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Children's representation about travel: A comparison between what children remember and what children desire

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1. Introduction

Developmental research recognises several functions of family, such as protective, affective, regulative, normative, predictive and representative (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; Brazelton & Greenspan, 2001; Stern, 1987). Across these functions, optimal parenting also involves recreational responsibility, that concerns the role parents have in providing children with a leisure environment and playful activities (Bornstein, 2007). Recently, one leisure activity that has become particularly important for families is the travel and tourism experience (Crompton, 1981; Lehto, Choi, & Lin, 2012; Shaw, 1997). Children are more and more involved in travelling, both with their families and their schools. Considering the world of education, currently out-of-class trips move a lot of students. For instance, ISTAT (Istituto Nazionale di Statistica) statistics about the school population in Italy claims that 2.6 million students travelled for cultural reasons in 2016 (128.000 classes), 40% of whom are children between 5 and 12 years old.

Family journeys have positive effects on social interactions between family members and can strengthen social connectedness, which contributes to the development of social identity (Schanzel, Yeoman, & Backer, 2012). Furthermore, leisure activities such as holidays are characterised by higher expectations about the quality of the experience, higher levels of involvement, more time spent together and more intense interactions between family members than in other kinds of activities (Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, & Havitz, 2008; Shaw, 1997).

Many research studies have recognised that children play an important role in the decision-making process regarding family trips (Bakir, Rose, & Shoham, 2006; Darley & Lim, 1986; Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Khoo-Lattimore, DelChiappa, & Yang, 2018; Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Cheah, 2015; Nanda, Hu, & Bai, 2006). Some studies that have explored the family decision-making process about trips, show that family trips are influenced by children's desires (Bronner & de Hoog, 2008; Filiatrault & Ritchie, 1980; Fodness, 1992; Tagg & Seaton, 1994; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004). However, these works have mostly focused on the parents/adults' perspectives, neglecting the "voice of the children" (Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001; Pearce & Stringer, 1991; Poria & Timothy, 2014; Small, 2008). Khoo-Lattimore (2015), underlines five methodological considerations which should be taken into account with young respondents: the participant's phase of development, props, prompts, positionality of the researcher and pre-requisites for research with children. These requirements help us to "understand the development of various competences in children, as well as their own skill set for interviewing children" (p.854). Poria and Timothy (2014) suggest some possible reasons explaining the lack of research about the child's representations of travel. Among these reasons, they underline the researchers'lack of expertise in the developmental field, little knowledge on the methods traditionally used with children, (e.g., storytelling) and little adherence to developmental theories. For example, following Piaget's theory on cognitive development, scholars should consider travelling as an opportunity of cognitive decentration (Piaget & Inhelder, 1947). Indeed, children can get in touch with different cultures and places, whose appreciation requires the acknowledgement of new points of view.

Besides being an opportunity to overcome intellectual egocentrism, travels provide also a chance for learning (Casella, 1997; Gmelch, 1997; Langley & Breese, 2005; LaTorre, 2011; Laubscher, 1994; Lemet & Lemet, 1982; Steves, 2009). Indeed, travel influence the way in which people interpret experience, and thus it promotes personal growth and allows to assume different perspectives on the self. Graburn (1983) suggests that travel experiences can deeply influence the formation of identity and aspirations. Furthermore, he claims that these kinds of experiences could have strong effects on children's awareness of the historical, natural and geographical realities, influencing their future lifestyles and their recreational behaviour as well as autobiographical experiences. Thus, the educative potential of travel and its influence on personal growth should be considered in order to create tourist services that are tailored on children's needs.

Starting from this assumptions, it seems necessary to further investigate children's representations of tourism, working "with" them and not "about" them (Poria & Timothy, 2014). Hence, the study of children's memories about their tourism experiences may be one good way to let them raise their voice.

Furthermore, the need to explore children's representations of the travel experience emerged in the context of a broader Italian project (CAB – Città Ai Bambini), whose aim was to implement new tourism services tailored on children's needs and desires.

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In this study, we looked at two different, but complementary aspects of memory, that are the reminiscences of past experiences (retrospective memory) and the ideal expectations about their future (prospective memory) (McDaniel & Einstein, 2001). The latter are deeply influenced by the former, because the memories of the past predict the expectations of the future; at the same time, the meaning of past events depends on the expectations that have been built about those events, including our desires and our ideals. This is also true for travel. When we plan a journey, we are inspired by our past travel experiences, and when we are going to travel, we have expectations about the upcoming events.

In literature about children and tourism, there are studies that have mostly investigated memories of past experiences, especially real trips that children have made with school. However, there is little research about ideal trips, which reflect children's wishes and desires about the journeys that they would like to take.

1.1. Real trip: What children remember about trips

By the age of 9–10, children have generally lived experiences of travel with their family or school. Trips are emotional experiences during which children may explore new places, learn new things, and meet new people, and these factors dramatically impact autobiographical memory (Farmer, Knapp, & Benton, 2007; Knapp, 2000; Larsen & Jenssen, 2004; Small, 2008). In the field of research about children's tourism, scholars have mostly investigated school trips and specifically the effects of these extra-curricular experiences on learning and memory (Farmer et al., 2007; Fivush, Hudson, & Nelson, 1984; Jones, Eagles, Fallis, & Hodge, 1994; Knapp, 2000; Knapp & Barrie, 2001; Knapp & Poff, 2001; Palmberg & Kuru, 2000). Overall, these studies demonstrated that participants' knowledge was greatly improved from these types of trip; in other words, informal educational experiences positively influence children's formal education. Moreover, informal field trips also promoted a positive attitude toward different subjects. For example, Knapp (2000) has conducted an evaluation on elementary school students (third and fourth-grade students) who attended an environmental science programme. He found that this trip promoted children's curiosity and interest toward the subject and destination of the trip. These results are probably linked to the novel setting of the experience. Overall, these experiences seem to be effective in promoting memory and learning.

Similar results have been found in another work (Farmer et al., 2007). The authors found that, after one year from an excursion to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, fourth grade elementary students reported a lot of memories related to environmental and ecological issues.

Taken together, these studies demonstrated that when children appreciate a travel experience, they remember it in positive terms, with positive consequences on their learning and their knowledge. This is due to certain factors, such as the novelty of the trip's setting, social interaction and the information sharing of the tourist visit, the prior knowledge about the topic of the visit, and finally the individuals' interests and motivation in particular topics (DeWitt & Storksdieck, 2008).

The above-mentioned factors can be effective not only for school trips, but also for leisure travel. For example, the novelty of the place, the social interaction and the personal motivation may explain the positive attitude toward travel in children and may contribute to making the trip a positive experience that consequently affects the autobiographical memory of that experience. Concerning the social dimension, travelling “with” was more important than travelling “to or from” (Small, 2008); in fact, social interaction is important during the entire trip, from the departure until the return, when people are usually engaged in the recollection of trip memories (Larsen & Jenssen, 2004).

A small number of scholars have examined children's memory of leisure travel, focusing on what children remember about their experience. Children at the age of 3 and 4 years were interviewed about their visit to Disneyland, 6 months and 18 months after the trip (Hamond & Fivush, 1991). All the children remembered a great number of details. In particular, children tended to remember activities, such as those performed by them, and descriptions, such as information linked to the environment, rather than explanations (reasons why certain things happened) or statements about affect (all the references associated with affective, physical and mental states). Specifically, the older children recounted more detailed narratives and remembered more information spontaneously than the younger children. An important factor that contributed to the memories of this trip was the sharing of narratives with parents.

Hilbrecht et al. (2008) have explored children's experiences of family vacations. Children between 10 and 12 years of age were interviewed about their travel experiences, with the goal of exploring their feelings, activities, social interactions, desires and what they have appreciated, or not, about their travels. The authors found that three aspects were really important for children: fun, novelty and familiarity of the activities, and social connections. Indeed, children seem to prefer and to remember the moments of fun better. Moreover, during holidays, children appreciate doing new activities and unusual adventures that represent a break from their routine where they have to face uncommon situations. In this way, they can feel independent, but in a safe environment provided by the family. Finally, children like to share these experiences with significant others, such as parents and peers. Because travelling is a key opportunity to strengthen those close relationships.

In our opinion, in order to explore what children really like and how they perceive a journey, it is not sufficient to simply investigate memories of their past trips, but it is important to ask them directly about what they would like to do on an ideal trip.

1.2. Ideal trip: What children desire

The worlds imagined by children create a framework or context in which they can act out their fantasies. By analysing these fantasies, it is possible to have a direct look at what children appreciate in a journey and which is their travel representation. However, no studies have explored this field. One exception is an extensive work about the role of the media in influencing children's imagination, conducted by a group of researchers from four countries, Germany, Israel, South Korea and the United States (Götz, Lemish, Moon, & Aidman, 2014). With the goal of exploring the impact of media on children's imagination, scholars asked children ranged from 8 to 10 years old to imagine a fantasy trip – organised by adults – and then to write and draw what they imagined. Scholars identified nine broad “world” categories: harmony and peace, conflict and threat, amusement, foreign land, supernatural power, travel, sensual pleasure, royalty and technology. Many children imagined worlds in which utter harmony of nature, animals and humans prevailed, where they were free to explore and enjoy themselves. In many instances, the children envisioned their loved ones – family and friends – to be there with them. Another notable world is “travel”, in which children imagine travelling to all kinds of faraway geographical areas, countries, time periods, and beyond this world into space. The central theme is being on a journey. These children dreamed about being “on the road” and the journey seemed to be as important as the destination. Sometimes, children take a best friend or family members with them. In another type of world, a world of sensual pleasure, children frequently emphasised the many “good things” in life, such as candies, chocolate and other treats. The other themes involve fantastic worlds, battles, heroes and princesses, and also theme parks or other amusement parks, such as Disneyland. Khoo-Lattimore and Jihyun Yang (2018), claim that tourism products and brand messages have a big impact on the shared desires of the Chinese children's market. Indeed “children are able to articulate their brands and associate them with positive experiences” (p. 12). Furthermore, this study shows that very young children understand the meaning of fun, recall which

product or service generates fun (water slides, bath tubs and connecting doors), and share memories from their family's travels. Children often include biographical references in their make-believe worlds, so that their fantasies are entangled with traces of real-life experiences. They imagine their friends joining them in their fantasy world, and, in some cases, they do not admit parents because parents cause too much pressure. In half of the cases they are alone; in one third of the cases, they appear together with real others and much less often with a fantasy character, even if there were many characters from media world. Thus, media plays a central role in children's make-believe worlds, but without suffocating their ability to create imaginary worlds. Overall, this research demonstrated the importance of investigating children's imagination in relation to travel.

Representations of real and imagined trips have been compared in a sample of high school students (Morgan & Xu, 2009). The authors aimed to study in more detail how past experiences influenced future travel aspirations, by asking students to report on their most memorable trip and the trip of their dreams. Specifically, the students were asked, "What is the most memorable or enjoyable place you have visited?" and "What is your dream country for a holiday?" In both cases they were also asked "Why?". Concerning the places of the actual trips, results showed that the majority of students reported the Mediterranean area as the most remembered destination of their travels (e.g., Spain, Portugal, France, Croatia, Greece, Cyprus or Turkey). Concerning the reasons of the choice of a specific memorable locality, results found "fun with friends and family" to be the most mentioned. Here the destination was less important than the people they travelled with, and the memory was of a significant social occasion. Regarding the dream destination, only 18% chose their dream country from the same region as their most memorable place. In fact, the most desirable places to visit are southern hemisphere countries, like Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. Students did not refer to specific reasons for their choice, even if one of the reasons was to experience a different culture. Overall, this study showed that a unique and memorable holiday experience was the result of a social interaction, either with the local culture or, more likely, with the group of friends or family with whom the students had travelled. This confirmed the importance given in the literature for social motivations for tourism (Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987; Ryan, 1997). In other words, what makes experiences memorable, and desirable, for many is the encounter with different peoples, lifestyles, landscapes and cities.

Starting from these findings and given the lack of investigations on children in this field, the purpose of our study was to explore the representations that children have about travel, by comparing two different representations on their past favourite trip and that on an ideal trip.

1.3. Travel as a narrative

Considering both the retrospective and perspective sides, narration is an effective way to study memory (Smorti, 2011; Smorti & Fioretti, 2016). Indeed, children's narration about travels reflects the way in which they organise their experiences, providing them with a personal meaning. Future events can also be organised through this narrative process. In this research, we use narration to explore travel representations in children, asking a sample of 9- and 10-year-olds to narrate two kinds of stories: one about a real trip, that gleans information from autobiographical memory; the other one about an ideal trip, based on wishes and desires.

There are several motivations to explain the use of the construction of stories to investigate travel memories. Narration is a is a privileged tool that allows to understand the meaning children give to tourist experiences, and children make past experiences and memories meaningful through the narrative process (Bruner, 2002). Narration can also help them in the construction of a personal representation of the travel (Pudliner, 2007), providing it with a canonical structure that often follows the labovian model (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 2003). According to this model, stories are characterised by a plot with a complicating action (i.e., the moment when a problem arises) and a resolution (i.e., the moment when the problem is solved and balance is established again). Sometimes, these narratives include also an evaluation that provides information about the child's point of view and opinion on the events; As several scholars have observed, narrative and travel are strictly and reciprocally linked (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994; McCabe & Foster, 2006; Mikkonen, 2007; Servidio & Ruffolo, 2016; Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003). The journey is considered a symbol of narrative. In fact, "the narrative potential of travel lies in the fact that we recognise in it temporal and spatial structures that call for narration. The different stages of travel – departure, voyage, encounters on the road, and return – provide any story with a temporal structure that raises certain expectations of things to happen" (Mikkonen, 2007, p. 286). Similarly, narrative can be seen as a journey; in fact, narrative, for its structure of development, growth and change, is considered as a physical process of movement, disruption, and return (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994); Overall, people share their travel experiences with others via narration. According to McCabe and Foster (2006), the natural attitude of the tourist is a "narrativistic" attitude, because the recounting of the experiences requires the development of a story. The recounting of the tourism experience is essential for the formation of individual and social identity (McCabe & Foster, 2006; Yoo, Lee, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2009). Narration is also critical for autobiographical memory (Smorti, 2011; Smorti & Fioretti, 2016). Overall, people travel to remember (Ernst, 2006; Wirtz et al., 2003) and also to share their memories with others (McCabe & Foster, 2006). The recounting of the journey permits the consolidation of experiences in the long-term memory, since personal narrative is considered an elaborative rehearsal of memory (Tulving & Craik, 2000).

All these studies have mainly concentrated on the adult population, although narration can be an effective way to investigate travel representations in children (Poria & Timothy, 2014). To date, scholars have mostly investigated school trips, and specifically what children remember about their journeys (Farmer et al., 2007; Fivush et al., 1984; Knapp, 2000; Knapp & Barrie, 2001; Knapp & Poff, 2001; Palmberg & Kuru, 2000). However, except for a few studies (Götz et al., 2014; Hilbrecht et al., 2008), researchers have neglected to explore children's desires, in particular what children would like to do on an imaginary trip.

1.4. The current study

In order to investigate children's autobiographical memories, as well as their expectations about tourist experiences, which might come from school trips or family holidays, school-aged children were asked to write down narrations about these experiences. In the first task, children had to write down their memories of the most enjoyable trip they have ever had; in the second task, they had to write about their ideal trip, in order to explore their imaginary expectations about a tourist visit. The children were invited to concentrate on their experiences of visiting a place and to construct a narration about these experiences.

The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore representations children have of a trip, analysing the differences between the two types of written narration (real trip vs. ideal trip). Our interest is to deepen linguistic features of these representations, starting from the idea that children at this age are able to express both memories and expectations through language. It is supposed that the narration of real trips draws directly on children's repertoire of autobiographical memories. As for the ideal trip, it is expected that imaginative and fantasy components play a vital role in determining children's representation in travel.

Table 1
Summary of the analyses of the current study.

Content analysis	Travel destination	Geographic place (Italy, Europe, World)
		Environment (urbanistic/naturalistic)
	Kind of place	Real/Fantasy
	Childrens actions	Hedonistic/Fact finding/Social
	Animals	Presence/Absence
	Celebrities	Presence/Absence
Structure analysis	Overall organisation of the story	Narrative plot/list of events
	Complicating action	Presence/Absence
	Narrative style	Cognitive/Descriptive
	Evaluation	Presence/Absence
Lexical analysis	Pronouns	I/We
	Words related to cognitive processes	Causation/Insight/Discrepancy
	Words related to affective or emotional processes	Positive Emotions/Positive Feelings/Optimism and Energy/Negative Emotions/Anger/Sadness
	Temporal verbs	Past/Present/Future/Conditional
	Temporal and causal connection words	Words indicating the links between events
	Words referred to others	Words indicating references to friends/to family/to humans

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

One hundred and eighty children aged 9–10 years participated in the study. Eighteen participants were excluded because they did not respond correctly to the task. All participants were students in two primary schools in Tuscany, a region in central Italy. The final sample (N = 162, 54.3% female) was split in two groups: 70 children (33 males and 37 females) wrote about a real trip and the other 92 children (41 males and 51 females) wrote about an ideal trip. Most of the participants were Italian. Only the 5.6% of them came from other European or International countries. There were no children with learning disabilities in the sample. The school deans informed the researchers that all children had experienced trips with their family or school. The data collection was conducted during two hours of the daily school program.

2.2. Procedure

Two primary schools were contacted: one was located in San Casciano (a village with a population of 17,129 in the district of Florence) and one in Follonica (a village with a population of 21,339 in the district of Grosseto). Both villages were representative of the population of the Tuscan region. The aims of the study were explained to the deans and to the teachers of the schools. The parents or legal tutors of all the participants were asked to provide their informed consent to the research. After all informed consent had been returned, contact with the children was established in their class, in order to create a confidential and calm atmosphere. After the introduction the topic of the research (i.e., travel and city visits), every child received a sheet containing a prefilled code to guarantee anonymity. In order to investigate either their memories or desires regarding tourist experiences, the children in the classrooms were randomly divided into two conditions: 70 children were requested to narrate a real trip, and the other 92 to narrate an ideal one. The slight difference in number of participants belonging to each group was due to the different numerosity of the classes that adhered to the research. The first task asked about a memory of an experienced trip (e.g., a school trip, a trip with the family), that children considered as their most enjoyable trip. In the second task, children were asked to write down an imagined trip in order to investigate their dreams, desires and expectations. The decision to provide the two groups with different tasks was motivated by the aims of avoiding the confounding effects of tiredness and task order. Indeed, the narration of a real trip experience could impact the narration of the other type of the story and vice versa. Children in the first condition received the following oral instruction:

> "…So, children! Have you ever been on a trip with your class, your parents or friends? (…) We would like all of you to tell us in detail about the most enjoyable trip you have done in your life".

The children in the second condition listened to the following instruction:

> "… We would like all of you to tell us in detail about the most enjoyable trip that you could imagine, as the trip of your dreams".

No further instructions were given and there was no time limit. In case of need, teachers were allowed to provide their support to children. Once the stories completed, children returned to their class activities.

2.3. Measures

The method of this work is grounded in narrative research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Starting from this methodology, we analysed three main dimensions of the stories, that appeared more adequate to investigate children's representations about travel experiences: the content, the structure and the lexical dimensions of the stories (see Table 1). The content analysis allowed to extrapolate information about some recurrent components of the travel that were mentioned in the narratives; the structure analysis, provided information about the stylistic nature of different kinds of children's stories; finally, through the lexical analysis, some affective, cognitive and social aspects of children's travel narratives emerged. The analysis of these three dimensions was particularly adequate to investigate children's representations about travel, because they provided an overall picture of what children like of their travels, how they structure a story about them and which words they use to talk about them.

2.3.1. Content of story

The content analysis was preceded by a preliminary analysis of both the real and ideal stories, according to a bottom-up process and supported by the existing literature. The data was analysed separately by two expert researchers of narrative psychology. From this preliminary analysis, the following important variables were assessed:

- Travel destination, including:
  - the geographic place (i.e., Italy, Europe, world).
  - the environment: (i.e., urban or naturalistic environment)
- The duration of the travel: not specified, a one-day excursion, a more than one day trip.
- The kind of place: real place (e.g., city or country), fantasy place (e.g., Candy Land). This dimension was considered only for the ideal trip condition.
- The context of the trip: city tour (including focuses on archaeological sites or museums), theme parks (also including the fantasy places of the ideal trip narratives), natural environment (e.g., natural parks, mountain trekking, countryside trips), seaside, cruises.

We also took note of unspecified contexts.

- The reason for the trip: unspecified, family holiday, school trip, recreational activity (e.g., trips with family and friends, sport team trips).
- Children's actions: hedonistic (e.g., leisure and enjoying activities), fact finding (e.g., actions to increase knowledge), social actions (e.g., activities shared with other people)
- Presence vs. absence of animals (e.g., children and their pets or animals met in the environment)
- Presence vs. absence of celebrities (e.g., singers, actors, football players)

To test the homogeneity of the data analysis implemented, a K of Cohen test was run and a high degree of crossover was found for each dimension: geographic place (K = 1.00), duration (K = 1.00), environment (K = 0.89), the kind of place (K = 1.00), context (K = 0.94), reason for the trip (K = 1.00), children's actions (K = 0.93), presence of animals (K = 1.00), presence of celebrities (K = 1.00).

2.3.2. Structure of the story

For the exploration of the structure of the stories, we analysed the final corpora of each story through a scale that was realised ad hoc for this project. Starting from Labov's work on psycholinguistic analysis (Labov, 1972; Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Labov & Waletzky, 2003), we evaluated the stories according the following dimensions:

- Overall organisation of the story. This dimension included two categories: narrative plots and lists of events. These two kinds of narratives refer to two different narrative genres: the former is more similar to realistic stories, that are structured on a series of connected events, following Labov's model (e.g., "*My favourite trip was when I went with my family to several cities. The city that I really preferred was Genoa because we went to the Aquarium and we saw many fishes and jumping dolphins"*); the latter comprises all the stories that do not adhere to the Labovian structure, but are organised as simple scripts, made of a list of unconnected events and elements (e.g., "(...) *In this city there is the Colosseum (where gladiators fight), motocross racers, infinite Wi-Fi, infinite money, many televisions, Pokémons, mythological animals, some puppies, famous singers and dancers, telephones and tablets, the most important historical monuments, restaurants where you can eat every meal in the world, raining consoles and video games"*)
- Presence/absence of complicating actions (e.g., "*On the last day we went to a little snow park in Aosta, but the ski-lift was frozen"*)
- Narrative style. This dimension idenitified two different styles: cognitive style (e.g., "*The third day was the best, because it was snowing and it was amazing because I had never seen snow before"*) and descriptive style (e.g., "*We went to rest in the hotel and then we went out for dinner. On the second day we went to the huge M&M's shop and we walked a lot"*)
- Presence/absence of evaluations of the trip experience (e.g., "*It was a really beautiful week and it was very special because I spent some time with my best friend"*).

A K of Cohen test was run for each dimension: overall organisation of the story (K = 0.93), complicating action (K = 0.89), narrative style (K = 0.88), evaluation (K = 1.00).

2.3.3. Lexical of story

The final corpora of the children's stories was explored with the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count software (LIWC, Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001). For the specific interest of the project the study variables were the following:

- Pronouns: "I" and "we" that provide information about the way in which the narrator posits him/herself in the text.
- Words related to cognitive processes: causation (e.g., because, effect, hence), insight (e.g., think, know, consider), and discrepancy (e.g., should, would, could), as they are important in investigating the cognitive processes of the narrator.
- Words related to affective or emotional processes: positive emotions (e.g., happy, pretty, good), positive feelings (e.g., happy, joy, love), optimism and energy (e.g., certainty, pride, win), negative emotions (e.g., hate, worthless, enemy), anger (e.g., hate, kill, annoyed) and sadness or depression (e.g., grief, cry, sad). These words provide information about the emotiveness of the story.
- Verbal forms: past tense verbs (e.g., walked, were, had), present tense verbs (e.g., walk, is, be), future tense verbs (e.g., will, might, shall) and conditional (e.g., would, could, should). These variables explain the temporal collocation attributed to the event.
- Temporal (e.g., when, then) and causal (e.g., for, because) connection words which provide information about the narrative structure of the story. A story which is rich in these elements tends to have a higher probability of being understandable and well structured.
- Words indicating references to friends (e.g., buddy, pal, fellow students), to family (e.g., parents, brother, cousin) and to humans (e.g., girl, woman, group). These variables provide information about the subjective importance of sharing the experience and with whom it is shared.

3. Results

For the content analysis, the frequency of the variables considered among the two conditions (real trip vs. ideal trip) was compared by a Chi Square Test. For structure analysis, the two types of narration (real trip vs. ideal trip) were compared using the Mann-Whitney *U* test. Finally, aiming to confront the lexicon of the two types of narration (real trip vs. ideal trip), the means of the LIWC variables were compared, using a Student *t*-test for all variables.

3.1. Content analysis

We explored the content of the children's real and ideal stories, by assessing the frequency of the variables (see Table 2) and comparing them using a Chi Square test. Concerning the travel destination, in the real trip group, the majority of children visited Italy (58.6%), as opposed to only 4.3% of the ideal trip group who chose Italy as a possible destination for imaginary travel. The majority of the participants in the ideal trip group (58%) mentioned foreign countries as possible destinations of their travel, whereas in the real trip condition this percentage was settled at 27% of the participants. Finally, 30% of participants of the ideal trip group did not refer to a specific place ("not specified places", i.e., imaginary places not identifiable), while in the real trip group children usually referred to a specific and identifiable place (χ 2 = 64.4, df = 2, $p < .001$).

Concerning the duration of the trip, in the real trip condition most of the children (69.0%) spent more than one day in the place visited, while 22.5% of the participants talked about a one-day excursion, and the remaining 8.5% did not specify the length of the experience. In the ideal trip condition, most children did not specify how long they remained in the place (63.4%), but among those who did, the majority preferred longer trips (32.3%) to one-day ones (4.3%).

Regarding the kind of place, in the ideal trip condition, the majority of children chose a realistic place (63%), but a moderate percentage talked about a fantasy world (37%).

Regarding the environment, 51.4% of children in the real trip group wrote about an urban environment, 25.7% and a naturalistic environment, and 22.9% of children mentioned both of these environments. Similarly, 48.9% of children in the ideal trip condition preferred to visit an urban environment, while 29.3% combined cities with naturalistic elements (χ 2 = 0.949, df = 2, p = ns).

Concerning the context of the trip, 47.9% of children in the real trip group described a trip in a city, 16.9% talked about a natural

Table 2
Percentages of dimensions' content analysis by condition (real trip vs ideal trip).

	Real trip (*N* = 70) %	Ideal trip (N = 92) %
Geographic place		
Italy	58.6	4.3
Europe	31.4	13
World	7.1	33.7
Italy and Europe	–	4.3
Italy and World	–	4.3
Europe and World	–	2.2
Italy and Europe and World	–	5.4
Not specified	2.9	32.8
Environment		
Urban	51.4	48.9
Naturalistic	25.7	21.8
Urban and Naturalistic	22.9	29.3
Children actions		
Hedonistic	28.6	30.4
Fact finding	17.1	14.1
Social	2.9	2.2
Hedonistic and fact finding	24.3	30.4
Hedonistic and social	17.1	13
Fact finding and social	2.9	4.5
Hedonistic and fact finding and social	7.1	5.4
Presence of animals	21.4	53.3
Presence of celebrities	8.6	14.1
Kind of the place		
Real place	98.6	63
Fantasy place	1.4	37

Note: Italy includes one or more places situated in Italy; Europe includes includes one or more places situated in Europe but not in Italy; World includes one or more places situated in the World but not in Europe.

environment, 16.9% about a seaside experience, 14.1% about theme parks, like Gardaland (a famous theme park in Italy) or Disneyland, and the remaining 4.2% recounted a cruise. In the ideal trip group, 48.4% of children talked about a trip in a city, 28.0% described an ideal theme park, 12.9% imagined a seaside experience and the remaining 10.8% focused on a natural environment, but nobody mentioned cruises. However, the distribution of the context in the two narrative conditions did not differ significantly (χ 2 = 9.036; df = 4; p = ns).

In the real trip group, for the majority of children, the reason underlying the travels was a family holiday (71.8%), while 19.8% of participants split equally between school trips and recreational activities. The residual 8.5% did not specify the reason for their trip. However, when children were asked to imagine their ideal trip they reported recreational activities as the main driver of their experience (41.9%), whereas 28.2% of participants mentioned a family holiday and 2.2% a school trip. The remaining 28.2% of children did not specify the motive for the trip. The Chi Square analysis shows a significant difference between the two groups of children concerning the reason for the travel (χ 2 = 43.487; df = 3; $p < .001$).

Regarding the children's activities, the majority of children in the real trip group spent time in hedonistic activities or in hedonistic and factfinding activities (28.6% and 24.3%). Similarly, in the real trip group, children mostly wrote about hedonistic (30.4%) and hedonistic and factfinding activities (30.4%) (χ 2 = 1.77, df = 2, p = ns). Regarding the presence of animals, we found a significant difference among the two conditions: 21.4% of the real trip group participants talked about animals as opposed to 53.3% of children from ideal trip group (χ 2 = 16.86, df = 2, p < .001). Finally, there were no differences in the presence of celebrities (8.6% in the real trip group vs. 14.1% in the ideal trip group (χ 2 = 1.19, df = 2, p = ns).

Below, the results of the content analyses are synthesised into two narratives from the real trip stories and the ideal trip stories.

The participant n.3 from real trip group wrote:

> "My favourite trip was the one to Bolsena Lake. After a journey of two hours, the bus left us in the enormous city of Bolsena. We went up a hill and a little bit later, we arrived at the museum […] After having visited the aquarium, the Etruscan ruins and other spots, we went to a terrace which had a very beautiful view […] We went down the hill but a friend of ours suddenly realised that he had forgotten his backpack, so he went back quickly to pick it up and we left again […] I had so much fun during this experience."

In this narration we can observe that the destination of the trip is an Italian city, where the environment is both urban ("*enormous city*") and naturalistic ("*hill*"), where the child experienced particularly hedonistic and fact-finding activities (e.g., "*visited the aquarium, the Etruscan ruins"; "I had so much fun during this experience"*).

The participant n. 97 from ideal trip group wrote:

> "I would like to go to Russia to my grandmother's place in St Petersburg. I would also like to go to Egypt with my best friend Noemi and visit all the monuments and maybe go inside a pyramid. Then I would like to go with her to Japan, to visit some friends who once couch surfed with us. Finally, I would like to go to Austin, America, to visit a friend of my Italian grandmother. In Italy I would like to go to Naples, but I would avoid the volcano, Vesuvius! Then I would go to the heel of Italy in Puglia and then I would go back to Castiglione della Pescaia, close to Grosseto".

In this narration, the child mostly wrote about foreign countries ("*Russia, America*") and also about moving from a place to another (e.g., Russia, America, Naples, Puglia). There are hedonistic and factfinding activities, but also social activities ("*to visit some friends who once couch surfed with us; visit all the monuments and maybe go inside a pyramid*").

In the following excerpt of a narrative from the ideal trip group, we can find the presence of a fantasy place.

> "Candy Land is a country that is totally made of sweets, where everything can be eaten. The streets are made of dark chocolate, the cars of ice-cream, the houses of gingerbread; the shops are made of marshmallows and the rivers and lakes are Nutella. The street signs are made of liquorice. The trees are made of chocolate sticks and the leaves of mint. The sky would be water and the clouds milk, the sun a lemon, the grass is salad and the people ice-cream" (Participant n. 85).

3.2. Structure analysis

Table 2 presents the percentages of the variables of the real trip narratives and the ideal trip narratives. Differences among real trip stories and ideal trip ones emerged when comparing their structure through a Mann-Whitney Test U. The way in which children narrated their story was significantly different (narrative plot: real trip 71.4%, ideal trip 33.7%, Mann-Whitney's U = 2005, $p < .001$; list of events: real trip 28.6%, ideal trip 66.3%, Mann-Whitney's U = 2005, p < .001). We found significant differences for complicating actions (presence of complicating actions: real trip 34.4%, ideal trip 7.6%, Mann-Whitney's U = 2361, p < .001) and of resolution (presence of resolution: real trip 14.3%, ideal trip 4.3%, Mann-Whitney's U = 29,000 $p < .05$). Similarly, we observed a significant difference in the way in which the narrator wrote about the travel experience: cognitive style (real trip 52.9%, ideal trip 29.3%, Mann-Whitney's U = 2463, $p < .01$); descriptive style (real trip 47.1%, ideal trip 70.7%, Mann-Whitney's U = 2463, p < .01). Furthermore, a significant difference was found regarding the presence of an evaluation of the experience of the narrated trip (presence of evaluation: real trip 64.3%, ideal trip 25%, Mann-Whitney's U = 1955, p < .001).

Below, you can find some examples of narratives that show differences in the structure of real and ideal trip stories.

The following is from the real trip group:

"It was a very beautiful day. I went to Follonica with my cousins […] We went by van and the mums sat in the back while the men were driving […] As soon as we arrived in Naples (at 20.15), we dropped the bags at the hotel. At 20.30 we wanted to take a little walk, but my cousin Filippo was tired and hungry, and he got angry. At 21.40 we went to have a good pizza. I had so much fun enjoying this experience […]" (Participant n.16).

In this story, we can find a narrative plot with a complicating action ("*My cousin Filippo was tired and hungry and he got angry*"), a resolution ("*At 21:40 we went to have a good pizza*"), and a final evaluation, like a coda ("*I had so much fun enjoying this experience*").

The participant n.147 in the ideal trip condition wrote:

"I would like to travel to Valencia, Spain. I would like to go there with my classmates and with other friends. I would like to visit the environment and Valencia on foot and to see as many parks as possible. I would like to have a tour in a hot-air balloon and to visit Valencia and Spain. I would like to find a little lake with whales and dolphins; I would like to travel along the city by tandem".

This narrative appears as a list of activities in which there is no a plot around a complicating action and a resolution.

3.3. Lexical analysis

Overall, children across the two experimental conditions wrote narratives of similar length. In the real trip condition, the mean number of words was M = 136.20 (SD = 72.27) and the mean number of words in the ideal trip condition was M = 124.46 (SD = 62.83).

The comparison between the two types of narration (real trip vs. ideal trip) with LIWC indicators (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations of variables) showed that the use of the pronoun "we" was more frequent in the real trip narrations compared to the ideal trip ones (t = 9.07, p = .001). Moreover, when children wrote about a real trip, they use more words of causality (t = 2.47, p = .014) and words of introspection (t = 1.93, p = .05), compared to the children who wrote about the ideal trip. Furthermore, the real trip narrations contained more verbs in the past tense (t = 14.74, p = .001) than the narrations of the other group. Also, the real trip narrations showed more causal (t = 2.37, p = .019) and temporal connections (t = 5.06, p = .001) compared to the ideal trip narrations. Finally, the real trip narrations contained more references to the familiar, compared to ideal, trip narrations (t = 2.75, p = .007) (Table 4).

Children made more use of the pronoun "I" in the ideal trip narrations compared to the real trip narrations (t = −4.69, p = .001). Regarding cognitive mechanisms, the ideal trip narrations contained more words of discrepancy (t = −7.14, p = .001). In addition, where emotional language is concerned, the ideal trip narrations contained more positive emotions compared to the narrations of the real trip condition (t = −1.98, p = .049). However, the ideal trip group used more words of sadness compared to the real trip group (t = −1.88, p = .06). Regarding the temporal structure, the children who wrote the ideal narrations used more verbs in the present (t = −2.50, p = .013), future (t = −3.04, p = .003) and conditional (t = −11.02, p = .001) tenses, compared to the children who wrote about their real experiences. Finally, the ideal trip narrations contained more references to friends (t = −3.84, p = .001) than the real trip narrations did.

Table 3
Percentages of dimensions of narrative structure by condition (real trip vs ideal trip).

	Real trip (N = 70) %	Ideal trip (N = 92) %
Narrative plot	71.4	33.7
List of events	28.6	66.3
Presence of a complicating action	34.4	7.6
Presence of a resolution	14.3	4.3
Cognitive style[a]	52.9	29.3
Descriptive style[a]	47.1	70.7
Presence of an evaluation	64.3	25

[a] These two categories are mutually exclusive.

Table 4
Means and standard deviations of LIWC indicators among the two experimental conditions (real trip vs ideal trip)*.

LIWC indicators	Real trip (N = 70) M (SD)	Ideal trip (N = 92) M (SD)
I	1.51 (1.56)	3.21 (2.70)
We	2.75 (2.51)	0.24 (0.78)
Causation	1.11 (1.16)	0.70 (0.91)
Insight	1.10 (1.27)	0.75 (1.07)
Discrepancy	1.02 (1.01)	3.29 (2.52)
Positive emotions	0.93 (0.99)	1.32 (1.39)
Positive feelings	3.03 (1.66)	2.87 (1.83)
Optimism and energy	0.20 (0.49)	0.28 (0.50)
Negative emotions	0.55 (0.79)	0.57 (0.99)
Anger	0.19 (0.42)	0.18 (0.48)
Sadness	0.13 (0.32)	0.31 (0.73)
Past	5.57 (2.75)	0.62 (1.45)
Present	6.10 (2.64)	7.28 (3.19)
Future	0.05 (0.23)	0.31 (0.69)
Conditional	0.21 (0.48)	3.93 (2.79)
Temporal connections	2.15 (1.60)	1.04 (1.19)
Causal connections	0.85 (1.05)	0.50 (0.80)
Friends	0.27 (0.55)	0.76 (0.94)
Family	1.04 (0.57)	1.29 (0.85)

* Descriptive statistics (percentages) have been calculated by the software out of the total word count of the collected texts.

These results are evident in the following narratives. The first one is drawn from the real trip group:

"On Sunday morning I woke up and mum and dad had prepared a snack and some water. I did not remember which day it was, so I went to check the calendar and… it was my birthday!! I asked my parents where we were going, and they answered: 'We are going to Gardaland!!' I was very happy because my dream had come true!! I had so much fun!"(Participant n.58).

In this excerpt, we can find the use of the first person singular, verbs in the past tense, the presence of introspective words ("*remember*"), temporal and causal connectors ("*Sunday morning*", "*because*") and also the presence of family members, like parents.

The following is an excerpt from an ideal trip story:

"I would like to go to America with my hip-hop teacher and mates. I can imagine a beautiful trip by plane without my family. I would like to go there because I like dancing and I would like to meet some American dancers."(Participant n.92).

In this narrative, there is a frequent use of the conditional and of discrepancy words ("*I would like to go*"). The experience is narrated in first person singular, but is shared with friends and, in some cases, children prefer to spend their time without parents ("*I would like to go to America with my hip-hop teacher and mates (…) without my family*").

4. Discussion

Although the topic of child tourism is important both for family and for school activities, and despite the growing importance of tourism in society, there is an evident lack of studies that include children in this field. Specifically, scholars have neglected to investigate how children represent their tourist experiences. Moreover, when studies have explored this topic, they have not always used an adequate theoretical and methodological developmental framework (Poria & Timothy, 2014). The present work aimed to study children's representations of their travels and tourism experiences as they were told in their

narratives. As reported above, the research was part of a broader project, named "CAB" (City to Children), which aimed to construct and implement tourist services specifically tailored to children's needs and desires. The role of psychologists in the CAB project was that of exploring how children represent the experience of travel and how they narrate it, in order to understand the experience of visiting, in line with the narrative genre and the specific plot they described.

In this sense, the current study aimed to analyse both the memory of past travel experiences and also expectations and wishes about hypothetical trips, starting from the idea that these two aspects are strictly linked to memory. In our study, through the recollection of two kinds of stories, we have observed how 9–10-year-old children represent, in different ways, the most beautiful trip that they have done, and the trip of their dreams. In some cases, our results confirmed the existing data on this field, in other cases they enriched the field with new theoretical suggestions.

The content analysis highlights that the travel experience depends on the chosen destination and includes a series of sensations and activities that allow children to deeply experience the place visited. This is also suggested by the unanimous narrations of long trips, lasting more than one day, where children have the impression of diving into the everyday life of the place visited and sharing this experience with significant others, such as family members, friends and classmates. This underlines the need for tourism marketers to enhance the explorative and recreational potential of tourism destinations in order to provide children and their travel friends with an opportunity to immerse in the tourism environment and culture.

The two types of narrative were different as to the level of represented reality. Some ideal narratives also included imaginary elements where daily rules were suspended (e.g., places full of sweets or the world without school). Children often talked about animals (as pets or as exotic animals), celebrities, and nature, and attributed exotic and mysterious features to these places, which are typical of fantasy worlds. Several things described by the children in these stories are not possible in the realm of reality; however, children talked about them because these things effectively belong to the children's dream world, and that explains the great success of theme parks, such as Disneyland, in which a child's fantastic desires become reality.

We interpreted these results considering the important role of the adventure and fantasy dimension in children's desires and memories about a travel experience. In this sense, tourist services can propose the visiting experience as an adventure in which cultural and historical issues are shared, together with mysterious features stimulating fantasy and imagination. For instance, tourist services could dedicate much more attention to tailoring tourist visits that involve animals (statues, paintings) and natural issues (in the specific case of Florence, the river Arno and the disastrous flood in 1966). Therefore, travelling becomes for children the opportunity to take part in an adventure in which the learning process is part of a broader experience of being a protagonist of a story full of fun and mystery. The results of our study could help tour operators define a proposal to families tailored to children's desires based on what they have narrated as their best memories and as their own desires.

Furthermore, the analysis of the structure suggested that stories about real trips were mostly told in a narrative structure, and that was because they drew on autobiographical memories (Peterson & McCabe, 1983). In other words, autobiographical memory scaffolded children's narrative production, allowing them to specify details of their experience, expressing their needs and providing the canonical chronological articulation of their experience. This could be an important information when it comes to tailoring tourism services for children. The real trip narrations were based on, and followed, a narrative plot which provided a start to the story, a development and an end, which was configured as an evaluation of the experience. In these plots it was possible to find at least one complicating action which was configured as a problem to be resolved or something unforeseen, followed by its resolution. Hence, the story structure, with the disruption of an initial equilibrium (complicating action), development of the plot (attempts of resolution), and restoration of the equilibrium (resolution), replicates the classic travel scheme, with a departure, a voyage and a return.

However, when children were requested to specify their ideal trip, they used a different type of account, in comparison to the real one, because they mainly expressed a list of beautiful experiences they would like to live. Eco (2009) developed a detailed study about the importance of the list as a way of organising reality in a form that is in-between paradigmatic/categorical and a narrative way of thinking.

When people talk about travel without using connections, but using only temporal links, they do not provide a story, but a mere exposition, a list, or a chronicle (Tomashevsky, 1925), when people talk about travel without using connections, but using only temporal links, they do not provide a story, but a mere exposition, a list, or a chronicle. Peterson and McCabe (1983) have also found that children's personal narratives about trips were a relatively boring chronological list of actions, as compared to narratives about spills, wrecks, stings, fights, and injuries.

Considering the results of the structure analysis, agencies working in the fields of marketing and management of tourism could take into account the need of children to experience the tourist visit as a "story" in which they are the protagonists. Our results give voice to the importance of defining and offering itineraries as narrative plots in which every point of interest is not a single location but is strictly connected to the others as a "chapter" of a broader story involving the participants. For example, a travel itinerary could be divided into different and subsequent steps in which every point of interest could be found by solving a riddle (for instance, a quiz in which the correct answer suggests the next location to visit) or by performing a game (for example, a puzzle reporting the picture of the next monument to visit). Creating services based on a narrative structure means including complications and resolutions in the tourism experience and narrating the environment as the scene of a story. Moreover, as suggested by the results of the structure analysis, tourism marketing experts should consider itinerary proposals that involve children in a comprehensive experience, including the departure the journey, the stay and the final return.

Scientific literature underlines a deep relationship between narration and travel (McCabe & Foster, 2006; Mikkonen, 2007). Narration usually works in travel in terms of a physical process of movement, disruption, and return (Curtis & Pajaczkowska, 1994). When the real experience of travel is lacking, a child cannot draw from that experience in order to invent a story. Not having a script to follow, they can find it difficult to engage themselves in storytelling, such as a daydreaming activity.

The lexical analysis confirmed the results of the structure analysis. Since real trip stories drew on autobiographical memories, they were structured around cognitive processes such as, for example, causal and temporal connections, as well as introspection. These elements made the stories more understandable and coherent. Furthermore, the real trip memories were more likely to be narrated in the past tense, an indicator that the story drew on the narrator's autobiographical memory. Finally, the social dimension of the real trip was evident: they were told in the first-person plural, experienced with family members.

Regarding the ideal trip, which drew on the child's imagination, discrepancy and desires were evident, manifesting themselves in words like "I would like" or "I wish". These were also indicated by the frequent use of conditional structures, accompanied by future and present tenses. In line with the existing literature (Götz et al., 2014), the ideal trip narrations were mostly focused on the "I", because they reflected the personal desires of the children. However, the social dimension was also important (Morgan & Xu, 2009), because children reported that they would share this trip experience with friends. This kind of narration was richer in positive emotion words, but also in sadness, probably associated with the end of the journey. In summary, while in the real trip narratives the lexical analysis underlines that children assume a

collective perspective that accounts for reality, given the shared nature of the family experience, in the ideal trip narrations, children underline their individual point of view, where their own desires assume a central position. In other words, the lexical analysis highlights further that in the real trip narrations children draw on their autobiographical memory, whereas in the ideal trip narrations, even though they build on their real experience, they use their imagination to create possible worlds. For this reason, the results of the lexical analysis provide useful information about unmet needs and expectations that can be fulfilled through new marketing strategies.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this work has demonstrated that, in order to know "the voice of the children" (Poria & Timothy, 2014), it is necessary to refer both to the account of past experiences and also to their desires and imagination about possible trips. Personal narratives can be reconstructed like scripts or in a canonical format as a story; conversely, ideal trip stories are often realised like lists, including a lot of fantastic and unrealistic elements, which can be enriched and transformed into a story with other tools.

One limitation of our study regards the method used to collect the ideal trip narrations. Children probably needed a more directive task to stimulate the construction of a story. For example, some scholars (Götz et al., 2014) have used a guided approach to stimulate an imaginary trip story from children. Future studies could compare real trip and ideal trip narrations by using different cues, like a story to be completed, to prompt children's imagination.

Another criticisms is that we used a small and culturally specific sample. So, in the future, it would be interesting to extend the study to a bigger and more varied sample and to also consider age differences. Another limitation was that we did not have data about other real trips done by the children; we found that children preferred trips in Italy, but we did not know where the children in the sample had travelled to and if there was a homogeneity about trip destinations among children.

An important outcome of this work concerns travel planning and the decision-making processes in the family and school. Parents and teachers should consider the children's point of view, but not only the aspects linked to reality, e.g. the places to visit, but also the world of imagination.

Tourism services dedicated to families and children could focus on guided tours with the support of technology and devices aiming to narrate a story of the city as an adventure in which the children are the protagonists and have to solve puzzles. As reported by children in their narratives, the protagonists of the travel experience can meet helpers (for instance, the guide, statues of animals or an avatar in the device) who provide explanations and suggest the keys to solving the problems and completing the visit.

Authors' contribute

Chiara Fioretti and Andrea Smorti conceived and planned the experiments.

Benedetta Elmi and Debora Pascuzzi analysed narratives, performed the computations, and wrote the manuscript in consultation with Andrea Smorti.

Chiara Fioretti, Enrica Ciucci, Fulvio Tassi and Andrea Smorti gave their contribution to the Discussion and the Conclusion and revised the entire manuscript.

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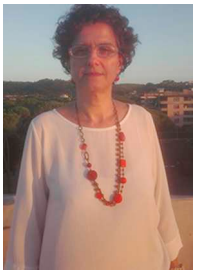

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