



# RETIREMENT AND TOURISM

## Themes in Retirees' Narratives

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**Abstract:** This article examines central themes in traveling retirees' perceptions of tourism and travel. It aims to understand the place and value of tourism in retirement. The study described in this article focused on relatively recent retirees, and utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 20 male and female retirees involved in a "Learning in Retirement" program in a mid-sized southeastern U.S. city. Results identified five themes, associating post retirement tourism not only with the new life phase, but also with lifelong interests, leisure activities, retirees' social networks and perceived constraints. These findings are discussed in light of general theories of adaptation and aging. **Keywords:** old age, adaptation, family, continuity, constraints. © 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### INTRODUCTION

During the past decade older adults have been drawing increased attention from tourism researchers, as well as from service providers. Several trends have influenced this interest, including the aging of populations all over the world, as well as changes in older adults' sociodemographics and travel patterns, making them an appealing target population for the global tourism industry (for review see Patterson 2006, ch. 4; Schröder and Widmann 2007). The older adult segment is attractive not only because of its current size and purchasing power, but also as a result of demographic and social forecasts (e.g., Hossain, Bailey and Lubulwa 2003; Lohmann and Danielsson 2001; Schröder and Widmann 2007), which argue that it is going to continue to grow rapidly in the next decade or two.

Studies examining tourism in later life have explored several areas of interests. Some of them have focused on descriptive characteristics of older adults' tourism behavior (e.g., Georggi and Pendyala 1999; Hossain et al 2003; Javalgi, Thomas and Rao 1992) and on the associations between various sociodemographics and seniors' tourism (e.g., Peterson 2007; Zimmer, Brayley and Searle 1995). Other studies examined psychological aspects of tourism such as motivations for tourism

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(e.g., Sellick 2004; Shoemaker 2000), factors influencing decision making (e.g., Bai, Jang, Cai and O'Leary 2001; Kerstetter and Pennington-Gray 1999), and the benefits resulting from tourism (e.g., Botterill and Crompton 1996; Milman 1998; Roberson 2001; Statts and Pierfelice 2003). Several researchers (e.g., Blazey 1992, Fleischer and Pizam 2002; Hong, Kim and Lee 1999) have examined constraints on tourism at an old age, and some have focused on older adults with chronic health conditions or physical impairments (e.g., Burnett and Bender Baker 2001). Another stream of research has addressed specific tourism forms such as adventure tourism (e.g., Muller and Cleaver 2000), educational tourism (e.g., Gibson 1998), eco tourism (e.g., Cleaver and Muller 2002) or multigenerational tourism (e.g., Gardyn 2001).

Some studies that examined tourism at an old age have compared older tourists with younger tourists. Along with some similarities between these groups, certain differences were found as well. For example, You and O'Leary (2000) found that tourists' behavior changed over time in terms of travel propensity, destination activity participation and travel philosophy, and that both the age and generation cohort had an effect. Gibson and Yiannakis (2002) examined tourist role preference over the life course and found that while some roles decreased in frequency, others increased or demonstrated variability. Blazey (1992) focused on people over the age of 50 and examined the association between retirement status and travel activity. He found that retirees were more likely to travel for longer durations, with a larger number of persons in the travel party than those who were still working. They were also more frequently involved in package tours, less involved in a few travel related activities, and reported somewhat different constraints on traveling than non retirees. Other studies (e.g., Pennington-Gray and Lane 2001; Shoemaker 2000) examined older tourists exclusively, and tried to identify differentiated sub-segments within the older adults' segment. All of them came to the conclusion that the older adult segment is very heterogeneous, and that there is significant variability among subgroups within the older age cohorts.

Although studies examining tourism in later life are very diverse, they share two common features: most of them used quantitative methods, and many of them referred to chronological age when identifying older adults. Although later life may include several life-course phases, most studies have not classified different later life phases when relating to older adults. Researchers tended to not distinguish between an early retirement phase and a physical disability phase, or between seniors who have retired and those who continue to work. They simply related to a population that has passed a certain age. This approach may be criticized in light of the fact that age alone is not always effective in differentiating between older and younger people's traveling patterns (Farana and Schmidt 1999).

The dominance of the quantitative approach was recently criticized by Patterson (2006), who argued that researchers should further develop and apply qualitative methods that will enable "to gain a better and more in-depth recollection and understanding of the actual trip experience" (p. 40). In addition, Sedgley, Pritchard and Morgan (2006)

argued that relatively little research has sought to understand the meaning of tourism and leisure for older people, and that it is not possible to study older people's behavior through 'snapshot' research, which isolates a single moment in time. They claimed that in order to fully understand how leisure and tourism experiences are constructed, researchers must try to engage with the context from which those experiences emerged. Their claim is consistent with former arguments of leisure and tourism scholars (e.g., Gibson and Yiannaki, 2002; Iso-Ahola, Jackson and Dunn 1994) who have used Levinson and colleagues's framework (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and McKee 1978, Levinson 1996) to suggest that leisure and tourism should be understood within the context of people's life structure. Inspired by these views the study described in this article aimed to focus on one later life phase while implementing a qualitative approach. The life phase examined was the ten years after retirement, a phase that is also regarded as the peak period in older adults' tourism. Following retirement, lack of time is no longer as significant a constraint on tourism, and in most cases, health is not yet a significant constraint (Fleischer and Pizam 2002). Therefore, the retired individual has both the time and the health required for frequent and long travels, if they so choose.

Retiring from work is one of the major transitions in later life. For some people it may be fraught with feelings of loss of meaning and purpose, but for others it signifies an opportunity for a new beginning (Gee and Baillie 1999). In most cases, the transition is not traumatic, but it does require some level of adjustment (Hyde, Ferrie, Higgs, Mein and Nazroo 2004; Nuttman-Shwartz 2004). While some retirees seek part-time or even full-time jobs, most devote their additional free time to leisure interests (Harvard Center for Health Communication 2004; Robinson and Godbey 1997). Most evidence shows that leisure has a central role in explaining post retirement psychological well being (c.f., Fernandez-Ballesteros, Zamarron and Ruiz 2001; Nimrod 2007). However, as people age, they face more constraints on their participation, including, among others, reduced income, declining health capacity and loss of significant partners (Jackson 1993; McGuire 1984). As a result they tend to decrease their level of participation, especially in outdoor and physical activities (Janke, Payne and Son 2007; Son, Kerstetter, Mowen and Payne 2007). However, the effect of constraints may differ according to gender (Stanley and Freysinger 1995) or sociodemographic and health characteristics (Strain, Grabusic, Searle and Dunn 2002). Tourism may be considered as a form of leisure (Norris and Wall 1994; Thornton 1995), as well as a context for leisure activities (Brey and Leh-to 2007; Thomas and Butts 1998). Tourism fits all definitions of leisure, but it has few distinct characteristics (Carr 2002). It is also hard to determine when and under what conditions tourism provides a leisure experience (Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987), and some scholars have already argued that leisure and tourism are complementary and should be studied together (e.g., Ryan 1994; Shaw and Williams 1994; Swain 1995).

Retirees place tourism higher in their priorities (Statts and Pierfelice, 2003). A central explanation for this tendency is that today's retirees are healthier, richer, more educated, more independent and more obliga-

tion-free than older people in the past (Martin and Preston 1994; Zimmer et al 1995). They are also distinct from former cohorts of retirees as many of them have travel experience, both in groups and alone, in connection with their work lives as well as a result of traveling for pleasure (Hayslip, Hicks-Patrick and Panek 2007). In her interviews with older adults aged 65–90, Gibson (2002) found that most of her interviewees were “busy travelers,” as they were engaged in many travels and for various purposes. For most of them, leisure-travel was a meaningful component of life, and it became so significant only upon retirement, when they felt that they had more freedom to enjoy it. However, after about five years for many of the retirees the novelty of traveling diminished or was constrained. Being able to travel can seem almost the “essence of retirement” (Weiss 2005:135) as there are no limitations on the timing of travel and the duration of stay any more. Some retirees celebrate their entrance to retirement by taking long-term trips. These travels serve as a neutral, transitional zone between voluntary or imposed endings and new beginnings, where summaries of the past and plans for the future are made (White and White 2002). For others, tourism provides a challenge, often shared with a spouse, which involves planning, solving unexpected problems, facing new situations, new people, food and so forth. Successful coping with that challenge is demonstrated by returning with stories and photographs to display (Weiss 2005).

While some studies have examined the effects of the tourism experience on the older adults’ perceptions of life or themselves (e.g., Botterill and Crompton 1996; Roberson 2001), the effect of life events on older tourists’ perceptions of tourism is under-researched. The current study aimed to examine how retirement is perceived in association with tourism by traveling retirees during the first years after retirement. Adopting the wide-view approach, suggested by Sedgley et al (2006), the study aspired to understand how the tourism experiences and behavior of relatively recent retirees are constructed, by engaging with the broad context of retirement from which those experiences emerged. More specifically, the study was designed to answer the following questions: How do relatively recently retired individuals, who travel, perceive tourism in association with their post retirement reality? Do recent retirees perceive post retirement tourism as time periods that stand apart from their daily lives, in which they can forget, or even escape, everything, or do they link them to other life domains? And if such linkages exist, does it characterize post retirement concerns only, or does it involve pursuits initiated prior to retirement? By answering these questions, a better understanding of older adults’ thoughts and behavior can be gained, and it may serve practitioners as well as theoreticians interested in the role of tourism in older adult development.

## RETIREMENT AND TOURISM

### *Study Methods*

In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of retirees: members of a *Learning in Retirement* (LIR) chapter in a mid-sized

southeastern US city. This program has approximately 300 members; and it gives seniors an opportunity for continued learning on a non-credit basis. In addition to courses and a variety of social activities, it offers travel/study programs. Therefore, it was assumed the LIR would be a good context to find traveling retirees (i.e., retirees who travel at least once a year). Study participants were recruited by advertising in the LIR monthly newsletter. Interview data were collected from 20 participants, who were selected out of 47 volunteers based on gender and time since retirement. The criterion for inclusion was retirement duration shorter than ten years. Respondents were ten males and ten females ranging in age from 57 to 78 (mean = 64.5); and most of them (13 out of 20) were retired for less than five years (3.9 years in average). All participants had at least a bachelor's degree. Eleven were retired faculty or staff from a nearby university. While two were foreign-born, all were Caucasian. Six of them moved to the city from other cities in the US only after retirement.

*Interview format.* Semi-structured interviews were conducted in March and April 2005 at the respondents' home or in a university conference room in the same town, according to respondents' choice. The interviews lasted an average of one hour and 30 minutes, ranging from 50 minutes to two hours. Respondents were asked to tell their "story of retirement". After giving a short description of the "circumstances" of their retirement (when, from what occupation, and why) and providing some background related to their personal history, they were asked to describe their post retirement activities in general and their travel activities in particular, and how they had changed since retirement. Every travel experience mentioned was further explored with additional questions that probed for connections and understanding. Respondents were not asked *directly* about the relationships between tourism and daily lives, or between tourism and basic life domains such as work, family and social relationships, and leisure. The associations between these spheres were examined in the data analysis process.

*Data Analysis.* This study was exploratory in its nature and utilized a grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998) approach. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcriptions were subjected to qualitative data analysis techniques, using cross-case analysis and the constant-comparison method, in which core themes were identified and compared, and analytical categories derived. Since the study aspired to understand tourism experiences and behavior in light of the broad context from which they emerged, the data for each respondent were first divided into two categories: "tourism" and "broad context (personal profile)", and only after coding each part separately, axial coding was used to examine the relationships between them. The first step of this process included deconstruction of individual descriptions relating to tourism, collecting and reducing "instances" by phenomenon, while also reviewing the transcripts for elements that may have been missed. After the first coding, the organized material was read several times and open coding was used to identify variations found within each category

and overlapping between categories. Moving back and forth between preliminary sub-groupings and revised versions assisted with refining the codes and determining subcategories.

The second step of the process included careful reading of the full transcripts to identify the broad context of retirement and general circumstances characterizing each respondent's life, and creating a personal profile for each participant. The next step used the refined codes and subcategories to do axial coding between subcategories (Strauss and Corbin 1998), and between the subcategories and respondents' profiles. Organizing the data in that manner enabled themes of meaning to emerge from the data. Hence, themes are based on the perceptions or realities expressed by those interviewed. The centrality of a meaning to individuals' discussions of each theme served as a justifying criterion, and lead to an exploration of five themes dominating retirees' perceptions of post retirement tourism. Once preliminary interpretations were made, pseudonyms were created and irrelevant personally identifying details were eliminated to assure confidentiality, and participants were contacted to provide for a "member check" as to the accuracy of the interpretations of material attributed to them. Based on their responses, several changes and refinements were made in the analysis.

### *Results*

Participants' involvement in tourism proved that the LIR group was indeed a good context for studying perceptions of traveling retired individuals. Seventeen participants out of 20 reported traveling on a regular basis (i.e., at least once a year), and most of them reported traveling several times a year. Participants' narratives yielded five central themes. These themes are presented here, while their theoretical contribution and their associations with existing theories are considered in the discussion section that follows.

*Theme 1—Retirement as an Opportunity.* Most participants perceived retirement as an opportunity to travel. Having more time, and relatively few obligations, they thoroughly enjoyed the idea that they could travel whenever they wanted and for as long as they wished. This was expressed in many of their texts. For example, Mr. L (74 years old, retired for six years), a retired administrator, said:

...My wife retired one year before I did, and this provided the opportunity, we both being retired, that we could do some traveling, that we hadn't done, did never do too much of before... We both enjoy traveling and of course before we retired, we traveled but rarely, maybe one trip every couple of years or so. Now, (a) we can afford it and (b) we have the time. We just got back from New Zealand. We're going to Greece in September. So we are genuinely looking for opportunities to travel...

Similarly, Ms. N (78 years old, retired for seven years), who is married to a medical doctor, stated:

We had wanted to travel, but you can't take off a week or two weeks for travel, if it was during the school year. I could probably over the

summer, but he couldn't. And patients expect the doctor to be in the office, and so we were really looking forward to that, and we have done a good bit of travel since then. And that has been fun.

Retirement was perceived as an opportunity to travel even before retiring, as tourism was central part in the plans made for retirement, as exemplified by Ms. M's (62 years old, retired for five years) description:

We were going to get an RV and see all the states and then spend a lot of time on the road traveling and seeing the world too. We had done very little travel before, while we were working, and that was our goal, to get to retirement and just stay on the go, see anything we wanted to see.

However, retirement was not only perceived as an opportunity to travel more, but also as an opportunity to travel *differently*. With more time available, participants noted that they did not have to rush anymore, and could travel with no pressure. On arrival at the destination, they could spend longer periods and practically live in that place and get to know it better, or as beautifully summarized by Mr. E, they could now "unpack their suitcases." Mr. E. (65 years old, retired for 18 months) traveled in Europe with his wife for six months, mostly in France, first in the south where he rented a villa, and then renting an apartment in Paris:

When you're not retired, you've got your two or three weeks and you kind of force it into those three weeks and then you're so busy... that even though you see a lot... you never really settle. And I had decided I wanna unpack my suitcase... and I wanna be able to... If I go to the Louvre, I wanna come back and put my feet up and read a book on one of the artists. And you don't do that if you're just traveling for a week at a time. You just don't really have time to relax...

Tourism and travels were also perceived as a compensation for the losses that accompanied retirement. This was expressed, for example, in the words of Ms. E (74 years old, retired for eight years), a retired chemist:

You lose the camaraderie with your colleagues, your coworkers. You lose the excitement... But then you had to look at what you gained... One was, of course, freedom to do as you please. No more tight schedule. Time to relax. Pick up old hobbies that you never had time for. Do things that you had never done. Travel as much as you want. And boy, have I done it.

Most participants found the ability to expand their travel a blessing. However, one participant, Mr. A (75 years old, retired for nine years) a retired lawyer who had to travel a lot as part of his job, perceived retirement as an opportunity to travel less:

I was a litigator which, among other things, meant traveling an awful lot, one or two trips a week and sometimes long trips... The one thing I don't want to do is travel... after all the traveling I did... We've had great, great travel experiences, and I don't really have any desire to go anywhere...

*Theme II—Negotiating Constraints.* Although most participants expressed interest in traveling more, many of them mentioned at least one factor that created a constraint on their ability to travel. Constraints mentioned were diverse and mainly included limited income, health limitations, caregiving burden, and lack of traveling partners. The way participants coped with these constraints could generally be described as *negotiating constraints* (Jackson, Crawford and Godbey 1993), but this description groups together four sub-categories: “Change in tourism style,” “Reduction,” “Finding substitutes” and “Ignoring constraints.”

“Change in tourism style” refers to cases where the way to cope with a constraint was to make an adjustment in the tourism style. An example for this strategy could be Ms. J (57 years old, retired for two years), a former high-school teacher, who retired as a result of severe arthritis. In order to be able to travel, she reduced the physical effort involved in traveling and started taking many breaks while traveling:

... You constantly are adjusting. . . you can't tote (suitcases) anymore. You just can't. Uh, travel. . . It's funny, we're from another southern country. . . It takes nine hours to get there. . . you used to be able to make the trip with maybe one stop. Now, you stop every two three hours. And, uh. . . the third time you get out of the car, you just can't move. (laughs). . . It's just, you get so stiff. And, uh. So, you make adjustments in your traveling.

Other examples include Mr. U (73 years old, retired for eight years), who decided to give up participating in conferences while traveling, because “we're two old people; I'd go to meetings and she found out that she couldn't walk the streets alone. She was a mark; people stealing from her and things like that. . .”, and Mr. T (63 years old, retired for three years), who found southern US rather boring: “trees and that are pretty, but, you know, I've seen one, I've got the idea. I don't need to see five million more, right?” Having limited financial resources, he decided to allocate them differently:

... Instead of taking these little trips around, you know, for three or four or five days or something, and they still cost you, I don't know, whatever, five or six hundred dollars or something, well, for two of those little trips you don't really enjoy, you go hop on a plane and go to New York or something for three or four days or something like that. And so that's what we decided to do. . .

“Reduction” refers to cases where the way to cope with constraints was traveling less or postponing travels. Two participants, for example, were constrained by caregiving for their grandchildren, but while Ms. E reported that “It restricts my traveling a little bit” and therefore traveled less often than desired, Ms. T. (62 years old, retired for two years) postponed her six-months planned trip to Europe until her daughter was “somewhat settled” and “would survive without me.” Mr. I (73 years old, retired for six years), who was a main caregiver for his very sick wife, decided not to travel anywhere as long as she lived. Other participants, such as aforementioned Ms. M who had lost her spouse, and Ms. O (63 years old, retired for four years), who never married, but traveled a lot

as part of her academic career, reduced their travel frequency as a result of having no travel companion, and traveled only for visiting family and friends.

While the first two strategies were relatively common, “Finding substitutes” and “Ignoring constraints” were rare. “Finding substitutes” refers to coping with a limiting constraint by finding a substitution for a lost or unattainable travel activity. Mr. O (67 years old, retired for six months), a retired journalist, could not afford overseas travel and opted for a wide range of courses, creative work and cultural activities after retirement. To an extent, it seems that he reduced the importance of traveling:

I did a lot of traveling, but not overseas. And there are so many things that can be done locally; I don't need to travel that far. I don't need to spend a lot of money. I just want to have my surrounding of culture, of environment, of the . . . I don't think I have to travel, even though I like to travel. . .

A case of “Ignoring limitation” was Mr. E's decision to go for a six-month trip to Europe although he and his wife had older parents who did not want them to go:

. . . Well there's always a reason you can't do something. You just got to figure out the reasons you can do something and do it. We had both kind of decided that this was a good time for us even though I've got a ninety year old mother who, you know, do you want us gone for two years? And she has a ninety year old father. So I said, well this is something we need to do. . . otherwise, I'm just gonna fade into retirement and I said, I'm not ready for that.

*Theme III—“Spillover” between Leisure and Tourism.* Most participants reported significant “spillover” (or flow) between their travels and daily leisure activities. Their narratives described how their travels affected their daily activities and vice versa, and it seemed that the line between leisure and tourism in their lives was rather thin.

Good examples of the perceived effect of tourism on leisure include the stories of Ms. Y (63 years old, retired for one year), who took a LIR course on Cuba because she wanted to travel there, Mr. D. (70 years old, retired for six years) who keeps his fellowship in an educational association because it allows him to go to seminars and international program trips which are his “hobby horse,” and the aforementioned Ms. T, who took French lessons before going to France because she wanted to “live in the countryside and not just in the cities where people speak English.” Another way in which tourism affects leisure is through travel planning (often done by using the Internet). This became a leisure activity per se for some retirees, as expressed in the aforementioned Mr. L's words: “we are genuinely looking for opportunities to travel. . . I guess from a number of conversations we have at the dinner table [that] involved where we would like to go next.”

Although the described effect of tourism was usually in expanding leisure activity, there were also examples where tourism constrained leisure. Such was the story of the aforementioned Mr. D, who had to “opt out of the schedule for LIR in the fall” because he was planning to “do

more traveling and camping.” Similarly, Ms. R (72 years old, retired for ten years) could not commit to playing team tennis, which demands constant attendance, because of a planned trip. Examples of the perceived effect of leisure on tourism were also pretty common. In some cases there were long-standing leisure interests that directed post-retirement travel plans as with the aforementioned Ms. O., whose main leisure activity prior to retirement was golf. When she retired, she dramatically expanded her involvement in golf, and the only vacations she expressed being interested in were golf vacations. Similarly, the aforementioned Ms. J, who enjoyed riding old locomotive trains for pleasure for many years, could now do that more often, and would “actually travel to get on a train.”

In addition, there were examples where new leisure pursuits, adopted only after retirement, affected participants’ tourism. This describes the situation of the aforementioned Mr. A, who became a fiction writer after retiring:

... We’ve used my interest in fiction writing for some travel, and apart from the writers’ conference here, I’ve been to several in North Carolina... which is a good time to just go and schmooze with other writers... it provides an opportunity to travel and meet other people who have common interests... you can submit fifteen or twenty pages of what you’ve written and have it reviewed by somebody who knows what they’re doing and get some advice and I’ve done some of that.

Somewhat similar is the story of aforementioned Mr. E, who wanted to learn how to make furniture in his free time:

... In two weeks, I’m going to North Carolina to go to a woodworking class for a week. You live at this wood workers place and he has an inn there that he runs with his wife. And he has a class for five days, and you learn how to build furniture using the latest tools and doing these joints in wood, and things like that... And I’m doing this class for a week... with the idea that that’s something that I think I’d like to do... I would like to be able to build things from time to time.

*Theme IV—Tourism may preserve Old Interests.* Although tourism may be perceived as an opportunity to explore new places, cultures, people, etc., as well as an opportunity to learn new things about oneself, a central theme in participants’ narratives was that tourism is perceived as a tool that preserves old interests and provides a sense of continuity. Interests mentioned had usually something to do with participants’ jobs prior to retirement as well as long lasting intellectual interests.

The aforementioned Mr. L, for example, spent a lot of his time since retirement on a coastal island, where he and his wife have had a beach house for many years. However, since he is the chair of the board of directors of the association that owns the island, most of his time, both there and back home, was devoted to preserving this island:

... You wouldn’t normally think of that as recreational, but it’s how I spend a lot of my leisure time down there, in dealing with island business... It’s an experiment in private conservation... It’s something I believe in strongly and I want to make it work... So that has con-

sumed my time, but it's been a real use of my time... It's not just [when I'm] there, yeah, [it's also] phone, telephone, e-mail...

Mr. L was also involved in several preservation organizations, and even while traveling to other destinations, he chose places that demonstrate successful preservation work, such as New Zealand and Costa Rica. This interest is consistent with his career in forestry and soil science, and as he stated, it was born even earlier, in his days in the Boy Scouts. It seems that Mr. L's post retirement activities not only preserved a sense of continuity, but also a sense of productivity and value, feelings that are often at risk in retirement.

Other examples include the aforementioned Mr. U, a retired theater scholar and professional, whose post retirement trips were all linked in one way or another to theater, and the aforementioned Mr. I, who kept traveling to professional conferences with his wife until she was too sick to join him. In addition, there were examples for post retirement tourism that preserved non-work intellectual interests or preferences. Such was the case of the aforementioned Mr. T, who preferred traveling to big cities because he used to live in a big city for many years and described himself as "city-oriented," and the aforementioned Ms. J:

My husband has an interest in paleontology. So, we like to see where dinosaurs are. I have an interest in archeology and geology and uh and anthropology. I like science and history. And so we're very interested in cultures and in animals, and in plants. We like to find botanical gardens. That's one of the reasons we like to go back to places...

*Theme V—Tourism is for Quality Time with Loved Ones.* Family and friends were frequently mentioned in participants' travel stories. It seemed that one of the main motivations to travel was to spend time with loved ones, whether family, friends or both. In addition, three travel patterns were identified. The first, and most common pattern, was traveling to visit family and friends in their own cities and countries. This was the case for Ms. H (67 years old, retired almost two years), originally from Sweden, who often traveled to visit her siblings in Sweden, and even planned to celebrate her seventieth birthday with them, the aforementioned Ms. Y, who traveled to visit her eighty-seven years old father and her two sons, each one in a different state in the US, and the aforementioned Ms. M., who used to travel to the city where she lived before retiring, to visit her old friends.

Another pattern, mentioned by several participants, was joint trips with children and grandchildren. In most cases, the trips were sponsored by the interviewees and were considered as gifts as with the aforementioned Ms. N, who showed up to the interview carrying an album of photos from her family trips:

... We had been to Alaska, and we were so impressed with it, and I told my husband, "I'd like to take the children." He said, "Which ones?" I said, "All of them." (laughs) And so that's what we did... We also went out to the Redwood Forest... and then, also, last September, to the sequoia... And... we'd looked through the Elderhostel catalog, and they had something intergenerational, and they had some places that we would like to take the children.

Similarly, the aforementioned Mr. A and his wife meet their son every year at a music and dance festival in North Carolina, and the aforementioned Ms. H gave her nephew from Sweden, who got married, a honeymoon in New Orleans, and joined him and his wife on a Mississippi River cruise. The aforementioned Ms. J and her husband travel with their daughter's family:

We decided that instead of a bunch of (gifts), gift for birthday and gift for this and gift for that, we were going to do one big gift for the year and it was gonna be a trip. Last year, it was Yosemite, and we just had a great time together for 4 or 5 days. Now this is gonna be a week (in Hawaii), so I hope we're not like on each other's nerves after a week.

A third pattern was somewhat similar: renting or owning a vacation house and inviting family and friends to come over. Mr. H (75 years old, retired for three years) and his wife, for example, own a country house in France, where they spend the summer every year, and host family and friends. The friends who come to visit are from the US, including friends from Mr. H's college fraternity, as well as French colleagues from the period he worked in Europe. Similarly, the aforementioned Mr. E invited "everybody" to visit him and his wife at the villa he rented in southern France:

I then sent out invitations to friends and families, and said, here's your chance to come to France and spend some time with us... And so we had a great time, just a fabulous time... people came and visited us and paid nothing... that was an added attraction for them but it was also good for us and we felt good about it.

## CONCLUSION

The LIR group utilized in this study offered a promising context for studying relatively recent retirees' perceptions of tourism among retirees who actually travel. When interpreting the study's findings, one should be aware of the relatively lack of diversity among participants. Participants in this study were "learners" by definition, and relatively unimpeded by the circumstances that often keep others from participating in tourism activities. They represent a relatively highly educated, upper-middle class group of participants, and many of them had already traveled extensively through their paid employment or for other purposes. Yet, even within this relatively homogeneous group of senior travellers, diversities were found, as implied by the findings. The use of a qualitative method, the focus on one later life phase, namely, the years following retirement, and the adoption of the wide-view approach (Sedgley et al 2006) that engaged with the broad context of retirement, led to some understandings regarding tourism and travel's place and role in relatively recent retirees' lives. In accordance with the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998), the findings described in this study offer a basis for a reconsideration of the role of tourism in recent retirees' lives that may have more to say about successful adaptation to retirement than former studies that examined later life tourism. The study led to

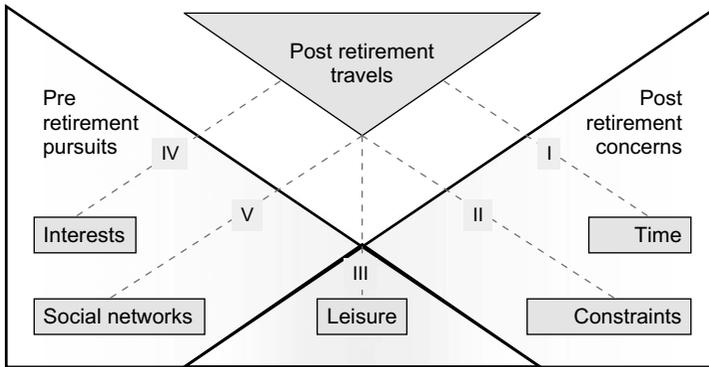
four theoretical propositions, which may also be supported by previous research and few existing theoretical frameworks.

The first proposition is that tourism and travel take a central role in post retirement reality. This study does not argue that tourism is the essence of retirement, as suggested by Weiss (2005), but rather that retirement is an opportunity to travel. With more time available, and fewer work and family responsibilities, retirees feel that they can travel whenever they want, for as long as they wish, which also provides an opportunity to travel differently. Instead of rushing from one place to another and trying to see and explore as much as possible in a limited time, retirees can thoroughly explore a specific tourism destination, and even settle in it for a while and become temporary residents of the visited place. These findings are consistent with some former studies, such as the study by Statts and Pierfelice (2003), which showed that tourism is a desired long-term activity for retirees, or the study by Gibson (2002), which revealed that leisure-travel becomes a significant part of life upon retirement.

The centrality of tourism in retirement is implied not only by the first theme (*Retirement as an Opportunity*), but also by the fact that the time spent in tourism and travels does not stand apart from retirees' daily lives. Tourism corresponds with retirees' present realities, as well as with pursuits and roles adopted prior to retirement. Two themes that emerged from the interviews suggested correspondence with post retirement issues, namely, the opportunity to travel as a result of having more free time, and negotiating constraints. Two other themes corresponded with pursuits initiated prior to retirement, namely, lifelong interests and social networks. Pre retirements pursuits were initiated prior to retirement, but lasted into retirement. An additional theme exposed the relationship between tourism and leisure activities, both continuing activities, which were adopted prior to retirement, and new activities that were added after retiring from work. These correspondences suggest that travels are not isolated periods in retirees' lives, but rather an integral part of them. A graphic description of these correspondences is illustrated in Figure 1 (the numbers in the figure represent the theme suggesting each correspondence).

The years immediately after retiring from work may be a peak in older adults' tourism as they are characterized by relatively few constraints (Fleischer & Pizam, 2002). However, this does not mean that recent retirees do not face constraints that may limit their ability to travel. They simply face different constraints than in pre retirement (Blazey 1992).

The second theoretical proposition suggests that retirees do not only travel *because of* fewer constraints, but also *in spite of* limiting conditions. Even though the participants in this study were a group of relatively healthy and engaged seniors, almost all of them mentioned facing some sorts of constraints. However, the way they coped and negotiated constraints reflected patterns of successful aging. The considerable research on *constraint negotiation* suggests that constraints do not inevitably prevent participation (e.g., Jackson and Rucks 1993; Shaw, Bonen and McCabe 1991), and identified a number of negotiation strategies that are employed in a variety of ways (e.g., Hubbard and



**Figure 1. The Correspondences between Post Retirement Travels and Other Life Domains**

Mannell 2001, Jackson, Crawford and Godbey 1993). Such strategies may be considered in terms of the Selective Optimization and Compensation (SOC) model of successful aging suggested by Baltes and colleagues (Baltes and Baltes 1990; Baltes and Carstensen 1996; Freund and Baltes 1998, 2002). This model defines successful aging in terms of making the best of what is possible, and argues that it is adaptive and healthy to respond to limiting factors that accompany aging. In the best case the response is *being selective* about the goals and activities chosen, *optimizing* the allocation of available resources for achieving those goals, and *compensating* for loss of available resources by finding alternative approaches and getting help in order to maintain an effective and satisfying involvement. Each one of the negotiation strategies defined in this study may be described in terms of SOC. While “Reduction” may be described as selection, “Finding substitutes” may be regarded as compensation. “Ignoring constraints,” which places the travel goal before anything else, has to do with prioritization, and may be considered as both selection and optimization, since once the most important goals are defined, most resources are devoted to achieving them. “Change in tourism style” may reflect some SOC dimensions, and even all of them simultaneously in some cases. Participants in this study utilized these strategies effectively, in a way that enabled most of them to travel despite limiting factors. This leads to suggesting that the first years after retirement are not only characterized by relatively few constraints on tourism, but also by a considerable capacity to successfully negotiate with them.

The correspondence between post retirement travels and pre retirement pursuits (themes III–V) leads to a third theoretical proposition, which suggests that post retirement tourism is not only compensation for the losses accompanying retirement, as suggested in some respondents’ narratives; it also serves as a mechanism that helps retirees preserve pre retirement roles, whether familial, leisure, intellectual or work-related roles. The continuity theory (Atchley 1989, 1993, 1999)

posits that continuity is a primary adaptive strategy for dealing with changes associated with normal aging, and that individuals wish to maintain stability in the same roles engaged in during their life course, even though their aging may impose obstacles to these roles. Individuals will tend to maintain continuity of psychological and social patterns adopted during their life course (e.g., attitudes, opinions, personality, preferences, and behavior) by developing stable activity patterns that will help them to preserve earlier ones. The tendency for continuity was reflected in this study's findings; however, further theoretical clarification is needed. Continuity theory distinguishes internal continuity from external continuity (Atchley 1993), and suggests that older individuals try to maintain continuity of psychological and social patterns adopted during their life course (i.e., internal continuity) by developing stable activity patterns that help them to preserve earlier ones (i.e., external continuity). When interpreting this study's findings in light of continuity theory, we may say that retirees use tourism to preserve internal continuity. But can we relate to their travel activities as external continuity? Since most respondents in this study also traveled before retirement, there is clearly some level of external continuity. However, continuity and change in tourism are also a matter of destination and travel style. External continuity may be the case for retirees who always travel to the same destinations, or own a vacation house, but it does not fit tourism narratives that focus on exploring unfamiliar destinations and experiencing new places, people, cultures, etc. A better theoretical framework for this pattern would be innovation theory (Nimrod and Kleiber 2007), which identifies two types of innovation in later life: self-reinvention innovation, which represents an opportunity for reinvention of self, and self-preservation innovation, which "represents an opportunity for renewal, refreshment and growth that is continuous in some respects from earlier interests and capacities" (p.17). It seems that many post retirement tourism experiences fall into the category of self-preservation innovation.

The spillover found between leisure and tourism supports former arguments about the need to study them together (e.g., Ryan 1994; Shaw and Williams 1994; Swain 1995). Carr (2002) suggested viewing leisure and tourism behaviors as a continuum, affected by residual and tourist cultures. The effects depend, however, on the perceived differences between the home and vacation environments, and on personal characteristics and motivations. The fourth theoretical proposition is, that after retirement, when leisure becomes the center of everyday life and acquires new roles and meanings (Kozarevic 1972), the line between leisure and tourism is even thinner than before retiring. Brey and Lehto (2007) demonstrated three types of associations between daily leisure activities and vacation activities (positive, nondescript and negative), and suggested that strong positive association may be explained by a high level of involvement in an activity. The concept of serious leisure (Stebbins 1992, 2006) may be considered as the highest level of leisure involvement. It describes hobbyist, amateur and volunteer activities that are characterized by considerable commitment and perseverance, a well organized participant group of likeminded associates with whom members

identify, and other durable psychological benefits. Serious leisure is particularly beneficial for retirees, as it may substitute work by offering structure, affiliation, responsibility, challenge and sense of essentiality. It is possible that retirees tend to be more involved in serious leisure, and therefore demonstrate more positive associations between everyday leisure and tourism activities. It is also possible that tourism becomes serious leisure, as suggested by certain behaviors, such as taking a course before traveling, or the “unpacking of suitcases,” that may allow for “serious tourism.” However, this proposition, like all aforementioned propositions, should be further explored in future research.

The findings may have some practical implications for developing services and marketing strategies when targeting recent retirees. For example, the need for continuity characterizing the years after retirement may be used in promoting educational and eco tourism. The gift pattern suggested by the fifth theme may serve as consumer insight when developing communication strategy for intergenerational tourism or vacation units. However, the most significant contribution of this study is theoretical. The study strengthens Sedgley et al’s (2006) argument that in order to fully understand how leisure and tourism experiences are constructed, researchers must try to engage with the broad context from which those experiences emerged. Moreover, the spillover found between leisure and tourism suggests that studying one without the other might lead to limited understanding of both. In addition, even though there is still a lot of ground to be covered, and there are still many questions to be answered by additional research, the current study definitely supports further exploration of the role of tourism and travels in older adults’ developmental psychology, as well as its role in adjusting to the changes associated with later life. **A**

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