human presence	Tasks in direct contact with dolphins: fieldwork as part of volunteering activities, PhD education and research.