

Constraints and facilitators for senior tourism

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a detailed understanding of how and why tourist behaviour changes in old age. Multiple case studies are built employing qualitative biographical interviews with 23 seniors from Freising, Germany. A model is developed that draws upon hierarchical leisure-constraints dimensions, facilitators, and the fundamentals of ecological systems theory, thereby linking constraints, facilitators and negotiation strategies with their underlying causes rooted in seniors' individual life courses. The model illustrates how intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints and facilitators (e.g. health and emotional stress, loss of travel partners) and microstructural and macrostructural factors (e.g. finances and travel regulations) explain tourist behaviour among seniors. The model incorporates strategies that seniors develop to overcome constraints to travelling, via anticipation and intervention. An understanding of the constraints and facilitators for senior tourism can assist tourism businesses and destinations to develop strategies to reduce negative effects and reinforce positive influences on seniors' participation in tourism.

1. Introduction

Seniors represent one of the most important market segments in tourism (Patterson, 2012). The senior population is of interest to the tourism industry because of its growing size and increasing participation in travel activities. Predictions from the United Nations indicate that by 2050, every fifth person on Earth (about two billion people) will be older than 60 years, a doubling of the 2013 figure (United Nations, 2013). Between 1970 and 2008, the travel propensity of seniors in Germany aged 60 to 69 years – that is, the percentage of the population who undertook a vacation trip of at least five days within a calendar year – increased from 41% to 78%. In 2008, every fourth vacation journey was undertaken by a senior. It is predicted that by the year 2020, every third traveller in Germany will be older than 60 years (Lohmann & Aderhold, 2009). This trend is not limited to Germany as various researchers have reported an increased importance of the senior tourism market in, for example, South Korea (Lee & Tideswell, 2005), Taiwan (Jang, Bai, Hu, & Wu, 2009), China (S. Chen, 2012; Hsu, Cai, & Wong, 2007), the United States (Hudson, 2010), and Australia (Horneman, Carter, Wei, & Ruys, 2002).

The term senior comes from Latin and basically means “elderly”. There is no official definition of seniors, and the literature shows great variation in the use of this term (Patterson, 2006). This study follows Faranda and Schmidt's (1999, p. 9) suggestion as to how to characterise

seniors: “Whatever the cut off chosen, decision makers must ensure that it allows them to uncover and not miss relevant opportunities and unmet needs.” Taking this point of view, the study applies a broader age definition used by the German Reiseanalyse, the largest tourism survey in Germany, which defines seniors as people aged 60 years and older.

Senior age is accompanied by physical, psychological and social changes (Brünnner, 1997; Lehr, 2000) which affect the ability opportunities to participate in tourism activities. Seniors have to cope with declining body functions such as vision, hearing or mobility in their everyday lives (Boyd & Bee, 2009). Aging also has a mental and cognitive dimension and elderly people can show increasing signs of dementia or other memory defects and declining skills, for example in solving complex problems or paying attention (Moody, 2009). From a socioecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), older adults' lives are accompanied by disruptions of to their social environment with associated life course transitions due to retirement or the increased mortality of peers and spouses. On the other hand, senior age can be perceived as a period in life associated with growth and opportunities (Liechty, Yarnal, & Kerstetter, 2012).

Given the importance of these life course changes in senior age, such as retirement or the death of a spouse, this article adopts a constraints and facilitators approach to gain in-depth understanding of tourism behaviour and patterns among the elderly. Constraints are those factors that limit or prevent tourism participation, while facilitators are

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dimensions that promote engagement in travel activities. The objective of this paper is to explore the nature of constraints and facilitators as they apply to senior tourism and to identify the strategies that seniors use to negotiate and overcome barriers to travel – an aspect that is overlooked by existing literature.

Research on the tourism behaviour of seniors is vital given the opportunities and challenges that come with the increased size of this market. By enhancing their knowledge of senior tourism, the tourism industry, destinations, and policymakers will be better prepared for the forthcoming demographic challenges. Business opportunities emerge not only due to the sheer economic significance and purchasing power of the market segment but also to its potentially positive effects on seasonality given that seniors often tend to travel during off-peak and shoulder seasons (Alén, Domínguez, & Losada, 2012; H. Kim, Woo, & Uysal, 2015).

From a managerial perspective, a better understanding of the constraints and facilitators of senior tourism can assist businesses in developing strategies to reduce the negative and reinforce the positive effects on tourism participation and activities. The development of tourism products and services that anticipate constraints to travel may facilitate the continuation of travelling into old age. This is particularly important given research showing that participation in leisure activities can have a positive effect on the well-being of seniors (H. Kim, Woo, & Uysal, 2015; Morgan, Pritchard, & Sedgley, 2015).

The majority of existing studies neglect the developmental nature of aging processes, an oversight criticised by some researchers (Oppermann, 1995; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2001). Not many studies have examined the extent to which historical and contextual life events influence the travel behaviour of seniors. In this context, Sedgley, Pritchard, and Morgan (2006, p. 43) state that “it is not possible to study older people's leisure behaviour through ‘snapshot’ research”, which isolates one moment in time. For this reason, this study adopts a “real life events” approach using qualitative semi-structured biographic interview techniques to investigate changes in seniors' tourism behaviour across their life course. This article contributes to the body of knowledge by presenting a model that links constraints and facilitators dimensions and negotiation strategies with their underlying causes rooted in seniors' individual life courses to explain senior tourism behaviour.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical framework that informs this study builds upon constraints and facilitators concepts, ecological systems theory, and the concepts of life events and life course transitions. According to Jackson (2005a), life events and the constraints and facilitators approach are closely related because transitional points in the life course – such as marriage, birth of the first child, and retirement – present new opportunities for or limitations to leisure.

2.1. Constraints and facilitators

The concept of constraints has been adopted in the tourism domain from two disciplinary angles: tourism geography and leisure. The geographer Torsten Hägerstrand (1970) developed a constraints model in the 1970s based on the presumption of the inseparability of time and space. According to Hägerstrand's time-geographical approach, activities are constrained by time-space prisms, which build a frame of human action-space behaviour. The model distinguishes between “capability” (biological limitations), “coupling” (interpersonal dimensions), and “authority” constraints (opportunities to participate in tourist attractions).

Constraints concepts were introduced in the field of leisure in the 1980s. The initial leisure constraints discourse focused on structural barriers such as time and financial resources and defined the impact of constraints in terms of participation or non-participation in leisure

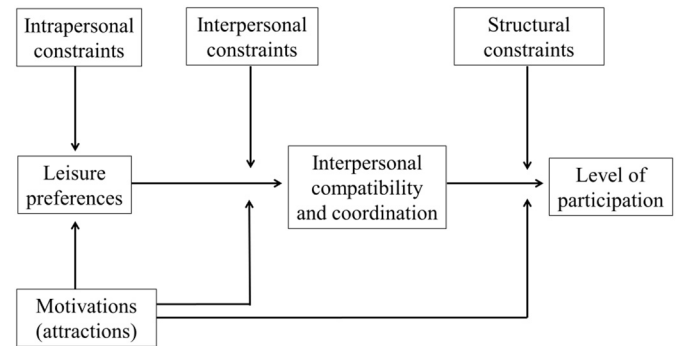


Fig. 1. The hierarchical/negotiation model.

Source: Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey (1993), (p. 9).

activities (Jackson, 2005b). Crawford and Godbey (1987) enhanced the concept by adding a preference dimension and also contributed to the discourse with their differentiation of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. Intrapersonal constraints are concerned with the psychological and physical characteristics of the individual, such as their health and self-confidence; interpersonal constraints reflect opportunities for social interactions; and structural constraints refer to the broader context outside the individual, such as time availability and financial resources (Silva & Correia, 2008). Some studies deconstruct structural dimensions into sub-categories, e.g. time, costs and place attributes (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008).

Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) made a substantial contribution with their work on a hierarchical model of leisure participation. In this advanced model, higher constraints levels are encountered hierarchically. After preferences are shaped, leisure activities are constrained first on the intrapersonal and interpersonal, and then (when earlier levels of constraint have been overcome) on the structural level (Fig. 1).

The hierarchical model suggests a process whereby people negotiate a way through the constraints that impinge on their leisure pursuits; Jackson and Searle (1985) suggested that constraints do not necessarily result in non-participatory behaviour but perhaps in a change of activity.

The constraints approach is not free from criticism (see, for example, Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010). The most fundamental critique comes from Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997, p. 445) who argue that constraints concepts view leisure participants as “passive responders” rather than active agents, thus disregarding the dynamics in people's lives. Other scholars identify issues related to the hierarchical nature of the model (Kerstetter, Yen, & Yarnal, 2005; Nyaupane, Morais, & Graefe, 2004).

Raymore (2002) introduced facilitators to the constraints-dominated discussion of leisure participation, proposing “that the absence of constraints does not necessarily lead to participation” (p. 39). Facilitators encourage individuals into leisure activities by helping them to form preferences by negotiating through constraints. In this sense, facilitators do not simply act as the opposite of constraints (Raymore, 2002). Woodside, Caldwell, and Spurr (2006) stress that it is the combination of constraining and facilitating factors that lead to, rather than prevent, outcomes such as overnight travel.

2.2. Ecological systems theory and life events

Ecological systems theory defines human development within the context of social system levels that range from “micro” to “macro” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem comprises the pattern of individual activities and reflects their social roles and interpersonal relations. The macrosystem describes the external environment of an individual such as their customs, lifestyle, belief systems, ethnicity, and

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