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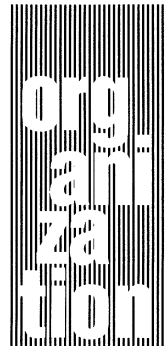
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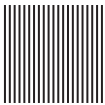
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From *Moby Dick* to *Free Willy*: Macro-Cultural Discourse and Institutional Entrepreneurship in Emerging Institutional Fields

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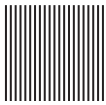
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Abstract. *In this paper, we draw on a case study of the development of commercial whale-watching on Canada's west coast to explore the role of macro-cultural discourse and local actors in the structuration of new institutional fields. We argue that the development of the commercial whale-watching industry in the area was made possible by broad macro-cultural changes in the conceptualization of whales in North America. At the same time, however, the characteristics of the geographically distinct institutional fields that emerged depended on local action and the processes of structuration that those actions supported. The constitution of specific new fields required interested actors to engage in the institutional innovation and isomorphism that produced the unique networks of relationships and sets of institutions that constituted those fields. Key words.* cultural industries; discourse; fields; institutional entrepreneurship; macro-culture



'That captain was Ahab. And then it was, that suddenly sweeping his sickle-shaped lower jaw beneath him, Moby Dick had reaped away Ahab's leg, as a mower a blade of grass in the field . . . Small reason was there to doubt, then, that ever since that almost fatal encounter, Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale . . . The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung.' (Melville, 1851: Ch. 9)

In this paper, we discuss how changes in macro-cultural understandings



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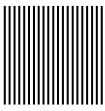
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of the nature of whales—from *Moby Dick* to *Free Willy*—provided the critical institutional preconditions for the development of a commercial whale-watching industry in North America. But we will also argue that these preconditions were not enough. Although these broad discursive changes created the possibility of whale-watching, they did not determine its final form. We discuss how the development of commercial whale-watching depended on individual action that resulted in the development of several geographically distinct institutional fields. In other words, we will argue that discursive activity at a macro level can act to provide the building blocks for new institutional fields, but how these building blocks are used to construct a field depends upon local action and the strategies of local actors.

In order to understand the emergence of institutional fields, we draw on neo-institutional theory (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996) to develop a theoretical framework focusing on the interplay of institutional entrepreneurs and the institutional context in which they operate. Although relatively little of the work in institutional theory has been devoted to understanding the emergence of new institutional fields (DiMaggio, 1991), the literatures on institutional entrepreneurship (e.g. DiMaggio, 1988; Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Lawrence, 1999) and the transformation of institutional fields (e.g. Tolbert and Zucker, 1983; Greenwood and Hinings, 1996) provide a range of useful insights that form the theoretical foundation of this paper. We believe that understanding how institutional fields emerge is an important next step in the development of institutional theory.

Our framework and analysis contribute to the management and organization literature, and especially research in institutional theory, in several ways. First, our framework connects a number of ideas from the institutional theory literature with concepts from structuration theory and discourse analysis to help explain the processes that underlie the emergence of institutional fields. Second, our study highlights the important role of macro-cultural change in the emergence of new institutional fields. Although there has been some discussion of the relation between macro-cultural discourse and industries or fields, this connection has not been explored in depth in the literature despite its importance in understanding the development of new commercial activity. Third, our framework highlights the importance of the effect of both purposeful action and institutional processes in the production of fields. Although fields are highly emergent in that their final form is unintended by any actor, strategic activity on the part of powerful actors also plays an important role in processes of structuration that determine the characteristics of the field.

The remainder of this paper is in four parts. First, we outline a theoretical framework for the examination of the emergence of new institutional fields. Second, we draw on this theoretical framework to examine the emergence of commercial whale-watching around



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Vancouver Island and the San Juan Islands. In the third section, we draw on both the theoretical framework and the case study to discuss the dynamics of new institutional fields. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our study for research on the emergence of institutional fields and on institutional processes more generally.

The Emergence of New Institutional Fields

According to one of the most cited definitions, institutional fields consist of 'those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of life' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 148). Discussions of institutional fields have argued for the importance of two constitutive elements: a set of *institutions*, including practices, understandings and rules; and a *network* of organizations (Tolbert and Zucker, 1983; DiMaggio, 1991; Leblebici et al., 1991). Combining these ideas, we define an institutional field as a set of organizations that constitute a recognized area of life, are characterized by structured network relations, and share a set of institutions. The definition of a field therefore cuts across traditional industries and focuses on the activities in which groups of organizations participate and their relationship to each other. Institutional fields are produced and maintained through processes of structuration where patterns of social interaction are shaped by, and reproduce, the institutions and relationships that characterize the field (Giddens, 1984; Barley and Tolbert, 1997). But whereas the link between structuration and institutions has been discussed at some length (Giddens, 1984; Barley and Tolbert, 1997), the complex structuration processes underlying the emergence of institutional fields have not been considered in sufficient depth (DiMaggio, 1991). The remainder of this section focuses on these processes in terms of two issues: the role of macro-cultural institutions and the ways in which interested individuals—institutional entrepreneurs—draw on these pre-existing institutions to structure new networks of relationships and sets of institutions.

The Impact of Macro-Cultural Discourse

At the broadest level, the context in which new fields emerge is constituted by macro-cultural discourse, by which we mean the broad discourses and associated sets of institutions that extend beyond the boundaries of any institutional field and are widely understood and broadly accepted in a society (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In examining the emergence of new institutional fields, macro-cultural institutions come into play through the ways in which they facilitate and constrain behavior. The institutional context in which a new field emerges involves sets of broad macro-cultural institutions as well as more local, specific or technical institutions. These macro-cultural institutions often act as templates or set boundaries on the degree of innovation possible within a new field. Macro-cultural rules, practices and understandings provide



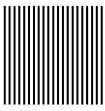
important raw material from which actors can fashion new patterns of activity and new relationships. Although it has been argued that the structuration of institutional fields is logically and historically prior to the institutionalization of organizational forms (DiMaggio, 1991), we would argue that the processes of structuration of fields and the institutionalization of practices, understandings and rules are inevitably intertwined as actors draw on existing concepts from other discourses to institutionalize local concepts and patterns of interaction. No institutional field is born in a vacuum: new areas of life are developed as actors work to overcome the limitations of existing fields through innovative concepts and patterns of interaction, bringing with them the discourse of other arenas. In other words, actors who wish to innovate draw on related fields and on macro-cultural discourse to produce the innovations that lead to the emergence of a new institutional field. This leads to our first research question:

Research Question 1: What role does macro-cultural discourse play in the emergence of new institutional fields?

The Role of Institutional Entrepreneurship

The importance of pre-existing practices, rules and understandings in the development of institutional fields does not mean that this process is simply determined by the existing institutional context. Rather, actors have the option of drawing on multiple pre-existing institutional fields and the ambiguous and contested macro-cultural discourse. They engage in what Cassell (1993: 10) refers to as the ‘tricky business of “trying on” ’ these institutions: adapting and modifying them to fit their own purposes. Although pre-existing institutions constrain the potential range of activities and relationships that will make sense to other actors, they also provide the potential for innovative combinations and new practices. Like the elements of language, institutions do not specify a fixed outcome but rather define a context from within which actors can produce a wide range of actions and relationships (Pentland and Rueter, 1994). As well as providing the potential for innovative usage, the institutions themselves are potentially subject to innovation and transformation. And, in the context of a new institutional field in particular, the likelihood of concepts being transformed seems high. As new actors in new relationships employ institutionalized concepts, the local meaning of those concepts may well change to reflect the local conditions under which they are used. Thus, institutions are not fixed and determined but rather the subject of ongoing transformations by motivated actors.

The general importance of local action in the emergence of new institutional fields is clear. Without local actors, the concepts embodied in existing fields would never come into play; without local action, no new networks of relationships or sets of institutions could be formed. What we will focus on, then, is the development of a more detailed understanding of the role of agency in the formation of a new field and



the relationship between that agency and pre-existing institutions. This leads us to our second research question.

Research Question 2: What role does institutional entrepreneurship play in the emergence of new institutional fields?

Methodology

Our research methods reflect our interest in the role of macro-cultural discourses and the strategies of local actors in the dynamics of emerging institutional fields. In this section, we first describe our research site and then go on to describe our approach to data collection and analysis.

Research Site: Whale-Watching in Victoria

The institutional field that we chose was commercial whale-watching in Victoria, a city of approximately 300,000 on Vancouver Island off the west coast of Canada. This field had three important characteristics for the purposes of our study. First, whale-watching in this area had begun within 10 years of the beginning of the study; this aspect of the field ensured that people would remember the events that led to the emergence of the field and that early participants would still be available to be interviewed. Second, the field, although significant in financial terms, was still small enough that it was practical to interview all of the important actors in the field. Third, and most importantly, whale-watching in Victoria met the basic characteristics of an institutional field—it was a recognized area of life characterized by distinct institutions and inter-organizational networks.

Whale-watching in Victoria cuts across a range of traditional industries and activities. It consists of professional and amateur whale-watchers who watch whales for fun, research or commercial purposes. The commercial aspect of whale-watching comprises a rapidly growing ecotourism sector that specializes in taking tourists to view various kinds of marine life including dolphins, grey whales, sea lions, seals, eagles and killer whales. The industry has been growing rapidly since its birth in the 1970s and is made up of operators of small boats in the lower Vancouver Island area, where Victoria is located, and of larger boats in northern parts of Vancouver Island. In addition, there are a number of marine research organizations that focus on the whales (particularly killer whales). Researchers spend considerable amounts of time studying the behavior, habitat and movements of the whales. Finally, the institutional field is also populated by a range of other, less central, actors: the amateur whale-watchers; related industries such as sea plane companies (which often spot whales and pass on the information), ferry companies and fishing boat companies; and the various regulators such as the Government of British Columbia, the Canadian and American Coast Guards, and various travel and tourism boards and associations.



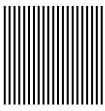
Data Collection and Analysis

Our approach to data collection and analysis involved two main stages. The first stage focused on the local whale-watching field. This involved the collection of data through a series of 17 interviews with a range of industry stakeholders, including commercial whale-watching operators, regulatory agents, tourism industry association representatives, environmentalists and marine biologists. Each interview took between 60 and 90 minutes and all interviews were taped, transcribed and entered into a NUD*IST qualitative data analysis program. In each interview, the interviewees were asked to describe in detail their activities and relationships with respect to whale-watching and to relate the history of commercial whale-watching in the area.

In addition to this traditional case study, we also performed a much broader discourse analytic study of the discursive construction of whales across three important arenas: the regulatory structures that govern human-whale interaction, and particularly the commercial hunting of whales; the anti-whaling discourse that has argued for the protection and preservation of whales; and the images of whales in popular culture, especially those in popular movies. The data for this analysis came from a range of sources. Data on the regulatory and anti-whaling discourses came largely from a number of scholarly texts that have detailed the history of human-whale interaction (Herscovici, 1985; Barstow, 1989; D'Amato and Chopra, 1991; Ellis, 1991; Gambell, 1993; Kalland, 1993; Ris, 1993; Ford et al., 1994; Heimlich-Boran and Heimlich-Boran, 1994; Stoett, 1997). Initial data on the presentation of whales in popular movies was drawn from the Internet Movie Database and Microsoft's Cinemania CD-ROM, with more detailed data then being collected through a variety of sources, including film-oriented internet newsgroups, personal communications and watching the movies ourselves. The process of data analysis involved a combination of traditional qualitative data analysis and more interpretive discourse analytic methods. Our intention was to understand the conditions that preceded the development of the field and the processes that underpinned the structuring of the field.

The Emergence of Commercial Whale-Watching in Victoria

The emergence of commercial whale-watching was the result of the interaction of significant change in a set of macro-cultural discourses and individual action that capitalized on those discourses. Changes in macro-cultural discourses made commercial whale-watching possible; individual action provided the impetus for structuration that led to the formation of the field. In this section, we begin by exploring some of the more important macro-cultural discourses that provided the preconditions for commercial whale-watching and then describe how the field came into being in one particular community on Vancouver Island.



The Evolution of 'the Whale' in Macro-Cultural Discourses

Society's conceptualization of whales has changed profoundly over the past 150 years. Animals that were considered horrifying monsters in Melville's time have been reconstructed into almost mythical creatures deserving of our respect and admiration. The change in societal representations of killer whales has been particularly startling. The general tenor of representations of killer whales from ancient times up to the 1970s can be summed up in the words of Pliny the Elder: 'a killer whale cannot be properly depicted or described except as an enormous mass of flesh armed with savage teeth.' These animals were monsters to be feared and hunted. Yet, by 1992, understandings of killer whales had changed to the point that a Hollywood film, *Free Willy*, featuring a killer whale as an endearing creature worthy of empathy, compassion and even admiration, generated over US\$150 million and spawned two sequels, *Free Willy II* in 1995 and *Free Willy III* in 1997.

In understanding the development of commercial whale-watching, it is critical to understand the radical changes that occurred in societal understandings and representations of the whale. Whale-watching as a tourist activity depends on a particular construction of the whale. Different constructions of whales make possible different forms of human-whale interaction and only some constructions of the whale lead to commercial whale-watching. Several important macro-cultural discourses shape conceptualizations of whales, affect the sorts of activities that can be legitimately carried out around the whales, and reflect both the intended effects of skillful actors and the unintended effects of dispersed and unconnected actions. For our purposes, it is less important to determine why these discourses changed than to come to some understanding of how they changed and how that affected the emergence of commercial whale-watching as an institutional field. We will focus here on three discourses that have been dominant in the recent history of human-whale interactions: the regulatory discourse, the anti-whaling discourse, and the popular culture discourse.

The Regulatory Discourse Humans have been hunting whales since the beginning of history (Francis, 1990; Gambell, 1993). Despite the existence of commercial whaling since at least the 12th century (Francis, 1990; Ellis, 1991), no attempts were made to regulate the industry at an international level until the 20th century (Gambell, 1993). From the commercial whaling perspective, whales were understood as 'a common property resource, which implies that no single user has a right to the resource, nor can they prevent others from sharing in its exploitation' (Gambell, 1993: 98). Consequently, as local coastal stocks of whales were exhausted, whaling operations expanded into the international waters of the open seas. As in many other fisheries, this approach led to over-exploitation and the rapid depletion of marine stocks (Francis, 1990; Gambell, 1993; Stoett, 1997).

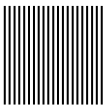


Beginning in the 1930s, a series of international regulations were developed aimed at controlling the number and type of whales harvested. Initially, these agreements were the result of whaling companies' financial concerns: an 'uncontrolled and great slaughter' of whales in the 1930–1 Antarctic season had led to an oversupply and consequently depressed prices for whale oil (Gambell, 1993: 98). Later agreements through the 1930s and 1940s continued to treat whales as a resource in need of management: the 1944 protocol, for example, established the Blue Whale Unit (BWU), which fixed 1 blue whale to equal 2 fin whales, 2.5 humpbacks or 6 sei whales, and set the overall limit to 16,000 BWU. The conceptualization here is of 'whale stocks' rather than whales as individuals or as a species, and it is human need for those natural resources that is the pre-eminent concern.

Beginning in the 1960s, the regulatory discourse around whales began to shift significantly, from an understanding of whale stocks as natural resources to a concern for the preservation of species. Regulations protecting humpback and blue whales were enacted in 1963; sustainable yields were calculated for each species; and in 1972 catch limits were set by individual species rather than by Blue Whale Units (Francis, 1990). The regulatory discourse also became increasingly scientific as advances in the understanding of whale biology led to the calculation of maximum sustainable yields (MSY) for various species. Although this approach was initially viewed with optimism, the difficulty in calculating both the MSY and the size of the whale stocks was such that, by the early 1980s, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) was unable to reach any agreement regarding the catch limits of stocks subject to commercial whaling (Gambell, 1993). These difficulties were an important factor in the IWC's 1982 decision to implement a moratorium on all commercial whaling beginning in 1986 (Kirkwood, 1992).

The Anti-Whaling Discourse Since the moratorium, the ecological argument that whales are endangered has been losing credibility among the scientific and regulatory communities. Even whale protection advocates are admitting that the scientific evidence clearly demonstrates the possibility of sustained, limited, regulated whaling without endangering some species (Barstow, 1989; Ris, 1993; Stoett, 1997). The arguments against whaling, however, have not abated. Maintaining the anti-whaling argument has necessitated another shift in the image of the whale.

The anti-whaling discourse currently conceptualizes the whale neither as a resource to be managed nor as a species in danger of extinction, but as an animal with special qualities that make it inherently valuable. Protection arguments focus on whales, not as a species, but as individual animals, with inalienable rights (Barstow, 1989; D'Amato and Chopra, 1991). The anti-whaling discourse has moved from an ecological foundation to an ethical one. This position was adopted by Greenpeace early in the anti-whaling movement (Herscovici, 1985), but has been taken on



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much more widely since the scientific discourse again began to support limited catches (Kalland, 1993; Stoett, 1997). Organizations such as the Cetacean Society International and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), which have traditionally taken an ecological position, now argue that the primary reason not to resume commercial whaling is ethical. Similarly, the US Commissioner to the IWC in 1991 stated in an interview that 'he thereafter would have to oppose whaling on ethical grounds since scientific evidence now indicates that some stocks can be hunted under proper protective measures' (*Marine Mammal News*, cited in Kalland, 1993: 124). Ris argues that the anti-whaling discourse has constructed as its goal 'the total protection of all cetaceans, irrespective of scientific findings, sustainable development principles and social and cultural considerations' (1993: 156).

The Popular Culture Discourse As in the regulatory and anti-whaling discourses, the image of the whale in popular culture has changed dramatically over time. This is particularly important because the idea of whales held by the majority of the population is both produced and reflected by popular culture. In order to explore how whales have been constructed in society, we examined the roles that whales have played in one important form of popular culture—movies. Table 1 presents a list of movies in which whales were portrayed between 1930 and 1997.¹ Although this list does not include every movie in which whales were characterized, because data on their characterization could not be gained for several movies, those movies for which the data could be gathered show a marked shift that corresponds approximately with the shift that occurred in the regulatory and anti-whaling discourses.

All of the movies produced in the 1970s and earlier present a negative image of whales, primarily as threats to people. The 1930 and 1956 characterizations of *Moby Dick* serve as powerful prototypes of our traditional conception of a whale. Huge, man-eating and ship-destroying,

Table 1. The Characterization of Whales in Popular Movies

Movie title	Year of production	Characterization of whales
<i>Moby Dick</i>	1930	Negative
<i>20,000 Leagues Under the Sea</i>	1954	Negative
<i>Moby Dick</i>	1956	Negative
<i>Pinocchio</i>	1940	Negative
<i>Orca</i>	1977	Negative
<i>Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home</i>	1986	Positive
<i>The Whales of August</i>	1987	Positive
<i>Free Willy</i>	1993	Positive
<i>Whale Music</i>	1994	Positive
<i>Free Willy 2</i>	1995	Positive
<i>Free Willy 3</i>	1997	Positive



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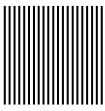
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Moby Dick showed no hint of compassion for Ahab or his crew. *Pinocchio* (1940) echoes this characterization, although drawing more explicitly on biblical images, as Pinocchio and Gepetto are trapped in the belly of the whale. In *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, no physical whale is present, but what turns out to be a submarine is initially thought to be a giant narwhal destroying and sinking ships in the late 1800s. More recently, *Orca* (1977) presents a killer whale going on a rampage in a harbor after seeing its mate killed.

The movies produced after 1980 present a very different image of whales and their relationship to people. The 1986 film *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* invokes both ecological and ethical discourses in its characterization of whales: a space probe, which is threatening the earth's destruction, is emanating humpback whale calls and waiting for a reply by the now extinct species. So, a humpback whale from the 20th century is needed to save mankind by replying to the probe. The films that follow *Star Trek IV* focus more directly on the image of the whale as a special creature, worthy of particular attention and caring. *Whale Music* (1994) explores a reclusive musician's efforts to create a piece of music that will summon the whales. In *The Whales of August* (1987), the whales are a positive factor, though not central to the story line: they are used metaphorically to depict an earlier and happier time in the lives of two elderly sisters.

Perhaps the films most emblematic of the cultural transformation of the whale, however, were *Free Willy* (1993) and its sequels, *Free Willy II* (1995) and *Free Willy III* (1997). In the first of the series, Willy the killer whale ends up in a marina after being separated from its parents by fishermen. Meanwhile, Jesse, a street kid assigned to clean up the marina after being caught vandalizing it, befriends Willy. Jesse teaches the whale to perform tricks, which the trainer has been unable to do. But, when Willy is a dud in front of the marina audience, the owner plans his revenge and the boy and his friends must try to free Willy. Thus, the initial focus is an ethical one, in which the unique nature of the whale is highlighted through its connection to the boy. In *Free Willy II*, the film engages both the ecological and ethical discourses, as a crashed oil tanker endangers human and animal lives and Willy and Jesse must both work to save the day. *Free Willy III* refocuses squarely on an ethical conceptualization of the whale, as this time Willy is threatened by illegal whalers.

In combination, the changes in the three discourses discussed here—regulatory, anti-whaling and popular culture—indicate some of the ways that whales, and in particular killer whales, have been reconstructed in macro-cultural discourses over time. Currently, the reconstructed whales are no longer resources to be harvested or even species to be saved, but rather individuals to be appreciated and respected. The whales exhibit almost human behaviors and are associated with mythical properties. These macro-cultural discourses provide a powerful context that con-



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fronts anyone interacting with whales. In particular, these discourses, along with a variety of local resources including the whales themselves, create the conditions of possibility for the emergence of whale-watching as a tourist activity and a commercial industry.

'We're Missing the Boat': The Story of Whale-Watching in Victoria

The basics of commercial whale-watching are the same the world over. Companies take tourists out on boats to areas where it is likely that whales will be found. These tours also generally include visits to a range of other animals and sites that they visit for more or less time depending on the availability and accessibility of the whales. But, although there is an underlying similarity to whale-watching, versions of it vary significantly across location and company. Local conditions present different opportunities depending on local topography, the type of whale and the flow of tourists by season. Whale-watching companies, too, differ greatly in terms of the kind of tours that they provide. In particular, they vary in the type of boats they use and in the length and nature of the trip. Some whale-watching occurs on large boats and includes dinner or lunch. Some use smaller, faster boats and provide shorter, more focused trips. Other whale-watching takes place in kayaks on multi-day excursions. In the remainder of this section, we describe the emergence of whale-watching in Victoria, Canada, highlighting both the local action that took place and the impacts of the macro-cultural discourses described above.

Whale-watching in Victoria as a commercial activity began in the fall of 1987 when John Cyprus began offering wildlife tours from Victoria Harbour.² Understanding the development of the distinctive characteristics of the local field begins with an understanding of the importance of Cyprus's early choices. Cyprus's decision to launch a wildlife tour business grew out of a complex set of factors that led him to recognize an opportunity: tourism operators were failing to offer ocean-based products to the growing numbers of tourists who were visiting Victoria.

So I came down to Victoria and I started looking around . . . And I thought, I think there's an opportunity here. Because what I saw, I saw a bunch of land-based attractions: all stationary—Butchart Gardens, the Wax Museum, the Land of the Little People or whatever . . . and all these things that people went to. And I thought, we're missing the boat: we're literally missing the boat. (Interview, JC)

But Cyprus did not begin his company as a 'whale-watching' company. Instead, he intended to use fast boats to provide exciting and educational tours of the wildlife around Victoria—what he called 'adventure coastal tours.' The tours would therefore combine the excitement of getting there with the ecotourism appeal of learning about the ocean around Victoria. But it was the whales that interested his clients. By the late 1980s, representations of the killer whale in popular culture and the anti-whaling discourse had established the animal as distinctly valuable and



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interesting. Thus, the culturally conditioned attitudes of his clients led Cyprus to see that the real opportunity was in whale-watching.

A problem rapidly emerged, however: how could he consistently find the whales? Pods of killer whales move continuously and can swim long distances in a day. Cyprus's solution was to cooperate with another whale-watching company across the strait that was looking for the same whales but not competing for the same tourists:

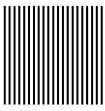
The first year we went out we realized that we were bumping into killer whales about 30% of the time. We thought about that a little bit, and joined up with then the only other tour operator in the San Juan Islands and communicated over the radio the next year. By agreement we would share some sighting information. Our sighting success went up to 60% of the trips that we ran. We worked on it a little harder the next year, and it went up to 80%, or almost 80%. (Interview, JC)

These early decisions were critical in shaping the emerging institutional field of whale-watching in the Victoria area. Whereas the whale-watchers further north on Vancouver Island's west coast used large boats to carry large numbers of people to see the whales, Cyprus's decision to use small boats set the tone for the whole field in Victoria. Similarly, his decision to start a spotting network set the stage for the basic structuring of the field around two competing spotting networks that developed as more firms sprang up to compete for the growing numbers of tourists:

They basically studied our operation, went out with us, followed us on the water—by literally following us in a little boat—and learned that we had land-based spotters to find the whales and followed them to find out what sites they were using . . . And that's what everyone else has done, except now they don't do that, they just follow us out in the harbor. . . . So the competitors who have cropped up in the last two years are basically followers. (Interview, JC)

The result of this process is a set of undifferentiated companies providing very similar trips in similar boats to see the same whales. Victoria whale-watching companies use small, fast boats to take tourists out for two-hour trips to killer whale pods as much as 100 kilometers from Victoria. They all work from the same location, visit the same sights, use the same boats and outfit their guests in the same storm suits. They also have practically indistinguishable brochures: almost all of the marketing material takes the form of uniformly sized one-page brochures adorned with one or two pictures of jumping killer whales that are reminiscent of scenes from the *Free Willy* movies. Although the early choices made by Cyprus became the standard pattern in the industry, this mimetic isomorphism was based on a perception of success that was simply not true.

But the hardest thing, I guess, was that we did all the groundwork for those that followed us. That's a tough one. . . . And there's the perception that you're doing well, and we never did well financially. There was the perception that we were doing really well. (Interview, JC)



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As the field grew, two organizations emerged that served to cement the isomorphic quality of the field: the Victoria Marine Tourism Association (VMTA) and the Northwest Whale-Watchers Association (NWWA). The VMTA came into being at the request of the City of Victoria as a way to manage access to the harbor and dock facilities. Membership in the Association is required for all firms (including whale-watching companies, fishing charters and seaplane operators) that operate out of the harbor. In order to obtain a license, a firm must become a member in good standing, which requires appropriate insurance, safety inspections and adherence to a set of guidelines for operating out of the harbor.

The NWWA was created to set basic standards for commercial whale-watching around Victoria and the San Juan Islands. The basic concern was to avoid regulation by instituting a set of voluntary guidelines.

We keep hearing rumblings, from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans now. We keep hearing noises about they're gonna regulate, control, or they're gonna shut it down altogether. . . . unless we can control ourselves, the government will step in and regulate it. How they regulate it is what we're afraid of. (Interview, DT, owner of competing firm)

The primary problem faced by the NWWA is the perception of harassment owing to the large number of boats that often surround the whales:

And you get out to the whales, sunny afternoon, mid-summer, and you know there could be 30 boats that are commercial going over towards the San Juan [Islands]. You're looking at 30 to 35 commercial boats plus the pleasure operator. There can be up to a hundred boats around whales. (Interview, SC, owner of competing firm)

Amateur whale-watchers—some on shore, some in other boats—have begun to suggest that this intense observation of the whale might constitute 'harassment.' This notion of harassment is strongly tied to the macro-cultural discourses described above. Descriptions of the harassment of whales echo ideas from human culture, such as bullying, stalking and sexual harassment, and are consistent with the popular culture and anti-whaling discourses, which represent whales as unique and special individuals. Threats to the whales and the reactions to those threats also illustrate, however, the ongoing tensions and overlap in the adoption of ideas from macro-cultural discourses: when killer whale stocks appeared to be lower one summer, for instance, there emerged a strong and immediate reaction that invoked notions of preservation and species depletion, even though these ideas were not generally prominent within the anti-whaling or even regulatory discourses.

Beginning with one boat providing wildlife tours in 1987, Cyprus's company, and the field of commercial whale-watching more generally, grew rapidly. By 1995, Cyprus's company had three boats and sales of C\$500,000. By that time, there were 5 companies with 11 boats providing whale-watching tours in the Victoria area, and total ticket sales by



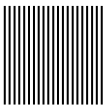
Victoria-based whale-watching companies were over C\$2 million and growing at about 40 percent per year. John Cyprus's decision to offer wildlife tours had sparked the creation of a whole new arena of activity in Victoria—an arena that was part of a broader industry but was characterized by a discrete network of actors and a distinctive set of institutionalized practices and rules.

Discussion

In this section, we return to the two research questions that motivated this paper. Our first research question addressed the issue of the role of macro-cultural discourses in the formation of new institutional fields. Our study highlights two issues that we see as critical to understanding the role of macro-cultural discourses: the importance of widely available and highly legitimate discourses; and the potential for dramatic field-level change as change occurs in macro-cultural discourse. Our second research question focused on the role of individual actors in shaping the development of new fields. Again, our study points to two important issues: the role of innovation and isomorphism in institutional action; and the emergent, contingent nature of institutional entrepreneurship.

Macro-Cultural Discourses and the Dynamics of Institutional Fields

The first issue highlighted by our study concerns the availability and legitimacy of macro-cultural discourses. In collecting data for this study, it became clear early on that the manner in which people conceptualized killer whales was a critical element in understanding the field. In particular, the reverence and personification of the whales was extraordinary, and led us to examine the societal discourses around these animals. What we saw was that the concept of a whale is one that was constructed and contested in discourses that were widely available and highly legitimated. The regulatory and anti-whaling discourses had interacted in highly public ways to reconstruct the concept of a whale multiple times with significant economic and cultural impacts. These discourses had also worked to establish and maintain their legitimacy by drawing variously on economic, scientific and ethical forms of argument as the impacts of commercial whaling were assessed and reassessed. The discourse of popular culture acted more directly on the field of whale-watching. Its products, especially Hollywood movies, picked up the myth of the super-whale established in the anti-whaling discourse, elaborating and personifying it in the form of *Willy*. Whereas the positive image of whales had previously been promoted primarily by groups such as Greenpeace working through the news media, movies such as *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, *The Whales of August* and, most dramatically, *Free Willy* suddenly reached mass audiences with a message that was not filtered through a third-party medium—the concept of a whale became unequivocally valuable and admirable.



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In the local context of Victoria whale-watching, the impact of macro-cultural discourses played out in specific ways that were contingent on the interests and capabilities of the network of actors involved. Two aspects of broader discourses were enacted in quite elaborate ways: the anthropomorphizing and the individualizing of the killer whales. In the discourse of popular culture, the killer whale has been radically anthropomorphized, being associated with human qualities such as compassion and bravery. In the Victoria context, the harassment issue led some actors to try to foster a humanistic image of the whales that, while still sympathetic, also lent the whales an air of independence and sophistication:

I call them urban whales. They've been dealing with pleasurecraft since pleasurecraft existed. (Interview, AS)

I mean the fact is that these whales have grown up in these waters and they're totally habituated to boats and I think anybody who has the same kind of experience as we have in observing them will tell you that. (Interview, JC)

Along with their humanization, killer whales have also been significantly individualized in the Victoria context, particularly through the naming of all of the 'resident' killer whales—those whales that spend the summer period around the island. Each whale lives in a specific pod, labeled A through K, and is assigned a corresponding alphanumeric 'name,' such as A1, A2, B1, B2. This has made the whales available as individuals and as members of families for resources in the production of interesting and engaging whale-watching tours—it is more fun to see and talk about specific individuals than anonymous animals. Many of the animals have also been given 'personalities' by the researchers and the commercial operators:

This one whale has a sense of humor as well—you'll never convince me that he doesn't. We were out with the whales, pretty calm water, we were just sort of putting along, the whales were mucking around, and they're fishing and playing, and all this stuff . . . The next thing I hear is 'Shit!', and the whale is right in front of the motor and he's come up and deliberately exhaled really hard. . . . [T]hey do have a sense of humor. (Interview, AS)

The anthropomorphization and individualization of the whales draw heavily on ideas developed in the anti-whaling and popular culture discourses. As species depletion became a less convincing argument, whales were presented by anti-whaling advocates not just as members of an important animal species, but as individuals whose innate qualities made them worthy of protection. Based on these dynamics, we argue that, when new fields are emerging, the impact of other discourses and fields will depend on their availability and legitimacy to key actors. In many areas of life, these will be macro-cultural discourses, such as science, law and popular culture, which are widely available through a



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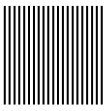
variety of media and whose institutionalized concepts tend to pervade a wide range of fields (Friedland and Alford, 1991). The legitimacy of these concepts will depend on the local context within which the new field is emerging. For instance, in some counter-cultural contexts, the legitimacy of concepts from popular culture, science or law might be explicitly rejected simply on the basis of their origins. At the same time as they are being rejected, however, these concepts are still working to structure the emergence of the field. This leads to our first proposition:

Proposition 1: *Macro-cultural discourses will have a greater impact on the emergence of new institutional fields when they are easily accessed and legitimate to participants in the emerging field.*

A second issue highlighted by the case study is the potential negative impact of change in macro-cultural discourses on the activities within institutional fields. Although the generation of new fields may require local action, changes in macro-cultural discourses can potentially undermine the basis for institutional fields without the cooperation of, and often in spite of resistance by, local actors.

For example, over the history of commercial whaling, the fates of whalers were largely out of their hands. Negotiations at the international level in regulatory bodies and in the international media led to changes in the concept of the whale and associated changes in regulatory and political structures. Several transitions in the 20th-century history of commercial whaling exemplify this dynamic. Beginning with the first regulation of commercial whaling in the 1930s, the reconceptualization of whales over time led to an increasingly hostile environment for commercial whalers. Originally conceptualized as an implicitly infinite resource, whales were there for the harvest. But, as they were reconstructed as a scarce resource measured in Blue Whale Units, and then as a potentially endangered species with Maximum Sustainable Yields, whales were increasingly protected from commercial hunting. More recently, with the advent of the ecological and animal rights movements, commercial whaling has faced an overall loss of legitimacy, particularly in North America and southern Europe. Finally, the commercial whaling industry was all but wiped out with the 1982 moratorium.

It could be argued that these changes were the result of an increasingly scientific understanding of whale populations, but we argue that a simple 'progress' model is misleading. Although the scientific understanding of the dynamics of population growth and biodiversity has unquestionably grown over the past 100 years, this does not account for the shift in focus from ecological to ethical concerns: the transformation of whales from an endangered species to individuals with inherent rights. The movement within the anti-whaling discourse from ecological talk to ethical talk and the corresponding shift in the portrayal of whales in popular movies illustrates the degree to which macro-cultural discourses can delegitimize an activity in ways that are beyond the resistance of local actors: a



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commercial whaler operating out of Tofino has no real chance of influencing a discourse that emanates from Hollywood or Washington, DC. This possibility exists because most fields depend on concepts that are constructed and maintained outside of the field. If the macro-cultural discourses that support these concepts change such that these concepts are delegitimated, then the foundation for the field may crumble. This leads to our second proposition:

Proposition 2: *The delegitimizing effects of change in macro-cultural discourses may deinstitutionalize the activities of a field despite the actions of local actors.*

Institutional Entrepreneurship in Emerging Fields

Our second research question focused on the role of the individual actors, and especially institutional entrepreneurs, in the development of new fields. The first critical issue with respect to individual action that was highlighted by our study was the degree of intentionality associated with institutional entrepreneurship. In the theoretical development of the concept of institutional entrepreneurship, organizational researchers and writers have emphasized its intentional nature (DiMaggio, 1988; Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Lawrence, 1999): institutional entrepreneurship has been presented as an alternative to the deterministic images of isomorphism where organizations reactively adopt practices and structures because of a desire to avoid uncertainty, sanction or a loss of legitimacy. Although research has certainly provided examples of institutional entrepreneurs working proactively and intentionally to shape their institutional environments (e.g. Lawrence, 1999), what appears prominently in our study of whale-watching in Victoria is the actions of an institutional entrepreneur whose strategies were emergent, contingent and reactive and yet also highly influential in shaping the field.

Many of the practices and ideas associated with the local field of whale-watching in Victoria stem largely from the initial decisions made by John Cyprus—the type of boats, the method of whale-spotting, the timing of tours, the look of the brochures. And yet, as the case shows, many of these decisions were done in a reactive manner for which the consequences were largely unintended. For instance, the ability of the tour operators to reach whale pods that are significant distances from the harbor is dependent on their use of small, fast boats, and yet the initial decision to use these boats was based on wholly other reasons:

I connected with a builder in Sidney . . . At the time they were working on the prototype for the Coastguard of the rescue-style Zodiac boats—one of the first rigid hulls that they built. I looked at it and thought, that looks like fun. The guy tried to dissuade me or discourage me because they're so expensive. So that sort of rolled around in the back of my head. I looked at it and I thought, people would like to go out in that, it looks like fun. (Interview, JC)



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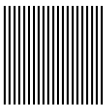
Of course, small fast boats, such as Zodiaks, are used in a wide range of marine communities for a variety of purposes, and often serve those purposes extremely well. Our point is not that Cyprus's choice was unique or dysfunctional, or that other operators' imitation of this choice was irrational; rather, his initial decisions emerged out of a confluence of factors that were not necessarily connected to what emerged as the commonly understood rationale later in the development of the field, and other operators imitated these decisions in an attempt to overcome the high levels of uncertainty that were associated with this emerging field.

We therefore argue that, although strategies of institutional entrepreneurship can be either intended or emergent (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985), and likely are a mix of both, the dynamics of new and emerging institutional fields will make emergent strategies much more likely. The strategic, social and technological uncertainties associated with the emergence of new fields are likely to make the realization of intended institutional strategies a matter of chance. This means not that institutional entrepreneurship is simply luck, but rather that rapid recognition of failed strategies or changing environments, and adaptation to them, will be more important than long-term planning or rigorous analysis.

Proposition 3: *The effects of institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields are likely to be highly uncertain and therefore the strategies of institutional entrepreneurs are more likely to be emergent than intended.*

The second critical issue with respect to individual action concerns the degree of innovation, conflict and imitation evident in the formation of new institutional fields. One of the basic premises of institutional entrepreneurship as a concept is that different institutional structures will work to advantage actors in different ways (DiMaggio, 1988; Clegg, 1989; Lawrence, 1999). Thus, the dominant motive for institutional entrepreneurship will be the development of institutional arrangements that work in favor of the protagonist. At the same time, this suggests that the formation of institutional fields is a process likely to be rife with conflict over the specification of those arrangements (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994), as has been illustrated in other research contexts (e.g. DiMaggio, 1991; Lawrence, 1999). In examining the emergence of whale-watching in Victoria, however, what was in evidence was not so much an extended conflict over the structuring of the field, but rapid cycles of innovation, imitation and institutionalization.

An example of this dynamic illustrates the field's tendency toward rapid isomorphism. As mentioned in discussing the previous issue, one of the first key decisions made by John Cyprus was the adoption of small, fast boats. These boats favored particular types of tours—shorter, more focused tours in which whale-spotting is the dominant feature, with no provision for any sort of amenity such as food or even toilets. Although a competitive model of the industry might suggest that rival start-ups might offer alternative accommodations and tour styles, instead a series



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of copycat firms emerged that imitated JC's offerings almost exactly. Another source of the rapid, low-conflict institutional isomorphism came from the field-specific organizations that emerged. These organizations were developed by John Cyprus and other early entrants in response to the threat of government regulation of the industry and the demands of the local municipality. Despite their specific origins, however, these organizations further entrenched the original product and service design decisions by providing mechanisms for the dissemination of 'best practice' types of information from established operators to new and potential entrants.

Although the definition of networks and institutions in any new field clearly has a significant strategic impact on the competitors within the field, the manner in which that definition took place in the field we examined suggests that this may not necessarily lead to significant conflict. We argue that this dynamic, where initial innovations are rapidly imitated and institutionalized, may be common in many emerging institutional fields, and may contrast with those situations where more established fields are undergoing transformation. Rather than being concerned with obtaining competitive advantage, early entrants may be worrying more about organizational survival and thus be keen to imitate approaches that seem to be working and be willing to comply with demands from apparently legitimate bodies.

Proposition 4: *Institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields is likely to be associated with rapid imitation and relatively little conflict.*

In combination, our two propositions concerning individual action suggest that emerging fields are highly fluid, reactive, competitive environments. In new fields, institutional entrepreneurs are engaged in emergent, contingent strategies, where their initial choices lead to unintended and unexpected consequences to which they then adapt. At the same time, early followers are relatively blindly imitating the choices of those institutional entrepreneurs out of a desire for certainty and legitimacy. Consequently, emerging institutional structures that define the field are highly vulnerable to the initial decisions of institutional entrepreneurs as well as the early influences of customers and other stakeholders. In other words, processes of structuration in emerging fields amplify the effects of early decisions and reactions.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine closely the emergence of a new institutional field and understand the roles of pre-existing institutions and local action. The development of whale-watching around Vancouver Island has highlighted several important issues with respect to these dynamics: the importance of availability and legitimacy in the impact of macro-cultural discourses; the potential disruptive force of a relatively distant macro-cultural discourse; the contingent and emergent nature of

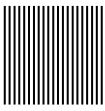


institutional entrepreneurship in emerging fields; and the potentially rapid cycle of innovation, imitation and institutionalization in new institutional fields. This study and these issues lead to several important implications for research in institutional theory.

First, ideas from linguistic theory more generally, and discourse analysis more specifically, can play an important role in the development of institutional theory. Studies in the institutional theory tradition have made clear the importance of symbols and myths in the evolution of inter-organizational networks and fields of activity (e.g. Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Greenwood and Hinings, 1988; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). From the perspective taken here, discourse analysis provides a means of delving more deeply into the dynamics of those cultural objects. Our examination of the concept of a whale across three macro-cultural discourses, and its role in the emergence of a new institutional field, points to the potential utility of integrating discourse analytic approaches with institutional analyses. For instance, understanding the dynamics around the 'harassment' of the whales is aided by recognizing that there are multiple conceptions of the whale available to actors in this domain, with potentially conflicting conceptions emphasizing their special, sacred quality and their human, social side.

Second, analyses of institutional entrepreneurship should recognize its contingent and emergent nature. What became clear in our examination of the role of institutional entrepreneurship in the emergence of whale-watching was the important roles of chance and of reactive decision-making. John Cyprus was in many ways a classic institutional entrepreneur—an innovator whose ideas and actions set the tone for the whole industry. Yet those ideas and actions were clearly evolving in unexpected ways, to the extent that he never even intended to form a whale-watching company, let alone a whole field of whale-watching in the Victoria area. Thus, in examining institutional entrepreneurship, we need to adopt a broad, processual understanding of strategy, rather than retain a limited view of strategic action that recognizes only intended, rational action.

Finally, studies incorporating discourse analysis with institutional theory must be sensitive to the interplay of multiple discourses in the social construction of new institutional fields. The discourses of commerce, science, animal rights and Hollywood are all deeply involved in the construction of the whale-watching industry. At the same time, however, the flow of concepts among these discourses is partial and strategic. Whereas Hollywood and the tourism industry promote the intelligence and social characteristics of killer whales documented by marine biologists, they do not incorporate the killer-whale behaviors that might be viewed as 'vicious' or 'mean' into their conceptualization. Killer whales might 'play' with a seal for an hour before finally killing it and they might 'graze' on a blue whale for days, slowly eating away at the flesh of the larger animal, but these aspects of killer whale biology are not



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a part of the ecotourism or Hollywood discourses. Thus, an understanding of the discursive foundations of whale-watching as a field of activity requires a recognition of the ways in which concepts move between discourses and are transformed in the process.

At a more general level, our study demonstrates the effectiveness of institutional theory as a framework for understanding the emergence of a new industry. Concepts such as institutional field, institution and institutional entrepreneur provide a theoretical framework that highlights the interplay of agency and structure in the emergence of a new area of activity like whale-watching around Vancouver Island. Although other theoretical frameworks provide useful ways of thinking about the development of technologies (e.g. Latour, 1987) or markets (e.g. White, 2001), institutional theory provides an understanding of the relative roles of existing institutions and the actions of institutional entrepreneurs in constructing new 'recognized areas of life.' It highlights the limitations placed on action by existing institutions and the importance of local action in structuring new fields.

Notes

- 1 This list represents all of the movies in either the Internet Movie Database or Microsoft's Cinemania for which information regarding the characterization of the whales could be ascertained.
- 2 All names of individuals and companies are disguised for purposes of anonymity.

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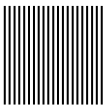
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