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SENIORS' PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM

Nowadays societies are rapidly changing: fertility rates are declining, life expectancy is lengthened, urbanization and migration are important circumstances too in this environment (European Commission, 2014). The prognosis of the UNWTO says that the trips of people over 60 will mean two billions travel by 2050 (Morgan et al., 2015). Such forecasts supposed that each older generation would be healthier, better educated and more financially secure than the previous (Patterson, 2006; Morgan et al., 2015). Older adults are a very attractive segment for tourism stakeholders. The reason for that – among others – is that they have an increased awareness of their health status, so health can be a crucial motivator when travelling with tourism purposes (Chen et al., 2013).

Keywords: senior, tourism, successful ageing, ageing societies, Europe

Ageing societies

All over the world, societies are rapidly changing: fertility rates are declining, life expectancy is lengthened, urbanization and migration are important circumstances too in this environment (European Commission, 2014). Over the past century the proportion of older people has been emerging without intermission (Harper – Leeson, 2008; Nielsen, 2014). By 2030 people aged over 65 years are expected to reach one quarter of the population, and by 2050 this ratio is predicted to rise to one-third (Harper – Leeson, 2008; Nielsen, 2014).

17% of the European Union's population are already over 65 and in the United Kingdom (UK) 650,000 people turn 65 every year (Office for National Statistics, 2014; Morgan et al., 2015). This segment has been recognised as a vital tourism market, their spending during the travel means an increasing ratio of tourism spending. The prognosis of the UNWTO says that the trips of people over 60 will mean two billions travel by 2050 (Morgan et al., 2015). Such forecasts supposed that each older generation would be healthier, better educated and more financially secure than the previous (Patterson, 2006; Morgan et al., 2015).

The number of senior EU residents is increasing rapidly in the next 50 years (Fig. 1). In 2012, 16.7% of the EU population was 65+. According to population forecasts, the number of 65+ persons will have risen by more than 20% in 2020 compared to 2010 (CBI, 2015).

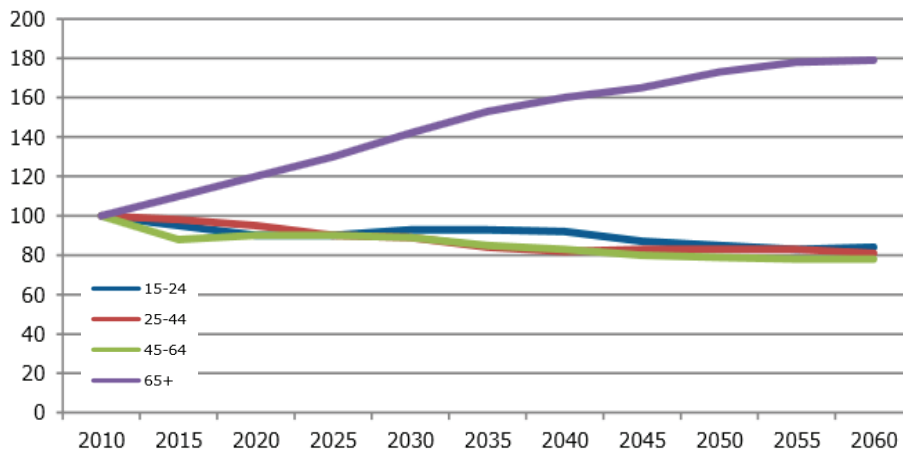


Figure 1: Trends in EU population by age group, 2010–2060 (index: 2010 = 100)
(Source: https://www.cbi.eu/sites/default/files/market_information/researches/product-factsheet-europe-senior-travel-2015.pdf)

Who are ‘seniors’?

There is no common definition for or understanding of what is meant by an older consumer market and at what age a person should be considered a senior citizen. There are many terms, they vary from 50 years old (e.g. Lohmann – Danielsson cited by Pesonen et al, 2015) to as much as 65 years old (Norman et al., 2001 cited by Pesonen et al., 2015).

The Table 1 shows the heterogeneity of this segment which means that it’s difficult to make generalisations about these group(s). Companies have to understand the heterogeneous characteristics of senior markets, and if it happens they can provide added customer value in their marketing activity and product development for this segment(s) (Pesonen et al., 2015).

This challenges notions of legal entitlement and participation in social schemes targeted at specific sections of the populations. However, historically there has been an imbalance that is being corrected as men and women have qualified for pension benefits at different ages. Gender differences do not merely present in age terms but also through discussions of contributions made during working age. We must consider the creation of seniors as a social construction, premised upon long ingrained notions of social norms and behaviours, which in turn create individual and social expectations.

Table 1: Different grouping of senior segment
(Source: Pesonen et al., 2015; own compilation)

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| Vigolo & Confente (2014) | Prospective seniors: people ranging from 50 to 64 years of age, Seniors: people at least 65 years of age. |
| Lohmann & Danielsson, 2001; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2007; Foot, 2004 | The post war Baby Boomer generation (people born in the years 1946–1966) = seniors |
| Peter Laslett, 1987 | Third age: active phase, self-fulfilment, extensive leisure time, good health, secure livelihood as a retired people, Fourth age: pensioners start becoming dependent on others, health problems. |
| Collins, 2002; Lawson, 2004 | Empty nesters (age group 55–64 years): still working, children have left home or people without children, not dependent, strong financial background, Young seniors (age group 65–79 years): retired, time-rich group, usage of their past savings, high health and quality awareness, Seniors (age group 80+ years): late retirement phase, declining health status is declining, less or little travels. |

Thanks to the above mentioned issues nowadays it's an important issue how we should age successfully. 'Successful ageing' dates back to the 1950's. This was the time when gerontologists started to research this topic with the aim of understanding 'normal ageing'. In 1996 Rowe and Kahn created their well-known definition containing three related elements. These components are in strong interaction with each other (Fig. 2):

- avoidance of physical illness and disability;
- maintenance of high physical and cognitive function;
- continuing engagement in social and productive activities.

This definition opened the door to think about the optimal behaviour related to aging on the part of individuals and the society as well.

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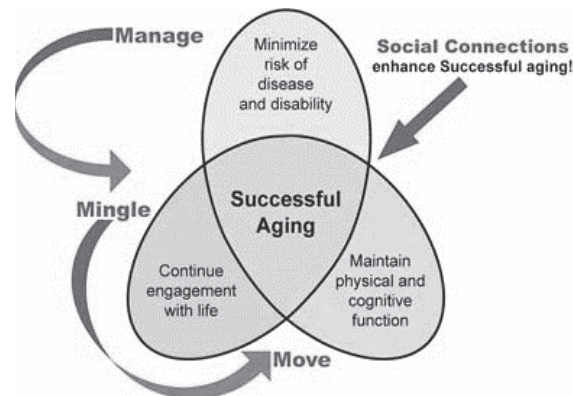


Figure 2: Successful ageing

(Source: <http://www.universityvillage.net/lifestyle/stories/the-power-of-social-connectedness.aspx>)

Related to tourism this concept is important to understand the needs, wants and motivation of senior people. On the other hand tourism is an effective tool to carry out an active and successful aging because being socially engaged has the most important impact on one's health and quality of life (Fig. 3).

- | Successful ageing |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Relationships are Everything • 2. Keep Learning • 3. Focus on the Process • 4. Be Resilient and Engaged in Life • 5. Face Pressure Head On • 6. Be a Problem Solver • 7. Reinvent Yourself Regularly • 8. Exercise Matters • 9. Be Positive • 10. Never Underestimate Yourself |

Figure 3: Relationships Are Everything – Top 10 action steps for healthy and successful ageing
(Source: <http://www.atriaseniorliving.com>)

Demographic development is having a considerable impact on a broad set of aspects in the life of everyone. With the baby boom generation moving into older age bands, the older segment of the European population is growing significantly. Such a demographic change has direct consequences also on tourism demand and implications in the ways to adapt the touristic supply.

The survey of the European Commission

A recent survey, financed by the European Commission in the framework of the ESCAPE project (2015), shed some light around some basic needs and expectations of tourists aged 55+ across the whole European Union. Older tourists are a very heterogeneous group, whose needs and expectations vary a lot in relation to age, health conditions, social and familiar constraints (e.g. care duties) and economic status. Nevertheless the survey allowed to highlight some common patterns and preferences, especially concerning the age range 55–75. This chapter is built on the report AGE delivered after having analysed the 900 questionnaires gathered in November 2014.

No matter of their countries of origin or residence, or their education, the majority of the interviewed older tourists like to travel with a partner, with relatives or family members, as well as in groups with people they know. They also appreciate to enjoy holidays with a budget up to 100€ a day, and prefer to take 4–7 nights breaks (42%), when possible, and also to extend the length up to 13 nights (33%). With respect to seasonality, they prefer to travel in summer and spring and tend to be quite autonomous in planning and managing their travels, opting less frequently for all-inclusive packages, preferring to organise their holidays individually. Relatives, friends and the internet seem to be reliable sources of information that tourists aged 55+ privilege when choosing their destinations. With regard to the preferred means of transport, it is the plane to be ranked in the number 1 position (40%), followed by the car (26%). Interesting enough, the provision of services in the airport was not considered a priority though. Furthermore, seniors are open to travelling both abroad (51%) and within their own countries (42%), they don't expect to spend a lot of money, neither of time, no matter if retired or not.

When asked to rate the importance of themes, topics and activities that could better shape its holidays, the sample opted for 'nature and culture' as the preferred touristic themes, and considers very important to have clean and easy accessible natural and cultural heritage site, as well as affordable ones. The natural environment is indeed very important, alongside with the local culture. Security and comfortable and clean accommodations are also relevant general factors having an impact in the choices of senior travellers. Tourists aged 55+ have undoubtedly different expectations when travelling: the personal preferences and tastes also matters. Nevertheless it is possible to state that seniors appreciate and require security, clean and reliable sites and services, and better value for money, as well as they would like also to be ensured that toilets, pharmacies and supermarkets are available infrastructures in their tourist destinations.

The survey allows gathering some specific insights on one Eastern European Country, Bulgaria, also covered by the ESCAPE project. With that respect, it was possible to note that:

- the majority of Bulgarian people belonged to a rather young cohort (aged 55–60) and were not retired (differently from the respondents from other countries);
- they prefer to travel by car (36%) and by bike (38%), rather than by plane, as reported in the questionnaires received by other countries. They also tended to rate as important sport and leisure, as well as religious aspects mattered to them. These latter categories were not particularly popular among the replies gathered from other countries.

Other investigations

Besides this analysis, AGE Platform Europe gathered some other interesting insights from some of its members, complementing the width and the depth of the study. In particular, the following notes are worth being reported.

- Specifically on security, additional comments reinforced the aspect of accessibility and web-accessibility. There should be much more awareness for rules which matters accessibility, to the benefit of all generations, and especially of those suffering from any temporary or permanent disability. Security goes beyond the protection against pick-pockets, and airport security, and encompasses essential accessibility issues, both of the physical environment (entrances, accessible and open toilets, accessible lifts, accessible inter-modality, ...) and the virtual one (accessible websites, available phone numbers of basic services for tourists, ...).
- With particular regard to health safety, a comment targeted the controls on legionella. This shows that the attention of older tourists towards health related issues, and the need to go beyond the provision of pharmacies and the availability of doctors. Food safety cannot be neglected and more awareness must be raised.
- Insurances and premiums costs must also be considered. In some countries (the specific example came from the UK, but the situation is common across Europe) those costs are exorbitant and discrimination on the ground of age is a risk. Action is needed to cope with such an issue, especially in the light of the elaboration of new and tailored tourist packages for senior tourists.
- Despite the 38% of older tourists travel with their partner, and 28% of the respondents travel with relatives and family members, about 20% travel in groups. In practice, the majority of offers are meant for 2 persons sharing one

room, resulting in an extra cost when opting for single rooms. Tour operators could be more aware of the fact that some older people may prefer a single room (for health reasons, for practical reasons ...) and could consider some offers for people who prefer a single room.

Various studies¹ confirm the trends and analysis hereby reported. Taking a broader perspective, so to encompass intergenerational comparisons, it is interesting to read the results of this present work with the statistics and analysis that took into account the preferences of younger cohorts, as it is the case in the Eurobarometer study (2014) on the preferences of Europeans towards tourism. As a matter of fact, the report highlights that older respondents are more likely to go on holiday in their country: '54% of people aged 55 and over plan to do this, compared with only 38% of 15–24 year old'. According to the Eurobarometer, age seems to influence the reasons to go on holiday. Respondents aged 55 and over are more likely to mention nature (35%) as their main reason, compared with 15–24 year-olds (21%). Conversely, they are the least likely to go on holiday for the sun/beach (36% vs. 48–53% for the other age groups). Younger respondents are the most likely to have gone on holiday to visit family/friends (38% of 15–24 year-olds and 40% of the 25–39 age group vs. 30% of 40–54 year olds and 33% of people aged 55 and over).

What follows here are other extracts from the Eurobarometer survey, suitable to raise further points of comparison and discussion around touristic preferences and ageing:

- The younger respondents are more likely to regard recommendations from friends, colleagues or relatives as important: 67% of 15–24 year-olds mention this, compared to 44% of those aged 55 and over. Unsurprisingly, the youngest respondents are also the most likely to mention social media sites (15% vs. 3% of people aged 55 and over). Respondents aged 55 and over are much less likely than younger respondents to mention Internet websites (28% vs. 52–59% for other age groups), but are the most likely to mention tourism offices/travel agencies (22% vs. 16% of 25–39 year-olds);
- Respondents aged 15–24 and 55 and over (both 31%) were the most likely to have been on an all-inclusive holiday in 2013, while 25–39 year-olds (23%) were the least likely to have done so. Additionally, 15–24 year-olds were the most likely to have gone on a holiday where the services were purchased separately, whereas people aged 55 and over were the least likely (45% vs. 35%);
- People aged 55 and over (32%) are the most likely to have taken a holiday lasting more than 13 consecutive nights, with 25–39 year-olds (23%) the least

¹ Cfr. bibliography

likely to have done so. Conversely, 15–24 year-olds (53%) are the most likely to have taken a short-stay trip (up to three nights), while respondents aged 55 and over (44%) are the least likely to have done so;

- People aged 25–54 (63%) are the most likely to cite financial reasons, while those aged 15–24 (45%) are, surprisingly, the least likely to do so. 15–24 year-olds are the most likely to say they lacked the time (31% vs. 6% of people aged 55 and over), while the latter are the most inclined to mention personal/private reasons (39% vs. 16% of 15–24 year-olds);
- Respondents under the age of 25 are more likely to plan holidays lasting 4–13 nights (50% for 15–24 year-olds) than people aged 55 and over (34%). Similarly, people aged 55 and over are less likely to plan short-stay trips than other age groups (24% vs. 34–40%).

About seasonality, it is interesting to mention a part of the study, carried out by the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry (2014), on the economic impact and travel patterns of accessible tourism in Europe. The report refers to people aged 65 and above only and states that this group in Sweden, Belgium and the UK is ‘less likely than average to travel over the summer holidays. In contrast, Swedish seniors are more likely to travel during the spring holidays, UK seniors over the winter holidays, and Belgian seniors in the offseason. In terms of most likely period for a holiday, three countries stand out for seniors: people aged 65 and over Belgian seniors are less likely than average to have stayed with family or friends in the past 12 months but more likely to have stayed in a rental house or flat, or in a spa or wellness resort’.

Seniors’ participation in tourism

Tourism has been seen to exert a positive psychological impact on older people, on their subjective wellbeing, quality of life, self-assessed health and life satisfaction, regardless of type or duration of trip (Dolnicar – Yanamandram – Cliff, 2012; Hagger – Murray, 2013; Hunter-Jones – Blackburn, 2007). It similarly plays a role in creating and sharing memories (Marschall, 2012; Sellick, 2004; Tung – Brent Ritchie, 2011) and reminiscence is recognized as promoting and maintaining older people’s mental wellbeing as it engages memory and fosters social interaction (Coleman, 2005; Mullins, 2011). Emotional and psychological wellbeing are vital to ageing well and whilst loneliness and isolation are not concomitants of ageing as many older people lead rewarding and socially engaged lives (Victor – Scambler – Bond, 2009), it is notable that in the UK over a million over-65s say they are often or always lonely and spend around 80% of their time at home (Age UK, 2011). Depression is the most common later-life mental health problem, with 2.4 million older UK adults suffering from depression severe enough to impair their quality of

life (Institute of Public Policy Research, 2009) and older people frequently have to deal with often interconnecting life transitions such as bereavement, physiological change, increased ill-health and reduced socio-economic circumstances (Age Concern & Mental Health Foundation, 2006; Naef – Ward – Mahrer-Imhof – Grande, 2013). Such concerns can predispose them to poor sleep and create a downward spiral of mental and physical health, seriously impacting their wellbeing. Despite the significance of issues such as emotional wellbeing and bereavement to older people, particularly women, they remain neglected by tourism researchers (Small, 2003). Scholarship has established however, that tourism provides opportunities to promote social inclusion, extend limited social realms, facilitate social interaction and networks, and 'for reaffirming self and developing a new identity ... in later years' (Grant – Kluge, 2012, 130). Studies demonstrate how tourism impacts positively on a range of economically or otherwise disadvantaged groups, including low-income families, teenage mothers and people with health issues and disabilities and their carers (e.g. Gump – Matthews, 2000; Hunter-Jones, 2004, 2005, 2010; McCabe – Joldersma – Li, 2010; McConkey – McCullough, 2006) and relieves stress (Toda et al., 2004).

At the same time, researchers have identified the barriers to older peoples' tourism participation as: economic; time; transportation; health; family responsibilities; the lack of a travelling companion (Blazey, 1986; McGuire, 1984; Romsa – Blenman, 1989; Shoemaker, 2000). Yet, there are few studies that explicitly connect tourism non/participation and later-life wellbeing with the burgeoning social tourism literature (Durko – Petrick, 2013).

Defined as 'tourism with an added moral value, of which the primary aim is to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange' (Minnaert – Maitland – Miller, 2011, 414), social tourism affords a range of tourism opportunities to those who would not otherwise be able to participate due to a certain disadvantage, such as the lack of money, their role as a full-time caregiver or a health problem or disability (All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Tourism, 2011). Social tourism encompasses a variety of activities and programmes across Europe and elsewhere that provide social and economic benefits, stimulate tourism development or promote understanding between guests and hosts in tourist destinations (McCabe – Minnaert – Diekmann, 2012; Minnaert – Maitland – Miller, 2006, 2009; Minnaert et al., 2011). In Europe, there are clear differences between the northern (e.g. UK, Germany, Scandinavia) and Mediterranean (e.g. France, Spain) social tourism models, whereby the former is dominated by charitable organisations and the latter includes interventions by social services, trade unions, etc. (Hall – Brown, 2006; Hunter-Jones, 2011). Many European social tourism schemes are based on the 'inclusion' and 'stimulation' models of social tourism that encourage participation for all (Minnaert et al., 2011). In today's times of austerity, a number of

governments have re-evaluated their welfare programmes and the potential economic benefits of social tourism have received increased levels of attention (Minnaert, 2014).

A much-quoted example of the economic benefits of social tourism is the Spanish IMSERSO programme that offers holidays for senior citizens (and a companion) in domestic coastal resorts during the shoulder season. The holidays are subsidised by the public sector with beneficiaries paying only 70% of the costs. An estimated 10.5 million people have participated in this initiative that provides year-round employment (important in Spain where 30% of jobs are seasonal) and revenue, generating 13,000 direct and 85,000 indirect jobs and a €300 million return to the Spanish government (Rodriguez, 2010). To encourage similar schemes throughout Europe, the European Commission launched the Calypso programme in 2008, which aims to lower seasonality by assisting specifically defined social tourism groups to travel between different European countries (Minnaert et al., 2011). Whilst the ‘inclusion’ and ‘stimulation’ models of social tourism schemes are well established in such countries, in the UK social tourism is mainly provided by the charitable sector and largely focuses on its welfare benefits, encouraging the participation of disadvantaged individuals (Diekmann – McCabe, 2011) in the social tourism ‘participation model’ (Minnaert et al., 2011).



Figure 4: Factors of seniors' participation in tourism (Source: own compilation)

Social tourism studies clearly evidence its positive impacts, especially for families (e.g. Hazel, 2005; McCabe, 2009; Minnaert – Stacey – Quinn – Griffin, 2010; Quinn – Stacey, 2010; Sedgley – Pritchard – Morgan, 2012). Minnaert et al. (2009) argue that social tourism helps deprived families increase their family and social capital and widen their social networks and fosters positive behaviour and self-esteem. Social tourism offered them moments for reflection, assessment and aspiration, so that ‘...things that seemed out of reach now seemed possible after all’ (2009, 328). At the same time, participants saw holidays as opportunities to escape from routine, a time ‘to leave ... worries and financial problems at home, and concentrate on more positive things’ (2009, 328). Quinn and Stacey’s (2010) research similarly identified increased self-esteem and self-confidence amongst

deprived young people, evidencing how social tourism experiences diversify the routines of children from 'limited spatial worlds' (2010, 42).

Sedgley et al. (2012) also highlighted the role of tourism participation in social inclusion: their study of London families living in poverty reveals that exclusion from tourism makes a clear contribution to their children's exclusion from everyday norms as holidays are regarded as part of contemporary British family life. Such studies emphasize how the benefits of social tourism extend beyond the immediate holiday experience and into participants' daily lives. Some researchers caution that, contrary to studies that identify pre-holiday anticipation as a wholly positive aspect of the tourism experience (Gilbert – Abdullah, 2002), social tourism trips can be wrought with uncertainty (Minnaert, 2014) whilst the return home from any holiday can generate negative reflections on lives and relationships (Hall – Brown, 2006). Nonetheless, studies overwhelmingly find that social tourism offers opportunities for escape from the stresses of mundane life, routine variation, new experiences and a 'fresh sense of perspective on problems' (McCabe, 2009, 682).

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Websites

<http://www.atriaseniorliving.com>

ESCAPE website

IMSERSO programme

<http://www.universityvillage.net/lifestyle/stories/the-power-of-social-connectedness.aspx>



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