



A Research Agenda for
Senior Tourism

Edited by
Trinidad Domínguez Vila

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The socio-economic relevance of social programmes for seniors: the case of Portugal

Celeste Eusébio, Joana Lima, Maria João Carneiro and Elisabeth Kastenholz

Introduction

Leisure and tourism activities are today recognized as part of modern lifestyle in the economically more developed world, representing relevant aspects of social integration and major factors of individual health, overall well-being and quality of life – and even considered a human right (Kastenholz et al., 2015; McCabe & Diekmann, 2015; Moura et al., 2018). However, they are still not accessible to all, with important social groups, even in more developed countries, excluded from participation due to economic, social, physical or psychological barriers. These barriers may in part be overcome through well-designed social tourism programmes, considering diverse disadvantaged social groups, and correspondingly specific benefits sought and obtained (Carneiro et al., 2021; Lima & Eusébio, 2021; Moura et al., 2018). This is the case for many senior citizens due to: (i) social isolation (often associated with changing lifestyles in modern, urbanized and also more fragmented and individualist societies with less cross-generational living contexts); (ii) low pensions (particularly among women who have not been professionally active, and are not compensated for family work in many countries); and (iii) poor health and limited mobility (also implying safety concerns) preventing many elderly individuals from enjoying regular tourism offerings (Eusébio et al., 2017; Minnaert et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2015).

On the other hand, seniors' participation in tourism, stimulated by social tourism programmes, is proven to bring them important benefits, regarding personal well-being and enjoyment of life, social inclusion and even health (Carneiro et al., 2021), thereby promoting active and healthy ageing, and thus relevant societal benefit. Eusébio et al. (2014) conducted an economic impact study on a social tourism programme targeting the elderly population in Portugal. By employing an input–output analysis and considering multiplier effects, they identified that the programme served as a significant economic development instrument in the destinations it was implemented. Specifically, their findings revealed that the total effect in terms of value added to the Portuguese economy in 2007 was about four times higher than the state investment allocated to finance the programme.