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Journeys of research, emotions and belonging: an exploratory analysis of the motivations and experience of ancestral tourists

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**ABSTRACT**

Ancestral tourism and amateur genealogy are popular phenomena, driving members of diasporas to reconnect with their ancestral roots and discover family histories. Tourism researchers have not yet paid much attention to Scandinavian countries as ancestral destinations. After waves of emigration, there are now millions of individuals with Scandinavian roots in countries like the United States. We explore the demand-side of American ancestral tourism to Sweden. Our findings stem from nine interviews with Swedish-Americans who have been ancestral tourists in Sweden. Ancestral tourists live highly emotional experiences dependent on factors occurring prior to and during travels and involving many sites and stakeholders beyond the control of the destination. Our study reveals the importance for ancestral tourists of establishing a network of allies through genealogy research for their experience in Sweden to be positive. The accumulation of family memories and of information gained through genealogy research makes ancestral travels to Sweden a highly personal endeavor, rather than an elusive reconnection to a distant heritage. Yet reconnecting with the ancestral homeland and establishing a sense of belonging to its society also matters to these tourists, though cultural stereotypes influence this experience. We conclude with recommendations for destination development and future research.

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**Introduction**

An increasing number of people are interested in their genealogy nowadays and demonstrate a strong willingness to trace back their ancestry line (Nash, 2002; Santos & Yan, 2010; Yakel, 2004). The appearance of television shows that help participants discover their genealogy and the growing market for DNA testing reflect the emergence of this phenomenon. Furthermore, scholars such as Alexander, Bryce, and Murdy (2017), Hjorthén...
Ray and McCain (2009) and Kramer (2011) argue that the popularity of such television shows and the market for DNA testing, as well as the organization of homecoming events related to the discovery of family heritage depict the growing interest for ancestral discoveries and tourist experiences in distant ancestral homelands for members of multicultural societies.

Different sub-segments of heritage tourism have emerged in tourism scholarship to define travels to sites of personal heritage and family history (Alexander et al., 2017; Timothy, 2011). There is diaspora tourism, which defines the travels of migrants and their subsequent generations to their countries of origins, often in order to visit relatives and friends, but also possibly to strengthen and relive their national identity (Coles & Timothy, 2004; Li, McKercher, & Chan, 2019). Migrants can travel to relive personal memories at sites of personal significance in the country they left behind (Marshall, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017). After many generations though, tourism to the homeland becomes less of a quest to relive personal memories of places and events, and rather becomes a pursuit rooted in nostalgia and longing for a distant past. This form of tourism undertaken by later generations is often called roots tourism (see Basu, 2004; Maruyama, 2016; Mensah, 2015) or legacy tourism (see McCain & Ray, 2003) and implies travel to a heritage destination with a motivation to feel a connection with the past by finding personally relevant information on site. The attraction of these visitors to a distant ancestral homeland demonstrates the powerful connection that members of immigrant societies have with their ancestral heritage (Hughes & Allen, 2010; Leite, 2005).

The growing interest in genealogy led Santos and Yan (2010) to use the term genealogical tourism to describe amateur genealogists who travel to facilities that support family history research. Genealogy research can encourage amateur genealogists to take their ancestral research further by travelling to their ancestral land to find information of relevance to them (Nash, 2002). Following Alexander et al. (2017), we use the term ancestral tourism to describe “any visit which might be partly or wholly motivated by a need to connect or reconnect with an individual’s ancestral past”. In this article, the association that ancestral tourists feel towards their ancestral land is shaped significantly by their genealogy research prior to their travels and their wish to continue this research during their travels.

Researchers have explored a great diversity of cases to study diaspora tourism (Li et al., 2019). For instance, there are a number of studies looking into tourists with Chinese roots travelling to China (see Maruyama, 2016; Weaver, Kwek, & Wang, 2017) and of Jews travelling to Israel (see Cohen, 2008; Collins-Kreiner & Olsen, 2004). Researchers have studied the journeys of different diaspora with a dark legacy, such as the African diaspora travelling to sites of the slave trade (see Mensah, 2015; Teye & Timothy, 2004) and the Jewish diaspora travelling to sites of the Holocaust (see Kidron, 2013; 2015). In the European context, Scotland has been studied extensively as an ancestral destination (see Alexander et al., 2017; Basu, 2004; 2005; Bhandari, 2010; 2016; Bryce, Murdy, & Alexander, 2017; Murdy, Alexander, & Bryce, 2018; Wright, 2009). Interestingly, Scotland has identified people of Scottish descent as an important market segment for its tourism, and consequently developed a marketing brand and tourism strategies around the development of their ancestral tourism product (Bhandari, 2016).

Unlike Scotland, Scandinavian countries do not have national strategies to attract ancestral tourists. This is somewhat surprising as, after many waves of emigrations in modern history, there are now millions of individuals of Swedish, Norwegian and
Danish origins in countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia. It is estimated that from 1841 to 1925 nearly 1.3 million Swedes, just over 820 000 Norwegians and some 350 000 Danes immigrated overseas, the great majority to the United States (Clemensson & Andersson, 2004; Jensen, 1931). The American Community Survey outlines that, in 2017, nearly 3.7 million Americans considered themselves as having Swedish ancestry, nearly 4.3 million Norwegian ancestry and nearly 1.3 million Danish ancestry (US Census Bureau, 2017). Nonetheless, researchers have yet to meaningfully explore the particularities of individuals who travel to Scandinavian countries as ancestral tourists, and suggest related strategies for destination development accordingly. We redress this imbalance through our exploration of the experience and motivations of nine Swedish-Americans who have visited Sweden for genealogy purposes. This study serves to outline fields for further research that could enrich the scientific conception of ancestral tourism for genealogy purposes. We start with a literature review of ancestral tourism, focused on its dynamics and experiential dimension. After our methodology, we present our case and its results. We conclude with recommendations for destination development, and suggest future research.

Ancestral tourism

Ancestral tourism implies a special interest in learning about and getting in contact with the heritage of a distant homeland. It is an activity anchored in highly personal narratives, sometimes even resembling myths, which leads to the experience of powerful emotions like nostalgia and belonging (Basu, 2004; 2005; McCain & Ray, 2003; Meethan, 2004). There are special interest tours organized in a variety of countries like Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Germany and China that offer journeys and plan events according to their customers’ family history and genealogical interests (Basu, 2004; Li et al., 2019; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2003). Such tours exist in Scandinavian countries as well. Sites of interests for these tourists vary greatly, including not only museums and historical landmarks, but also churches, old houses and rural landscapes to which these tourists feel a personal connection, and which are not necessarily conventional heritage tourism attractions (Alexander et al., 2017). Moreover, the supply of ancestral tourism can relate to a wide range of genealogical services, such as those provided by amateur genealogists, heritage centres, cultural associations and archivists, and through the organization of mass family reunions (Alexander et al., 2017). These services are not part of the traditional tourism supply chain, which makes the development and delivery of ancestral tourism at a destination more complex than with other forms of heritage tourism (Bryce et al., 2017).

Coles and Timothy (2004) suggest that tourism scholars are increasingly recognizing the growing popularity of diaspora tourism and its importance for destinations. Scheyvens (2007) and Mortley (2011) recognize that diaspora tourism is a significant tourism market segment in countries with large diaspora, though tourism development strategies often disregard the significance of this segment. Studies of specifically ancestral types of tourism have mostly focused on exploring the demand-side, such as the travel behaviors and experiences of the ancestral tourist at the destination (see Alexander et al., 2017; Basu, 2004; 2005; McCain & Ray, 2003), while a few studies have identified key elements of its supply-side (see Bryce et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2003). Researchers recognize that facilities, services and products to assist ancestral tourists in their journeys of self-discovery are
crucial elements to a positive experience during ancestral tourism (Basu, 2005). However, Murdy et al. (2018) claim that many heritage sites fail to understand and foresee the travel motivations and expectations of ancestral tourists, making it difficult for destinations to benefit from this niche market.

**Research and the journey**

Ancestral tourism usually encompasses much more than the actual journey abroad to sites of personal and ancestral meaning. These travels often stem from intensive amateur genealogy research. In their study at the Historical Genealogy Department at the Allen County public library in the United States, Santos and Yan (2010) observed how devoted and attentive to details amateur genealogists could be in their search for genealogical information. Searching for one’s family history is currently relatively easy with the physical preservation and digitalization of a range of records in many countries (Kramer, 2011; Nash, 2002). Globally, there are countless genealogy databases, with the most popular ones holding over millions of record, such as Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org and MyHeritage.com. On many of these websites, amateur genealogists can build and share a family-tree as they search for relatives in their home countries and worldwide. In Sweden, government records (e.g. census data and property documents), church records (e.g. birth, death and marriage certificates) and old photos of all sorts are accessible on websites like ArkivDigital.se and Rötter.se.

According to Alexander et al. (2017) and Bryce et al. (2017), when ancestral tourists visit their ancestral homeland with limited or distorted information about their family heritage, they are likely to organize the trip inadequately, visiting the wrong sites for instance, and might experience disappointment. The collection of reliable genealogical information pre-departure is an important factor influencing the ancestral tourism experience, and while doing genealogy research is not always part of the travel plans (Murdy et al., 2018), it is arguably useful to guide the tourist to meaningful sites. Sometimes, relevant information can be missing, impeding research and travel plans. Amateur genealogy is then a frustrating process (Santos & Yan, 2010). The availability of reliable genealogical information pre-departure is very significant to a positive ancestral tourism experience, not only for the organization of the journey abroad, but for the emotional experience felt during the journey where the ancestral tourist seeks to connect with what they understand as relevant sites and people. Santos and Yan (2010) argue that an urge to explore ancestral histories is fundamental to an individual’s amateur genealogy, and consequently inspires travels to places of personal relevance in the ancestral homeland.

**Emotions and belonging**

Researchers maintain that during diaspora tourism, visitors experience very strong emotional and spiritual moments, sometimes some of the strongest in their lives even (Alexander et al., 2017; Basu, 2004; Wright, 2009). Leite (2005) contends that these tourists intentionally look for tactile contact with past memories during their travels to site of personal heritage. She uses an example from Kugelmass (1994) of an American Jewish tourist seeing the shoes of Holocaust victims at a Polish concentration camp to reflect on this sort of experience (Leite, 2005). The tourist understands that her shoes are indistinguishable to
those in the container in front of her. The tourist becomes overwhelmed, feeling an inclination to touch the shoes, to include her shoes to the many others to experience the tragic heritage (Leite, 2005). Such heritage experience enhances awareness of the past and can lead to feelings of fascination, surprise and disbelief (Isaac & Budryte-Ausiejiene, 2015). A desire to be involved in instinctive and seemingly real encounters with their ancestors attracts these tourists to the ancestral homeland (Meethan, 2004). Travel to these heritage sites is thus like pilgrimage, where the objective is the discovery and commemoration of a personal history, such as the place of birth or baptism of an ancestor (Feldman, 2001).

The search of one’s family history does not have a clear end-goal, but rather is an ongoing process of building a larger narrative about one’s self and the past (Yakel, 2004). Researchers like Basu (2004), Nash (2002) and Santos and Yan (2010) argue that self-identification and self-discovery processes have become significant in modern society for individuals who feel alienated from their roots and cultural background. Not only are individuals more diverse in their leisure interests, there is more time spent searching for emotional rather than material connection during leisure time in modern society (Santos & Yan, 2010). Self-discovery and identification also play into the powerful connection that members of immigrant societies have with their ancestral heritage as they seek to understand and preserve their family history to give meaning to their existence (Basu, 2004; Nash, 2002; Santos & Yan, 2010). In this regard, Timothy (2011, p. 419) describes ancestral tourism as a profitable market for “old world countries” and predicts that interest in its products and services is likely to grow as global immigration accelerates and uproots more people.

The search to feel a sense of belonging to a nation is a powerful force drawing visitors to heritage sites (Palmer, 2005; Park, 2010; Wong, 2015). In regards to ancestral tourism, the pull to the ancestral homeland is often due to feelings of attachment to the latter (Huang et al., 2013; Hughes & Allen, 2010). Maruyama (2016) argues that even when members of a diaspora do not engage in repeated visits to their land of origins, they still view the latter as a special destination. To Leite (2005) and Basu (2004), the notion of a distant homeland is part of a constructed reality made up of particular imagery about a place of belonging for the members of immigrant societies. On this matter, Bryce et al. (2017) outline that members of a diaspora can feel close existentially to their ancestral homeland. However, due to their distance to this homeland in time and space, their impression of it can easily be distorted by romantic and nostalgic national imagery diffused in the media and within the diaspora (Bryce et al., 2017).

Marshall (2015a) argues that tourists who visit places where they have personally been involved in their past seek the familiar as they construct their journey through their memories. This is different from the ancestral tourist who only knows the homeland through an imagination founded on the memories of others, genealogy research and cultural discourses. Nonetheless, Marshall (2017) contends that these later generations of the diaspora can still find a deep sense of identity and rootedness during their journeys back to the ancestral homeland. Coincidently, scholars argue that ancestral tourism experiences have transformative power due to the strong feelings of attachment it generates amongst the subsequent generations of a diaspora (Bhandari, 2010; 2016; Hughes & Allen, 2010). For instance, Bhandari (2016) found that ancestral tourists in Scotland experience a stronger feeling of belonging to Scotland after travelling there. The informants felt aware of
their Scottish past through their visits to ancestral sites, and thus a feeling of Scottish nationalism grew stronger in them.

**Swedes in America**

While Scandinavian countries currently receive a large share of overseas migrants in search of better lives, there was a time when their own populations sought better lives overseas. During the 1800s up to the mid-1900s, Denmark lost around one-tenth of its birth surplus to emigration, while Sweden and Norway both lost roughly one-fourth (Jensen, 1931). Overall, an estimated 2.4 million people left Scandinavia, mostly for North America, and especially to the United States, during the time of mass-emigration (Jensen, 1931). Sweden experienced the largest share of this emigration. From the mid-1800s up until the 1930s, about 1.3 million Swedes left Sweden (Clemensson & Andersson, 2004; Jensen, 1931). Amongst those Swedes, there were also Finns who had previously immigrated to Sweden to find better living conditions (Koivukangas, 2003). Around 320,000 Finns left Finland for North America around that period (Koivukangas, 2003). As their Nordic counterparts, Swedes sought religious freedom, better living conditions, farmland and work opportunities on the North American continent (Clemensson & Andersson, 2004). As a result, nearly 3.7 million Americans currently identify themselves as being of Swedish descent (US Census Bureau, 2017).

Swedish immigration to the United States took place in several waves, the first starting in the 1850s where an average of 3000 Swede per year emigrated until 1868 (Ljungmark, 1979). Poor economic conditions in Sweden led many to leave the country permanently to settle in prosperous America, which early pioneers and entrepreneurs actively advertised as a land for immigration. The widespread famine of 1868 and 1869 engendered a second wave of Swedish mass-immigration. This famine left Swedish farming families starving and eager to find farmland in America. A last significant wave of Swedish immigration started in 1879, lasting 14 years, in light of agricultural crisis and socio-economic difficulties. At the peak of this wave in 1885, over 45,000 Swedes immigrated to the United States. Swedish mass-emigration dropped afterwards, resurging a few times early 1900s and dying out in the 1930s.

Early Swedish immigrants settled mainly on farmland of the American Midwest (i.e. Illinois, Minnesota and Kansas) in communities where they preserved their traditions. Many Swedish immigrants also settled in cities, like New York and Chicago, where they formed neighbourhoods. Over the years, these immigrants and their descendants have founded many organizations and institutions in their new home country. The Swedish-American diaspora became an organizational entity where factors such as common heritage, identity, language and geographical origin led to the development of informal and formal institutions holding the diaspora together (see Sahradyan & Elo, 2019). In the United States, there are various Swedish churches and colleges, such as the Augustana College in Illinois, the Gustav Adolphus College in Minnesota and the Swedish Covenant Hospital in Chicago. Organizations directly upholding Swedish-American history and genealogy are, for instance, the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis and the Swedish-American Historical Society in Chicago. Traditional Swedish celebrations like Midsummer and official holidays like Swedish National Day are still celebrated in states with large proportions of Americans of Swedish descent.
The Swedish television reality show *Allt för Sverige* (literally *Everything for Sweden*, though marketed in the United States as *The Great Swedish Adventure*), in its eighth season in 2019, reflects the interest Americans of Swedish descent have in discovering and reconnecting with their Swedish origins. The same concept is also used in Norway and Denmark. The show follows a reality television format where American contestants go through various challenges in the hope of avoiding elimination and winning the final prize, which in this case is a family reunion with distant relatives in Sweden. During the course of the season, the participants go on journeys to learn more about their roots and ancestors, but also learn about Swedish culture. Hjorthén (2017), who analysed the series, argues that it diffuses a normative sense of Swedishness where, while these participants can construct an imaginary attachment to Sweden through cultural discoveries, it is ultimately their bloodline and biological resemblance to Swedes that entrusts their national belonging.

In Sweden, there are currently hundreds of local and regional heritage and genealogy societies, gathered under the Federation of Swedish Genealogical Societies, who preserve genealogy records and provide support to amateur genealogists interested in researching their Swedish roots. There are evidently a significant number of institutions and outlets promoting American-Swedish heritage in light of these two countries’ historical connections. This connection makes it interesting to explore the experience and motivations of Swedish-American ancestral tourists to Sweden, a context not yet explored meaningfully in ancestral tourism research.

**Methodology**

This study consists of nine semi-structured qualitative interviews with Americans of Swedish descent who have been ancestral tourists to Sweden. It was important to choose a qualitative research design for this study since the aim is to explore the experiences and motivations of a particular group of individuals. Qualitative research methods are essential to capture the in-depth perspectives of informants in light of the complexities of a social phenomenon (Flick, 2014). Importantly, qualitative research methods help capture the details of human experiences and interactions within a particular social context (Flick, 2014).

**Data collection**

The first author found the informants through the Facebook group *Swedish American Genealogy*. The group had 9771 members (mainly Americans) at the time of research, and is currently a forum where people of Swedish descent help each other trace back their ancestors. In August 2018, the first author published a post on the group’s homepage with an invitation directed at group members that had been in Sweden for genealogy purposes to participate in an interview via video-call. She left her contact details in the online post. Group members expressed their interest in participating in the study by writing to her privately or by leaving a comment on the online post. The first author contacted the group members who showed interest in the study and, after nine interviews, repetitive patterns had emerged and she decided to move on to the analysis for the time being.

The first author recorded all the video-call interviews in order to review thoroughly the data during the analysis. The interviews lasted on average an hour and were in English, the
native language of the informants. As the ancestral tourists lived across the United States and the researcher was located in Sweden, it was impossible to reach the informants for face-to-face interviews. That is why the main author decided to interview them through video-call on Skype. Nehls, Smith, and Schneider (2015) say that many researchers are now using online applications like Skype to carry out their qualitative interviews. With video-call interviews, the researcher can override geographical boundaries and connect with informants at different locations (James & Busher, 2016; Nehls et al., 2015). This was important for this study, which sought to connect with individuals spread out over a whole country. The research team considered this approach more efficient than to address American tourists during their visit in Sweden, as they would have been hard to find and reach.

During video-call interviews the researcher can observe all the expressions, emotions and sensory activities of the informants, making it akin to the face-to-face interviews, while reducing the cost of travel for both sides (James & Busher, 2016; Nehls et al., 2015). However, conducting a video-call over an online application means that the researcher and informants both need to have access to a computer and be technologically skilled. Moreover, although Internet is widely used, access and affordability can still be an issue for some people (James & Busher, 2016; Nehls et al., 2015). However, since amateur genealogy usually implies a great deal of online research and networking, we presumed that the use of online communication tools for this study would not greatly hinder the process. It does imply the selection of informants who do their genealogy research online and who are users of social networks to pursue this activity.

Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to explore specific themes through a pre-determined interview structure, while leaving space for the participants to freely express their opinions and perspectives (Galletta, 2013). Our semi-structured interview questions served to gather detailed information about the motivations and experience of our informants as ancestral tourists in Sweden. Predetermined questions included: what kind of genealogy research have you done before coming to Sweden? What motivated you to visit Sweden? What kind of places did you visit? How did it feel to visit places related to your ancestors’ lives? What were your impressions of Sweden? How has your genealogy research progressed since?

The informants are between 30 and 74 years of age. Three of them are retired, four of them employed, and two identify as homemakers. Most of the informants had travelled to Sweden with their spouses or with other family members. Only one had chosen to travel alone on one occasion. Five of them had been to Sweden only once, three of them twice while one frequently travels to Sweden, though this is often because of work assignments. The amount of time spent in Sweden varied amongst the informants, but most stayed in Sweden eight to ten days. The ancestral sites they visited in Sweden were primarily situated in the counties of Västra Götaland, Halland, Värmland and Dalarna. The main author gave the informants pseudonyms in this article for the sake of anonymity (see Table 1).

**Data analysis**

The main author transcribed all the interviews verbatim. There was no member-checking during the analysis though every informant was asked if they could be contacted again in case there were further questions or a need for clarification. The interviews were analysed
in order to find thematic narratives related to the experience of being an ancestral tourists in Sweden. Narrative analysis is useful to understand how individuals perceive themselves within their social world (Freeman, 2004; Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis is not about finding definitive truth about human existence, but rather about articulating the meaning that individuals give to their lives and surroundings (Freeman, 2004; Riessman, 2008).

Three recurring narratives emerged through a two-phase coding process (see Gibbs, 2018; Saldana, 2009). Firstly, the main author carefully read and re-read the transcripts, where line by line she assigned codes to parts of the text with relevance to the overarching research aim. These codes reflected the informants’ perspectives, values, encounters and actions. In the second phase, the main author reviewed the codes and then organized them under relevant categories. Repetitive and similar codes were merged, while the irrelevant ones were eliminated. The three themes below reflect these analytical categories.

### Results

We now explore some of the particularities of the experience and motivations of Swedish-Americans ancestral tourists visiting Sweden for genealogy purposes. We present the results through three themes that define: 1) The significance of the networks of allies established through genealogy research upon visiting Sweden, 2) the significance of visiting sites of past everyday life in the countryside where the past can be felt and understood, and 3) the significance of experiencing Sweden as a place of belonging by identifying and relating to stereotypes in Swedish society.

### Connecting through a mission

The informants were all involved in some way with genealogy research, making amateur genealogy a significant aspect surrounding the ancestral journey to Sweden (see also Alexander et al., 2017; Nash, 2002; Santos & Yan, 2010). Amateur genealogy easily takes the form of a mission, which drives its proponents to dig up meticulously pieces of the past to solve a mystery. Jeremy called it, a *detective story*. Angela described her amateur genealogy as part of *coming full circle*, meaning she sought to build a complete picture of her
family history. This mission leads these proponents to create a vast network of allies who can help them assemble information about their past. The informants spoke of reaching out to their extended families in Sweden during their research and asking Swedish genealogists or archivists for help through e-mail communication. Often, they visited themselves the Swedish genealogy database Arkivdigital.se and other ancestral research websites, as well as archive centres in the United States, where they would also find allies.

Genealogy research can become time consuming, and sometimes even become a part of one’s life goals and identity. This is the case for Jeremy who took graduate courses in genealogy to become a genealogist and for Emma who did a master’s degree in history and library science because she was interested in researching the past, including her own. Informants had been doing their genealogy research for many years. For instance, Beatriz said she started her research in 1999 and explained in detail the time it took, places where she looked and people she talked to during those years, calling it a long effort. Genealogy research is arguably very overwhelming and emotional for amateur genealogists (Santos & Yan, 2010; Yakel, 2004).

Informants spoke of their frustrations caused by an inability to find help or by a lack of available records. Importantly, some frustrations stemmed from doing this research in the context of Swedish ancestry. For instance, church records and other documentation put online by Swedish genealogists are in old Swedish, which is a challenge for Americans, as native English-speakers, who do not understand Swedish. Informants also had difficulties finding their ancestors in Sweden because immigrants with different linguistic backgrounds often change their name to blend in their new society. Moreover, Scandinavian last names were traditionally the result of writing son or daughter after the first name of the father, which confused many of the research participants during their amateur genealogy. It is thus crucial for the amateur genealogist to find people who can help them surmount these challenges.

Through their amateur genealogy, the informants built a network of allies that enriched not only their genealogy research, but also their ancestral tourism experience in Sweden. Seemingly, the supply of ancestral tourism very often relies on the presence and efforts of distant relatives in the ancestral homeland who end up simultaneously acting as objects of attraction and as amateur genealogists and guides delivering a customized tourism experience. This finding highlights, as Marschall (2016) proposes, that the creation and preservation of a memory of the past, in this case a distant past, is mediated through social relations developed through its reconstruction during travels to the homeland. Swedish relatives, who invite their American relatives in their homes and take them to family sites, create a highly personalized experience for the latter, while legitimizing the toured sites as elements of an ancestral past. Angela found a distant cousin in Halland through genealogy research. In Sweden, the cousin took her to personal heritage sites where she gave much information about their family history. Angela explains how her cousin’s dedication and knowledge created a wonderful personalized experience:

She did so much research before I got there. She knew so much more about my family than I did. We were one on one and it wasn’t a group. We talked like “You need to stop at your job what you are doing and start this. You can start as a genealogy tourism person”. I am like “You are phenomenal”. She just blew me away.
Through such encounters, the genealogy mission can continue beyond deskwork and starts to take a new emotional character. Alexander et al. (2017) found that community involvement enriches the ancestral tourism experience, such as help from volunteers at genealogy centres and from museum workers. In this case, local help even means a Swedish relative turned into a tourist guide through her devotion towards a distant cousin. Such findings outline the special character of ancestral tourism for genealogy purposes in Sweden as it relies not only on intensive genealogy research, but also on meaningful encounters with relatives.

**Emotions in the countryside**

Ancestral tourists experience very strong emotional and spiritual moments during their visits to sites of personal significance (Alexander et al., 2017; Basu, 2004; Meethan, 2004; Wright, 2009). As Leite (2005) reflects, these individuals can feel a strong urge to be in contact with the physical elements of the past. Informants shared many anecdotes of the emotions they felt while observing the attributes of the Swedish countryside. These observations were always influenced by the memories they had had passed down to them or their knowledge gained through genealogy research about their ancestors having been there. This was the case with Angela who was amazed at a field where she could imagine her grandfather running as a child. Jeremy was ready to cry as he saw a tree probably planted when his ancestors lived in their farmhouse in Västra Götaland. He describes his emotional experience as such:

I got tears in my eyes. I almost started to cry when he showed that one tree that was super old and he said that this tree was probably planted when my grandfather’s mother was a small child. That goes back to early 1800s. The tree is still there and I almost started crying. All these emotions came up that I couldn’t control. So, that is how it felt. Why it felt that way, I am not sure, but I’m glad that it did. It made the trip all worthwhile.

Marschall (2015b; 2016) argues that the memory of a cultural heritage is not only related to historical monuments, museums, statues and sites, but also includes material objects of everyday life, stories, music and poems, and even elements of the cultural landscape. The two examples above show how the rural landscape becomes an emotional realm for ancestral tourists as they use it to conjure memories. Informants were motivated to visit the places where their ancestors had lived their everyday lives, and those were not usually urban places or tourist sites, but rather small countryside areas in various corners of Sweden. As Alexander et al. (2017) and Basu (2004) identified, ancestral tourists are attracted to small heritage sites of personal meaning outside of traditional heritage tourism areas.

Connected to these strong emotions of seeing the Swedish rural landscape was a desire from these individuals to be specifically in the places where their ancestors had once been. Brandon shed light on this motivation with this explanation:

Having been there, experiencing the culture of the country beyond just, you know, digging up on the internet or whatever. You understand that the only way to really know is to be there, to try it out.

There is a sense amongst the informants that amateur genealogy is not enough to fulfill the mission of putting the ancestral puzzle bits together as it does not help one to
understand truly the past lives of the ancestors. When speaking of his motivation to travel as an ancestral tourist to Sweden, Jeremy gave this metaphor:

To me, [amateur genealogy] is the branches or the twigs on a family tree, but it is not leaves. The leaves are stories and personal connections. The kind of stuff that makes trees beautiful. Otherwise, it is just a tree without the leaves. It is interesting, but it is more interesting if you got leaves on your tree. That is what I wanted. I wanted stories. I wanted to know more about the farm. I wanted to see the farm. I wanted to know more about the community.

Informants not only wanted to see and be at the sites where their ancestors had lived, they also wanted to understand the way the ancestors had lived in their homes and farms, and the realities they faced. Basu (2004) claims that ancestral tourists often seek to know who their ancestors were in order to form their social identity. In this study, Sharon, who knew that one of her ancestors had an illegitimate child and lived in very poor conditions with her family on a farm in Sweden, was able to see the farm where she knew her ancestor had lived. She explained that she was able to somewhat understand past challenges of farm life through the information she received on site and her own visualization. While memories of the homeland for first generation migrants consists of lived experiences (Marschall, 2015a), in the case of later generations, experiences that generate memories of the homeland and validate belonging to it must be acquired through travels where the past can be concretely imagined. The significance of this sort of experience was important for Sharon because it helped her understand her heritage and herself, she said. As Santos and Yan (2010) explain, individuals find identity and meaning in the quest to understand and preserve family history.

Ancestral sites, like homes and farms, usually disappear through time if they do not have heritage value that could encourage their preservation as attractions or cultural landmarks. For instance, Melanie was disappointed during her ancestral travels because she could not find any remains of the ancestral home she had hoped to see. This experience reflects the challenging nature of pursuing a form of tourism reliant on historical turn of events and the presentation of everyday life (Alexander et al., 2017). As Bryce et al. (2017) established, ancestral tourists seek confirmation of ancestral narratives, real and imagined, during their travels. In this case, genealogy research makes confirmation a very specific matter, not only reliant on vague narratives built in popular media or within the diaspora about the homeland, but on the objective existence of traces of the past. As Nash (2002) explains, genealogy is a practice that combines the imagination of a socially constructed past with the objectivity of empirical research. As it is, Melanie currently searches for information about possible remains of the ancestral home’s ground foundations, which reflects the ongoing process of seeking meaning in genealogy, as described by Yakel (2004), where the search never really ends.

It was important for the informants to visit religious places of personal significance such as old churches and cemeteries in parishes where their ancestors had resided. They often sought to see their place of baptism and discover any marks they would have left on the parish. These narratives of reconnecting with spiritual sites, in memory and physically, are reminiscent of the pilgrimage, as Feldman (2001) established. Basu (2004) also identified that visiting places of worship evoke strong emotions amongst ancestral tourists. In this study, Brandon discovered while visiting Sollefteå in Västernorrland that his grandfather helped build the local church. It fascinated him to know that his grandfather was
behind the construction of this building before he left for the United States later in his life. The informants also explained that they learned more about the religious traditions of their ancestors by visiting old churches. Beatriz was fascinated to see the old church where her ancestors were baptised and even met a pastor at the church who told her about the religious traditions of her ancestors. The pilgrimage does not only come into effect through contact with objects as Leite (2005) proposes, but also through encounters with community-members that have relevant knowledge about these meaningful sites and objects.

**Reliving Sweden**

Many informants discussed the connection they felt to Sweden prior to their decision to embark upon ancestral travels, often describing symbolic elements during their upbringing that were behind such feelings of rootedness. The pull to the ancestral land stems from strong feelings of belonging to it, strengthened by the existence of objects, stories and practices reflecting national identity (Hughes et al., 2013; Hughes & Allen, 2010). These symbolic elements shape the level of familiarity that descendants of the diaspora will feel towards the nation and its homeland, and will be significant in guiding their gaze during their travels there (Marschall, 2015a). Some of the informants were exposed to Swedish culture and traditions since childhood. These individuals had always practised Swedish traditions like eating *smörgåsbord* at Christmas and celebrated traditional holidays like mid-summer. Some participants told of family journals and books preserved by living relatives. Stories and recollections of the past prompt an interest in amateur genealogy and ancestral travels. For instance, Emma expressed that she developed a desire to visit the places her grandmother talked to her about as she grew up in order to relive their connection:

> It was really about being able to see where she was from and the places I heard of so many times. So, it was very deep. I have a picture that was given to me. It is my great-great-grandmother and she is standing in front of the house, and I actually went and stood in the exact same spot.

As Basu (2005) suggests, it is through performances like researching genealogy, visiting relevant sites and learning about traditions that individuals bring into being their ancestral identity. In Emma’s case, the performance consisted of reproducing a picture of an ancestor in a context that was completely new for her. These ancestral tourists form their ancestral identity by mixing the novelty usually associated with travels abroad with the familiarity Marschall (2015a) describes with personal memory tourism. Though physically being in Sweden is new to them, they understand it through a process of remembrance, seeking to reconnect with cherished people and encounter traces of a tangible past.

Not all ancestral tourists visiting Sweden grew up surrounded by Swedish traditions and symbolic objects and stories. In this case, the pull to the ancestral homeland is arguably due to alienation to an identity and an urge to establish a personal narrative, as Santos and Yan (2010) proposed. Some informants revealed that they grew up completely cut off from Swedish culture and, in some cases, even though they had living family members in the United States who had emigrated from Sweden during their childhood.
For instance, Angela’s grandparents emigrated from Sweden to the United States, but did not preserve any sort of tradition in the new homeland. There was no one speaking Swedish, no celebrations of traditional holidays, and not even any mention of their Swedish origins. Angela thus did not grow up with a strong sense of her family origins and culture, but was nonetheless very curious to explore her ancestral homeland and trace back her genealogy to understand herself better. The two different stories from Emma and Angela outline the different types of narratives that can motivate one to connect with an ancestral homeland.

As the ancestral tourists are interested in discovering Sweden in relation to their personal heritage, their general impression of Sweden and Swedes appears to matter to their ancestral tourism experience. As Bryce et al. (2017) argue, ancestral tourists will seek to confirm their beliefs, real and imagined, about the homeland while visiting it, and in the case of Sweden the homeland took the shape of a nation of homogenous people similar to the one Hjorthén (2017) identified as promoted on the television series Allt för Sverige. Some informants made comparisons between their appearance and the appearance of Swedes while in Sweden. Mostly, the stereotypical Swedish trait of being blond with blue eyes came up as a matter of discussion in interviews as the informants talked about their impressions of Swedish society. For instance, Sharon was surprised when the clerk at a store addressed her in Swedish because she looked just as if she was Swedish. For her, Sweden was a place of belonging, where she felt a connection due to her personality and appearance.

The participants also compared their values, personalities and lifestyles to that of contemporary Swedes during their travels. Brandon found similarities between the lifestyles of Swedes and of his family in the United States. He saw his way of life as very Swedish and was glad to establish this fact through his impression of the Swedish society. The Swedish value of avoiding excess (epitomized in the word lagom) was for Brandon very similar to his family values. Yet again, as Marschall (2015a) contends, elements of familiarity are significant to the experience of the subsequent generations of a diaspora visiting the homeland. Such encounters foster an authentic experience of the homeland (Bryce et al., 2017). Although, in this case, familiarity is found not through memories of lived experiences in Sweden, but through knowledge about the ancestral homeland acquired through its preservation in the new homeland and arguably through stereotypes diffused in the media. The experience of being a Swedish-American in Sweden is, as Hjorthén (2017) contends, a mixture of cultural discovery, where in this case Swedishness can be discovered in one’s lifestyle, and of the observable traits of the bloodline, where here resemblance is found in physical appearance.

Palmer (2005) and Park (2010) established that visits to sites of national symbolic meaning promote a sense of collective belonging for its visitors. In the context of ancestral tourism to Sweden, visitors develop feelings of nationhood through contact with places and objects of the past of cultural and historical significance, but also through an immersion in the everyday life of contemporary Swedes and even through comparison with their physical appearance and lifestyle. This type of search for significance positions yet again the cultural landscape as an important site for the production of memory and for the practice of national identity, as argued by Marschall (2016). This finding is unlike the findings from studies looking at tourism, roots and nationhood in Ireland and Scotland from researchers like Basu
(2004; 2005) and Bhandari (2010; 2016) who overlooked connections between ancestral tourists and the current social practices and values of the local population at the ancestral destination. These scholars mostly saw attachment in visits to historical sites, landscapes and monuments.

**Conclusion**

The popularity of the television series *Allt för Sverige*, the existence of hundreds of local genealogy associations and the mass digitalization of genealogical archives reflect a growing interest in Swedish amateur genealogy. Santos and Yan (2010) and Timothy (2011) predict the growth of ancestral tourism as individual passion for amateur genealogy increasingly translates into a quest to reconnect with sites and people of ancestral meaning in real time. As Schevyens (2007) reflects, the tourism sector should not underestimate the contribution of diaspora population to the local economy. However, individuals of Scandinavian descent are not a noteworthy tourism market segment for Scandinavian countries, nor have their experiences been studied to contribute to ancestral tourism research. Similar to previous studies (Basu, 2004; Bryce et al., 2017), during ancestral travels to Sweden, we found that there is a reconnection with the homeland based in nostalgia and fueled by cultural stereotypes acquired in the new homeland. However, since Sweden has not developed a national ancestral destination brand, the reliance on narratives and imagery fuelled by the tourist industry cannot be said to influence these emotions during the ancestral tourism experience. This could explain some aspects of the differences we found in ancestral tourism experience and motivations in Sweden compared to other countries like Scotland and Ireland, namely: 1) national belonging is also expressed through identification with current Swedish society, and 2) encountering living relatives and community-members is significant to the positive ancestral tourist experience in Sweden.

Firstly, we found that ancestral tourists to Sweden expressed their sense of belonging to Sweden through their familiarity with its society, by comparing physical traits and lifestyle choices with those of Swedes during their visits. It was important for the participants to talk about their impression of Sweden and Swedish people during their interviews, thereupon explaining how they understood that they fit in the Swedish society. The connections between ancestral tourists and current Swedes, with their particular social practices and values, thus emerged as an important aspect behind processes of self-identification and national belonging. This is not a factor that researchers looking into ancestral tourism to Scotland and Ireland such as Alexander et al. (2017), Basu (2004) and Bhandari (2010; 2016) have identified. In these studies, self-identification and belonging rests more on the contemplation of the past and its tourist objects and sites.

Secondly, the findings reveal the importance for these ancestral tourists of building networks with various community-members during their amateur genealogy and ancestral tourism in Sweden. These networks of allies consists of actors who give their time freely to guide and inform throughout the personal journey. Importantly, there is a reliance on community-members during the ancestral tourism experience in Sweden, not only when it comes to local genealogists and museum workers, as already identified by Alexander et al. (2017), but also when it comes to the distant relatives of these tourists and
other local actors holding historical and/or cultural knowledge, such as pastors and landowners. These networks are the result of intensive genealogy research, and thus outline the special character of ancestral tourism for genealogy purposes in a context where people have to rely on each other more than on the tourist system to prepare their holidays.

The particular context of the Swedish-American diaspora highlights the intersection between personal memories and roots attachment as motivations to travel to a distant ancestral homeland. Similarly, as Santos and Yan (2010) found in their research, self-identification was important for the participants of this study as they underwent genealogy research to understand their past and their selves better. Researchers have identified that visitors to heritage sites, such as ancestral tourists, identify and feel a sense belonging to their ancestral land as they experience meaningful historical places and objects (Bhandari, 2010; 2016; Palmer, 2005; Park, 2010). In the case of Sweden, the baggage of family memories and knowledge that these ancestral tourists carry with them on their journeys to Sweden, especially having known the migrant relative in person in some cases and having done intensive genealogy research, specifies their place of attachment in the ancestral country. It gives them highly personal motivation to travel to Sweden, rather than only seeking an elusive reconnection with a distant heritage, as is usually understood with roots tourism (Marshall, 2017).

Our study supports that there is a strong reliance on the cultural landscape and its sites of rural life such as fields, churches and cemeteries, and farm buildings in ancestral tourism. Kneafsey (1998) argues that local people and their lifestyles are important components to the development of tourism in rural areas. It is through their distinct knowledge and practices that local people give place a special character, which in turn entices tourists to visit (Kneafsey, 1998). In the case of ancestral tourism, engagement with local community is significant to the sense that tourists have, not only of the place itself as special and unique, but also of themselves. There is as such an opportunity to provide highly desirable tourist experiences with little investment beyond facilitating networking, and with little disruption to local landscapes and cultures in rural regions of Sweden. There could be more research aimed at understanding the character and dynamics of encounters with community-members during ancestral tourism, or even during heritage tourism in general, as this study merely identified their importance within a wider conceptualization of the production of ancestral tourism experience.

Themed packaged tours are popular diaspora tourism products in many countries with large diaspora, such as Israel and Scotland (Collins-Kreiner & Olsen, 2004; Li et al., 2019). Such packaged experiences can cater to a very diverse diasporic market in search of differentiated experiences, where genealogy and heritage awareness can be coupled with aspects of socializing, adventuring or sightseeing (Collins-Kreiner & Olsen, 2004). Of course, these elements of the supply-side are gaining popularity in the Swedish context. However, the destination interested in promoting ancestral tourism as part of its heritage tourism development strategy will have to decide what kind of a sense of place it wishes to diffuse. The process of packaging stories to present the past to tourists is embedded in the contemporary circumstances of local society (Ooi, 2001). The destination might not wish to solely rely on the development of packaged experiences filled with stereotypical images of Swedes and Sweden as fixed in the diasporic psyche. In this regard, storytelling would be useful to promote distinctiveness in relevant rural areas, where the sense of place of the
destination is promoted through the diffusion of its local history, culture and heritage (Durie, Yeoman, & McMahon-Beattie, 2006; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2010).

In conclusion, future research could establish the challenges and opportunities of developing a sense of place based not only on generic historical narratives and national identity, but also on very personal and emotional stories where a desire to connect with current local traditions, culture and everyday life is also important. Moreover, future research should look more into Scandinavian countries as ancestral destinations to balance the amount of research about Scottish and Irish ancestral tourism and genealogy. This future research would be especially interesting if it explored the perspective of suppliers, meaning stakeholders as diverse as archivists, genealogists, tour entrepreneurs and heritage workers who influence the ancestral tourism experience.

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