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## **‘Time-out’ with the family: the shaping of family leisure in the new urban consumption spaces of cafes, bars and restaurants**

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In many north-western European countries, the family practices of drinking and eating used to be largely located in the private domain of the home. This situation has recently begun to change, particularly in gentrified urban areas where middle-class families are growing in number and family outings in bars and restaurants are becoming more widespread. This paper examines the new practices of family consumption from two perspectives: the providers and the consumers. Entrepreneurs shape family-friendly spaces by reducing boundaries between eating, drinking and playing and by offering out-of-home pleasures in home-like environments for both parents and children. They balance between accommodating the families and retaining their childless clients. Families that consume in the food and drink spaces are primarily local middle-class families, and fathers and mothers equally participate. This study further reveals that leisure time spent with the family cannot always be classified as leisure time as a family. Parental involvement with the children differs. We distinguish leisured caring time with high parental involvement, own leisure time mainly directed at parents’ personal activities and social leisure time mainly directed at maintaining social relationships beyond the family. We discuss earlier research on the complicated character of family leisure related to the caring duties of parents. Empirical evidence comes from an exploratory study of ten consumption spaces in the inner city of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

**Keywords:** consumer culture; gender; geography; leisure; sociology; popular culture

### **Introduction**

Over the past decades, many Western cities have become more popular places to live, to work and to consume. Central urban neighbourhoods are engaged in processes of gentrification related to changes in the urban economy, where industrial production is increasingly replaced by production based on knowledge, creativity and services. The new urban employment structure attracts the young well-educated childless middle-classes often referred to as yuppies (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). More recently, there are signs that part of the young urban professionals (yuppies) decide to stay in the city when they get children (Boterman, 2012; Brun & Fagnani, 1994; Butler, 2003; Hjortol & Bjornskau, 2005). After a period of massive family

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suburbanisation, the number of family households is on the rise again in central neighbourhoods of various cities from Amsterdam to Berlin and from Oslo to New York (1). Those new urban families are identified as young urban professional parents (YUPPs) (Karsten, 2007). It is about middle-class families with two working parents that have time-spatial reasons to stay in the city: they need to live near their work in order to be able to combine care and career. With their choice of an urban residential location, the YUPPs distinguish themselves from the traditional middle-class family that still dominates the suburb. Living in the city as a family has become part of a particular family life style (Karsten, 2007; Ley, 1996).

Urban households are not only defined according to their residential location, but also according to their consumption practices. Consumption is informed by class and as such an act of distinguishing (Bourdieu, 1984). Following Zukin (1995, 1998) everyday needs and consumption have become linked to identities and life styles. Having a coffee is not only about drinking coffee but also about choosing a specific coffee in a particular space and preferably within a leisurely ambiance. New urban consumption trends are related with fun rather than with 'necessity' (Mullins, Natalier, Smith, & Smeaton, 1999). With their demand for a specific supply of consumption goods and spaces, new urban households contribute to the emergence of new urban consumption infrastructures. This transition is characterised by a process of upgrading visible in the replacement of traditional retail spaces by more 'fancy' consumption spaces such as fashion boutiques, art galleries and exotic caterings. The arrival of new trendy consumption spaces shows a high percentage of food and drinking spaces that has been carefully mapped (Bridge & Dowling, 2001; Zukin, 2011). Surprisingly, little is known, however, about the day-to-day practices in the new restaurants, bars and coffees.

This lack of knowledge becomes even more striking when we focus on a particular group of consumers: urban families and their children. One of the reasons may be that – so far – mothers, fathers and children as members of a family group have not been a dominant category in cafes, pubs and restaurants. In North-Western Europe, decent families were expected to consume daily meals and drinks in the private sphere of the home. Traditionally, pubs were male-dominated spaces (Rogers, 1988) and restaurants were places where couples could enjoy a night out without being 'disturbed' by their children. Eating out with the family was done for special occasions, such as birthdays and other family celebrations. In these situations, children were expected to behave. Children were seen in public spaces, but preferably not heard (Valentine, 1996).

New out-of-home practices of consuming families raise new questions on how to behave as a family in public (2) and how to organise leisure for all members of the family. Family leisure is a complicated concept with varying qualities related to different levels of parental involvement (Daly, 2001; Karsten, 1995; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). In the current paper, we focus on the practices of families that claim public eating and drinking spaces as family places to spend their leisure time. We consider the production of leisure as a dual process in which both commercial parties and the families are engaged. Therefore, the research question is twofold. First, how do entrepreneurs construct their food and drink business as a family-welcoming place? Second, which families are engaged in the public consumption of food and drinks and how do they organise out-of-home leisure with children? The aim of this paper is to add to the existing literature on family leisure spaces by focusing not on traditional family spaces, such as playgrounds and parks, but on the new urban

consumption spaces in central urban districts, not yet often associated with family use. We consider the study reported in this paper a first exploratory research within the specific context of Amsterdam. In this Amsterdam case study, we analyse the 'who', 'how' and 'why' of family welcoming consumption spaces from the perspectives of both the entrepreneurs and the parents involved.

## Literature

Large Western cities have a long history of suburbanising families. Spacious and green environments are considered to be best for families. Recently, however, there has been a modest but clear counter movement of middle-class families that remain in the city and raise their children there (Boterman, Karsten, & Musterd, 2010; Butler, 2003). It is mainly two earner families with parents dependent on the urban labour market: they prefer to live close to their work in order to be able to combine care and career (Brun & Fagnani, 1994; Hjortol & Bjornskau, 2005; Karsten, 2003). In addition, they are keen to profile themselves as different. Within a massive process of family suburbanisation, it is a way to distinguish as a family to live urban (Karsten, 2007). Living in the central urban areas, however, is rather expensive. Only the (higher) middle-classes can afford to do so. Those new urban middle-class families have the ability to choose and spend. In their position of relatively wealthy people, they form a new niche in the market of urban consumption. Not only do these families have money to spend, but they also struggle with time pressure related to their career and caring duties (De Meester, 2010; Jarvis, 2005). That may stimulate families to employ the strategy of out-sourcing household tasks. Eating out is one of these out-sourcing methods. It costs money, but daily shopping can be decreased and time for cooking and washing the dishes can be saved.

However, eating out may be more than a time-solving strategy. Eating out as a family relates to family practices outside the private domain of the home among largely unknown outsiders (DeVault, 2000). Public parenting can be considered a display of family identity (Finch, 2007) that is constructed in day-to-day 'doing family' activities (Gustafson, 2009). Family is not a pre-given, but the outcome of performing practices (Morgan, 2011). When families visit a restaurant they use this place as a stage for performing family. The question of how you perform family is related to what you consume and where and with whom. Consumption decisions are informed by class (Bourdieu, 1984), and family outings distinguish the classes (Warde, Martens, & Olsen, 1999). Families that consume outside of the home not only show that they can afford to do so, but they also show where (not) to go. In their consumption of specific spaces, families express their belonging to those spaces and related persons. This also reflects exclusionary elements, i.e. spaces and people with whom one does not wish to be associated.

To some extent, middle-class families have multiple choices. This is a particular stressor in today's context, as mothers and fathers are held responsible for their children at all times. Parents are constantly pressured to make the right choices and/or 'buy' the best for their child (Coakley, 2006; Lareau, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2007). Consumption with children is viewed as a project that aims to reproduce the next generation within the middle classes. Children are taught how to consume (Martens, Southerton, & Scott, 2004). The new emphasis on healthy/organic meals is an example of the highly reflective attitude of the middle classes regarding food and drinks (Wills, Backett-Milburn, Roberts, & Lawton, 2011).

The relocation of the family meal from the private space of the home to the public space of the bar, pub or restaurant may be an important vehicle to carve out family leisure time. Rather than cooking and eating in a time-rush at home, parents may search for a more convenient ambiance in which they are not responsible for the entire preparation process but can pay full attention to each other and the children. Today, spending leisure time with children is regarded as an important aspect of parenting that benefits family bonding (Hallman & Benbow, 2007; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Notwithstanding the increase in parental (particularly mother's) employment, the time spent with children has increased in recent years for both parents (Craig & Mullan, 2012; Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau [SCP], 2011). The search for family leisure may be one of the drives behind the family food outings. It seems to be easier to experience leisure outside of the home. At home, parents are always on call. In a study on families at home, Beck and Arnold (2009) show that only 15% of the time spent at home could be categorised as leisure. But also time spent outside of the home is not always experienced as true leisure and may result in disappointments and tensions between family members (Daly, 2001). The presence of children implicitly entails different degrees of parental supervisory and emotional care work that vary with the age of the children (Wimbush & Talbot, 1988).

Family leisure is thus an ambiguous mix of leisure and care with different degrees of freedom for the parents. From a parental perspective, three types of family outings can be distinguished (Karsten, 1995). The first type is leisured caring time, i.e. family outings in which parents are fully involved with their children and together they operate as a family. Leisured caring time is often referred to as family quality time and considered to be important for cementing family ties. Whereas mothers were previously primarily responsible for childcare during family outings, changing gender relations may increase fathers' engagement with leisured care time (Coakley, 2006; SCP, 2011). The second type is own leisure time, i.e. family outings in which parents and children develop their personal activities next to each other. This type of family outing is produced by parents who feel relatively free from caring duties. The production of own leisure time can be considered to reflect individualisation within families, i.e. each member developing and following his/her own interest (Giddens, 1992). When a father visits a museum where his child attends a children's workshop he is able to follow his personal preferences of watching specific pieces of art. In so doing, he's creating own leisure time. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), the ethics of individual self-fulfilment and personal achievement is a powerful force in modern society. The construction of own leisure time can be one of the vehicles to increase personal autonomy. A third category of family outings consists of social leisure time, i.e. families interacting with 'outsiders' like friends, kin or acquaintances. It is not primarily the own children, nor the personal aims that is central. Social leisure time is about social interaction beyond the nuclear family in a leisurely context.

In their exploration of urban public spaces, families behave like other urbanites in transforming the public into private (Lofland, 1973). To create feelings of being at home, urbanites build on their knowledge of specific spaces, serving personnel and the regular users. Over time, this may result in certain privileges. Whereas first-timers in a restaurant only order from the menu, regular visitors are allowed to request special treatment. Families that frequently attend a specific consumption space may ask for child-related privileges such as small portions or special tables. When these privileges are rewarded by the personnel, both parties contribute to

practices that will attract more families in the same position (and may prevent non-families from entering the business).

There is a growing commercial supply of spaces for family outings (DeVault, 2000). Entrepreneurs attempt to sell certain goods or services by pleasing both parents and children (Clarke, 2007; Cook, 2003; McNeal, 1992). They transform the settings of consumption in different ways in order to welcome a larger or a new public. One of the mechanisms used by entrepreneurs to attract new publics is the implosion of former distinct spheres (Ritzer, 1999). The term implosion refers to the erosion of boundaries. Following Ritzer (1999), cafes that only function as drinking locales will not receive many family customers, while new formula of reducing the boundaries between drinking, eating and playing may increase the attendance of families considerably. McKendrick, Bradford, & Fielder (2000) studied such an 'imploded' consumption setting: the commercial playground. Play spaces were transformed into spaces that not only serve children, but parents and others as well. Besides spaces to play, commercial playgrounds offer comfortable sitting areas for the parents and serve drinking and eating for the whole family. In this transformation, children are growing in importance as little consumers. Children are becoming an important market for entrepreneurs; a process known as the commercialisation of childhood (Martens et al., 2004; McNeal, 1992).

The commercial supply of new family welcoming spaces can be considered to contribute to the development of the commercialised family environment we do not know much about yet. How do entrepreneurs market their cafes, bars and restaurants to parents and children? What families are attracted to these new commercialised family leisure spaces? And how do different family members create some leisure for themselves? These and other questions are addressed in the following sections. But first, we give an explanation of the way the Amsterdam study was designed.

### **Case Amsterdam: spaces and methods**

Amsterdam has experienced an increase in family households. The growth of households with children is particularly visible in inner city areas (Boterman et al., 2010). In the current study, we focused on these centrally located family neighbourhoods. To avoid tourist spaces, only spaces outside of the city centre were selected. Family consumption spaces were searched on the Internet (e.g. Dinersite, Iens and Spots Amsterdam), in newspapers (advertisements) and by biking around the city. Ten spaces were selected that together represent a diverse picture of coffee, lunch and dinner locations (often a combination), day and evening spaces (also often a combination) and that are relatively well-spread across the urban landscape. Three consumption spaces belong to a (franchising) commercial chain, and all others belong to independent entrepreneurs. To guarantee the anonymity of the spaces/entrepreneurs/clients, we label the food and drink locations with the name of the neighbourhood in which they are situated (Figure 1).

Amsterdam is a multi-cultural city with large numbers of non-Western immigrants in all neighbourhoods, be it in different percentages (3). Consumption spaces in the West are located in neighbourhoods with the highest numbers of migrant families, those in the South have the smallest number and those in the East fall between these two levels. Two consumption spaces are newly built (Oostelijk Havengebied and IJburg), but all have short histories, as they only recently converted their businesses into family-friendly spaces.

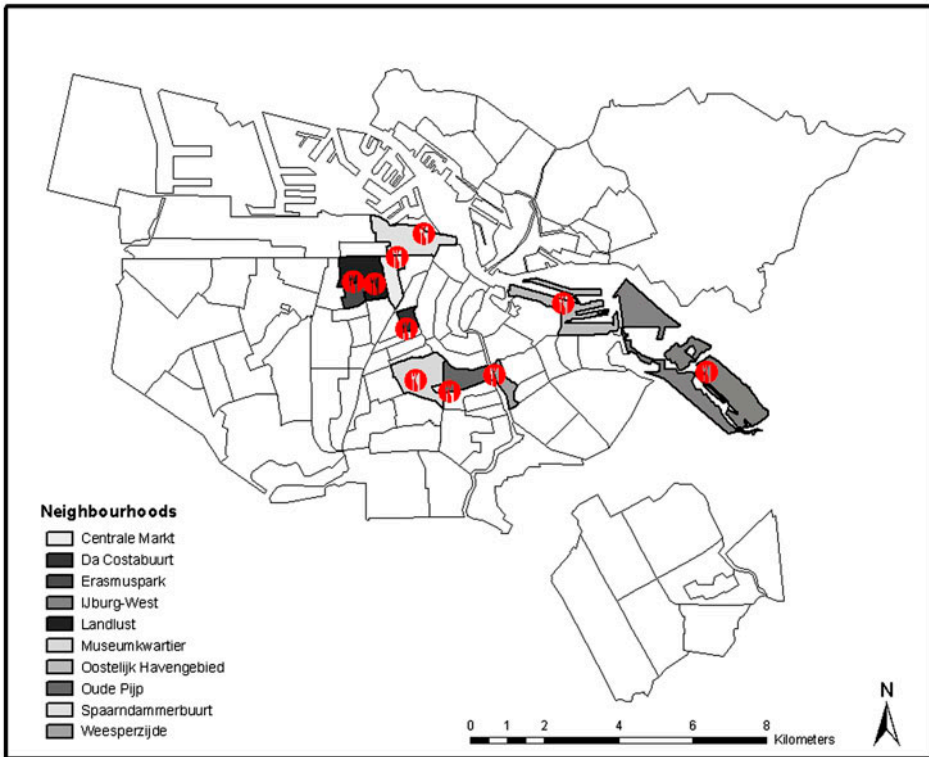


Figure 1. Consumption spaces studied ( $N = 10$ ).

Family eating/drinking outings are constituted by the central consumers (parents and children) and those who welcome them, i.e. the entrepreneurs and serving personnel (DeVault, 2000; Zukin, 2011). Together, they produce the new family consumption space. In the current study, fieldwork was directed at both the families and the entrepreneurs and encompasses interviews, questionnaires and observations.

The first and most delicate step of the fieldwork was gaining access to the spaces by permission of the entrepreneur. We expected some resistance but did not experience any non-response. Some entrepreneurs were quite enthusiastic because they felt affirmed in their choice of attracting more families. Others felt suspicious and asked for additional explanations. All were quite clear about the demand to not disturb clients or serving personnel. We assured them that would be a matter of course.

Our modest attitude aided in establishing access, but it also limited the possibilities to gather information, particularly in regards to interviews. We held short interviews on location with families ( $N = 12$ ) and personnel ( $N = 21$ ). At times, interviews with the parents were disturbed by their children, who wished to play, eat or have the full attention of their parents. Other interviews were limited in time because the families did not wish to disrupt their leisure time for a long period of time or had to depart. Twenty-eight families completed a short questionnaire. Problems also arose when interviewing the serving personnel, as they could only answer questions during slow times. For some locations, we had to return several

times to complete the interview (sometimes with another member of the personnel). All interviews were fully transcribed and related to the specific contexts described in the field notes.

As participant observers, we behaved as typical clients as much as possible. We ordered beverages or food like ordinary customers. We situated ourselves at a place with a good overview and performed two types of observation. First, we made observations of the consumption spaces, the clients, the personnel and all particularities. This resulted in field notes, photographs and detailed maps that are related to family-friendly aspects such as the layout of the interior, specific objects and the menu. Second, we ‘followed’ 36 (groups of) families during their stay at the consumption space. We made detailed descriptions of the behaviour of families and the ways they interacted with each other and their surrounding environment (other clients and serving personnel). Families were defined as at least one adult and one child. All observations, including short conversations, were recorded in field notes. The empirical work was conducted in the spring of 2012 by two junior researchers who were assisted by one senior researcher (the authors of this paper).

### **Marketing family food/drink spaces**

How did the entrepreneurs attempt to attract families? Observations reveal that they distinguish their businesses from ‘ordinary’ food and drink spaces in three ways: interior, practicalities and menu.

Most of the consumption spaces reflect an interior that is called cosy (or ‘gezellig’ in Dutch), i.e. home-like interiors, pastel colours and large lounge-like benches. All but one of the businesses has an open front with large windows that makes it easy to see inside. Interiors often have informal layouts, e.g. chairs and tables are not fixed and easy to replace. This makes the gathering of larger families (or groups of families) easier and facilitates the navigation of strollers. Some of the consumption spaces clearly present themselves as part of the neighbourhood. Reading tables include news about the neighbourhood and bulletin boards contain advertisements of neighbourhood events, complemented with ads for family outings, child care and other family-related services.

Practicalities are related to children’s needs. All consumption spaces have chairs for children. One of the restaurants has even 50 child chairs available. A supply of toys, children’s books and colour pencils is standard in all observed spaces. Some spaces have a computer with children’s games. A baby changing table is rather common, and one of the spaces has a small child toilet. In some cases, an entire play corner is provided, and one location has an outdoor playground in the backyard. The entrepreneurs purposely create a home away from home to support the continuation of family life, as a Landlust entrepreneur explains: ‘Of course it’s a cosy place, as you see. The benches and so on, to feel at home, that is purposely done. I think that’s important for families and we have a lot for children. We have a cupboard with children’s games, a blackboard and chalk. They can make drawings. We have a table to change nappies, yes, and we have children’s chairs’.

Menus usually do not offer the ordinary French fries or pizza, food that most children love. In some cases, there is not even an official children’s menu. The menus contain food that children like but that are also generally considered as healthy, such as bagels with cream cheese or yoghurt with fruit: not too fat, not too sweet and freshly made. It is probably not a coincidence that some of the consump-



tion spaces deliberately present themselves as healthy and/or organic settings. That fits well with middle-class discourses of good parenting. Menus in those restaurants contain information about the origins and qualities of the drinks and foods. We observed several parents reading the product information supplied. Parents and personnel often discuss not only the order but also how it will be served, e.g. a bun in small pieces; hot chocolate that is not overly hot; drinks served in plastic cups, etc. Some spaces allow parents to bring drinks and food for the children: 'Families always get extra attention and a little children's juice is for free. Sometimes parents have their own children's consumption with them and they only order for themselves. Many children had their first strawberry/raspberry juice here. I always say: camera standby!' (Entrepreneur Erasmuspark).

Flexible layouts, children's provisions and negotiable menus all demonstrate that the consumption spaces are not only meant to drink or eat. Boundaries between eating, drinking, playing, informing and socialising are purposely eroded in order to attract the new clients (Ritzer, 1999). This is further reinforced by high levels of personalised service and an informal atmosphere (Bridge & Dowling, 2001) that echo the good old places described by Oldenburg (1989). The field notes report many observations of personnel warmly welcoming families. They open the doors, help clients enter with strollers and prams, say hello, know names, know what to serve (your favourite one?) and how to please the children (bring their favourite toy) and the parents (serve children small portions/ cut cakes in small pieces). Upon request, they serve items that are not on the menu. Families that are frequent clients receive many small privileges (compare Lofland (1973). Entrepreneurs attempt to create a place that is similar but also different from home, as parents do not prepare or clean and children are allowed to choose their favourite food. In this combined act, commercial aims are, however, evidently clear: 'We have babyccino, that is something children get for free. But we use it as a bait, so that the children say: Mom we want a babyccino and then the parents will decide to take a latte for example' (DaCosta).

But, entrepreneurs also report mixed feelings that have much to do with the erosion of boundaries between formerly relatively distinct spheres: adult services and children's play. There are doubts and complaints that mainly revolve around children who 'do not behave'. According to the entrepreneurs, parents do not always carefully watch their children, occasionally resulting in minor or serious conflicts. As one of the waitresses in Oude Pijp states: 'Two days ago I forced a family to pay the bill and to leave. I had already said three times that the children are not allowed to run over the benches ...'. Another waitress reports: 'But it must not become a playground, that's why we have the rules on the blackboard in the play corner' (Oostelijk Havengebied). Indeed, visitors can read the following text: 'Dear children and parents: This play corner is for your pleasure and your convenience. This place, however, is also a restaurant. So our request is don't be too noisy and don't run nor cycle through the restaurants'. There seems to be a delicate balance between welcoming families and retaining the restaurant order when children start to play. This may explain why the consumption spaces studied did not wish to be exclusively considered as a family place: 'Too many children would disturb the present mix of clients and it would chase away our business clients' (Spaarndammerbuurt). For this reason, Oude Pijp closed the play room: 'Two years ago we introduced the children's play room, we got many positive reactions. But because the many enthusiastic children don't let themselves restrict to the play room, there came growing complaints from the other guests who think of our place as too busy to enjoy a

meal or a drink at ease'. Centrale Markt reports the slowly establishing 'natural' divide in time that aids in minimising conflicts between different groups of clients: 'Many of our residents without children simply don't come on Sunday. They know that's the day of the week we have many many children inside'.

### **Consuming families**

What families visit the new family welcoming cafes, bars and restaurants? The consumption of food and drinks outside of the home places a heavy weight on the family budget, especially when it is a regular activity. Interviews with both personnel and parents made clear that the majority of the families belong to the middle classes with two-earner, well-educated parents. Observations of clothes and equipment (e.g. bugaboo stroller or car bikes) confirm the middle class status of the families. We met children of all ages, but particularly babies and toddlers. Observations show that mothers and fathers are approximately equally present.

Most families arrived on foot or by (car) bike. They live nearby and daytime visits are often combined with shopping or school trips: 'Many mothers with strollers in the morning. Probably they bring their older children to school and then walk back and have a coffee together. Often, two or three mothers who chat and inform each other. Then this space transforms in a sort of a school yard without playing kids!' (Landlust). A father in Spaarndammerbuurt states the following: 'We know many customers by face because they also come here quit often. It's not that we are here because of other people we know, we like the bagels of course! But it's nice. Sometimes we see a classmate of our son and we know his parents, like some seconds ago. Than we have a small talk. That's the change with children. They invite you into their world. Many of the children in this neighbourhood go to the same primary school, parents attend the same supermarket, and so on'. Then, he continues to discuss the neighbourhood: 'Basically, it's a village and this space is quite popular for family lunches. That's how all those contacts come together'.

The local character of the consumption spaces is affirmed by the entrepreneurs: 'It's all children from the same neighbourhood, they all attend the same crèche, the same school, the same football club. They are all friends or at least they know each other' (Museumkwartier). However, the new consumption spaces are not used by all of the families that live in the neighbourhood. Family consumers do not reflect the neighbourhood population, which has a much higher percentage of migrant families. This is particularly evident in multi-cultural Landlust, where many migrant families live nearby. We visited Landlust three times and only once we observed one migrant family with children. This one family was enthusiastically welcomed by the manager: 'Families are the heart of the community here and integration is best with kids who don't yet recognise 'colours'. We see ourselves as an important integration meeting point'. The migrant (Turkish-Amsterdam) father on his turn explained us why he enjoyed the place: 'We live nearby, easy to come here. The children like it very much and we built a good relationship with Mike, the manager. That makes it extra nice. It's always cosy. I like particularly the mixed population ... Maybe I romanticise too much (laughing), but the children enjoy and we don't have to look after them'. This Turkish-Amsterdam father will be aware of the absence of other migrant families in this consumption space. So far, the aimed integration of the owner is only partially successful. We did observe diverse migrant backgrounds among youngsters attending Landlust, but we did not meet other migrant families.

### Creating family leisure

The literature makes clear that family leisure is not a matter of course, but something that has to be created with different outcomes as the result. How do families organise a family outing in an urban consumption space and what types of leisure are created? In many consumption spaces, families immediately direct themselves towards the play corner or another informally indicated family destination mostly at the back of the space or near the lounge bench. In addition, most families claim a table for themselves and thus create a relatively private space in a public area. With this time-spatial zoning, families distinguish themselves from non-families.

We observed the behaviour of 36 families in greater detail, including 46 females, 42 males and 67 children of all ages, but particularly the ones under four. These observations were used to classify types of family leisure. From a parental perspective, we could distinguish leisured caring time, own leisure time and social leisure time (Table 1).

Family outings were classified as leisured caring time when one or both parents and the child(ren) sit at the same table and consume food and drinks together while having a conversation and/or playing together. This is a situation that in the literature is referred to as quality time and by the parents themselves as 'our family moment'. This timespace is purposely created and defended: 'We always go as a family. Incidentally, a friend of our children is invited. We often see acquaintances, parents and children we know. We greet each other, but the children don't play with each other. It really is OUR (emphasis by the mother) family moment' (mother, Erasmuspark). Depending on the age of the children, leisured caring time involves some work for the parents. They feed their children and/or scrutinise their eating behaviour. But also when the children can eat independently, parents are clearly focused on their children. They invite them to order their favourite items, attempt to maintain the conversation or begin a family game. This type of outing is often a mix of eating, playing and talking, which may follow a fixed order: 'Family of three: father, mother, child around 1.5 years old. They eat together, have small talks with the toddler and after dinner the whole family goes to the play corner' (Observation Oostelijk Havengebied). During leisured caring time, the family clearly presents itself as a family to the outer world. This includes ensuring that the children know

Table 1. Types of family leisure per consumption space.

Family leisure/ family welcoming consumption spaces ( $N = 10$ )	Leisured caring time	Own leisure time	Social leisure time	Total number of observed practices
Erasmuspark	4			4
Spaarndammerbuurt	1	3		4
IJburg-West	1	1	2	4
Landlust	1	1		2
Dacostabuurt	1	3		4
Centrale Markt		3	2	5
Oude Pijp	2		2	4
Museumkwartier	1		1	2
Weesperzijde		1	2	3
Oostelijk Havengebied	3		1	4
Total	14	12	10	36

how to behave (public parenting). Families in South Amsterdam are particularly focused on educating children to eat and talk in proper ways. This 'grown-up' behaviour is rewarded after dinner, when the children are allowed to play: 'Children and parents eat together and talk with each other. The children don't have toys or other instruments to play. They remain seated until everybody has finished. After dinner the children get permission to start to play for some time in the cloak-room' (Observation Museumkwartier).

Family outings were classified as own leisure time when parents somewhat distance themselves from the children and seek to 'do their own thing'. Parents primarily use own time to read, work (laptop) or talk with each other. Children have their own activity such as reading, drawing, playing and sleeping at the family table or elsewhere (another table/corner of the restaurant). In half of the classified cases, both parents were engaged in creating own time. Four cases included a mother with child(ren) and two cases included a father with child(ren). When babies were asleep, parents did not have difficulty in creating own leisure time. When the children reach about the age of six years old, a second period begins that sometimes allow parents to quite easily create time for themselves: 'Daughter reads a children's magazine while drinking a cola. Father reads a newspaper and has his coffee. That takes  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour without any problem and with only brief communications between them' (Observation Weesperzijde). Creating own leisure time with toddlers can be more complicated. Thus, some families bring their own favourite toys and equipment. We observed the new arrival of the Ipad in the Netherlands, which is used by both parents and children. One waitress remarks: 'Today, the iPad is the new nanny'. Some parents attempt to arrange own leisure time by connecting their child with other children that can serve as playmates, but success is not always guaranteed: 'Mother walks with daughter to the play corner. She tries to convince her daughter to play with the other kid, but the daughter seems not to like it and refuses to do so' (Observation DaCosta).

Social leisure time occurs when families merge with other families, friends, grandparents and so on. Families operate in larger groups of adults and children. In IJburg, on Saturday morning, the restaurant is used as a meeting place after children's sport activities: 'Two mothers, two fathers, two children: everybody seems to enjoy. The adults talk with each other, but also with the children. One of the children is drawing and gets attention and compliments from the adults. They are having lunch together without any complaints' (Observation). One of the parents explained: 'Yes, we come here every week after sport ... I know practically everyone here, they live in this neighbourhood or they are members of the same sporting club. It's particularly the children that make appointments to meet'. Social leisure time can easily transform in chaos when the parents forget to pay attention to their children. To prevent parents from only interacting with their adult friends, some restaurants now refuse to serve separated adult and child tables: 'That's becoming a mess within no time' (Centrale Markt, waitress).

When parents shape own leisure time or social leisure time, children must develop their own activities. Sometimes children, particularly the youngest children, feel neglected by the parents: 'Father, mother, child and two friends (adults) with two dogs. The parents chose the table near the play corner. They sit and a conversation starts among the adults. The son (around 3 years old) starts running around, returns, tries to get some attention from his parents, his father and later his mother talks to him for a while, one of the friends goes outside with the son and the dogs,

they return and the adults continue their conversation. The son continues to try to get attention from his parents, he starts to cry a little bit, the mother decides to comfort him and put him on her lap. Then, the child goes playing with another child. But some time later, he starts to cry again and sits down with his mother' (Observation Oostelijk Havengebied). Parenting from a distance may be a complicated construction of family leisure. In most observed cases, however, children seem to be happy. They run into the play corner, collect some toys and start to 'do their own thing': 'At a two-person table, a woman and a man are having a coffee while their children are much involved in colour painting at the big reading table. The parents take care of them from a little distance and sometimes warn them like – don't talk too loud'. Children particularly enjoy themselves when they are invited to order their favourite meal/drink: 'They are allowed to choose whatever they want. Of course, it is also their outing' (parent Spaarndammerbuurt).

The leisure types described above do not always last for the entire visit. Different types of leisure may follow each other in time: 'Parents meet some other parents, apparently friend. Parents are mostly talking with their friends, but the moment the children return from the play corner, they all direct to the children. Then, the eldest daughter leaves for the play corner, starts to make a colour painting with a child of one of the neighbouring tables' (Observation Centrale Markt).

The observations and interviews demonstrate that not all family outings result in family togetherness or family quality time. Time spent with the family is not always time spent as a family or can be classified as leisured caring time. The current study shows that in approximately two-thirds of the cases, family outings are primarily directed at personal activities of the parents (own leisure time) or social activities beyond the family (social leisure time).

### **Conclusion and reflection**

This small scale Amsterdam study reveals new practices of middle-class families creating family leisure in public drinking and food spaces in centrally located and/or gentrifying urban neighbourhoods. The number of urban middle-class families in those neighbourhoods has increased (Boterman et al., 2010). Along with this increase, the number of commercial drinking and eating spaces welcoming families has grown. This is a relatively new phenomenon that has not received much scientific attention. Further research is needed to measure the scope and scale of these new family leisure practices: in what countries/cities do we see the same development and with what kinds of similarities and differences? This Amsterdam case study is a first exploratory study of the use of urban commercial consumption spaces by families from the viewpoint of both entrepreneurs and parents.

Western cities are changing from spaces of production to places of consumption (Zukin, 1995). This transformation is reflected in the growth of new populations, including middle-class family households, called young urban professional parents: YUPPs (Karsten, 2007). Within this new urban context, entrepreneurs see a new way to earn money and attempt to facilitate adults' and children's time-out as a family. They do so by eroding boundaries between eating, drinking, playing and socialising (Ritzer, 1999). They focus mainly on local families living in the neighbourhood and come close to the creation of the forlorn good old places described by Oldenburg (1989). Entrepreneurs accommodate families by offering

home-like settings where families feel at ease with some forms of practical sustainment related to the bringing of (young) children. Parents experience an out-of-home leisure experience, as they do not have to perform the preparations or clean. Children enjoy agency through the choice of food and attractive toys. But children's play, sometimes seen as unruly behaviour, forces entrepreneurs to balance between families and childless clients. Many entrepreneurs have ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, they welcome the new consumers who are growing in number and in spending. On the other hand, they fear losing other clients due to families' disturbing behaviour. Time-spatial arrangements that put boundaries more clearly and reduce possible conflicts have developed. In some cases, entrepreneurs temper their profile as a family-friendly space.

This study shows us mothers, fathers and children who have become visitors of consumption spaces that were traditionally non-family and non-children spaces. The middle-class families studied attempt to continue their pre-children urban lifestyle with high levels of consumption outside of the home. Family leisure, however, is not a matter of course: it has to be created and it is characterised by different outcomes. We distinguished leisured caring time, own leisure time and social leisure time. In this Amsterdam case study, slightly more than one-third of the observed practices were classified as leisured caring time, i.e. family leisure with high parental involvement. In those cases, parents and children were mutually directed at each other as members of the same family by eating, talking and/or playing together. This is a form of family quality time that is both appreciated (cementing family relations) and demanding (leisure as caring work). Both mothers and fathers were engaged in leisured caring time. As such, it reflects glimpses of changing gender relations.

This study further demonstrates that leisure time with family members does not always result in spending time as a family. It may also result in own leisure time: parents and children spending time in the same space but each engaging in personal activities. Both mothers and fathers employed some reading, working or socialising as children develop their own activities, primarily play. The creation of own leisure time is sustained by the family-friendly conditions of the space. When social-spatial conditions are such that children can enjoy themselves, it is easier for parents to follow their own interests. The production of own leisure time can be considered to be a manifestation of the individualisation within today's families (Giddens, 1992). Different members tend to optimise personal growth and autonomy by creating time for themselves. This tendency can be understood in the context of today's pressure on individual self-fulfilment and personal achievement (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

A third type of family leisure – social leisure time – was constructed by families intermingling with other families. In social leisure time, families connect with others outside of the nuclear family and become part of broader social circles. That may be social gatherings with kin and friends and may also include some networking with neighbours and colleagues that live in the same neighbourhood. The new consumption spaces studied function as nodes in a local network society (Karsten, 2007). Generally, entrepreneurs most fear this type of social leisure. Groups of families tend to dominate the public and the parents sometimes neglect the children. That's why, in many consumption spaces, separated tables for adults and children are no longer negotiable.

All three forms of family leisure have a generally limited duration. Leisured caring time may end because the children do not wish to sit at the family table any

longer. Own time is limited because children claim their parents after some time. Social time may sometimes end in chaotic scenes. The outcome of family outings may be disappointing (Daly, 2001), but remarkably few conflicts have been observed.

During family outings families are publicly performing 'family' (DeVault, 2000; Morgan, 2011). This study reveals the production of new types of motherhood, fatherhood and childhood. Having children does not prevent these parents from attending eating and drinking consumption spaces. Children become more fully engaged in public urban life. Women are more frequently visible in public urban space, whether it is due to their position as mothers or as middle-class females (Bondi, 1999). Men behave as fathers in the public arena. Within the boundaries of the consumption spaces researched, gender and age relations are changing, but further research is needed particularly when it comes to children's position. How do children negotiate different types of family leisure and family spaces? When parents shape own leisure time, children are expected to do the same. We did not get the impression that the new family leisure practices include only self-absorbed parents, but to answer this question we have to incorporate the children's view in future research.

Another avenue of future research is related to our conclusion that within this study, class and ethnic relations intersect and remain static. The new urban consumption spaces welcome predominantly middle-class native Dutch families. Lower-class migrant families are practically absent. Social divisions between groups of families are reconstructed spatially. The generally high prices for consumption do not welcome families with limited resources, but there may be additional reasons for not-participation. The exclusionary dimension of new family welcoming consumption spaces need to be further researched.

- (1) In Amsterdam the growth of family households in inner city areas is well documented (Boterman et al., 2010). Brun and Fagnani (1994) described inner city middle class family life in Paris already in the 1990's. For Oslo: see Hjortol & Bjornskau, 2005. Berlin experienced a local 'baby boom' at the end of the 2000s ([www.statistik-portal.de](http://www.statistik-portal.de)), most visible in particular neighbourhoods like Prenzlauerberg (see also Time, 21st of August, 2007 ([www.time.com](http://www.time.com))). New York saw an increase in Manhattan of children under 5, particularly between 2000 and 2004 (26%). While the percentage of 0–5 year old has decreased in all New York (–4.7), but only in Manhattan the percentage has increased (+0.7) ([www.nyc.gov/](http://www.nyc.gov/) table demo). And see also: New York Times (01-12-2005/23-03-2007): Manhattan little ones come in bigger numbers ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)).
- (2) Recently the discussion room of the New York Times was devoted to the question of whether families with small children should be allowed in public bars. Title of the discussion room: Are modern parents self-absorbed? ([www.nytimes.com/roomfor\\_debate/2012/08/27](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfor_debate/2012/08/27)).
- (3) Amsterdam is a multi-cultural city with around 35% non-western migrant residents, 16% western migrant residents and 50% native residents ([www.O&S.Amsterdam.nl](http://www.O&S.Amsterdam.nl)).

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