KAS 2017 Abstract—Jason Fox

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Networks of Sustainability within the Iceland Whale Watching Industry: Communication, Environmental Impact, and Economic Growth

 Whale watching is one of Iceland’s most popular activities supporting the country’s rapidly-expanding nature-based tourism industry. Driven by the economic opportunities of the tourism boom, whale watching operations continue to expand their services, and old and new operations housed within the same harbors compete for customers. Operators generally recognize the importance of sustainable management and environmental stewardship in such a nature-reliant industry, but the degree of commitment and action toward sustainability varies between each company. As Iceland’s whale watching industry continues to grow amidst regional climatic and societal changes, communication and cooperation between companies may be vital to ensuring that whale tours may continue to be offered with minimal environmental implications. This interview-based study of company owners, managers, and local activists determined trends in company growth management, tourist education, and future goals of some of Iceland’s most prominent whale watching operations in three locations: Reykjavik, Húsavík, and Akureyri. Many companies regularly commit to environmental sustainability to some extent through participation in certification programs, development of sustainability protocols, and collaboration with research bodies that monitor cetacean populations; however, the degree of cooperation with other operations located both within the same harbor and in other regions is greatly variable. This study also considered the collaborations between whale watching operations and outside entities such as local museums and the International Fund for Animal Welfare.