Practitioners' perception of hotels' family-friendliness

TAMÁS CSORDÁS[1] – ÉVA MARKOS-KUJBUS[2] – KITTI BOROS[3]

As family-friendly hotels become more and more popular, and a growing number of hotels claim to be family-friendly, it still remains unclear how the concept of family-friendliness can be best defined. The main aim of our research was to examine how professionals perceived the notion of family-friendliness in their everyday practice. To that end, a series of in-depth expert interviews was conducted. Our results show that family-friendliness still remains a fuzzy concept for both service providers and consumers. Our research established a "continuum of family-friendliness" along the two main dimensions of physical environment and holiday experience where dissatisfiers and delighters of a family-friendly accommodation are identified. Our results contribute to further positioning strategies for hotels that aim to use the "family-friendly" label in their service offering.

Keywords: family tourism, tourist experience, family-friendliness.
JEL codes: L83, Z33, M37, M31.

Introduction

Families travelling with children represent one of the largest, most universal and enduring markets in tourism (Backer–Schänzel 2013). At the same time, family holidays involve an above-average risk to families as well as to service providers: differences in rhythm, attitudes, expectations, and perceptions between family members, increased stress levels on the side of families and a need for (sometimes extreme) flexibility on the side of service providers are all variables related to family vacation.

Despite this dynamic and therefore complex relationship, relatively little academic attention has been paid to the meaning and post-purchase perception of the family vacation experience (Carr 2011). In pursuing the market, tourism service providers have increasingly included family-friendly services in their offer. Thus,

[1] PhD, assistant professor, Corvinus University of Budapest, Institute of Marketing and Media, e-mail: tamas.csordas@uni-corvinus.hu.

[2] PhD, assistant professor, Corvinus University of Budapest, Institute of Marketing and Media, e-mail: eva.kujbus@uni-corvinus.hu.

[3] PhD student, Corvinus University of Budapest, Institute of Marketing and Media, e-mail: kitti.boros@uni-corvinus.hu.

service providers have developed products and services going from family suites through various activities and animation to packages for family reunions and weddings, and/or offering selling points such as amenities specifically designed to cater to family vacations and children's needs and various discounts for family trips (Kang et al. 2003). Yet, as of today, few professional certification systems are in place to guarantee all generations the experience of a joyful relaxation, which may lead to potential disappointment with hotels that misuse the family-friendly label in their positioning strategy.

Theoretical background

According to Carr (2011. 7), a family is a unit composed of individual components, who, "while unique, are bonded together in complex ways". For one, the members of a family are bonded together in ways unlike any unrelated persons. Moreover, the family is a core unit of society, a central element in the lives of people, and a primary socialisation vehicle for the younger generations. The ideal-typical concept of a nuclear family (i.e. a social group living together consisting of a father, a mother and their child(ren) (Murdock 1949)) is challenged in today's society, bringing about alternative conceptualisations of the composition and thus broadening the definition thereof. Modern families tend to spend more time apart in their everyday lives, making the time spent together on vacation all the more important. At the same time, modern families are also facing various constraints that restrict who – from within the family – will be able to go on vacation at all. All of the above lead to an increased diversity and fluidity of family travel, wherefore a family vacation should be conceptualised as "leisure travel away from the home for more than one day with at least two members of the family involved" (Kennedy-Eden–Gretzel 2016. 462). This can include children travelling with a single parent, but also multigenerational travel, "grand travel", i.e. children travelling with their grandparents (Kang et al. 2003), extended family member travel, i.e. "professional aunts" (Camargo–Tamez 2015), and even pet travel (Gardyn 2001). The change in family structure equally leads to new family vacation patterns, such as weekend vacations in nuclear families (see e.g. de Bloom et al. 2012), or more time-constraint-free vacations during "grand travel" granted by grandparents' "reserve army" (Mikkelsen–Blichfeldt 2018) status. Nonetheless, in later childhood stages, the school calendar equally adds as an extra bottleneck when planning family vacations (Peercy–McCleary 2010).

Most family definitions in the family travel literature take a multigenerational approach, with the presence of children being a stable element therein. "Childhood" can be first defined as a life stage different from adulthood, and second, as a complex process of becoming adult (Carr 2011). As such, childhood includes a wide variety of sub-steps and a complex set of differentiating markers – e.g. chronological (i.e. age), biological (e.g. puberty), social (e.g. acquisition of a growing set of social roles and responsibilities), psychological (i.e. feeling like an adult), and legal (e.g. legal age of emancipation) (Settersten et al. 2015). Some of the most important characteristics of children vis-à-vis adults in terms of holiday experiences are, on the one hand, the fact of being dependent and vulnerable, and on the other, the active gathering of experiences and the fact of being free from the obligations and responsibilities of adults (Carr 2011). These differences will mostly manifest themselves in a set of motivations and attitudes regarding the tourism experience that will heavily differ from those of other members of the family. Yet one should also bear in mind that it can be "potentially difficult to provide for children when definitions of what is appropriate for them, and will be of interest to them, are based on adults' conceptualisations of children" (Carr 2011. 6), and children ought to be equally considered as active agents of the process (Gram 2007).

On the whole, family vacations are a crucial part of family life (Shaw–Dawson 2001), less in breaking normal routine and escaping everyday realities (Backer et al. 2012) than in strengthening relationships and reconnecting as a family unit by spending quality time together and creating collective memories (Shaw et al. 2008), thus enhancing family communication, cohesion and satisfaction with family life (Agate et al. 2009).

In terms of the caveats of family vacations, an escape from everyday reality is harder during this type of holiday as, depending on the nature of the holiday/ accommodation, it will still involve a variety of duties, especially for women/ mothers (e.g. family caregiving, household chores), making relaxation a relative concept (Shaw et al. 2008), where "a reduction in the pace and standards of work" (Backer–Schänzel 2012. 108) can also be perceived as a positive outcome. Moreover, family leisure requires a considerable amount of preparatory work (mental and physical alike), while a substantial emotional load is omnipresent during the whole process "to ensure that everyone is having a good time" (Trussell–Shaw 2007. 368), making family leisure a "purposive leisure" rather

than a freely chosen or intrinsically motivated one (Shaw–Dawson 2001). In fact, family holidays can be among those factors that can cause "stressful and hostile environments within the family where the holiday desires of one or all family members are not met" (Carr 2006. 138). Individual motivations can be spending time with the family and seeing/doing new things (Backer–Schänzel 2013) for parents, going travelling and being away from the habitual setting for children (Cullingford 1995), having fun and engaging in physical activities for adolescents (Carr 2006). Yet, in their role of parents, adults were equally shown to be performing a "duty of parenthood" (Shaw–Dawson 2001. 227) and making a "sacrifice" (Johns–Gyimóthy 2002. 326) to cater for their children's needs. Moreover, gender differences in motivations among parents also appear in the literature: Shaw and Dawson (2001), for instance, report that mothers are somewhat more concerned with keeping the family together during the vacation, while Such (2006. 197) suggests a difference between mothers' parenting orientation of "being there" for their children and fathers' leisure orientation of "being with" them. All in all, family holidays can be conceptualised as a set of constraints that need to be negotiated (Jackson 2000).

When organising a family vacation, consumers are faced with a complex decision-making task, as it is "a multi-dimensional phenomenon that involves planning, anticipation, trip experience and post-trip recollection" (Lehto et al. 2009. 463). As a service, family tourism can be defined as a supply of services to families. In the case of a hotel, this is manifested in the adaptation of rooms, stay and service experience, and catering to the specific needs of families. Habibah et al. (2015), in their study of the Malaysian context, identify the following service elements largely related to the physical environment that hotels can emphasise in connection with family-friendliness: varied room types, baby and kid needs (e.g. special furniture), catering offer and service design, swimming pool for kids and family, kids club and games for family, kids' games in- and outdoors, family leisure and recreation, family areas, decoration.

The family vacation literature has largely focused on the roles and processes of decision making (Lehto et al. 2009). As a result, one can conclude that family decision styles depend on family situational dynamics and vacation types. While joint decisions seem dominant in the overall consumption process, even though often accompanied with situations of stress (Backer–Schänzel 2013), previous studies find that wives are more active in the early stages of the decision process

(information collection, gatekeeping, setting the pool of available choices), and children have a decisive influence on what programmes the family will effectively choose once on vacation (Lehto et al. 2009). An "ideal family togetherness" (Backer–Schänzel 2013: 160) is hard to achieve, which can lead to family members reporting differently on the lived experience, with mothers being less positive, also possibly affecting their feedback on it.

Methodology and sample characteristics

The research methodology consisted of in-depth expert interviews with participants holding a senior management and/or director position across six different organisations within the Hungarian hospitality industry. Thereby, the present study adopts a realism paradigm (Sobh–Perry 2006) with an in-depth qualitative research approach to map the external reality of the marketplace in an extremely dynamic landscape where practitioners are often a cornerstone in terms of topical knowledge and latest developments (see e.g. Harms et al. 2017; Truong–Simmons 2010). The main research question addressed in the present research is "How do professionals perceive the notion of family-friendliness in their everyday practice?".

As Sobh and Perry (2006) suggest, triangulation is an instrument in the realism paradigm for assessing whether results are generalisable, i.e. an objective reality exists, or, conversely, results fall within the scope of constructivism, i.e. the acceptance of multiple realities (Guba–Lincoln 2005). The present study is a link in a chain of studies using various qualitative methods and angles that investigate the "family-friendliness" construct in depth: Ásványi and Markos-Kujbus (2017), using a student sample, built a database of family-friendly hotels and consumer evaluation criteria thereof, while Csordás et al. (2018a, 2018b) examined online user reviews to determine how family-friendliness could be conceptualised as described by the consumers of family-friendly services. Concurrently, the limitation of the paper is that it resorts to external validity in the evaluation of its results as generalised conclusions might only be drawn from a summary of the stream of research, which is, however, outside the scope of the present study.

A systematic convenience sampling method was used for the interviews. Contacted institutions were selected based on results from previous phases of the aforementioned stream of research the present paper is a part of and on the confirmatory evaluation of the hotels' websites which needed to explicitly

communicate that the institution was family- and/or child-friendly (Table 1). The interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation (Sandelowski 2008) was reached. The interviews took place between March and May in 2019. Table 1 outlines the position for each participant and provides a short description of their respective institutions, with emphasis on hotel location and size, whether the hotel adheres to any official label certifying its family-friendly status, and a short overview on their positioning strategy based on the analysis of the hotel's official website in the order that the various explicitly targeted groups appear on the web page.

Table 1. Study participants

Participant	Role	Hotel description
A	hotel and sales director	• Average-size hotel located near a county seat in the Northern Hungary Region • Hotel does not have an explicit family-friendly label • Communication on website: family, events, couples, children
B	CEO	• Above-average-size hotel located in a county seat in the Southern Transdanubia Region • Communication on website: family, wellness, conferences
C	marketing director	• Above-average-size resort hotel located near a county seat in the Western Transdanubia Region • Communication on website: wellness, family-friendly, various child age groups
D	marketing and sales director	• Above-average-size resort hotel located near a county seat in the Central Transdanubia Region • Communication on website: child-friendly, baby-friendly, family-friendly, wellness, events
E	sales director	• Above-average-size resort hotel located in the Central Transdanubia Region, in the greater catchment area of the capital city • Communication on website: child-friendly, wellness, events
F	marketing manager	• Large hotel located in a spa town in the Western Transdanubia Region • Hotel does not have an explicit family-friendly label • Communication on website: child-friendly, wellness, conferences

Source: own edition

To capture the full range of insights, participants represented institutions of various sizes from all over the country, going from a ca. 30-room average-

size hotel to a 300+-room large hotel. The same way, some of the represented institutions explicitly adhered to various family-friendly labels, while others willingly did not.

Before each interview, the participants were briefly informed, via email, about its general purpose. After some introductory questions about the general trends in tourism, informants were asked – in a general manner – to describe what child-friendliness meant to them, and then, to their guests. Support questions – should the given topic not come up in the interviewee's free speech – included inquiring about conceptual differences between baby-, child- and family-friendliness, the way in which the concept was handled within the operations of the hotel, on their website as well as on social media and in online reviews. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, with each one being digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted in three steps, as suggested by Miles et al. (2014): data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing/verification. During data condensation, the body of text was coded for emergent underlying dimensions, using NVivo 10 software, by two independent coders. The first two interviewers were coded separately using a first version of the codebook, then a session was organised to discuss differences in coding. At the end of the coding process, the authors once again met to finalise the results and to discuss their qualitative observations. In the following presentation of the results, individual quotes will be used to illustrate the findings.

Results of the study
What is a family vacation?
While previous studies showed a slight difference between the concepts of baby-, child-, and family-friendly accommodations (see e.g. Csordás et al. 2018b), no clear definition of any of them could be found in our sample as the perception of the various concepts differed greatly among our informants and, even during the interviews, the terms were often employed inconsistently: sometimes they were used as synonymous, while at other times, to emphasise a marked difference. Our analysis, therefore, will attempt to contrast and synthesise the underlying dimensions that were identified throughout the data condensation phase.

As McCabe (2015. 175) puts it, the "concept of family is something that everyone can instantly relate to as being identifiable and comprehensible […] yet

it is also confounding in its nebulousness and is subjectively constructed". While our sample did not bring up as unique segments as "professional aunts, no kids" (Camargo–Tamez 2015), according to our results, family vacation is still not a trivial matter.

For one, the fragmentation of the tourist market as a megatrend can also be seen from within the family target group. Segmenting the larger family target market into various sub-groups seems to become a notable instrument for hospitality establishments' capacity management.

Age, but also family structure can become meaningful variables in that. As formulated by one of our informants, "*families are manifold*" (C) and their description in our sample is equally heterogeneous. Various family types that came up during our interviews are: divorced parent, family with more than one child with a large age difference between children, mothers with their first infant, grandparents with grandchildren, etc. According to our informants, age does have an influence on consumer behaviour in terms of two aspects: for instance, when choosing babies "*as a target group, there is a presence during workdays as the targeted group is not linked to school [holidays]*" (A) making families with babies "*good travellers even during the [working] week*" (C). Also, "*preschoolers often arrive with grandparents even during the [working] week*" and, therefore, they might also be a target for special offers (E).

At the same time, family structure is also an important facet in this market: following the age of the child, family size is the second dimension involved in defining the audience, yet a more complex one as it entails a number of bottlenecks. As one of our informants put it, "*if they have three kids in three age groups, I should be able to entertain all three of them, even in a completely separate manner*" (B) (see also: Table 3/7). Similarly, a family with a first newborn poses a communication challenge during customer acquisition, as they are in an information vacuum about the possibilities offered to them, while families with more than one child are likely to have an own experience already. The same way, families turned out to be a more complex segment in terms of overall marketing communications, for example because it is a completely different communication niche to "*put a two-year-old onto the photo, and not a 12-year-old*" (A).

The continuum of family-friendliness

The most important result of the present study is that it establishes a continuum of family-friendliness and the difference – as ingeniously formulated

by one of our informants – that lies between the "*software*" and the "*hardware*" when it comes to being a family-friendly institution.

On the one hand, baby-friendly hotels require very special infrastructure that has to be taken into account from as early as the drawing board: if the hotel was not explicitly built to be baby-friendly (taking into account the specific needs of the target group in terms of logistics), then it is very hard for it to become one through subsequent reorganisation, not only because of the growing number of standards to live up to but also the physical constraints emerging from the layout of the building (i.e. "*hardware*") (Table 3/1-3). Physical environment features are those that can be most easily verified when organising a family trip. It is therefore not surprising that the industry certifications mentioned during the interviews focused essentially on this issue. Also, as mentioned in our literature review, previous studies in the field equally focused on family-friendliness dimensions, with many of them relating to the physical environment (see e.g. Habibah et al. 2015), which is an "*entry level that should be passed*" (D). Yet, in our sample, the physical elements are not necessarily related to the concept of family-friendliness, but rather to a subset thereof, namely small children. Most specific mentions came up either in connection with room size and furnishing (being able to accommodate babies) or with child entertainment spaces (playrooms and sports equipment). These dimensions were found to provide a minimum experiential level of family-friendliness, referred to as "dissatisfiers" in the management literature (see e.g. Khalifa 2004), elements that consumers implicitly expect when searching for family-friendly accommodation, elementary product requirements that every offer within the category should satisfy in order to be marketable: their existence does not lead to additional satisfaction, but their absence leads to customer dissatisfaction. Yet, family-friendliness should not be mistaken for this level of service. As our informants put it, "*if a client goes to a hotel that claims to be family-friendly, where family-friendliness only consists in* [various minimum criteria provided by our informants – see Table 2]*), then family-friendliness will mean that to them and these will be the call signs associated with it*" (C), leading to the formation of a pandemonium of first individual impressions about the concept on the demand side. Then, when they stay at another potentially better-suited accommodation, "*they are often surprised by the number of programmes that are provided*" (D) on the supply

side, yet, having gotten used to another (lesser) idea of the service, "*they will not be willing to pay more for another [level of] service that they perceive as the same*" (C). Thus, based on our interviews, there is a persistent need for establishing a common understanding of the family-friendliness concept.

Table 2. Dimensions of a perceived minimum level of "family-friendliness" for hotel guests

- "*… being able to get a crib for the baby for the night, or having three high chairs at most for babies at the restaurant, one of which they might snatch, or even maybe having a playroom with three baby tables where they can play with their child…*" (C)
- "*… having a very tiny playroom with six toys…*" (B)
- "*… having a playground, high chairs, etc. …*" (D)
- "*… having a potty and a high chair …*" (A)

Source: own research

Taking away the greater part of the physical constraints (e.g. children already having passed the sensory-motor stage of development), catering to the various needs and motivations of family members becomes the next primordial step in the evaluation of whether an institution is indeed family-friendly. Our informants corroborated the importance of children's needs and, thus, of child-friendliness (Table 3/4). Here, animation and entertainment were highlighted as the most important experience factors, which require a great deal of flexibility in operations and organisation (i.e. "*software*") from the host institution. This was conceptualised as a transitional stage between the physical environment and service offers, where the establishments first needed to be equipped with a number of facilities (the most often mentioned ones were: playrooms and playgrounds) where activities (such as animation, contests, thematic programmes) could be performed. These, however, also rely heavily upon the human factor, such as the staff and the overall management philosophy of the hotel, offering an on-the-spot experience to those who participate. A family-friendly hotel's management philosophy can manifest itself through actions like offering specific programme packages or thematic series of events, exacting and ensuring continuous training (Table 3/5), being up-to-date on the target group's expectations, and taking into account family dynamics (Table 3/8).

Table 3. The continuum of family-friendliness – Illustrative quotes

Dimension		Quote
"dissatisfiers" / "hardware"	[1]	"*Even before the hotel was built, since **as early as the blueprints**, the owners believed that families and kids were very important here*" (F)
	[2]	"*Our **'software'** that we developed for this can be considered the best in the country, but our **'hardware'**, it wasn't made for [a family-friendly hotel], so it needed some remodelling*" (E)
	[3]	"*Every corner of the hotel is designed to be suitable for families. The furniture is chosen accordingly, wall paint materials are chosen accordingly, plants in the garden are planted accordingly. [...] Recently, we renovated our restaurant. But before that, **we examined how families could eat more comfortably...**" (C)
"software" / operating philosophy	[4]	"*We needed to focus on what a child and a parent could expect. The **two must coincide, because the parent wants to see that their child is in good hands**" (E)
	[5]	"*At our place, being able to speak with the child, to understand what they want, to be able to prioritise the child's request, which comes first – that is **an absolute basic** [element of the] **training**.*" (C)
	[6]	"*We also strive to offer the possibility of leaving the child under the supervision of a [skilled kindergarten] teacher [...] while parents go for a massage*"(E)
	[7]	"*Another challenge for family-friendly accommodations is to [ensure that] the various generations can **enjoy themselves, side by side, while being diverse**" (C)
	[8]	"*We also take the kids to lunch if the parent requests it [...] but there is also this problem with parents, that [even if] we take their child, then mom **can't bear it not to watch** her kid from the corner*" (A)
"delighters"	[9]	"*Guests arrive with their children and leave them with qualified childcare workers to allow themselves three hours of free time, so they won't tolerate anybody else's child jumping up and down because that's the exact reason why they handed over their own kids, **to enjoy a little peace and quiet**" (C)
	[10]	"*All rooms are equipped with an inside and outside baby carriage, a changing table is **prepared in advance**, the wet wipe holder is heated – they **go to such lengths**" (D)

Note: authors' translation. Emphases added by the authors.

Source: own research

At the other end of the continuum, based on the interviews, family-friendliness is ultimately achieved when all family members are satisfied with the service they have received and, even more, they have benefited from unexpected advantages

that are referred to as "delighters" in the management literature (see e.g. Khalifa 2004). In the interviews, although some of the elements identified as delighters were, by their nature, related to the physical environment (Table 3/10), they could be deemed more as extra considerations and efforts made by the hotel –and, as such, unique selling points – pertaining to the larger category of operating philosophy and company practices and policies that contribute to a smooth family vacation. Indeed, as mentioned before, family holidays can be a source of stress for parents (Backer– Schänzel 2013) if they constantly have to entertain their children themselves to a point where too much family time becomes counterproductive (Mikkelsen– Blichfeldt 2015). In this regard, a truly family-friendly hotel might provide services not only to cater to the specific needs of children and keep them busy (e.g. playrooms, skilled animators, kiddie pools) but also to relieve some of the burden of parenthood from adults (e.g. employing professional nursery school teachers, setting up the playhouse next to the restaurant, separated only by a glass wall, in order for parents to be able to eat peacefully), peaking in offering adult-only services specifically for parents (e.g. adult-only spa section) and ultimately leading to a joyful and relaxed experience, where "*mom does not stress out and dad is left alone and can enjoy a beer on the balcony*" (D). This finding is in line with the results of Backer and Schänzel (2013) who, based on their study, affirm that institutions targeting family holidays primarily need to focus on relieving stress throughout their service offers. All in all, based upon our set of interviews, family-friendliness is a much more subjective concept than baby- and child-friendliness and it can be perceived as achieved when all family members – including parents – genuinely enjoy their stay and are able to relax. The above findings are summarised in Figure 1.

Holiday motivations

The conflicting motivations that make family holidays a challenge for service providers equally surfaced during the interviews. Mentions of activities such as animations were mostly related to children (Table 4/2), while adults were mostly mentioned as passive agents being present at these events as carers/supporters, with no interest in those activities (Table 4/1) or as active agents needing downtime and relaxation on their own (Table 3/9). Family-friendliness in this context relied on the ability of the hotel, through their operating philosophy and staff, to act as intermediaries or facilitators (Table 3/6). That way, parents can "outsource" (McCabe 2015. 178), more or less reluctantly (Table 3/8), some of their duties and entrust the service provider with part of their family leisure. In rising to the occasion, an interesting facet of our
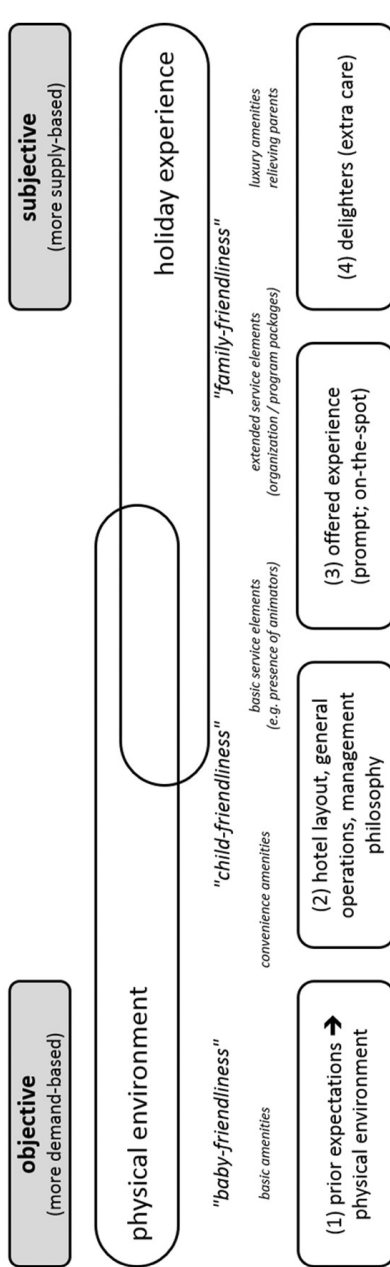
Figure 1. The continuum of family-friendliness

Source: own edition

interviews was some of our interviewees' reference to their animation staff. Indeed, at least three of them emphasised – directly or indirectly – the professional status of their personnel. As such, instead of referring to them as "animators", they used very specific terms such as "pedagogue" (E), "professional animator" (F), "nursery school teacher" (F), "qualified nursery school teacher", "qualified child supervisor" (C). This is complemented by the fact that this specific workforce requires constant training, both psychological (to be able "*to talk to the child, to understand what they need*" (C)) and practical ("*we regularly have first aid training so that, if anything happens to the child, or even to the adult, our colleague can intervene*" (C)). Contradictorily, our interviews showed that, even if practitioners realised the importance of a professional staff, that did not (always) pertain to all human resources of the hotel: at most times, only to those interacting with children, that is, animators. Other employees, such as waiters (Table 4/6), receptionists or housekeeping staff, were not mentioned in the above context. One of our informants summarises this idea stating that "*a family-friendly operation is a rather labour-intensive matter, as the need in [manpower] is a lot different from a general hotel's and the latter also doesn't need to pay extra for [this specialized manpower]*" (C).

Most of our interviews show that the analysed family-friendly hotels realise that family-friendly positioning is cost- and labour-intensive, yet targeting this niche brings undeniable benefits. Two interesting exceptions to this observation were two half sentences, where the interviewee did not perceive baby-, child- or family-friendly services as a given, despite being the representative of a hotel that is expressly family-friendly ("*we have specifically equipped rooms [for babies] and we don't even ask more [money] for them*" (A)).

Can family-friendliness be standardised?

Few professional certification systems exist to guarantee both generations the experience of a joyful relaxation (Backer–Schänzel 2013). According to our informants, a legitimate certification should offer consistency and thus comparability to consumers (Table 4/5) in order to provide an effective solution to the issue of the numerous (and sometimes widely) differing consumer perceptions of the family-friendliness notion and, in the long run, to be able to educate the consumer and the market as a whole. On the market side, based on the interviews, this might not stem from a voluntary certification system initiated by a private company (Table 4/5), but rather from a centrally operated and/or coordinated body, such as a professional association or a government agency.

**Table 4. Additional dimensions identified in the research –
Illustrative quotes**

activity vs. relaxation	[1]	"*We're also trying to involve the **adults** [with family programmes], but I must say, they **are very lazy**"* (E)
	[2]	"*There is animation every day, no matter how many kids are in the house*" (E)
standards	[3]	"*There are around **100 criteria, mostly involving the infrastructure**. [...] These criteria are very strict.*" (E)
	[4]	"*If for us, as a hotel, with a certification like this, [...] and one has to [comply with] **a long list** then [they see that] there are some things, developments that are overdue, they are a continuous [warning] for us to keep complying.*" (A)
	[5]	"*When a private company takes it upon itself to begin certifying [hotels] from one day to another, it is not suited to offer a solid comparison of a whole [complex] market. [...] this system may now have 21 hotels in it and I'm not sure, when I go to any of these 21 hotels, I'll be able to discover any **consistency** [...] so it **still doesn't help the consumer**"* (C)
standards–human factor	[6]	"*There is no such training specifically **for other staff**. [...] Waiters **grew into the role** and **acknowledged** the fact that they had to cross the premises with their plates while having 3 kids running around them.*"

Note: authors' translation. Emphases added by the authors.

Source: own research

As mentioned before, the foundations of family-friendliness were (as much in our sample as in other pieces of research) identified as being embedded in the physical environment, as the target group has specific logistical needs throughout their holidays. Nonetheless, as our interviews show, compliance with a "list" of purely infrastructural requirements (Table 4/3-4) will not necessarily make a hotel family-friendly; the above-mentioned service practices and operating philosophy are just as (if not more) important to fulfil the fundamental need for a family vacation, namely resting (Backer–Schänzel 2013; Csordás et al. 2018a).

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore stakeholder views within a specific segment of the hospitality industry, namely family-friendly hotels, as to their perceptions of the family-friendliness notion and related practicalities. Since a growing number of hotels claim to be family-friendly, in-depth expert interviews

contributed to offering topical knowledge and the latest developments in the field. As our informants confirmed, clients do not have a clear idea of the family-friendliness concept related to hotels. In addition, the interviews confirmed that a lot of the aforementioned hotels were more likely to use the term as a fad, while lacking the attitude, operating philosophy, and know-how to offer a genuinely family-friendly service. Thus, the findings indicate that, while fuzzy, family-friendliness is a dynamic concept from the side of the demand that can be moulded by leading market actors. Hence, the importance of consumer education also indirectly surfaced in our research.

Family-friendliness can be conceived for hotels as a unique selling proposition for targeting consumers, where quality assurance becomes a key marketing concept (Schänzel–Yeoman 2014). In the co-creation of value between the service provider and the consumer, however, a common understanding of the concept is primordial, all the more so as, even though professional certifications do exist, they are rarely used in the area. At the same time, while there is still a multitude of consumer understandings about what a family-friendly service offer should look like, not even online consumer reviews, otherwise at the centre of attention in the tourism industry, will be able to provide an authentic tool to assist consumers in their decision making.

A continuum of family-friendliness arose from our research, showing a connection between the tangible elements of physical evidence (hotel layout, facilities, equipment) that can be viewed in parallel with service dissatisfiers, and an establishment's operating philosophy, and company practices and policies that contribute to a smooth family vacation that can act as delighters and thus as unique emotional and selling points for hotels that aim to use the "family-friendly" label in their service offering.

References

Agate, J. R.–Zabriskie, R. B.–Agate, S. T.–Poff, R. 2009. Family Leisure Satisfaction and Satisfaction with Family Life. *Journal of Leisure Research* 41(2), 205–223.

Ásványi, K.–Markos-Kujbus, É. 2017. Családbarát szállodák a családok szemével. In: Bányai, E.–Lányi, B.–Törőcsik, M. (eds.) *Tükröződés, társtudományok, trendek, fogyasztás: Egyesület a Marketing Oktatásért és kutatásért (EMOK) 23. országos konferencia*. Pécs: Pécsi Tudományegyetem, 14–22.

Backer, E.–Schänzel, H. 2012. The Stress of the Family Holiday. In: Backer, E.–Yeoman, I.–Schänzel, H. (eds.) *Family Tourism - Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, 105–124.

Backer, E.–Schänzel, H. 2013. Family Holidays - Vacation or Obli-cation? *Tourism Recreation Research* 38(2), 159–173.

Backer, E.–Yeoman, I.–Schänzel, H. 2012. Introduction: Families in Tourism Research. In: Backer, E.–Yeoman, I.–Schänzel, H. (eds.) *Family Tourism - Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. Bristol: Channel View Publications, 1–14.

Camargo, B.–Tamez, M. F. 2015. Professional Aunt, No Kids: An unexplored segment of family tourism. *e-Review of Tourism Research (eRTR)* 12(3/4).

Carr, N. 2006. A Comparison of Adolescents' and Parents' Holiday Motivations and Desires. *Tourism and Hospitality Research* 6(2), 129–142.

Carr, N. 2011. *Children's and families' holiday experience*. London: Routledge.

Cullingford, C. 1995. Children's attitudes to holidays overseas. *Tourism Management* 16(2), 121–127.

Csordás, T.–Markos-Kujbus, É.–Ásványi, K. 2018a. „A gyerekeim imádják, ezért én is imádom" – Családbarát hotelek fogyasztói percepciói online értékelések alapján. *Turizmus Bulletin* 18(1), 17–28.

Csordás, T.–Markos-Kujbus, É.–Ásványi, K. 2018b. "Where Rest Isn't a Power Hike" – Consumer Perception of Family-Friendliness of Hotels on Online Review Sites. In: Gounaris, S.–Alexandr, M.–Hamilton, K.–Karampela, M.–Lacka, E. (eds.) *Proceedings of the 47th EMAC Conference – People Make Marketing*, Glasgow: University of Strathclyde.

de Bloom, J.–Geurts, S. A. E.–Kompier, M. A. J. 2012. Effects of Short Vacations, Vacation Activities and Experiences on Employee Health and Well-Being. *Stress and Health* 28(4), 305–318.

Gardyn, R. 2001. The New Family Vacation. *American Demographics* 23(8), 43–47.

Gram, M. 2007. Children as co-decision makers in the family? The case of family holidays. *Young Consumers* 8(1), 19–28.

Guba, E. G.–Lincoln, Y. S. 2005. Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging influences. In: Denzin, N. K.–Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 191–215.

Habibah, A.–Hamzah, J.–Er, A. C.–Buang, A.–Mushrifah, I.–Selvadurai, S.–Nor Ghani, M. N. 2015. An Appraisal of Family-Friendly Tourism in Malaysia. *International Business Management* 9(6), 1523–1534.

Harms, B.–Bijmolt, T. H. A.–Hoekstra, J. C. 2017. Digital Native Advertising: Practitioner Perspectives and a Research Agenda. *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 17(2), 80–91.

Jackson, E. L. 2000. Will Research on Leisure Constraints Still Be Relevant in the Twenty-first Century? *Journal of Leisure Research* 32(1), 62–68.

Johns, N.–Gyimóthy, S. 2002. Mythologies of a theme park: An icon of modern family life. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 8(4), 320–331.

Kang, S. K.–Hsu, C. H. C.–Wolfe, K. 2003. Family Traveler Segmentation by Vacation Decision-Making Patterns. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* 27(4), 448–469.

Kennedy-Eden, H.–Gretzel, U. 2016. Modern vacations–modern families: new meanings and structures of family vacations. *Annals of Leisure Research* 19(4), 461–478.

Khalifa, A. S. 2004. Customer Value: a review of recent literature and an integrative configuration. *Management Decision* 42(5), 645–666.

Lehto, X. Y.–Choi, S.–Lin, Y.-C.–MacDermid, S. M. 2009. Vacation and family functioning. *Annals of Tourism Research* 36(3), 459–479.

McCabe, S. 2015. Family leisure, opening a window on the meaning of family. *Annals of Leisure Research* 18(2), 175–179.

Mikkelsen, M. V.–Blichfeldt, B. S. 2015. 'We have not seen the kids for hours': The case of family holidays and free-range children. *Annals of Leisure Research* 18(2), 252–271.

Mikkelsen, M. V.–Blichfeldt, B. S. 2018. Grand parenting by the pool. *Young Consumers* 19(2), 127–140.

Miles, M. B.–Huberman, A. M.–Saldaña, J. 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Murdock, G. P. 1949. *Social Structure*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Peercy, M. A.–McCleary, K. W. 2010. The Impact of the Year-Round School Calendar on the Family Vacation: An Exploratory Case Study. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* 35(2), 147–170.

Sandelowski, M. 2008. Theoretical Saturation. In: Given, L. M. (ed.). *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 875–876.

Schänzel, H. A.–Yeoman, I. 2014. The Future of Family Tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research* 39(3), 343-360.

Settersten, R. A.–Ottusch, T. M.–Schneider, B. 2015. Becoming Adult: Meanings of Markers to Adulthood. In: Scott, R. A.–Kosslyn, S. M. (eds.) *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 1–16.

Shaw, S. M.–Dawson, D. 2001. Purposive Leisure: Examining Parental Discourses on Family Activities. *Leisure Sciences* 23(4), 217–231.

Shaw, S. M.–Havitz, M. E.–Delemere, F. M. 2008. "I Decided to Invest in My Kids' Memories": Family Vacations, Memories, and the Social Construction of the Family. *Tourism Culture & Communication* 8(1), 13–26.

Sobh, R.–Perry, C. 2006. Research design and data analysis in realism research. *European Journal of Marketing* 40(11/12), 1194–1209.

Such, E. 2006. Leisure and Fatherhood in Dual-Earner Families. *Leisure Studies* 25(2), 185–199.

Truong, Y.–Simmons, G. 2010. Perceived intrusiveness in digital advertising: Strategic marketing implications. *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 18(3), 239–256.

Trussell, D. E.–Shaw, S. M. 2007. "Daddy's Gone and He'll Be Back in October": Farm Women's Experiences of Family Leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research* 39(2), 366–387.