Age-friendly tourism

EIP on AHA: Action Group D4 Age-friendly cities, buildings and environments
By Willeke van Staalduinen (Promoter EIP on AHA D4 and Age-friendly Nederland), Mireia Ferri Sanz (Polibienestar UVEG), Elisa Valía Cotanda (Polibienestar UVEG), Jorge Garcés (Polibienestar UVEG), Iosif Klironomos (FORTH ICS), Léa Rallu (Bas-Rhin France), Jovita García (Ambienta 45), Carina Dantas (Cáritas Coimbra)

Introduction

Demographic change has a big potential for economic growth in the tourism and leisure sector. Indeed, nowadays tourism has become one of the main goals in the retirement age in Europe; many older people are looking forward to their retirement to visit tourism destinations because they are still healthy, they have time available and economic resources. In specific, many of the post-war-generation has built up relatively good pensions due to higher education and higher level jobs as well as national pension-savings programs. These older people have the opportunity to spend their days on leisure activities and tourism, also in low-seasons.

TOURage project, 2014. Questionnaire filled in by 963 senior citizens of 38 different nationalities:
Age is not an obstacle to tourism; even older seniors (80+) are interested in tourism activities. Most of the seniors prefer to organize their travel individually, however many of them use the services of travel agencies and they usually book travel and accommodation separately instead of all-inclusive packages. They receive information mostly from friends, relatives and family and their own experience. Many seniors are married and travel with spouse, partner and friends. Summer is the most favourable season for travelling but autumn and spring are close.

The main barriers of travel are lack of time, health problems and financial reasons. The most important holiday motivations are rest and silence and experiencing something new. Safety, quality of services, historical sites, local culture and nature are the top pull factors of seniors.

In many European regions and cities, tourism is an important economic motor. It generates extra income (spending in shops, restaurants, hotels and museums and local taxes) and maintains or creates local or regional employment. That is one of the reasons why public authorities welcome a flourishing tourism sector on their territory. Many regions/cities or businesses would like to have tourism activities during the whole year, and not only during high seasons. Therefore, increased interest of older people for low-season tourism could be very welcomed to avoid tourism seasonality.

European Action

Action Group D4 (Age-friendly Buildings, Cities and Environments) of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing pays special attention to age-friendly tourism. The group aims to achieve a network for age-friendly tourism, improved quality of life of older people, accessible accommodation and activities and finally to promote and advocate to put age-friendly tourism on the agendas of local and regional authorities and the tourism sector. Their objective is to promote active and healthy habits by increased participation of older people in leisure activities linked to age-friendly tourism.

Challenges

When people age, the chance enhances that their physical and mental condition decreases. They get one and often more than one chronic disease (multimorbidity). Two thirds of the people of 65 years or older have at least one chronic disease, like heart failure, diabetes or COPD. They use pharmaceutic treatment and therapies. Walking and climbing stairs often becomes more difficult and people would be needing walking aids or a wheelchair.

Looking at the tourism sector there are to find many good examples of age-friendly tourism. We think of hotels that are accessible for wheelchairs; The extending numbers of group travels and activities that are offered, especially for older people; Museums and promenades that are accessible and walkable with walking aids as well.
However we also see and hear of barriers for older people in this sector, for example:

- Wheelchair accessible hotels don't always have bed or bathrooms that are suitable.
- Medicines in one country have another name in others.
- Many older people are single, and they have to pay double to rent a room in hotels.
- Transport to and from touristic areas is not well equipped according to the needs of older people.

There is a reduced number of scientific research about the personal and social benefits arising from age-friendly tourism. However, existing research evidences the link between tourism participation and satisfaction with life, self-perceived health (physical and mental) and autonomy (Garcés et al., 2015).

To make sure that the European touristic sector keeps up-to-date with provisions that meet the needs of the growing number of older people, action is needed. As Action Group D4, we continue to work on identifying and disseminating good examples of age-friendly tourism. Also we made an inventory on guidelines or standards that help the tourism sector to upgrade their accommodations and form a database and network of age-friendly tourism. In the following part we pay attention to this.

Working on solutions

In Europe there are several initiatives and projects addressing age-friendly tourism. From the repositories of EIP on AHA and of the Covenant on Demographic Change interesting initiatives and projects have been identified. They are shortly described below.

Mapping initiatives of age-friendly tourism in Europe		
Initiative	**Description**	**Website**
TOURage	TOURage project had the overall purpose to improve sustainable regional economy by developing senior tourism. It also aims to support active and healthy aging through the exchange of good practices and experiences between partner regions	http://www.tourage.eu/
LAKtive	LAKtive Tourism will carry out at least 5 pilot tests in the low / medium season, in the 5 different destinations. The pilot test will be preceded by a detailed presentation of "LAKtive Tourism package" to the reference market in each country in order to sell the innovative package to the selected target group.	http://www.laktive.eu/
DiscOver55	One of the main objectives of the transnational project DiscOver 55 is to attract senior tourists 55+, during low and medium season in the four target areas through the creation of customized tourist packages thanks to the collaboration of senior organisations and SMEs in the tourism sector (such as incoming and outgoing agencies, services providers etc.).	http://www.discover55.eu/
Meet Nature	Based on recent studies, Nature is the most highly appreciated asset for the destinations of seniors. Therefore, the proposed Product aims to bring the seniors into nature and offer the challenging experience of its complexity and diversity, through creative and playful learning.	http://www.meetnature.eu/
BAROQUE EXPERIENCE	The project is about the establishment of a participatory baroque festival for seniors which will be tested and evaluated in the European region Danube-Vltava (Austria and Germany) in order to increase senior tourism in low season times in Europe and eventually to transfer this touristic offer to other European baroque regions.	http://www.barocklive.eu/
C.A.R.E.	C.A.R.E. (Città Accessibili delle Regioni Europee – Accessible Cities in the Regions of Europe) is a project based on the cross-national sharing of city development policies in which accessibility to everyone is key to quality, in order to make the geographical resources better suited to the requirements of all those users who have special needs.	http://www.interreg-care.org/site/
ActivSeniors	The project is about active ageing and linking health and rural development networks. It aims to train the tourism sector in the creation of services and products aimed specifically at travelers over the age of 55 looking for destinations with a high quality environment	http://www.ambienta45.es/

	for developing activities in nature and enjoying services of the highest quality.	
Haut Koenigsbourg Castle	The Haut Koenigsbourg Castle developed a specific touristic offer adapted to the needs of older people from young pensioners to dependent. Physical accessibility was improved: the castle grounds, from the carpark to the lower courtyard, are accessible to visitors in wheelchairs accompanied by their helper. Furthermore, different tours give the opportunity for visitors with auditory impairment, with visual impairment, with reduced mobility or mentally handicapped to discover the castle."	http://www.haut-koenigsbourg.fr/

Built environments

We work on solutions in the built environments. We think of accessible hotels, museums, airports, buses, restaurants:

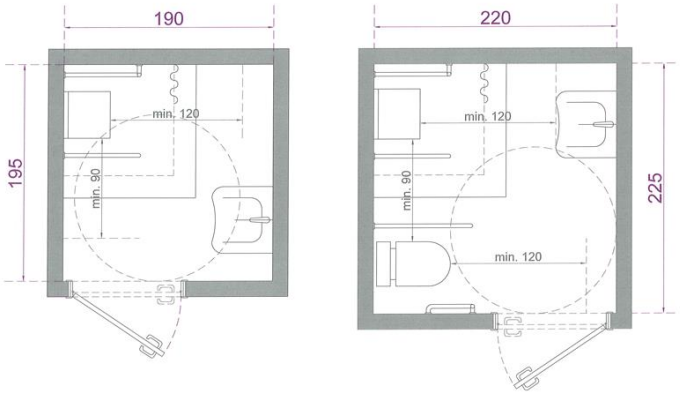
- Wheelchair accessibility to bedrooms, dining rooms, gardens, parking place.
- Enough room next to the beds to get help from another person.
- Accessible bathrooms and enough space to help out as well.
- Attention to adapted features on lighting, spoken messages and signage.
- Pavement-level transport.

For example, additional information is available from the following links: Accessibletourism UNWTO of WHO Age-friendly Cities guide.

Examples:

Wheelchair accessibility to go off an on the sidewalk and the main road.
Source: Willeke van Staalduinen, Age-friendly Nederland, 2016

Signage also available in braille.
Source: Toegankelijkgebouw.be



Design for wheelchair accessible bathrooms.
Source: toegankelijkgebouw.be

Elevator to access apartments by persons using a wheelchair or walking aid.
Source: Willeke van Staalduinen, Age-friendly Nederland, 2016

Pavement level public transport and pavement signage in Rotterdam (NL)
Source: Willeke van Staalduinen, Age-friendly Nederland, 2016

Natural environments

Creating a friendly environment is not just about technological design or its accessibility but also about awareness of the people who live in these spaces. Furthermore, the use of nature and tourism in natural areas as a tool for active ageing is an opportunity for the social and economic development of large areas in Europe, placing value on environmental conservation to protect what is a source of health and wellness as well.

Key lessons of the Ambienta 45 ActivSeniors project:

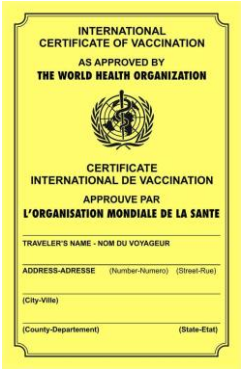
- Innovative is the integration of health, nature and leisure in tourism destinations for active older people, focusing on training, the environment, and services that are offered to tourists.
- Coordination of therapeutic activities of active tourism, and leisure and culture. The measure of success is the creation of a network of professionals able to host such tourist activities throughout the year.
- The consideration of active tourism and contact with nature as a strategy for improving the quality of life and therapy for specific age-related ailments, are a new way of understanding tourism and involving the creation of development opportunities, both for professionals in geriatrics, and for tourism professionals and local populations.

Source: Active Senior Tourism, Ambienta 45

Personal health

Older people who have (chronic) diseases and use pharmaceutical or other treatments, take precautionary measures before they leave on holidays to ensure that they carry enough pills and other pharmaceutics. A big help would be to have paper or digital health file with relevant data to carry along and could be used with customs and local healthcare providers during holidays. It would also be helpful to have a checklist to use before leaving.

Some examples are:
Personal mobile health file to carry along while on holidays to describe personal medicines, treatments and therapies. Like the Yellow Card of WHO (certificate of vaccination) (see picture)



Mobile Health Files: there are already many on the market. The WHO makes inventories of what is available, that can be found on the following link. Maybe it could be used as well by health providers in tourism areas.

Inventory list of European names of treatments, pharmaceutics and therapies and places where WHO offers the solution by publishing the so called INN (International Nonproprietary Names for Pharmaceutical Substances) can be consulted in the following link Link

Database and network of age-friendly tourism

Another solution where D4 works on is the permanent disclosure of information on age-friendly tourism and networking facilities. We propose to use the EIP on AHA / Action Group D4 as central information point. To provide information related to:

- Age-friendly tourism and leisure possibilities recommendations: the TOURage project published a "Good Practices for Senior Tourism" catalogue. These good practices identify methods which take seniors into account with regard to tourism development.
- Creating a network of travel agencies that offer and support age-friendly tourism.
- Initiate to withdraw local inspections of age-friendly tourism done by older people themselves.
- Install contact persons for age-friendly tourism in touristic areas.

Conclusion

As a result of demographic change, supply and demand of age-friendly tourism has a growing potential to benefit older citizens in Europe and local/regional economies. Further exchange of knowledge and practices is needed to increase the supply of age-friendly tourism and to stimulate that more older people – even despite health problems – can enjoy travel and leisure activities. We encourage all of you to become involved in age-friendly tourism: as user or provider. You are welcome to become a member of Action Group D4, Working group age-friendly tourism, by submitting your commitment on the EIP on AHA.