



## Intergenerational leisure and family reconciliation

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**ABSTRACT:** Scientific literature suggests the contribution to family reconciliation as a motivation for leisure shared by grandparents and grandchildren. However, there are some discrepant results. The study aimed to examine the need for family reconciliation as a practical motivation for grandparents' and grandchildren's shared leisure, and its linkage with its frequency, the geographical residential area, and the cohabitation of both generations in the same home. A questionnaire was administered to 357 grandparents of children aged 6 to 12 years residing in northern Spain, and a descriptive study and inferential analysis of the data were performed. The results placed the need for family reconciliation in an intermediate position, below the motivations of entertainment and emotional motivations, but above those related to co-learning and the absence of other people to perform such activities. The need for family reconciliation is associated with the frequency of shared practice, but not with the geographical residential area or the fact that both generations cohabitate at the same address. The possible exceptionality of the current situation, within the framework of COVID-19, which may have produced significant alterations in the grandparent-grandchildren relationship, is discussed, with the consequent need to continue this line of inquiry.

**Keywords:** grandparent-grandchildren's relationships; leisure; family reconciliation; motivations.

### *Ocio intergeneracional y conciliación familiar*

**RESUMEN:** La literatura científica sugiere como motivo para los tiempos de ocio compartido por abuelos<sup>1</sup> y nietos la necesidad de contribuir a la conciliación familiar. No obstante, se desvelan resultados discrepantes al respecto. El objetivo de este estudio fue examinar la necesidad de conciliación familiar como motivo de práctica en el ocio compartido entre abuelos y nietos, y su vinculación con la frecuencia de práctica, la zona geográfica donde residen y el hecho de cohabitar ambas generaciones en la misma vivienda. Se utilizó un cuestionario ad hoc administrado a 357 abuelos de niños de 6 a 12 años residentes en la zona Norte de España, y se llevó a cabo un estudio descriptivo y un análisis inferencial de los datos. Los resultados situaron la necesidad de conciliación familiar en una posición intermedia, por debajo de motivos focalizados al entretenimiento y aquellos de corte emocional, pero por encima de los vinculados al co-aprendizaje y a la ausencia de otras personas para realizar dichas actividades. La necesidad de conciliación familiar se vincula a la periodicidad de práctica compartida, pero no a la zona geográfica de residencia ni al hecho de convivir ambas generaciones en el mismo domicilio. Se discute si la excepcionalidad de la situación actual, en el marco del COVID-19, ha provocado alteraciones importantes en la relación abuelos-nietos, con la consiguiente necesidad de continuar esta línea de investigación.

**Palabras clave:** relaciones abuelos-nietos; ocio; conciliación familiar; motivaciones.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the document, an attempt will be made to use inclusive language, although "under Law 3/2007 of 22 March, for the effective equality of women and men, any reference to positions, persons, or groups included in this document in the masculine, are to be understood as including both women and men."

## Introduction

Labor and structural changes in twenty-first century society have created difficulties for family reconciliation. Excessive time spent at work, the stabilization of women in the labor market, or changes in family functioning as a result of demographic variations can determine the quantity and quality of the time shared (Bolívar, 2006; González-Bernal y De la Fuente, 2010; Varela y Fragueta, 2016). It has been found that salaried mothers have long working days and few moments to enjoy free time or leisure experiences (MacInnes y Solsona, 2006; Varela et al., 2016), which makes family balance difficult to reconcile.

Spain is one of the countries with the highest life expectancy, at an average age of 83 years, and if the trend continues, it will reach an average of 85.8 years in 2040 (Foreman et al., 2020). The increase in longevity and the decrease in the birth rate affect the family structure, now, with fewer children, an increase in the number of generations per family, and greater coincidence of grandparents with their grandchildren, which favors their spending more time together (Ramos, 2019). Some authors (Meil, 2003) indicated that the coexistence in the same home of three or more generations was linked to the geographical area of residence, with Galicia, Asturias, and Cantabria being the autonomous communities with the highest proportion of grandchildren who live with their grandparents.

Before the emergence of the home confinement policies and mobility restrictions to control COVID-19, a considerable number of grandparents, one of the most vulnerable and most affected groups by the coronavirus (Pinazo, 2020), played an active role in the daily family life, with regular and intensive care of grandchildren in families with active parents. This is confirmed by recent studies (Airei et al., 2020; Borsch-Supan, 2019; Mari-Klose & Escapa, 2015) that also reveal that the average hours of dedication of Spanish grandparents to their grandchildren exceeds that of Europe. However, one of the specific recommendations for older people to help maintain their health during the pandemic has been to free them from the care of their grandchildren, given the high risk of contagion that this entailed (Buitrago et al., 2020), with the emotional consequences that this imposition has implied for adults and children.

Ambivalent feelings are observed in the coexistence of grandparents/grandchildren. The grandparents are frequently happy to take care of their grandchildren (Fauziningtyas et al., 2019; Henderson et al., 2017; Triadó et al., 2009, 2014) but, at other times, this care-taking entails an obligation that can exhaust them or create frustration or stress, mainly when they have problems reconciling the care of the grandchildren with their personal life (García & Martínez, 2018) or when they all live together in the same home, which could generate problems of adaptation, hindering communication (Martínez, 2017; Ochiltree, 2006).

However, the scientific literature has found multiple benefits of generational exchange for the integral health both of grandparents and grandchildren. In the grandparents, it provides vitality, self-esteem, motivation, enthusiasm, and resources to cope with mental illness. In the children, it increases self-esteem and self-confidence, optimism, tolerance in the face of adversity, enjoyment, and prevention of harmful habits (Díaz et al., 2020; Hilbrand et al., 2017; Labuiga, 2016; Martínez et al., 2017).

In addition, relationships between grandparents and grandchildren contribute to family well-being, as they favor cohesion, flexibility, and family communication (Alonso et al., 2020; González-Bernal & De la Fuente, 2007; Montero & Bedmar, 2010; Williamson et al., 2019), facilitating the creation of stable and lasting bonds (Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2011; Valdemoros et al., 2019).

Leisure is a vital area that frees people from everyday reality, a source of enjoyment and fun (Cuenca, 2004), so its experience shared by grandparents and grandchildren can strengthen both family ties and intergenerational relationships. These experiences must go beyond the role of caregiver attributed to the grandparents and grant them greater social and educational involvement with their

grandchildren, which translates into a source of human development for both generations (Sanz et al., 2020).

Various authors (González-Bernal & De la Fuente, 2008; González-Bernal et al., 2009; Tyszkowa, 2005) reported conversation, telling stories, watching television, playing, walking together, or accompanying the children to school as the leisure activities most practiced by grandparents and grandchildren. They also found that the least shared activities were listening to music, reading, and going on excursions and trips to the countryside or the beach.

These activities are shared more when the mother works (González-Bernal et al., 2008), which implies that reconciling needs is one of the essential reasons for the times shared by grandparents and grandchildren. These demands are due to the labor and structural changes that have taken place in today's society (Bádenes & López, 2011; Ramos, 2019).

However, the motivations for this shared practice could also be based on the psychological, social, educational, and cultural benefits perceived by both generations (Caballo et al., 2020; Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019), which are linked to: psychological health—enhancing positive feelings, social health, fostering personal relationships and bonds based on enjoyment and voluntariness; and the cultural and educational sphere—generating co-learning and transmitting historical knowledge, tradition, culture, and values (Bedard, 2020; Cambero & Rangel, 2020; Gaskin & Orellana, 2018; Lasota, 2015; Megías & Ballesteros, 2011).

### ***The present study***

The review of the scientific literature has confirmed the multiple benefits of generational exchange for the comprehensive health of grandparents and grandchildren, as well as its important contribution to family well-being. Similarly, previous studies point to leisure experiences as promoters of intergenerational relationships.

Recent research also confirms that one of the fundamental reasons for this practice of shared leisure is the need to help family reconciliation, without neglecting other motivations linked to physical, emotional, and social benefits obtained from these joint experiences.

Finally, some studies link the coexistence of three or more generations in the same household to the geographical area in which the family residence is located.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were: a) to determine the link between the motives that guide the practice of intergenerational leisure and the typology of leisure; and (b) to examine family reconciliation as a reason for practicing shared leisure by grandparents and grandchildren, and its link to the periodicity of the practice, the geographical area where they reside, and whether or not the two generations share a household.

The present study proposes that the physical, emotional, and social contribution is as prominent or more so in the promotion of intergenerational leisure than the motivation related to the commitments and demands that arise from the need for family reconciliation (Hypothesis 1). In addition, we consider that the place of residence is a conditioning factor both for the shared practice of leisure and for family reconciliation (Hypothesis 2). We also hypothesize that, when grandparents and grandchildren live together in the same family residence, the need for family reconciliation increases as a priority reason for the times shared by the two generations (Hypothesis 3).

## Methodology

### Participants

The study was conducted with 357 grandparents of children aged from 6 to 12 years, living in the northern part of Spain (made up of 8 provinces: Cantabria, Biscay, Guipuzcoa, Alava, La Rioja, Navarre, Burgos, and Palencia). The living grandparents of each child between the ages of 6 and 12 were taken as the population unit.

In a previous phase, the population was defined from the statistical data published by the ministries and education departments of each participating autonomous community, which showed a population size of 250,357 primary school students. Setting an absolute error of 3%, a 95% confidence level, and considering the assumption of  $p = q = 0.5$ , the sample size is estimated at 1075 students. With experimental mortality of 1.11%, the final sample size consisted of 1063 students, from whom we obtained the sample of the 357 grandparents who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

Of these 357 grandparents surveyed, with grandchildren enrolled in Primary Education, 26% were under 65 years old, 27% were between 65 and 69, 25% were between 70 and 74, and 22% were over 75 years old. Most of them were retired (71%), only 9% were working (6% self-employed and 3% employed), 3% were unemployed, 4% were pensioners, and 13% were responsible for household chores.

### Instruments

We used an ad hoc questionnaire to collect the relevant information for this study through 5 variables:

- a) Shared leisure, a dichotomous variable that recorded whether any type of leisure activity is shared with the grandchildren; it could be cultural, recreational, festive, digital, environmental-ecological, and solidary, through the question "Do you share any activity [each of the indicated dimensions is specified] with your grandchild aged between 6 and 12 years?" The categories established were: *yes/no*.
- b) Reasons that lead to sharing leisure with your grandchild(ren), a categorical variable that recorded the motivations that guide the joint practice, through the item "Indicate the reason why you would like to do each of the indicated activities" rated on a Likert response scale of 8 categories: 0 = *simply because I like it*; 1 = *I take care of them while their parents work*; 2 = *I have no other people with whom to share that activity*; 3 = *my grandchild(ren) has/have no other people with whom to share that activity*; 4 = *my grandchild(ren) knows/know a lot about this activity and they teach me*; 5 = *I master that activity and teach my grandchild(ren)*; 6 = *to entertain my grandchild(ren)*; 7 = *to spend more time with my grandchild(ren)*.
- c) Periodicity with which leisure is shared, a categorical variable that collected the sections of leisure time shared with their grandchild(ren), through the item "Indicate the frequency of practice with which you perform each of the indicated activities" on a Likert-type response scale of 8 categories: 0 = *I do not share leisure with my grandchild(ren)*; 1 = *only on vacation*, 2 = *only 1 or 2 days a month*; 3 = *on weekends, one day*; 4 = *on weekends, both days*; 5 = *on weekdays 1 or 2 days*; 6 = *on weekdays 3 or 4 days*; 7 = *on weekdays all 5 days*.
- d) Geographical area in which the grandparent resides, nominal variable made up of 6 possible response categories to the item "Place where you live": *Cantabria, Castilla y León, La Rioja, País Vasco, Navarre, and Others*.

- e) Cohabits with their grandchild(ren) in the same dwelling, a dichotomous variable that responds to the item "Share a habitual domicile with one of your grandchild(ren)". The established categories were: *yes/no*.

### ***Procedure***

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of La Rioja (Spain) on December 17, 2019 (code CE\_02\_2019).

The questionnaire was applied randomly among the students of the different schools of each of the 8 provinces that make up the northern part of the Spanish state. The student body was handed a consent form of the research to give to their parents and/or legal guardians, which contained information about the study and in which they had to write down the contact of the grandparent who wished to participate and return to the school.

Five trained investigators contacted the grandparents by phone and completed the questionnaire according to their testimonies. The recording time of the questionnaire was around 30-45 minutes.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was performed in two phases using the SPSS 23.0 statistical program.

First, a descriptive study was carried out that, through the frequency statistic, showed the leisure activities that the grandparents shared with their grandchildren aged between 6 and 12, the periodicity of these activities, and the reasons for their practice.

In the second phase, an inferential analysis was performed using the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) to fulfill the objectives of the study, examining: a) the degree of relationship between the motives guiding shared practice and the type of leisure; b) the existence of significant differences in the periodicity of intergenerational leisure practice and family reconciliation as a reason for such practice; c) the presence of significant differences in the geographical area where the grandparents reside and family reconciliation as a reason for practice; and (d) the existence of significant differences in terms of sharing or not sharing housing between generations and family reconciliation as a reason for practice.

The level of significance established for this study was set at  $p < .05$

### **Results**

Grandparents with grandchildren aged 6 to 12 in northern Spain have an average of between 3 and 4 grandchildren.

Five percent of the grandparents share a habitual residence with their grandchildren under the age of 12 ( $n = 18$ ), of whom approximately one-half share a home with their son's children, and the other half with their daughters' children. Only 0.6% ( $n = 2$ ) share a habitual residence with grandchildren over the age of 12, their daughter's child.

All the grandparents shared leisure time with their grandchildren. The percentage of the performance of the different activities was very diverse, as some leisure activities were hardly carried out jointly and others were widespread.

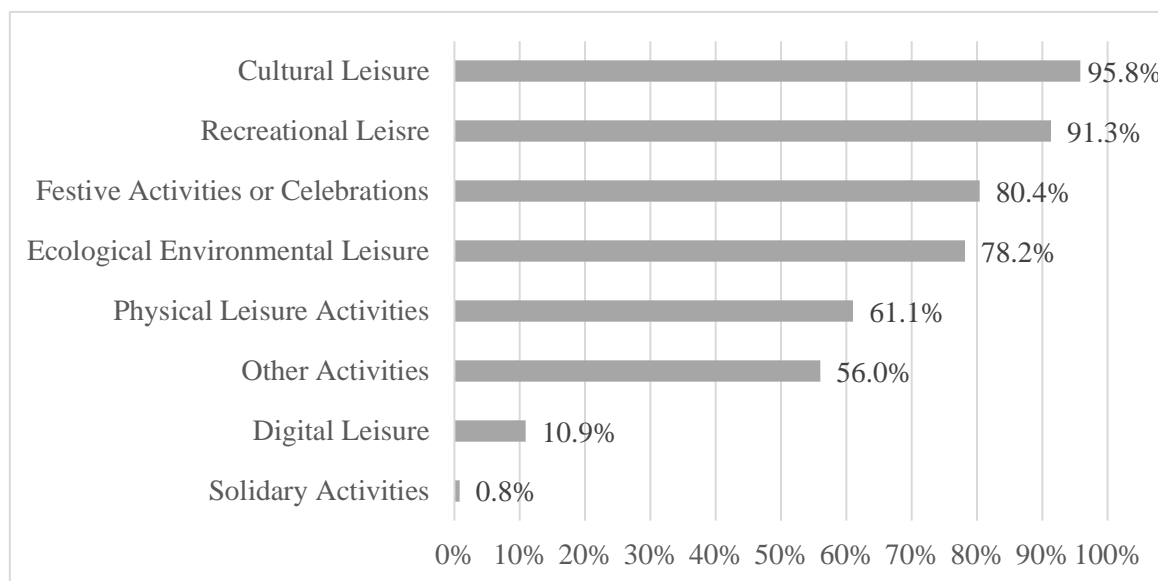
In the aggregation of the different activities according to typology (Figure 1), cultural and recreational leisure dimensions were shown to be the majority ones, where board games are indicated as highly shared activities with a value close to 83% ( $n = 296$ ) and watching television by 79.3% ( $n = 283$ ) of the grandparents. Next were the festive and environmental dimensions, with going out to eat or drink something indicated as a priority practice by 71.7% ( $n = 256$ ) of the surveyed grandparents, and going



to traditional parties, by 68.3% ( $n = 244$ ). Other activities, such as solidary and digital activities, were not highly represented.

**Figure 1.**

*Typology of shared leisure activities by grandparents-grandchildren*



The motivations for the practice of shared leisure were concentrated around enjoyment and emotional aspects; “simply because I like it” and “to spend more time together” were the two most common reasons, the first with a percentage of 92.4% ( $n = 330$ ), and 90.1% ( $n = 322$ ) for the second. Then, with little percentage difference, 83% ( $n = 296$ ) reported “to entertain my grandchildren”. The contribution to family reconciliation as a reason for shared leisure obtained an intermediate position, with 55.5% ( $n = 198$ ).

The reason for teaching the grandchildren through the shared activity was indicated by 37.4% ( $n = 134$ ) of the grandparents, whereas the feeling that the grandchildren master the activity and, therefore, they teach the grandparents, was reported by 23.2% ( $n = 83$ ) of the respondents as a stimulus to share the activity with their grandchildren.

At the opposite extreme, the lack of other people with whom to perform the aforementioned leisure activity was practically a residual motivation, with a value of 3% ( $n = 11$ ), both in relation to the lack of company for the grandchildren and the grandparents.

The Chi-square test revealed significant differences,  $\chi^2_{(72, 357)} = 279.26$ ,  $p < .001$ , between the reasons that guide the shared practice according to the type of leisure.

Although in global terms, the motivations were very similar in each of the leisure typologies, in some cases, the differences were substantial (Table 1). Specifically, digital leisure is the type of leisure that concentrated the lowest proportion of people who take care of their grandchildren while the parents work, specifically 47.4% ( $n = 18$ ). It stands out as a dimension in which the grandchildren's mastery is greater, since almost half of the people, 44.7% ( $n = 17$ ) indicated as they shared this type of leisure because their grandchildren mastered it and taught it to them. The rest of the leisure typologies did not present notable differences, showing values close to 55% ( $n = 21$ ).

Assistance in family reconciliation occupied an intermediate place within the motivations (Table 1). Specifically, it was in the fourth position out of 9 (55.5%), a large percentage distance from

the reasons located in the previous positions (to entertain him/her, with 83.3%) and subsequent positions (I master this activity and I teach it, with 37.4%).

**Table 1.**

*Reasons for the practice of shared leisure according to leisure typology*

	<i>Cultural Leisure</i>	<i>Digital Leisure</i>	<i>Recreational Leisure</i>	<i>Physical Activities</i>	<i>Ecological Environmental Leisure</i>	<i>Festive Activities or Celebrations</i>	<i>Solidary Activities</i>
<i>I like it</i>	93.5%	86.8%	93.5%	94.4%	93.9%	94%	100%
<i>I take care of my grandchild(ren) while their parents work</i>	55.5%	47.4%	55.4%	56.5%	56.6%	55.1%	0%
<i>I don't have other people with whom to share it</i>	2.7%	7.9%	2.8%	2.8%	3.2%	2.5%	0%
<i>My grandchild(ren) has/have no other people with whom to share it</i>	3.2%	7.9%	3.4%	3.3%	3.9%	2.5%	0%
<i>My grandchild(ren) teaches/teach me this activity</i>	23.6%	44.7%	23.8%	27.1%	24.4%	23.5%	100%
<i>I master this activity and I teach it</i>	38.3%	55.3%	39%	40.7%	41.9%	40.7%	66.7%
<i>To entertain my grandchild(ren)</i>	84.7%	81.6%	83.9%	88.8%	86.4%	85.3%	100%
<i>To spend more time together</i>	91.2%	97.4%	91.3%	93.9%	92.8%	93.7%	100%
<i>Other reasons</i>	6.8%	15.8%	6.8%	9.3%	8.2%	6.7%	0%

In the periodicity of shared leisure practice, significant differences were obtained,  $\chi^2(7, 357) = 83.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , between grandparents who did it to facilitate family reconciliation and those who did not mention this reason. Thus, it is observed that family reconciliation as a reason for the practice of shared leisure by grandparents and grandchildren is much more closely linked to daily leisure than the rest of the reasons given. Specifically, 26% ( $n = 51$ ) of the people who cared for their grandchildren while the parents worked did so five days a week, compared to 9.3% ( $n = 14$ ) of those who indicated other reasons. The same is observed, albeit with a greater percentage difference, with the rest of the weekly ranges. The inverse relationship only occurs when referring to both days of the weekend (Figure 2).

The reason "I take care of them while their parents work" is compared with the place of residence. The Chi-square test showed that, although there are apparent differences, they are not consistent enough to be considered statistically significant,  $\chi^2(5, 357) = 7.88$ ,  $p = .163$ .

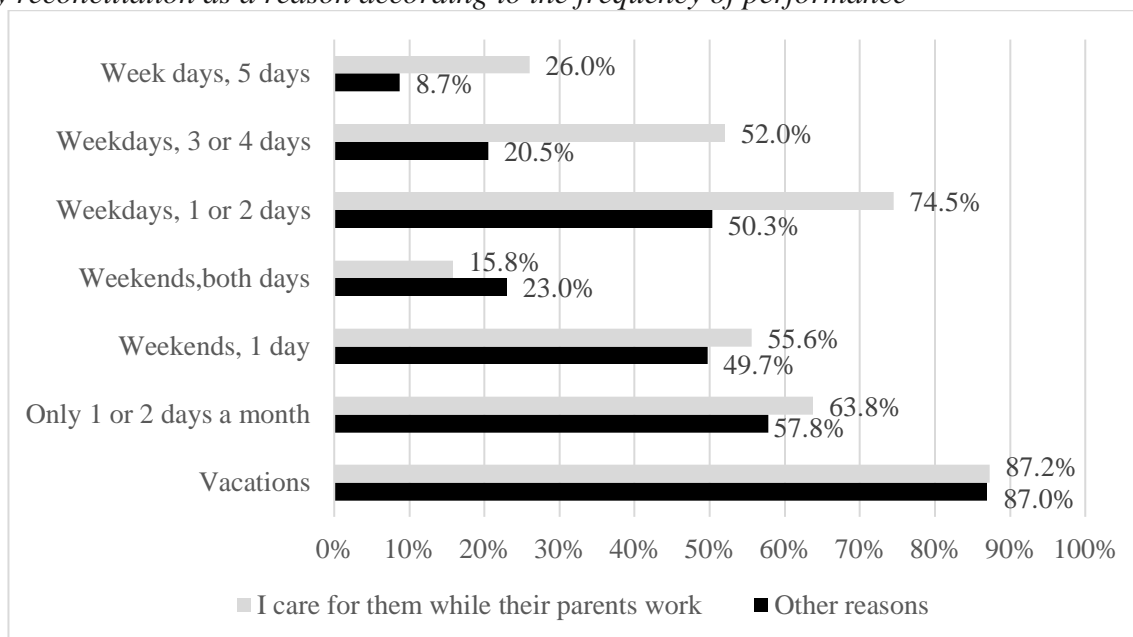
The communities where shared leisure was more motivated by family conciliation were La Rioja with 50.6% ( $n = 45$ ) and the provinces of Burgos and Palencia, with 53.5% ( $n = 23$ ). The rest of the autonomous communities of northern Spain analyzed presented values very similar to each other and did not exceed 40%.

Regarding coexistence in the same home, there was no statistically significant relationship between sharing a home and caring for the grandchildren when the parents could not do so as the reason for sharing leisure,  $\chi^2(1, 357) = 1.96$ ,  $p = .161$ .

Specifically, only 3.6% ( $n = 7$ ) of the people who indicated this reason share a home, whereas 6.8% ( $n = 11$ ) of those who do not indicate this motivation live with their grandchildren. Analyzing it in reverse, 55.8% ( $n = 189$ ) of people who do not share a home do take care of their grandchildren when their parents cannot, whereas 38.9% ( $n = 7$ ) of the people who do live together indicate this reason. Although, in this case, there seems to be some difference, it is not consistent enough to be considered statistically significant.

**Figure 2.**

*Family reconciliation as a reason according to the frequency of performance*



## Discussion

Sharing leisure activities is a very common practice for grandparents and grandchildren, and the most enjoyed activities are board games, watching television, going out to eat or drink something, and going to traditional parties, which mainly correspond to the dimensions of cultural and recreational leisure, but also to those of the festive and environmental aspects, which is concordant with the findings of previous studies (González-Bernal & De la Fuente, 2008; Tyszkowa, 2005). The opposite occurs with those activities linked to solidarity and digital leisure, which are hardly present among the intergenerational leisure activities manifested in this study.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, grandparents contributed to the care of the grandchildren while their parents worked, although this factor is virtually never unlinked to other, less utilitarian, motivations.

The motivations for the practice of shared leisure are found, firstly, in the experience of autotelic leisure, that is, enjoyment or obtaining a reward linked to the very act of performing the activity, and not to other extrinsic contributions of the activity (Cuenca, 2014); and, at the same level, in emotional activities, indicating the affective bonds created by spending more time together, as well as aspects related to entertainment, also coinciding with previous studies (Caballo et al., 2020; Osuna, 2014; Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019). On the contrary, not having other people with whom to carry out these activities was revealed as a residual motivation, as it was barely present in the interviewees' responses.



The contribution to family reconciliation as a reason for leisure shared by grandparents and grandchildren found in previous research (Airei et al., 2020; Bádenes & López, 2011; Borsch-Supan, 2019; Mari-Klose & Escapa, 2015; Ramos, 2019), and which is a key objective of this research, obtained an intermediate position among the reasons given for the practice of shared leisure activities.

The co-learning originating in these exchanges also facilitates intergenerational leisure, although it contributes less to family reconciliation. It considers that the grandparents share their knowledge and experiences with their grandchildren, and the grandchildren, in turn, share their learning with their grandparents. These findings coincide with the results of other investigations (Cambero & Rangel, 2020; Sáenz de Jubera & Valdemoros, 2018).

These findings partially confirm our first hypothesis because they reveal that the motives linked to emotional and social benefits, in particular, co-learning, and also the strengthening of affective bonds and entertainment are as relevant or more so as those related to the necessary obligations to contribute to family reconciliation, as numerous authors have defended (Bedard, 2020; Caballo et al., 2020; Cambero & Rangel, 2020; Gaskin & Orellana, 2018; Lasota, 2015; Megías & Ballesteros, 2011; Sciplino & Kinshott, 2019).

We have verified the intermediate position of the conciliatory motive, regardless of the type of leisure, except for digital activities, which are farther from this conciliatory position. What drives digital activities is mainly the grandchildren's contribution to their grandparents' learning.

Caring for the grandchildren while their parents are working is more closely associated with daily leisure than the rest of the reasons given. It is more common among those who declare a conciliatory reason to care for their grandchildren five days a week, indicating that these shared times are a first-order tool to organize family times and favor reconciliation.

The communities where shared leisure was more motivated by family conciliation were La Rioja and the provinces of Castilla y León. Although there are differences, they are not sufficiently consistent to be considered significant. This cautiously confirms our second hypothesis, which proposed that residence in the different geographical areas would condition the reasons that lead to the practice of shared leisure.

Finally, based on our findings, there is no link between living in the same home and sharing leisure to care for grandchildren when their parents cannot. This conflicts with our third hypothesis, which indicated that this would make it easier for grandparents to replace the parents in the care of the children.

### ***Limitations and future lines***

As a limitation, we note that social desirability could have conditioned the responses obtained, as previous research confirms people's propensity to increase the levels of satisfaction in their responses when emotional and affective bonds are involved (Caputo, 2015).

This research reflects a context prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The exceptionality of the current situation has provoked significant alterations in the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren (Brooks et al., 2020; Dalton et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020), which has activated, among other issues, the use of technologies to grant continuity to a private relationship of physical contact (Ayuso et al., 2020). Hence, we propose to expand this study prospectively to explain and compare the realities of intergenerational leisure and family reconciliation during the state of alarm and in the new normality, in contrast to the situation before the pandemic.

## Conclusions

We highlight, as the main conclusions of this study that cultural and recreational leisure activities, followed by those of a festive and environmental nature, are the most shared by grandparents and grandchildren. We also note that the contribution to family reconciliation occupies a central place among the reasons for the shared practice, and it is linked to daily leisure. The main motivations are the experience of autotelic leisure, co-learning, emotional ties, and entertainment. Finally, no relationship was found between grandparents' and grandchildren's coexistence in the same home and the conciliatory motivation for the practice of shared leisure.

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