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TOURISM AND AGEING

A transformative research agenda

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Abstract: This paper provides a reflexive marking of tourism and ageing research, arguing for a transformation of its research approaches. It observes that extant research on tourism in later life is largely quantitative and concerned with developing market-oriented typologies. Here we argue the case for humanist, participatory approaches to the study of older people that adopt the principles of critical gerontology and hopeful tourism. We discuss biographical research to illustrate how such enquiry could engage older people, foreground their voices and agendas and impact on their lives. We conclude with a four part agenda for tourism and ageing research. **Keywords:** older people, critical gerontology, hopeful scholarship, humanist research, biographical research. © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

This paper argues for a transformation of tourism and ageing research to embrace the principles of critical gerontology and hopeful tourism scholarship. Tourism enquiry has seen a dramatic growth over the last 40 years; yet despite the enormous expansion in research and publication, leading scholars describe a considerable proportion of this research as “confirmatory”, “reproductive” (Tribe, 2005) and “formulaic” (Page, 2005) and suggest that the power of qualitative enquiry remains underserved (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2000; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Arguably this is true of much tourism and ageing research which has tended to focus on market trends and marginalize personalized accounts which foreground the voices of older people themselves. In this paper, we scrutinize tourism and ageing research’s architecture of knowledge and outline a future research agenda that includes *both* existing approaches *and* new cross-disciplinary enquiry

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in order to achieve holistic understandings of tourism in later life. Such a paper is opportune as the dramatic increase in the numbers of older people means that there is likely to be an acceleration of tourism research focused on these individuals (Glover & Prideaux, 2009). For example, in more developed countries there is predicted to be some 1.2 billion people aged 60 and over by 2025, rising to two billion by 2050—three times as many as today (World Health Organisation, 2009).

Our argument in this paper is framed by what we term hopeful tourism scholarship (Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2007), an emergent knowledge network in tourism enquiry, which has achieved ‘a measure of success in enrolling people, ideas and inscriptions’ (Tribe, 2009, p. 12). Hopeful tourism scholarship is a values-led approach that aims for co-created knowledge based on partnership and reciprocity and regards moral and ethical obligations as intrinsic to its enquiry (Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010). It advocates the transformation of relationships between the researcher and the researched—regarding the latter not as subjects or even participants in projects, but wherever possible as co-creators of tourism knowledge (e.g., Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2007; Richards, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010). Framed by these tenets of hopeful tourism scholarship, the paper critically analyzes the assumptions, techniques and methods that underpin the majority of tourism researchers’ attempts to understand the experiences of older people. It is a reflexive accounting (Seale, 1999) of tourism and ageing research, which establishes that it has been largely restricted to market analysis and derived from large scale, quantitative research methods. In order to balance such knowledge and promote scholarship that gives voice to older people and has a transformative impact on their lives we conclude by suggesting a four part agenda for scholars engaged in tourism and ageing research.

First, we advocate complementing existing approaches to the study of tourism in later life with cross-disciplinary enquiry based on dialogue between critical gerontologists and tourism scholars. Indeed, we draw parallels between critical gerontologists and hopeful tourism scholars, arguing that greater engagement from both will provide a more valuable insight into the lives of older people, thus helping to reformulate tourism and ageing research. Second, we champion a transformation in the nature, norms and values that characterize tourism’s research approaches to older people. In this, we call for a new approach that actively engages older people in the research process, so that we hear their voices and recognize their perspectives. Third, we argue for more personalized accounts of tourism experiences in later life that embody emotion, agency and individuality. Finally, we suggest that tourism researchers aspire to advocacy scholarship that promotes the social inclusion, human dignity and human rights of older people. The paper begins, however, by briefly considering the paradigms, principles and methodologies that serve as a foundation for researchers in the field of tourism and ageing.

TRANSFORMING TOURISM AND AGEING RESEARCH

Forecasts estimate that the number of people over 60 will more than double to constitute 22% of the world's population by 2050 (Magnus, 2009). The sheer scale of this increase implies many inter-related transformations in the very nature of societies and policymakers at local, national and supranational level (such as the European Union) recognize the need for research which maps social arrangements and structures, behavioural patterns and the potential to exploit the so-called silver economy. In this context, it is therefore not surprising that the tourism industry has recognized the market potential of older people and tourism research has tended to focus on developing competitive business and marketing strategies to target these consumers. In trying to segment this market, much of this research has attempted to comprehend their motivations (see e.g., the work of Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Guinn, 1980; Norman, Daniels, McGuire, & Norman, 2001; Romsa & Blenman, 1989; Sellick, 2004; Tongren, 1980; Zimmer, Brayley, & Searle, 1995). In segmenting the market in this way, many researchers have categorized older people into various marketing groups using demographic and psychographic data (Horneman, Carter, & Ruys, 2002), lifestyle and attitudinal factors (Marthur, Sherman, & Schiffman, 1998; Muller & O'Cass, 2001), educational and income levels (Jang & Hams, 2009; Javalgi, Thomas, & Rao, 1992) and even housing type and ownership (Reece, 2004).

This emphasis on understanding the tourism motivation of older people is premised on the notion that it is possible to predict the travel behaviour of an entire generation and has led to generalization and stereotyping. Just like any other demographic category, older people are a diverse group of complex individuals but in their case the sizeable age range that tourism researchers tend to use when classifying someone as 'old' compounds this heterogeneity. Patterson (2006) observes that there has actually been a downward shift in marketers' definitions of older people so that the term often applies to a cohort of people separated by as many as forty years. Moreover, studies often under-represent the experiences of those aged 80 years and over (the largest growing group) as people aged between 60 and 70 are considered to be better marketing 'prospects' as they are generally in better health and enjoy higher income levels and a greater diversity of activities (Patterson, 2006).

Researchers have formulated various classifications and labels for different types of older tourist. You and O'Leary (1999), for example, formulated three groups of older tourists, 'passive visitors,' 'enthusiastic go-getters' and 'cultural hounds.' In a similar fashion, Kim, Wei, and Ruys (2003) identified 'active learner,' 'relaxed family body,' 'careful participant' and 'elementary vacationer.' Morgan and Levy (1993) in distinguishing between the different attitudes and motivations of older people recognized 'pampered relaxers,' 'highway wanderers,' 'global explorers,' 'independent adventurers' and 'anxious travellers.' Likewise, Moschis's (1996) work identifies 'healthy indulgers,' 'healthy hermits,' 'ailing out goers' and 'frail reclusers.' Such studies of older

people and tourism are typical of tourism researchers' desire to develop tourist typologies. Based on their analysis of tourism articles published between 1996 and 2004, [Phillimore and Goodson \(2004, p. 11\)](#) argue that this obsession is "underpinned by positivist modes of thinking which attempt to provide predictive, analytical and explanatory tools based on generalisations which are then applied to broad populations." Such generalizations are rooted in positivist commitments to empiricism, quantification, neutrality, objectivity, distance, validity, and reliability ([Pritchard & Morgan, 2007](#)).

Given the drive to identify and categorize older people in this way, it is not surprising that tourism research has been heavily dependent on discovering trends using quantitative methods and large sample sizes ([Nimrod, 2008](#)). It is important to note that tourism is not unique in this and [Edmondson and von Kondratowitz \(2009\)](#) describe how the study of older people in many disciplines has taken a quantitative approach, influenced by the natural sciences' desire to predict and control human behaviour in order to make it more manageable and researchable according to scientific principles and measures. They argue that such quantitative approaches have resulted in a general resistance within ageing research to consider older people as individuals, and a tendency to ignore their voices. In tourism enquiry as elsewhere then, too much research is done 'on' rather than 'with' older people.

The dominance of such approaches to understanding the lives of older people has meant that the nature and quality of their tourism experiences, particularly the meaning and value they attach to travel has been underserved. Instead of investigating the full breadth of older people's travel experiences and encounters, tourism researchers have overly focused on market intelligence-style studies in order to provide marketing recommendations to the tourism industry. This pattern of research has produced a highly specific and narrowly defined corpus of knowledge in tourism and ageing research and a significant part of "the potential canvas of tourism truth is left uncharted by this approach... [particularly] emotions, aesthetics and values" ([Tribe, 2005, p. 369](#)). Thus, for example, we know little about those older people who cannot engage in tourism despite the high priority now given in many more developed countries to a social inclusion agenda that regards travel as a right of citizenship ([Cole & Morgan, 2010](#)).

Similarly, research stories relating older people's emotional encounters through travel, the role it plays in their lives and its impact on their physical and emotional well-being remain largely untold. This is not to suggest of course that there have been no qualitative studies of older people's travel experiences, only that substantially more are required ([Patterson, 2006](#)). Over a decade ago [Ryan \(1995\)](#), in his 'conversations' with a small number of older tourists in Majorca, supported the case for more qualitative research observing:

if it is accepted that tourism is concerned with an experience of places and the interactions that occur at those destinations; that the nature of these experiences are important to people... then research that denies the opportunity for

holiday-makers to speak of their own experiences in their own words—that seeks only reactions to a researcher-determined agenda- is itself limited (1995, p. 214).

Engaging in Humanist, Participatory Research

Perhaps it is time for tourism researchers to explore new ways of understanding tourism in later life that go beyond conventional qualitative approaches to give older people an integral role in the research process. Such participatory approaches can complement the presently dominant empirically based quantitative analyses of the older market by recognizing economic and cultural diversity and adding nuance. Further than augmenting attempts to understand the market by contributing additional insight however, they have the potential to create a different kind of humanistic co-created scholarship, which allows older people to represent themselves, so that it becomes empowering and transformative knowledge. Productive cross-disciplinary relationships are central to such a transformation of tourism and ageing research and tourism scholars can find inspiration in other research fields and disciplines if they look beyond “their intellectual comfort zones. . . to explore otherwise unknown territories” (Coles, Hall, & Duval, 2009, p. 86).

Tourism and gerontology researchers working in the critical tradition have much to gain from synthesizing philosophies and techniques that to date remain discipline-specific, yet neither set of researchers have tried to reach out to the other. Indeed, extant tourism and ageing research contains no reference to the methodologies that are currently shaping critical gerontology studies or to their findings (Sedgley, 2007). For researchers such as Holstein and Minkler (2007) for example, their determination to engage older people in the research process means taking methodological risks and they contend that scholars cannot afford to rule:

... out knowledge that is gained from personal narratives, fiction, poetry, film, qualitative investigations, philosophical inquiries, participatory action research and any other method of inquiry we may discover that yields insights into fundamental questions about how, and why, we experience old age in very particular ways. We need to worry less about large-scale generalisations and more about getting the story right (Holstein & Minkler, 2007, p. 22).

Certainly a great deal unites critical gerontologists and critical tourism researchers as both sets of scholars argue for a move away from reality-oriented enquiry predicated on external ‘truth’, towards understandings that we live in a world of socially constructed realities. More research rooted in this school of thought that recognizes the value of lived experiences and obtains personal and emotional understandings would balance the current reliance on ‘paradigmatic knowledge’ that stresses empirical truths based on observation and description. Thus, whilst critical tourism scholars call for research which considers the meanings people bring to tourism (Ateljevic et al., 2007; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004), critical gerontologists argue for insider perspectives derived from narratives that are “the self’s primary means of

negotiation” (Ray, 2007a, p. 62). In projects that aim for in-depth understandings of meanings and experiences this kind of qualitative research can have a far greater impact than quantitative research; it is more understandable and memorable, able to invoke compassion and empathy and can more easily lead to changes in policies, perceptions and attitudes (Ray, 2007a).

As we have intimated above however, incorporation of these approaches into tourism and ageing research not only has the potential to complement existing market analysis with insight into the subjective experiences of respondents but it can fulfil very different research aims and objectives—especially where the goal is to create transformative and emancipatory knowledge. Too rarely does social science research influence the lives of those it studies but the approaches advocated by hopeful tourism researchers and critical gerontologists offer the possibility of making a difference to the lives of older people. Founded in political economy, feminism and humanism, critical gerontology foregrounds the relationships between ageing, and cultural and economic characteristics in later life and the impact of social policy (Bernard & Scharf, 2007).

This ‘passionate scholarship’ attempts to understand ageing from the inside, aiming not for certainty but “for the freedom to pursue questions, to challenge assumptions, to hear and respect a multitude of voices, and to take engaged critique as a long term commitment” (Holstein & Minkler, 2007, p. 26). Such gerontologists remind us that ageing is a life course issue that affects us all not merely ‘the old’ (an essentialising term that fails to recognise diversity). Often also termed humanist gerontologists, these scholars argue that we need to examine the issues which are central to the exploration of later life (e.g., power, social structures and cultures, politics, the economy and health-related questions) without losing sight of the individually of the people concerned (Edmondson & von Kondratowitz, 2009; Hazan, 2009).

Taking these contentions further, the critical gerontologist Ray (2007b) argues that consumerist research approaches are unlikely to provoke major change in established power relations or to challenge oppressive ageist discourses. Thus, rather than seeing older people principally as consumers, she suggests we need more research which benefits them and involves both those who participate in activities and those who do not. These ideas resonate strongly with the hopeful tourism scholarship agenda which argues for more research engaged with “social justice, disenfranchisement and human and spatial marginalisation” (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007, p. 13). It emerges then that both critical gerontology and hopeful tourism share a commitment to transformative research which engages underpowered people, seeks to ameliorate their lives and attempts to involve them as partners in exploring their lived realities and opportunities to promote change (Bernard & Scharf, 2007; Ray, 2007a; Richards et al., 2010).

Research with older people can promote social justice and challenge some of the negative social constructions of later life that characterize it as a time of disengagement and dependency. However, research is unlikely to have an impact on the lives of older people if they are

not involved in the research process and they do not have access to research findings. Yet, whilst academics are familiar with communicating with each other, policy makers and formal organisations, they are less accustomed to sharing research information with older people and wider communities (Ray, 2007b). Nevertheless if academics aspire to become change agents, “broadening and deepening public perceptions and providing alternative images and expectations” of older people (Ray, 2007a, p. 60) then they must engage older people and share their work with stakeholders in policy communities. In this way, researchers open up knowledge to older people that provides them with an opportunity and an increased confidence to challenge and engage with public discourses. Such involvement in the research process can occur in two ways. Firstly, researchers can provide older people with opportunities to shape their own narratives (for example, collecting data, writing and reviewing the analysis and presenting the findings). Secondly, researchers can invite older people to become members of research development groups, advisory boards and steering groups (Ray, 2007b).

The relationship between the researcher and the researched raises a number of ethical dilemmas, which are by no means specific to research amongst older people and which have exercised researchers in other disciplines and fields far more than they have in tourism (e.g., Spivak, 1988). Researchers can adopt a variety of stances in relation to their research participants, ranging from ones that regard them as research subjects to others where they become partners bound by mutual reciprocity and emotional commitment. Those schooled in scientific rationalism advocate positioning the researcher as the impartial, objective scientist detached and distanced from his or her respondents. In contrast, researchers who attempt to transform the subject-object relationship inherent in traditional research argue that treating people as objects is morally indefensible (Stanley & Wise, 1993) and fails to recognize the openness and culturally constructed nature of the social world, peppered as it is with contradiction and complexity (England, 1994).

Feminist researchers have led the way in espousing approaches that seek to disrupt the hierarchical power dynamics that traditionally characterize research relations (Harding, 1987). Recognizing that research is a dialogue, feminist researchers acknowledge their reliance on the research participant to provide insight into the fine-grained nuances of meaning that structure everyday lives; they thereby acknowledge that the research participant is the expert on their own experiences (England, 1994). At the same time however, they do not deny that the researcher is ultimately the author of the research text and thus the most privileged person in the relationship. The issue facing any researcher who seeks to co-create knowledge is how to present others' narratives without appropriating them; as Olesen (2005, p. 252) observes, “how to make... voices heard without exploiting or distorting those voices is... a vexatious question.”

Tourism scholars interested in understanding later life experiences can utilize a number of strategies that facilitate the articulation of

the researched voice. These include text sharing, the use of extensive quotations, and participant involvement in thematic analysis and verification phases. All kinds of storytelling, whether through interviewing, focus groups, biographical research or feminist methods such as memory-work allows participants to reflect on their individual and shared memories as a means of agency and change (Small, 2007). For example, in Pratt's (1998) collaborations with Filipino female domestic workers, the women were involved not merely in relating stories about their experiences but also organized and structured the workshop and focus group sessions and reviewed the analysis. In addition, a number of experimental writing and research dissemination techniques such as reflexive accounts, fiction and poetry and performance pieces including dramatic readings and plays all encourage participant involvement and challenge traditional research reporting (Olesen, 2005).

Such approaches in tourism and ageing research would not only transform current researcher-respondent power relationships but also in the process, allow older people to learn new skills (Ray, 2007b). Holstein and Minkler (2007) call for participatory research that matters to, and ideally springs from, older people themselves and which involves them in setting the research agenda and collecting and analyzing research material. This requires a mind shift in tourism research where the researcher's voice and role as 'expert' has been little challenged (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Yet ignoring opportunities to involve older people in the research process without doubt limits the scope of our enquiry. In representing older peoples' stories (particularly marginal or subaltern stories), we can never retrieve 'true' or 'authentic' voices as our identities as researchers will inevitably transform the original narratives to fit into our agendas (Niranjana, 1999; Raju, 2002). Nevertheless, the asymmetric power relationships inherent in traditional tourism researcher-respondent roles require challenge. As Holstein and Minkler (2007, p. 17) comment: "A critical perspective is necessary... if older people are to become part of our work, not simply as objects of study... but as co-learners whose expertise about the meaning and significance of ageing we have too long ignored."

The Potential of Biographical Research

In an ideal world, respondents would speak for themselves but this is not often possible, not because they do not have the knowledge but because they do not speak the language of academe and policy. In these circumstances perhaps one of the most valuable types of research that allows understanding from the inside out is biographical or life story research. Certainly, if we are to comprehend older people's lives, we need to appreciate where they have come from (Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2006; Sedgley et al., 2007). Biographical research not only allows researchers to get close to respondents but also places them at the centre of the research, allowing them to focus on those issues that are of significance to them. Feminist research has had a major impact on biographical study in the social sciences and its emphasis on giving

a voice, conscious raising, empowerment, collaboration and attention to meaning and experience enable it to be emancipatory and transformative (Roberts, 2002). Biographical research is highly personal, explores people's lives in situ, and highlights the complexities of their everyday experiences and yet is largely absent from tourism studies. As a result, there has been insufficient emphasis on understanding the personal and the broader social and cultural context of older people's earlier lives, particularly their impact on those individuals' current tourism participation. Consequently, there is little appreciation that a person's biography shapes their tourism behaviour and provides the context for understanding their experiences (Sedgley, 2007).

Biographical research allows us to uncover a terrain of life events that help explain the impact of socio-cultural characteristics (e.g., gender, class and ethnicity) and personal factors (e.g., familial, work and friendship networks, where people live, their sense of neighbourhood, health, levels of social engagement and consumption patterns) on people's participation and non-participation in tourism. As well as allowing us to understand these aspects of people's lives, biographical research also enables us to recognize the wider social and historical changes older people have experienced (e.g., economic and political change) and how these impact on their current circumstances and attitudes (Victor, Scambler, & Bond, 2009). Thus rather than merely identifying tourist motivation, biographical research provides a life course perspective that opens up complex, personalized and fine-grained understandings of a person's motivation for participating in tourism.

This is not to suggest that research which attempts to take account of biographical issues is entirely absent from tourism enquiry. For example, Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter (2001) analysed two age cohorts in Canada in an effort to understand their tourism behaviour (an age cohort is a group of people who have experienced a common significant life event, for example, birth within a particular decade). They examined two cohorts of older adults aged 55–64 years ('Depression Babies') and 65 years and older (the 'Roaring Twenties Generation'), however, the very large sample sizes in such studies (in this case almost 15,000 people) underplays personal experiences and individual agency. Not surprisingly, such large studies whilst valuable in establishing trend data, lead to the formulation of generic models to predict age cohort behaviour that cannot take account of the heterogeneity of older people.

These studies can also result in the assumption that older people's travel motivations remain relatively stable over time. For example, Lohmann and Danielsson (2001) explore the potential of generation age in predicting travel behaviour and conclude that older people assume quite rigid and conservative patterns of behaviour during their fifties, which then continue throughout their lives. In fact, their study reaches the conclusion that:

... understanding the future travel behaviour of senior citizens is perhaps not as difficult as it might first appear... the actual travel behaviour (including expectations, motivations and aspirations) of people aged between 55 and

65 years in 2000 allows a prediction of prospective travellers aged 65 to 75 years in the year 2010. Such an approach supplies reliable data for the design of future marketing strategies and suitable products (2001, p. 357).

In suggesting that middle-aged people's tourism and life behaviour change so little with age, researchers fail to recognize the impact of personal life events and individual agency. Ryan is one of the few tourism researchers to acknowledge that "the correlation between age and the importance of past experience is thus not a factor of life stage *per se*, but one of age being a proxy for learning opportunity" (1995, p. 208). Patterson (2006) also recognizes the diversity of experience and behaviour within age cohorts, arguing that although two people may share the same birth date, more important in shaping behaviour is each individual's health, psychological well-being, socio-economic circumstances, social and family situation, gender, race and ethnicity, etc.

Biographical research can remind us of the influence of those overarching historical, economic and social power structures that are the context to individual narratives. These also play their part in explaining older people's participation or non-participation in tourism, although tourism researchers tend to concentrate on those who are able to take holidays (Shaw & Williams, 2002), emphasizing the value of tourism in allowing older people to age 'successfully'. Frequently, more developed societies construe an older person's ability to engage in physical and cultural activities as 'positive' ageing. Yet Holloway (2007, p. 162) cautions that this represents an affluent expectation of what is required to age in an exciting way, an image which runs the risk "of constructing a new stereotype (a leisured class of elders) and of creating narrow, unrealistic expectations of what later life should be like." Thus, whilst we can celebrate positive portrayals of older people as active tourists, it is also important to challenge the assumption that such lifestyles are open to everyone in later life. Many older people in societies around the world lack the opportunity or ability to engage in tourism, particularly those living in poverty and with poor health. As Holstein and Minkler (2007, p. 16) point out, the successful ageing model "fails to account for particular life trajectories and environmental realities" and can therefore devalue "those who do not live up to their ideals." We need to be mindful that tourism researchers do not impose false expectations on older people, as this would amount to another form of ageism.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to scrutinize how and what we know in ageing and tourism research. What emerges is the power of extant tourism research to subtly "define; to skew; to objectify; to foreground some issues leaving others untouched; to legitimize some methods casting others to the periphery; to privilege some groups while excluding others and to tell stories in particularistic ways" (Tribe, 2006, p. 375). In terms of tourism research on experiences in later life, it currently foregrounds tourist typologies and marketing priorities and marginalizes tourist

embodiments, emotions, identities and narratives. In this respect, research in this area is perhaps not so very different from tourism enquiry in general, which has been similarly characterized (Pritchard & Morgan, 2007). Hence, in the paper we have argued for a transformation in the way tourism researchers study later life and proposed approaches that go beyond conventional qualitative methods to give older people an integral role in the research process. Such participatory approaches could complement current analyses of the older market by contributing additional insight. More significantly, however they have the potential to create a different kind of humanistic co-created knowledge, which is empowering and transformative and has application beyond research with older people for tourism scholars working with other demographic (particularly marginal and subaltern) groups.

In order to effect this transformation, we can summarise these approaches in a four part inter-related agenda for tourism scholars engaged in ageing research. First, we consider essential a cross-disciplinary approach to the study of tourism in later life that encourages dialogue between critical gerontologists and tourism researchers. Indeed, we have drawn parallels between critical gerontology and hopeful tourism scholarship and argued that greater engagement from both groups will provide more holistic understandings of the lives of older people, thus helping to reformulate tourism and ageing research. Engaging with the principles of critical gerontology will mean involving and consulting older people throughout the research process so that their voices are privileged and their agendas and perspectives recognized. This in turn reduces the risk of researchers applying their own priorities and generalising from their own experiences in their attempts to understand the lives of older people.

This humanistic approach naturally underpins the second part of the agenda—transforming the norms and values that characterize tourism's research approaches to older people. Such participatory research sets out to engage older people in the research process and to shift the balance of power away from the researcher towards the respondents. These methods counter the tendency in dominant research approaches for academics working at a particular historical moment to generalize from their own experiences and "... to take for granted that it was shared in other social groups or at other periods" (Thompson, 1981, p. 253). Critical gerontologists such as Edmondson and von Kondratowitz (2009) urge academics to see older people as 'us' rather than 'them' and to strive for co-created knowledge rather than to do research 'on' them. They remind us that ageing is a life course issue that affects us all and in this paper, we have taken biographical research to illustrate approaches that seek to contextualise tourism behaviours, attitudes and experiences. Its subject-centred, 'bottom up' strategy allows older people have more control, involvement and ownership of the research and become co-producers and co-learners in the research process.

Biographical research offers insight into how older people themselves interpret their lives and sheds light on the different ways in which individuals respond to life events. In this sense, biographical

research can be empowering as it locates older people at the centre of the research, allowing them the opportunity to discuss what is important to them (Warren & Clarke, 2009). Moreover, as researchers gain greater insight into what has 'gone before', the challenges that people have overcome and their acts of resistance, there is more scope to challenge deterministic and ageist assumptions about their later life attitudes.

This leads to the third item of the transformative agenda—the incorporation into tourism research of more personalized accounts of tourism experiences in later life that embody emotion, agency and individuality. Recognizing the weaknesses of research in the reality-oriented tradition, we have argued that attempts to formulate models and predict behaviour overly dominate research on tourism in later life. Older people embody agency, individuality and reflexivity, thus their behaviour is uncertain and changes across time. Large-scale quantitative surveys clearly have a valuable role to play in tourism and ageing research but they are an inappropriate way of capturing and understanding these changing subjectivities. Research that relates stories and narratives on the other hand, offers more scope to appreciate the experiences of older people by capturing the subjective, individualized aspects of their lives. This involves less deterministic and homogenous understandings of older people in tourism and instead presents more personalized studies that recognize individual agency and the diverse experiences of later life.

Thus, we have argued for more individualized, subjective research that explores the intricacies of older people's lives. Once again, we highlighted the potential of biographical work here as a way of exploring the impact of life experience on older people's current lives, particularly their expectations, experiences and reasons for engagement with or disengagement from tourism. The emphasis within biographical research on the whole life course reveals how individual subjectivities as well as social, political and economic structures influence our choices in later life. Without this context, it is impossible to understand isolated periods of older people's lives. As Wilson (2000, p. 12) states, "men and women are not just 'old'. They are ageing people with pasts and futures. Their pasts may be personal and include all sorts of experiences that made them what they are, or stopped them living as they would have liked." Biographical research allows us the scope to excavate peoples' earlier lives in order to provide clues about current behaviour and lifestyles.

In advocating approaches like biographical research and in focusing on the political, economic and social context of older people's lives, we also urge researchers to acknowledge the structural disadvantages that face many older people across the globe (in particular economic and health constraints). We must not assume that all older people are part of the 'new age' elderly (Patterson, 2006) with good health and pensions to make tourism participation possible. However, identifying the structural constraints that many older people face will not be enough. We must reflect on the potential policy implications of our work and on what we as tourism researchers might do to challenge the status

quo. Too often, research appears to be undertaken for its own sake (Walker, 2004), with no positive impact on people's lives. This is in fact, the final part of our four part agenda. We suggest that tourism researchers aspire to advocacy scholarship that promotes the social inclusion, human dignity and human rights of older people. Involving older people in the research process and engaging with their agendas is likely to result in studies that inform policy, work for older people and challenge ageism. It also creates spaces to challenge negative stereotypes of older people as inactive, dependent and disengaged and allows academics to work in partnership with older people in advocacy research which can lead to positive social change for us all as we move through the life course. ■

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