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The Impact of a Holistic Approach to Animal Welfare within Moroccan Mountain Tourism

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A collaborative initiative between the Donkey Sanctuary and SPANA Maroc has allowed a multimodal, holistic approach to promoting pack mule welfare within the Moroccan mountain tourism industry to be developed. This pilot scheme was initiated within the Aït Bouguemmez valley, in the Central High Atlas, in 2009. This remote, mountainous area is home to the national mountain guide training school (CFAMM) and is Morocco’s second most important destination for trekkers, after the Toubkal National Park.

Community building: This initiative has sought to involve and bring together a wide range of actors in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, skills and understanding. The networks created are complex and interact in different, often unpredictable ways, creating learning opportunities for all involved. This holistic approach to promoting animal welfare within the mountain tourism industry recognises the need to promote ‘communities of practice’.

Communities of practice "are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking to be appraised. Work was undertaken both in the local souks and at the guide school, a process of learning taking place in the everyday, where mules are subjected to a clinical examination before and after the expedition. During the expedition, the students are involved in the ongoing education of the mule team. It has taken several years for the value of this check to be accepted and recognised by the authorities at the CFAMM.

ii. Veterinary clinics: This initiative has sought to involve and bring together a wide range of actors in order to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, skills and understanding. The networks created are complex and interact in different, often unpredictable ways, creating learning opportunities for all involved. This holistic approach to promoting animal welfare within the mountain tourism industry recognises the need to promote ‘communities of practice’

The programme incorporated:

i. An educational programme that targeted the student guides studying at the CFAMM. These guides will work as trek leaders and will represent tourism agencies on the ground. As such, their decisions will impact on mule welfare and their professional development is essential if norms and standards are to be established across the industry.

ii. Veterinary clinics allowing the various welfare problems common in the valley to be appraised. Work was undertaken both in the local souks – to evaluate the wider population of working equids – and at the guide school, where mules are subjected to a clinical examination before and after the expedition. During the expedition, the students are involved in the ongoing monitoring of the mules’ condition.

iii. Wider consultation and engagement with the authorities, muleteers, animal health technicians, traditional saddle makers and farriers. Consultations are undertaken in a reflexive, non-didactic, way, allowing individuals to reflect on their own assumptions, practice, roles & responsibilities.

The educational programme drew on experiential learning theory, as practised in outdoor education1,4,5. This approach proved invaluable as a means of identifying, studying and exploring the commonly encountered animal welfare problems seen on treks and expeditions. Students were exposed to a corpus of skills and knowledge bases. Higher-level learning was encouraged through assignments and, perhaps most significantly, by ensuring the learning was applied during the course of a two-week, 300km expedition. This experience required students actively participate in team selection (Fig. 4) and then problem solve and work through the various challenges encountered en route.

Working collaboratively with the mules and their owners, a range of solutions and options have been explored in a reflexive way. Student guides and owners are thus encouraged to consider various aspects of good packing practice, including team selection, equipment design, nutrition, loading and packing, route choice, group management, risk assessments, wound management, first aid and emergency care (Figs. 3 & 5).

Knowledge sharing and exchange has thus been promoted:

- between institutions: UoE, DS, SPANA Maroc, IAV and the CFAMM.
- across disciplines: outdoor education, philosophy of education, medical geographies, tourism studies, animal husbandry and veterinary science.
- across the mountain tourism industry.
- between student guides and muleteers at the CFAMM.

References


Figure 2: The students at the CFAMM often attend and help out with SPANA Maroc’s mobile clinic in the Sunday souk. This provides an opportunity to assess problems (such as hoof balance) to be discussed with the authorities at the CFAMM.

Figure 3: One of the muleteers and on advice provided by the students and makes repairs and adaptations to a burdâas in order to eliminate contact with the withers.

Figure 4: Students assist Prof. Alyakine in the pre-expedition evaluation of the mule team. It has taken several years for the value of this check to be accepted and recognised by the authorities at the CFAMM.

Figure 5: Promoting a care ethic: Students are charged with wound care and for identifying and eliminating the cause of the wounds.