Whaling Conflict in Iceland

Hand in #2: Conflict assessment and strategy

Date of submission: 19.12.2024

Group 7: Chiara Stichling, Gabrielle Gomes Viana, Marianne Jocelyne Fellay, Om Mahesh Vaknalli, Parinder Khural Dalby, Sara Kristin Skaliks

Summary

This report discusses the longstanding debate over whaling in Iceland. From the point of view of a consultancy agency for the government, it highlights the clashes between economic interests, cultural heritage, and environmental conservation. Following a brief history of whaling in the country, the first part of this report applies the progress triangle framework (substance, procedure, and relationship) to describe the conflict. A stakeholders' analysis identifies the diverging priorities of Hvalur Hf, the conservationists, and the Icelandic government, as well as their power status, main aims and interests. Pro-whaling groups uphold the economic benefits and cultural continuity, while anti-whaling entities advocate for animal welfare and ecosystem preservation.

The second part of the report delves deeper into the stakeholder dynamics, power imbalances, and strategies employed by pro- and anti-whaling groups by identifying the elements, relationships, and power fluxes in the framework of a situation map. This technique establishes the power and relationship dynamics between the key stakeholders by grouping them according to the correlation of their interests and power status. After a brief window into the strategic choices made so far, the consultancy recommends government-led mediation through principled negotiation and reframing perspectives to foster collaboration. Along with mapping their risks, proposed strategies include transitioning the whaling industry towards ecotourism, enhancing stakeholder dialogue and implementing joint marine conservation projects.

Note: The situation of our conflict has changed due to a new whaling permit issued by the government in 2024, December 5th. It allows the killing of over 426 fin- and minke whales per whaling season for the next five years. The government that issued the permit was an interim government without any mandate, which will be replaced by the elections held at the end of November 2024.

Situation Map

Whaling in Iceland is dynamic and complex. It is a soft system built around different perceptions of whales as nature or natural resources and whether they should be hunted or conserved. As shown in Fig. 1 (red writing), these two ways of treating whales are at the centre of the conflict.

With a situation map like Fig. 1, this dynamic complexity is visualised by pointing out the main issues and drivers, the different stakeholders and the relationship between the different elements. That way, the input, the output and the boundaries of the conflict can be revealed (*Lecture L14*). It is important to construct such a map of these systems clearly, so people can relate to the situation and get a hold of the different interconnections (Daniels and Walker, 2001). Not only the end product but also the process of drawing such a map, discussing different worldviews of the situation and agreeing on the different elements and relationships, helps to find a common view (Daniels and Walker, 2001).

The **elements** in a situation map contain relevant factors to the whaling conflict in Iceland. They are stakeholders, values, actions, triggers and other components of the conflict (Fig. 1). These elements are then connected by the lines, which represent the **relationship** between them (*Lecture L14*). The whale is in the centre of the conflict, and thus our situation map (Fig. 1) is directly linked to hunting and conservation because that is what happens to the whales on both sides of the conflict.

Affecting the relationships and the whole process of the conflict are the **inputs** and the **outputs** (Daniels and Walker, 2001). The inputs are the driving forces of the conflict which are in our case the market, the conservation and the traditions and culture, since all four are responsible for the different stakeholders' interests. The outputs on the other hand are the products and impacts produced by the possible outcomes of the conflict. In our case, these are the jobs in whaling, the policies which will decide the conflict and the environmental impacts on the other side (Fig. 1).

Furthermore, the situation map shows the boundaries of the conflict (*Lecture L14*). In our case, we chose policies and research because they define the regulations the conflict has risen around (Fig. 1). Two feedback loops (Fig. 1) are highlighted in pink. They show how closely connected the different elements are, and how changes at one point affect multiple elements positively or negatively (Eden, 2004). Last but not least, the whole situation is embedded in the environment of the global market and capitalism, nature conservation, and public opinion (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Situation map of the conflict about whaling in Iceland

Mapping and Analysis of Power and Relationships

Friedman and Miles (2006) in *Stakeholders: Theory and Practice* underline the importance of mapping stakeholder relationships to understand and manage the dynamics between the key stakeholders. The mapping process visualises connections and presents stakeholder conflicts by identifying interests, power, and influence levels (Friedman and Miles, 2006).

In the accompanying map for this case, the Relationship Dynamics (Fig. 2) are marked as:

- Red: signifies normative obligations.
- Green: highlights instrumental considerations.
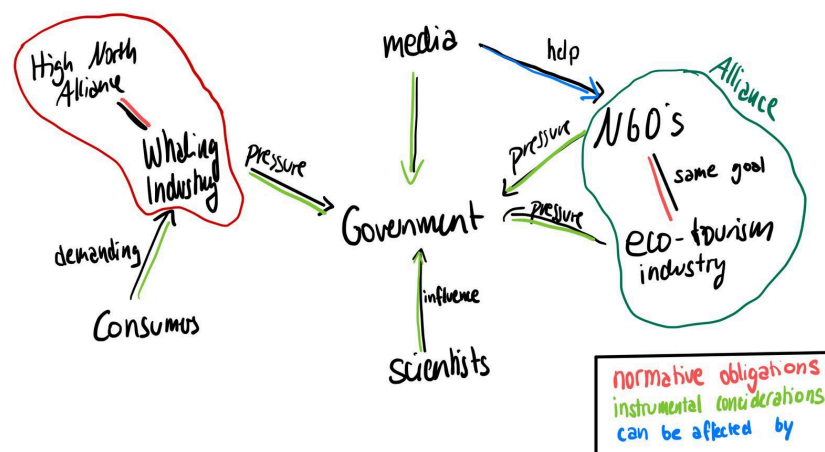- Blue: indicates how stakeholders influence or are influenced by one another.

Figure 2: Relationship Dynamics

Friedman and Miles (2006) stress that relationship mapping is dynamic and requires regular updates to reflect evolving stakeholder interests, power dynamics, and external conditions. This ensures that management strategies remain effective. This map is commonly displayed as grids or diagrams that show connections and hierarchies. This tool identifies interactions and potential areas for collaboration, hence, power-shifting dynamics (Friedman & Miles, 2006).

In the Icelandic whaling context, parties can be grouped into four categories to analyse the power dynamics of these stakeholders (Fig. 3).
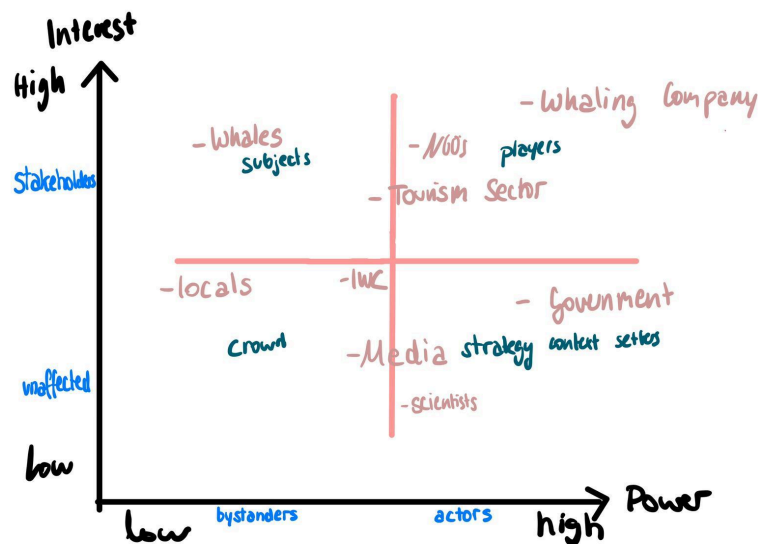
Figure 3: Interest-power dynamics between stakeholders

- **Crowd** (locals, IWC, and some media): Low power, varying interest. Media and the IWC can influence public opinions and indirectly increase their influence on the public and the conflict;

- **Strategy Context Setters** (government, scientists, and some media): High power, medium interest. Influence conflict by regulations and public discourse;

- **Subjects** (whales): Central to the issue; lack direct power. Conservationists represent their well-being;

- **Players** (whaling companies, tourism sector, and conservation organisations): High power and interest. Different power dynamics, as the definition of conflict, depend on individual ethical and economic dimensions of whaling.

When these power dynamics shift, it can help address stakeholder imbalances while supporting collaboration between parties following the same interests. In this case, this would include: empowering *low-lower groups* by informing locals, leveraging media, and involving the IWC to amplify their influence. Collaborative efforts between conservation organizations and the tourism sector can effectively lobby against whaling and promote sustainable practices. This partnership has already begun showing positive results in empowering both parties. Additionally, collaborative policymaking by the government, supported by involving scientists, conservationists, and the tourism sector, can ensure balanced economic alternatives. External pressures from the IWC and global media can influence the policy-making procedure.

Evaluation of Strategic Choices

The two main parties involved in the whale hunting conflict in Iceland show characteristically opposed views on the matter. Both the whaling companies and the NGOs have adopted an approach to the resolution of the conflict which can be qualified as "forcing" (Daniel & Walker, 2001). Both sides are trying to push their agenda, which if achieved for one would result in leaving the other side unsatisfied.

By its decisional power, the government should generally reflect a mediating position in the debates, hopefully leading to a rightful resolution. However, when it comes to listening to each side and formulating regulations, the Icelandic government lacks a distinct direction. Going back and forth in the policies, putting a restriction which will later end up being removed, the government and its decisional power hardly ever proves to lead to a coherent and admitted resolution (Einarsson, 2009; Tómas, 2024).

Whales constitute the most affected key stakeholders in this dispute, however they cannot make their voices heard. NGOs take this role in aiming to protect biodiversity. These organisations seek to defend whales' rights, yet as they hold no economic interests in their hands, their influence on decisions affecting the country as a whole is limited. The tourism industry also stands as a key stakeholder in the discussions. Affected by the economic aspect of the conflict, tourism as well as ecotourism would settle for a compromising solution.

In this regard, a collaborative potential could be feasible. Forming a link between the ecotourism sector and the NGOs defending nature conservation would be an interesting aspect to consider. When looking beyond each side's positions and pinpointing their interests threatened in the conflict, it suddenly becomes obvious what revolves around whales' well-being for one relates to economic aspects for the other (Fisher & Ury, 2012). Following this line of thought we might realise that ecotourism could benefit from a ban on whale hunting, giving an attractive international image of Iceland's protected nature. It has also been shown that the economy of whale watching witnessed a clear rise in opposition to the declining market of whale meat consumption (Einarsson, 2009).

When it comes to such a divided conflict, prejudice appears evident on both sides. The long history between whale rights advocates and whaling companies has given rise to lots of resentment, framing the situation as an inevitable fight for a win-or-lose outcome. This perspective adopted by both sides enables us to understand how in such a conflict nobody can find a suitable resolution (Gray, 2003).

This concept of framing, which can be understood as a type of social construct resulting from an instinctive behaviour developed in society, adds a great deal of difficulty to finding a solution as it generally serves to justify our actions. Building the legitimacy of its position in the conflict on Iceland's economic interests and cultural traditions, the whaling industry shows this bias in its argumentation. On the side of the NGOs for biodiversity conservation, a similar process can be witnessed. The whale wellbeing issue raised in Iceland is part of a bigger agenda, leading to global issues such as climate resilience (Einarsson, 2009). The specific framing given to the conflicts by such organisations can be seen as a tool to mobilise local and international people around nature conservation (Gray, 2003).

Both sides show strong identity framing as well, expressing an important difference in the constructive meaning surrounding the conflict. On the one side, the whaling companies embody the traditionalists' values, and on the other, the nature conservation groups assume a "saviour" position advocating for unheard voices and future generations.

Regarding the government's perspective on the situation, their behaviour betrays an avoidance of conflict responsibility. Justifying sustainable hunting by the means of scientific argumentation, the government leans towards a compromising approach, favouring the whaling industry while remaining unsatisfactory for the NGOs.

Managing the Conflict

To resolve the conflict, we recommend the government act as a mediator to help key parties reframe the dispute. Reframing occurs when disputants adopt new perspectives, requiring a shift in their point of view (Gray, 2003). The initial framing has solidified opposing positions while hindering potential negotiations (Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003). Therefore, reframing can reduce intractability by encouraging stakeholders to engage in collaborative learning and view the conflict from new angles. According to Daniels and Walker (2001), collaborative learning is particularly effective in complex multi-party situations. This approach not only addresses the conflict's complexity but also helps uncover shared values among key stakeholders, potentially leading to a successful reframing process.

The government holds a unique position as the only party with decision power. Therefore, as a neutral stakeholder, the government should mediate between pro- and anti-whaling parties, listening to their interests and helping them understand and reformulate the underlying issues. This conflict's intractability levels range from *unlikely* to *impossible*, being nearly impossible to resolve due to firmly held beliefs, cultural importance, and reliance on whaling for economic reasons. This intractability is characterised by a lack of recognised authority in the government – which has constantly changed position over time –, the polarisation between the two opposing sides, and the stakeholders framing the conflict as a zero-sum game, in which one's gain will result on the other's loss (Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003).

We further propose the principled negotiation method (Fisher & Ury, 2012). This strategy addresses issues based on their intrinsic value rather than through bargaining. In other words, it involves the process of identifying shared benefits and, where disagreements persist, objective criteria must be applied. Given the high level of intractability, principled negotiation is essential to achieve solutions that recognise the needs of all parties. Therefore, using climate change, biodiversity loss, and the declining whale meat market (Hutchins, 2024) as objective criteria, we propose that the government acknowledge the whaling industry's economic needs while suggesting alternative revenue streams that support conservation goals. To support these goals while addressing local economic concerns, we suggest creating mutual gain agreements through the development of sustainable tourism. This includes e.g. embracing the tradition of whaling by establishing museums, offering eco-tourism incentives, and repurposing whaling ships for whale watching.

Examining the progress triangle model (Daniels & Walker, 2001), we suggest the improvement, at the subsistence level, by establishing joint scientific programmes focused on transitioning from commercial whaling to sustainable industries that preserve biodiversity. At the procedure level, involving key management actors (e.g. regulatory bodies, local population, international mediators) in multi-party dialogue platforms, such as joint workshops, may create transparent decision-making process transition programmes. These platforms would facilitate communication among stakeholders allowing them to share their needs and interests. At the relationship level building trust between environmental groups and industry is crucial. Trust can be built as stakeholders participate in facilitated discussions and become more familiar with each other's needs and interests (Krauss & Morsella, 2014). Furthermore, we advise the government to strengthen communication with local communities to develop collaborative marine conservation projects.

Management Recommendations

The resolution requires both short- and long-term management actions.

For the short term, we recommend establishing transitional support for the whaling industry, offering alternative revenues in the eco-tourism sector. At the same time, we suggest that stakeholder consultations be implemented, that is, regular forums between representatives and local communities to discuss challenges and solutions for the transition. Further, economic alternatives must be prioritised.

As long-term strategies, we propose that new policies be implemented – policies that focus on sustainability and marine tourism with a focus on building sustainable tourism infrastructures, e.g. modernise facilities to support whale watching as an ecotourism activity, build museums that recount the history and culture of whaling in Iceland. Furthermore, there should be an establishment of training programmes for maritime workers to transition to sustainable industries along with the development of new regulations that prioritise marine conservation while maintaining maritime employment.

Risks should, however, be considered. Financially, both the transition programmes and infrastructure developments have high costs, and uncertainty in tourism revenue projects must be considered. Moreover, international trade relationships could potentially be affected. As for social risks, unemployment could rise during the transitional phase. Operationally, there

could be challenges in converting whaling vessels for new purposes. Lastly, political risks would involve the government being faced with opposition from whaling industry lobbyists.

Conclusion

To sum up, the whaling conflict in Iceland highlights deep tensions between cultural traditions, economic interests, and environmental conservation. The situation map shows the complexity of this issue as the stakeholders involved have different priorities. While whaling industries defend their practices based on economic and cultural grounds, conservation organisations promote biodiversity and climate resilience.

The solution for this conflict would be a collaborative approach between the two parties, in which the Icelandic government must act as a neutral mediator. By applying the strategy of principled negotiation a balance between ecological preservation and sustainable economic alternatives can be created.

References

Academic Articles and Books

Daniels, S. E., Walker, G.B. (2001). Crafting Effective Policy in a Contentious and Complex World, *Working Through Environmental Conflict The Collaborative Learning Approach* (pp. 35). Praeger Publishers.

Eden, C. (2004). Analysing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems. *European Journal of Operational Research*, *159*(3), 673-686.

Einarsson, N. (2009). From good to eat to good to watch: whale watching, adaptation and change in Icelandic fishing communities. *Polar Research*, 28(1), 129-138

Fisher, R., & Ury, W. (2012). *Getting to yes: Negotiating an agreement without giving in*.

Friedman, A. L. & Miles, S. (2006). *Stakeholders: Theory and Practice*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Gray, B. (2003). Framing of environmental disputes. In R. Lewicki & M. Elliott (Eds.), *Making sense of intractable environmental conflicts*.

Krauss, R. M., & Morsella, E. (2014). Communication and conflict. In M. Deutsch, P. T. Coleman, & E. C. Marcus (Eds.), *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (pp. 161–181). John Wiley & Sons.

Putnam, L., & Wondolleck, J. (2003). Intractability: Definitions, dimensions, and distinctions. In R. Lewicki, B. Gray, & M. Elliott (Eds.), *Making sense of intractable environmental conflicts* (pp. 35–59).

News Articles and Online Resources

Hutchins, R. (2024, December 6). *Iceland issues whale hunting permits until 2029*. Oceanographic. Retrieved December 17, 2024, from https://oceanographicmagazine.com/news/whaling-in-iceland-issues-whale-hunting-permits-until-2029/

Tómas, R. 2024. "Hvalur Files Claim Against Icelandic State Over Whaling Ban." [Online]. Available: https://www.icelandreview.com/news/politics/hvalur-files-claim-against-icelandic-state-over-whaling-ban/?utm_source=chatgpt.com