

PARTIAL FINDINGS FROM A RESEARCH PROJECT STUDYING TOURISM OF SENIOR CITIZENS

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Abstract

The article deals with the supply of certain products and services for senior citizens. This topic is a rather hot issue, mainly due to the current trend of the population ageing, not only in the Czech Republic. Every year the number of retired people increases, and the Czech Statistical Office reports there are more than 15% of those aged over 65 years now. In the second part the article presents the partial results of a research project conducted among senior citizens in the Liberec Region, when their travelling habits were examined. Senior tourism is tourism of the older generation. Although the average age extends, fitness and health of current senior citizens improves. They achieve a higher vital activity in comparison with past generations. Senior tourism is important especially in terms of removing seasonality, and it is interesting for many investors in the field of services.

Introduction

An important fact of the present days is the growing trend of population ageing in the developed countries, where due to high living standards and advances in medicine, people live longer. People retire when they are still in a good physical and mental condition; they are still active and they want to pursue their pastimes and hobbies. Since their economic security is better, they have become an interesting segment for product and service offerings from various areas.

1 Defining the Concept “Senior Citizen”

Generally speaking, senior citizens are older people. Some sources state that they are economically inactive citizens. The criterion for defining the segment of senior citizens should not be their reaching the retirement age. Nowadays, many people eligible for retirement benefits are still working voluntarily; on the other hand, there are also many people who choose early retirement. Moreover, if the senior citizens were to be defined in the European (or even global) context, there would be significant differences, as in each country people retire at a different age. That is why this information cannot act as a relevant standard.

The segment of the elderly offers great opportunities for marketers. It is important to remember that the senior market cannot be regarded as a homogeneous one. Senior citizens can be classified from different aspects, such as age, temperament, physical and health

abilities, their lifestyle and beliefs, or wealth. It should be noted that the concept of a senior citizen is not to be understood as the concept of a pensioner, which often occurs because in terms of pension insurance a senior person is understood to be anybody older than 65 years. [4]

There are many different definitions of the senior citizens in terms of tourism, when seniors are designated as the "third age tourists." In terms of tourism, we usually mean the age group of people over 55 years of age, and this group is further divided into sub-groups of those at the age of 55-64, 65-74 years and over 74 years. Great opportunities for the development of senior tourism arise from the fact that they possess more free time, while a drawback may be caused by the fact that many of them have some health problems in old age, or they suffer from major or minor disabilities. In some countries, including the Czech Republic, one of the barriers is also the level of funding resources available to senior citizens. [13]

In a prosperous community, senior citizens are an important group of consumers of various services. Moreover, providing services for them creates the necessary jobs for others, and services used by the elderly also bring a direct source of profit for those who supply them. [2]

According to the Senioragency, the 50+ consumers in the economically developed countries spend more than 50% of the costs of purchases of durable goods. Seniors are becoming a business target for many companies as their numbers are enlarging. Unlike previous generations, current seniors, who grew up in a consumer society, are interested in the new trends and products and are willing to spend money on them. For example, the purchasing power of the 60+ people in France and Great Britain has increased sevenfold over the last twenty years. [3]

2 Tourism of Senior Citizens

In recent decades tourism has become an important social, cultural and economic phenomenon. [5] The notion of senior tourism belongs to a group of social tourism, which is known as "tourism for all". Senior tourism is tourism of the older generation. [12] Although population is ageing and the average age gradually prolongs, the fitness and health of seniors improves; seniors achieve higher vitality and activity when compared with the previous generations. Senior tourism is important especially in terms of removing seasonality, and it is interesting for all investors. Tourism of seniors from the perspective of the European Union can also facilitate integration in international cooperation.

In other countries, there are many holiday programmes for the elderly; in particular we mean the senior tourism programmes in Portugal, Spain and France, in which mainly local and regional authorities participate.

To promote tourism of seniors there is a rather wide range of possibilities also in the Czech Republic. These include:

- the support activities offered by businesses in tourism:
 - discounts provided by carriers
 - discounts provided by cultural and social organizations
 - discounts provided by travel agencies
 - discounts provided by accommodation facilities
 - discounts provided by spa facilities
 - discounts provided by former employers [7]

2.1 Selected Products and Services in Tourism for Senior Citizens

The most important task of the marketing mix aimed at seniors is to invent high quality products or services which will be in agreement with the specifics of the market for senior citizens. These should be mainly products that help to eliminate problems associated with the ageing of the elderly. The offer of the products should be unique, and in most cases unusable for other age groups. This expectation is also applicable on the tourism sector services. Sometimes it is sufficient if an established product is just modified to meet the needs of the senior market.

Some companies try to attract the attention of older customers, and therefore they have begun to work on new products designed specifically for seniors and they have included them in their product range. The special products that are currently appearing on the market include **mobile phones** for seniors, **vacations and accommodation facilities for seniors, vitamins, food supplements or foodstuffs** specially adapted for the elderly. Another service which is tailored to suit seniors consists of **financial products** – loans, and personal accounts, which have been added to the offer in order to make travelling easier.

Mobile phones for the elderly are characterized by their size and clarity. They are of a large size, the telephone keys are designed so that the senior is able to recognize them, and they have a more durable and easier-to-read display. The colour of the display is adapted for people suffering from cataracts, and the display itself presents only the most basic information, such as the time and date, battery and signal levels, and information about incoming messages and calls. Unlike the traditional cell phones, mobile telephones for seniors are louder. Their batteries are designed to last for a longer period of time. These phones contain only the basic features, like calling, messaging, an address book with contacts and an alarm clock. At the same time there is a tendency to reduce the number of keys on the phones for the elderly. [6]

Housing and accommodation for the elderly is based on the different demands for housing, and therefore this kind of business can successfully target these segments. On the market there are also companies which offer special household equipment and equipment for hotels and other accommodation facilities. In their offer, one can find products, such as the **stairclimbers** that serve handicapped people in wheelchairs. New on the market are **special bathtubs with doors**, which you can enter without having to climb over a high edge, and these are equipped with non-slip mats. There are also other details such as the **remote control to switch off lights**, various booster seats or auxiliary **handles, handrails** in the bathroom and toilet, and adjustable bed slats. We can also add an excellent complement of a kettle, which is a special holder to protect a user from getting scalded in the everyday activities. [9]

Most older people of a certain age suffer from impaired mobility, and therefore they cannot ride a bicycle. Yet, cycling for many of them is more comfortable and suitable than walking. Therefore, a **bicycle** designed specifically for seniors is on offer now. A specific feature of this bicycle is a low frame, which makes it much easier for senior citizens to mount. Among other benefits, which older people will certainly appreciate, are the pedals, which are located slightly to the front. The seat is very soft, large, comfortable and adjustable, designed to suit the elderly. [8] All of these products play a significant role in development of tourism.

2.2 Travel Habits of Senior Citizens

The Department of Marketing carried out a research project in cooperation with students of tourism at the end of year 2011 to examine the travel habits of senior citizens. The research objective was to find empirical data on the senior tourism in the Liberec District. There were 176 respondents among seniors in the age group 55+. The representation of women in this

sample was 67%. More than half of the respondents came from the age group 55-60 years, the remaining categories (61-70, 71-75 and 75+) were represented in the file with the same percentage. The vast majority (65%) of respondents receive the retirement pension. The economic situation was perceived as a good and sufficient one by most of the respondents.

A partial aim of the research project presented in this paper was to define:

- participation of seniors in tourism, or the reasons for their absence (why seniors do not travel)
- the target destination of their travels (most frequently visited sites)
- evaluation of travels (perceived obstacles and benefits of travels)
- usage of intermediaries for travelling.

Of the total sample of studied respondents, approximately 84% travel and participate in package tours. The remaining 16% of seniors do not travel to tourist destinations.

The main reason why older people do not travel is seen by respondents mainly in the *lack of need* to travel. This absence may be due to a lack of awareness of potential customers, or due to a lack of motivation on the part of the studied segment. Another obstacle to travelling is the *lack of funds*, which cannot be influenced by the organizations offering services. Yet, there is a possibility to create special offers and to provide discounted tour prices. According to the respondents' answers, a proven strong obstacle to travelling is *poor health* as well; for tourism this may mean an advantage for the offers in the area of spa, medical and health tourism. *Lack of time*, which made up about 10% of all responses, may be related to the assumption that older people, due to their higher age, carry out all activities more slowly, and thus they perceive the amount of free time as relatively smaller. From this finding it can be deduced that seniors need to have their leisure time well organized and planned in advance. One of the reasons listed as an obstacle was also liability to domestic or farm animals, which represents one of the specific characteristics of seniors living in small towns and rural areas.

The following part of the study focused on the target destinations of senior citizens. The aim was to determine the most frequently visited sites in the examined segment of the Czech Republic and abroad. Among the most visited areas in the domestic tourism the following ones belong: Prague, the Krkonoše and the Šumava mountains, the Bohemian Paradise, the towns Český Krumlov, Mariánské Lázně, Lednice-Valtice and Brno.

The most frequently visited foreign countries are Croatia, Slovakia, Germany, Poland, Italy and Greece. In their trips, senior citizens favour tourist destinations mainly in European countries, but in rare cases, seniors have visited countries such as Israel, Bali, Thailand and Canada.

2.2.1 Travel Arrangements

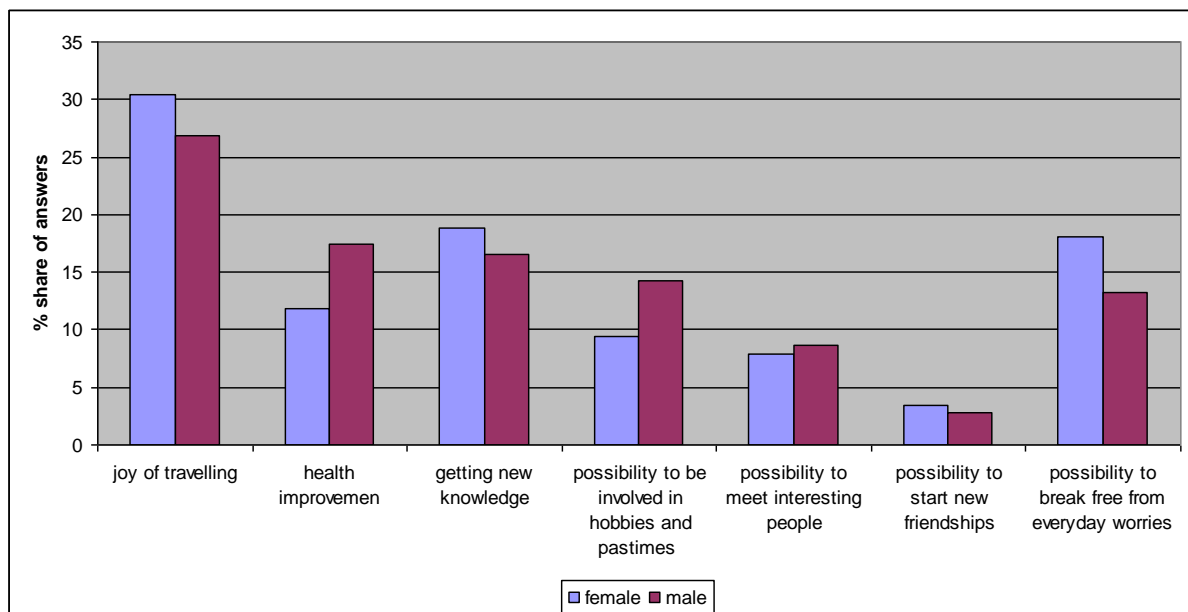
The investigation also focused on explorations into who pays and who organizes tourist trips for seniors. Less than a half of respondents organized their journeys by themselves. They are mainly the elderly people who are satisfied with their health, who consider it to be good, and who have enough funds. A quarter of respondents trust tourism with travelling agents, and less than a quarter of respondents travel with their families. Approximately 10% of seniors said that they travelled with various social organizations, such as: Red Cross, senior clubs, parishes, the Czech Tourist Club, the tourist club “Liberecká vlastivěda” and health insurance institutions. The question about financing the travels was answered as follows: 84% of respondents pay for their journey from their own resources and a 9% have travelling paid by their family members. Institutions or organizations contribute to only 7% of respondents. If

there are any financing institutions or organizations involved, the elderly most often mention the Czech Tourist Club, the University of the Third Age, health insurers and employers.

2.3 Obstacles to and Benefits of Senior Tourism

One of the questions examined the extent to which seniors met specific difficulties or obstacles in their travels due to which they could not enjoy the pleasure of travelling. Approximately 30% of respondents met unwillingness of the tourism enterprises' staff. Seniors consider the staff of tourist centres unprepared and unwilling to adapt to the changing demand. Another issue evaluated by respondents as a problematic one is the lack of equipment necessary in services for the elderly. An additional problem is seen in high prices of tourism services. Approximately one third of respondents think that tourist destinations are inaccessible and offers are not adapted to the needs of the elderly. Almost 36% claimed an insufficient number of social organizations promoting tourism for the elderly to be another drawback.

The survey clearly shows that the vast majority of seniors are actively involved in tourism, mainly because of the joy brought by travelling and exploring new places. For some participants the benefit of tourism is also their health recovery. Therefore, popular destinations are spa towns and other medical facilities. It can be noted that even the mere pleasure of travelling can contribute to health improvement. Some seniors see the benefits in the possibility of acquiring new knowledge, understanding other cultures and different attractions. For a large number of respondents, travelling is linked to their interests and hobbies. As a result of more free time available, seniors go out for walks, visit castles and UNESCO sights not only in the Czech Republic but also abroad. While travelling, senior citizens can meet interesting people, which is yet another - interesting benefit of tourism. An equally important contribution of travelling is seen by the survey respondents in the opportunity to break free from everyday worries and from the stereotypical way of life. The benefits of travelling perceived in relevance to genders are presented in Fig. 1.



Source: own

Fig. 1: Travel benefits

2.4 Suggestions for Improvement of Tourism from Participating Respondents

One of the most important aspects in tourism is quality – whether it is the quality of accommodation, catering, transport or services provided. [1] Participants in senior tourism like to pay extra for the higher quality of services; that is why their requirements should not be forgotten. Given that many seniors perceive high costs of services provided as an obstacle to their travels, it would help if organizations offered special action products and discounts. Participating respondents would welcome reduced holiday prices and reductions in the price of accommodation, namely prices for single rooms without an extra charge. In transport fares they also require reductions, especially senior discounts in public transport or in railway transport. Another proposal was to increase the amount of package tours offered especially for the elderly, whether in the peak season or in the off-peak season.

Conclusion

Nowadays, seniors have different habits than the generations before them. In principle, senior tourism can be divided into three groups: active travelling for relaxation, tourism for passive relaxation and travelling with grandchildren. A greater interest is connected mainly with health-related travels and relaxation, i.e. stays at spa towns. Because of the improved medical care for seniors it is true that they not only live longer than the previous generations of seniors, but they are also considerably more active. The trend of overnight hiking trips in larger groups has become very successful. Among seniors there is a definite interest in travelling to less remote places; that is why trips round the Czech Republic are flourishing. Simultaneously, there is a strong trend to return to the places already visited before and to recall earlier times. They are interested in short stays, mainly due to the lower financial costs, or in case of health deterioration. Seniors travel mostly with their spouses, friends and acquaintances, and eventually with their grandchildren and family. The availability of more free time enables older people to go on trips outside the main season. As for accommodation, respondents frequently reported the requirement for a barrier-free access, which is also associated with a better access to tourist attractions. Also they would like to see the tourism staff to be adequately qualified, willing to help, friendly and flexible.

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ANALÝZA NABÍDKY PRODUKTŮ A SLUŽEB PRO SENIORY APLIKOVANÁ NA OBLAST CESTOVNÍHO RUCHU

Článek se zabývá nabídkou některých produktů a služeb pro seniory. Jedná se o velmi aktuální téma, především z důvodů současného trendu stárnutí populace nejen v České republice. Každým rokem se zvyšuje počet lidí v poproduktivním věku a ČSÚ uvádí více jak 15% občanů starších 65 let v současné době. V druhé části příspěvku jsou prezentovány dílčí výsledky provedeného výzkumu mezi seniory Libereckého kraje, který zkoumal jejich zvyklosti při cestování. Seniorský cestovní ruch je cestovním ruchem starší generace. Přestože se prodlužuje průměrný věk, tak roste kondice a zlepšuje se zdravotní stav novodobých seniorů, kteří dosahují vyšší vitální aktivity v porovnání s minulými generacemi. Cestovní ruch seniorů má význam zejména z pohledu odstraňování sezónnosti a je zajímavý pro mnohé investory v oblasti služeb.

DIE ANALYSE DES PRODUKT- UND DIENSTLEISTUNGSANGEBOTS FÜR SENIOREN AUF DEM GEBIET DES TOURISMUS

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit dem Angebot von Produkten und Dienstleistungen für Senioren. Es handelt sich um ein sehr aktuelles Thema, vor allem wegen des gegenwärtigen Trends der Alterung der Population, und das nicht nur in der Tschechischen Republik. Jedes Jahr erhöht sich die Anzahl der Menschen im nachproduktiven Alter und das tschechische statistische Bundesamt führt gegenwärtig mehr als 15 % Bürger an, die älter als 65 Jahre alt sind. Im zweiten Teil werden Teilergebnisse der Umfrage unter den Senioren des Reichenberger Bezirks (Liberecký kraj) präsentiert. Es wurden dabei deren Reisegewohnheiten erfragt. Der Tourismus der Senioren ist die Reisetätigkeit der älteren Generation. Obschon sich das Durchschnittsalter verlängert, wächst die Kondition und es verbessert sich der Gesundheitszustand der neuzeitlichen Senioren, welche im Vergleich zu früheren Generationen eine höhere vitale Aktivität erreichen. Dem Reiseverkehr der Senioren kommt vor allem aus der Sicht der Neutralisierung der saisonalen Begrenzung eine wichtige Bedeutung zu und er ist interessant für viele Investoren auf dem Dienstleistungsgebiet

ANALIZA OFERTY PRODUKTÓW I USŁUG DLA SENIORÓW W SFERZE TURYSTYKI

Artykuł dotyczy oferty niektórych produktów i usług dla seniorów. To bardzo aktualny temat, przede wszystkim z powodu obecnej tendencji starzenia się populacji nie tylko w Czechach. Co roku rośnie liczba osób w wieku poprodukcyjnym a wg danych Czeskiego Urzędu Statystycznego obecnie ponad 15% mieszkańców ma powyżej 65 lat. W drugiej części artykułu zaprezentowano częściowe wyniki badań przeprowadzonych wśród seniorów Kraju Libereckiego, które dotyczyły ich zwyczajów związanych z podróżowaniem. Ruch turystyczny seniorów to ruch turystyczny starszego pokolenia. Chociaż średnia wieku rośnie, to poprawia się kondycja i stan zdrowia współczesnych seniorów, którzy osiągają większą aktywność witalną w porównaniu z poprzednimi pokoleniami. Ruch turystyczny seniorów ma znaczenie w szczególności z punktu widzenia braku jego sezonowości, jak też wydaje się interesujący dla wielu inwestorów w sferze usług.