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The tourism business operator as a moral gatekeeper – the relational work of recreational hunting in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses how hunting tourism businesses in Sweden navigate in the nexus between moral and economic value spheres. Through the analytical lens of ‘moral gatekeeper’, the business operators are depicted as acting from a position where they navigate in a contested space. The analysis demonstrates how the operators balance different norms and practices of recreational hunting, wildlife management, business ethics and customer expectations. The study is based on ethnographic interviews with business operators, observations of hunting arrangements, and document analysis of hunting media, with a focus on narratives and accounts of value. The findings show a complex moral economy where stewardship hunting and gift economics are both intertwined with and kept separate from market relations, which makes the hunting arrangements, appear as a ‘peculiar’ form of commodity. The analysis demonstrates how moral arguments concerning wildlife management and human well-being are embedded in market relations and discourses on experiences, entailing seemingly opposite forms of commodification. One is related to calculable values, as in trophy hunting, and one is related to the embodied experience of nature. The study provides nuanced and contextual knowledge of the intertwinement of personal and market relationships in recreational hunting and the commodification of wildlife experiences.

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Introduction

In this article, we examine how hunting tourism businesses in Sweden navigate in a complex social, economic and moral environment. Hunting tourism takes many forms and can be broadly defined as a form of consumptive wildlife tourism, where hunting takes place in a region other than the hunter’s own region (Lovelock, 2008). We have chosen to view hunting tourism as a range of commodified and non-commodified activities: from clearly market-based relationships with packaged tours and professional guides, to forms that involve informal friendship or community-based hunting. As we will demonstrate in this study, the interconnectivity of formal and informal social and economic relationships contributes to the complex character of hunting tourism. Furthermore, as travelling for recreational hunting is a consumptive form of wildlife tourism (cf. Lovelock, 2008), it highlights ethical aspects and has been described as a morally-contested area (Cohen, 2014; von Essen, 2018).

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Recreational hunting in Sweden is characterised by a democratic hunting tradition where the local hunting team is ascribed a main role in wildlife management. These teams often include the landowner, or the landowner may receive either monetary compensation or a proportion of the meat as payment. Harvest quotas are often determined in a negotiated process between landowners, the hunting team and government authorities who decide on the quotas. However, the hunting team may decide whether they should fill the quota or not, which may create an incentive for hunters to establish a more sustainable wildlife population (Wikenros, Sand, Bergström, Liberg, & Chapron, 2015). Hence, many Swedish hunters adopt a stewardship approach to hunting, where they see themselves as lay wildlife managers. Furthermore, since 1938, the Swedish Hunters' Association¹, has been commissioned by the Swedish government to play an active role in wildlife management. Subsequently, recreational hunting in Sweden is organised as a form of gift economy on the interpersonal and local level, as well as on a societal level.

However, the hunting tradition formed around local hunting teams may be undergoing a transformation due to demographic changes where new groups of hunters from urban areas enter the arena (Hansen, Peterson, & Jensen, 2012; von Essen, 2016, 2018). Since these new hunters may have neither personal access to hunting grounds nor a social hunting network, it may pave the way for a new market in commercial hunting. Women have traditionally been recruited primarily through their male partners (Heberlein, Serup, & Ericsson, 2008), although this pattern may change with new recruitment channels. New forms of the rural middle classes in European countries are emerging (Heley, 2010), although the traditional division between the landowner aristocracy and hunting for subsistence among the rural working class still prevails (Mischi, 2013; von Essen, Allen, & Hansen, 2017). Broadly speaking, new demographic and class-related patterns imply that new approaches to hunting and wildlife may emerge, and previous research has pointed out that utilitarian values of hunting for food and stewardship are encountering new leisure-oriented values (von Essen & Tickle, 2020).

With this complex, sometimes contradictory, social and economic arena as a background, we focus on a type of stakeholder that represents multiple interests, and thus operates in the nexus between different social and economic spheres. Swedish hunting tourism operators are often experienced and passionate hunters themselves and deeply involved in the Swedish hunting community. They can thus be described as representing consumer/hunting interests, as well as commercial interests. In this article, we argue that the business owners or operators can be viewed as mediators or moral gatekeepers in situated negotiations with customers and other stakeholders in the hunting tourism market, balancing different ethical, economic and social values. Through the theoretical framework of 'relational work' (Zelizer, 2005; 2013) in economic sociology, we aim to shed light on how such moral balancing is performed, and to identify the specific social and economic characteristics of recreational hunting that underpin such balancing work. Although we focus on the perspective of the hunting business operators and primarily how they interact with the other stakeholders within the social sphere of hunting, these operators also interact with a wider non-hunting public. This may be in the form of an educational mission or an ambition to attract new customers, or more indirectly by responding to criticism of hunting by means of 'accounts' (Scott & Lyman, 1968) – a narrative of justification for the prevailing norms and practices. In conjunction with the prevalence of a mutualist value orientation towards wildlife in many countries today, which emphasises that animals should be assigned rights to their own life in co-existence with humans (Gamborg & Jensen, 2016; Manfredo, Urquiza-Haas, Don Carlos, Bruskotter, & Dietsch, 2020), a critique of a utilitarian value orientation to wildlife (which often underpins hunting) is being voiced. We identify structural tensions and show how ethical practices in specific situations manifest. By focusing on businesses operators' accounts in a contested arena, the article contributes to the academic discourse on the moral economy of hunting tourism and the commodification of the wildlife experience.

Hunting tourism as an ambiguous social arena

It has been argued that hunting tourism can be a path to social sustainable development, benefiting rural communities and contributing to a diversification of local economies and to the sustenance of local cultures and traditional forms of livelihood (Dahl & Sjöberg, 2010; Matilainen & Keskinarkaus, 2010; Novelli, Barnes, & Humavindu, 2006; Nygård & Uthardt, 2011; Willebrand, 2009; Wszola et al., 2020). However, the extent to which hunting tourism is economically and socially beneficial to local livelihoods, particularly in comparison to non-consumptive wildlife tourism, is highly contextual. It is contingent on political conditions, such as the North-South divide, as well as specific social, cultural and environmental contexts (Baker, 1997; Mbaiwa, 2011, 2018; Novelli et al., 2006). Trophy hunting is often seen as the most notorious form of international hunting tourism, and apart from divided or ambiguous views on its effects on the conservation of wildlife (Aryal, Morley, Cowan, & Ji, 2016), studies of local residents' and the public's views on trophy hunting and sport hunting in various parts of the world demonstrate underlying moral, social and political tensions (MacKay & Campbell, 2004; Mkono, 2019; Nordbø, Turdumambetov, & Gulcan, 2018). Trophy hunting and sport hunting is often associated with the wealthy, and hunting 'merely' for pleasure symbolizes asymmetrical power relations, sometimes with colonial connotations (Mkono, 2019) and a marketized, even itemised (Cohen, 2014) view of wildlife. In contexts where hunting tourism is perceived as a more 'folksy' and less upmarket form of recreational hunting, it seems to evoke more positive attitudes among local residents and the general public (cf. MacKay & Campbell, 2004). In the Nordic countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, the general public is generally supportive of recreational hunting, particularly if it has a utilitarian dimension (Gamborg & Söndergaard Jensen, 2016; Kagervall, 2014; Ljung, Riley, & Ericsson, 2015; Willebrand, 2009). In Sweden, the way in which the tradition of local hunting teams is intertwined with wildlife management at the governmental level may contribute to the relatively large public support that exists for recreational hunting.

Nevertheless, there are many potential conflicts associated with hunting. One such issue in Sweden is the controversy surrounding the wildlife policy of predators, which studies of illegal wolf hunting have demonstrated (Eriksson, 2017; Peterson, von Essen, Hansen, & Peterson, 2019; Skogen & Kränge, 2020). Wolf hunting has become a symbol of cultural resistance among sections of the Swedish hunting community, related to wider societal issues such as the rural/urban divide and political alienation. This demonstrates the deeply embedded social and cultural significance of hunting in Sweden, particularly among the rural population. In our study of tourism operators, predator hunting is not particularly promoted or marketed. The type of game being marketed is primarily moose and deer, wild boar, and different species of fowl such as grouse, goose, and pheasant. This may be due to the relative public visibility of commercial operators, who probably try to avoid criticism from the public.

Apart from potential criticism from opponents of hunting, the commercial operators may also face resistance from within the hunting community. Studies from Norway (Oian & Skogen, 2016), Finland (Nygård & Uthardt, 2011), and Scotland have shown a pattern of 'frictional resistance' (Watts et al. 2017) in the local and dominant hunting culture towards hunting tourism. Several reasons for this have been identified: Competition for resources in places where the game is decreasing due to intensified hunting and increasing prices for hunting leases when more hunting rights are allocated to commercial stakeholders. Other factors being identified are socio-cultural dimensions such as risks associated with unethical hunting practices. The latter is described as a risk that may undermine local values and traditional hunting practices. Studies of the Swedish context (Dahl & Sjöberg, 2010; Gunnarsdotter, 2005; Kagervall, 2014; von Essen, 2016; Willebrand, 2009) point to how a cultural tradition of stewardship in hunting may engender an ambivalent attitude among hunters towards commercial hunting tourism (Dahl & Sjöberg, 2010).

The results from the aforementioned studies indicate that the social and cultural context of recreational hunting are relevant to consider in order to understand the specific characteristics

and constraints of a hunting tourism market. The Swedish context, seen through the eyes of the business operators, provides a new perspective. Furthermore, the intertwining of less commodified and informal travel for hunting with a fully marketized hunting tourism – in combination with traditions of stewardship and subsistence-oriented hunting – provides an analytically illustrative case for a study of a complex moral economy.

Values, boundaries and peculiar goods

Hunting tourism as a market comprises quite different types of products. The trophy is one type of commodity, often with a high price. A total hunting experience that focuses on an embodied experience of nature and social aspects is yet another type of service product, and there are multiple in-between forms of semi-commercial arrangements. Through the emergence of hunting tourism, an increasing variety of ‘objects’ – from trophies to packaged experiences – are made commensurable, quantified and thus valued in a market (see also Beckert & Aspers, 2011). However, in hunting, as in wildlife tourism generally, market values intersect with moral values. Hence, the valuation of the game, the meat and the experience seems to be connected to different but overlapping value spheres, or what Arjun Appadurai (1986) has called ‘regimes of value’.

As Marion Fourcade (2011) has aptly shown in her socio-historical analysis of the valuation of nature, when moral value regimes such as the preservation of the environment is valued in a similar way to commodities in the economic value regime, we can see the development of so called ‘peculiar goods’². Peculiar goods are commodities that may evoke moral doubt or ambiguity when they are for sale, such as human body parts, acts of solidarity, or wildlife. When values in economic terms and values in a moral sense are intertwined, as in the case of peculiar goods, the goods must find legitimacy as ‘products’ (Beckert & Aspers, 2011).

Viviana Zelizer’s theoretical framework of ‘relational work’ provides an analytical tool for studying how various commodities are categorised and legitimised as ‘products’ and, more particularly, what social relationships these products are associated with, as well as the boundaries being drawn around these relationships. As we will show, the valuation of wildlife as either a tangible commodity in the form of a trophy or a more intangible experience, evokes relational work. Not only do these commodities, in Fourcade’s terms, have peculiar characteristics, but hunting comprises different forms of social relationships and norms of exchange, connected to different value regimes.

One of Zelizer’s key arguments is that economic and non-economic social spheres are always connected. However, due to moral and cultural norms, social and economic spheres are separated by symbolic boundaries, such as separating friendships from business relationships, or gift giving in intimate relationships from more transactional forms of exchange. While this applies to all kinds of social settings, people devote greater time and effort to negotiating the meanings of relationships involving both personal and economic transactions. In ‘relational work’, boundaries are drawn, reinforced, negotiated, and redrawn. Zelizer (2005; 2013) defines four important elements of such work: *relations* – durable sets of understanding, practices, and obligations between two or more individuals; *transactions* – bounded, short-term interactions implying economic exchange; *media* – accounting systems and their tokens, such as money, gifts, or favours; and negotiated *meanings* concerning relations, transactions, and media.

In hunting, the exchange of favours and of space in hunting teams is an important form of gift economics, existing in parallel with commercial forms of hunting. However, the exchange of gifts is based on different premises than market relations since the gift economy is ‘a system of redundant transactions within a moral economy, which makes possible the extended reproduction of social relations’ (Cheal, 1988:19). As we will show in the analysis, stakeholders in the hunting market arena make constant attempts to draw lines between marketized and less-

marketized spheres, between what they perceive as good and bad business, what forms of payment and favours are considered appropriate. This highlights the indistinct and often fluid character of socially constructed boundaries, such as between friendships and more professional relationships (cf. Andersson Cederholm & Åkerström, 2016). We have used the term 'balancing work' when this form of relational work is connected to specific service encounters and to the hunting situation. We think the term captures the situated, almost literal, balancing that goes on between various stakeholders and their different positions, experiences, and interests. As part of their business practice, hunting operators must negotiate what they consider to be ethical hunting practices. In this mode, we depict them as moral gatekeepers, as they are situated in the nexus of various value spheres, relating to various types of stakeholders, with different views on what is considered to be the 'product' on offer.

Hunting tourism is a special type of market in several senses. Erik Cohen (2014) has highlighted the paradox expressed by hunters when they state that they love the animals they kill (see also Reis, 2009). This engenders a need for justification and methods for dealing with this paradox. Cohen argues that specific 'recreational hunting ethics' have emerged, which are intrinsic to the hunting community and different from the 'exogenous' hunting ethics typical to the environmentalist argument that hunting is necessary for the preservation of the animal population. This intrinsic form of justification often draws on the sports-oriented idea of the 'fair chase', and underpins the development of a sacralising, ritualised framing of the hunting practice and the actual kill. However, Cohen suggests that this practice of sacralisation is increasingly undermined by a process of commodification, which draws attention to the itemised trophy rather than to the chase and the rituals surrounding it. This 'itemisation' of the game and its role in a commodification process is an interesting argument in our case as well. The value of the object, the trophy, as well as the sacralisation of the chase are clearly discernible in the narratives of the Swedish business operators in our study. However, we suggest that the theoretical framework of relational work and an analytical focus on how the business operators' own narratives and accounts of value may enable a nuanced analysis of the *simultaneous* existence of different and overlapping value spheres. It also enables us to look at different and parallel processes of commodification, one that is related to the itemisation of hunting in the form of measuring and counting trophies, and one that is connected to the embodied experience and associated services.

Methods, material, and settings

The study sample includes seven hunting tourism businesses, in-depth ethnographic interviews conducted by the authors with ten owners or managers (two of these businesses were followed up with a second interview and additional visits), observations made during two to three days of hunting at several hunting events (although not as hunters), as well as document analyses of Swedish hunting magazines and social media sites for hunters. The businesses were identified primarily through their advertisements in hunting magazines and on hunting websites, but also through snowball sampling. We searched for businesses with different profiles in terms of marketing – some of them do not market their business as specifically tourism oriented with service packages etc., or barely do any marketing at all, others have a clear marketized profile with specific service offerings and packages. We have included businesses of different size and character – some own their own land, some lease hunting grounds, some have extensive grounds, some are relatively small. Most of the enterprises are located in the south of Sweden, but two of the hunting firms in this sample are located in the north, suggesting that they offer a different type of game. Some of them run farms that have an abattoir and/or offer meat for sale. Some of the establishments are run by a single owner, a few of them by a couple/family, and a couple of them comprise large estates or farms. Most of them contract one or several outfitters or guides,

as well as catering firms, if they do not have their own restaurant or cook themselves. All of them offer hunting tourism packages or events to national as well as international guests. In broad terms, the level of professionalism varies, as well as the operator's professional background. Some are farmers, some have a formal education in hunting and wildlife management, and some have previous experience of the service industry.

The interviews lasted between two and three hours, often accompanied by a tour around the location or estate in 'go-alongs' (Kusenbach, 2003), where we often interacted with assistants and guests. The guests were both women and men, experienced as well as new hunters, from various parts of Sweden and Denmark. The assistants were either helping the operators in a reciprocal relationship, or were students at agricultural colleges.

We started the interviews with a few introductory questions, 'Could you please tell us a bit about this business and how it started?', with the aim of encouraging more elaborate accounts (Riessman, 2008). The themes and guiding principles for our interviews were: 1) What is the value of hunting in general and of running a hunting-related business in particular? 2) Who are the important (human) stakeholders (partners, family members, suppliers, customers, authorities) and how are the relationships maintained? 3) How is the business conducted: how do they enact their business, for instance in the service encounter, and how do they articulate and market their product? 4) What is the meaning and relationship ascribed to the local community, the wildlife, and the locality? Each interview was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymised. All the names in this article are fictitious.

Data collected from field observations and go-alongs add nuance to the narratives, as well as illustrating their accounts. Conversations with guests provide the perspective of recreational hunters, and in these conversations we typically identify descriptions and narratives of a 'good' hunting experience. Analysis of travel magazines, primarily Swedish Hunting (Svensk Jakt) which is the magazine published by the Swedish Hunters' Association and has 11 issues per year, and of travel stories, blogs and films published on social media provide normative and discursive data on values and norms in the Swedish hunting community.

The analysis was informed by the grounded theory approach developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006). By focusing on *accounts*, we focus on the mode in which the social reality is explained, narrated and justified (Scott & Lyman, 1968). In this mode, we can also discern many different voices or counternarratives in the interviewees' accounts as they relate to various positions (sometimes conflicting) and opinions of other stakeholders within the hunting community as well as in the general public. In particular, we have focused on accounts of valuation, i.e. how hunting and the hunting business are assigned a value or 'worth' – economically, morally and emotionally. We focus on the boundaries being drawn between categories such as the 'good/not good' hunting experience, the 'reputable/less reputable' operator and customer, the 'ethical/non-ethical' hunting practice, what medium is used in social exchanges (exchanges of favours or money), as well as mismatches in social interactions, such as misunderstandings between stakeholders, and deviations from what is perceived as the norm.

The first part of the analysis focuses on relational work more generally, showing the overlapping value spheres in the Swedish recreational hunting arena. The second part focuses on balancing work in the situated service encounters, where notions of service, human well-being and animal ethics come to the foreground.

Relational work in hunting tourism

Typical for the business owners or operators in our study is that they describe themselves as experienced hunters, with skills acquired in childhood or adolescence, with a strong passion for nature and wildlife. This seems to be regarded as an informal prerequisite for being regarded as a reputable and knowledgeable commercial hunting operator. In the simultaneous role of being

a hunter looking for new hunting grounds and a provider of hunting opportunities, they often refer to the notion of 'friendship hunting' or 'exchange hunting'. These are established concepts in the Swedish hunting community, often mentioned in hunting magazines and social media, and refer to an established form of reciprocal or friendship hunting exchange in locations other than one's own home environment. Peter, one of our interviewees explains:

This is how hunting works. My friend arranges a hunt on his land and then I invite him here, and then I invite someone else ... this is how you build ... and when you have hunted together a couple of times you become friends. And others are already friends and you invite one another because you are friends. So, it can start with friendship and it can end up as friendship.

Exchange hunting is a way of sustaining and creating social relationships. Since the enactment of this reciprocal relationship includes specific work tasks it is an informal economy, based on the exchange of favours as a form of gift-giving. Often these exchanges are unspoken – as is often the case in gift economies. Since a gift exchange aims at strengthening social relationships, reciprocity can never be openly articulated as an obligation, or, as Jacques Godbout states: 'The magic of the gift can only operate as long as the underlying rules are not formulated' (Godbout 1998:5). In some cases, the exchange of favours are more formalised and articulated as a form of institutionalised gratitude:

We went to a hunting event on a friendship basis up in mid-Sweden, at a place that hires people to help out ... we call it a 'gratitude hunt' or here in the south we call it 'slyngeljakt'³. This is where I help out with my dogs. And when the season is over, we get to hunt in return for helping out.

This non-marketized exchange of hunting opportunities is not always regarded as 'tourism', neither by the hunters themselves nor by the providers of such events – although it involves travel and accommodation. When domestic hunting tourism is referred to, 'commercial hunting' is the concept most frequently used. Furthermore, the distinction between a reciprocity-based and a market-based form of hunting is accentuated by the exclusive framing of some of the offerings. According to our interviewees, the purchase of a whole hunting event, with accommodation, service and professional guides, is perceived as costly. They describe the commercial arena as primarily for those who do not have access to land through ownership or local networks, but also for people who want to hunt on new land, often international guests. Hence, we have different forms of hunting tourism, or rather two overlapping value spheres with different social and economic systems or forms of logic. The exchange hunting is to a large degree a system of gift economics – both on the societal level and on the interpersonal level, where favours are reciprocated.

Through the use of specific concepts and references to traditional hunting, boundaries between different value spheres are demarcated. Nevertheless, these different spheres overlap and create tensions. It demonstrates that the 'exchange hunting' as a less commodified form of tourism exists both in parallel with, and intertwined with, a more marketized form of commercial hunting tourism.

Friendship or business?

Relational work between different forms of exchange could be subtle or engender elaborate explanations among the business owners. Peter's account of his company's bookkeeping strategies illustrates how he tries to keep friendship ties separate and 'clean' from market-induced ties. Peter has a tourism business with accommodation and a farm, as well as his hunting business. The account starts with a detailed and elaborate explanation of how he formally, in the legal sense, keeps his hunting services 'private' and lets his company buy these private services. He does so in order to be able to invite his friends to hunting events, and not only paying guests: 'since I have so many friends and I really enjoy being invited to their places, I need to keep those hunting arrangements private.'

Despite efforts to define boundaries between friendship exchanges and business relationships, mismatches do occur, for instance in the form of unfair competition. Tony is another operator who explains how the tradition of exchange hunting and the business collides.

It is almost like a competitor, this exchange hunting. If I got a request from a hunting team down south who wanted to buy a hunt from me ... but then it turned out that one of them had got in contact with a man in the neighbouring village, where he used to live, and then they could hunt there for free. And after that, they could go and visit them and hunt wild boar ... so in that way I lost my contact on that hunting team ... but there is not much you can do about these things ...

Tony also added that sometimes a local hunting team tries to hire the company's guide and pay him off the books to work for them instead: 'So I have to be very clear with the guides, they have to be loyal. That is very, very important. And to have loyal customers as well.' Tony stresses how important it is to be surrounded by people who appreciate professional service.

This type of narrative illustrates the overlapping boundaries between different traditions and different value spheres. The interviewees stress the importance of having good relationships with other operators, but also with friends and local hunting teams. The hunting world is described as a 'small world', where rumours travel fast. The operators emphasize that it is important to have a good reputation. However, navigating in a world with overlapping value spheres seems to be a complex undertaking, where the hunting operators adopt a role that can be described as moral gatekeeper. A recurring form of distinction being made is between themselves and the less reputable business operator, such as someone who takes advantage of the friendship exchange system and does not respect the boundaries between the different systems, hence creating unfair competition.

Wildlife management or exclusive pleasure?

Our interviewees' accounts are rich in moral argumentation about the right and wrong type of business, and the right and wrong type of hunting. Although the arguments are quite similar, there are minor differences between operators, which demonstrate where they position themselves in relation to various types of markets. Some business operators, such as Sven, are clearly anti-elitist, and seem firmly grounded in an egalitarian hunting tradition.

Well, everything costs money. But it should be normal prices, for the average wallet, so that ordinary people can come here to hunt. It shouldn't cost a whole month's salary for a hunting weekend. This is an old cultural heritage, and I think that everybody who has an interest should be able to do it. But they cannot! In some places, you pay 20-30,000 kronor (approx. 2-3,000 euros, our comment) for two days of hunting, which is ... that's absurd!

Relational work in this context demonstrates the distinction being made between the highly exclusive market, and the market for 'ordinary people'. Different accounts of value are discernible, where the valuation of the game, as well as hunting as such, is related to different political and ideological values. For this operator, hunting is seen as a cultural heritage and the game as a common resource that should be accessible to the many, and he opposes the view of game as a marketized product with a price that only a few people can afford.

Pricing is a delicate matter, however, and Sven mentions that it makes him somewhat dubious in the eyes of other stakeholders in the market:

But then, I have taken a lot of shit from some operators. They say my prices are too low and that I ruin it for them. But I don't give a damn. Because I see the value it has for ordinary people, to be able to hunt. And it costs so much money. It always does.

Although this operator uses moral arguments in the way he describes the business as egalitarian and as a means of preserving a cultural heritage, in the eyes of the community of commercial stakeholders, his attitude is practically considered to be disloyal. However, by stressing

that he is doing it for a good cause, 'for ordinary people', he justifies the potential undermining of business ethics. He further elaborates his view on 'real hunters':

I am really passionate about this, that ordinary people should be able to... real people that have... ordinary jobs or are unemployed. They are the real hunters because they spend all their time and energy and money on wildlife management... if you look at those rich people, they pay for the hunt but they don't care about wildlife. They are just interested in shooting. Because it is pleasurable for them, relaxing. I understand that they need relaxation, but I think it is wrong to kill for pleasure. It should be a *whole* experience.

The advocacy of the egalitarian hunting tradition is in this account embedded in an argument about wildlife management and a subsistence economy. The value of hunting is connected to both the tradition of fellowship, community 'gemeinschaft' and recreational pleasure. This interviewee clearly opposes the marketized exclusiveness in hunting, which he equates with hunting being 'merely' a recreational pursuit for pleasure. In our conversation, Sven further emphasizes the importance of taking care of the meat, as part of 'the whole experience'. He also offers hunting experiences in combination with courses in wild boar hunting and management, where cutting and preparing the meat is included. Although he is a commercial operator, Sven is positioning himself against a commodified 'itemized' (Cohen, 2014) view of game. Sven's anti-elitist position differs from that of the operators that work with a more exclusive market segment, such as Johan.

Johan is a wildlife manager and director of a large farm or estate with a hotel, a restaurant, and an abattoir. The enterprise offers exclusive hunting packages where guests pay up to 20,000 euros for a large trophy. Johan's guests are often international tourists, and he exemplifies this with an American couple who spent two years travelling around the world hunting, looking for rare and interesting game. According to Johan, his guests are generally not interested in bringing home a piece of meat. It is the trophy that matters and the quality services, including gourmet food and wine.

The meat generally plays an important symbolic role in the interviewees' accounts of value. Highlighting the importance of taking care of the game contributes to the notion of the responsible hunting business operator. Previous studies have also shown that the Swedish public is generally positive towards hunting, as long as the meat is dealt with properly (Kagervall, 2014). Hence, the meat does indeed play an important role in these two operators' accounts of what is valued in a good hunting experience. However, in Peter's business, the meat is taken care of by the farm, not the guests. His business has many visitors who just come for the hotel and restaurant, and 'from forest to table' is used as a marketing slogan. To the hunting visitors, cutting and preparing the meat is not presented as part of the recreational experience. It is only presented in a refined form, as gourmet food. Hence, Sven and Peter represent two extremes, almost polarised, views when it comes to the way in which they target different segments, and how the game as well as the activity of hunting should be valued in a market.

Nevertheless, these two operators' overall accounts of the value of hunting are more similar than they first appear. They both talk passionately about hunting as a form of wildlife management, and the importance of maintaining an ecological balance. Peter calls himself 'the wildlife advocate' and explains how the exclusive hunts he arranges are a form of culling, where specific individual animals are targeted. Both operators' narratives of a 'good' business and 'good' hunting practices are deeply embedded in arguments about sustainable wildlife management.

In these two examples, as well as among other business owners and operators in our study, there is a clear attempt to distance themselves from the less reputable operator; who is portrayed as someone who does not care for wildlife, who is short-sighted and 'primarily' or 'only' thinks about profit. Ecological and economic sustainability are interconnected in this type of account, often in a blunt and straightforward way. The operator who does not act in an ethical manner will soon go out of business, is the message being conveyed.

Synthesis: Different accounts of value

The different accounts of value discernible in the hunting market express different valuation practices of both the game itself and the hunting practice. As mentioned previously, commodities in the hunting market are ‘peculiar goods’ (Fourcade, 2011). When such goods emerge in a market they often evoke uneasiness or resentment, at least if economic value supersedes non-economic value. Furthermore, the market for exclusive trophies has similarities to the art market, where rare species and individual animals with large skulls have a high monetary value as a unique piece. The hunting market in general can be analysed through the conceptual distinction between standard markets and status markets as suggested by Patrik Aspers (2009). In standard markets, the value is perceived as being closely connected to the product itself, with relatively clear standards that have been agreed upon by the market stakeholders. For instance, when a wild animal becomes meat, the value is relatively standardised. When the value is the unique trophy, the value is highly arbitrary and related to a dynamic interaction of supply and demand in a specific recreational hunting market. This is a status market – typically illustrated by the art market – where the value of the goods is related to the status of the stakeholders, rather than to standard measures. However, when the value of the game animal is primarily related to social ties, friendship and moral values, monetary valuation becomes ambiguous. In these instances, the value is assigned to the moral rather than the economic value sphere, or somewhere in between. The hunting arena comprises all these different accounts of value. Hence, the relational work, the attempt to find order and draw boundaries between different value spheres, is intense. It is expressed through the hunting operators’ accounts of different groups of clients, and their elaborate accounts of the priceless, non-monetary value of ecological sustainability, as well as the cultural heritage of democratic hunting, balancing against the highly exclusive marketization of certain types of game.

Balancing work

This second part of the analysis demonstrates a form of relational work that we call ‘balancing work’. It is closely connected to the specific hunting situations, and emphasizes the notion of how the interviewees understand and act on ethical dimensions. It also demonstrates the emergence of a discourse about the tourism experience in commercial hunting, which has an impact on the dynamics of the social negotiations about different values.

Shooting versus embodied experience

What is clearly discernible among the business operators in our study, as well as in the Swedish hunting media, is the emphasis on the embodied and holistic nature experience in hunting. *Shooting is silver but abstaining from it is golden* was the headline of one article in the magazine Swedish Hunting, and this is quite illustrative of the informative and normative positioning of the magazine (Svensk Jakt, 2019)⁴. In an article entitled, *The Hunter’s Responsibility to Explain Why We Hunt*, a specific project is described where two companies and a hunters’ association invited film makers to: ‘... produce a short film about what hunting means to them, more than the shot. This is why we hunt – actually.’ (Svensk Jakt, 2015)⁵. The narratives ‘what hunting is actually about’ and ‘more than the shot’ are counter narratives, in the face of potentially reluctant attitudes from people who are not familiar with or who oppose hunting.

It is also assumed, among the hunting associations as well as the business operators, that traditions inherited for generations, and thus taken for granted, need to be articulated to new groups of hunters. This is often postulated by the interviewees, where they juxtapose hunting ‘today’ with hunting in previous generations. As Johan puts it:

In the olden days, you grew up with hunting, you went into the forest with your granddad or grandma or whoever it was ... but that is not so common anymore. Now you have people born in the cities who want to learn to hunt. They need places, with professionals, instructors who can help them. They are very willing to pay for that service.

Reaching out to new urban hunters is both an educational mission and a business strategy. What is discernible when the moral counternarrative, 'over and above the shot', is framed in a commercial context is the emergence of an experience narrative. Although the holistic nature experience in hunting is not new in itself, what is discernible is a 'servicification' (Tomiyama, 2015) of hunting tourism. 'Servicification' refers to a gradual packaging and marketing of service components, typically in ventures where the service component has not been present or recognised as having a monetary value.

The operators in our study often emphasize the value of embodied experience in a manner that can be interpreted as a combination of a moral account and marketing. It indicates that although services and embodied experiences are assigned values in a market and to a certain extent are commodified, it is also embedded in different moral arguments. One such argument is the wellness argument, which claims that people today are stressed and need to find ways to relax and get back to basics. Hunting is regarded as a means of finding focus in an overstimulated world. Tony, for instance, started his business because of his passionate interest in hunting, but also for personal reasons, after recovering from illness.

This is my thing, it makes me unique, I have my own niche. I combine hunting with wellness. This is really my mission. I want to reach out with this, because it has really helped me./--/So it is my conviction that hunting is a wellness experience, and I want to provide that to my customers, all these soft values, things that have to do with being present in nature.

Although not always as commodified as in this case, accounts of wellness and the beneficial effect of nature are ubiquitous among the interviewees. They often criticise the urbanised society today in which people have lost connection with nature and wildlife. They emphasise the reverence for nature and that 'hunting should be on nature's terms'. One assumption is that hunting should involve effort, that it requires skill, and that it should take time. Anders, who runs a hunting and fishing business with his wife Susanne, describes the value of the hunting experience in the following way. Typically, the narrative starts with the counternarrative, 'it is not about shooting ...'.

It is not about shooting a lot of animals but ... that it is the shooting that you pay for ... but it is the feeling of waking up early and the late nights ... and then finally you manage to shoot that wild boar ... ah, it is such a great feeling, and you have been so tired and ... then the hunt has a totally different meaning for you personally, because you have worked for it, to shoot that animal/--/but it is on the animal's terms.

The story of how you track a specific animal for days and finally get your reward is common. When we ask a group of tourists that we accompanied during a hunting event to describe a 'good hunting experience', this is the typical story we hear, told with emotional emphasis. Although the final shot is the reward, it is the *chase* that is the highlight of the experience, and the respect for the individual animal. This is in line with Reis's (2009) study on recreational hunters in New Zealand, where the embodied hunting experience, 'more than the kill', is highlighted, and depicted as a sublime union between nature and the landscape. Embedded in this type of narrative is an implicit criticism of a type of hunting that is too efficient, and where there is too much focus on the number of animals killed. To reiterate Cohen's (2014) argument on intrinsic moral justifications, this illustrates such justifications. It can also be interpreted as criticism of a form of recreational hunting that primarily focuses on the end result.

Quantity versus quality

Despite the emphasis on an embodied and holistic experience 'over and above the kill', the hunt for large trophies represents a contrasting narrative. It is the narrative of the calculable, of

quantity. These different discourses exist in parallel, and the operators have to navigate between them, trying to meet customer expectations. Several interviewees emphasize the urge to 'lower the expectations' of customers. By which they mean expectations of a certain number of kills, despite the regulated harvest quota for some game, or an excessive preoccupation with finding the golden trophy. By stressing that 'hunting has no guarantees', they describe how they try to maintain what they perceive to be an ethical standard.

Susanne: We have something important to convey. When we have those big groups coming, they all need to sign a hunting declaration so that everybody knows what the conditions are ... in terms of safety and all that. And we have a responsibility so that it doesn't escalate and become ... that the form of hunting will change. And that we have those expectations that everybody will get to shoot ... and that ... no.

Anders: Many people have seen a lot of hunting films and those are really just commercials for riflescopes and ... all those hunts where animals are ubiquitous and easy to find. But that is not how it works in real life.

Keeping customers satisfied, and still ensuring what they perceive to be ethical standards – often described as making sure that you minimize the risk of wounding animals – is a balancing act that is accomplished in a variety of ways. Peter describes how you need to 'read the customers' and 'know your hunting ground'.

There are many ways of lowering (gesturing with his hands)/--/if you are a professional, then you know that 'ah, he can shoot, or she can ...' you just know so that there will not be too much shooting or too little./ --/You know you can pick those three, because they can shoot, and you can put them in the VIP lane as we say, because otherwise you cannot fill that bag so that the customer will be pleased. So, this is all about professionalism, to try to find ... to know your own land, to know that 'you can shoot a lot here, but less here ...' You cannot let the customer shoot more than he is capable of, because then we get into ethics and morals ... it is our obligation to make sure that everything is run smoothly and that the customer will at least be fairly pleased.

To balance the customers' different expectations and skills with animal ethics is a challenging task with new customers. One type of situation that is considered to be particularly challenging is when there is an informal leader in the customer group, who raises expectations, such as the organiser of the trip. Going through the rules and formalities before you start the hunt is one way of keeping customers on track, and there are fines and a so-called 'red card' if you break the rules. A more positive form of reinforcement that our interviewees emphasize is hospitality. All the business operators stress the importance of the ancillary services, apart from the hunt itself, such as good food, drink and the opportunity to socialize. The interviewees all describe with pride that they are skilled service providers, such as Anders and Susanne.

If there are days when the hunt is not going so well ... then ... and that is nothing you can learn in any formal way, but is just something we have in our genes ... we are so service minded ... people come to our place and you joke with them and we show them that we are interested in them ... we are there for them.

Synthesis: Balancing expectations, balancing values

Balancing work is taking place at various levels. On the more specific level, it is about balancing the varying expectations of customers and providing a satisfying hunting experience without compromising what the operators perceive to be ethical values and safety. Skills in reading customers and nature, working with positive or negative reinforcement as well as service skills, hospitality and 'people knowledge' are highlighted as important means of accomplishing such a balancing act. On a more general level, it is also about balancing various accounts of value – the value of quantity with a primary focus on the outcome or result, with accounts of the embodied experience, emphasizing 'other' values. In that sense, the operators play the role of moral gatekeeper or mediator. Since recreational hunting at the end of the day entails taking the life of an animal, justifying accounts in various forms are ubiquitous. Narratives of hunting are framed in counternarratives and explanations. These are embedded in moral values of connection to nature, and the

well-being of humans as well as animals. Furthermore, these moral dimensions are socially and culturally intertwined in a tourism market where experience is commodified and valued in economic terms, in a servicification process. In this study, we can discern a tension between two opposing but parallel discourses – the embodied and holistic nature experience with a focus on wellbeing and sustainability, and the discourse of quantity, efficiency and calculable outcomes.

Concluding discussion

Hunting tourism is a complex arena – socially, morally and economically. Through the notion of ‘accounts of value’, we have focused on how hunting tourism operators navigate this arena. These operators face many different expectations, ideals, narratives and counternarratives of what is considered to be a good hunting experience, good hunting ethics, and good animal ethics. These are narratives and counternarratives that are often implicit in their stories, but to which they relate in one way or another. In that mode, they justify, explain, argue, display and share their own, as well as the views and experience of others. We have depicted these operators as moral gatekeepers, acting from a position situated in overlapping value spheres. In the Swedish hunting context, we have identified several different, but related, overlapping value spheres. The tradition of friendship- or community-based exchange hunting primarily works as a system of gift economics. It exists both in parallel to and intertwined with a market-based system of exchange. This is partly, but not exclusively, connected to a democratic hunting tradition formed around local hunting teams, and the boundaries that are being drawn to an exclusive form of hunting where the valuation of the trophy is equivalent to that of the art market. However, the latter form of hunting is not only market-based, but to a certain degree friendship and network based as well. Two different forms of economic and social exchange, together with the tension between egalitarian and exclusive hunting, creates a dynamic where the value of the hunting activities, as well as the game and wildlife, is brought to the fore, being the subject of social, moral and economic negotiation.

The notion of relational work as developed by Viviana Zelizer is a valuable theoretical tool for capturing the boundary work being performed, where stakeholders order and rearrange the various value spheres. In this study, we have introduced the notion of balancing work as an even more situated form of relational work, illustrating the gatekeeping role of the hunting operators in specific situations and encounters, where they express the intention to ensure the best possible outcome for two important stakeholders: their customers and the animals.

The study contributes to the relatively sparse literature on hunting tourism. We have demonstrated the situated and enacted, as well as the structurally conditioned social and economic context of hunting tourism. We have also shown how tourism provides an account of valuation through the discourse of experiences. Tourism may have a commodifying role in nature recreation, but, as this study of Swedish hunting tourism entrepreneurs has shown, this is not a straightforward process. With a commodification of the hunting experience, in tandem with gift economic exchanges and a reluctant orientation to marketized social relationships, commodification is both embraced and resisted (see Andersson Cederholm & Sjöholm, 2020). In this mode, tangible as well as intangible commodities in the hunting market can be viewed as a form of peculiar goods (Fourcade, 2011). These are peculiar since they are anomalies, situated in-between moral and economic value spheres.

Through the theoretical framework of relational work and ‘accounts of value’, this study contributes more generally to research into the role of tourism – as a social, cultural and economic force – in relation to wildlife and nature. Hunting tourism is a lens through which we can understand wider processes in society and how norms related to nature and wildlife are being negotiated. Hunting, as a consumptive form of wildlife recreation, highlights moral dilemmas and challenges. This is partly related to the issue of animal ethics, with a possibly growing tension in society today between mutualist and utilitarian or materialist value orientations (Gamborg &

Söndergaard Jensen 2016; Manfredo et.al., 2020), as well as to various concerns and attitudes related to sustainable wildlife management.

As this study has demonstrated, hunting tourism sheds light on a moral economy with contradictory and intersecting value spheres. Towards the backdrop of hunting being an intensely negotiated space, both within the hunting community and in society at large, it is vital to understand how this moral economy works. As the controversies around wolf hunting in Sweden have shown, concerns around wildlife and hunting are never merely about hunting or the conservation of specific species, these are deeply embedded in social, cultural, and political contexts. Likewise, the process in which wildlife resources are being transformed into tourism products cannot be fully understood if it is merely viewed as an emerging market, without considering that this type of economic activity is deeply embedded in different forms of social and moral exchange in which the product is ascribed meaning and legitimized – or not legitimized. Hence, a wildlife management system cannot be isolated from its cultural and social context. As participant observers at conferences and seminars co-arranged by the Swedish wildlife authorities and the Swedish hunting associations, we have noted that the notions of ‘dialogue’ and ‘collaboration’ have been brought up as crucial in efforts to create a sustainable wildlife system. We have particularly noted that ecologically informed presentations and debates around issues such as how to calculate harvest quotas, often end up in concluding summaries expressed in wordings such as ‘the challenge is to understand the people, not defining the quotas’. Hence, knowledge of the complex, and to a large extent ‘hidden’, moral economy of recreational hunting may be relevant to wildlife management at all levels, to facilitate informed decisions based on insights of these complexities.

Notes

1. The Swedish Hunters’ Association (SJF) is Sweden’s oldest nature conservation organization and handles certain aspects of hunting and game conservation in Sweden. It is financed by the hunters themselves through a state hunting permit. They have just over 150,000 members and work with the education and training of hunters as well as wildlife management, monitoring game and informing the general public about the value of hunting and nature conservation. Their agreement with the government is available on their website (<https://jagareforbundet.se/jakt-och-viltvardsuppdraget/om-uppdraget/>).
2. See a similar discussion on Karl Polanyi’s concept ‘fictitious commodities’ in Stuart & Gunderson, 2020.
3. This is a local concept for the reciprocal ‘gratitude hunt’.
4. Svensk Jakt, Nr 9, 2019.
5. Svensk Jakt, 2015. (<https://svenskjakt.se/opinion/jagarnas-ansvar-att-forklara-varfor-vi-jagar/>), published April 9, 2015. Translated from Swedish by the authors.

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