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# Children's Influence on Family Vacation Decision-Making

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## ABSTRAKT

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Syftet med detta lärdomsprov är att studera på vilket sätt österbottniska barn påverkar sina föräldrars resebeslut innan de anländer till en destination. Fokuset ligger på de så kallade "tweensen" som är mellan 8 och 12 år gamla och de strategier som tillämpas för att få föräldrarnas uppmärksamhet angående reseönsknin-  
g.

Detta lärdomsprov består av två delar: en teoretisk del och en empirisk del. I den teoretiska delen behandlas olika element av familjeresande, barns inflytande och familjens beslutsfattande. Olika variabler såsom barnens kön, familjestorlek, de olika rollerna inom familjen som kan påverka beslutsprocessen samt familjens resehistoria tas i beaktande. Den empiriska delen utfördes genom att tillämpa en kvalitativ undersökningsmetod. Totalt genomfördes sju djupgående intervjuer med respondenter som alla hade rest tillsammans med familjen det senaste året och hade åtminstone ett barn i åldern 8-12.

Undersökningsresultatet visar att barnen påverkar resebesluten oberoende av kön och familjens storlek. Beroende på skedet i beslutsprocessen så kan barnen tillämpa olika strategier både indirekt och direkt. Många av respondenterna kunde inte först nämna strategier som deras barn använder, vilket tyder på att den huvudsakliga påverkan sker indirekt. Dessutom har barnen olika roller under beslutsprocessen. Barnen deltar genom att samla information före resan samt genom att agera som påverkare och som slutkonsument. Dessa roller varierar i grad beroende på familj.



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The role of children in decision making is becoming increasingly important due to the constant growth in the family vacation market and children's increasing ability to influence purchase decisions. (Nickerson & Jurowski 2001, 19). Families have been identified as one of the most important consumption and decision making groups and have therefore attracted marketers for years. A large amount of the research conducted on the influence children have on decision making, emphasizes that children influence their parents' at least to some extent. Some report that the impact of children in purchase decisions is growing (Atkin 1978, Jenkins 1979 & Tufte 2003). As the role of children increase, so does the need for research including children (Martensen & Grønholdt 2008, 14). A study conducted by Foxman in 1989 discovered that children influence vacation and travel decisions in 60% of families. (Blichfeldt, Pedersen, Johansen & Hansen 2011).

Family vacation trips are increasing as working parents with a good income have less time to spend with their children on weekdays and want to use the vacation time to reconnect as a family. Parents are trying to actively encourage their children to participate in the process of decision making. (Nickerson & Jurowski 2001, 19). In recent years the family structure has changed which to some extent has made the communication in the family more open and democratic. Parents pay more attention to the opinions of their children which consequently makes it easier for children to influence (Nørgaard, Bruns, Christensen & Mikkelsen 2007, 197).

Children use different strategies and methods when trying to influence their parents. Some of the strategies identified are: bargaining, persuasion and requests in addition to indirect and direct influence strategies. These are the strategies that will be investigated more thoroughly in this thesis. Other variables that are suggested to moderate the amount of influence children have within the family are the communication patterns of the family, the parent's socialization style, the family size as well as the children's age (Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany 2012, 811).



Children today have grown up faster and they are more informed, more connected and have more personal power which makes them different from any generation before them (Nørgaard et al. 2007, 197). In recent years the spotlight has been on the so-called “tweens”, who are children between childhood and teenage years. The exact age of tweens is not agreed on by researchers, but most of them set the age span on children between 8- 12 years old. This is a group that is likely to be more active in the decision-making process than younger children while they may not want to escape from their parents as teenagers might do on a holiday. A Danish study about tweens in in-situ decision making, concluded that tweens do not belong to the traditional picture of passively submitting to their parent’s choices. Neither do they behave like the stereotypic image of self-centered individuals searching for their identity. One reason appeared to be because of their awareness of the different needs, desires and wants of the family members (Blichfeldt et al. 2011).

This thesis will investigate the influencing power children have on vacation decision making from the parents’ point of view. The emphasis is on the different ways children try to make their opinions heard as well as the roles and stages that may take place during the decision-making process. The focus will be on the decision-making occurring before the actual vacation when the destination, duration and accommodation are decided.

### **1.1 Aim of the thesis**

The aim of this thesis is to identify in which way Ostrobothnian tweens aged 8-12 influence their parents’ vacation decisions prior to arriving to the destination. Parents’ responses to their children’s influence in addition to the strategies children apply to get their parents’ attention regarding holiday wishes will be investigated. Moreover, different variables that may influence the decision-making process such as children’s gender, family size, family travel history and the different roles within the family will be studied.

## **1.2 Limitations**

Decision-making is a very wide subject which can be researched from numerous different angles and perspectives. In this paper, the focus will not be on the decision-making occurring at the destination, but instead on the period prior to travelling. The topic will be researched from the parents' viewpoint and not the children's. The families chosen for the study are Ostrobothnian families with at least one child aged 8-12. Therefore, the results in this thesis are specific to this area and may not be applicable in other family arrangements and other parts of the country. Moreover, the marketing aspect of the topic will not be taken into consideration.

## **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is structured into three sections; an introduction, a theoretical study and an empirical study. The introduction will provide the reader with an overview by presenting background information about the topic and the aims and limitations of the thesis.

The theoretical section includes three chapters where family leisure travel, children's influence and decision-making will be presented. The second chapter about family leisure travel, clarifies the concept of travelling together with a family and compares the culture of travelling in the different Nordic countries. The following chapter, tweens as influencers, includes the influencing strategies implemented by tweens and the impact of children's age, gender and the parental responses. The final chapter in the theoretical section includes different family decision-making models and a comparison between them.

The empirical section consists of the research process, the segmentation of the respondents as well as the analysis of the qualitative research conducted. Finally, the validity and reliability will be discussed and suggestions for future research will be given.

## 2 FAMILY LEISURE TRAVEL

Families with children are one of the biggest tourism markets today. It has been predicted that family travel will continue to grow faster than any other form of leisure travel, partly because it is a way of reuniting as a family and spending time together away from work. Family tourists differ from other types of tourists because they focus on creating memories and being together as a family. Schänzel, Yeoman and Backer define family tourism as follows:

“A purposive time spent together as a family group (which may include extended family) doing activities different from normal routines that are fun but that may involve compromise and conflict at times” (Schänzel, Yeoman & Backer 2012, 3)

A family can be defined in several ways, but according to Statistics Finland a family consists of a married or a cohabiting couple or persons who are in a registered partnership living together with their children. A family can also be a married or a cohabiting couple or persons in a registered partnership without any children or one of the parents living together with his or her children (Statistics Finland). However, in this thesis the family referred to is the nuclear family which according to Swarbrooke and Horner (2007, 129) is defined as a family consisting of two parents and one to three children. Statistics Finland reported that in 2013 there were 576,000 families in Finland with underage children (at least one child under 18). This makes families with children 39% of all families in the country. Nevertheless, the number of children in a family has been decreasing in the past years. In 2013 the amount of children decreased by 2700 from the previous year.

When on a holiday together with the family, research reveals that 50% of parents think that spending quality time together as a family is the most important thing. Surprisingly, 89% of children prefer to spend most of the vacation together socializing with their family. Despite the increase in electronic gadgets such as phones and iPads, children still prefer traditional holiday activities such as making new friends and swimming (Thomas Cook 2012).

Studies have showed that joint activities are positively related to communication in the family and the development of children's skills such as problem solving,

negotiating and compromising. Two different benefits of vacationing as a family are the reduction of pressure and the possibility to share time with family. It not only strengthens the family bond, but also strengthens family values and traditions. (Lehto, Lin, Chen & Choi 2012, 836)

Comparatively, households with children tend to have a much more limited choice of travelling dates and duration of holidays because often the schools holidays are taken into consideration. Both authorized and non-authorized absences are normal in the middle of the school year. The high prices during the school holidays may cause parents to try to save money by travelling during off-peak periods which are cheaper (Schänzel et al. 2012). Nonetheless, Tallink Silja Line reports that most of the holidays spent on their cruises are occurring during the school holidays. Over 60% of the cruise passengers are families during the summer and 50% during other school holidays.

The motivators for taking a family holiday are many. The motivational factors related to tourism can be divided into two different groups: the factors which motivate an individual to go on a holiday, and the factors which motivate an individual to take a holiday during a specific time or to a particular destination. Beard and Raghubar have developed a leisure motivation scale that clarifies four different motivators: First is the “*intellectual component*” which assesses the extent to which a person is motivated to do activities involving learning, exploring and discovery. The second is the “*social component*” which measures the extent to which a person is motivated by social reasons such as friendships and other relationships. The third is “*competence-mastery*” which assesses the motivation in order to achieve, compete and master a challenge. Usually the challenges are related to being physical in nature. Finally, is “*stimulus-avoidance*” which assesses the desire to get away from over-stimulating situations to unwind and rest. (Swarbrooke & Horner 2007, 53-54)

## 2.1 Nordic tourism and resources

The term “Nordic” refer to the following northern European countries: Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Norway as well as territories of Greenland, Åland Islands and the Faroe Islands. This region has been marked by significant cooperation and peace, especially since the end of the Second World War. Today, the region has some of the world’s most open borders which makes it possible for any Nordic citizen to travel between the countries with only an identity card. The membership of Finland, Sweden and Denmark in the European Union did not provide any significant changes. Especially since both Norway and Iceland signed the Schengen agreement which abolished the systematic border controls inside Europe. (Hall, Müller & Saarinen 2009, 2-5)

Finland differentiates from the other Nordic countries because of its non-Germanic language and the existing cultural links with Russia. Finland has a unique landscape of Lakeland and forest and in many tourism campaigns the unspoiled nature and the absence of pollution is being emphasized. Another Nordic country famous for its nature is Norway. Tourists have travelled to the fjords and the combination of coast and mountains since the nineteenth century. The isolation of many areas which have been separated by the fjords and mountains explain why much of the traditional culture is preserved until today. Due to the widespread ownership of cottages, many Norwegians decide to travel within the country (Boniface & Cooper 2009, 216-227). Statistics show that a total of 19.2 million leisure and holiday trips were made by Norwegians in 2013. The amount includes domestic and international trips. According to Innovation Norway, 60% of these holidays were made in Norway (Innovation Norway). In the year 2011, Norwegian households were, to a greater amount, tourists in their own country. In addition, they enjoyed cultural experiences, pleasure activities and restaurant visits. Nevertheless, the decrease in the money spent by travelers affected mainly package tours and transport services abroad (Statistics Norway).

One of the largest countries in the Nordic area is Sweden. However, Sweden does not have as clear an image as both Finland and Norway have. Instead of being known for its tourist attractions, Sweden is mainly known for its mineral re-

sources, the quality of the products manufactured and its film contribution. After the Second World War and the development of the economy, Swedes were able to travel more and had in year 2009 75% propensity to travel. The majority of the citizens of Sweden are entitled to at least five weeks of holiday and are in comparison to other Europeans, more likely to take a second holiday. In 2009, 12 million international trips were made (Boniface & Cooper 2009, 220-221). The amount of overnight stays in accommodation establishments in Sweden have increased with 36% since year 2000. A total of 18.8 million foreigners visited the country in 2013 of which 18% were business travelers (Tillväxtverket).

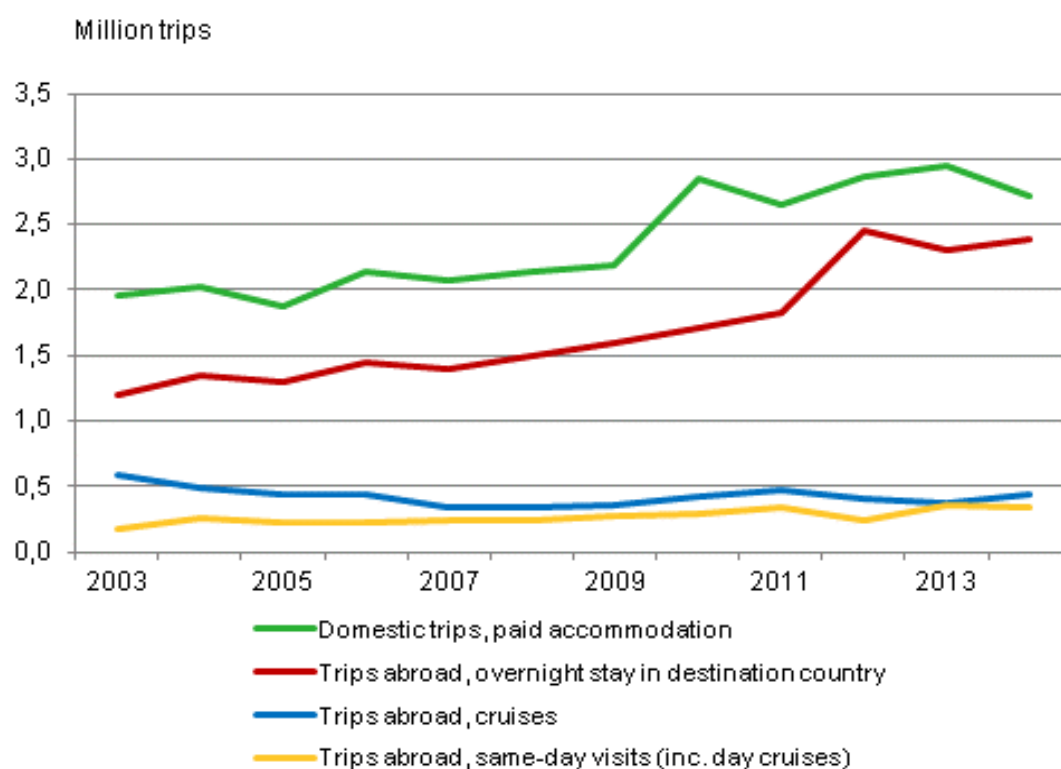
Denmark does not have spectacular scenery or much wilderness areas but it does have picturesque villages, towns and countryside. The country only has a short land border with Germany which makes Denmark very close to the sea. Sailing is very popular and according to Boniface and Cooper (2009, 213) the yacht ownership is one of the highest in Europe. Like Swedes, Danes are entitled to a long holiday. Two thirds travel away from home every year of which half travel domestically. Danes tend to prefer to stay with relatives and friends and accommodate in rented summerhouses and camping sites. (Boniface and Cooper 2009, 213-214)

In comparison to the other Nordic countries, Iceland is the home of over 200 volcanoes. The summer temperatures rarely exceed 20 degrees Celsius and the tourist season is short. Nevertheless, the air is unpolluted, there are unspoiled natural sceneries and there are plenty of geothermal resources. Iceland has attempted to increase the amount of tourists, however the inbound tourism is small mostly because it is an expensive country that is relatively difficult to reach. (Boniface and Cooper 2009, 227-228)

## **2.2 Finnish travelers**

When Finns travel to rural parts of the country, nature, especially lakes and forests, is taken for granted. Finns value country scenery and it is common to rent a cottage during the holiday. In 2009, about 50% of all Nordic households had access to a second home, however, in Finland the number is likely to have been

higher (Hall et al. 2009, 122-123). Finns not only travel domestically but also internationally. In 2013, the favorite countries to visit were Estonia, Sweden and Spain (VisitFinland). A study conducted by the British company Timetric in 2014, revealed that a Finnish person travels 7.5 times per year of which 1.7 are outbound and 5.8 domestic.



**Figure 1** Finns' leisure trips in May to August in 2003-2014 (Statistics Finland)

Statistics from 2014 show that 23% more trips were headed to the Mediterranean countries by Finnish residents in the summer months when compared to the previous year. This due to the cold summer in Finland. The increase in international travel decreased the amount of domestic trips with paid accommodation by 8% in 2014. During the summer months, May to August, 11 million domestic leisure trips with overnight stay were made. Of these, 8,5 million were trips with no paid accommodation. The most popular destinations to visit were located in Varsinais-suomi, Uusimaa and Ostrobothnia. In Ostrobothnia there was a 6% increase in

trips than the year before. Compared to the previous year, Pirkanmaa and Lapland became less popular locations to visit (Statistics Finland)

In May to August, a total of 3.2 million leisure trips abroad were made. This number includes same-day trips, cruises and trips with an overnight stay in the destination. Nearly all cruises were made to the neighboring countries Sweden and Estonia. (Statistics Finland)



### 3 TWEENS AS INFLUENCERS

The influence of children in family decision-making has grown in the recent years. The final decision still lies with the adults but children are increasingly participating in the planning process (Tallink Silja Line). Influence is assumed to be when one person intentionally acts in a way that can change another person's behavior. The influence of children is characterized by actions that make a difference during one or more of the different stages in decision-making. Studies have found that children influence vacation decisions in 60 % of the families (Martensen & Grønholdt 2008, 15-16)

Many tourism operators do not believe that young people can influence expensive purchases such as vacations. However, there is evidence that suggest otherwise. A research conducted by VisitBritain in 2006 claimed that children are the key influencer when deciding where to travel, either directly or indirectly (Schänzel 2012, 144). A survey by Teletext Holidays discovered that of 2000 children surveyed, with an average age of 10, almost 80% mentioned that their parents sometimes allow them to help choose the destination for the family holiday (Travolution 2009). Another study by One Poll for Thomas Cook showed that one out of three parents allow their children to choose the holiday for the family. Two out of ten parents go as far as to letting their child have the final say about the destination every time. Moreover, research shows that as many as 50% of children decide where to go on vacation (Thomas Cook 2012). The increase in the use of internet has made children, especially tweens aged 8 to 12, very eager to do research about upcoming destinations. With the knowledge, children learn about destination opportunities and can negotiate with their parents about where to go and what do there. (Tallink Silja Line). The influence tends to increase in high income families, large families and families with less authoritarian and restrictive communication. (John 1999, 200)

A variety of influence strategies has been identified to examine how children attempt to influence family consumption decisions. The strategies can be classified as *bargaining*, *persuasion* through forming coalitions, nagging and pestering,

*emotional* display of negative and positive effects, *requesting* and *laissez-faire* strategies such as taking independent action. In addition, direct and indirect influence strategies have been identified. Direct strategies involve asking, pleading and begging while indirect influence implies that parents purchase something because they believe their children will appreciate it. Indirect influence has a tendency to occur on an unconscious level (Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany 2012, 811). Blichfeldt et al. (2010) argues that children are expected to influence parents' mainly indirectly. Two major categories of influence have been identified for the socialization process: cognitive factors and environmental factors. The cognitive factors are commonly related to age whereas environmental factors include factors such as peers, culture, mass media and family (Sharma & Sonwaney 2013, 33).

Researchers have different suggestions as to which phase of the decision-making process children influence and take part in. Researchers such as Shoham and Dallas (2005) and Wang et al. (2004) have found that children predominantly influence problem recognition whereas Gram (2007) and Nestoras (2007) argue that children mainly take part in the information search or in the buying decision. Nonetheless, most researchers agree that the parents have the final say (Blichfeldt 2010, 7 & John 1999, 200) According to Nickerson and Jurowski (2001, 22) children have the least influence in decisions such as how much money to spend, where to make the purchase and the decision of whether or not to make a purchase.

Influence varies depending on product category. Findings have presented that children have most influence when purchasing products for their own use (Nørgaard et al. 2007). In addition, influence varies depending on how interested or involved the child is in the purchase of a product. The more directly involved the child is in the consumption, the stronger the influence. Parents perceive their children to exert most influence on decisions related to mobile phones and vacations (Martensen & Grønholdt 2008, 15).

Research suggest that children eventually learn which influencing strategies are successful. Children have a tendency to hold on to a strategy if it has worked before and are believed to repeat rewarding behaviors until they are no longer suc-

cessful. If children notice that they may not have a chance to change the parent's decisions, they might try finding ways to increase their influence. One way to increase the influencing chances are by forming a coalition with other family members. Parents are suggested to respond more to the influence of multiple children. Children can also choose to target the parent who is most likely to accept their purchasing request. Moreover, children can use information collected from the internet to support their requests. These strategy types may however be age related. Older children are suggested to have a greater influence than their younger siblings (Kerrane, Hogg & Bettany 2012, 818)

### **3.1 Children's age and gender**

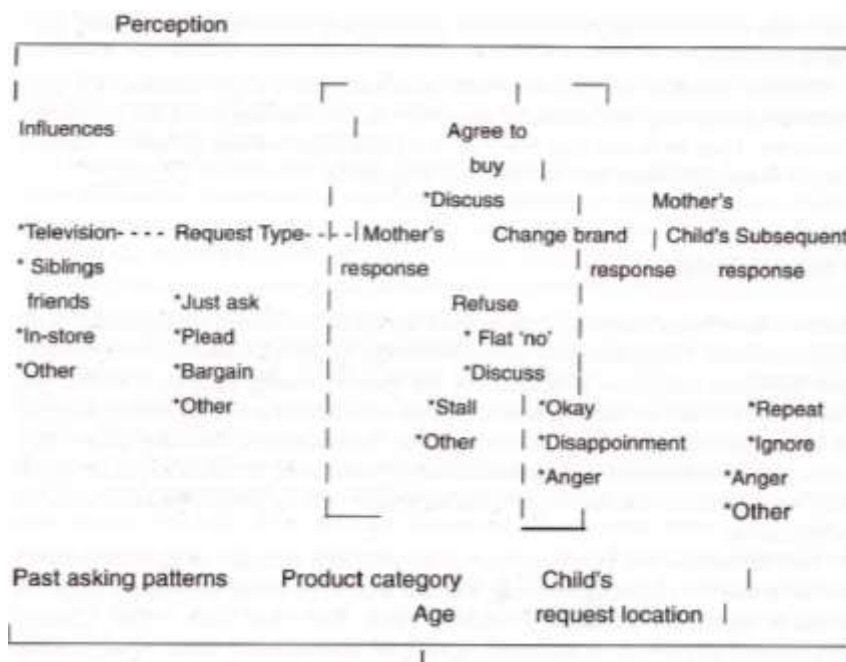
Researchers such as Piaget (1970), Barenboim (1981), Selman (1980), and John (1999) have among others conducted studies about the consumer socialization process of children. They have all concluded that the age of children is an important factor when considering the influence children have on decision-making. Research has shown that older children have more influence than younger ones. These results are for instance due to the cognitive ability of children and their growing ability to understand other people's perspectives. With age, children gain a stronger position when negotiating and persuading (Martensen & Grønholdt, 2008, 14).

Tweens mainly belong to the concrete operational model created by Piaget. This stage includes children aged 7-11 and is a big turning point for the cognitive development, mostly because it is the start of logical thoughts. (McLeod 2009) In this stage the child develops what Piaget called "logical operations". This means that the child develops a more logical thought process that can be applied to existing problems. A child in this stage has no problem providing correct thinking for her/his answers. What is most important is that the child evolves communication, non-egocentric and cooperative skills. This means that a child in this age group is aware that other people may have different conclusions. Therefore, he or she is more likely to look for validation for his or her thoughts. (Wadsworth 1984, 113-116)

Any significant differences in the gender of the children has not been found in any other products than those aimed specially for boys or girls. Children's gender also does not contribute significantly to parent's perception of the influence of their children. (Martensen & Grønholdt, 2008)

### 3.2 Different parenting styles and responses to children's requests.

There are almost as many kinds of parental responses to requests as there are ways for children to ask for something. Generally, four types of responses dominate. First, the parents can decide to make the purchase in order to meet their children's requests. Second, they can substitute for another purchase if they feel like the requested product or service is too expensive, of poor quality or inappropriate. Third, parents can decide to postpone the purchase for another time, and finally, they can either ignore or refuse the children's request. Nevertheless, not all parents respond to children's request in the same way. Figure 2 illustrates the different influencing factors for children such as friends and siblings as well as children's request strategies and the different responses by parents. (Gunter & Furnham 1998, 62-63)



**Figure 2** Model of children's requests and parental response (Gunter & Furnham 1998, 21)

The explanation for the different responses by the parents often lies in the parenting style which here refers to the discipline practices and child-rearing patterns adopted by parents. Parents cannot solely be grouped into one specific parenting style but they do however follow certain defined patterns. The following parenting groups were identified by Carlson and Grossbart in 1988:

1. *Authoritarian parents* try to protect their children from outside influences and the decisions are commonly made by the parents. In families where this parental style is used, the children's involvement in the decision-making process is limited.
2. *Permissive parents* avoid exercising control over their children and the parents have a friendship relationship with the children. Permissive parents consider children to have adult rights but with few responsibilities.
3. *Neglecting parents* show little concern for the development of their children and the parents do not have much control over their children.
4. *Democratic parents* attempt to have a balance between the rights of both the parents and the children. They value independence and try to encourage the children's self-expression. Democratic parents are supportive but they expect the child to behave maturely.

Carlson and Grossbart found that the most active role in the socialization of the child as a consumer was the democratic parents and to a lesser extent permissive parents. (Gunter & Furnham 1998, 62-63, Carlson & Grossbart 1998, 78-94, Koc 2004, 92 & Assael 1992, 467)

## **4 FAMILY DECISION MAKING**

Family decision-making is a type of decision-making that involves several potential influencers and decision-makers. (Nørgaard et al. 2007, 199) The process of decision-making contains various sub-decisions that can be dealt with before one arrives to the destination or during. The beginning of the decision-making process is considered to be when deciding to go or not go on vacation. This is typically followed by determining the type of holiday, accommodation, duration, budget, activities, transportation and destination. These decisions are often made months before going on holiday (Blichfeldt et al. 2011, 135-136).

The memory of preparation and anticipation before the actual travel experience are exciting occasions in family life. For many families it is the highlight of the year (Goeldner & Ritchie 2012, 239). However, for families the vacation decisions also involve a big emotional investment. Tourism often requires spending a lot of money on something which cannot be tested or seen before the purchase. Many families may only have the opportunity to go on vacation once a year. The big risks and the high level of importance it has for the family makes tourism usually fall in the category of joint decision-making (Koc 2004, 88).

### **4.1 Joint purchase decisions**

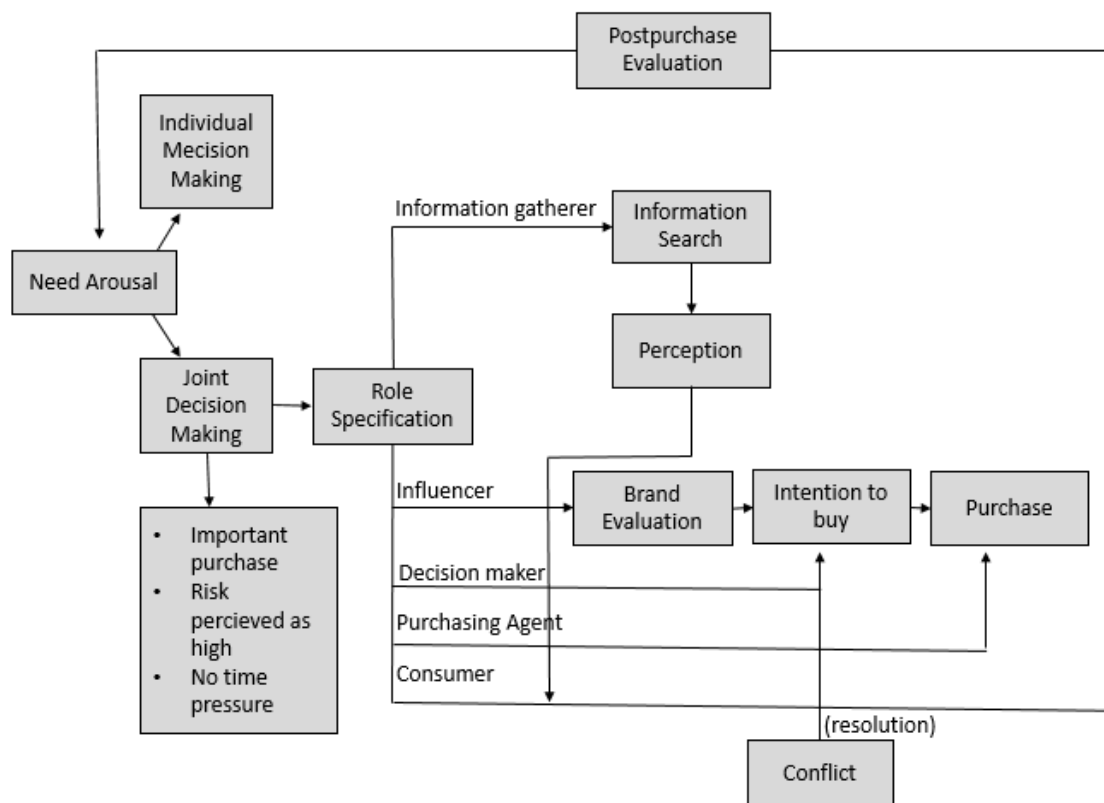
Joint purchase decisions, which mean making decisions together, are most common when the perceived risk of purchase is high. The whole family will be affected by a wrong decision and therefore joint decisions are likely to occur to reduce possible risks and uncertainty. There is some evidence suggesting that people may make riskier decisions because the failure can then be shared by all decision-makers. This is called risky shift phenomenon. (Assael 1992, 456)

Another reason for joint decision-making is if the purchasing decision is important to the family. Importance and risk are very much related. The risk may be lower if travelling to the same destination the family has visited several times before and bigger if going to a new destination. The likeliness of involving all family members is higher if the time limit for travelling is higher. Certain demographic

groups may be more probable to encourage joint decision making. Middle-income groups are more likely to involve the whole family while low-income households are more woman-dominant and high-income households more male dominant. A study has found that as the family gets older, there is a decrease in joint decision making because family members learn to make decisions that are acceptable to the other members of the family (Assael 1992, 456)

#### 4.2 Assael's model of decision-making

The model created by Assael in 1992 demonstrates that family decision-making is more complex than decisions made individually because of three different factors: the frequency of joint decisions, the different roles in the family and the need to resolve possible conflicts when making decisions (Assael 1992, 454). The model shows the different social roles that the family members may take on in addition to various behaviors in the process of decision-making. These roles are not permanent but will change depending on where in the family life-cycle a person is (Koc 2004, 88)



**Figure 3** Assael's model of family decision making (Assael 1992, 455)

The starting point is the need for arousal. The arousal can occur when the family members have agreed on wanting to go for a vacation. The figure shows that the joint decision is important to families because of three reasons. First, the decision is something the family finds important. Second, the risks of the decision are relatively high and third, there is no time pressure if the trip is decided early. When the family has established the need for a joint decision, different roles will occur as shown in the figure. These five roles can be played by any member of the family and depending on the situation, the family member can either take on one roll or all five of them:

**1. The information gatherer**

The role as the gatekeeper or information gatherer influences and controls the type and level of stimuli exposed to the family. The information gatherer is most aware of alternative information sources and has great expertise in evaluation of different sources. In family vacation decision, this can be the family members who have searched for information about interesting areas.

**2. The influencer**

The influencer in the decision-making process is the person who initiates the vacation. This can for example be children who already know where they would like to go. The influencer often establishes the criteria that compares the different variables such as cost, durability etc. and influences the evaluation of other family members' opinions.

**3. The decision maker**

The decision maker often has the budgetary power and is usually the person who decides on what is to be purchased.

**4. The purchasing agent**

The purchasing agent is the person who does the final purchase for the family. The purchasing agent may or may not have the freedom to choose the brand because the decision has already been made. He or she may however have the power to choose from which store to buy the product.



## **5. The end consumer**

The end consumers are the whole family that goes on vacation, evaluates the experience, and gives feedback to the other family members about the satisfaction of the purchase.

During the process of gathering information and evaluating alternative areas, a conflict may arise between the family members. The children may not agree on the destination and may have different preferences for what activities they wish to do. One might want to go to Mexico, and the other one to the Caribbean. The conflict can be resolved by for instance telling one of the children they can visit the other place next year. The resolution of the conflict will then lead to the final step in the model, the purchase. (Assael 1992, 454-457)

Out of the five roles in family decision making, Webster and Wind (1972) argue that children are traditionally seen as users and influencers and not as gatekeepers, buyers or deciders (Blichfeldt et al. 2011). This differs slightly from the family decision model by Assael where children are considered to be part of gathering information in addition to the roles as users and influencers (Assael 1992).

### **4.3 Family conflicts**

The different needs, desires and wants of parents and children can transform the holiday itself as well as the decision-making process into an art of compromising, conflict handling and negotiation (Blichfeldt et al. 2011). Children prefer activities while parents may want a relaxing time to recover from the demands of everyday life. As many as 70% of people state that the main reason for going on a holiday is to relieve stress. The pressure of having a happy family leisure time can have negative consequences for parents who may feel guilty and stressed because the perfect picture is difficult to achieve (Schänzel et al. 2012, 105)

According to Assael (1992, 458) conflicts may arise over the reason to buy something or the evaluation of alternative options. Conflict over the motives of buying is more serious and requires adaptation among the members' of the family. Conflict over brand evaluation usually leads to an agreement. Most of the conflicts in

the family are over alternative products and are usually resolved by consensus. This is because the family members' are a cooperative group and they all have similar primary goals. Primary goals for a family are likely to concern trust, security and affiliation.

When family members disagree about goals there are two strategies that can be used: persuasion and bargaining. Assael (1992, 460) lists three different bargaining strategies:

1. Allowing a member in the family to get his or her way this time if the other person can decide the next time.
2. Buy on impulse and do the bargaining later
3. Procrastinate

Methods for persuasion are:

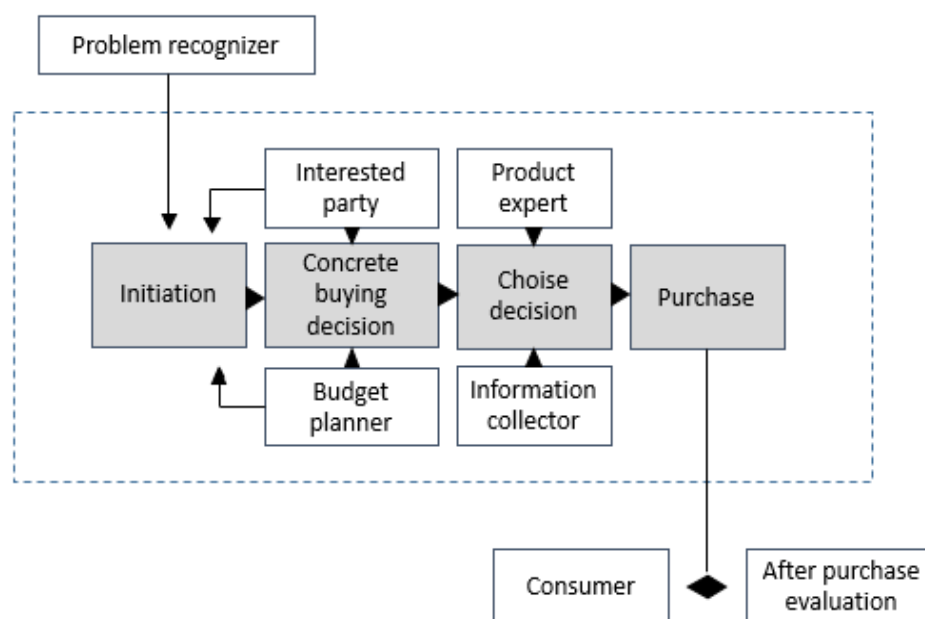
1. Criticizing the decision made by the family by dissociating from the decision.
2. Spousal intuition of knowing how to most effectively influence each other.
3. Trying to get an agreement through direct involvement
4. Threatening
5. The family members form an coalition

The least desired forms of conflict resolution are threatening and coalitions and these are likely to occur when family members not only disagree about buying goals but also life-styles and attitudes. A family who is disoriented by the parents' political or economic values are more likely to resort to coalition and threats. (Assael 1992, 460)

The situations in which disagreements are most easily resolved are if one person is recognized as having the authority and the conflict can be resolved by delegating the decision-making to this person. The second situation occurs when one family member is more involved than the rest. Finally, the third situation is when one person is more empathetic to the needs of others. (Assael 1992, 461)

#### 4.4 Jensen's model of family decision-making

While the model by Assael focuses on joint decision-making and the different roles within the family, the model by Jensen is mainly about complex purchases with a high risk and the different stages in decision-making.



**Figure 4** Jensen's (1990) model of family decision-making (Nørgaard, Bruns, Christensen & Mikkelsen 2007, 199)

Jensen's model has four different decision-making stages which are marked in gray in the figure above. Children have been found to gain influence in all four stages but mostly in the initiation and choice stage. The boxes around the four stages are different roles that family members can focus on and influence (Interested party, product expert, budget planner and information collector). In the initiation stage children act as initiators and express what they want. In the following step "concrete buying decision" parents' respond to the wishes and influences of the children and act as general decision-makers. When the children have been acknowledged they continue to the choice stage. In this stage children participate by doing various tasks but they rarely participate in comparing different prices. The final step is the purchase of a product or an experience. The decision is often

decided on jointly but parents have a bigger say in the final purchase than children do (Nørgaard et al. 2007)

#### **4.5 Theory comparison**

The two previously mentioned decision-making theories both address the same topic but from different point of views. Both theories explain the phases of the buying process and the influences in the different stages. The main difference lies in the way the decision-making process is being approached. Jensen's model takes into consideration several decision-making stages as well as families with more adults than one. The model does, however, mainly focus on complex purchases involving a big risk (Nørgaard et al. 2007). In comparison to Jensen's model which concentrates on the different phases a family goes through in the process of decision-making, the model by Assael shows the roles taken by family members during the same process.

Similarities can be found in the stages in which children are perceived to gain most influence. Of the four different decision-making stages in Jensen's model, children have been found to have the most influence in the initiation and choice phase. This corresponds to some extent to Assael's model where the influence by children is perceived to be the greatest in the roles as information gatherers, influencers and users. Both theories are, thus, agreeing that children are an influencing factor in the decision-making process.

## **5 RESEARCH**

The empirical section of the study begins by explaining the different research methods and the different methods for conducting a qualitative research. The chapter continues with the process of the research and the segmentation of the respondents. The interview questions are presented and an analysis is made based on the results. At the end of the empirical section, validity and reliability issues are discussed and finally suggestions for future research are given.

### **5.1 Qualitative and quantitative research**

When conducting a research, it is important to decide if a quantitative or a qualitative method is to be used. A quantitative method transforms the information gathered into numbers and amounts in order to make statistical analyses. It answers questions such as “how much”, “how many” and “how long”. Often a large number of people have to be studied to obtain reliable results. Data can be derived from observations involving secondary sources or counts, or it can be derived from a questionnaire survey. (Veal 2006, 40; Nyberg & Tidström 2012, 122-123)

Qualitative research aims to understand perceptions, intentions and experiences. A qualitative method answers questions such as “who”, “what”, “how” and “in what way”. The information that has been collected are expressed in words and sentences, and are not in general presented in the form of numbers. While quantitative research gathers information from a lot of people, qualitative research focuses on a small number of respondents. As a result, the answers may be difficult to generalize. (Veal 2006; Nyberg 2012, 125-126)

Combining both a qualitative and a quantitative method in a study is usual. By doing so the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized. A combination of both the methods can in some cases be of advantage because the results complement and supports each other. (Finn, Martin & Walton 2000, 9; Nyberg 2012, 123)

## 5.2 Qualitative research methods

The most used methods for collecting qualitative research include informal and in-depth interviews, group interviews/focus groups and participant observation. *In-depth interviews* seek to acquire information more deeply than is possible with a questionnaire-based interview. An in-depth interview encourages the respondents to talk, and it gives the interviewer the possibility to ask supplementary questions and ask the respondents to explain their answers. A *group interview* or a *focus group* is similar to in-depth interviews but they are conducted in a group instead of individually. In this type of interview, the “subjects” interact with the researcher as well as with each other. During a *participant observation*, the researcher becomes a part of the social process studied. For example, a researcher studying the use of a resort can spend periods at the facility as a user. (Veal 2006, 193-202)

Furthermore, there are three different types of interviews that are defined by the way they are structured. First, there are structured interviews which will produce quantitative data by asking specific questions face-to-face with the respondent. Second, there are the semi-structured interviews which also has specific questions but seek more clarification and more detailed answers. Finally, the unstructured interview aim to understand the perspective of the interviewee. The role of the interviewer is minimal during an unstructured interview which allows the interviewee to express ideas and thoughts in his or her own words without being influenced by the interviewer. (Finn 2000, 73)

## 5.3 The research process

In this thesis, a qualitative research method was chosen to conduct the study. The goal was to gain deeper understanding of the way children influence their parent’s decision-making. By conducting a smaller number of in-depth interviews, supplementary questions could be asked and more thorough answers could be obtained. The method was chosen in order to obtain more detailed information about the respondents’ experiences about the topic.

The in-depth interview consisted of 13 semi-structured questions that were based on the theories discussed in the theoretical part. The questions were tested on four individuals before the beginning of the real interviews in order to ensure that the questions would be understood the correct way. The questions were then modified according to the comments received.

The interview began by asking a few background questions in order to get a sense of the family's travel history as well as making the respondent feel more comfortable with the situation. Questions such as how many children, the age/gender of the children, how often the family travel each year and why they go on family vacations were asked. The background questions were followed by nine open-ended questions related to influence, decision-making and conflicts.

The majority of the interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents. One respondent was not comfortable being recorded because she thought she would not be able to give personal answers. Due to that, notes were taken instead. After completing the interviews they were transcribed into an excel sheet and analyzed.

#### **5.4 The respondents**

The respondents were chosen based on their location and the age of their children. With the help of colleagues, neighbors, friends and acquaintances, a total of seven females were interviewed. All of the respondents were mothers located in the Ostrobothnian area of Finland. The requirements were that the respondents should have one or several children aged 8-12 and have been on a family holiday during the last year.

The respondents were contacted by phone and a location and time was decided on for the interview. The interviews were chosen to be conducted in a place where the respondent would feel comfortable. Therefore, all of the interviews, except for two, were conducted in the homes of the respondents, the other two preferred to meet in a café. The interviewees will remain anonymous, only the age, gender and the number of the children in the family will be revealed.

Ostrobothnia is a region where both Swedish and Finnish are spoken. Therefore, out of the seven interviews, three were with bilingual families where one of the parent speaks Finnish with the children and the other Swedish. The remaining four are families where the spoken language in the family is Swedish. Nevertheless, the language used when conducting the interviews was Swedish.



## 6 EMPIRICAL STUDY RESULT

In this chapter, the interview answers are analyzed. The questions are divided into three groups depending on which category the question belongs to. The groups are: background questions, influence of children and decision-making. The interviews are analyzed by comparing the different answers with each other and with the theories from the theoretical part.

### 6.1 Background questions

The aim of the following three questions were to obtain background information about the family size as well as the family's travelling patterns and their motivation for going on a family vacation.

*The number of children in the family and their age and gender:*

In total there were seven families with one to three children aged 8-12. The first family have six children aged 12, 15, 18, 18, 18 and 20 of which the five oldest are boys and the youngest is a girl. The family consists of two families connected by marriage, where the three youngest children are from the mother's previous marriage and the three oldest from the father's previous marriage. The second family interviewed have four children, three boys and one girl aged 4, 8, 10 and 12. The third family have a boy and a girl aged 10 and 12. The fourth family have three children aged 7, 10 and 12 of which two are boys and one is a girl. The fifth family have two twin 9-year-old boys. The sixth family have three children, two boys and one girl, aged 7, 12 and 14. Finally the seventh family have five children of which three are boys and two are girls and their ages are 5, 5, 10, 13 and 14.

*The frequency of travelling together with the family within or outside of Finland per year:*

This question was asked in order to discover how much experience the children have of travelling both abroad and within the Finnish borders. Research has revealed that there is an increase in family vacations and therefore, the aim is to determine whether or not this is the case in Ostrobothnia as well.

The majority of the respondents answered that they travel together with the family 1-2 times per year. Mostly within Finland but also to Sweden and other foreign countries such as Spain, Germany, United Kingdom, Turkey and Italy. The respondent with six children added that because the mother re-married, the three youngest children also travel with their father and his partner in addition to the 1-2 times per year the children travel with their mother, her husband and his three children. Some respondents also mentioned that they try to find cheap vacations so that they can go for a holiday more regularly. The previously mentioned respondent with six children said that they mainly purchase airplane tickets from ryanair because that way the whole family of eight can afford to go on a journey together.

A few of the families tend to travel more frequently than 1-2 times annually. Two of the respondents travel with the family 2-3 times per year. The family with a 10 and 12-year-old differentiated from the other families by answering that they normally travel as many as 3-4 times a year. However, because of a long vacation to Florida and the Caribbean this spring, they have been trying to travel less to save money and have therefore not travelled very much the last year.

Research by Timetric in 2014 revealed that the average amount a Finnish person travel per year is 1.7 times outbound and 7.5 times inbound. The answers in the interview revealed that the families travel approximately 1-4 times per year. This suggests that families in the Ostrobothnian region travel outbound more regularly than the average Finn.

*The motivation for going on a family vacation:*

This question is connected to the leisure motivation scale by Beard and Raghob that identify four different motivators for going on a vacation. Research conducted by Thomas Cook (2012) concluded that for many parents, the most important thing on a holiday is to spend time together with the family. Moreover, Lehto (2012), mentions that the possibility to have quality-time with the family in addition to reducing pressure are two of the benefits of family travel. The purpose of

the question is to determine if the respondents' main motivators match that of previous research.

The majority of the respondents answered that the main reason they go on a vacation is to get away from their busy everyday life and to have a change of surroundings. Spending time together with the family was mentioned by some of the respondents. The respondent with five children aged 5-14 said "we travel to be with the family and to get away from the activities we normally have every day". The family with six children mentioned that because the family is "new" and consisting of two families, they travel to create a bond between the family members. For many of the families it was important to gain experiences and memories. One respondent said "we get fun and positive memories for the rest of our lives. I remember from when I was a child that it was fun to go on a vacation."

Out of the four stages by Beard and Raghob, the most important ones by the families interviewed seems to be the stimulus-avoidance and the social component. The stimulus-avoidance refers to getting away from busy situations and relax whereas the social component means the motivation to be with a social group such as the family

## **6.2 Question about the influence of children**

The following questions about were created to receive information about the respondents' experiences about their children's influence. The questions are connected to the theoretical study of this thesis about influencing strategies, gender differences and parental responses.

*How do the children influence the vacation decisions?*

There are many ways for children to influence. Kerrane et al. (2012) mention that there are both direct and indirect influence strategies that occur on a conscious and an unconscious level. The aim of this question is to investigate in which way children are perceived to influence and whether direct or indirect strategies are more commonly utilized.

In some of the families the main influence children have on the travel decision is when deciding on the time-period for the vacation. The majority of the respondents mentioned on some occasion during the interview that they attempt to travel when the children have less in school, for example, during the summer or during the autumn break. The answers of the respondents suggest that the families who aim to travel during school holidays are families who mostly travel within Finland and not often further away than the neighboring countries. The families who travel abroad tend to travel when the airplane tickets are cheaper. One of the respondents who travel abroad with the family in average two times per year, said that they travel mainly during off-peak seasons when it is cheaper. In order for the children to not miss a lot of school, they travel for longer weekends such as from Thursday to Sunday.

The majority of the respondents also answered that they try to choose a vacation which the children will like. One respondent with three children aged 7, 12 and 14 said “yes, the children do influence the travel decisions a lot. We want them to have something to look forward to and we try to make sure there is something during the travel that is suitable for children”. Some of these respondents mentioned that they take the children into account when choosing an accommodation. One family with three children aged 7, 10 and 12 chose all-inclusive when travelling to Greece with the children. Something they would not have chosen if the parents were travelling alone. Another family with a 10 and a 12-year-old chose a hotel with a waterpark when they travelled to Turkey.

It seems like the children mainly influence their parents indirectly. Parents choose activities and accommodation options they believe their children will appreciate. Whether travelling on-peak or off-peak, the parents take the children’s school into account, and try to choose a travelling time which will not make the children miss a lot of school work.

*What kind of differences are there between boys and girls considering the influence on vacation planning?*

This question was only answered by the six respondents who has children of both genders. The majority of the respondents answered that they have not noticed any

big differences between the genders. One respondent with two daughters and one son aged 7, 10 and 12 said that the main difference she has noticed is in the age of the children and not in the gender. Many mentioned that they do not know if the small differences are because of the children's personality or because of their gender. The family with six children aged 12-20 said "the biggest difference is in the age. The boys just go along and don't have many opinions while the girl want to decide more. It may be due to her personality".

Martensen and Grønholdt (2008) mention that any major differences in children's gender have not been found in any other products than those specifically aimed for girls or boys. That may be the reason why many of the families did not notice any major differences in the planning process. The differences the respondents did mention only occurred during the actual vacation. The family with two girls and one boy aged 7-12 said "last time we were on a holiday the boy quickly wanted to drive a four-wheeler and dive while the girls were happy at the pool drinking soda, tanning and swimming". Similarly a second family with two boys and one girl aged 7-14 said that the girls like shopping while the boys do not. A third family said that the boy likes movies and the girl likes dolphins and they try to find activities both will like. All in all it seems like the gender does not contribute significantly while the vacation is being planned, however, when in the destination, the activities are influenced to some extent by the gender.

*What kind of strategies are the children using when influencing?*

In the theoretical part, a variety of influencing strategies are mentioned by Kerrane et al (2012). The strategies identified are: bargaining, persuasion, emotional display, requesting as laissez-faire. The purpose of this question is to identify which strategies are most commonly practised by the respondents children and whether or not the parents are aware of their childre's attempts to influence.

The majority of the respondents began by saying that their children do not use any strategies for influencing the parents. The children are just happy to be able to go on a holiday. However, after thinking for a while longer surprisingly almost all of

the respondents came to the conclusion that their children do indeed have strategies. The respondents said that their children use various degrees of direct persuasion strategies such as nagging and pestering. The respondent with two 9-year-old twins said "well kind of normal whining such as "please can't we go". The children are very used to us parents making the decisions and because we don't travel very often the children are just happy to get away". Interestingly, although the parents identified influencing strategies, all of the respondents still insisted that their children are amenable and only use influencing strategies very sparingly.

In one family the youngest 12-year-old girl tends to use emotional strategies. The respondent said "she tries to make us feel sorry for her by saying it is her biggest wish". The other children in the same family occasionally request a vacation by finding out where there is a football game and requesting to go as an audience. The family has travelled for instance to Barcelona and London because of the football. One family with five children aged 5-14 mentioned that the children do not use any strategies because the parents buy the airplane tickets without conferring with the children. The children are later involved in the hotel decision which is made separately.

*In which way do you usually react when the children are proposing something travelling related (both wishes that are possible and impossible to satisfy)?*

Gunter & Furnham (1998) present a model of children's requests and parental responses. The authors mention that the parents can respond either by agreeing, discussing, refusing or stalling. The purpose of creating this question was to investigate in which way the parents themselves perceive their actions. Moreover, the purpose was to study if any different parental styles by Carlson and Grossbart (1988) could be identified.

All of the respondents consult to some degree with their children before going on a vacation and they try to find a solution that everyone are happy with. However when the children propose something that is not possible, the majority of the respondents answered that they try to discuss and explain the reason for why it is

not possible. The family with two 10 and 12-year-old children said “the children are so big that we can discuss and explain why we cannot do something, for example, because of money, time or because it does not fit everyone”. The respondent with six children aged 12-20 answered that when their 12-year-old girl requested to go to the United States, the parents tried making her aware of price differences. The respondent said “we explain that a vacation to USA is equivalent to for example several salaries or a smaller car. Eventually she understands why we cannot go where she wants”.

One respondent with children aged 7, 10 and 12 answered that the parents have not yet had to refuse any of the children’s wishes because they have always been proportional to the incomes. The family have for instance travelled to Lapland and Sweden and only recently began travelling further away from Finland. Therefore, the children understand when their parents tell them that because they went to Greece last year, they cannot go this year. In another family with three children aged 7-14, they try to find a more realistic substitute that the children will be happy with. The family with five children aged 5-14 said that they have not yet had to react on impossible wishes because the parents make the purchase before telling their children about it.

The answers suggest that the majority of the parents try to discuss travel plans with their children and explain why they cannot do something or travel to a certain place. The parents want their children to understand the reasons by either making examples or suggesting something the family can do instead. The parents appear to have a democratic parenting style, which means that everyone in the family has a voice and they communicate with each other to reach decisions everyone are pleased with. Only the parents who decide on a vacation before consulting the children seem to lean towards an authoritative parenting style meaning that the decisions are commonly made by the parents.

### **6.3 Questions about family decision-making**

The following questions were created to receive information about the family decision-making process and the roles and stages associated with the models created

by Jensen and Assael. Moreover, possible conflicts occurring during the process and how they are resolved were investigated.

*Which decisions are children usually part of making?*

In the theoretical part Nørgaard et al. (2007) mentioned that because the family communication has become more democratic, the parents pay more attention to their children's opinions. This seems to be the case in the majority of the families interviewed. The parents tend to involve their children not only in the choice of attractions and accommodation, but also in the choice of destination.

A few of the respondents answered that the children are very much involved in the decision-making process. The respondent with a 10 and a 12-year-old said "they get to decide quite a lot. We travel pretty much according to their opinions and what they think and want to do". Similarly the respondent with three children aged 7, 10 and 12 said "when we have decided to go for a holiday and saved money, they (the children) are deciding just as much as us (the parents)". When considering the decisions the children are involved in, the majority of the respondents answered that their children take part in deciding the activities in the destination. In addition, some of the respondents said that their children also take part in deciding which hotel to stay in. Only one respondent with four children aged 4-12 said that the parents are the ones deciding most of the decisions.

In two families the children are involved in deciding the destination. The respondent with six children aged 12-20 mentioned that they give their children options, for example Barcelona or Bremen. The children are then allowed to choose which destination they prefer. The family with two 9-year-old twins give their children options as well, however, only when travelling within Finland.

The decisions the children are included in do not seem to be dependent on the family size. The families with five and six children involved their children in the decision-making as much as the families with two children. The difference is assumed to be in the parenting style and in the amount of communication and discussion between the parents and their children.



*Who usually suggests that you go for a vacation and in which way does he/she suggest it?*

Surprisingly, most of the respondents answered that the vacations are almost always suggested by the parents themselves and not by the children. Of these, a few mentioned that the mothers are normally the ones proposing. The respondent with three children aged 7, 10 and 12 said “it is always, without any exception me. The father can suggest a ski trip or something that is practical, but he would never suggest a trip to the South”. In the families who answered that the parents, and most commonly the mother propose a vacation suggest that the parents have the role as “the influencer” in the model by Assael and not so much the children. Only three respondents mentioned that occasionally the children also act as influences. One respondent with a girl and a boy aged 10 and 12 said “The children do tend to have their opinions /.../ the boy would like to go everywhere. He wants to go to the Great Wall of China for example. He likes to travel and would like to see everything”.

When proposing a holiday for the family, the respondent with six children aged 12-20 answered that she normally asks the older children if they have a possibility to be absent from school. Another respondent with two children aged 10 and 12 answered that she normally has an idea that she thinks about for a very long time before first suggesting it to her husband and later to the children. The respondent also answered that sometimes her entrepreneur husband says “we need to go somewhere, I need some free time” and as a result they usually go for a short weekend to Sweden or Lapland.

When considering the way of proposing an idea, the most common answer was that the parent begin by suggesting a trip to their partner before mentioning it to the children. The respondent with three children aged 7, 12 and 14 said that it normally begins with her saying “what if we would go somewhere for the summer” and the plans start from there.

*Do the children normally research the destination beforehand and what information do they look for?*

In almost all of the families the children actively search for information before arriving to a destination. Especially the older children. The information searched for is mainly what attractions there are and what the destination has to offer. The family with a 10 and a 12-year-old is travelling for a longer vacation this year and they have decided to rent a house. The respondent mentioned that their son has researched the area online and also used google earth in order to see what the house they have rented look like. The family had, however, at the time, not yet started planning any activities for the holiday.

The children in another family also use Google to conduct research about the destination and available attractions. When the family with three children aged 7, 12 and 14 go camping or stay at a hotel, the children usually find out what the place look like beforehand. The children also sometimes use an atlas to see where on the map they are travelling. One respondent answered that her five children aged 5-14 normally look at the weather forecast in addition to searching for information about the hotel.

A few of the respondents answered differently. The respondent with six children aged 12-20 said that the only thing the children do research beforehand, is anything football related and not about the destination or accommodation. Another respondent with 7, 10 and 12-year-old children said “the children do not take out much in advance. They do of course have travelling fever in the beginning and think it will be fun, but not like they would sit, plan, think and expect something. They are very open minded when we arrive to the destination”. The same mother said that that the parents always keep in mind that much can happen with three children. They do not want to give the children too high hopes because the trip can easily be cancelled if one of the children get sick.

It seems like in the majority of the households, the children do act as “information gatherers”. They search various information about the weather, location, attractions, and housing. The information gathering tend to occur after the vacation has already been decided and not very much in the choice stage as in Jensen’s model.

*Which types of conflicts usually arise during the decision-making process and how are they normally resolved?*

Conflicts appear to be a common occurrence during the decision-making process. Out of the seven families interviewed, only one respondent answered that the family do not normally have any issues or conflicts before the vacation. The other families mentioned a variety of conflicts that are both easy and more difficult to resolve. The question aim to discover which types of conflicts the parents can identify and if any bargaining or persuasion strategies are used to resolve the conflicts.

The family with very football interested boys mentioned that they once had a conflict because their son would have missed a very important football training. The conflict was resolved by calling the son's trainer. Another respondent with a 10 and a 12-year-old said that the family usually agree, the only thing they tend to have troubles with is the homework. The respondent said that they try to do as much as possible before the vacation in order to not have to bring schoolwork with them. Therefore, the children have to spend a lot of time doing additional homework before the holiday.

The only conflict the family with three children aged 7, 10 and 12 have encountered is whose turn it is to use the pretty bag. To resolve this issue, the children have been taking turns using the bag and the parents are considering buying new bags for all the children. The respondent said that they usually only have conflicts about small things such as the luggage and not about the destination itself. The activities are decided on once they have arrived to the hotel and are therefore not an issue beforehand.

In another family with two 9-year-old twins, the conflict have been getting everyone to pack their luggage in time before leaving and one twin not enjoying the sun as much as the other twin. The respondent mentioned that they have been able to avoid much of the conflict by having a family tradition they call "surprise vacation". The surprise is that the parents will not tell their children about the vacation until a few days beforehand or once they are already halfway there. The holiday becomes therefore a happy surprise for the children.

In two families the conflicts are destination and time related. In the family with five children aged 5-14, the children sometimes wish to stay for longer, for example two weeks instead of only one. Because the vacation would become too expensive, the parents have to explain to their children why they can only stay for one week. The other respondent with three children aged 7-14 said “often someone would like to go somewhere we cannot afford, maybe how long we will stay. We usually compromise, one time we do as one child wants, and the next time we do as the other child want”.

It seems like the only strategy used by the parents are to allow one person to have his/her way this time if someone else can decide the next time. Persuasion and the other two bargaining strategies by Assael, “procrastinate” and “buying on impulse” are not practiced to resolve conflicts. The reason may be because the conflicts explained by the respondents are such that they can be resolved by taking turns deciding or by explanation.

*What do the children do to get their own way before travelling?*

In order for the children to get their way, some of the families mentioned different persuasion strategies. A strategy utilized by the family with two children aged 10 and 12 is direct involvement. The family try to come to an agreement by involving the children in the decision and planning process. The respondent with four children aged 4, 8, 10 and 12 mentioned that in order for the children to get what they want, they have to sacrifice something else. For example if their daughter wish to go on two summer camps, she has to choose only one camp in order for the family to be able to do what she wants. The same bribing strategy is utilized by another family as well. The respondent with five children aged 5-14 said “we usually bribe or give demands. For example, they should put the dirty dishes in the dishwasher one day or help take care of their siblings”. One respondent with children aged 7, 12 and 14 said that her children sometimes use small threats to get their way. They may for instance say that they will not clean unless they get to go somewhere. The rest of the families said that they cannot think of any strategies their children use.

## 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the research was to identify in which way children, especially tweens aged 8-12 influence their parents' vacation decisions during the planning process and before arriving to the destination. The aim was also to investigate which influence strategies the children use and which roles are taken by the children in the different stages in decision-making. The theories were mainly based on research by Assael and Jensen. Furthermore, in order to understand the extent of children's influence, variables such as the children's gender, the family travel history and parental styles were taken into consideration. This conclusion will summarize the results from the interviews in addition to highlighting the main theories in the theoretical part.

Based on the theories and the recent studies, the expectation was that children do have an increasingly important role in influencing decisions. Many of the sources mention that family decision-making and is an important topic that has interested researchers for a long time. However, research about children's influence related to travelling is not a subject that has been widely studied. The majority of the information available is related to other types of purchases such as electronics and food. Therefore, finding relevant information was a challenge.

The interviews revealed that all of the respondents experience their children to influence their vacation decisions. The parents tend to take their children into consideration when planning the trip and often the children also take part in the planning process. In many of the families the children influence the time-period for the vacation. In other families they influence the choice of destination, activities and accommodation. The parents did, however, not notice any major differences between the genders in the planning process. The differences they did comment on were only related to activities occurring after arriving to the destination.

The fact that the majority of the respondents did not at first recognize that their children use any influence strategies, suggest that the main influence occurs indirectly. It may also suggest that the children's influence strategies have become a part of the "normal", and, thus, it is not instantly recognized as a strategy by the

parents. This could be observed during one interview when the respondent answered that she do not think that her children use any strategies. After she asked her children, who were in the same room, they immediately exclaimed that they whine “because it always works”.

The strategies the respondents recognized that their children use are: nagging, pestering, emotional strategies and requests. Tweens appear to be the ones who use influence strategies the most. Three of the respondents specifically mentioned the tween in the family when explaining different methods used by the children. The influence strategies do not appear to be used in an extreme way because all of the respondents commented that their children are commonly very pleased with the decisions that have been made, and they are just happy to be able to travel somewhere.

Researchers disagree to some extent about which phase of the decision-making process children influence and take part in. The interviews suggest that the children mainly act as information gatherers/information collectors and end consumers but also in some families as the influencer. Almost all of the respondents mentioned that their children do various types of research before arriving to a destination. The majority of the respondents said that their children actively search for information. The information children research are: which activities and attractions the destination and the hotel offer and what the temperature is. In addition, the children search information about the location of the destination and how the area and the accommodation look like. Children tend to search for the information after the vacation has been decided on and in some cases already purchased. This may indicate that the information gathering do not occur much in Jensen’s choice stage but rather in a later stage. The availability of the internet seems to make it easier for children to study a location. Search engines such as Google and Google earth provide easy access to information and is widely used by the respondent’s children.

Assael (1992) and Webster and Wind (1972) consider children to be part of the role as the influencer who initiate a vacation. The interviews however, suggest that the parents, especially the mother, act as the main influencer. Almost all of

the respondents answered that the parents are almost always taking the role as the influencer and only a few respondents mentioned that their children occasionally take the role. The children who act as influencers appear to be tweens and older. Two of the families where children act as influencers travel abroad several times per year and one family travel mainly within Finland. Therefore, differences in the frequency of travelling and the choice of destination do not seem to affect whether or not children act as influencers.

During the different stages in the decision-making process, a conflict may arise. This is also the case in the families interviewed where only one answered that they never have any conflicts. The conflicts that occur in the families are mainly minor issues that are easy to resolve. The conflicts mentioned were: doing additional homework before travelling, packing the luggage in time as well as whose turn it is to use which bag. Other conflicts mentioned were which destination to travel to and for how long. The conflicts were usually easily resolved by either discussing or compromising or by taking turns to decide. The findings suggest that conflicts do occur but rarely interrupt the planning process. The parents appear to know how to deal with the situation and how to avoid the conflict harming the expectation of the vacation. Any differences between Swedish speaking families and bilingual families could not be noticed

### **7.1 Validity and Reliability**

Both a qualitative and a quantitative research method should be critically examined to determine the validity and reliability of the information collected. However, if the reliability is high it is not guaranteed that the validity automatically will be high as well. A question can provide the same answers during several occasions but may still not measure what it is supposed to measure. (Bell 2000, 89).

When conducting an interview it is important not to influence the responses of the interviewee. The interviewer should avoid agreeing, disagreeing and suggesting answers that may influence the interviewees' answers. This is difficult because in a normal conversation we tend to contribute to the discussion. However, in an in-depth interview these may lead the interviewee in a different direction and provide

answers that might harm the validity and reliability of the research (Veal 2006, 199).

Reliability is about the research being consistent if repeated several times under the same circumstances (Finn et al. 2000, 28; Veal 2006, 41 & Bell 2000, 89). The questions in the interview required the respondent to answer questions about their children as well as their family. Therefore, the respondents may not have been completely honest in fear of revealing too much intimate and personal information. Moreover, unconsciously there may have been occasions where the respondent was influenced by the interviewer. During two of the interviews the respondents preferred to have the family nearby while being interviewed. Consequently, the respondent asked the family members about certain questions and thus, the answers were more detailed. In order to assure a higher reliability, all of the interviews could have been conducted with all family members present to acquire a wider perspective.

Validity means if a measuring instrument measures what it is supposed to. (Bell 2000, 90) The respondents were both Swedish speaking and bilingual families with various backgrounds, different amounts of children. Because of the differences, the analysis of the interview provides a general view of the children's influence and participation in decision-making in the Ostrobothnian families. In order for the interview questions to be understood the correct way, they were pre-tested beforehand by four different people and adjusted according to their comments.

## **7.2 Suggestion for further research**

The topic of family decision-making and the influence of children in various purchases, is a topic of increasing interest. However, there has not been much research conducted about the tourism aspect of the topic. Therefore, research about children's influence when purchasing different tourism products and services could be expanded. Research could be conducted to not only include the children's influence before travelling but also the influence after arriving to the destination. Furthermore, the research could focus on the influence during the different



parts which make up the experience. For example accommodation, activities, and destination.

Children influence differently depending on which age-group they belong to. This research focuses on tweens, but the focus could be on either younger children or teenagers. By focusing on children in different ages, knowledge about how children in a certain age influence can be acquired. In addition, a comparison between families with different languages such as Finnish and Swedish can provide an interesting perspective to the topic.

Furthermore, instead of interviewing the parents, the children could be interviewed instead. This can give the topic a new perspective and children may have some insight about the topic that the adults do not. Moreover, the children know how they should behave to influence their parents in the most effective way. The family can also be interviewed as a group where each family member can complement the answers of the other family members and create a more comprehensive view of family decision-making.

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## APPENDIX

### **Background questions:**

1. Hur många barn finns det i familjen?
2. Hur gamla är de och av vilket kön?
3. Hur många gånger om året reser ni utomlands eller inom Finland tillsammans med familjen?
4. Varför åker ni på familjesemester?

### **Children as influencers:**

5. På vilket sätt påverkar barnen era semester beslut?
6. Hurdana skillnader finns det mellan pojkar och flickor med tanke på påverkan av semester planering?
7. Vilka knep använder sig barnen av när de försöker påverka?
8. Hur brukar ni reagera på barnens reseförslag, både sådant som är, respektive inte är, möjligt att uppfylla?

### **Family decision-making**

9. Vilka beslut brukar barnen få ta del utav gällande semester?
10. Vem brukar vanligtvis föreslå att ni skall åka på resa och på vilket sätt föreslår han eller hon det?
11. Brukar barnen söka information om destinationen innan ni åker på resa och vilken information brukar de söka efter?
12. Hurdana konflikter brukar uppkomma i beslutsprocessen och hur brukar ni reda upp det?
13. Vad brukar barnen göra för att få deras vilja igenom innan ni åker på semester?