Senior Tourists´ Tours´ Experiences: The Case of Portugal

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ABSTRACT
This is an innovative study to understand the objectives and motivations of senior tourists, based on their past experiences as tourists. It involves the data of a study undertaken with nine senior tourists, aged between 69 and 84, who frequent a senior university in the northern region of Portugal. The collected data was used for category analysis. The results show that senior tourists described with detail and authenticity the tourism destinations, constitute a heterogeneous segment and are intrinsically motivated by cultural enrichment.
Keywords: Senior tourists, Tourism, Tourism destination, Tourism experience, Tourists motivations

I.   INTRODUCTION
The ageing process influences behavioral changes related with the trips. So, it is crucial for tourism sector companies to understand the needs and preferences of the senior tourist, including understanding perfectly the behavior of the target market, as each segment has different needs and preferences.

The article starts with a literature review, presenting senior tourists' motivations, highlighting the importance of representations and narratives as a means to understand the tourist experience. The second part describes the investigation methodology, data collection and main conclusions.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW
Personal motivation is a decisive base underlying all the actions of an individual, that exerts influence in the image formation before and after the visit (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Motivation to travel could internal or external, and is influenced by satisfaction and behavioral intents, as well as by the result of the decision to acquire the tourist product (Moretti, Mason & Gos, 2016). Aged tourists numbers are increasing, as population ageing is an unavoidable reality (Le Serre, Weber, Legohérel, & Errajaa, 2017), and the market should have enough products to cater to their needs.

The motivations to travel can be classified into three categories: "intellectual" connected, for example, with the desire to know the country´s history, experiment with different cultures and lifestyles, discover the natural ambiance, know better a place, the people and things; "affective links" related to the desire to visit family and friends, to spend time with near and dear ones; "escape from the routine" linked with the desire to run away from the daily routine and experience new adventures. Different motivations have a direct effect on the tourism destination image and an indirect effect on the intention to repeat the journey (Esichaikul, 2012; Jang & Wu, 2006).

Several investigators have been studying the tourists´ motivations and their contribution to form the destination image, that also influences the consumer behavior and is of utmost importance in the tourism

decision-making (Agapito *et al.*, 2014; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Rey-Moreno, Medina-Molina, & Rufín-Moreno, 2014; Santos, Ferreira, & Costa, 2014; Stylos, Bellou, Andronikidis, & Vassiliadis, 2017).

In their study, Sancho & Álvarez (2010) concluded that socio-psychological motivations (physical, cultural, interpersonal, social and prestigious) are the results of prior experiences before arriving at the destination.

Several studies in the literature points out to other facts that affect travel motivation. As per Meng, Tepanon e Uysal (2008), travel motivation depends on the tourist´s previous satisfaction, that is seen in the decisive role of selecting the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martín, 2004; San Martín & Rodriguez Del Bosques, 2008).

The attributes that may convince a tourist to visit a place include natural and historical precedents, rich heritage, boarding facilities, climate, among others (Stylidis, Belhasse, & Shani 2015). Or, the more the tourist knows about the positive characteristics of the place, the more reliable will be his cognitive evaluation of the same (Sahin & Baloglu, 2011). Amongst the preferred means of transportation of the elderly, are buses, followed by airplanes, and trains (Prideaux, Wei & Ruyz, 2001). For journey organization, tourism packages (all inclusive) are the preferred option (Bai, Jang, Cai & O'Leary, 2001; Kazeminia, Del Chiappa & Jafari, 2015), as observed by Lindqvist & Bjork (2000), safety is an important factor in decision making by the elderly and it increases with ageing.

Prideaux, Wei & Ruys, (2001) considered "passing the word" a significant information source for the elderly travelers. Though some investigations proved that they are less interested in technology that other age groups (Sund & Boksberger, 2007), estimates show that the internet will be the main means for the aged to research, plan and make reservations for their vacations (Lukaitis & Davey, 2012). In accordance with the study of Vojvodic (2015), senior tourists prefer a higher level of comfort, considered safety as a primary factor in decision-making, and as a result, preferred organized trips. Senior tourists also demonstrated the desire for novelty and the need to procure authentic experiences (Vojvodic, 2015).

While considering the vacation experiences as multi-sensorial, that include tastes, sounds, aromas, feel, impressions and visual images (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013), the narration constitutes an efficient method of transmitting that experience (Mattila, 2000, 2002). Mattila (2000) argues that experiences are made up of a sequence of events. The narrative structure supplies an inference causal basis about the meaning of the tourism experience (Escalas, 2004).

III.   METHODOLOGY

The theme of study and the scope of this investigation required the identification of the objectives that allow clarity about what is the aim of the study. The general objective of this investigation is to understand the motivations and representations of the senior tourist based on past experiences. For such, the following specific objectives have been delineated: understand the senior tourists´ motivation while being absent from their residence place; identify the senior tourists´ preferences, based on their past tourism experiences.

In response to the objectives, a qualitative study was undertaken, to have a detailed understanding of the experiences. The qualitative approach is focused on the interpretation and comprehension of each theme.

Every participant in this study were selected based on the principle of quality of information (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), or, were selected intentionally, in accordance with their knowledge and experience of the facts of the investigation (Morse, 1994). So, the sample for this investigation was made up by nine Portuguese senior citizens (represented by E1 to E9), aged between 76 and 84 years (see Table 1). The participants are elders of both genders and age groups, with tourism experiences. They were frequenting a senior university, that self-consider themselves to be of the upper middle class, that is, with high purchasing power, with experiences and stayovers, as mentioned by Hung, Bai & Lu (2016). The delimitation process of the sample followed the theoretical saturation criterion, or, the same was closed when new diversified data did not emerge from more interviews, thus, considering that the experiential representation was achieved.

Table 1
BRIEF CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SAMPLE

Seniors Sample	Gender		Age	Previous occupation	Marital status	With whom dwelling	Years since retirement
	Male	**Female**					
E1		X	76	Secretary	Widow	Alone	11
E2	X		84	Veterinarian	Married	Accompanied	22
E3		X	79	Economist	Married	Accompanied	14

E4		X	82	Teacher	Widow	Alone	23
E5	x		69	Economist	Married	Accompanied	1
E6		X	73	Teacher	Married	Accompanied	7
E7		X	74	Teacher	Married	Accompanied	8
E8		X	78	Teacher	Widow	Alone	12
E9	X		69	Manager	Married	Accompanied	3

Source: Own elaboration

In the interviews, the interviewer understood the need that senior tourists had to narrate and describe various things that had happened to them. So, the conversations did not end when the recorder was shut down. The specific form of conversation, that is established in an interview for research purposes, favors the direct or indirect access to perceptions and representations, to beliefs and to the meaning that people attribute to their experiences of the study theme.

The presentation of results derives from the senior tourists´ interviews, based on several categories. The categories are described and defined using the narratives, language that translates each type, helping in the process, the interpretation of the same. In order to deepen the analysis, excerpts of each interview are presented.

It is to be understood that the fundamental interpretation of results as a whole and not in parts, is essential. It is done through a comprehensive and interpretative form of the same, in order to obtain an integrated sense, to enable the understanding of the motivations and representations of the senior tourists.

In this investigation, we selected as instrument, the semi-structured interview, as "one of its advantages is the direct contact with personal experiences" (Fortin, 2009, p.379). Through this technique, new questions can be added, and the interviewee can express his sentiments and opinions. The interview is an investigation technique much used in qualitative methodologies (Fortin, 2009), that allows the collection of data about beliefs, opinions and ideas of subjects (Lessard-Hébert, Goyette & Boutin, 2005). Further, it gives the interviewees the possibility to understand better their own auto-reflection, sentiments and their own identity (Fortin, 2009). In fact, the interview is frequently considered as the most popular qualitative method of social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For these reasons, it is one of the most important and widespread forms of conducting investigations on tourism, particularly under the "post-positivism" and "constructivism" investigation paradigms (Noy, 2008). As per Clark (1998), interviews are the form of collecting qualitative data that becomes more useful while providing a view of how individuals or groups feel about their world and how they construct the "reality" of that world. For this study, the semi-structured interview was considered appropriate, as it facilitates the access to narratives and gives the interviewee more liberty to explain his thoughts; enables also the revelation of occult facets of the human and organizational behavior (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The semi-structured interview developed for this study was based on the study of Jang & Wu (2006).

Interviews were developed with base questions, referring the motivations, representations and preferences, formulated from the literature review. It was elaborated due to the lack of specific instruments to collect data for this theme. It is composed of three parts. The first aims at establishing an empathy relationship between the interviewer and the respondent and includes a set of social questions about journeys. In the second part, a set of questions was formulated regarding the motivations to travel and the destination attributes. It was followed by questions related to the representation of senior tourists at national and international levels, the tourism destination and the tourism offers. Finally, in the third part, was elaborated a summary and conclusion of the interview. Additionally, questions regarding the individual preferences and the emotions that those preferences arose were put to them. In short, this tool enables the possibility to put new questions, flexibly and naturally, being thus just a structural model.

The resulting interview can also be used in future studies, becoming a useful tool that can stimulate senior tourists regarding their motivations and representations on the theme.

After ending all the interviews, they were transcribed integrally, in a morose and long process, making thus the "corpus of analysis" (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). The transcription was made by the means of audition and simultaneous reading, to confirm the fidelity. Through this process of transcription, a written copy was prepared, duplicating as exactly as possible the narration of each participant, avoiding this way missing any details.

Computer software was used to analyze the interviews. The codification process for data and grid corresponds to several readings of the empirical material. As a guide for data analysis, we used "Grounded analysis", the approach line of the "Grounded Theory" (Matteucci, & Gnoth, 2017). As per this method, the main objective is building the theory, distinguished by a simple description, that after a guiding scheme that integrates multiple concepts, should be able to explain and forecast happenings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

IV. RESULTS

Table 2 presents the emerging categories of the analysis.

Table 2
EMERGING CATEGORIES

Categories	Topic of analysis
i. Tourist motivations	Internal; external; cultural; natural
i. Tourist attractions	cultural; natural
i. Tourism destination	National; international
v. Means of transportation	Car; Train; Airplane
v. Travel planning	Travel agency; Family

Source: Own elaboration

i. Tourist motivations

According with the realized analysis to the narrations of the nine elders, it was possible to understand that all answered affirmatively regarding the likeness of travelling. All of them evidenced in their narrations, clearly, several reasons that lead them to visit other places. In order to approach the first theme, the question was based on the motives that lead the elder to travel, *"What motives lead you to travel?"* It was observed that all nine of them mentioned internal and external reasons.

Senior tourist´s motivation, in this study, generally corresponds to the search of cultural knowledge and the satisfaction of curiosity regarding the material and immaterial cultural patrimony [E2] –*"Different cultures, uses, habits, those are the fundamental conditions."*; [E1] – *"To know museums and new lands and also new monuments."*; [E6] – *"(...) to know new places and to spend time with other people."*; [E4] – *"(...) other cultures, curiosity for the historical patrimony,"*; [E7] – *"Quest for knowledge, likeness for cultural tourism, as I become more culturally enriched"*. Another motive found in the discourse of three senior tourists was relaxation. They travel to relax and rest [E3] *"something that motivates me is the calmness, being relaxed without the grandchildren"*; [E8] – *"(...) relaxation intention"*. [E9] – *"in this phase of my life, I travel to places that I never had the opportunity to know, for example, I would like to go to Lanikai in Hawaii and to the Maldives to take advantage of the sun and enjoy the magnificent beaches, or in other words, to relax"*. Another reason to travel identified, was [E5] – *"Appreciate the landscape and then analyze the differences in each country is something that fascinates me. I loved Mount Saint-Michel and Provence in France, Rome in Italy and I also adored Dubrovnik"*.

A few studies on motivation for tourism show that tourists get rid of their daily activities and of their daily routine, and rest and relaxation are the main motives for which people travel. The motivational factors are different for each tourist (Chen & Tsai, 2007). In accordance with the study of Chang (2014), motivation to travel is interpreted as an incentive that motivates tourists to roam or visit tourism destinations. In this sense, tourists´ motivations cover psychological and physical aspects, as they fulfill different levels of needs.

ii. Tourist attractions

The category is very important for analysis, as tourist attractions are one of the main components of the tourism destination. Here we can understand which are the main characteristics that are linked to the selection of the tourism destination (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014). Below is presented the synthesis of the affirmations of the interviewees regarding the attraction categories of the tourism destination, where two sub-categories are identified: cultural resources and natural resources. It is observed that cultural attractions evidence the largest number of affirmations, revealing that senior tourists´ value it as a fundamental attraction during their visits.

With regards to cultural attractions, the majority of the participants showed more interest in these resources, strictly connected to material culture, equipment and cultural infrastructure [E1] – *"(…)monuments, museums is what I most appreciate"*; [E2]–*"Shows"*; [E4]–*"The shows, theatre and opera, mainly the behavior of the spectators, visits to museums and culture houses and the daily routine of the locals; it is important to visit the market as it shows a lot about the character of the population we visit (...)"*; [E7] – *"Culture and history"*; [E8] – *"Museums."*; [E9] –*"Handicraft fairs and markets"*; here is revealed the specific interest in the culture (main motivation), meaning that the participants desire to travel and deepen their comprehension about the

visited cultures, travelling mainly for that end. Only three senior tourists presented interest in natural resources in their narrative; [E3] – *"Time and beaches"*; [E5] – *"Good landscapes, good climate, parks"*; [E6] – *"Landscapes"*. We interpret landscape as the form of the tourism place in its visible state. It can be concluded that all the landscape can be considered as tourism, depending only on the observer and how he interprets the sense of each landscape. This result matches those obtained in the studies of Bagus & Susanto (2017), and Ram, Björk & Weidenfeld (2016), that defended that senior tourists tend to look out for more cultural attractions. The attributes of the destination and the main local attractions are the main fundamental factors in the choice of selection of the destination and are considered as key elements in the development of the same. In this sense, not only the ambiance, but also the culture and its possible meanings for the community must be considered. Tourist attractions play a fundamental role in tourism and on the desire of visitors to the destination (Molinillo, Ekinci, & Japutra, 2015).

Every country has its own attraction factors, motivating a person to travel specifically to a specific destination (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014). The authenticity is also characterized by the culture and lifestyle of each country, or in other words, reveals an interest for something genuine and real that is frequently related with tourist places, tourist attractions and tourist experiences (Chhabra, 2005).

iii. Tourism destination
In terms with the analysis of the senior tourists´ narratives, regarding the tourism destination at national and international level, it was observed that they prefer national destinations: [E1] – *"National, I don´t want to go abroad"*; [E2] –*"I prefer to travel inside the country."*; [E3] – *"I want to discover the interior of the country."*; [E4] –*"First to know well the marvels of my country and enjoy them (...)"*; [E5] – *"I prefer the country, especially now."*; [E6] – *"(...) I already travelled a lot, but I do not know the interior of our country"*; [E7] –*"(...) At this age, I would like to know all the villages of Portugal"* ; [E8] *"(...) now nationals, few internationals"*; [E9] – *"I can tell you that as long as this disease lasts, I will remain in the country and do not wish to travel abroad for the next three, four years, because if you analyze, as long as there is no vaccine or medicine all over the world, I do not feel safe"*. The studies of Litrell, Paige & Song (2004) and of Wu, (2003), regarding the selection of the destination (national or international), verified that elders travel both nationally as well as internationally. Nevertheless, this study verified that the choice is totally on a national level of destination, due to the actual global situation (Covid-19).

iv. Means of transportation
To understand the means of transportation preference was also one of the objectives of the study: [E1] –*"Bus, as in a group, we socialize"*; [E2] –*"Car, because I have mobility to go wherever I want"*;[E3]–*"First car, then bus, group trips and then airplane"*; [E4] – *"(...) Car, even for long distances, to be able to stop whenever I see a city, village, landscape, monument, group of people, exceptional motives"*; [E5] – *"(...) car, because it is more functional whenever I want to go"*;[E6]– *"Bus or car as they are usually comfortable and the person feels safe"*;[E6] – *"car(...)"*; [E7] –*"Car, I can stop everywhere and visit more places"*; [E8] – *"Bus"*; [E9]- *"For me, the airplane would not be the safest means of transportation (...)"*. Car, in particular, is the preferred means of transport of the elders for pleasure trips, followed by the airplane (Javalgi, Thomas, & Rao, 1992; Prideaux, Wei, & Ruyz, 2001).

v. Travel planning
As regards elder people travel planning, they reveal clearly the choice towards travel agencies, as shown in most evidences. Two main sub-categories came out of the conversation: travel agencies and relatives. Generally, the interviewees opted for travel agencies: [E1] –*"An agency."*; [E2] –*"Mostly an agency (...)"*;[E4] –*"I already have an agency that takes care of everything for national and international trips (...)"*; [E6] – *"(...) Travel agency"*; [E8]– *"(...) Agency"*; [E9]- *"(...) several travel agencies"*; [E7] –*"I go to an agency and they take care of everything and I do not have to worry, avoid headaches, and feel safer"*. This way, it is understood that travel agencies assume a fundamental role in this age segment, having a perfect knowledge of the market, both demand-wise and supply-wise, in order to prepare competitive price packages as per the taste of the clients. It is clear that travel agencies still play an important role, transmitting credibility and safety on the services rendered. Only two of the interviewees mentioned that near relatives plan their trips [E3] – *"(...) my husband or my kids do that"*; [E5] - *"My son makes the reservations"*.

Based on the categories found, three constructs were identified, through the subjects´ narrations: authenticity, culture and insecurity. The said constructs explain the motivations and representations of this group of elder tourists, transmitting the common meanings shared by them. Such statements aroused a reflection about each one of them, based on all the analyzed interviews. The authenticity construct is revealed by all interviewees, through the description of their tourism experiences as genuine and unique. They presented,

through their narrations, the essence of the places they visited, the cultural and natural attractions, the opportunity to experience the traditions, the gastronomy, among others, based on their individual perceptions. Culture was also another construct that emerged from the senior tourists´ speech, giving a greater meaning to the journeys, this being an important motivational factor. Culture makes journeys more meaningful and memorable. Insecurity is another construct that is present in the speech of the interviewees, making obvious that fear of travelling to international destinations is there, the main reason for such fear being the risk of contracting the disease (Covid-19), thus giving preference to the national tourism destinations.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The ageing process is one of the key questions of the XXI century. Portugal is no exception to this context, that happens to be a global phenomenon. The increase in the average life expectancy (and associated quality of life), as well as the use of digital means by the elderly population, make this age group search for newer experiences, mainly in neighboring countries. The first part of this work consists in a theoretical revision in order to deepen the knowledge on the matter under discussion. In the second part, all the underlying methodology was discussed. Through the narrative, it is possible to obtain information about the internal world of tourists.

It can be concluded that senior tourists´ motivations are an heterogenous segment; nevertheless, the majority of them are motivated intrinsically by cultural enrichment. The results demonstrate that senior tourists describe their journeys in detail and with authenticity. They also reveal that the main motivation range from breaking the routine, change in ambiance, passing through knowing other cultures and different customs, the opportunity to know new places they never had a chance to visit before, revealing now a greater availability from the retirement age. The identification of the motives that lead senior tourists to travel is a key ingredient to understand their decision-making process that can facilitate the efficacy of the marketing activity.

With regards to the representation of senior tourists as far as tourism attractions are concerned, we could identify the interest for cultural attractions, revealing in this form that for senior tourists the development of products/packages based on cultural tourism is essential.

Further, after analyzing the senior tourists´ preferences towards tourist destinies, it was made clear that they prefer national destinations, as a result of the pandemic situation that the world lives currently. All the interviewees clearly expressed their fear and insecurity about international trips. It was possible to understand that the majority prefer to use cars, due to facility of mobility between localities. The results of this study also reveal that the majority of the senior tourists opt for travel agencies to plan their vacation, showing that they trust the tourism sector companies. All the interviewees are retirees, are insensitive to the travel costs as long as they feel safe. The free time is a reciprocal opportunity, both for the elderly as well as for the tourism agents.

The collected results suggest the importance of travel agencies for this segment in Portugal, thus promoting the development and potential interest in the companies operating in the tourism area in the country.

THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE IMPLICATIONS

There are many studies undertaken about senior tourism in Portugal, but there are very few qualitative ones regarding the motivations and representation of this class of tourists. We were able to achieve fundamental results based on the senior tourists´ narratives in order to find out that there is a need to design tourism programs for this segment. Furnishing interesting data for the adequation of the tourism offer to the needs of seniors, regarding the internal market.

We could not find any literature review on Portugal on this specific qualitative type theme; however, the senior tourism motivations are already a theme widely studied internationally, with quantitative and qualitative studies.

Using the literature review as a base, it was seen that existing tourism offers do not accompany the evolution and nature of this segment given the reduced number of studies conducted in this area. This is an ever increasingly active public, that throughout their lives, accumulated a very significant set of knowledges and experiences. This acquired and demonstrated knowledge in this study is a starting point for many scientific investigations, that may lead to the promotion of new businesses in the tourism area, based exactly on the needs of an ever-ageing population.

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IMPLICATIONS

On the basis on the national level research undertaken, there seems to be a shortage of travel agencies directed specifically towards the senior public, and this could be an interesting project that would be viable given the population ageing factor. A company could be founded in Portugal to cater services all over the world. In order to guarantee good quality services, it would need local highly experienced human resources, with expertise in each region of the country. The tourist guide is a key element in each senior tourist journey, and the travel agencies must have this fact in mind too, while planning such packages.

On the reference the epistemological attitude of the *"Grounded Theory"*, that knowledge is always contextual and temporary, it is understood that the data collected is an important contribution and an added value to this phenomenon (Fernandes & Maia, 2001).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS
There are many preoccupations in maintaining the scientific and methodological rigor, and also have time to develop works of this nature, sometimes some limitations crop up.

The first limitation is related with the instrument utilized, namely the interview (main element), considering that its nature was oral, and this could be hampered by all the conditions of human communication.

In further investigations, the work developed till now could be crossed with another aimed at youngsters. These two visions would be quite interesting for the development of tourism products for grandparents and grandchildren, combining the services for both generations in the same travel package.

It would also be interesting to have a more significant sample, more homogenous, verifying if the gender representations differed in relation to the motivations and their tourism experiences. Two or more groups of different regions could also be studied.

Some other questions that could eventually come up in subsequent studies could be included. It would be interesting to develop longitudinal studies that would enable an evaluation of the stability and mental change representation regarding this phenomenon (Huh, Uysal & McCleary, 2006).

Nevertheless, there are limitations that must be taken into consideration. This study adopted a qualitative approach, with no intention to generalize the conclusions with a limited sample restricted to the Porto region. Expanding the study to include more people of various areas of Portugal would be useful in the process of constructing and confirming a more accurate conceptual model. It is also necessary to empirically test motivational factors derived from the readings of the interviews and compare them continuously with the results of a new research.

Research about senior tourism is particularly important for two reasons: first, senior tourism can offer economic opportunities for companies and tourism destinations. Obtaining significant insights about that population segment is important as tourism brings a positive impact on local, regional and national economies (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Secondly, tourism can serve as an individual wellbeing vehicle and support a healthy lifestyle for the elderly (Silverstein & Parker, 2002). Senior tourism is associated to the social participation and to successful ageing strategies, substituting functions and lost activities, that can then be part of an internal renovation process. (Nimrod & Rotem, 2012).

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