

# Older tourists' travel motivations and overall satisfaction at the destination: The case of Sirmione

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## Abstract

*Purpose:* As the number of older tourists is progressively growing due to population ageing, tourism destinations are increasingly striving to attract them. For this purpose, destination marketers need to gain deep knowledge about the relationships between older tourists' travel motivations and satisfaction at the destination. This paper aims to provide an in-depth examination of such relationships in a specific destination, highlighting the effects of four travel motivations (culture; pleasure-seeking; relaxation; physical).

*Methodology:* A cross-section design was adopted based on a survey among a sample of older tourists visiting Sirmione, a mature destination located on Lake Garda, Italy. Data were analyzed through multiple techniques, including analyses of variance and linear regression.

*Findings:* The results reveal that relaxation was the most important motivation making older tourists decide to visit Sirmione. Moreover, relaxation was the only motivation showing a statistically significant relationship with satisfaction at the destination.

*Practical implications:* The results of this study provide destination managers with valuable inputs to reposition their destination to effectively attract older tourists.

*Originality/value:* This paper contributes to enhance available knowledge – which is quite scarce – about the effects of travel motivations on satisfaction at the destination among older tourists.

**Keywords:** Older tourists; tourist satisfaction; travel motivations.

## 1. Introduction

Due to the increased population aging (United Nations Population Fund-HelpAge International, 2012), older individuals have become one of the most attractive market segment for the tourism industry. Studies have shown that older tourists tend to spend more than younger generations for quality services, have more free time, and have the opportunity to travel in off-peak season (Thompson and Thompson, 2009; Nimrod and Rotem 2010). Therefore, older tourists represent an interesting target for destinations needing to deseasonalize their tourist flows and willing to attract more quality-oriented tourists.

Travel motivation are utterly important because they stimulate people to travel (Moutinho 1987; Fodness 1994; Crompton, 1979; Sangpikul 2008). To meet older tourists' needs, destinations should strive to understand their travel motivations and how these motivations affect tourists' satisfaction. However, the older tourist market is characterized by a high level of the heterogeneity in terms of travel motivations and travel behavior (Vigolo, 2017). Therefore, further research is needed about the relationship between travel motivations and satisfaction at the destination for this specific segment.

Based on these premises, this paper aims to explore older tourists' travel motivations toward an Italian destination, Sirmione, and to investigate the effect of travel motivations on tourists' satisfaction. In addition, the study compares the motivations of two different age groups (i.e. tourists aged 60 to 69 and tourists aged 70 or more). The study was conducted in Sirmione, which is a well-known mature destination located on Lake Garda, Italy. Sirmione offers a variety of tourist attractions, ranging from nature, cultural heritage and events, wellness and spa, sport.

A survey was conducted on a sample of both domestic and international tourists aged 60 and over during their stay in Sirmione. The findings of regression analysis revealed that travel motivations significantly affect tourist satisfaction at the destination. In addition, significant differences in travel motivations emerged between age groups.

The next section presents the conceptual framework for the study, followed by the methodology and the main findings. Finally, the discussion and conclusions are addressed.

## 2. Theoretical background

The relationship between the performance of a destination and tourist satisfaction is well-established in literature (Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Baker & Crompton, 2000; Danaher & Arweiler, 1996; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000). For example, Kozak (2002b) developed a model to benchmark different tourism destinations based on customer-driven performance (tourist satisfaction). Different theories have been used to address tourist satisfaction, such as the expectation/disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1980; Meng, Tepanon, & Uysal, 2008). Literature has classified motivations into internal motivations, regarded as psychological drivers, and external motivations, related to destination attributes (Uysal and Hagan, 1993; Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977, 1981; Uysal & Jurowski, 1993). In particular, Kozak (2002a) developed a tourism motivation model that includes 14 items grouped into 4 constructs: culture, pleasure-seeking/fantasy, relaxation, physical. Wang et al (2016) also found that travel motivation affect travelers' cognitive image, which in turn interacts with affective image to shape individuals' expectations toward the destination.

Moreover, literature has found that travel motivations affect satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Fielding, Pearce, & Hughes, 1992, Mason, Gos, Moretti, 2016). For example, Hsu et al (2010) also found that expectations toward a destination

directly influence the motivation to visit the destination. In addition satisfaction is a significant antecedents of a tourist's intention to return to the destination (Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Taher, Jamal, Sumarjan, & Aminudin, 2015).

Several studies have explored the relationships between travel motivations and tourist satisfaction in specific tourism contexts such as festival tourism (Lee and Hsu, 2013; López-Guzmán et al, 2017), religious tourism (Battour et al, 2017), film tourism (Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai, 2015), rural tourism (Devesa, Laguna, & Palacios, 2010), and dental tourism (Jaapar et al, 2017; Kovacs and Szocska, 2013). In conclusion, the relationship between travel motivation and satisfaction with a destination is well-established. However, there is a need to further understand how travel motivations affect satisfaction for the older-tourist segment.

In recent years, both scholars and practitioners have recognized the importance of the population ageing phenomenon for social and economic activities, including traveling (United Nations Population Fund-HelpAge International, 2012). Even though literature does not provide a unique definition of older tourists, the threshold of 60 years is commonly used (e.g. United Nations, 2015; Hung et al., 2015).

With regard to travel motivations of older adults, several studies emphasized the importance of relaxation and seeking (e.g. Guinn, 1980; Boksberger & Laesser 2009; Sangpikul, 2008; Ward, 2014). In addition, social purposes such as spending time with the family or meeting people and socialize often represent a travel motivation for older tourists (e.g., You and O'Leary, 1999; Horneman et al. 2002; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Musa & Sim, 2010).

Moreover, health and well-being represent primary travel motivations for older adults (e.g. Horneman et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2003, Lee & Tideswell, 2005). With regard to wellness tourism in particular, Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper (2009) argue that older tourists look for recreational facilities besides the benefits of health resorts and spas. Conversely, Borges Tiago et al. (2016) found that health and wellbeing were only secondary motivations for European baby boomers.

Further, some scholars identified learning (Jang and Wu, 2006), self-fulfillment, self-enhancement (Jang & Wu 2006; Lu et al. 2016) and self-actualization as possible travel motivations for older tourist. Interestingly, some studies found that older tourists travel to practice sports and do physical activities (Boksberger & Laesser 2009; Le Serre & Chevalier, 2012). To a lesser extent, some older tourists can be motivated by religious or spiritual purposes (Jang & Wu, 2006; Le Serre & Chevalier, 2012; Ward, 2014) or by nostalgic reasons, i.e. to revisit places from their past that have a particular personal meaning for them (Cleaver Sellick, 2004; Tung & Ritchie 2011).

To conclude, the literature review reveals a great variety of travel motivations among older tourists, to the extent that travel motivations can be used to segment older tourist into more homogeneous groups (e.g Le Serre & Chevalier, 2012; Carneiro et al., 2013; Alén et al., 2015). However, the relationship between motivation and satisfaction for this specific segment needs to be further addressed.

### **3. Methods**

A survey was conducted among a sample of older visitors in Sirmione, a well-known mature destination on Lake Garda, Italy. In 2016, Sirmione registered 383,166 arrivals and 1,288,690 stays (<http://turismoweb.provincia.brescia.it/statistiche/index.php>). In detail, foreign tourists accounted for 64.27% of the arrivals and for 72.89% of the presences, with Germany being the main tourism source country. The number of same-day visitors is also

remarkable in Sirmione, which attracts visitors both from other destinations of the Lake Garda area and from cities such as Verona. Tourist flows in Sirmione are concentrated in the period from April to October. For example, in 2016, tourism arrivals were 262,453 in August and 13,359 in January.

Data were collected in two moments, from August to September 2015 and from April to September 2016. Questionnaires were self-completed by visitors who were approached by trained interviewees in several areas of Sirmione. Overall, 706 questionnaires were collected, of which 211 were completed by people aged 60 or over, which were considered for the purpose of this paper. Of the 211 participants, 13 were same-day visitors while the others were tourists.

The questionnaire measured travel motivations, tourist satisfaction as well as socio-demographic variables. Following Kozak (2002a), travel motivations were measured with 14 items grouped motivations into 4 constructs: culture, pleasure-seeking/fantasy, relaxation, physical. Responses could range from 1 to 7 (1 = very unimportant and 7 = very important). Satisfaction with the destination was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 to 7 (1 = completely unsatisfied and 7 = totally satisfied). Principal Component Factor Analysis was performed to check the validity of the measures of the 4 motivation constructs. In addition, a linear regression explored the effect of the four motivations constructs on tourist satisfaction.

#### 4. Results

The majority of respondents were female in the 60-69 age range and retired. With regard to nationality, 86 were domestic visitors while Germany and UK were the most important foreign visitors' countries of origin. As concerns accommodation, 131 participants were staying at a hotel. The majority of tourists (81) reported a length of stay of 8-14 days, while 56 respondents of 2-7 days. Finally, only 56 participants had never been in Sirmione before. A Principal Component Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation was run to check whether the 14 items suggested by Kozak (2002) grouped into the four intended motivations (culture, pleasure-seeking/fantasy, relaxation, physical). Two items ('to meet local people' and 'to spend time with people cared deeply about') with high cross-loadings were removed from the analysis.

As expected, the rotated solution yielded four factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 and all items loaded on the intended factors. In addition, Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were very close to or greater than 0.70, thus confirming the internal reliability of the scales (Cortina, 1993).

As regards travel motivations, relaxation has the highest mean value (6.20 on a seven-point scale). Cultural motivation obtains a slightly lower score (5.25), while pleasure seeking and physical motivation rank low (4.26 and 4.02, respectively).

To explore the effect of travel motivations on satisfaction, a linear regression analysis was conducted on the entire sample. The findings show that relaxation is the only motivation significantly related to satisfaction ( $\beta=.227$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Since relaxation was also the most important motivation to visit Sirmione, it can be argued that the results of the linear regression analysis suggest that tourist satisfaction is related to the destination's ability to respond to their need for relaxation.

## 5. Implications and conclusion

The findings enhance available knowledge about the relationship between travel motivations and satisfaction at the destination for older tourists. Among the four travel motivations (culture; pleasure-seeking; relaxation; physical) investigated in this paper, only relaxation emerged as a statistically significant antecedent of satisfaction at the destination. However, these findings refer to the total sample of older tourists, who present different profiles in terms of age, education and professional status. As emphasized by previous studies (e.g Alén et al., 2015; Vigolo, 2017), the older tourist market is highly heterogeneous and hence destination marketers should not address older tourists as a unique, homogenous segment when implementing their marketing strategy. Therefore, further research is needed on this issue before drawing detailed conclusions. In particular, future research should address the relationship between travel motivations and tourist satisfaction across different older tourists' age groups, for example comparing tourists aged 60-69 with tourists aged 70 or more. These analyses may help destination managers to go beyond a stereotyped image of older tourists and rather address the heterogeneity of this segment with a variety of activities.

Finally, this study presents some other limitations. First, only data from one tourism destination were collected. Future studies may investigate how the relationship between older tourists' travel motivations and satisfaction at the destination varies among different types of tourism destination. In addition, the number of tourists aged 70-79 and 80 or more was relatively small, thus making not possible to conduct further in-depth statistical analyses. Finally, other variables not considered in this study could moderate the relationship between travel motivations and satisfaction, such as self-perceived age or self-perceived health. Future study may also develop a more comprehensive analysis including not only the relationship between travel motivations and satisfaction but also the relationship between satisfaction and intention to revisit the destination.

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