

OPPORTUNITIES FOR HANDLING CHILD AGGRESSION IN TOURIST ANIMATION THROUGH CREATIVE TOURISM

Mariya Veleva* and Krasimira Yancheva

University of Economics-Varna
Department of Economy and Organization of Tourism
Varna, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT— *The goal of this paper is to review some behavioral features of child aggression in order to suggest opportunities for handling it through creative tourism application. The research methods applied are theoretical synthesis, theoretical analysis and observation. We suggest that creative tourism has big potential in handling child aggression in tourist animation if applied in specific ways. To reveal the nature of aggression in child behavior we particularize the reasons: aggressive behavior in children, especially when social skills are missing, is used to attract attention, to achieve a goal, to satisfy desire for leadership, to overpower or suppress others. We insist on the importance of animators' ability to handle child aggression and we precise and particularize the process. Building social skills, developing emotional intelligence and participating in positive group behavior are some of the suggestions we offer as opportunities to handle child aggression in tourist animation. The focus on child aggression in tourist animator's work brings to light a problem that is still virgin regarding research in the Bulgarian scientific publications. This, and the suggestion how creative tourism can play significant role in handling child aggression are innovative and can contribute to other researches related to tourist behavior.*

Keywords: *child aggression, behavior, social skills, tourist animation, creative tourism.*

INTRODUCTUON

Problems related to display of child aggression in the course of the tourist animator's work are relatively poorly explored so far, which gives us the opportunity to focus our attention on this particular topic of research. The animator is responsible for the children entrusted to his care, and he is obliged to pay equal attention to each one of them. Sometimes, though, conflicts between children arise and they can easily develop into problematic or aggressive behavior, if the animator cannot get things under control. Behavioral problems in children may happen to be ignored or neglected, since the main emphasis lies usually on providing the best possible holiday for the parents. At the same time children have their own experiences and emotions and the animator can reinforce them, if they are positive, or take control over them if they are negative, as it is the case with child aggression.

*Corresponding author at: University of Economics-Varna, Department of Economy and Organization of Tourism Varna, Bulgaria, e-mail: maria.veleva@ue-varna.bg

The subject of this paper is child aggression, and the goal is to review some behavioral features of child aggression – both in general and in tourist animation in particular, in order to suggest opportunities for handling it through creative tourism.

The research target is the theoretical statements on the problem of child aggression, as well as its behavioral display. The research methods applied are theoretical synthesis, theoretical analysis and observation. The observation covered quantitative and qualitative parameters. The quantitative ones are as follows:

- Place: the observation was held in hotel animation clubs of 4 and 5 stars hotels in Northern Black Sea Coast resorts: Albena, Golden Sands, and St. Constantine and Helena;
- Time: the observation was held during the time period 10.06.2017 - 30.08.2017;
- The number of children being object of observation was 809.

The qualitative parameters include:

- Nationality. The observed children represented by nationality in percentage are: Germany - 27%, Russia - 24%, UK - 20%, Romania - 10%, Sweden - 7%, Poland - 5%, Norway - 4%, Bulgaria - 3%,
- Age groups. The observed children are of two age groups: 3-6, and 7-12.

The results of this research point to some opportunities to handle child aggression in tourist animation through creative tourism application.

1. Nature of aggression in child behavior

It is considered natural for children to display anger and aggression during certain stages of their personal development. Most authors (Baron, 2004¹; Dinstein, 2011²; Miczek and Meyer-Lindenberg, 2014³; Koob, 2010⁴) unite around the statement that aggression is a pattern of behavior that involves threatening or causing harm to another living being that does not want to be treated in this way. It also involves intentional insult, humiliation, offence, i.e. it causes not only physical pain but also mental suffering. Along this line of thought child aggression is synthesized (Stamatov, 2000) as: „Aggression is a type of behavior aimed at causing harm to another person: pain, humiliation, insult, by deliberate intent to do evil“⁵. There exist various typologies and classifications of child aggression. Stamatov uses the pair model: *active-passive*; *open-hidden* (= social manipulation); *physical-verbal*; *reactive-proactive*; *impulsive-non-impulsive*. *Instrumental* and *hostile* aggression also belongs to this classification.

There can be defined various classifications of aggressive children, as i.e. the three types of aggressive children (Kalchev, 2012):

- *Instrumental aggressive children*: they demonstrate high levels of aggressive actions while at the same time the levels of anger and hostility are low. Their aggressive actions are caused not by anger or hostility but by the strong desire to achieve certain goals – acquiring different things, imposing their own opinion etc.; with these children the difficulties are usually related to the values they have accepted, as well as to their attitudes to use aggressive actions in order to achieve the goals set;

¹ Baron, R., D., Richardson, Human Aggression. Plenum Press, 2004.

² Dinstein, Y., War, Aggression and Self-Defence. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

³ Miczek, K., A. Meyer-Lindenberg, Neuroscience of Aggression. Springer, 2014.

⁴ Koob, G., et al, Encyclopaedia of Behavioral Neuroscience. Elsevier - Academic Press, 2010.

⁵ Stamatov, R., Child Psychology. Hermes Publishers, Plovdiv, 2000, p. 325.

- *Angry aggressive children*: this group is characterized by high levels of aggressive actions and anger, yet at the same time low levels of hostility. The actions of children belonging to this group are caused by uncontrollable anger. They have difficulties with self-control, therefore very often their outbursts of anger prove to be rather unacceptable;

- *Hostile aggressive children*: this group displays high levels of aggressive actions, low levels of anger, maintaining high levels of hostility at the same time. A typical feature of the actions of this kind of children is that they are performed in a cold-blooded manner; aggressive behavior is a result of the explicit desire to cause pain and suffering, and this desire is usually an end in itself. Behind the aggressive actions there is almost always a feeling of hostility revealing malice, accumulated bitterness because of some unjust treatment in the past, humiliation, rejection, traumatic experience, revenge and suspicion of others.

Taking into account the study conducted by Fakirska⁶, here could be added another categorization, consisting of three main groups of children showing aggression:

A) *Children using aggression to draw attention to them*. In such cases typically there is no cruelty shown but we observe an expression of strong emotions (cries, insults). Once they manage to attract the attention, these children become friendly and their aggression disappears;

B) *Children perceiving aggression as a norm of behavior* when they have some goals to pursue: through their actions they pursue a certain goal and once they have achieved it, they calm down;

C) *Children deliberately causing pain and humiliation as this makes them happy*. With this type of children we observe a violent direct physical aggression, without any feeling of guilt. Such children disregard the person next to them. Their actions are not selfish but their problem is that they don't recognize the achievements of others. Their egocentricity lies at the heart of the intentional aggression they demonstrate, and they find satisfaction and positive emotions in the destructive results for the object of their aggression.

Since the 80s it has been accepted by a number of authors (Huesmann et al., 1984,⁷ Dodge, 1986⁸, Kazdin, 1987⁹, Rubin and Daniels-Beirness, 1983¹⁰) that the main reasons for child aggression are most often expressed in:

- *Pursuit of independence and identity*: establishing one's personality takes place in an aggressive way as the child perceives aggression as an acceptable approach in order to feel significant and somewhat grown-up;

- *Feeling of helplessness*: it occurs when the child is unable to establish control over something or someone in the way s/he wants to. The feeling of helplessness unlocks the manifestation of aggression;

- *Egocentricity and lack of empathy*: since at this age empathy is not developed, children see their peers as objects, not as equal beings who have feelings;

- *Lack of control over impulses*: at an early age children are still not capable of controlling their impulses. In this case aggression is a continuation of the 'stimulus-reaction' type of behavior;

⁶ Fakirska, Y., Prevention of Aggression through Cultivating a Tolerant Behavior Attitude. *Preschool Education*, No.7, 2006, pp. 22-27.

⁷ Huesmann et al., Stability of Aggression Over Time and Generations. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 20 (6), Nov. 1984, 1120-1134.

⁸ Dodge, K. A., A social information processing model of social competence in children. In: M. Perlmutter (Ed.), *Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology*, 1986, pp 7-125. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

⁹ Kazdin, A. E., Treatment in antisocial behavior in children: Current status and future directions. *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 102, 1987, pp. 187-203.

¹⁰ Rubin, K. N., Daniels-Beirness, T. Concurrent and Predictive Correlates of Sociometric Status in Kindergarten and Grade 1 Children. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, Vol. 29, 1983, pp. 337-351.

- *Lack of social skills*: they are not innate but are rather taught gradually by means of experience, adult imitation, through the ‘trial-error’ method or by following instructions. Since in childhood social skills are still not completely developed and consolidated, there is no mechanism deterring impulsive behavior (through them);

- *Lack of intellectual competence*: because of this lack high levels of aggressiveness are maintained not only in childhood but also in the next stages of the individual development. It is important to note that intellectual competence is directly related to emotional intelligence - the higher the children’s intellectual competence, the higher the likelihood of them developing high levels of emotional intelligence, and, respectively, developing a mechanism deterring aggression. Whether this will happen, however, depends on the operation of a number of situational factors, whose impact must also be taken into account (family, environment, group, socio-cultural characteristics, etc.);

- *Inability to anticipate the consequences*: due to lack of social skills, experience and emotional intelligence, the child is not able to predict what will happen if s/he hits or hurts someone else;

- *Lack of speech abilities*: at a young age, children still do not have good verbal expression skills, that is why they often resort to the physical form of expressing themselves.

In order to have a more complete picture of the reasons behind child aggression, it is necessary to indicate the other factors that trigger it:

- *External environmental factors*, causing physical discomfort: pain, hunger, lack of sleep, illness, cold, heat, crowded places. External factors are most effective where there are no mechanisms deterring aggressive behavior (such as social skills, life experience, and emotional competence);

- *Emotional factors*: they are considered a prerequisite for triggering aggressive behavior when children are hostile treated or forced to exist in such an environment, when they experience lack of attention and affection, when they are subjected to sudden changes in life, when there is too much control exercised over them, or on the contrary, there is no control at all, when parents are substituted by other people (relatives, caregivers, etc.), children cannot adapt positively to and accept them on an emotional level.

It can be summed up that aggressive behavior in children, especially when social skills are missing, is used as a means of attracting attention, achieving a goal, satisfying the desire for leadership, overpowering or suppressing others. This type of behavior would definitely create problems for the child to be accepted and well-established in the group as a full-fledged member, as well as problems in building social and intellectual skills for communication with others. Therefore, it can be assumed that studying the causes of child aggression and taking them into consideration is of great importance when choosing the right approaches to handle this negative and destructive behavior.

2. Child aggression and animator’s ability to handle it

The attention of this research is pointed to child animation because it has a specific place among the other types of animation: it has a special subject - children accompanying parents in the place where parents are accommodated, or independent children and adolescent tourist groups. One of the most serious problems in the child animator’s work is to identify the reason for child aggression and the possibility of handling it in tourist animation. Because of this, one of the most challenging tasks of an animator is to work with aggressive children, and to protect them from sources of aggression. When dealing with children showing aggression, it is indispensable that the child animator is familiar with some specific child characteristics:

- ✓ *Age characteristics in children*: Three-year-olds are beginning to demonstrate self-awareness, but this is a process that takes place accompanied by very strong emotions - joy, discontent, anger.

They are not able to distinguish between ‘real’ and ‘made-up’ and they think everything they see is right. It is for this reason that they need clear explanations, instructions, rules imposed in order to understand what is right and wrong, good and bad. Children must know exactly what the animator wants from them and why. At this age children are inquisitive, moving and active, but they get easily tired and to avoid aggression, the activities children are involved in need to be changed at regular intervals; their behavior must be carefully monitored as they can lose interest in activities lasting for a long time.

Children aged 7 to 12 get excited more easily have diverse emotions and are even prone to conflict. To avoid states of aggression, it is important for the animator to retain children’s interest through attractive events and impressive suggestions. Typical of this age group is that they lose their unconditional obedience to adult authority and prefer clear and precise rules of the game. Competition games must therefore be conducted in strict compliance with the rules that have been previously explained and clearly understood by the participants. Here, the role of the animator as a referee, judge or leader is predominant to ensure fair play, otherwise it is possible for children to develop aggression.

Teenage children demonstrate maturity and independence, they want to present themselves and be regarded as grown-ups, but their interests and abilities are still childish. That is why they are extremely difficult to work with; they often perceive the proposed animations skeptically and with mockery.

✓ *The younger the children, the greater their dependence and attachment for their parents, and the temporary separation from them may become a reason for aggression and drama. Social experience is smaller. This determines the communication with children with similar characteristics as responsible, requiring a higher degree of security and attention by the animators.*

✓ *Sometimes aggressive behavior results from the parents’ attitude to children’s animation, which may differ. For some, it is just a paid service that will allow them a few hours of freedom from the never-ending children’s ‘why?’ Others see it as an opportunity for children to improve their social communicative skills, communicate with peers, or show their talents. The common expectation is that the child will be safe and cared for.*

✓ *In children’s animation, greater effort and skills are needed to guide and regulate child activity, to overcome uncontrollable manifestations of strong emotional excitement. Often children behave differently in the club than they do in their parents’ presence, which explains why some children are more dynamic and energetic once they find themselves into a society of peers. They tend to experiment and are often initiators of aggressive acts in order to attract attention or simply win others’ recognition.*

All the above-mentioned peculiarities and manifestations of aggression in children’s animation show that the children’s animator’s work is complicated, complex and requires specific skills and competences. The animator should be very good psychologist with a high level of emotional intelligence and empathy, as well as excellent communication skills. Knowing what causes child aggression would give him different opportunities to choose one or combine several effective approaches in order to handle child aggression.

3. Opportunities for applying creative tourism in order to handle child aggression in animation

One of the popular definitions of creative tourism, defining its essence, is that of UNESCO, presented also at the International Conference on Creative Tourism in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA (Wurzburger, R., et al, 2008): ‘Creative tourism is travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of the place, and it

provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture.¹¹ The definition focuses on the relationship of the tourists with the local population. However, it turns out that, in some cases, there is little or no connection at all between the so-called creative action and the place or people living there. That is why Smith (Smith, 2009) introduces definition change and comes up with the following one: 'Creative tourism explores and expresses one's creative potential whilst on holiday. The activities and the relationship to the self are the primary focus. Context or environment is secondary.'¹²

Along with all other definitions, there are also those with a more specific focus, such as, for example, the definition offered by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014): 'Creative tourism can be explained in conjunction with the definition of the creative economy, which can be perceived as an expansion of the creative industries to generate new values and sustainable development based on creativity and innovation'.¹³ The definitions listed above point to the fact that creative tourism has a potential big enough to be used in animation in coping with child aggression, especially when creativity and innovation are incorporated.

Keeping in mind that children's animation is not only entertainment but also education, and taking into account the highlights of the above-mentioned definitions of creative tourism, we believe that child aggression can be handled successfully and transformed into positive behavior by using creative tourism in order to handle child aggression. This can be done in different ways, some of the most appropriate in this case being:

- *Authentic experience through participation in learning arts*: it can be achieved by organizing children into small groups and encouraging them to actively participate in /for example/ work-games such as: making *martenitsas*, making a doll in a traditional folk costume, mask making, painting, painting of clay figures, folklore animation, lessons in folk dances, folk singing, musical instrument demonstrations, etc. Thus, on the one hand, children's energy will be directed towards developing their creative skills instead of aggressive behavior, and on the other hand, the classes will enrich children's cultural knowledge about Bulgarian folklore and help them develop different kinds of skills;

- *Expressing one's creative potential*: this can be accomplished by means of /for example/ get-to-know-each-other games, movement games, energizing the group, feedback games, games on the beach, 'family, theatre, stars' games, thematic days, Olympiads, carnivals, competitions, participation in food preparation, etc. Activities like these, along with similar ones, would contribute to developing children's social skills, emotional competence, building impulse control, developing speech skills, and so on. In other words, in this case the animator would have an important role to play in developing and unfolding children's personal potential so that they adopt the attitude of lifelong learning and communicating with others in a positive way. Using their intellectual abilities in various games and mental activities will encourage children to look for challenges and goals for their personal growth and development;

- *Using the creative industries to generate new values and sustainable development based on creativity and innovation*: this can be done by using the IT technologies, dance competitions, children's discos, culinary parties, beauty contests, etc. In modern life, at an early age children start learning how

¹¹ Wurzburger, R., et al, Creative Tourism: A Global Conversation How to Provide Unique Creative Experiences to Travelers Worldwide. Santa Fe & UNESCO International Conference on Creative Tourism in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, 2008. Sunstonepress, 2010, pp. 210.

¹² Egger, R., and Chr. Mauer, ISCONTOUR 2013, Proceedings of the International Student Conference in Tourism Research, 2013, pp. 80.

¹³ OECD (2014), Tourism and the Creative Economy, OECD Studies on Tourism, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787//9789264207875-en>.

to use modern communication technologies and this predetermines to a large extent their implementation in children's animation without any problem. It can be assumed that in this way children will be more engaged and diligent in performing the assigned creative tasks. Maintaining a high engagement of attention as well as setting of not too difficult, feasible goals, would encourage them to become empathetic and responsible to the game and the creative process. This, in turn, would naturally neutralize the manifestations of aggression in child behavior.

By suggesting the pointed above approaches to handling child aggression, we believe that creative tourism has a great potential to contribute to the personal growth and development of children who are participants in children's animation: children have the opportunity to build up their social skills, spend their excess energy in creative and physical activities, develop their emotional intelligence and empathy, develop the sense of belonging to the group, have an opportunity to express their creative potential and achieve self-assurance through goals successfully accomplished, etc. Thus, not only will aggression be eliminated from child behavior, but also the animator will be able to stimulate and support the personal development of the children involved.

Conclusion

The focus of the study is pointed towards child aggression in tourist animation - area that lacks serious theoretical and field research in Bulgaria so far. The paper contributes to the research topic by suggesting that creative tourism can be turned into a positive tool for handling child aggression by the tourist animators working with children. The main purpose of children's animation is to keep children entertained and engaged in the most interesting way possible, in order to allow parents to relax and unwind, to rest assured that 'someone' takes good care of their children and they are safe and satisfied. To achieve this, however, it is necessary that tourist animation companies, hoteliers and all others offering animation services should know, observe and apply the basic principles and requirements for the animator's working duties, especially when the subject is a child. Based on the study, we can conclude that the children's animator is a person with serious and responsible work assignments and should have high level of professional competencies. Tourism industry should not underestimate or ignore the need to organize and conduct professional training for animators (including children's animators) in order to provide, both theoretical knowledge aimed at studying behavioral patterns in children and the peculiarities of age groups in children's animation, and as well as ways to devise children's animation programs, reveal the nature and role of games in animation, offer types of games and how to use them through practical modules.

We consider that creative tourism, along with its typical features, has a great potential in terms of handling child aggression in tourist animation. This type of tourism can offer sufficient opportunities for children to be involved in different activities in order to develop their creativity and creative potential: participation in learning some arts, Olympiads and games to develop one's creativity, emotional intelligence, social skills, empathy and care for others. We suggest that these can enhance the development of children's personal qualities. The use of creative industries would maximize the positive effect of applying creative tourism to working with children in tourist animation. In this regard, it can be assumed that when children's animators know the essence of child aggression, some of its most prevalent kinds, and the types of aggressive children with their characteristic manifestations, they could more easily select and apply suitable creative approaches to use creative tourism in handling child aggression in tourist animation.

There are some limitations of the study that we accept to develop into opportunities for future research on the topic: a field research could be hold to validate the suggested in this paper approaches

for handling child aggression. The further research may choose to focus on few groups: children, parents, animators and managers, in order to be able to assemble the whole picture, and find the most suitable solutions for handling this problem.

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