

Grand parenting by the Pool: Extending family tourism research to grandparent-grandchildren holidays

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Abstract | Research on family holidays has focused on the nuclear family. But family holidays come in many different forms and this paper uses 81 interviews to explore the under-researched issue of grandparents and grandchildren vacationing together. Although grandparent-grandchildren holidays resemble nuclear family holidays in many ways, significant differences also exist as these holidays (a) enable grandparents and grandchildren to interact in ways they cannot do (as easily) at home; (b) are a means for grandparents to help their children; (c) allow for grandparents and grandchildren to be both together and apart; and d) are critical to how contemporary families 'do' family across generations.

Keywords | Family holidays, extended families, three generational holidays, grandparenting

1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework

In order to de-masculinize, re-socialize and de-exoticise tourism research (Larsen, 2008; Obrador, 2012; Schänzel, 2010), the 'social turn' emphasizes family and kinship and, in recent years, theory on how families 'do family' and perform thick sociality during the holidays has matured, establishing a theoretical framework for studying family units, who bring with them domestic, everyday life responsibilities whilst holidaying. Family

tourism frameworks tend to focus on the nuclear family, whereas family members beyond the nuclear core have largely been ignored. For example, Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel (2016, p. 13) argue that "the tourism literature still largely assumes that family vacations include a husband-and-wife team and maybe other family members joining in" although many family holidays qualify as family assemblages, including "a combination of all or some family members". Schänzel and Carr (2016) find that tourism research should embrace the full

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spectrum of families that exist and Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel (2016) point to a survey conducted by Tripadvisor that shows that 37% of respondents plan to take a multi-generational trip. Life spans are becoming longer in most western societies and this strengthens bonds across generations, creating multi-generational families including grandparents (or great-grand parents) who still live active lives and go on vacation and increasingly do so together with their children and/or grandchildren. Hebblethwaite and Norris (2007, p. 121) opine that "literature focusing on the inclusion of older adults in the study of family leisure remains sparse" and Scraton and Holland (2006) argue that scant attention has been paid to grandparents' roles in family leisure. This paper seeks to advance understandings of multi-generational holidays and represents a small step towards rectifying the shortcomings of contemporary family tourism research by addressing roles grandparents play in family tourism. In order to theorize grand parenting during the holidays, the conceptual framework introduced below is comprised of family research and family tourism research.

1.1. Family tourism research

In recent years, scholars such as Carr (2011), Haldrup and Larsen (2003), Larsen (2008), Obrador (2012), Schänzel (2010), Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Lord and Parker-Hodds (2012) and Schänzel and Smith (2014) have developed a familial perspective that frames and theorizes sociality and family tourism. Studies of family holidays discuss issues such as cultural ideals of 'good' childhood and parenting, child participation (especially in decision-making processes), sociality and domesticity (e.g. how families 'do' family, domesticity and thick sociality) and togetherness, separation, conflicts and compromises as integral parts of such holidays (Blichfeldt & Mikkelsen, 2013; Blichfeldt, Pedersen, Johansen & Hansen, 2011;

Larsen, 2013; Larsen, 2008; Nanda, Hu & Bai 2006; Obrador, 2012; Schänzel & Smith, 2014). Although family tourism research, at the outset, emphasized parents' perspectives, children are increasingly given voice (e.g. Blichfeldt et. al., 2011; Carr, 2011; Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere & Havitz 2008; Mikkelsen & Blichfeldt, 2015; Schänzel, Yeoman & Backer, 2012). Consequently, conceptual frameworks that center on group dynamics, rich sociality and domesticity have emerged during the last decade, exemplified by Schänzel and Smith's (2014) model of the sociality of family holiday experiences. Furthermore, family holidays are often seen as facilitators of family bonding and interaction (Yeoman et al., 2012) and as an opportunity to spend time together, to bond and to create memories (Hilbrecht et al., 2008) as family holidays are frequently the only time the entire family is together for an extended period of time (Schänzel and Smith, 2014).

An issue that characterizes family tourism research is that it emphasizes nuclear families, thus neglecting other family types such as rainbow families, binuclear families, extended families etc. In regard to extended families, family tourism research has not yet provided proper conceptualizations including other family members, e.g. aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews or grandparents. Especially the exclusion of grandparents seems problematic as the tourism industry reports a significant increase in three generational leisure travel. As an example, a recent survey including 2,200 55+ years old Danish tourists shows that 3 out of 4 have taken (and mostly paid for) three generational holidays and a leading packaged tour company argues that three generational holidays have increased with 700 percent during the last 10 years (Trærup, 2015). Consequently, if family tourism research is to cover family tourism in all its forms, it seems that research on three-generational holidays is needed.

1.2. Family Research

Although 'the family' has recently taken new forms (e.g. single parent families; rainbow families; binuclear families etc.), it continues to be a key institution and an agent of socialization (Kemp, 2007) as individual lives are inextricably linked to family members' lives and are informed by intergenerational family socialization and reciprocal influences between generations (Putney & Bengtson, 2002). In contrast to tourism studies, within family research the idea that intimate relationships are shaped not only by nuclear family, but also by extended family binding generations together in an endless chain is widespread. Family tourism research' focus on the nuclear family makes much sense as a *starting* point when conceptualizing and theorizing family holidays. However, with the emerging 'roleless role' of the aged (Burgess, 1960), the aging experience more room for defining their familial roles (Hanks, 2001). Furthermore, as years of shared lives between generations; women's economic and social emancipation; and 'binuclear' family forms have increased, Bengtson (2001) opines that the role of grandparents in socializing and supporting grandchildren is likely to gain momentum. Kemp (2007, p. 857) argues that "increasing longevity has created the opportunity for more grandchildren to know more grandparents for longer than ever before" and consequently, the roles of grandparents as agents of socialization of grandchildren are changing.

Bengtson (2001) argues that it is time to 'look beyond the nuclear family' and that familial multi-generational relations will become increasingly important in the 21st century. He builds this argument on demographic changes resulting in 'longer years of shared lives', increasing needs for grandparents to ensure family functions and increasing strength and resilience of intergenerational solidarity. Particularly the longer years of shared lives between generations, he argues, "have resulted in increased opportunities – and needs – for interac-

tion, support and mutual influence across more than just two generations" (Bengtson, 2001, p. 5) and older family members increasingly represent a resource for help and support for younger generations (King, 1994). Although family research does address relations between grandparents and grandchildren, such research disproportionately emphasizes grandparent caregivers (Hanks, 2001; Finger- man, 1998) and under-represents the normativity of non-cohabitating grandchildren and grandchildren.

Clavan (1978, p. 351) argued that grandpa- rents "must construct a role for themselves" and three decades later, Gauthier (2002, p. 300) pointed to grand-parenting as "a role which is still not really defined today". Obviously, not all grandpa- rents are central to family functionality or grand- children's socialization, as indicated by Finger- man's (1998) and Johnson's (1983) finding that the lesser grandparents and grandchildren interact, the weaker emotional bonds they form. Grand- parents may concordantly not be significant to grandchildren's socialization across *all* families as argued by Kemp (2007), who points to the existence of different family-specific 'grand cultures'. Although Kemp (2007) identified families with no (or weak) 'grand cultures', she also identified fa- milies that have established 'grand cultures of affi- nity', in which relationships between grandparents and grandchildren are both frequent and socially and personally significant for both parties.

Grandparents may act as role models in the socialization of grandchildren (King, 1994); pro- vide economic resources to younger generations (Bengtson, 2001); contribute to cross-generational solidarity (King, 1994); ensure family stability and continuity over time (King, 1994; Silverstein, Gi- arrusso & Bengtson, 1998); and 'muster up' in times of crisis and emergency (Hagestad, 1996). Some authors (e.g. Johnson, 1983; Robertson, 1995; Troll, 1983) define grand-parenting as a fa- mily position that is dormant until emergencies arise, exemplified by Hagestad's (1996) 'reserve

army' and 'being there' grandparents. Denham and Smith (1989) point to grandparents having symbolic influence, indirect influence (influencing grandchildren indirectly through the parents) and direct influence on grandchildren. Furthermore, Gauthier (2002) argues that when grandparents look after their grandchildren in domestic space it typically represents intergenerational solidarity (i.e. extension of help provided to children).

Whereas family studies emphasize everyday life contexts, this paper emphasizes grand-parenting in a context away from home. Gillis (1996, p. 13) argues that "during everyday life, family members go their separate ways, their lives regulated by schedules emanating from work and school over which they have very little control" and as a result, "family has been redefined from people sharing a place to people sharing a past and a future". During joint holidays, grandchildren and grandparents share space and consequently, holidays seems to qualify as a context that may provide especially valuable insights into how grandparents 'do' family, thick sociality and domesticity. Daly (2001) argues that family time relates to the social production of memories and this may particularly be the case with holidays, during which the activities that families engage in are likely to be secondary to accomplishing the ideal of family togetherness. Consequently, perhaps holidays may be especially relevant in order for family members to share place, achieve togetherness and build memories as well as to transcend family as a "symbolic world that people live by" and make it "an actual physical world they live in" (Gilles, 1996, p. 13). Schänzel and Smith (2014) argue that the ideal of family time dominates westernized discourses on family tourism, albeit such discourses neglect needs for balanced levels of family cohesion in the form of balancing of togetherness (family time) and separateness (own time representing needs for freedom from familial roles).

Grandchildren and grandparents holidaying together may increase both type and frequency of

intergenerational solidarity and contact, thus facilitating associational solidarity whereas grandparents providing instrumental services during these holidays may enhance functional solidarity between generations. The fact that little research focuses on grandchildren and grandparents holidaying together seems rather surprising as children's socialization processes do not happen in a vacuum, but rely on significant 'others', including their extended families. Emphasizing holidays as times during which these issues play critical roles, this paper investigates the under-researched issue of grandparents and grandchildren vacationing together, with or without parents being present, from grandparents' perspectives.

2. Methodology

This paper is part of a larger-scale qualitative study that focuses on caravanning/camping in Denmark and this paper is based on 81 in-situ interviews with family groups (in total 173 interviewees) that mainly consist of couples over 50. Most of the interviewees are domestic, Danish tourists whereas international tourists are mostly Germans. Most interviewees have caravans (and a significant number spends several holidays at one specific caravan site), followed by recreational vehicles. 31 out of the 81 in-situ interviews were done with grandparents, who were caravanning together with their grandchildren. However, almost all interviewees regularly take the grandchildren caravanning.

The average length of interviews is around 30 minutes. However, some interviews are very short whereas other interviews lasted well over an hour. Quality of interviews varies considerably – from very short interviews where interviewees mostly offered very factual information, to in-depth conversations covering both this type of holidaying and contrasts to other types of holidays as well

as everyday life. Although attempts were made to give children voice during the in situ interviews, adult voices dominate and children's voices are under-represented, hence the grand-parent perspective. The vast majority of empty nester interviewees often have their children and/or grandchildren visiting while they are caravanning. Especially Danish empty nesters staying at the *same* Danish caravan site several times (sometimes several years) are frequently visited by their children and/or grandchildren; sometimes the children and grandchildren visit together, but at other times the grandchildren visit alone. As discussed in further details below, we acknowledge that caravanning is a very special type of tourism and consequently, the findings presented in this paper are not likely to generalize across three generational holidays.

3. Findings

The interviewees both point to holidays together with their grandchildren in the form of three-generational holidays and two-generational holidays (only grandchildren and grandparents). As for three-generational holidays, interviewees point to such holidays allowing for family time across generations and particularly to the fact that children can go play without adults having to come along, thus allowing both for family time across all three generations when the children return to the family space and for adults (grandparents and parents) to spend time together while children play. These holidays are characterized by both togetherness and separation (Schänzel, 2010; Schänzel & Smith, 2014) and three generation caravanning holidays resemble those of nuclear families portrayed in the existing literature (particularly Blichfeldt & Mikkelsen, 2013; Larsen, 2008; Larsen, 2013; Mikkelsen & Blichfeldt, 2015; Obrador, 2012 and Schänzel & Smith, 2014), portraying the inherent schism between (a) family time and together-

ness and (b) separateness and own time. In sum, existing literature seems to capture most of the themes characterizing three-generational holidays as portrayed by our interviewees.

Two and three-generational holidays are often combined as holidays with grandchildren often include children's visiting while bringing and picking up grandchildren, visits often extending into a day or two; or even joining in for a week or more. A typical example of combining two and three-generational holidays is a German couple, who has been caravanning for more than 30 years – but only at one specific Danish caravan site. When being interviewed, they were caravanning with their 13 years old granddaughter, but more family (including her parents) would come visit next week; staying one week thereafter. Another example is an interview with a couple in their sixties, eagerly waiting for the son and two grandchildren to arrive with a tent and kites, ready to do some days of family and kite-flying; an interview that was ended with the happy and loud arrival of the next generations.

Irrespectively of more specific holiday arrangements, to most interviewees, taking the grandchildren caravanning is an integral part of how they 'do' family and it represents a 'grand culture of affinity' that allows for frequent and 'deep' interactions with grandchildren. For some grandparents, it is an annual ritual to take the grandchildren caravanning (for example during the first week of the children's summer holidays, during which the parents do not have holidays), whereas others take their grandchildren caravanning several times a year in a rather flexible, ad hoc manner.

Some interviewees tell how they stopped caravanning when their children became teenagers, but started caravanning again when they had grandchildren and caravanning seems to 'run in the family' for these families. In the methodology section, caravanning was pointed to as a special type of holidaying and the heavy representation of 'grand cultures of affinity' as well as high levels

of family-orientation across study participants supports this notion. As an example, a grandmother, who often takes the grandchildren along when caravanning, explains that she and her husband stopped caravanning when their children became teenagers and for a series of years took packaged tours instead. She continues:

But then we had grandchildren and then we again saw the advantages of caravanning. Now our grandchildren often come along, so that our son and daughter-in-law can get a break back home. Every summer and often also during the weekends [...] It's about teaching the kids not to get up at 7 am and run to the playground and start yelling, hopping and dancing around. At a caravan site you live close to others, so one needs to be considerate.

She further explains that she and her husband take the grandchildren caravanning because "we, as grandparents, are able to give the grandchildren experiences our children don't have the time for." As exemplified by this grandmother, many of our interviewees see themselves as a 'reserve army' (Hagestad, 1996), that ensures family stability and continuity (Silverstein et. al. 1998) and helps their children by looking after the grandchildren (Gauthier, 2002) and the two generational holidays seem to represent cross-generational solidarity (King, 1994). However, these holidays are also about giving the grandchildren the kind of experiences they gave their own children, hereby transforming holidays to acts of how we 'do' family and holidays across generations and transforming family to people sharing a past and a future (Gillis, 1996). Likewise, a Danish grandfather in his 60ties talks about holidays with the grandchildren in ways such as:

In August we go caravanning in southern France. We do that for

the grandchildren's sake. [...] Both of our grandchildren have learned to bicycle during the holidays with us, because circumstances back home aren't fit for that. [...] Our grandchildren have so much to do normally. It is good for them to go caravanning. It's good for them to experience a bit of boredom. That doesn't hurt anyone. It's good for them to slow down completely.

According to this grandfather of three, they sometimes choose destinations (France) for the grandchildren's sake, but he also sees it as part of his 'grand culture' to learn the grandchildren to bicycle, to slow down, to learn how to deal with boredom and to do things mothers would not normally allow them to (e.g. to go to the playground on their own). Both of these grandparents see their roles not only as 'a resource for help' (King, 1994), but also as supporting grandchildren's socialization and development (Bengtson, 2001) in everything from learning to bicycle to 'slowing down' and dealing with boredom.

Caravanning also enables grandparents and grandchildren to interact more and in ways they cannot do (as easily) at home, hereby enabling grandparents to engage in rich sociality and domesticity (Larsen, 2008; Obrador, 2012). Most interviewees point to caravanning allowing them to be closer to their grandchildren and to become more central to family functionality (Fingerman, 1998) during the holidays. A grandmother in her 70ties, travelling with her husband and their two young grandchildren says that what she likes best about caravanning is the experiences with her grandson and "that they help cooking and that it's all kind of primitive. And it's good for them to learn that they have to go to the buildings with toilet facilities when they have to pee". Concordant with Kemp (2007), and exemplified by this

grandmother, our interviewees see themselves as agents of children's socialization that are very active during the two generational holidays. Most interviewees also point to it being easier and 'more relaxing' to have children and grandchildren visit at a caravan site than to 'entertain them back home' as caravanning provides more opportunities for grandchildren than a visit to the grandparents' home. For example, a Norwegian grandmother of two (aged 6 and 9) and a Danish couple caravanning with their two grandsons (aged 10 and 12) explained this as follows:

This is something different. At home, they use the computers and the television. We don't have television here. We have to play games and we do different things. So that's good. At our place, the grandchildren don't know what to do – so it ends up being TV, computers and computer games.

Hanks (2001) argued that grandparents' homes often qualify as traditional family gathering places. However, the presence of various technologies (computers, televisions etc.) makes grandchildren and grandparents spend less time together in these homes than at a caravan site.

Whereas some grandparents go abroad (the example with France), other Danish grandparents stay in Denmark during the summer for the grandchildren's sake. A grandmother who, together with her husband, has visited the same caravan site for 31 years in a row and has a 15 years old grandchild opines:

We like to stay in Denmark during the summer holidays. That allows us to help out with the grandchildren when our children don't have holidays. [...] There's nothing as cozy as playing games with the children. You can hear that at night: The sounds from the

tents and caravans when families are having a cozy time.

A central theme within family tourism research is the balancing of needs for togetherness (family time) and separation (during which family members escape their familial roles and pursue own time and interests). This balancing of needs is also present when grandparents take grandchildren caravanning. For example, a Danish grandmother of eight, who takes the grandchildren caravanning two at a time, argued that it is "a completely different kind of holiday than when we are alone, because we are 'on' a lot more. But it's such a pleasure for us 'oldies' that the grandchildren want to go with us and to see that they are having a good time". Nonetheless, she also explains that there needs to be playgrounds, other children and a pool when they take the grandchildren caravanning in order to "get some relaxation yourselves". As another example, a grandfather explained that "when our grandchildren come along, they use the pool everyday – even when it's raining." Finally, a grandmother, who has been caravanning with her husband for more than 30 years and a grandfather in his 70ties reasoned as follows:

When the grandchildren come along, it's more on their terms. It's not as relaxing as when we are caravanning alone. [...] Now we arrived with our granddaughter, it took around half an hour - then she had found a friend to play with. When she was told that she was going to visit us, her first reaction was: 'Can we go camping? We have taken her along before and [...] it's so nice for us, because we get to sit down and relax. At home we live in a suburban area – what should she do there? It'd be a nightmare to be frank. Because even though there's a playground back home, I'd need to follow her there. But here, she can

manage on her own. It's the freedom of caravanning. When the grandchildren visit, you don't have to entertain them all the time, they easily find playmates. If you're staying in a holiday house, then the parents and grandparents need to entertain the children, you don't have to do that at a caravan site. They can just run to the playground and we know where they are and it's safe.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Schänzel, Yeoman and Backer (2012) argued that family holidays depend on a balance between 'family time' and 'own time' and Larsen (2013, p. 6) suggested that the experience of "being together" is a "complex and hybrid structure of different, though interrelated, experiences". The study participants point to 'family time' and 'own time' not only being part of a complex structure, but that grandparents and grandchildren need to spend time apart in order for family time and family togetherness to be successful. As a result, grandparenting by the pool is not only about togetherness and 'family time' and 'own time', in an almost cyclic manner, enrich and inform one another. According to the study participants, 'real, quality family time' can only be achieved insofar both they and their grandchildren have 'own time' and can escape their roles as grandparents/grandchildren in between the precious moments of thick sociality and family togetherness, that all interviewees point to as peak holiday experiences.

This paper tries to contribute to de-exoticize and re-socialize tourism research by extending family tourism research to include grandparents. Although the paper only covers grandparents' perspective, and a non-generalizable type of holidays, it points to holidays as central to how three genera-

tional families 'do' contemporary family – and that grandparents use holidays as a means to both support their children and bond with their grandchildren. The study also supports Kennedy-Eden and Gretzel's (2016) finding that grandparents use holidays to get 'family time' with grandchildren, hereby strengthening family bonds. However, grandparents do not 'sacrifice' own time and needs during these holidays as caravanning with grandchildren allows both for quality time with the grandchildren (family time) and own time for both generations. This aligns with Cherlin and Furstenberg's (1986) finding that grandparents are both committed to family life *and* have lives of their own as well as with the together-apart scenario presented by Schänzel (2010). But caravanning allows both grandchildren and grandparents to both commit to family life (family time) and pursue their own interests through own time. Clavan (1978) argued that, in this 'role-less era', grandparents actively construct their familial roles and some grandparents establish grand cultures of affinity that entail holidaying with their grandchildren. However, by spending these holidays at a caravan site, grandparents ensure that the role as a grandparent does not 'take over' completely during the holiday as caravanning allows for both togetherness and family time with their grandchildren *and* separation and own time, during which they do what they would have done, had they not been holidaying with their grandchildren. Accordingly, grandparenting by the pool (and by the caravan) enables grandchildren and grandparents to be both members of family as a symbolic world they live by *and* to be a family as an actual physical world they live in; albeit own time allows both grandchildren and grandparents to not be 'stuck' in their familial roles 24/7.

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