

Connecting through family tourism and social inclusion during COVID-19 times

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Introduction

Families with dependent children represent a significant proportion of the world's population. Children and families form the closest and most important emotional bond in humans, and it is this social relationship that drives demand in tourism. It is estimated that families account for about 30% of the leisure travel market around the world (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2014). Family travel (defined as that undertaken by adults, including grandparents, with children) is predicted to grow at a faster rate than all other forms of leisure travel, mainly because it represents a way to reunite the family and for family members to spend quality time with each other, away from the demands of work and school. Grandtravel (grandparents travelling with their grandchildren) can facilitate significant bonds and contribute to intergenerational wellbeing and generativity (Gram et al., 2019). In an increasingly busy and hyperconnected but often socially disconnected daily life, families seem to put a high priority on taking holidays to allow for bonding, increased communication, and positive memory formation amongst its family members (Shaw, Havitz & Delemere, 2008). With all these seeming benefits there are social justice and equity questions to be raised about what it means for families for whom holidaying together is simply not possible.

This keynote is about the conceptualisation of family tourism based on insights gained from research including the voices of children (Schänzel & Smith, 2014), grandtravel (Gram et al., 2019), non-resident fathers (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017) and disadvantaged families (McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Minnaert, 2012), acknowledging the increasing diversity of family travel. It presents a conceptual model of family tourism that is promoting social connections and wellbeing at its heart while taking into consideration social equity issues. As such, it argues

for the importance of family travel in increasing intergenerational wellbeing as fundamental to society, particularly in the face of long-term societal trends towards individualism and self-expression. Given that the primary motive for most travel is social connection (Larsen, 2008), insights and conceptualisation into family tourism can connect us more to who we are and our deep-seated values. Social connection means the feeling that you belong to a group and generally feel close to other people. Let us not forget that combined with VFR travel, family tourism is the main form of travel during COVID-19 times to allow for social connection amongst extended family members.

This keynote proposes a social justice lens that nudges towards social change by shifting social relations in the direction of a more just world (see Long, Fletcher, & Watson, 2017), including giving active agency to children (Canosa & Graham, 2016) and include the voices of fathers (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017). Tourism has always been considered an activity for people with discretionary income rather than a necessity of life but given the profound social benefits that can be gained through family travel, it deserves to be promoted more widely. New Zealand in a COVID-19 environment is currently debating to radically change its approach to the visitor economy and reimagine a tourism industry based more on local and domestic tourism. What is preventing a reimagination to include making tourism more accessible for all, especially struggling families in New Zealand? A social justice lens is also about the advocacy necessary to address inequalities and power differences in a society (Long et al., 2017). This keynote takes this advocacy role by critiquing the exclusion of children from active agency as well as grandparents along with socially and economically disadvantaged families from the obvious social benefits of travel. It argues for the need for more inclusion of children in research along with social tourism and other initiatives to ensure the social inclusion of all children and their multi-generational families in travel.

Family Tourism Research

The growing field of family tourism research has made a substantial contribution to tourism knowledge by emphasising the relational dimensions of going on holiday. Going on holiday as a family is not only fuelled by a desire to visit and experience new places but is seen as an opportunity for ‘quality family time’ that allows bonding to ensure the happiness and togetherness of the family. Holidays are considered less about a break or escape ‘from’ home routines and more about spending time ‘with’ the family (including extended family) doing activities that are different to normal, fun and which create positive memories (Schänzel & Smith, 2014) and a sense of family (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). For parents, the social pressure to organise and orchestrate fun experiences and a happy holiday for their children can be significant and must be understood in the context of contemporary parental ideologies (Carr, 2011) and increasing displays of family leisure images on social media (Shannon, 2019). The peer pressure of presenting the perfect family life on holiday can add significant costs and stress to families.

For modern families, going on holiday is often the only time the whole family spends together for an extended period and can be understood as one of the few opportunities of coming back home to the family (Cheong & Sin, 2019). Much research has focused on time-poor parents worrying about the limited quantity of time they spend with their children, leading to an emphasis on ‘quality’ or ‘family time’ (Kramer-Sadlik, Fatigante & Fasulo, 2008). An ideologically loaded term, ‘family time’ evokes togetherness, positive engagement and child-centeredness, with discrepancies between expectations and lived experiences potentially leading to disillusionment, frustration or even guilt (Daly, 1996; Kremer-Sadlik et al., 2008). Tensions can arise from conflicting preferences, such as children seeking fun activities whilst parents seek relaxation (Gram, 2005; Small, 2008). Thus, ‘own time’ can supplement and even enhance ‘family time’ on holiday, offering respite from the obligations,

over-intimacy, and intensity of family time (Backer & Schänzel, 2013; Schänzel & Smith, 2014), highlighting that each family needs to find its own balance of time together and apart while managing complex internal social dynamics.

Shift to child-based and rights-based tourism research

Family tourism research has traditionally prioritized the heterosexual nuclear family. Parent-child or spousal dyads have dominated, alongside parental/maternal perspectives (Schänzel & Carr, 2015). Relatively few studies have examined family holidays ‘through the eyes of a child’ (Rhoden et al., 2016). Prevalent assumptions frame children as immature, vulnerable, incompetent, and in need of being gate-kept out of research (Graham et al., 2013). However, this reflects a narrow, developmentally determined approach to understanding children’s capability and agency that is rarely justified within or across any social or cultural context, since children of the same age can demonstrate remarkably divergent skills, responsibilities, and social and emotional abilities (Canosa & Graham, 2016).

Over the past 30 years, childhood studies have challenged entrenched assumptions about the ways in which children and childhood are constructed, advocating quite explicitly for a competent-child paradigm (Prout & James, 1990). Alongside such developments, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC – United Nations, 1989) has drawn international attention to children’s rights not only in relation to their protection from harm, provision of care and resources, but also to their rights to participation in matters that affect them, such as research about their lives. Consequently, a wealth of child-centred scholarship has emerged across a wide range of disciplinary fields. As a result, discourse has moved well beyond whether and how to involve children in research, establishing well-documented methods for research undertaken with and even by children (Kellett, 2010).

This recognises children's status and rights (e.g., children's 'agency' displacing notions of 'dependency') as a starting point for research, policy and practice away from 'adultism'. It introduces *childism* which is defined as the advocacy of the rights of children:

Childism is life feminism but for children. It has emerged in the academic literature as a term to describe efforts to respond to the lived experiences of the third of humanity who are children through the radical systemic critique of scholarly, social and political norms. (Wall, 2019)

This highlights some of the theoretical developments upon which tourism researchers might build in progressing high quality and ethically sound research involving children. Emerging research in tourism indicates that while children enjoy relaxed times and shared activities with family members, they particularly value fun, excitement, freedom from family commitments and interaction with other children (Rhoden et al., 2016; Schänzel & Smith, 2014; Small, 2008) which might differ from how their parents want to spend their holiday. As one eight-year-old boy stated so succinctly: "It is not a holiday if it is not fun. If it is fun then it is a holiday" (Schänzel & Smith, 2014, p.134), but ensuring children have fun also involves considerable work by the parents.

Grandtravel

Although children are sometimes included in family tourism research (Small, 2008; Rhoden et al., 2016), little is known about their tourist experiences as grandchildren. Similarly, while senior tourists are receiving increasing scholarly attention (Huber, Milne & Hyde, 2018), the focus tends to be on their travels as individuals or couples rather than as grandparents. A recent interpretive study which I was involved in (Gram et al., 2019) drew on interviews with grandparents and grandchildren from Denmark and New Zealand, exploring each

generation's experiences of grandtravel (grandparents and grandchildren travelling together for pleasure on day trips or taking longer trips together with overnight stays). Grandparents described these trips as special and life-affirming, and being more time-rich than parents, could enjoy being in the moment with grandchildren spending 'family time' rather than seeking 'own time'. For example, Dennis in New Zealand, reflected on how the meanings and experiences of grandtravel were primarily concerned with what they offered the grandchildren:

The new experiences I think is the main thing and seeing how they [grandchildren] enjoy it. And hopefully a lot of those new experiences as they grow older will see them through in later life. (Gram et al., 2019)

There was also a real sense of enjoyment by the grandparents which was echoed by the children in the study, who appreciated their grandparents making time for them, joining in their activities, and having fun together. Humour and laughter featured frequently in their stories, including those from John's granddaughters:

Grandpa tells stupid jokes that are actually funny because he laughs at them. (Gram et al., 2019)

Grandchildren relished the playful togetherness and felt valued by their grandparents. Underpinning these shared experiences of fun was grandparents' (and older grandchildren's) understanding that the time for grandtravel was finite. There was a realisation that either the grandparents were getting older and unable to travel or the grandchildren were growing up and not wanting to travel with their grandparents in the future. Generativity or the passing down of values and traditions has previously been identified as a grandparental concern (Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2011). In this study, grandparents' acceptance that the fun times of grandtravel were finite appeared to encourage reflection on their legacy. Imagining a future

beyond his own lifespan, New Zealand grandfather Dennis hoped he would be remembered as ‘someone who gave very good advice. Who loved them. Who did things with them’ (Gram et al., 2019).

These continuing bonds may be forged through future proofing memory creation as part of the grandtravel experience, yet in the long run, they transcend the touristic context, speak to the endurance of love and the role of emotions like love and grief in human flourishing (Nussbaum, 2003) or eudaimonia. Ultimately, grandtravel facilitated playmate bonds, poignant bonds, and continuing bonds between grandparents and grandchildren, making a potential contribution to intergenerational wellbeing and generativity, and to active, positive ageing agendas (Marhánková, 2015). This study, thus, showed how even short, relatively mundane family holidays could achieve both hedonistic and deeper, longer-term eudaimonic wellbeing and aid in family identity formation.

Non-resident father's travel

As demographic and life-style patterns change around the world, the structure of family life also changes, and families are becoming more diverse. However, this diversity of families is still underrepresented when it comes to family tourism research which traditionally has been informed by feminist gender representations. Seeking a more balanced or true gender scholarship requires a critical appraisal of gender relations that is inclusive of the male voice in family tourism (Schänzel & Smith, 2011). Research by myself and John Jenkins (2017) focused on the experiences of non-resident fathers who holidayed alone with their children and the meanings of these experiences for those fathers. Our findings reveal the importance of family holidays for separated families and for non-resident fathers' relationships with their children. This is illustrated by the quote from one father who went on an extended skiing holiday with his estranged teenage son:

Males in general, they don't tend to talk deeply to each other about their feelings and stuff. We were able to talk, and you know have fun together and that's worth a million dollars really and being able to do something that we both love doing together as well and now it's actually really solidified the relationship we have ... I have just moved house and he was saying 'there is a spare bedroom'. He was looking at that room thinking 'I can stay here'. (Schänzel & Jenkins, 2017, p. 167)

Leisure-based holidays shared with their children can be considered special times for these non-resident fathers to have fun, to teach skills and negotiate values, to explore the meanings of their lives, to (re)build and maintain family relations and to experience fatherhood. There were emerging themes of fatherhood that are common within the family tourism literature, such as the ubiquitous notion of bonding and spending time together, the importance of memory formation, engaging in activities that are more active and physical, or leisure-based fathering (Kay, 2006), and providing fun experiences often in the outdoors. There were also challenges mentioned including the overall sense of responsibility or work in ensuring that children are safe and cared for on holiday which are similar to the organisational and emotional work reported by mothers (e.g., Davidson, 1996; Shaw et al., 2008). However, the positive experiences arising from holiday-based interactions increased many non-resident fathers' happiness and wellbeing along with a sense of contribution as a father.

Disadvantaged families travel and social tourism

Most family tourism research is on middle-class families, underscoring that families are not universally affluent and able to travel. Disadvantaged families can experience deficiencies in various dimensions that might prevent them from taking holidays, such as income, health deprivation and disability, education, and training (Minnaert, 2012). Social tourism is a long-established practice in many European countries (e.g. UK, Belgium, Ireland) and is concerned with the inclusion of all members of a society in tourism participation, facilitated

by financial and social measures (e.g., charities and public funding). Social tourism is defined as ‘tourism with an added moral value, of which the primary aim is to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange’ (Minnaert et al., 2009, p. 2). Examples of social tourism range from holiday initiatives for people with disabilities and charity family holidays for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to the development of community-based tourism in economically underdeveloped areas.

While social tourism is not a new concept, it has in recent years attracted greater attention from researchers (McCabe, 2019). Multiple studies have shown that social tourism can contribute to an increase in family capital (e.g., Minnaert et al, 2009; McCabe & Johnson, 2013), which is the relationships between the family members and their resilience when faced with adversity. In these studies, social tourism beneficiaries reported that the holiday allowed the family members quality time together away from the problems and tediousness of the home environment. It provided children with the opportunity to have fun and form happy memories along with broadening their minds. Many parents reported that after the holiday they spent more time with their children, played with them more, or communicated with them better (Minnaert, 2012). The social tourism movement underlines the role of family holidays in strengthening family bonds, increasing social connections and contributing to subjective wellbeing under conditions of poverty, disability, and other challenges (McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Minnaert, 2012).

However, it has been pointed out by McCabe (2019) that any social tourism interventions should have a well-defined social intention, such as to encourage family cohesion amongst low-income families or to support accessible tourism for family members with disabilities or to combat isolation in older people by including grandparents. This is particularly pertinent

when it comes to the loneliness epidemic in societies around the world, with half of Britons over 65 considering the television or a pet as their main source of company (Howe, 2019). Social tourism initiatives could then contribute towards a more sustainable and equitable tourism future.

Lessons learnt from family tourism research

There seems to be an overarching desire for family togetherness on holiday due to perceived busyness and deficiencies in daily life or creating unique and lasting memories which has not waned during the pandemic. While the social identity constructions for the grandparents are about bigger issues of leaving a legacy with their grandchildren in the precious time spent together on holiday, the social identity constructions for the parents are more immediate but are still about generativity and engendering a sense of belonging or sense of family. For the children, family holidays are primarily about having fun with the realisation that fun experienced together runs deeper as social and egalitarian, reflecting a “with-equal-other-social bond” (Podilchak 1991). Previous research has highlighted how social tourism initiatives enhanced the wellbeing of families experiencing various forms of social exclusion (e.g., McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Minnaert, 2012). Ultimately, the potential of family travel is to facilitate integrative and intergenerational wellbeing that can be considered fundamental to society. Despite the positive effects of family holidays on family relations there are no universal requirements for annual leave entitlements for all families to benefit (for example the US does not guarantee its workers paid leave) (Minnaert, 2018), underlining this as another policy issue along with social tourism initiatives.

However, the infinite variety of potential tourism experiences and individual and social circumstances as well as family challenges that motivate and determine social tourism and

family tourism outcomes necessitates a note of caution here. There are limited time effects of benefits (De Bloom, Geurts, & Kompier, 2012) and potential increases in stress and tension prior to and during family holidays (Backer & Schänzel, 2013; Gram, Therkelsen & Larsen, 2018). Then there is the financial cost of taking children on holidays that are meant to be fun and exciting along with social pressures of family displays on social media. As highlighted by some social tourism practitioners (McCabe and Johnson, 2013), it is recognised that not all (disadvantaged) families will benefit equally from a holiday due to their individual psychological and social circumstances.

Conceptualisation of family tourism in promoting family wellbeing

Taking in the lessons learnt from tourism research on diverse families and inclusive of the active agency of children leads me to present a conceptual model of family tourism that is promoting social connections and wellbeing at its heart while taking into consideration its diverse elements (see Figure 1). At the centre of the conceptual model lies family connection, bonding and wellbeing as the main purpose of family holidaying which are synonymous with engendering belonging and instilling love. According to American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2003), an emotion such as love is considered the cornerstone of a humane society and results from seeing our interests reflected in others who should become beneficiaries of our concern and support. Love and emotions in general have been neglected by tourism academics. Indeed, tourism research has long been underpinned by a rationalist philosophy, despite tourism itself being suffused with emotions including anxiety, fear and disappointment as well as joy, pleasure and love (Robinson, 2012). The social connection and love achieved through family holidaying can then be considered to lie at the emotional heart of a more inclusive society and becomes part of human flourishing.

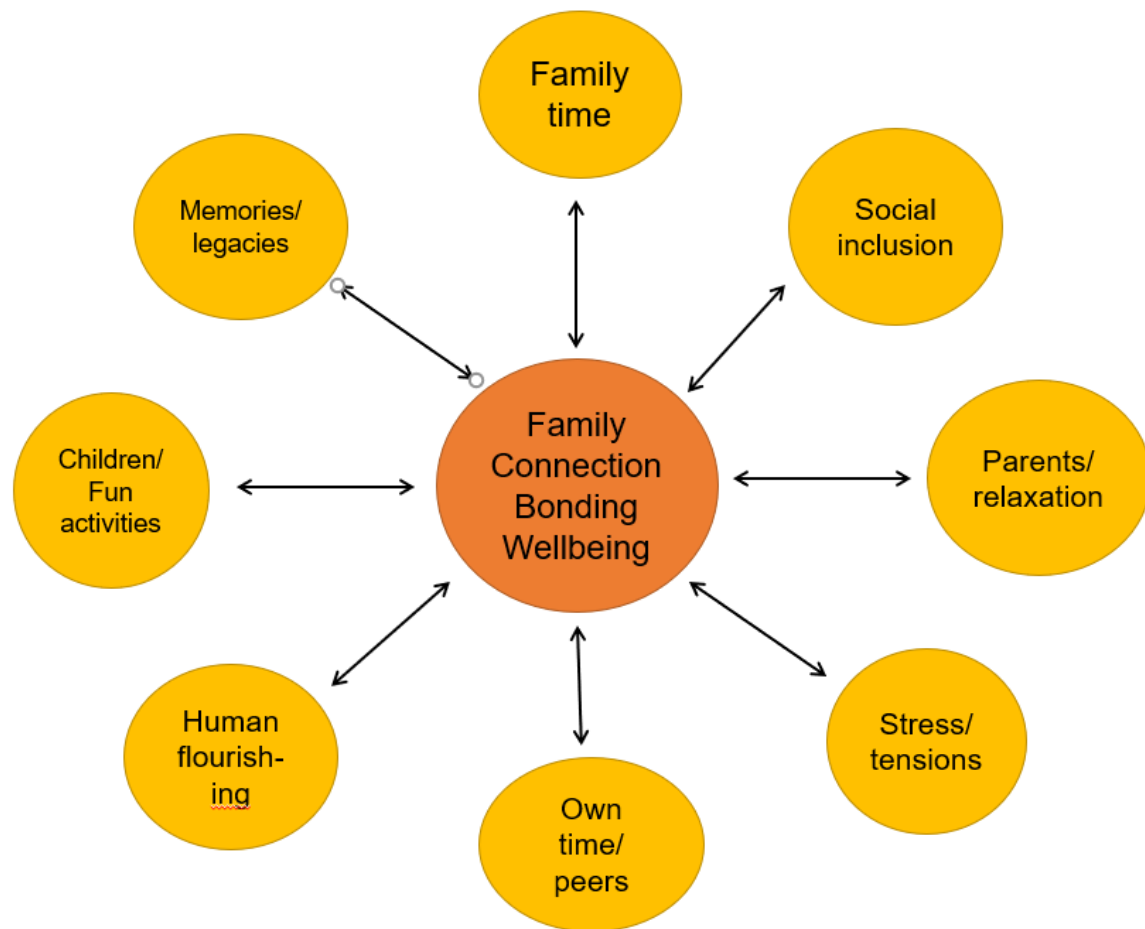


Figure 1: Conceptualisation of family tourism and social equity issues

Any emotions and deeper states of connections are made up of at times conflicting elements, family holidays are no different. On the one hand, there are the family stories and legacies passed down through the generations or generativity, and the long-term goal of creating memories that would enhance family cohesion and construct a positive sense of family (Shaw et al., 2008). On the other hand, there are potential stress and tensions before and during the holiday dealing with complex intra-family dynamics, financial expenses, additional work and social pressures (Backer & Schänzel, 2013; Gram et al., 2018). Then there is the overall emphasis on ‘family time’ spent doing family activities and the need for it to be balanced with ‘own time’ or ‘peer time’ away from family obligations, highlighting the complexity of engendering social connection in practical terms (Schänzel & Smith, 2014). Common

conflicting preferences are children seeking fun activities whilst parents seek relaxation (Gram, 2005) which needs to be worked out on holiday. Then there is the overall sense that social inclusion of all families benefiting from holiday experiences is an imperative and part of engendering human flourishing or eudaimonia in people's lives.

The conceptual model highlights the social nature of family tourism dimensions that are united by an emphasis on connection and belonging, thereby strengthening the advocacy of tourism for all families. While family holiday experiences do not need to be grand (e.g., day trips, camping or simple outdoor experiences), its benefits deserve to be spread more equally in society, be it through government funded social tourism initiatives or discount cards for underprivileged families within a domestic tourism context. A road map forward then is to research and find ways to make tourism more accessible for all families as part of a community-based values approach. The opportunities in a post-COVID-19 world are there to reimagine family tourism as way for promoting intergenerational and eudaimonic wellbeing for all children and their families and for a more just society.

Conclusions

After COVID-19, an agenda should be taken up to socialise tourism in the sense of guiding tourism development in proper ways of behaving with regards to society. Tourism participation for everyone should be included in debates about measures of family well-being and social connection as part of a social justice agenda. Social connection here means the feeling that one belongs to a family group and generally feels close to other family members. Research on family tourism highlights the emotional and social benefits and positive functioning associated with eudaemonic concepts of intergenerational well-being and feeling loved. This aligns with the philosopher Martha Nussbaum's (2003) central claim that an emotion like love, far from an irrational distraction, is an intelligent response to the

perception of value and vital for human flourishing. These are areas that appear to have significant utility for understanding the contribution of tourism to family connection and ultimately happiness. Increasing research points to social connection improving physical health and mental and emotional well-being, especially when dealing with age-related loneliness. Social tourism initiatives could then enhance family bonds and wellbeing by including grandparents in holiday programmes, helping grandparents in difficult circumstances to build lasting bonds and facilitate generativity with their grandchildren (Gram et al., 2019), and as part of an active aging agenda.

Family tourism in all its diverse forms offers the potential to experience different places and cultures (including own culture) and to broaden the horizons of the younger generation, and as such its contribution to positive family functioning should be recognised.

Holidays are times when families can enjoy quality time, and the fun activities undertaken are linked to personal growth and fulfilment. Therefore, family tourism has the potential to link to key aspects that lead to integrative and intergenerational well-being, particularly the developmental aspects of self within the family bond that contribute to eudaemonia. For social tourism beneficiaries, who without financial support are socially excluded from participation in tourism, the intergenerational wellbeing effects of family tourism may be greater than for general tourists (McCabe & Johnson, 2013). The issues raised in this keynote lead us to a future research agenda (see Schänzel, 2021):

- More research is needed to understand how different types of family tourism contribute to different aspects of social connection and wellbeing.
- More research is needed on how a holiday can optimise intergenerational wellbeing outcomes, and on the psychological and environmental conditions that might affect them.

- Research needs to become more inclusive to the silent voices in family tourism, including providing active agency to children, grandparents, (grand)fathers, and non-traditional families and/or non-western families.

The increasing importance of family holidays as meaningful time spent for (re)connection, social identity formation and intergenerational wellbeing should then not be underestimated. Family tourism is undeniably a social phenomenon from which we have much yet to learn about social relationships. Tourism research, then, can serve as a microcosm of society that can connect us to who we are, along with highlighting policy issues and supporting a transition towards greater social justice and well-being of all children and their families.

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