

CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCE OF NATURE HOLIDAYS:
A MOTIVATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

Children have the ability to contribute to sustainable tourism research. A great deal of research on nature holiday has been conducted. However, it is unclear how this travel might serve as a good motivator for children to engage in environmentally responsible behaviour. To address this research gap, 72 drawings of children aged nine to 12 from Tehran, Iran, accompanied with the stories of their holiday were collected. Thematic analysis was done to assess their experience in nature and their cognitive state of environmental responsible behaviour. According to the finding, children are significantly concerned about nature, and they mostly perceived their best holidays in the natural environment. Children displayed a profound awareness of environmental responsible behaviour themes through their encounters with nature. Their experiences are classified into five levels: sensory, emotive, cognitive, behavioural, and relationship. Each of these stages of experience may be used as a guideline for encouraging and training youngsters to be responsible.

Keywords: children; nature holiday; experience; responsible behaviour; Holiday drawing analytical model; Iran.

INTRODUCTION

Nature is the first target of entertainment in low-income countries with high demand which can be a danger for natural settings and need consideration. Children can play an important role in sustainable and responsible tourism if they are empowered (Hehir, Stewart, Maher, & Ribeiro, 2020; Seraphin, Yallop, Seyfi, & Hall, 2020). This chapter investigates children's nature holiday and how these experiences can act as motivation for environmental responsible behaviour. This responsible behaviour includes any effort for the restoration of environmental challenges. Children are so eager to learn and gain the opportunity on nature holidays to observe, understand and learn (Radic, 2019). Recently children are receiving stronger attention in tourism research (Ertaş, Ghasemi, & Kuhzady, 2021; Poria & Timothy, 2014; Small, 2008). A fresh perspective on children has recently emerged to illustrate the significance of children's perception, action, and impact in sustainability and responsible conduct, with an emphasis on educational sites and beyond family context (Horton, Hadfield-Hill, Christensen, & Kraftl, 2013; Green, 2017; Koščak et al., 2021; Mahidin & Mulan, 2012; Seraphin et al., 2020; Séraphin & Yallop, 2020; Somerville & Williams, 2015). However, their impact in tourism sustainability in a more family-oriented setting requires further exploration.

The key to sustainability and environmental responsible behaviour is knowing the environment (Ernst & Burcak, 2019; Mahidin & Mulan, 2012). Environmental awareness began since the 1970s (Ausubel, Victor, & Wernick, 1995). Later, this phrase was associated with economic repercussions, and then with tourism as a potential business for profiting from the environment (Weaver, 2006). It is critical that the tourist sector uses the environment in a way that does not endanger future generations (Green, 2017). Children are introduced as the change agents recently in the tourism literature (Mohammadi and Pearce, 2020; Seraphin et al., 2020). They can play their roles to behave responsibly toward the environment if they build the interaction and develop awareness. Early childhood plays an important role during the last decades for responsible behaviours development. There is a need to shift in values, knowledge, and action to get a more sustainable pattern (UNICEF, 2013, p.16). However, there is a quite number of studies on sustainability education programs and activities (Séraphin et al., 2020; Séraphin & Yallop, 2020), there are a few studies on children's perception of nature holidays and their impact. This issue

should be highlighted especially in underdeveloped countries as the United Nations had predicted the youth in those countries would be 80% of the world youth population by 2050 (Abbas, 2012).

One of the very most preferred settings for children to learn about the environment is the natural places (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). The effect would be greater if they have the chance of experiencing nature by themselves freely. The focus of this study is on nature holidays which the main motivation is nature (Luo & Deng, 2008). This chapter, adopting an empirical approach to evaluate if and how children nature holidays can motivate them to behave responsibly environmentally.

BACKGROUND

Research with children

Conducting research with children in tourism research is beneficial as children are part of the overall tourism market as active individuals and they influence the family behaviour directly or indirectly (Mohammadi & Pearce, 2020; Mohammadi, 2020). To do the study with children, several methodologies and procedures have been employed. Children have a tendency, ideas and interests in environmental issues (Green, 2017). But it is believed that researchers should think seriously about the methods and techniques, constraints, ethical issues, needs of children and the cultural/physical context (Barker & Weller, 2003; Ertaş et al., 2021; Punch 2002; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019).

It is not easy to grasp the view of children, although these changes can be overcome through the innovative and qualitative methodology. Visual methods are strongly suggested for research with children (Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008). Drawings are known as a fun, creative, and facilitating tool for research among children which enables them to convey thoughts, emotion and memories which are not easy to be expressed by words (Brechet, D'Audigier, & Audras-Torrent, 2020; Clark, 2005; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019). In various studies, children were asked to draw their thoughts (Barker & Weller, 2003; Brechet et al., 2020; Ertaş et al., 2021; Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019). This non-verbal technique has some benefits. It does not require a quick response which gives children enough time to think and remember (Punch, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Miles, 2000; Hill, 2006). This technique enables children to have control over the activity by changing or adding (Miles, 2000). It acts as a sedative to calm children down to interact easier and as a stimulus to interpret and organize their narratives (Hill, 2006). Although mainly the drawing technique was used in psychology (Merriman & Guerin, 2006), there are some studies using children's drawings to investigate children's perception of the environmental crisis (King, 1994), to access how children draw nature (Ulker, 2012), to analyze children's perception of birds (Prokop, Kubiak, & Fančovičová, 2007) and a few in tourism investigating children's perception towards museum exhibits and museum environment (Kisovar-Ivanda, 2014) and children's tourism perception (Ertaş et al., 2021).

Interaction with nature and responsible behavior

Environmental problems are universal issues so environmental education is getting great importance everywhere. Mahidin and Maulan (2012) argue that environmental irresponsible behaviour is the reason for a lack of interaction between children and the environment. If this interaction can be established from a young age, it will be more helpful since what children experience throughout childhood might impact their behaviour and attitude later in life (Mahidin & Maulan, 2012; Mohammadi & Pearce, 2020). The interaction includes contacts with nature, aesthetic attractiveness, and recreational purposes (Talbot & Kaplan, 1984). Children can understand and perceive environmental matters (Davis, 2009). A positive link with nature can help children gain a sense of environmental responsibility and appreciation (Ernst & Burcak, 2019). Educating children and equipping them with critical thinking is what education for sustainability is focused on to prepare the new generation to cope with new conditions (Green, 2017;

Sterling, 2012; Ernst & Burcak, 2019). The interaction with nature gives a quality observational and self-learning experience to children which facilitates sustainability behavior (Davis, 2009; Schill, Godefroit-Winkel, & Hogg, 2020). Environmental education relies heavily on play, engagement, and exploration of nature (Ernst & Burcak, 2019) which can be done in the form of a nature holiday that provides affective, cognitive, and behavioural experiences. In the light of these considerations, this chapter focuses on the experience of children during nature holidays to evaluate their perception and potentials to behave responsibly toward the environment.

METHOD

Sampling. Cluster and simple random sampling were used to choose students from primary schools in Tehran, Iran, to create a well-distributed sample based on socio-cultural and economic criteria. Children from nine to 12 were targeted based on Piaget's (1969) child development theory which states children at this age level are intellectually and socially developed and they can draw detailed outcome of their thoughts. In total 105 children participated. Iran has great biodiversity and is a good choice to be studied as it is so potential for investing in environmental holidays. For Iranians, being in nature is a must when travelling (Pearce & Mohammadi, 2019). The fascination stems from a cultural practice of camping along rivers and on beaches. Many Iranian children have spent a long time in nature since they were very young.

Data collection. To get started, a warmup activity took place by talking about travelling. In order not to create a subjective mindset, no proposed drawings were shown to them, and they were asked to draw their best holiday, whatever they remember and was attractive to them. Later only 72 nature-related drawings were collected for analysis which is sufficient for exploratory research with a novel method (Rhoden, Hunter-Jones, & Miller, 2016). Children were given a gift of a drawing kit for the activity. No kind of limit or interfaces from the researcher was applied. Listening to Children's own stories and interpretations of the drawings is an aid while using drawing technique which can provide a better image. (Punch, 2002; Clark, 2005). After the end of the artwork, each child was, in turn, telling his/her story of the drawing (Punch, 2002; Clark, 2005) and any of their environmental responsible behaviour accompanied with some short questions such as how they do practice environmental responsible behaviour while they are on holiday or what they have experienced, seen, or heard. These were open topics that are arranged to stimulate conversation about the aspects of responsible behaviour. The questions serve merely as a framework. Persian language was used by the participants which was translated into English by the researcher. Authorized permission was issued by the Department of education (Tehran) and required consent were taken from children and their guardians. For privacy, all collected data were stored anonymously with codes.

Data analysis. Analyzing children's drawings can be done in a projective or content-based manner. (Merriman & Guerin, 2006). The process of analyzing may face some difficulties as the result of the difference in drawing ability of the children, the importance, and the effect of the socio-cultural context of the children on the drawings and the presence of explicit elements. Due to the aim of this study, the focus is on the content of the drawing. The holiday drawing analytical model (Mohammadi & Pearce, 2020) was used as a framework. The first phase of this framework extracts the objects, the second phase searches for the tourism system elements and the third phase considers different levels of the experience. Analyzing the drawings and stories were done through manual thematic analysis (O'Leary, 2014). The information from the stories was summarized and categorized into environmental responsible behaviour themes. Excel 2016 and a free online word cloud tool (inforgram.com) was used to visualize the main key themes. In terms of reliability and validity, an external researcher repeated the coding, and a high degree of similarity was achieved between the coders.

human interactions which are reported 62.6 % in this study. These human interactions develop opportunities for discussion and learning especially when it is with peers. In the literature it was reviewed that children are a bit scared of too open areas, data also showed they prefer and enjoy small-scale spaces as it was proved with 79% of small-scale drawings. Children in this study showed high interests (76.4%) to travel to rural areas than urban. Data showed children prefer the natural environments with human interactions. In 62.5% of their drawings, they showed interest to participate with their family members, friends, and a group of people. The main activities observed are relaxing in nature, camping, enjoying the beauty, nature trekking, climbing, beach activities (including sunbathing, swimming, making sandcastles, boat riding, fishing), water sports, visiting aquariums, zoos and natural parks (Figure 2).

: INSERT FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE:

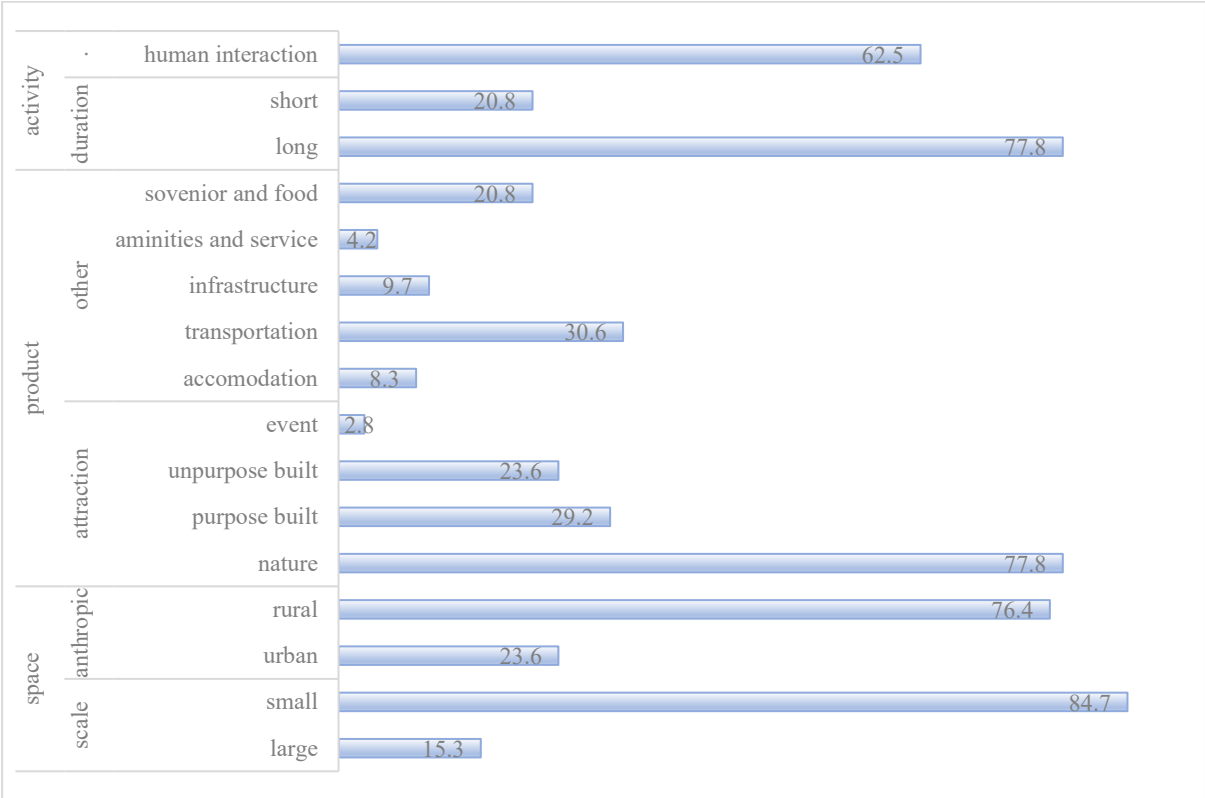


Fig 2. Children’s perception of nature holiday

Considering children’s nature holiday experiences based on the Orchestra model of experience (Pearce, 2011; Mohammadi, 2020), the dominant elements are affective experience followed by cognitive and sensory experience (Figure 3). Interaction with nature elicits both pleasant and unpleasant emotions (Tapsell, 1997; Talbot and Kaplan, 1984). Children mainly reported positive affections such as happiness, joy and surprise while some negative feelings recorded when they observed irresponsible behaviours such as littering on the beach or squandering energy. Children's good associations with nature and its positive leadings emotional consequences have a specific impact on their responsible behaviour toward nature (Vaselinoska, Petrovska, & Zivanovic, 2010). Analysing the cognitive level of the experience shows children have knowledge of both general environmental concepts and skills and strategies. This awareness is used to decide on what to do, they select the activities. They believe they can act an important role in deciding to behave responsibly. According to the data, children search for information about the place, ask questions to know the place and decide on the activities. They believe they can have a significant influence in determining how to behave responsibly. Learning as a factor of

the cognitive experience is reported 35.2% by children as Radic (2019) stated children are eager to learn on holidays. The experience level is largely disregarded when dealing with children in sustainability studies, even though it is where we should focus our efforts to motivate and educate children on what is required to save the planet's future. Children's greatest sensory experiences were through seeing and feeling; hence these two senses may be the most significant in their learning process.

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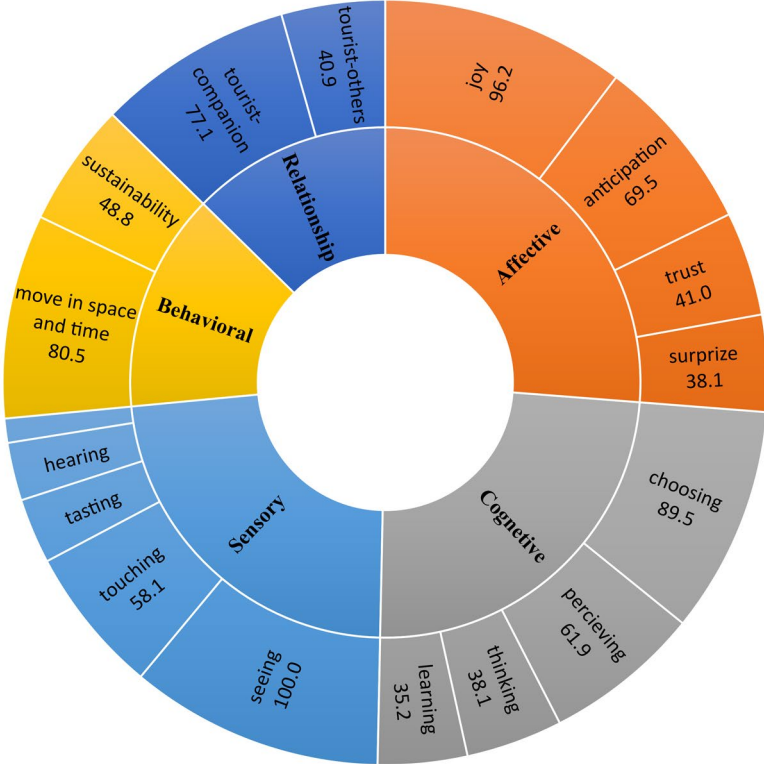


Fig 3. Children's nature holiday experience levels

The behavioural component of the orchestra model (Fig. 3) showed 80.5% are interested in spending time exploring natural spaces. This figure is close to the results of a study by TNS (2007) on Asian children showed 15% of children were very concerned about the environment and 43% were moderately concerned. Schill et al. (2020) discussed how past experiences as a behavioral component of the social cognitive theory acts a big role in proactive behavior of children. Interestingly, 48.8% of children shared some thoughts on responsible behaviour which can be resulted from the self-learning through observation and interaction with nature or/and from past experiences in nature. The responsible behavior thoughts are categorized under sustainability in the model. A more in-depth theme analysis of the children's responsible behaviour was conducted based on what they said about their drawings in their stories. Six environmental responsible behaviour themes emerged from the analysis. Table 1 represents the themes and a few sample quotes from children's stories.

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Table 1. Environmental responsible behaviour themes

Themes	Sample quotes from children's stories
Litter and recycling	<p>"We take our dishes to nature in order not to use disposable dishes and we bring our litters home with us."</p> <p>"Litters are everywhere around us and make nature ugly and unpleasant I have been to the Caspian beach and I don't like to go back again instead I want to go to Turkey where their beaches are clean."</p>

	<i>"It is very important to have recycle bins in the parks but if there is no bin, we should take the litter, or we always have a little bin inside the car as my mum showed me a cat who caught its mouth with a can lid."</i>
Energy conservation	<i>"I have been to a hotel in Kish and there was a 'save our planet' sign which asks for using towels more than once and don't request changing sheets every day. There was information on how much water is wasting every day! Interesting! they are green hotels and I love them as they save energy." "My grandparents live in Yazd. They have photovoltaic panels on the roof, which is used to warm the water... there was a hotel in Yazd which had high wind catchers to keep the hotel room cool during the summer. It is interesting that in old days people were cleverer than us." "while staying in a hotel we should not overheat or overcool it because we have paid for the room we should know if we overuse the energy so other people will not have enough energy to live with."</i>
Flora and fauna	<i>"I love trees to sit under their shadow and read a book or rest it is the best thing to do I have planted a tree in our garden in Chalous to have a big tree when I grow up." "We stayed in a hotel in the jungle. I think hotels should not be built in the jungles as they cut the trees to build new buildings in this way, we will have no jungles, so animals come to cities to find food and people get scared and kill them and they will be extinct." "I love zoo as they take care of animals which are rare and need help... like Persian Cheetah which can attract lots of tourists to come and see it...I don't feed animal without permission."</i>
Water conservation	<i>"If we waste water, we cannot see jungles anymore and there would be no place to see the animals and beautiful green trees." "I take short showers and while brushing my teeth I turn off the tap." "I visit Urmia lake every year and I see the water is disappearing... I am worried if the lake disappears totally, I love it."</i>
Pollution	<i>"My father decided to buy a hybrid car as it has no pollution." "Some days, I cannot go to school as the pollution level is high and dangerous for children, I wish I was living in a village."</i>
Caring for the earth	<i>"Erath is our mum; we should respect it." "Travelling to Japan, I saw how people care about their environment but in Iran people are not responsible." "I think we need to be responsible for the future. If we destroy the earth, there would be no more scenic places to visit by others."</i>

Litter free holiday is a recurring theme in children's stories. Litter in nature is one of the elements giving them a negative feeling. They are concerned about disposal of waste and how it can aesthetically and ecologically damage the environment as the concern and knowledge of recycling was observed in the work by Schill et al. (2020). Energy conservation is another concern for children. Children are mostly interested in innovative techniques and strategies to preserve energy and believe that energy is valuable. Hammad, Ahmad, and Papastathopoulos (2017) mentioned children's concerns for energy. Their concern for plants and animals is categorized as Flora and Fauna. This study shows children are not only concerned with their own lives but also, they care about plants, animals, biodiversity, and the ecosystem (Tiltman, 1994; Mahidin & Mulaun, 2012). They believe animals needs protection by not destroying their natural habitat, keep safe distancing or not feeding them with inappropriate sources. The next theme is water conservation. They shared their thoughts on consequences of irresponsible use of water such as endangering the ecosystem which will hurt them. Water has always played a positive role in children's emotion and attention to the environment in term of aesthetic attractiveness and entertainment (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989, Mahidin & Maulan, 2012). Pollution is another theme extracted from their stories. A few of the children mentioned pollution as the result of transportation in their stories. The context of this study as a polluted city explains the perception and concern. Children perceived the pollution as a restriction and experienced the primary consequences of it. The pollution-free concept was reported by children in a study by Green (2017) and Hammad et al., (2017). The final theme is caring for the earth. Interestingly, children think of the consequences of irresponsible behaviour. They have belief in shared sources and their accountability for the future of the planet to save the planet for the next generation.

They expressed that social networking has taught them a lot about how to behave responsibly. The influence of communication with family and peers is discussed by Schill et al. (2020) as the influential environmental determinants for children's agency.

CONCLUSION

This chapter considers the motivating role of nature holidays in conducting children's environmental responsible behaviour from a qualitative perspective in a family context. This study emphasizes the importance of actively including children in sustainable tourism research since they are the planet's future defenders. Children's nature holiday experience happens like an orchestra which highs and lows in sensory, affective, and cognitive experience. Learning is supported by sensory and affective elements, and it is boosted by family communication. These knowledge and concern will shape the onsite as well as the future responsible behaviour. Children's drawings and stories showed that they are able to understand and perceive environmental issues and have found themselves responsible for what is happening in the environment. They respect the environment and are willing to take action. They are ready to begin the transformation. Early ages interactions with nature shape attitudes by developing friendships, gratitude, and a sense of belonging to the environment. Such experiences allow children to chart their environmental responsible behaviour paths as adults. Repurposing the activities of nature holidays and use the setting for informal, fun educational purposes foster knowledge, sensitivity, and responsibility.

Through nature tourism, children will not only receive a richer, more enduring, and meaningful attachment to the environment, but they will also understand more about how to make a more beneficial influence on the world. Some activities can be suggested to be provided on family nature holidays such as providing information on the ecosystem, encouraging them to search for information, increasing attention to the environmental issues by having fun discussion sessions, practicing conservation with the children in reality, helping them to observe biodiversity loss and playing brainstorming games on new alternative energies. Although this study was confined to a limited context, it demonstrated that children's environmental knowledge and awareness are greatly influenced by interaction with nature over the holiday. Commitment to the cause of environmental preservation can have a long-term influence on how younger generations see ecosystems. Future studies can conduct a longitudinal study on the long-term effects of repeated nature holidays over time.

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