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# **Children's amenities in hotels**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Tourism is a form of consumption that satisfies specific needs of people during travelling and staying away from home for either leisure or business purposes (Gúčik, Maráková and Šípková, 2007). Taking into consideration the high number of hotels and other forms of accommodation and consequently high competitive hospitality industry, hotels, in order to stay competitive, are forced to differentiate from each other by offering new and unique products or services. In a world full of copycats, customers appreciate features that set the hotel apart from competition therefore hotel managers should be sensitive to changing trends on the market and search for niche market on which they can successfully focus their businesses.

For the last few years, there has been an increasing tendency to travel with children, even the small ones. According to the Ypartnership's National Leisure Travel Monitor, the percentage of adults traveling with their own children has increased from 26% in 2000 to 38% in 2008. World Value Survey (2005-2008) reveals that 71 percent of Swedish population has children with 15 percent of children being under 18 years old. At the same time more than 90 percentages of the Swedish families with children consider families as a very important part of their lives. Consequently, the segment of families with children requires family friendly hotels and appropriate activities (Gúčik, Maráková and Šípková, 2007). Parents want to travel with their children, but in order to take care of their kids they also want to be offered the same facilities they have at home. On the top of that, parents often want free time alone to relax, play tennis, golf, or have a quiet dinner (Makens, 1992). These trends and statistics make it easy to understand why hotels turn their focus to this market. Nevertheless, instead of looking at children's amenities from hotel managers' point of view, the focus of this paper is on hotel guests' perception. Hotels provide plenty of attractions and facilities for children. They offer kids' movies, kids' channels on the in-room TV, play areas with video games, jigsaws and materials for drawing as well as quiz trails for older children. Moreover, some hotels offer special children's sets which include bathrobes and slippers, baby washcloths, bath ducks, baby care cosmetics and other small but important things that make families feel like at home. On the top of that, changing tables, cots, high chairs and special menu for kids are provided in most of the hotels. All those

facilities are to make families' stay at hotels as comfortable as possible. Furthermore, attractions which aim to entertain children allow adults to have a moment of relaxation. As beneficial as the children's amenities can be for families with children, they may not excite customers who come to hotels alone and expect to have peace and relaxation time. Playrooms in hotels are often situated next to restaurants or receptions which on the one hand, are convenient for parents who can keep an eye on their children while sitting in a restaurant but on the other hand, they might disturb the rest of customers, especially when children are noisy. There is a habitual notion that business travelers cannot and do not want to coexist with families with small children as those two segments have entirely different needs and ideas of spending their time and thus are completely incompatible. This thesis is to investigate whether this concept proves correct and whether providing amenities for one segment of hotel guests influence the experience of other guests staying at hotels.

## **1.2. Aim and research questions**

The aim of the thesis is to investigate how children's amenities influence hotel guests' experience. In order to achieve the aim of the research, the following questions will be answered:

*(A) What is the influence of hotel children's amenities on hotel guests?*

*(B) What influences the overall experience of guests staying in hotels with children's amenities?*

Results from the study will contribute to the knowledge based on children's amenities' role in hospitality business. It will be of special value for lodging managers who will be able to translate the results of the studies into their businesses what shows societal usefulness of this thesis.

## **1.3. Scope and limitations**

In order to answer the research questions, few semi-structures interviews with hotel guests will be conducted. The focus is on two guest groups served by hotels: business travelers and families with children. Later in the paper, if the term 'families' is used, the meaning of it will be 'families with children'. The interviews will be conducted with Scandic hotels' guests however the questions in an interview guide will allow to get overview of other hotels

providing children's amenities as well. The reason for choosing only one hotel chain was to make the research more focused and to be able to receive more accurate answers from respondents. The choice of Scandic hotel chain is explained by its wide offering of children's attractions and facilities in its hotels.

Main limitation of this research is lack of literature on children's amenities in hotels. While much attention has been paid to the importance of other hotels' amenities such as in-room entertainment technologies (Berezina and Cobanoglu, 2010; Singh and Kasavana, 2005), design (Riewoldt, 2002), environmental activities of hotels (Choi, Parsa, Sigala, and Putrevu, 2009; Cornelissen, Pandelaere, Warlop, and Dewitte, 2008; Dolnicar, 2010; Hu, Parsa, and Self, 2010), the role of children's amenities has been underexplored.

This research is based only on one hotel chain, which may influence and limit the results of the paper. Moreover, the timing contributed to a small number of conducted interviews. For those reasons, the result of this research cannot be treated as indisputable fact but rather as a guideline for a wider research with higher number of respondents.

Furthermore, it was difficult to find families with children in hotels as they usually stay at hotels during summer. Also, when tried to reach them on Skype, problem of willingness arose.

#### **1.4. Layout of the paper**

This chapter aimed at giving an understanding of the importance of conducting this research, as well as at describing the aim and research questions of the thesis. In Chapter 2 theoretical framework for the study will be discussed. It will reveal the base on which the research is built. Chapter 3 will move on to the study itself, introducing the methodology that was used for data collection. Chapter 4 will present both empirical findings resulted from qualitative interviews and discussion on them. Chapter 5 focuses on concluding the findings, answering research questions as well as on suggestions for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This part of the thesis presents the literature and researches relevant to these studies and research questions. In order to explain the influence of children's amenities on hotel guests' experiences, theory on niche market and customer experience will be discussed. This section starts with definition of amenities and by explanation of the relationship between amenities and niche leads to theory on niche market. As it will be presented later in this section, niche tourism has a diverse nature and is defines in many ways, thus, children's amenities as well as families and business travelers' needs are presented in the chapter as the results of those definitions. Finally, the theory on experience is given and followed by the consequences of niche tourism on hotel guests.

### **2.1. From amenities to niche market**

Houghton Mifflin (1982) defines amenity as a feature that increases attractiveness or value as well as physical or material comfort. Applied in the context of hotels, Watkins (2003) explains that every extra product or service found in a hotel is considered to be an amenity.

The notion of hotel amenities appeared in a literature in the late 1980s (Anon., 1989). In the past two decades, there has been an ever-increasing demand for child care services within the family and business travel markets (Gaines et al. 2004; Watkins, 2003). Hotels which cater for corporate travelers now develop child-friendly amenities to encourage customers to bring family members with them and thus boost families' bookings (Yu, 2008). Parents enjoy spending vacation time with their children however they also enjoy having time to themselves; resulting in the need for child care services (Makens, 1992). Child-friendly hotels understand it and therefore attract family travelers by designing facilities and activities for every member of the family. These amenities may include playrooms or playgrounds, laundry facilities, drying and ironing facilities or baby-sitting services. The colorful luggage boxes customized with individual hotel names and containing various products for children are sometimes handed at the families' arrival. The boxes often include shampoos, clean soaps, travel toothbrushes, bubble baths, combs, washable colored pencils, travel journals or activity books (Vendor News, 1996). As Lashley (2000) asserts, some hotels offer nappy-changing areas, bottle-warming services with additional supplies of appropriate materials and foods for small children, as well as strollers for young children. In-rooms entertainment

and amenities such as cribs, cots, small-size furnishings, baby monitors, magazines, board games, coloring books as well as age-appropriate movies are also available for children. The hotels' restaurants provide high chairs and menu specifically designed for children. Furthermore, children can participate in a variety of activity packages that are tailored for their age group. As it was mentioned before, parents are extremely sensitive to safety and thus, products and services in hotels are being designed in such way that families can have fun without sacrificing their safety or comfort. Electric plug, outlet covers, first aid kits, tub spout covers, child-proof door knobs, night lights and protective balcony netting might be available for hotel guests. Sometimes, hotels also offer toilet locks, table top edge protectors, safety placement of wires and cords, secure lids for waste cans, retractable phone cords, and water temperature controls to prevent scalding (Gaines et al., 2004). Moreover, parents may enjoy a dinner or visit to the spa while children are entertained and watched by specially trained hotel staff. Besides all those amenities, it is common that children under certain age eat and stay free or at a discount in hotels.

The varieties of hotel amenities can help the hotels to build their competitiveness, differentiate them from competition, and reinforce brand identification with guests, however, by adding more and more amenities hotels fall into a trap of 'amenity creep' (Kandampully, 2001; Blank, 2003). They try to offer everything for everybody and consequently develop unnecessary products and services. Nonetheless, such moves do not necessarily contribute to the growth of hotels' profits (Enz, Potter and Siguaw, 1999). Despite the fact that customers consider swimming pools, the Internet or spa facilities in hotels of their choice as a must, only a fraction of them actually use them (Anon., 1989). Hoteliers invest their money but do not earn them back (Enz, Potter and Siguaw, 1999). In order to increase their profits, hotels must offer expanded amenities to a carefully defined niche instead to all kind of people (Suplico-Jeong, 2010) as hotels cannot be all things to all people (Doswell, 1970 in Medlik and Ingram, 2000). In order to achieve their visitation, economic, and other goals, they should choose only one or few segments they want to focus on.

Niche tourism has a diverse nature and is characterized in many ways. Cahill (1997) identifies niche by dividing a potential market into distinctive groups of consumers who differentiate from other groups and whose members have common needs and characteristics which lead them to making a demand for similar products and services (Cahill, 1997). Similarly, Robinson and Novelli (2005) defines niche market as a narrowly defined group of individuals



who are identifiable by the same specific needs or interests and have a strong desire for the products or services offered on market. On the other hand, Dalgic and Leeuw (1994) characterize niche market as a subset of a market sector that is generally under-exploited by the mainstream. According to Robinson and Novelli (2005) the concept of niche tourism has emerged in recent years as a response to consumers' needs and as a counterpoint to what is commonly referred to as 'mass tourism'; mass tourism is defined as selling standardized leisure services at fixed prices to a mass clientele (Poon, 1993) while niche tourism is about developing products and services which are currently not being sold by competitors or which meet the needs and wants of a specialist market segment (Hassanien, Dale and Clarke, 2010). These two ideas refer to *product-related* and *customer-related* definition approaches respectively (Robinson and Novelli, 2005). *Product-related approach* identifies niche tourism by putting emphasis on the presence of activities, attractions, settlement and other amenities which are to fulfill specific tourists' needs and wants. *Customer-related approach* however focuses on fulfilling the tourist requirements and expectations by putting an importance on the relationship between the demand and the supply side; tourists' needs and preferences are studied in order to enhance experiences of customers and make their holidays satisfactory. Furthermore, niche market is considered to be an element of *competitive strategy* with Porter's three generic strategies (Bowie and Buttle 2004; Cunill, 2006; Conrady and Buck, 2010; Okumus, Altinay and Chathoth 2010; Porter, 2004; Robinson and Novelli, 2005). Here, hotels concentrate on certain segment of the market in order to limit the scope of competition which can be achieved either by decreasing overall cost of offered products and services or by distinguishing organization's products and services from competitors. Concluding, niche is a distinctive group of customers who have common specific needs, similar feelings towards particular products or services and who expect organizations to fulfill their desires. In addition, the required size of the niche market is not clearly presented in the literature. It is suggested however that niche should be large enough to yield sufficient profit and small enough to be overlooked by competitors (Robinson and Novelli, 2005). Moreover, it should be small enough to be difficult to be broken down into smaller market sectors (Robinson and Novelli, 2005). In consequence, analogically to what has been presented about niche, leisure travelers can be split up into families and even further into families with children who can be classified as a form of niche market with children's amenities being offered to them.

## **2.2. Families and business travelers' preferences regarding hotels**

In the past, hotels used to concentrate on marketing to the corporate, business and meetings segments. Nowadays, they still promote their services to these types of travelers however they now extend them to families as well (Koss-Feder, 1996). Family travel is the segment of travel that appears to be growing the most these days (Mullen, 2010). Parents enjoy spending vacation time with their children. What they are looking for while choosing a place to stay is location and cleanliness, as well as worry-free staying in hotels (Dube and Renaghan, 1999). They also see personal interactions (Rogers, Clow and Kash, 1994) and room rates as prime attributes in their hotel selection (McCleary, Weaver and Hutchinson, 1993; Yavas and Babakus, 2005). As the 2001 National Leisure Travel Monitor (in Gaines et al., 2004) revealed, 90 percent of parents confirmed that safety has been the greatest priority when choosing a vacation destination.

Since the aim of the thesis is to study impact of children's amenities on hotel guests on the whole not only on families with children, business travelers are included in the theory as well. Dube and Renaghan (1999b) indicate that business guests expect comfortable stay above all others factors. Other researchers add that the main factors in choosing a hotel by business travelers are location and amenities in general (Yavas and Babakus, 2005). Lashley (2005) summarizes that both traveler groups search for a convenient and safe place to stay overnight with price and location as one of the most important criteria in their hotel choice.

Some studies reveal that amenities are becoming important value drivers for both family and business segment (Gaines et al., 2004; Watkins, 2003; Yavas and Babakus, 2005). Moreover, Watkins (2003) claims that childcare facilities are the second most important hotel amenities for both segments. The reason for evaluating the children amenities so high by business travelers is that the number of business travelers combining leisure activities with their business trips and taking their families along on trips for "mini vacations" is constantly growing (National Business Travel Monitor in G.W., 1997). The National Business Travel Monitor revealed that 70 percent of business travelers combine their business trips with leisure activities and 30 percent take their children with them. In order to survive in a highly competitive hospitality business, hotels must recognize and meet the needs of their guests.

### **2.3. Hotel guest's experience**

The concept of experience and its value have been widely studied in tourism literature during the last decades. Pine and Gilmore (1999) have introduced a term of the experience economy which emphasized the importance of triggering pleasant emotions and staging memorable experiences for hotel guests. Ford (2012) highlights that since today's consumers want their goods and services packaged as a part of a memorable experience, the most successful hospitality organizations provide carefully designed experiences that unfold over a period of time for their guests. If the experience is positive it stays in one's memory long afterwards. According to Erik Cohen (Jafari, 2000, p. 215) experience is "the inner state of individual, brought about by something which is personally encountered, undergone or lived through". Guest experience however is "the sum total of the experiences that guest has with the service provider on a given occasion or set of occasions" (Ford, 2012, p. 9).

Guest experience is affected by the hotel setting but also by individual experience as every person is unique, has different needs, wants, tastes, capabilities and expectations. Incidents and occurrences are never exactly the same for two people and therefore, no two people can have the same experience (Lounsbury and Polik, 1992). Nevertheless, they may be similar and people may respond to them in similar way.

Shaw and Ivens (2005) as well as Ford (2012) claims that customer experience is a complex process comprising both the physical and the emotional experience. The former relates to the hotel setting and physical performance of products and services (i.e. price, comfort, convenience), the latter refers to customer's feelings which evoke during customer's encounter with an organisation and its offering. This is again very individual feature as every person is unique, has different needs, wants and expectations. Furthermore, the experience is influenced by a customer's conscious and subconscious mind (Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden, 2010) where the conscious stands for everything one can see and be conscious of and the subconscious for what one sees but does not register in the conscious mind. Conscious aspect may include three components suggested by Ford (2012): service product, service setting and service delivery system which all make up the guest experience. The service product explains why a guest comes to a hotel in the first place; this might be either tangible product like a hotel room or intangible such as relax. The service setting refers to the physical aspect of the hotel setting such as size of the rooms or diverse and quality of hotel amenities. The last part includes human components (for instance a waiter) and the physical components (such as

kitchen facilities) plus the organizational and information systems and techniques that help deliver the service to the customer.

On the other hand, according to Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden (2010), there are at least ten subconscious aspects that influence people's experience, out of which six relevant to this studies aspects have been chosen. First, people make decisions based on their preconceived expectations of what an experience will be; what the chosen hotel can and should do, how the physical setting should appear, what cost should be. Second, people appreciate when an organisation shows empathy towards the needs of other people, even if it is not directly relevant to the purchased product or service of a particular customer. Authors assume that people trust a brand more when they perceive it as a 'moral leader'. The example of this aspect is travelers indentifying with the empathy shown by hotels towards families with children even though this has no direct relevance to what they bought. Third, current mood and 'gut feel' can change customer's sense of the positive and the negative. Since people can easily change their mood (Ford, 2012), it is important for hotels to evoke positive mood in their guests for example by applying appropriate lighting or music. Fourth, what people say is not always what they really want. Fifth, customers get bored very easily; they do not want only safety but novelty as well. What can be a 'wow' experience for guests upon a first visit, might be only 'as expected' the next time. The last aspect is that people do not consider all the elements of an experience but only those most noticeable. Since they are also the most memorable, they can represent the whole experience (for instance power of surprise). However, customers remember the negative more often, and treat the positive as expected unless there is a 'wow' factor.

Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden (2010) assert that experience can be additionally evaluated based on mindspace experience which consists of pre-experience, experiencing intent and remembering the experience. The first category includes future decisions based on the prejudiced, goodness or badness of episodes that customers experienced in the past as well as the overall desirability of episode that they have not yet experienced (Ariely and Carmon, 2000). Experiencing intent is about well-being and whether the company understands customers' needs. Remembering the experience has a crucial impact on decisions to repeat past experience or to not repeat them (Ariely and Carmon, 2000; Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden, 2010). In order to enhance customers' memories, hotels differentiate from others and turn amenities into unique experience which are easier to remember than a regular offering.

## **2.4. Consequences of niche tourism on hotel guests**

Niche market contributes to several benefits both to hotels and their guests. First of all it enhances customer satisfaction as it meets customer's specific needs and wants (Ennew and Waite, 2007). The niche group enjoys the experience more because a product and its features perfectly reflect characteristics of the group. If the customers are satisfied with the stay, they will tell others about it and as a result, they will make word-of-mouth advertising. Second, children are catalysts in creating family trips and often lead to extension of the length of stay in hotels (Ryan, 1992). Third, children influence and enrich the adult experiences, thus, if they have good experience during the stay in hotel, there is a chance that their parents will also enjoy it and choose to return to the same hotel next time they travel. Finally, people have tendency to return to the places from childhood. If children have good memories of staying in a particular hotel, they will probably return to the same place as adults (Makens 1992). This also elicits loyalty which can be confirmed by Skogland and Siguaw (2004) who in their studies developed that chief factors that engaged guests' loyalty were hotel design and amenities.

In consequence, hotels maintain a narrower range of amenities and save the money which would have been spent on unprofitable amenities or services.

Nevertheless, there is a risk that if the marketed products or services do not reflect consumers' needs and preferences, customers might turn to competitors who have a more focused approach to segmentation and can provide greater satisfaction to them (Ennew and Waite, 2007). Furthermore, if the activities or interests of the niche are getting popular and the niche market is growing, then a hotel is in danger to be forced to change strategy as the niche group became regular travelers (Burnes, 2009).

## **2.5. Summary of theoretical framework**

There is a false assumption that the more the better. Hotels try to be everything to everyone and unfortunately, by offering a wide range of amenities, fall into a trap of "amenity creep". In order to avoid it, some hotels focus on niche market and offer especially designed products and services to a particular segment of people who have similar needs, wants and feelings towards specific products. The example of niche group is segment of families with children to whom children's amenities might be offered. Families with children have similar

preferences regarding hotels and their specific needs are very likely to be fulfilled. Moreover, if their hotel experience is enriched, they return to the hotel and do word-of-mouth advertising for a hotel. On the contrary, if the experience is weakened, guests easily turn to competitors. Business travelers on the other hand have slightly different preferences than families however the same factors influence the hotel stay experience of both segments; these are conscious and subconscious factors as well as goodness or badness of previous experience, prejudice, desirability of the experience, level of understanding guests' needs or uniqueness of amenities and experiences, as well as uniqueness of every person.

### **3. Methodology**

This part of the thesis presents how the data for the study was collected and analyzed. The chapter starts with clarifying the choice of an employed research method. Further, it describes the process and setting of conducted interviews as well as the method of data analysis. Finally, it presents the problems encountered during conducting the research method.

#### **3.1. Choice of a research method**

The focus of this study is on children's amenities in hotels and how they influence hotel guests' experiences and guests' perception of hotels. Given the nature of this research, the most appropriate way of collecting data is through a qualitative method which gives better explanation of experiences than quantitative methods which provide data in numbers and figures. Moreover, qualitative approach provides a great deal of 'rich' information about relatively few people rather than more limited information about large number of people (Veal, 1997). Further, quantitative research studies only current behaviour and ignore the fact that people are influenced by their history and experiences (Veal, 1997). Lastly, quantitative methods bring researcher's perspective into an investigation while in the qualitative methods point of view of participants provides the point of orientation (Bryman, 2001). For these reasons, a qualitative method of research is chosen to perform in the studies.

According to Veal (1997), participant observation, ethnography, semi-structured and group interviews are the main qualitative research methods used in leisure and tourism research. Observation and ethnography have been excluded from the proper methods for this research as they do not reveal people's experiences or opinions; they are more appropriate in cultural studies for instance of ethnic groups or sub-cultures which part of the researcher has to become. Interviews, on the other hand, give rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, values, aspiration, attitudes and feelings (May, 2001; Veal, 1997). In the social science and, as a consequence, also in the field of tourism, the interviews are used to make sense of and understand the world in which we live (Ritchie, Burns and Palmer, 2005). For these reasons, an interview is the most appropriate qualitative research method for answering the research questions of this thesis. Nevertheless, in order to do this, proper type of interview must be conducted. According to May (2001), there are four forms of interviews that can be

distinguished within the field of tourism market research: structured interview, semi-structured interview, unstructured interview and group interview. The structured interview has been excluded from the appropriate methods for this research as it is a quantitative approach which does not give room for deviation from the schedule; the same questions with the same wording and order would have to be asked (Corbetta, 2003) and in consequence, respondents could feel constrained and thus, do not reveal all the information. Group interview, another method which has been excluded, demands gathering a group of 8 to 12 persons for one and a half to two and a half hours talk about the given topic (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990 in May, 1997). In these studies, that would be difficult to achieve as it would require gathering together a group of business and family travelers staying in particular hotel chain. For those reasons, only semi-structured and unstructured interview has been taken into consideration in this research. As Corbetta (2003) asserts, the difference between those two methods is that the content, but not form, of the questions in semi-structured interview is specified, and in unstructured interview, neither the content nor the form of the questions is predetermined, thus may vary from one interviewee to another. May (2001) adds that the former method allows respondents to answer questions within their own frame of references but at the same time, it allows to control the interview process which is necessary for my studies. Furthermore, semi-structured interview gives the researcher the insights into people's experiences, perspectives, aspirations, attitudes and personal feelings (May, 1997) and according to Pine and Gilmore (1999) only semi-structured interview can elicit them. Therefore, semi-structured interviews will be conducted for this research.

### **3.2. Interviewing process**

The aim of the paper is to study influence of children's amenities on hotel guests' experience. For that purpose, nine semi-structured interviews has been conducted with both leisure and business travelers visiting different Scandic hotels. If the term 'leisure traveler' or 'leisure guest' is used in the later part of the thesis, it means 'a person who at least once stayed in a hotel with his/her child or children'. Each respondent was informed about the topic of the interview, a purpose of conducting it and how and where the answers were going to be used. All the interviews were done according to an interview guide that was constructed in a way to answer the research questions of this thesis. Semi-structured nature of interview enabled the researcher to be more flexible in the interview process and follow the pace given by interviewees rather than dictating one. Although all the questions which make up



the interview guide have been answered, not all of them have been asked as some respondents covered them while answering other questions. In addition different wordings have been used from time to time to explain better the essence of the questions. Furthermore different order of questions has been used to make the interview more fluent and additional questions have been added to help to gain better understanding of received answers. Therefore, follow-up questions ('What do you mean by that?', 'Could you say more about that?'), probing questions ('Why is that?', 'What about?'), specifying questions ('What did you do then?', 'How did X react to that?') and interpreting questions ('Do you mean that...?') have been asked (Bryman, 2001). In addition, the researcher used silence to give the respondents time to think and develop their answers. On the top of that, 'facesheet' questions with general and specific questions such as about name, age, gender or numbers of visits in a hotel, have been added. Using different types of questions allowed the researcher to make the respondent's implicit knowledge more explicit (Bryman, 2001). Finally, questionnaires for families and business travelers differ slightly from each other; two questions (6. and 7., see Appendix) in the questionnaire aimed at business travelers have been skipped as they could be answered only by guests staying at hotel with children.

After conducting the very first interview with a hotel guest, the questionnaire has been slightly rewritten and few more questions have been added in order to get more information from the respondents. Moreover, it seemed as some questions were difficult to understand for the interviewee; they were academic and specialist thus the respondent kept asking about the meaning of questions or even single words. After reformulating the questions, the next interviews proceeded smoothly.

### **3.3. Interview settings**

Five interviews were conducted in four different Scandic hotels: Scandic Malmö St:Jörgen, Scandic Kramer, Scandic Malmö City and Scandic Helsingborg Nord. Three interviews were performed on Skype, of which one was conducted without video mode as an interviewee refused to turn it on. One interview was conducted on the plane during a flight from Warsaw to Malmö. The reason for conducting the last four interviews outside the Scandic hotels is that families with children do not often visit hotels in a period where the interviews were conducted. As the receptionist from aforementioned Scandic hotels confirmed, children are usually the guests of the hotels in the summertime and much less often at weekends. The three respondents who answered the questions on Skype were found through the Scandic fan page

on Facebook which is a social network gathering a massive number of fans. Out of eight persons who have been sent a request to, only three positive responses have been received which the researcher immediately replied on in order to set up a date and time of the interviews. The interview on the plane was conducted with a random person who during the regular talk asserted that once stayed with her child in a Scandic hotel in Copenhagen. Due to the difficulties in finding families staying in Scandic hotels at this time in the year, the interviewee decided to conduct an interview with the aforementioned woman.

All the interviews lasted between 20 and 50 min depending on the pace of speaking which was related to the ability to speak English but also depending on the setting of the interviews. The 20-minutes interview was conducted in a Scandic hotel with a businessman who was in a hurry and thus talked very fast; he, however, answered all the questions and in the end apologized for talking so quickly as he thought the number of questions would be higher and the questions “*more complicated*”. The 50-minutes interview was performed on Skype with a mother of three children and was interrupted several times by the respondent’s children. While performing interviews in hotels, the researcher tried to choose a quiet place of interviews where the conversation would not be overheard or disrupted and the recording easily heard. Consequently, four interviews took place in hotels’ restaurants or breakfast rooms and one in a play area for children. One interview was conducted straight after the respondent’s breakfast, the last four in the morning hours during the break in the conferences or meetings. The interviews on Skype were performed at the time convenient for respondents and, with an exception of one, were not disrupted by any circumstances. The one exception was the aforementioned interview with a mother of 3 children. Since the children were playing quite loudly, the interviewer had to pause the interview several times.

All the respondents were talkative and willing to answer the questions, however, some of them were pretty nervous at the beginning of the interviews. As they all admitted, it was mostly caused by a fear of talking English but also by anxiety about not being able to answer the questions. Nevertheless, once the first two questions have been asked, tension has been gradually easing.

### **3.4. Information about interviewees**

All respondents were chosen randomly however each of them has stayed in Scandic hotel at least once. Eight respondents were Swedish and due to inability of the researcher to speak

fluent Swedish, they were asked to be interviewed in English. One woman was Polish and due to the common native language of the interviewer and the interviewee, the interview was done in Polish and translated into English afterwards. Respondents were between 27 and 50 years old, five of whom were men and four were woman. It has been decided to hold all the names of interviewees anonymous as a few people did not want to be mentioned by name. The names, thus, have been changed and used in new forms to avoid misunderstanding in the text. The first interview was conducted in Scandic Malmö St:Jörgen hotel on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2012 with 44 years old Peter, a father of 4 children. He stayed in the hotel for business purpose. The second interview was performed with childless 38 years old Philip, who stayed in a hotel for the second time for business purpose. The interview was done in Scandic Helsingborg Nord hotel on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2012. The third interview with 31 years old Jesper was performed in Scandic Helsingborg Nord hotel on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012. Jesper stayed in a hotel as a business traveler and it was his second stay in Scandic hotels. The fourth interview was done with Magnus in Scandic Kramer on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012. The fourth interview with Frederik was conducted in Scandic Malmö City hotel. Frederik was a 50 years old childless man who stayed in a hotel for the conferences. It was his first stay in Scandic hotel. The fifth interview was conducted with Maria, 27 years old Polish woman, a mother of one child. The conversation took place on board a Wizzair plane on the 28<sup>th</sup> April. She stayed in Scandic hotel only once. The sixth interview was performed on Skype on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012 with 37 years old Susanne, mother of three children. She stayed in Scandic hotels twice. The last two interviews with Emma and Victoria were performed on Skype respectively on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012. Emma was a 41 years old mother of three children and Victoria 43 years old mother of one child. Only Susanne, Jesper and Philip stayed in one of the Scandic hotels more than once. The respondents' age, family status and number of their visits at Scandic hotels can help to understand the gathered data thus it has been presented above.

### **3.5. Collecting and categorizing the data**

The interviews, except the very first one, were tape-recorded with the permission of the respondents and afterward transcribed. The first interview was not recorded due to a mistake of the interviewer, however, after finishing the interview and discovering a mistake, it was immediately written down on the paper. The transcripts have been read through several times, analyzed and coded, i.e. gathered into groups of information (Flick, 2006) based on theoretical framework what will be presented in chapter 4.

### **3.6. Validity and reliability of the research**

The criteria for assessing qualitative research and its results are validity and reliability (Flick, 2006; Kirk and Miller, 1986; Veal, 1997). Reliability refers to the degree to which research findings are the same as previous studies or would be the same if the research were replicated at a later date or with different sample of participants (Veal, 1997). If a researcher can repeatedly measure the same thing and get the same result, accuracy becomes more reliable. However, according to Veal (1997), this is a difficult criterion to meet in the tourism research, and as a consequence in this study, as it concerns people's behavior and attitudes which are different for every person and also, can be changed over the years. Validity, on the other hand, concerns the degree to which the gathered data is authentic and reflects the phenomenon being studied (Flick, 2006). Validity is in a way about researchers' interpretations of findings; how far are they grounded in the constructions of those who they studied and how far this grounding is explained to others (Flick, 2006) meaning whether findings have been interpreted in a correct way.

In qualitative methods, validity and reliability are difficult to assess. In this research it is caused by studying people's opinions, behaviors and attitudes which can be different for different people and be changed over the years, but also by an interpretation of results relying on researchers' own words and concepts. These aspects contribute to deteriorating validity and reliability of the research. Nevertheless, validity and reliability can be enhanced by documenting the research process in detail as well as by being cautious in making general statements on the empirical findings (Flick, 2006). Moreover, checking accuracy of interview guide in test interview or after the first interview is crucial in qualitative research as putting right questions increase validity of the research (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Furthermore, by asking respondents follow-up questions, the clarification of the answers is achieved and thus validity improved. All those actions have been undertaken during these studies in order to enhance validity and reliability of the research.

### **3.7. Difficulties**

Several difficulties have been encountered during conducting the interviews. Availability of respondents was the biggest one. As families with children usually stay in hotels in summer, only one interview with a person representing this segment was conducted in a hotel. The rest of them were done either on Skype or on a plane. One of the interviews on Skype was

conducted without video mode which slightly lowered the quality of interview as it made it less personal. Interviewing without video mode was caused by unwillingness of the respondent to switch it on. The problem of willingness was also encountered when asked people to be interviewed. As people staying in hotels were quite happy to help, the problem appeared when tried to contact former hotel guests on Skype. The last difficulty was encountered when the interviewer accidentally did not record one of the interviews. The mistake was noticed when the interview was finished but it was reconstructed and written down straight after that.

Despite all the difficulties, the interviews were conducted and analyzed which would be presented in the following chapter.

## 4. Empirical data analysis and discussion

The chapter is divided into two parts. First, the data which was gathered during the interviews is presented. Latterly, the aforementioned data is discussed in relation to the theoretical framework from the second chapter.

### 4.1. Analysis of empirical findings

Respondents were first asked about the decisive factors in choosing a hotel. Price was often mentioned by families who wanted to get either relatively cheap price for room or a discount for their children. Peter admitted to always compare and choose hotels offering the cheapest prices while Emma asserted that “*a family with several kids like mine saves quite a lot of money if it’s allowed to get a discount price like a half of the regular price for every child [staying] at hotel*”. Apart from the price, Maria and Emma added the convenience to the vital factors in their choice of a hotel. Moreover, even if not directly said, the access to the children’s amenities in hotels was also of importance for families. The range of mentioned amenities was wide; Maria listed changing tables and high chairs, Victoria a cot for babies while Susanne simply looked for “*something to absorb [her] kids*”. Furthermore, Maria, Susanne and Victoria claimed that whenever they traveled with their children, the place where they stayed overnight had to be safe. Two business travelers appreciated easy access to a hotel; Magnus and Frederik usually picked a hotel in the vicinity of the place holding the conference. Frederik aptly noticed that the answer was depended on the purpose of the stay; as a good restaurant was beneficial in each case, a place where one can relax such as spa or swimming pool was crucial during a regular, leisure trip. Jesper gave similar answer but added massages and drink bar to the relaxing facilities. Furthermore, Philip mentioned comfort, safety and high level of service as the important factors in choosing a hotel.

Respondents were then asked about children’s amenities and whether they ever came across them in hotels. If the answers were positive, the interviewer further asked about the respondents’ experience concerning those amenities. All respondents except Philip came across children’s amenities in hotels. Most of them saw them for the first time in Scandic hotels, and some while going for a family holiday as kids. When he was a child, Philip used to stay in places with such amenities but as he claimed he stayed not in hotels but in beach resorts with lot of outside space for kids to play. Consequently, he was surprised that hotels in

the city could attract families by offering them children's amenities. Peter and his children did stay in a hotel with children's amenities and while asked about his experience, he responded that *"it was all right"* because his children enjoyed it. *"For me every attraction, it doesn't matter in a hotel, shopping center... wherever, well every attraction is the same. What can I expect? That it works maybe [smile] so my kids can use it"*. He then added that the most important thing for him was that he was not disappointed. Nevertheless, when asked about the way of spending his time while children were busy playing in a special area, he answered he was drinking a wine and relaxing.

Maria did not expect anything for her child while staying at a Scandic hotel. She got positively surprised by children's amenities and enjoyed her stay at the hotel a lot. When she was listing the amenities she talked in a vivid way and looked very excited. Therefore it can be assumed that she was happy to see them in a hotel. Moreover, Maria talked about the resort she used to stay in as a child. She had very happy memories about it and wished to go back there with her son when he grew up. Susanne appreciated that the hotel, by providing all the attractions and facilities, cared about families. As she said, after breakfast her kids loved to have a nap in *"a small room with pillows and toys"* and she loved her time of relaxation. When asked about her first impression about hotel she replied: *"Before we saw that [play] room for kids we thought yes it was a very modern and clean hotel but what to say it was a regular hotel, with good-looking rooms and attractive design. Those attractions [for children] changed our opinion immediately"*. Thus, since her first stay in a Scandic hotel, she has been loyal to it. Emma shared her experience about her visit to Disney World hotel. She and her kids loved a hotel and everything it offered including a video room, swimming pool or even décor. Babysitting in a playroom in the afternoons was especially beneficial for Emma. When asked about the experience in a Scandic hotel she was very positive about it. Both she and her children enjoyed the stay however she admitted that she hoped to see *"a bit more child-like rooms"* and interior design appealing to children. She then emphasized that she indeed was happy to stay in that hotel and would certainly recommend it to her friends but also since her stay at Disney hotel, she found herself comparing every single hotel to the latter. *"I even can't stop it. Whenever I stay at any hotel and enter the lobby the picture of that [Disney] hotel pops up in my mind immediately. I can't stop it (...) It's funny, even now when we're talking about Scandic I think more or less about the Disney hotel!"*. First thoughts that came to Jesper mind, when asked about children's amenities, were noise and dirt. However, when asked about experience while staying at Scandic hotel, he responded that he liked

the stay as he was not disturbed by any noise which he expected to hear from young guests. Jesper even went back to his first stay at Scandic hotel (in Malmö St:Jörgen) when he saw children using separate playing area during breakfast. Before coming to the hotel, Jesper expected to be quite noisy in there as the hotel promoted itself as family-friendly. Nevertheless, the respondent was not disturbed by any noise and could have *“a quiet and pleasant breakfast”*. Magnus liked a “child friendly” hotel he stayed in a couple years ago (it was not a Scandic hotel) because he did not have to search for places where he could spend time with his children. As he added with a smile *“there was no zoo or an entertainment park but everything was provided pretty much there”*. Frederik was not affected by the presence of children’s amenities in a Scandic hotel as he did not see any children during his stay at the hotel. Nevertheless, he evoked the memories from his childhood when he travelled with his parents. At that time TV sets were a novelty on the market and Frederik remembered a hotel where he could watch TV in long hours. *“I don’t remember there were any children’s channels or any special programs broadcasted, but it didn’t matter to me. Not a program but TV itself was so important”*.

Out of the nine respondents only Jesper who came to a hotel for the business purpose and Emma who was a leisure traveler knew beforehand that there were children’s amenities available in there. The rest of the interviewees found out about them while being at hotels. Susanne did not know about the amenities before the first stay at hotel and was positively surprised by them. *“My kids were playing in that small room with toys while we were finishing our breakfast. It was very relaxing [time] for us, ‘coz we didn’t have to hurry with breakfast, and our kids enjoyed it (...) We chose the same hotel next time we were in Malmö and got surprised for the second time! There was another room for children downstairs, we haven’t noticed it the first time we were there (...) [It] wasn’t as big as the first one but our kids enjoyed it anyway... and we liked it better too. We sat in comfy armchairs and enjoyed cozy atmosphere of the place”*. Maria used only a crib, a high chair and a changing table while staying at Scandic hotel as her son was too young to enjoy other attractions however she asserted that she would pick the same hotel in future when her son was a bit older. Victoria also did not know about children’s amenities at hotel but was pleased to see a playroom and TV channels for kids in her room.

Most of the respondents preferred to see children’s amenities on a hotel grounds. Maria could not imagine moving the play area outside the hotel as *“it’s not the surrounding but (...)”*



*hotel's amenities that make the hotel to stand out from others*". Emma was also convincing when she said that an entertainment park in the vicinity of the hotel would be beneficial but children do not need much to stimulate their imagination, thus even a small room with few toys could occupy them for a long time. Respondents, for whom a distance was a decisive factor in choosing hotel, claimed that if the attractions had been close to the hotel, they would not have minded it. However Susanne, Emma, Victoria and Philip claimed to be more convenient to have everything in a hotel. Susanne even said "*when I was young I had to walk to my school every day, and it was 4 km, nowadays people are too lazy to go to the shop at the other side of a town, they choose the nearest one instead. So why would they choose hotel with outside attractions if they could stay in one offering everything on a place. And think about the weather. If it rains what will you do with your children in a regular hotel? That [Scandic] hotel had a lot to offer*". Moreover, although it did not matter for him, Magnus thought about other people not feeling comfortable surrounded by screaming children. Philip on the other hand noticed that if a playroom was soundproof, at least to some extent, he would not mind if it was situated in a hotel. Susanne added that a playroom in a hotel was not an open area but it was surrounded by glass thus even though her children were jumping and laughing in that room, others could not hear them much. Victoria also thought about other guests who came to a hotel for business purposes or to relax, and thus pointed a hotel as an inappropriate place for games which require running (such as hide and seek mentioned by Frederik).

For all five leisure travelers, staying in a hotel with amenities for children is between quite and extremely important. Peter claimed "*if I had to I would stay in a hotel without those amenities but if I could choose between such a place and a place offering them I would go for the second one*". Before coming to a Scandic hotel, Maria did not think about the importance of children's amenities in hotels but she started considering them as very important after her and her child stay at the hotel. The same opinion had Victoria who realized how important the children's amenities in hotels were after her stay in a hotel that did not provide them: "*it was such a hard time for me... I mean me and my sambo really looked forward to visit the hotel. We heard from our friends that it had a great restaurant and its chef worked in a Michelin restaurant once. Oh yes we even checked the menu on the [hotel's] website. But once we got there, oh my, there were even no high chairs in that restaurant. Our son was 11 month old that time, he was too small to sit by himself so we were holding him on our laps. If you ever dealt with such a small baby you should know what I am talking about... He was*

*interested in everything (...) Oh we didn't have energy to enjoy meals*". Furthermore, she added that not any children's amenities were important for her but the ones of high quality. All the interviewed leisure travelers would prioritize hotels with attractions for children first compared to hotels without those attractions. As expected any of the interviewed business travelers considered children's amenities as important as they did not use them during their business stay at hotels. However three respondents claimed that it would be of priority if they were on vacation with their children.

Finally all the interviewees were asked about the influence of children's amenities on their perception of hotels. Each respondent, except Frederik, appreciated that Scandic hotels cared about children and families and thus perceived them as more attracted than the ones without this offering. Susanne claimed that every hotel should provide children's amenities as they would attract more guests. Moreover, she believed that *"high chairs, drawing pads or colored pencils are not expensive, especially for hotels, I am sorry but they probably spend more money for toilet paper than they would pay for those things for children. And when you think about it, it's not difficult either to make space for a small room for kids. Instead of having two tables in a restaurant, they could outline an area for children. I'm sure it would pay for itself really fast"*. In her opinion such little effort might bring high profits to hotels. Furthermore, she stated that her children influenced her perception of hotels because when they were happy or excited about something, she shared their feelings. This is also connected to her willingness to stay in a hotel again. In Magnus' opinion *"every single hotel should be ready to take any kind of guests"*. Frederik, however, asserted that children's amenities do not influence his perception of hotels as long as the persons who use them do not bother him during his work. He then added *"don't misunderstand me (...) I don't like to waste time. I wish to have my work done as soon as possible and do not think about it for the rest of my day. Any noise distracts me and makes me less focused"*.

## **4.2. Discussion on empirical findings**

As it was mentioned before, the transcripts have been read through several times and the data coded in relation to the theoretical framework from chapter 2. In order to make the discussion easier to follow, sections 4.2.1., 4.2.2. and 4.2.3. have been called the same as subchapters 2.2., 2.3. and 2.4. respectively.

#### **4.2.1. Families and business travelers' preferences regarding hotels**

According to Lashley (2005), the decisive factors in choosing a hotel by both business and family segment are price, safety and convenience in general. The findings from the research showed similarity. Each respondent indicated either price or safety or both factors which they considered important while choosing a hotel. Convenience was also often mentioned although in diverse context. Some of the interviewees expressed convenience as the access to relaxing facilities such as spa, massage, swimming pool or drink bar, the others thought rather about location of the hotel and its closeness to the airport, railway station or driveway. Furthermore, two respondents pointed out cleanliness which is what Dube and Renaghan (1999b) also indicated in their research. However, as one interviewee aptly noticed, cleanliness is what most people, if not everyone, expect to see in any kind of lodging; it is like a total package expected to get while booking a room. It can be assumed that for that reason, cleanliness, treated as a standard, was not mentioned by the rest of the respondents when asked about the decisive factors in choosing hotels.

Other important factors influencing a choice of the hotel are hotel amenities. As Kandampully (2001) emphasized, amenities define hotels and make them unique. One of the respondents even confirmed Kandampully's words saying that "*hotel's amenities make the hotel to stand out from others*" and thus stay competitive. Most interviewees were interested in what hotels had to offer before going there however the previous studies saying that both family and business segment was equally interested in children's amenities have not been supported in this research. The leisure travelers considered amenities for children as important when searching for a hotel but business travelers looked at other facilities such as spa, massage or jacuzzi. As mentioned in a theoretical framework, almost three quarter of business travelers combine their business trips with leisure activities and thirty percent take their children with them. None of the respondents in these studies has ever taken his or her kids on a business trip thus amenities for children were not of importance for them unless it was a pure leisure trip. The reasons for that may be two-dimensional. First, none of the interviewed business travelers knew about children's amenities in Scandic hotels until they came there. Second, Scandic hotels do not offer babysitting but activities that can be undertaken only under the supervision of parents; there is no one who could take care of children while their parents would be on business meetings. However, later in the interviews, three of the business respondents showed their willingness to come to the hotel with their families.

Of importance is that not all preferences regarding hotels were exposed straight away. As revealed later in the interviews, two of the business respondents who claimed to search for comfort and relaxing amenities in hotels meant not to be disturbed by any unnecessary noises. When asked about children's amenities in hotel, they did not mind them as long as they were separate rooms like soundproof playing rooms, separate TV rooms or outside playgrounds. They also did not mind children's activities but only as long as they did not required running in hotels.

Two other interesting responses concerning choosing a right hotel are worth to mention as they do not fit any of the responses from previous studies; that is high level of service and eco friendly performance of a hotel. When trying to sort these responses into the results of other studies, high level of service could be classified as a comfortable factor suggested by Dube and Renaghan (1999b) as well as Lashley (2005) as it could eliminate stress triggered by low service or impolite staff. On the other hand, eco friendly performance could also fit this category; the fact that hotel is doing something for the environment may bring a psychological comfort to the guests. Therefore, comfort can have a very broad meaning depending on the person who defines it. When rejecting aforementioned categories, the absence of eco friendly factor in other studies may be explained by relatively new interest in caring about the environment, however, the more likely answer is what Lounsbury and Polik (1992) said about every person being unique and having different needs, wants and capabilities. Concluding, all answers may be unique and correspond only to specific individual needs.

#### **4.2.2. Hotel guest's experience**

According to Ford (2012), the experience, if positive, stays in one's memory for a long time. Most interviewed hotel guests had good memories about staying in hotels with children's amenities, with some of them sharing memories from their childhood and some discussing their experience from the recent years. One respondent who talked about the time when he traveled with his parents as a young boy recalled the stay in a hotel with TV. At that time, TV sets were a novelty on the market and watching TV was perceived as a luxury thus his joy of doing it was even greater, and stayed in his mind for decades. Another respondent had great memories about her stay in Disney World hotel. She loved the experience relating to that stay and showed it by going back to those memories couple times during the interview. She and her children enjoyed the stay so much that, as she said, she found herself comparing

every single experience to the one connected to Disney World hotel. Another interviewee talked about very recent stay at a Scandic hotel. The experience during her first stay in the hotel was so pleasant and long-lasting that she referred to them when choosing a hotel for her next stay. Those cases prove that if the experience is positive, it will stay in someone's memory for a long time.

Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden (2010) suggested that the experience is influenced by a customer's conscious and subconscious mind which fits into the answers given by the respondents. Conscious aspect was visible when interviewees talked about their motives and expectations regarding a choice of the hotel. They referred both to tangible (such as diversity of offering, relaxing amenities, children's amenities, eco-friendly hotel) and intangible products (such as price, comfort, convenience, relax, level of service) about which they formed an opinion before, during and after their stay. Subconscious aspect is also clear when looking at the answers given by the hotel guests. Respondents based their decisions on their preconceived expectations of what an experience would and should be; for instance some interviewees expected to get free accommodation or at least a discount for their children if they were previous offered that in other place. Accordingly, respondents showed that they had preconceived expectations of the amenities provided by a hotel or service delivered by staff. Concluding, people go to a hotel with a complete image of a hotel and expectations about the stay. If they must pay a full price for children or do not receive service they think they would anywhere else, it will negatively influence their overall experience about the stay in that particular hotel.

Furthermore, people do appreciate when organisations show empathy towards the needs of other people even if it does not affect them. Not surprisingly, every leisure traveler appreciated that a hotel cared about children and families as it was the segment at which this service was mainly aimed at. However, three out of four interviewed business travelers appreciated that care as well. One reasoning behind that was that "*a family should be protected in any possible way as it is the most important thing one can have*", another reason was that children would be adults and possible clients one day. It shows that caring about others is not only a matter of morality as it stands in a literature but also that people are conscious of the consequences of today's actions in the future.

Another subconscious aspect influencing guest's experience is current mood which effect was already seen during one of the interview. At the beginning of it, the respondent was slightly

impatient and nervous and his responses were rather negative but at the end of the interview he contradicted his previous answers and was justifying every negative opinion. What he explained off the record was that he thought the questions would be more complicated and take more time to answer them. However, it has been also noticed that at the end of the interview there were less people in a breakfast room where the interview was conducted and consequently it was quieter. This phenomenon does not explain the theory on the influence of appropriate lighting or music on a guest experience but it clarifies the impact of the mood on people's feelings and actions. Moreover, during the interview in one of the Scandic hotels it could be noticed that one playroom was situated at a restaurant in which lighting, music and design created feeling of coziness and relaxation. A playroom in another restaurant, however, was hidden from one side behind a smorgasbord and from another side behind a wooden barrier what caused the feeling of privacy both for families with kids and other hotel guests. Consequently, it shows that hotels realize that by creating appropriate lighting, music or layout of the rooms they improve guests' mood.

In addition, Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden's (2010) claim, that what people say is not always what they really want, is also evident in the research. Some respondents were hiding their intentions from time to time; while analyzing the transcripts, it turned out that respondents who looked for relaxing amenities in hotels, rather searched for silence and places that do not provide children's amenities which elicit noise.

The last aspect saying that customers get bored very easily and need novelty from time to time is also seen in this research. In most cases what respondents named as a necessity in hotels of their choice, was exactly what hotels in which they once stayed had to offer. It shows that people expect the same things they once found in a hotel and consider them as a must the next time they are in a hotel. On the other hand, one respondent described a hotel as a chocolate box from which one never knows what is going to get when she discovered the second playroom in a hotel she once stayed. This shows that if the expectations are exceeded and guests are surprised, their experience will be enhanced. This aspect is connected to the last subconscious component of the experience which is power of surprise or 'wow' factor. People do not consider all the elements of an experience but only those most noticeable. What is more, the most noticeable occurrences are also the most memorable ones and thus can represent the whole experience. Nevertheless, most of the respondents in this research did not mention any particular surprise or a 'wow' factor that they encountered

during the stay in a hotel but either a few or none of them. Some interviewees did not name anything special, any event or occurrence in particular but they remembered their stay well enough to pick the same hotel next time they traveled. The research showed that it does not have to be one particular ‘wow’ factor to make the experience memorable; there can be many surprises or no surprises at all but simply the overall pleasant memories.

Concluding, the respondents’ experience consist of prejudice, previous experience, expectations, well-being and memories, which all fit Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden’s (2010) theory on evaluating experience based on mindspace experience (see chapter 2).

#### **4.2.3. Consequences of niche tourism on hotel guests**

According to studies of several researchers described in chapter 2, niche tourism contributes to numerous benefits both to hotels and their guests which was also confirmed by these studies. All interviewed leisure travelers enjoyed the stay in hotel and felt that their needs were fulfilled. Moreover, together with business travelers they would recommend the hotels to other guests and in consequence, unconsciously do word-of-mouth marketing. The importance of satisfying children was also often mentioned during interviews; if children had fun in a hotel, their parents felt the same way. Their experience was enriched because their children enjoyed their stay at hotel. Finally, respondents wished to return to the places from childhood about which they had good memories. According to Skogland and Siguaw (2004) this is connected to loyalty. A few interviewees assured their willingness to come back to the places from their childhood, nonetheless only one already showed her loyalty towards one hotel of which she had good memories. Of importance is that the respondent did not show loyalty to a hotel from childhood but from a very recent visit to a hotel. Thus, this cannot be referred to Skogland and Siguaw's (2004) theory about being loyal towards places remembered from childhood. Even though other respondents declared their readiness to go back to hotels from childhood the limit of time for this research hindered the researcher from checking whether they really did that. Thus, it is difficult to prove that loyalty is indeed elicited from the experience gained as a child because what respondents said could be only a wish.

Besides all the advantages of niche tourism, there is also a risk that if the marketed products or services do not reflect consumers’ needs and preferences, customers might turn to competitors. Every respondent more or less but liked the stay in a hotel and would

recommend the hotel to others; however as it was mentioned before, some of the interviewed leisure travelers talked about babysitting that was not provided in a hotel and few business travelers would be happy to see it as a hotel offering if they would stay in a hotel with their children. Consequently, although all respondents enjoyed the stay in hotels, there was still a risk that next time they could turn to the hotel which offered the aforementioned service.



## 5. Conclusions

Since the results of the empirical findings and discussion on them have been presented in the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on concluding findings, answering the research questions and the aim of the thesis as well as suggestions for future research.

The aim of the thesis was to investigate how children's amenities influence hotel guests' experience. In order to achieve the aim of the research, the following questions have been asked:

*(A) What is the influence of hotel children's amenities on hotel guests?*

*(B) What influences the overall experience of guests staying in hotels with children's amenities?*

In order to make the research more focused, Scandic hotel chain and its guests have been chosen as a support in this research. Five leisure travelers and four business travelers have been interviewed in order to gain knowledge about their experience and perception of hotels offering children's amenities. The respondents were very diverse and often gave different answers however conclusions which will be presented in the form of research questions were possible to draw.

### 5.1. Research question (A)

*(A) What is the influence of hotel children's amenities on hotel guests?* After analyzing all differently formulated answers, it is clear that hotel children's amenities influence guests' perception of hotels; respondents evaluate hotels with children's amenities higher than hotels that do not offer them and are willing to choose them again when travelling with children. This is driven by a fact that in a case of bad weather children are not left to boredom as there is plenty to do in a hotel. Another reason is that people think of children's amenities as a good investment for hotels and favor places which are well managed. Furthermore, if they are satisfied with the offer, they will recommend the hotels to other people and in consequence, unconsciously do word-of-mouth marketing. Moreover, having children's amenities around makes families to be more relaxed and their stay to be more pleasurable. When kids are busy with exploring toys or playing games, parents can relax or finish their breakfast without being hurried by bored children. In addition, amenities such

as playrooms, video games or TV rooms contribute to greater parents' convenience as parents do not have to search far for something that can entertain and interest their children. Since children's amenities are offered to a special segment of guests, they fulfill their needs more precisely and enrich their experience. Nevertheless, there is also a risk that if they do not reflect consumers' needs and preferences, hotel guests might turn to competitors. The level of children's amenities' influence of business travelers depends on a type and setting of the amenities. Since business travelers associate comfort with silence and relaxation, children's activities should not be in their opinion interrelated to running and screaming, and playrooms should be either soundproof or separated. If these conditions are fulfilled, the influence of children's amenities on business guests' experience is none. On the other hand, if hotels think about other hotel guests as well by adapting the amenities to their needs, it will improve business travelers' perception of these hotels what can contribute to their willingness to stay there when going for a leisure trip.

## **5.2. Research question (B)**

*(B) What influences the overall experience of guests staying in hotels with children's amenities?* The research shows that the experience is influenced by several factors including customer's conscious and subconscious mind. Conscious aspect is related to motives and expectations regarding a choice of the hotel; this is referred to either tangible products such as diversity of children's amenities or intangible products such as price, relax, comfort and convenience. Subconscious aspect influencing the overall experience includes preconceived people's expectations, current mood, prejudice, previous experience and setting for children's amenities. As the research shows, previous experience is not represented by one particularly memorable occurrence but by a sequence of good memories about the stay. Furthermore, even if people do not realize it, they go to a hotel with a complete image of a hotel and expectations about the stay. They also appreciate when organisations show empathy towards the needs of other people even if it does not affect them directly. Finally, fulfilling children's wants and needs contribute to the parents' overall experience.

## **5.3. Aim and final conclusions of the thesis**

The research questions have helped to reach the aim of the paper which was to investigate how children's amenities influence hotel guests' experience. The research shows that children's amenities contribute to positive and memorable experience which might

greatly influence future decisions of guests. If the needs and wants of hotel guests are fulfilled, the bond between guests and hotels will be tighten and guests will be willing to come back to that hotel. While the amenities enrich families' experience by their presence or consequences of using them, they do not influence business travelers as long as they are well designed. Business guests appreciate that hotels care about families but also that they think about other guests as well by designing amenities in a way that they are almost unnoticeable for others. Nevertheless, the overall experience depends on the factors mentioned in a research question (B). Concluding, children's amenities have mainly positive impact on guests' experience but there is always a risk that if they do not fulfill guests' expectations or disappoint them, their experience will diminish and guests will turn to competition. Thus, every hotel manager should think through before making any decisions about adding any extra amenity to the hotel offering and make sure that this amenity will not discourage the guests whom it is not directed to.

This research proves that the habitual notion that business travelers cannot and do not want to coexist with families with small children is not correct. As some business respondents either had their own kids or remembered themselves being kids and having specific needs, they were pleased to see children's amenities in hotels and they did not mind to be surrounded by children; nevertheless the condition was to not be bothered by them as they remembered the reason why they came to a hotel at the first place which was work that had to be done.

### **5.3. Suggestions for future research**

The old saying "*You can't please everyone*" turned out not to be accurate in case of this study as children's amenities in hotels positively influenced both families and business travelers. However, as the research was based only on few findings, it should not be served as an indisputable fact but rather as a guideline for future research. In order to gain better understanding of the influence of children's amenities on guests' experience and guests' perception of hotels as well as to enrich the findings of this study, larger number of respondents should participate in the future research. Furthermore, even though Scandic guests gave answers concerning other hotels offering children's amenities, it would be interesting to interview people staying at other hotel chains as well. Those findings in turn could be further compared to these results. In addition, it could be worthwhile to explore the topic from the managers' perspective. The combination of hotel guests' and hotel managers' opinions would give a wider overview of the meaning of children's amenities in hotels.

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# Appendix

Name

Age

Gender

How many times have you stayed in Scandic hotels?

1. What are you looking for while choosing a place to stay?
2. What associations come to your mind when you think about facilities and services for children in hotel?
3. Have you ever stayed in hotel with children's amenities? What is your experience? (perhaps when you were a child)
4. Did you know that there are amenities for children in this hotel?
5. Please name the children's attractions and services that you knew before coming to hotel and which you wanted to use. If there is one why did it attract you?
6. Have you used any of the facilities or services for children during your stay at hotel? If yes, are you satisfied with it?
7. In your opinion, could those attractions be replaced by, for example, other attractions outside but close to the hotel?
8. In your opinion, how is an ideal hotel equipped considering children? What sort of activities do you think are suitable for children in hotels? Which type of activities do you consider unsuitable for children in hotels?
9. How would you describe your perceptions about children's amenities in hotel before and after your stay? Has your opinion changed?
10. How important for you is to stay in hotel where there are attractions for children?
11. How much influence do children's amenities have on your perception of a hotel?
12. Would you come here with your children or recommend others to come here?
13. Would you prioritize hotels with attractions for children first compared to hotels without those attractions? Why or why not?
14. Do you appreciate that hotel cares about children and families?