

CRUISE TOURISTS IN SPITSBERGEN AROUND 1900: BETWEEN OBSERVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract

This article examines the early commodification of the Arctic, using emerging cruise tourism to Spitsbergen as an example. Its objective is to investigate how an Arctic tourism discourse emerged around 1900 and what its central characteristics were. Covering the period between 1893, when German Arctic cruise tourism took off, and 1914, the article argues that early cruise tourists drew on exploration, adventure and leisure discourses in order to frame their experiences. However, unlike explorers and explorer travellers (Laing and Frost 2014), they wished only to a limited extent to experience adventure themselves, or report transformative experiences due to the sublime landscape; rather, the travel narratives indicate that they were interested above all in observing adventure, this process being facilitated by the advanced technology and luxurious lifestyle of the cruise ships. As the article demonstrates, this ambivalence between images of a wild, uncontrolled and sublime Arctic and an Arctic controlled by modern technology and modern life helped to map the Arctic as a tourism space.

Keywords

Arctic history; Spitsbergen/Svalbard; cruise tourism; exploration; nature/culture divide

Setting off to the North

In the 1890s, a burgeoning European tourism industry discovered the archipelago of Spitsbergen as a travel destination. It extended the already well-trodden tourist path of steamship traffic along the coast of Norway, which had brought hundreds of tourists to the North Cape every summer since the 1870s, with numbers increasing during the 1880s (Spring 2017; Birkeland 2000). Most ships to Spitsbergen would take the route along the Norwegian coast and past Bjørnøya, whilst others would leave from the British Isles, in some cases stopping over at Iceland before passing the island of Jan Mayen, and from there on to Spitsbergen.

Before the advent of cruise tourism to the High Arctic, North Cape had been the northernmost point on the journey for the majority of leisure travellers: now it became an intermediate stop, a halt in-between South and North. I argue elsewhere that the Cape had been an epistemological border between the known and the unknown for a long time; with the tourist moving northwards, the border moved as well (Spring 2017). As a result the European Arctic, including Spitsbergen, increasingly became part of a shared space of experience, no longer exclusively reserved for scientists, explorers, hunters, and wealthy hunter tourists. The activities of the latter continued in parallel with the constant growth of Northern tourism, however, and provided a frame of reference for the cruise tourists. Scientific and geographical expeditions embarked to the North in an effort to reach the North Pole, or to investigate the area around it. During the 1890s, when cruise tourism to the Arctic was taking off, Norwegian scientist explorer Fridtjof Nansen and his crew undertook the famous *Fram* expedition (1893–96), British Sir William Martin Conway explored the interior of Spitsbergen (several expeditions between 1894 and

1909), and Swedish explorer Salomon August Andrée and his team attempted to reach the North Pole by air (1896, 1897). Such expeditions became a tourist attraction in themselves, with tourists visiting Andrée, and encountering Conway and other explorers on Spitsbergen. The islands were also rapidly becoming a point of departure for spectacular and speculative attempts to reach the North Pole, perhaps best illustrated by US journalist, explorer and aëronaut Walter Wellman who, like Andrée, tried to reach the North Pole by air (1906–9). The early tourist tours reflected these varied interests in Spitsbergen; unlike today's Arctic cruises with their focus on leisure and possibly adventure, they integrated different forms of tourism, including leisure, hunting, scientific investigation, and exploration/adventure.¹

Laing and Frost have coined the term “explorer travellers” for elite travellers who travel to unknown regions or visit places that have either never been or are not often visited by tourists, and who draw on “the myths of the explorer and the discoverer” (Laing and Frost 2014, 4). Explorer travellers were a wide-spread phenomenon in the nineteenth century, as a result of Romanticism and its focus on the exotic and wild; urbanization, which went hand in hand with a growing interest in uncultivated nature; and exploration which, particularly in the late nineteenth century, led to European imperialism and colonialism on a global scale (see also Laing and Frost 2014, 5). Even though Laing and Frost (2014, 194) emphasize that the term may also include group tourists, explorer travellers in the nineteenth century and today have mostly been solitary travellers. Hence, while the concept helps us to understand the fundamental interrelatedness of exploration and tourism, reaching back through history, it might be less useful for defining late nineteenth-century cruise tourists who followed a pre-arranged schedule and often travelled in large groups, sometimes up to 300 people. Tourism scholars differentiate between various types of tourists, depending on factors such as their motivation, their mode of travelling and their destination (see Lohmann and Netto 2017, 161–167). As Lohmann and Netto (2017, 163) point out, such typologies are problematic, as they tend to subsume different people under a single category or, as often has been the case, define adventure and tourist practices from the perspectives of European travellers. At the same time they are helpful, as they provide an indication of specific features which characterize tourist experiences.

Kolltveit (2006) defines the early Arctic cruise tourists as “deckchair explorers”, and points here at the general passivity of cruise tourists, who are transported to their destination and to solitary places, rather than actively seeking them out themselves. Whereas his term is useful for understanding a central feature of early Arctic cruise tourism, my material suggests that many of these early tourists played a more active role than this term allows for: they walked along Spitsbergen fjords and climbed mountains; some of them were scientists or dilettante scientists, who spent hours gathering research material; others collected stones, birds, and human remains as souvenirs; a number of tourists intervened directly in Spitsbergen animal life through hunting; and the cruise ships left behind traces of their presence, such as a wooden board with the name of the ship written on it. In other words, they defied categorization into a single type of tourist: at most we may call them explorer tourists or explorer mass tourists, although this does not necessarily cover the scientists on board. Kolltveit's term (2006), however, makes it explicit that the tourists drew on exploration discourses and practices, whilst at the same time not wishing to be involved in the adventures of exploration, nor even organizing and

¹ I have discussed this more extensively in Spring 2018.

executing them: rather, as I shall show, *observing* and *enacting* adventure were key activities on these tours, much more so than *experiencing* and *living* it.

In this paper I draw on narratives of travel to Spitsbergen that were published in German language newspapers and journals or books between 1893, when German cruise tourism to Spitsbergen started on an extensive scale, and 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War, which was to change patterns of travel significantly.² The German Arctic explorer captain Wilhelm Bade (1843–1903), who was among the key personnel in initiating organized Spitsbergen tourism, drew inspiration for his future career as a tourism manager from the *Württembergische Spitzbergen-Expedition* to the archipelago in 1891, which investigated the possibility of exploiting Spitsbergen’s natural resources. Tourism and exploration were thus closely intertwined from early on in German Northern discourse. The Spitsbergen cruise tours seem to have become very popular quite quickly, and by the mid-1890s travellers could choose between tours arranged by Bade and by steamship companies such as the Hamburg-Amerika-Line (HAPAG), the Orient Line and Norddeutsche Lloyd. The North Norwegian Vesteraalens Dampskibsselskab started a regular tour, aimed particularly at hunter tourists, between Trondheim/Hammerfest and Spitsbergen in 1896 (Arlov 2003, 211–212; K. J. 1896, 2; “Sportsroute nach Spitzbergen” 1897). Botanist Julius Wiesner, who took this tour and spent the summer in Spitsbergen in 1897 carrying out scientific research, pointed out that for enjoyment, leisure and a superficial experience of the islands, tours on the big cruise ships were suitable, but that people interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the landscape should use the Vesteraalen Dampskibsselskab’s route (Wiesner 1897, 1–2). While his criticism neglects the fact that cruise passengers were a widely heterogeneous group of tourists, it illustrates the difference between travellers spending a longer period of time on Spitsbergen and those passing by for only a few days, or even just a few hours.

While the cruise tourist descriptions of Spitsbergen are fairly similar in the way they portray life on board and depict the surroundings, despite having been written over a period of 20 years, they had to relate to different contexts at different times. Neither the organizers nor the tourists could draw on an established tourism discourse of the Arctic as the basis for their plans and experiences in the early years of organized Spitsbergen tourism. Instead, they had to refer to previous cruise tourist itineraries from other regions, as well as to expedition reports, literary works, and visualizations of the Arctic such as paintings or panoramas in order to frame their understanding of the North. In other words, they had to *invent* a tourism discourse of Spitsbergen, and one which challenged traditional images of the wild and inaccessible Arctic, its wildness and inaccessibility tempered, of course, by tourist travel taking place only in the summer months. Dr. K. J., who travelled with Bade to Spitsbergen in 1896, contrasted the safe journey of the steamer with his preconceived knowledge of the Arctic and its “hair-raising descriptions of the horrors of the polar world”³ (K. J. 1896, 7). German playwright and translator Ludwig Fulda, who took the HAPAG-steamer *Auguste Victoria* the following year, pointed out that general knowledge of Spitsbergen had until recently been based on school lessons and on newspaper reports of the region’s significance to expeditions to the North (Fulda 1897a, 1).

² Spitsbergen means “pointed mountains”. The German name, used by the authors of these texts, was “Spitzbergen”, though the place-name is actually Dutch, dating from seventeenth-century exploration to the region.

³ “haarsträubende Beschreibungen der Schrecken der Polarwelt”. All translations by the author.

Only a few years later the Spitsbergen tourism discourse, with its characteristic combination of topoi taken from geographical and scientific exploration, and from pleasure travel, seems to have been well-established: when journalist H. E. Wallsee, who had travelled several times to the North, published his book on cruise tours to Spitsbergen around 1912, he referred to Arctic explorers such as Julius Payer, the discoverer of Franz Josef Land, and gentleman adventurers such as Lord Dufferin, whose *Letters From High Latitudes* (1856) was an immensely popular source of reference for Arctic tourists. However, he also mentioned Hans Hopfen, an early cruise tourist to the North (Wallsee [1912]). In his book, Wallsee was able to draw on a wide field of Arctic travel experiences and media, and used these to frame his own observations.

Both organizers and tourists used the contemporary mediascape to distribute knowledge about their tours through postcards, photographs, lectures, albums, brochures, and printed narratives in newspapers, magazines and books. These accounts provide us with a fascinating insight into how the North was imagined in the early years of cruise tourism and how they set the tone for future journeys. Looking more closely at the early narratives of the cruise tours will not least help us to understand how a polar tourism discourse of the Arctic came into being. While valuable work has been published on this material (by e.g. Kolltveit 2016; Kinzler and Tillmann 2010; Reilly 2009), it is still underused as a source of understanding how popular images of and knowledge about the Arctic were produced and communicated.

Throughout the period examined here, travelling to the North involved entering a liminal space, criss-crossed by the familiar and the unknown, by reliable modern technology and the overpowering Arctic environment. These tensions shaped tourist experiences and created an image of the North that oscillated between the wish to control it and the desire to be controlled by it. This is a discourse which is prevalent in today's media coverage of the Arctic, in discourses of environmental protection as well as of tourist exploitation. It might be too easy to assume a direct continuity from the Arctic imagery and experiences of the 1890s to those of today, but there is little doubt that the widely popular reports of the early polar tourists had an impact on how the Arctic was subsequently perceived and talked about.

Commodified exploration⁴

The tourists of the early tours in the 1890s were, to apply Laing's and Frost's words in their description of contemporary explorer travellers, 'pioneers' and 'path-finders' (2014, 3) in both a physical and a metaphorical fashion. They were to lead the way in discovering new places (ibid, 36). As I have discussed more extensively elsewhere (Spring 2018), the early cruises of the 1890s invoked such a discourse: they were among the first tours to bring pleasure tourists to the Arctic, they communicated a feeling of embarking on a pioneering journey, and they built directly on an exploration discourse that had characterized much of the nineteenth-century Western way of thinking. In his announcement of a cruise tour to Spitsbergen in 1893, Bade emphasized that the tourists would get to know a polar world that "until now had been closed for the tourist"⁵ ("Gesellschaftsreise..." 1893). While this was strictly speaking not correct, since tourists

⁴ I owe the inspiration for this term to Varley's discussion of commodified versions of adventure in contrast to "original adventure" (2006, 188).

⁵ "dem Touristen bisher verschlossene Polarwelt".

and even cruises had been to Spitsbergen before, it was the first time that tourism was occurring on a larger and better-organized scale there.

One of the key features of Western exploration discourse was a desire for spatial expansion, to travel further than other Europeans had come before: to the West in North America; to the highest peaks of Asian and African mountain ranges; high up in the air; to the North Pole in the Arctic and the South Pole in the Antarctic. While cruise ships to Spitsbergen mostly kept to the safety of coastal waters, they also attempted to travel as far North as possible, and to reach the edge of the ice (“Oesterreichische Touristen auf Spitzbergen” 1895b; K. J. 1896, 7). Another feature of exploration discourse is the privilege of discovering and naming territory (Laing and Frost 2014, 95–96). When orthopedist Professor Adolf Lorenz (father of ethnologist Konrad Lorenz) travelled to Spitsbergen in 1895, the captain of his ship performed land occupation rituals (Lorenz 1895, 3) and in an article published that year we read that a modern luxury tour had been organized to Spitsbergen “[f]or the first time”⁶, and that it was the first time pleasure tourists would land on the islands (“Eine Vergnügungsreise” 1895, 3). Similar to flags announcing presence and control, wooden boards were erected in the landscape announcing to future travellers that specific cruise ships had already been there (see Lorenz 1895, 3).

Another central aspect of exploration involves taking risks, with sometimes fatal results. On the Spitsbergen cruises tourists did not take risks themselves, yet risk and danger were central characteristics of these tours. The tourists encountered them throughout the journey in the form of first-hand narratives and expedition remains. The caretaker of the small wooden hotel first erected by Vesteraalens Dampskibsselskab in Advent Bay in 1896 to cater for an increasing influx of scientific, climbing and hunter tourists was Bernt Berntsen, who had had first-hand experience of the dangers of the Arctic from the recently-returned and widely-known *Fram* expedition (Fulda 1897b, 1);⁷ the captain of the weekly steamer *Lofoten* taking hunter tourists on the so-called sports route from Hammerfest to Advent Bay in the summer months was the famous Norwegian polar explorer and *Fram* captain Otto Sverdrup (Wiesner 1897, 1). Tourists reported that former *Vega* expedition members worked as sailors on the steamer *Erling Jarl*, which Bade had chartered (“Im hohen Norden” 1896, 5),⁸ and they told of encounters with participants in Swedish and English expeditions (K. J. 1896, 7). The programme on the *Erling Jarl* in 1896 also included a visit to Andrée’s expedition (“Die Andrée’sche-Ballon Expedition” 1896, 10; “Im hohen Norden” 1896); physical chemist and subsequent Nobel Prize-winner Svante Arrhenius, who had joined the Andrée expedition, went for a short tour with the cruise ship to the edge of the ice (Kahlbaum n.d., 17); and in the years after Andrée and his team departed for the North Pole, disappearing in the ice, cruise tourists would visit the remains of the balloon hangar (e.g. “Aus dem Norden” 1897, 5; “Nordlandsreise” 1898, 8; Guttman 1908, 16).

The tourists brought along knowledge of the perils of living and working in the Arctic, and confirmed this by visiting graves dating back to the sixteenth and seventeenth

⁶ “Zum ersten Male”.

⁷ Botanist Julius Wiesner, who was in Spitsbergen for the purposes of scientific research, rectified some of the inaccurate details of the journalistic reports, such as Berntsen’s role as hotelier: his task was according to Wiesner to help scientists and tourists as a guide to the islands (Wiesner 1897, 1).

⁸ The expedition on the ship *Vega*, under Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, had been the first to traverse the Northeast Passage (1878–1880).

centuries, as well as the graves of hunters who had died more recently (e.g. Vely 1897, 574; Guttman 1908, 7–10; Bramsch 1896, 5). In some of the travel narratives a *memento mori* discourse connected to such visits may be discerned. Tourist Achim von Winterfeld called the former Dutch settlement Smeerenberg “a site of death”⁹ (Winterfeld 1913, 56) and mused about the decadent life in Spitsbergen during previous centuries, leaving only bones and graves in the present (56–57). Wallsee ([1912], 132) defined the graves as “monuments” that “humans had raised to avarice”.¹⁰ Medical doctor Hermann Guttman (1908, 7), who had been to Spitsbergen in 1896 and 1897, told of the “sad remains”¹¹ of a hut in which four reindeer hunters had been forced to overwinter. The left-overs of their survival efforts were still to be seen: shreds of clothes, tools, and food (ibid). Tourists who had participated in the first cruise tour with the *Admiral* in 1893 were later to learn that two Norwegian hunters whom they had met on the islands had not been able to return to Norway and were forced to spend the winter on Spitsbergen under extreme conditions (“Ueberwinterung auf Spitzbergen” 1894, 7). A number of German language newspapers recounted the hardships of these hunters, with the Hungarian *Pester Lloyd* even using the heading “A modern Robinson Crusoe”, calling forth associations with the islands’ isolation and inaccessibility (“Ein moderner Robinson Crusoe” 1895, 4).¹²



Figure 1: Tourists visiting the remains of a hut built by shipwrecked hunters. In: *Hamburg-Amerika Linie* [1901], 58. Source: *Historisches Archiv zum Tourismus (HAT)*

Observing adventure

What all these examples illustrate is that the journey was not about tourists trying to be adventurers or even explorers themselves, but about meeting and hearing about others who would expose themselves to the perils of adventure and exploration. Even though hunting was a major motivation and pastime for a number of cruise tourists, it was ideally to be conducted within a safe environment and not to involve any lethal danger. Here

⁹ “eine Stätte des Todes”.

¹⁰ “Denkmälern” that “Menschen der Habgier errichtet”.

¹¹ “traurigen Ueberreste”.

¹² The newspapers refer to one of the hunters by name, and I assume therefore that they talk about the same men despite the publication dates of 1894 and 1895.

again, Kolltveit's (2006) reference to Spitsbergen tourists as "deckchair explorers" is appropriate; like the more established image of the armchair explorer, the Arctic tourist could relax in the luxurious ship environment and "read" about what others had experienced. Cater (2013, 11) points out that reading adventure stories may replace the adventure itself, and Laing and Frost (2012) show the deep effect that fiction has had on tourist perceptions. In a beautiful description of his journey through the Netherlands in 1933, Patrick Leigh Fermor ([2005], 32) writes about the power of pre-conceived images in shaping our experiences:

Ever since those first hours in Rotterdam a three-dimensional Holland had been springing up all round me and expanding into the distance in conformity which was already in existence and in every detail complete. For, if there is a foreign landscape familiar to English eyes by proxy, it is this one; by the time they see the original, a hundred mornings and afternoons in museums and picture galleries and country houses have done their work.

If we consider the tourists' experiences in this light, turning well-known stories of the perilous and sublime Arctic from the two-dimensional into the three-dimensional, their interest in observing danger and death may become more understandable: the graves and the narratives of sacrifice functioned as evidence of well-known descriptions and images of the Arctic. Moreover, as Zweig (1981, 4) points out, the combination of risk and action is an essential feature of the adventure story, and by observing it directly the tourists could translate the adventure story into real life, albeit as readers, not as participants.

One precondition for maintaining the act of reading and observation, and avoiding corporeal involvement, was the ship itself, this vessel of modernity and material expression of technological progress; the belief in the latter being so essential to European culture in the late nineteenth century. Just as in the armchair, the tourists could feel comfortable and safe here, and appreciate the danger and risks presented to them by the outside environment from this position.

This was a paradox, in a way: the travellers had embarked on a journey which had only taken place a few times before, if at all, and they were travelling to a place and a region which for centuries had been associated with peril and death, and with risky activities such as expeditions and hunting. One of the attractions of the journey was precisely this dangerous environment; at the same time however, if the cruise tour was to be successful, the travellers had to feel safe. Danger should thus be controllable.¹³ There were, indeed, a few reports of potentially dangerous incidents,¹⁴ and the tourism companies tried to diminish risk by, for instance, having two ships in Spitsbergen at the same time. The Norwegian steamship companies Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskab (BDS) and Det Nordenfjeldske Dampskibsselskab (NFS) referred in their brochure to this as "an arrangement that will be of relevance in the northern polar sea" (Det Bergenske Dampskibsselskab 1906, 109; see also Kolltveit 2006, 358).¹⁵ The tourists repeatedly

¹³ This also characterizes today's adventure tourism, indicating similarities between early Arctic cruise tourism and today's risk tourism. For literature on this paradox, see Varley 2006.

¹⁴ In 1895, for example, the tourist steamer *Danzig* sustained damage at Spitsbergen, but was able to set sail again and travel to Norway ("Oesterreichische Touristen auf Spitzbergen" 1895a, 6).

¹⁵ "eine Ordnung, die von Bedeutung im nördlichen Eismeer sein wird".

mentioned the safety of the ships, contrasting it with the wild and unpredictable world outside (e.g. Wallsee [1912], 28).

Another paradox was that the ships functioned as containers of European bourgeois and aristocratic culture, and hence as an idealized representation of home, but were at the same time mediators between two cultures: that of Spitsbergen and that of the tourist. Many of the ships used for cruises to Spitsbergen were the same ones that embarked to and from America. They moved travellers from a familiar to an unfamiliar space and provided them with a smooth transition from one place to another. Bade used smaller ships because these were more flexible when entering and leaving fjords. Although these ships could not afford the same luxurious container culture as the big migration steamers, he advertised these tours as “luxurious”, emphasizing their elegance, comfort and how strongly-built they were (“Jagd-Ausflug” 1893, 8; “Mittheilungen von allgemeinem Interesse” 1893; “Touristenfahrt nach Spitzbergen” 1896, 2).

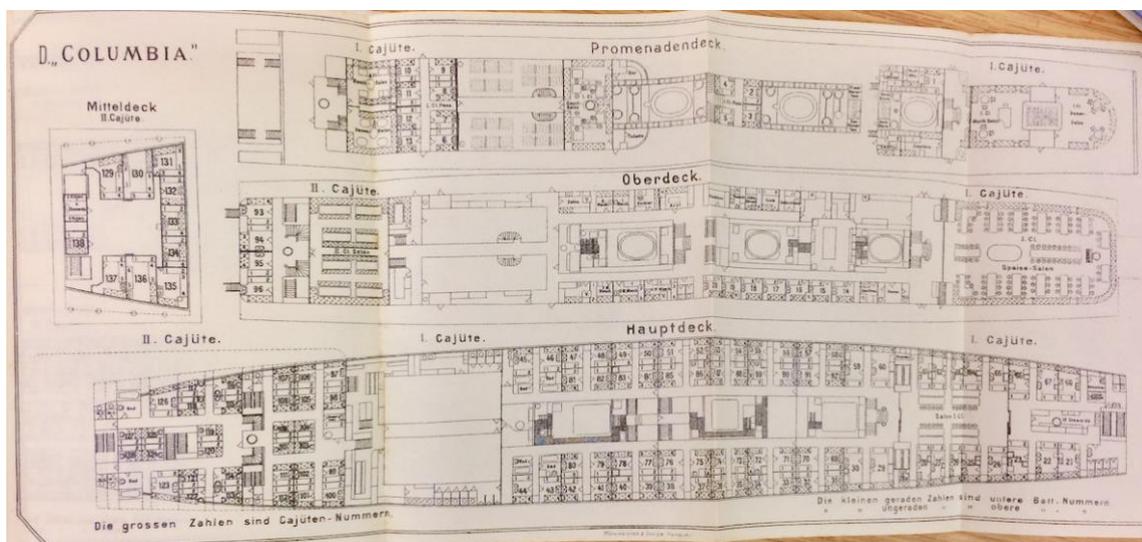


Figure 2: The HAPAG steamer Columbia sailed to Spitsbergen for the first time in 1895, symbolizing early Spitsbergen luxury mass cruise tourism. In: Hamburg-Amerika Linie [1899]. Source: Historisches Archiv zum Tourismus (HAT)

One common term to describe the big steamers of the nineteenth century was ‘floating palaces’ or ‘floating hotels’; tourist descriptions of their lavish design, the delicious meals, the outstanding music performed by the ship’s orchestra and the elegant dresses of the ladies indicate that luxury was an essential aspect of these tours (see e.g. Benedikt 1896, 1). For one journalist from the Viennese newspaper *Neues Wiener Journal*, one of the side effects of the comfortable life was that the tourist could forget “that he is on a latitude from which one can easily point at the North Pole”¹⁶ (“Spitzbergen” 1896, 2). Similarly, Ludwig Fulda, who had travelled to Spitsbergen on the HAPAG-steamer *Auguste Victoria* in summer 1897, referred to the ships as representatives of modern technology which gave the illusion of remaining in the same place while the landscapes of the world drifted by (Fulda 1897a, 1). Here we might refer to an early version of what Urry and Larsen (2011, 20) call a spectatorial gaze, that is, the collective gazing from a cruise ship, bus or train at the outside world, quickly consuming the sights that pass by.

¹⁶ “daß er sich auf einem Breitegrade befindet, von dem aus man bequem zum Nordpol zeigen kann”.



Figure 3: An evening on the ship *Auguste Victoria*. In: *Hamburg-Amerika Linie* [1901], 23. Source: *Historisches Archiv zum Tourismus (HAT)*

Unlike Laing and Frost's explorer travellers, who often use local clothing in order to fit in with their surrounding and adapt to the culture visited, as a means of escape or to experience "even rebirth" (Laing and Frost 2014, 168), Spitsbergen tourists wore European clothes adapted to the Arctic climate on their outings which could have been used for hiking tours in the Alps as well. The often-mentioned elegant clothing and robes reminiscent of the ballrooms of Central Europe show that they did not wish for a complete escape or immersion in their surroundings. For the Swiss Felix Gruebler, the elegantly-dressed travellers at dinner gave "an impression of a Parisian ball society rather than a

polar-travelling humanity”¹⁷ ([1908], 10). At the same time, the image of the safe ship as a defence against the outside world may have functioned better for some tourists than for others. On approaching the edge of the ice in summer 1893, German insurance director Friedrich Plaß (1894, 22) observed a change in the general mood onboard: some passengers were enthusiastic and felt the energy of the polar explorers, whilst others grew anxious. For the former, the ship was a secure way into an adventure; for the latter, the border between outside and inside was less marked and they felt the danger of the outside taking over. Here, borders became porous and the re-enactment of home aboard the ships was disturbed by the Arctic environment.

The Arctic as a world beyond

My argument has so far been that, unlike explorer travellers, explorer mass tourists were mainly interested in the observation of adventure, not in participating in it. The tourists appreciated risk and danger, but from the safe distance of a European upper-class perspective or a luxurious steamship. The Arctic was a land of adventure containing many stories of tragic deaths and heroism, and the tourist could, just as when reading an adventure novel, choose to what extent he or she wished to enter or leave this sphere. However, the tourist accounts also suggest that this border between inside and outside was frequently crossed, particularly when the Arctic turned into a liminal space with the potential for transformation.

Where this change began precisely is difficult to say. Büchten (2009, 119) and Jones (2004) both point to the polar circle as a key border between the Arctic and non-Arctic. Other examples found in my materials for this article are the crossing from Europe to the Arctic Ocean and the first sighting of Spitsbergen. The travel narratives suggest that crossing such imaginary and physical borders played an important role as thresholds of the unknown. These thresholds were topographical facts but also epistemological borders and they seem to have retained the capacity to evoke a feeling of entering another world throughout the period analysed here.

When Felix Gruebler’s cruise ship moved in 1908 into the Arctic waters on its way from Scotland to Iceland, fog obstructed the view and Gruebler mused about what lay beyond: “It was as if one left our world, through a boundless wasteland towards eternal sun” ([1908], 6). On crossing the polar circle, he cried out, “Europe lay behind us. Full steam ahead, we moved into a new world!” (13).¹⁸

Some travel reports indicate that the actual sighting of the Spitsbergen landscape stimulated a process of transition, rather than detached observation. Adolf Lorenz told of the passengers gradually turning silent when they first laid eyes on the Spitsbergen mountains: “The chattering group gradually turned silent at the view of this never before seen wonder and only now and then loud exclamations of enchantment disrupted the reverent silence.” “[T]he grandeur of the panoramas” reached its peak when entering Ice Fjord (Lorenz 1895, 2).¹⁹ While waiting impatiently for the first mountains to manifest themselves before him, Winterfeld (1913, 41) imagined himself in a mythical world, even

¹⁷ “weit eher den Eindruck einer Pariser Ballgesellschaft, als den einer polarfahrenden Menschheit”.

¹⁸ “Es war, als führe man aus der Welt hinaus, durch eine grenzenlose Öde der ewigen Sonne zu.” “Europa lag nun hinter uns. Mit Volldampf ging’s in eine neue Welt!”

¹⁹ “Die schwatzende Gesellschaft wurde beim Anblick dieser nie geschauten Wunder immer ruhiger und nur dann und wann unterbrachen laute Ausrufe des Entzückens die andächtige Stille.” “[D]ie Erhabenheit des Panoramas”.

seeing Lohengrin passing by. On finally sighting the mountains, he entered into an otherworldly state: “In silent, solemn admiration we stand before this fairytale of colours, [...], and the awareness of unworldly loneliness makes us shudder” (Winterfeld, 1913, 42).²⁰ The Arctic emerged as a world beyond the familiar. Penetrating its liminal space was tantamount to entering a state of transition (see also Laing and Frost 2014, 59).

Urry and Larsen (2011, 19–20) distinguish between various forms of tourist gazes, most prominently the romantic gaze and the collective gaze, the former referring to a predominantly solitary and potentially spiritual experience, and the latter to group or mass tourist consumption of place. As the following examples demonstrate, the early cruise tourists often combined these two gazes: they experienced solitariness and transformation, despite being surrounded by many other tourists and having to share these moments with them. Moreover, the tourists built on a well-established travel discourse that stretched back to early nineteenth-century Romanticism and the experience of the sublime, relying on preconceived explorer and scientific descriptions of the archipelago. As Federhofer (2011, 138, 142–143) notes, there was no coherent image of the North in early nineteenth-century German Romanticism and a literary discourse of the North existed side by side with a scientific one. Expedition reports, fiction and visual representations showcased the Arctic as a place where the mythic and unfamiliar prevailed, and where modern civilization was challenged (e.g. Potter 2007; David 2000), but where one could also find answers to scientific questions of the time. Loomis (1977, 96, 112) points out that nineteenth-century perceptions of the Arctic were strongly influenced by explorer discourses. He discerns an Arctic sublime, reaching its peak around 1850, which “could take strange, almost supernatural, forms, sometimes stunningly beautiful, sometimes terrifying, often both” (Loomis 1977, 96).

Since Loomis’ famous essay, the concept of the “Arctic sublime” has become a standard term to explain the experience of Arctic nature (see also Spufford 1996, Potter 2007). Researchers have pointed out that the nineteenth-century definition of the sublime was an integral part of imperialist discourse, since it created a distance between the one who observed and the one who was observed. It ascribed to nature a role as awe-inspiring, but in control (for a discussion of this, see Kjeldaas 2017, 41–42). Morgan (2016) has recently added a refreshing perspective on these culturally-embedded interpretations of the sublime and asked whether such a definition befits the late twentieth-century, environmentally endangered Arctic, with nature having largely lost its control and instead needing human protection (Morgan 2016, 3). Certainly, images of the Arctic in the late nineteenth century featured some of the characteristics of this protectionist attitude towards the Arctic. Although the experience of an Arctic sublime was also present, with nature overpowering man, the cruise tourists’ accounts showcase a belief that maritime technology had conquered nature. More importantly, Morgan questions whether the focus on the sublime as an aesthetic category has hidden or suppressed other aspects of the Arctic experience, such as its embeddedness in a specific environment (Morgan 2016, 3). While Morgan focuses on Arctic exploration narratives, we should heed his advice and be wary of interpreting too much in tourist narratives of the Arctic, and sometimes just accept their descriptions of the Arctic as being informative pieces about the landscape, aimed at an audience that had never seen it. My material suggests that some tourists were

²⁰ “In stummer, ernster Bewunderung stehen wir vor dem Farbenmärchen, [...], und uns durchbebt das Bewußtsein weltferner Einsamkeit.”

fascinated by the beautiful landscape, but kept their distance when describing what they saw, without suggesting that a state of transition had taken place (e.g. Posselt-Csorich 1897, 4–5). Nonetheless, many more did report an experience of transformation, called forth by the massive Arctic scenery. The question may thus rather be whether the term “sublime” has been used in a manner too inflationary to capture the various experiences called forth by the Arctic landscape. Certainly, in the case of the tourist accounts, it is more correct to speak of the “strange or uncanny” (Morgan 2016, 10) or of the “stunningly beautiful” sublime (Loomis 1977), rather than of a terrifying Arctic sublime in the sense of Burke or Kant.

The remoteness of Spitsbergen, its position in the mythic Arctic and the sudden appearance of mountains after a long journey on sea probably enhanced this experience. I have already mentioned Winterfeld who positioned the islands in “unworldly loneliness” (1913, 42). Medical Doctor Guttmann referred in his Spitsbergen guidebook to visitors’ reports of its beautiful glaciers: “How little is our spirit in such solitariness immune against romantic influences!”²¹ (1908, 28). Botanist and mycologist Franz von Höhnel, who travelled with Bade on the *Kong Harald* in 1897, described the “[s]oundless silence” of the Spitsbergen landscape, which underlined “the enthralling magic of this magnificent nature” (Höhnel 1897, 3).²²

Kjeldaas (2017, 48–49), drawing on Morgan (2016), shows that the experience of the sublime with its distancing of nature and its focus on transcendence could only be a temporary act for Arctic explorers, since they had to face the realities of Arctic nature, such as moving ice, bad weather, etc., and had to take measures in order to tackle these challenges. One could of course argue that tourists, in contrast to explorers, could indulge in the luxury of construing nature in the sense of a transcendental Arctic sublime, since they could rely on the safety of the cruise ship. At the same time, the ship actually contributed to making the experience of transformation only a transitory one: As Lorenz writes, once back on the ship the “dilettante [...] exploration travellers” turned into “salon people” (Lorenz 1895, 4),²³ with their detached view of the world outside. Indeed, one might speak of an enactment or a performance of the Arctic sublime and its potential for transformation on these cruises, helped by the tourists’ spectatorial gazes.

The travel narratives oscillated between letting landscape take control, leading to a state of transformation, and becoming distanced from it through observation and description. On approaching an enormous cliff in the Ice Fjord in 1896, Austrian banker Norbert Benedikt suggested that this sight led to a feeling of *communitas* (see Laing and Frost 2014, 65) which cut across social differences, indicating the co-existence of a romantic and collective gaze: “There was no difference any more between class, rank, profession – there was just One sensation, only One feeling, that of rapture” (Benedikt 1896, 2).²⁴ For Plaß, who travelled on the *Admiral* in August 1893, Spitsbergen helped to remove him from a time in which “nervosity”²⁵ predominated in everyday life (Plaß 1894, 5).

While these cruise tourists reported out-of-the-ordinary, even transformative experiences relating to the Spitsbergen landscape, wild animals appear to have played a

²¹ “Wie wenig ist doch der Geist in solcher Vereinsamung gegen romantische Einwirkungen gefeit!”

²² “[I]autlose Stille”; “den fesselnden Zauber dieser großartigen Natur”.

²³ “dilettirenden [...] Entdeckungsreisenden”; “Salonmenschen”.

²⁴ “Stand, Rang, Beruf unterschieden nicht mehr, es gab nur Ein Empfinden, nur Ein Bewußtsein, das des Entzückens.”

²⁵ “Nervosität”.

minor role in inducing such a feeling. An environment with wild landscape and animals brings about a stronger experience of uncertainty and unpredictability than cultivated and predictable surroundings (see Varley 2006, 181). This in turn encourages a feeling of transcendence and sublimity. In the cruise tourist literature, the danger of polar bears and whales was in fact turned upside down: the tourists sought them out, because they either wanted to hunt them or to take photographs of them (e.g. Lorenz 1895, 3; “Im hohen Norden” 1896, 5). On the Bade cruise tours a whale hunting boat accompanied the tourist ship, giving the passengers the opportunity to see how these enormous animals were killed (e.g. “Gesellschaftsreise...” 1893; Plaß 1894, 13). Polar bears were seldom encountered, something which frequently gave rise to disappointment, especially among the hunters (see e.g. Gruebler] [1908], 17). Whereas the mountains of Spitsbergen potentially evoked a state of transformation, its animal life emphasized the role of the tourist as an observer, with the aim of gaining control.

The above-discussed tourist narratives suggest that reaching and seeing Spitsbergen often involved crossing an epistemological border between the everyday and a world beyond. Elsewhere, I suggest that the unfamiliar and strange decreased conversely with the growth of tourism to the archipelago (Spring 2018). Tourist reports certainly show that the feeling of being first, of crossing into a world utterly unknown, gradually abated over the years, but they also indicate that the otherworldly status of the islands continued to exist throughout the first two decades of organized tourism. This was probably due to the power of intertextuality and genre, building on a long chain of associations which situated the Arctic as a mythical space.

Most of the examples I have referred to so far focus on visual experiences of Spitsbergen. However, the other senses are equally important for understanding tourist experiences (Urry and Larsen 2011, 14–15). Walking across graveyards, breathing the air and smelling cod liver oil, as well as climbing mountains, all added to the experience of the islands. Tourist reports show that being physically present in Spitsbergen added another dimension than simply reading about it. On sighting Spitsbergen, Ludwig Fulda concluded that “the visual perception was everything and the imagination nothing”²⁶ (Fulda 1897a, 3). While visitors before him had praised the clear air of the Arctic, it was still “unfathomable and fairytale”²⁷ to every new visitor (ibid.). Guttmann (1908, 10) stressed the uniqueness of the islands, and that no landscape was comparable to that of Magdalene Bay. The midnight sun enhanced this experience of Spitsbergen as a place beyond the well-known (ibid, 75). Winterfeld (1913, 46) spoke of a “magic world” that had to be “*experienced*”, since descriptions could not do it justice.²⁸

All three examples refer to what tourism scholars call the significance of “authenticity” in tourism discourse, i.e. the tourist’s desire to experience the “real thing” (see particularly MacCannell 2013). Walking around Spitsbergen, breathing its air and feeling the grass under one’s feet provided a corporeal experience that could not be achieved just by reading about it. Bearing in mind that the tourists wished to publish their experiences, the fact that they actually had been to Spitsbergen also provided them with “narrative capital” (Cater 2013, 11). Hence the narrative of Arctic otherworldliness continued to be reiterated, and its images and narratives still feature prominently in the tourism literature of Svalbard today.

²⁶ “die Anschauung Alles und die Vorstellung Nichts ist”.

²⁷ “unfaßbar und märchenhaft”.

²⁸ “Wunderwelt”; “*erlebt*”.

Conclusion

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Arctic remained a hybrid space subject to many different interpretations and associations, from modern to traditional, from sublime to pastoral (see Hansson and Ryall 2017, 7–8). The early tourist narratives showcase this divergence, but they also play upon a nature/culture divide, where culture was associated with observation and human control over nature, and where nature could lead to transformation. Early Arctic cruise tourism was placed at a juncture between the strange and unfamiliar Arctic landscape of Spitsbergen and the modern safety of the cruise ship. Spitsbergen was a place of exploration and adventure on the one hand and of leisure and pleasure on the other. The cruise tourists were hence both more and less than explorer travellers and deckchair explorers; they were, as I have suggested, early explorer mass tourists, mapping the Arctic as a tourism space. Knowledge of others who had been on an adventure was essential for this tourist experience. Significantly, the tourists followed in explorers' and adventurers' footsteps, not in order to embody them and share the same experience, but in order to observe what they had done, to gaze at what they had seen and to admire what others (such as *Andrée*) were doing or had been doing. Although the tourists did not re-enact their tours literally, as in the popular "following in the footsteps of" journeys today, they re-enacted their experience in a manner similar to reading an adventure novel.

Tourism to Svalbard today relies on ambivalence between safety and risk, similar to that in tourist narratives dating from the nineteenth century. Yet whereas in around 1900 it was first and foremost landscape that led to the crossing of the border between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the homely and the strange and overpowering, today it is wildlife, and particularly polar bears, that has largely taken over this role, situating the archipelago in the inconsistencies of adventure tourism discourse in which tourist guides protect the tourists with guns, hoping to guarantee their safety, while at the same time the highlight of the tour is to observe a polar bear. The process of commodification of the Arctic, which began during the 1890s, is today fully developed, but while in the early years of organised mass tourism the features of commodified exploration prevailed, today it might be more apt to speak of a commodified adventure journey. Moreover, in the tourism imperialist discourse of the 1890s, the wild and untamed Arctic had to be controlled by the technology of the cruise ships and the tourist observational gaze, whereas today the tourism industry attempts to let the increasingly protected Arctic slip from human control and build upon images of the wild Arctic, while maintaining human control by means of modern technology. To a certain extent, early cruise journeys to Spitsbergen resembled nineteenth-century safaris (Kolltveit 2006, 355). In both Africa and the Arctic, hunting was an important tourist pastime and European dominance over nature was a central feature. As Laing and Frost (2014, 184) point out, the safari had its own rituals, just as cruise ship voyages did, including formal dress and drinking champagne whilst out in the wilderness. Spitsbergen then became the object of the tourist observational gaze, playing upon human authority and potency, while keeping experiences of the sublime and transformative to a minimum. From this perspective, the newly-developed tourism discourse of the 1890s seriously disturbed images of the Arctic which had dominated until then, of a wild, untameable and uncontrollable space.

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