



The Experience of Educational Travel Program of Older Adults

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Background to the Study

- According to AARP (2000), 90% of adults 50 years and older wanted to learn in order to enhance their personal growth, what is going on in the world, and experience the joy of learning.
 - The desire for seeking intellectual refreshment and spiritual fulfillment increase with age (Morrison et al, 1994).
- In the case of eco-tourism, more than 60% of tourists are older adults (Hvenegaard, 1998).
 - Educational travel appeals primarily to older people as they enhance their quality of life through the benefits of learning and travel (Wight, 1996).
- Recent research on senior travelers has placed more emphasis on identifying senior travelers as marketing segments rather than as individuals (Ostiguy, 1998; Roberson, 2003).



Purpose of Study

- The purpose of this study is to gain the further understanding of the experiences of older adults who participated in educational travel programs.
 - What kind of experiences in educational travel programs older adults identified?
 - How do such experiences impact the lives of older adults?



Educational Travel

- What is educational travel?
 - An educational travel is defined as a travel offering a pre-organized, structured, high-quality learning experiences that allows travelers to experience the authentic cultural, historical and natural wonders of an area (CTC, 2001).

- Providers of educational travel programs
 - College and university alumni association
 - Non-profit organization (e.g. Elderhostel, Sierra Club)
 - Museum (e.g. Smithsonian Associates)
 - Tour operators

- Educational Components
 - Lecture, discussion, experiential learning, and research service.



What do we know about Educational Travel?

■ Motivations and Typology

- Mills(1993) characterized the Elderhostel participants as wealthier, better educated and more self-actualized than typical tourists motivated by the escape dimension.
- Thomas et al. (1998) addressed the relationship between intellectual and social interaction motivations of Elderhostel participants.
- Arsenault et al. (1998) identified a typology of Elderhostel participants:
 - the activity oriented, the geographical guru, the experimenter, the adventure, the content-committed and the opportunist.

■ Psychological benefits

- Milan (1997) explored the impact of travel experience on senior traveler's psychological well-being.
- Wei & Millan(2002) examined the relationship between participation in activities while on vacation, satisfaction and psychological well-being.

■ Travel Experiences

- Roberson (2003) identified the learning of older travelers during their trips
 - learning about one's character, trust, the world, and home.



Method

- Criterion sampling
 - Older adults aged 55 or older
 - Those who had participated in educational travel programs

- Semi-structure interview
 - 14 interviewees
 - September – October 2007
 - At the interviewees' home
 - 1.5 ~ 2.5 hours long

- Transcribed verbatim

- Data analysis
 - Constant Comparative method
 - Grounded Theory- open, theoretical and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

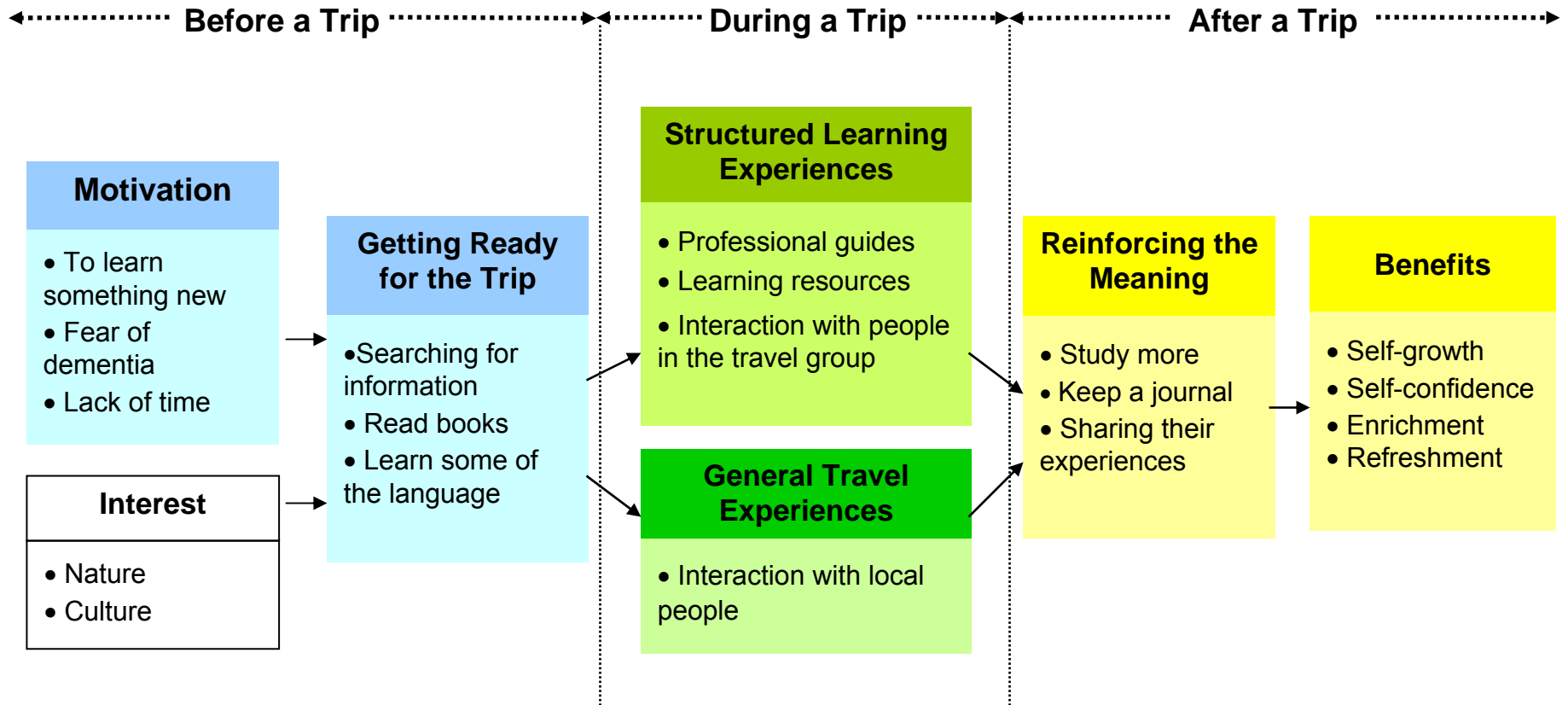
- Data Reliability
 - Member checking



Interview Participants

- Gender: 2 men and 12 women.
- Age: 60 to 85 years old ($M=73.8$).
- Education:
 - 3 Bachelor
 - 6 Master degree
 - 5 PhD degree
- Work status:
 - 10 retired (3-volunteer),
 - 3 part time
 - 1 hired
- Previous participation of educational travel programs
 - Elderhostel (1-30)
 - Museum travel (4-12)
 - Alumni travel (1-3)

Proposed Grounded Theory Model





Motivation

■ To learn something new

- **I want to know about the world around me** and traveler's one of the way, why should I doubt about it? (Jane, 61).
- What do I expect from the travels is to be intellectually stimulated...
To challenge me more than anything else to challenge me (Mari,73).
- **I don't want limit myself** which is a shame because there is so much to see and do (Elisa, 74).
- learning is.... learning is like growing. I think there are two things that living creatures can do. They can grow or they can die and learning is growing so I am happy when I am learning because I know something that I didn't know before and that makes me a new person and **I'm always growing when I'm learning** (Susan, 70).



Motivation

■ The fear of dementia

- even in my retirement I have been taking university courses. It's what keeps my brain working. ... I am trying **to stimulate my brain and my memory**, so that when I am 85 years old I will be like I am now. It's very important to me (Peggy, 64).

■ Lack of time

- Because I expect I could **travel up to 75 years old...** if my health is allowed until then, I will travel more.... So that's why I now travel a lot across the world (Joan, 61).
- While I'm healthy, I would like to travel as much as I can ... I became an enthusiastic traveler since I realized there was **no enough time to travel** the world 10 years ago (Eddie, 68).



Getting Ready for the Trip

- I usually find books to **read about the history** of the place. Um..I **always gets maps**. So I know where I'm going and I usually also want to know something about the geology (Peggy, 64).
- Actually, and programs before you actually go are nice so I **always do a lot of reading before I go on a trip**, so that I have a better idea of what I'm going to be seeing. I think the more information you have going into it that way you've got a better frame of reference and the more whether it be lectures or guided tours, I think that makes it much better (Joan, 60).
- Elderhostel will send you a list of books that you might want **to read the books**. But you also **go to google** and you can ride in the name of the place and then you learn before you go. If I'm going to another country international travel, **I always learn to some of the language before I go**. (Susan, 70).



Structured Learning Experiences

■ Professional Guide

- I went back on an Elderhostel Tour three years ago. It was wonderful! Had such a great time, I learned so much! **Our guide was Ph.D. archeologist**, who had worked at some of the sites that she took us to. It was wonderful, fantastic! So that was very memorable to. **I would like to go back**. I would like to do that again (Eddie, 68).
- That's because we have done cruise, with Smithsonian, that kind of everybody tied together all of time. And you have **a staff that is specialized in whatever area that you are going to**. So, that's the reason of why, we chose to do those particular travel. (Jane, 61).
- My expectations of a trip leader is that **I will learn more detail than I can read**, just by, reading an encyclopedia (Peggy, 64).



Structured Learning Experiences

■ Learning resources

- That was very educational. **That particular ship had the largest library** afloat on there, so there was **a lot of research tools** in addition to the professors that were on (John, 76).
- This person is interested in this and this person is interested in that. .. We had lots of people every time we cruise along. **Somebody be on the star bird, somebody be on the bow, somebody be on the microphone**, you had an opportunity that you always have specialists around you (Jane, 60).
- The cruise ship has **lecturers in climate, geology, marine animals, birds**. So there were **seven lecturers, professors on the ship** who were giving us all this information. Everyday we would go off the ship onto an island, a volcanic island, or even the main island of Antarctica, and we would learn about the penguins, the seals, sea lions, whales... (Peggy, 64).



Structured Learning Experiences

■ The interaction with people within the travel group

- That's part of the enjoyment. Is ah, **meeting people from other parts, the country or even the world, who share a common interest in learning...** That is one of the big pleasures of Elderhostel, is being with people who are educated and well read and interested and really want to know things. (Peggy, 64).
- **Intellectual stimulation and discussion with other people**, which is not something if I am driving alone by myself... sharing with someone and then having them say wow, did you see that and I say oh! no I didn't see that (Lauren, 86).
- **I'm more of the discussion kind of person.** Once we attended—discussion does occur, but it might be after you've had—it might be around the dinner table at evening because you'll all eat together on those kinds of cruise (John, 76).



General Travel Experiences

■ The interaction with local people

- in the Caribbean that the people are on this very poor island ... they don't know that they're missing something that we think they're missing. But **they're perfectly happy without it, and so you see the world from a different point of view** (John, 76).
- When they invited us to dinner, they gave us the best food and they didn't have money to buy that food. They prepared it specially for us because we were their guest and when we saw that the difference between how people with a lot of money and those ordinary people with **not very much that the big difference in the culture** (Susan, 70).
- Their job was to take a sharp shovel and go to the steps of the buildings and chop the ice so people could walk up the stairs and you know these grandmas had arthritis in their arms and it was cold and it was very hard and that was **their life compared to my life. I thought "oh my goodness we are so spoiled"** (Edna, 68).
- And the people—in the beginning, the people were very warm to talk to. Now it's like "if you want to take my picture, pay me." It's become kind of abused. Travel **has—all of us have made their country a different country, and I don't like to see that happen** (Frank, 80).



Strengthen the Meaning of Their Experiences

- **When I travel, I keep a journal** so I can go back and, ah, refresh my memory. Because I often will give a slide lecture on a place where I have been so that **I can share the knowledge that I learned** (Peggy, 64).
- I am usually anticipating the next trip. And sometimes it changes my interests, sometimes I will want to **do more research** in a certain area after I get home (Jane, 61).
- I think it's very important **to share what you have learned** about the world with other people that you come back. (Susan, 70).



Impact on Their Lives

- They makes me braver about the next new things that I approach. Yeah I think it is **a matter of confidence** ...it also makes me more **appreciative**, more grateful for the things that I have (Jane, 61)
- It pleases me to understand the world, so much as I can, it pleases me. It gives me pleasure. **The understanding toward outside world** (Peggy, 64).
- I found that I change **more broad** less narrow, less critical **more accepting. It is a growth...** growth of oneself and a better **understanding about me and the world** (Lauren, 86).
- Travel is **growth and change**. It gives me a time to reflect, introspection, and think about something outside your everyday activity (John, 76).



Discussion

- Overall, for these older adults, the knowledge obtained through their travels appears to have boosted their confidence about their self and the world.
- The data also shows that the travel experience is not confined to the actual trip.
 - Fridgen (1984) proposed that the tourist encounters 5 phases in their vacations from anticipation, to the actual trip and then recollection.
 - Each phase represents something different for these educational travelers with the anticipation – reading and researching in preparation and the recollection phase seemingly as important as the actual trip.
 - Interestingly, Gilbert & Abdullah (2004) found that the recollection phase contributed to subjective well-being in vacationers a few months after their holiday
- Their trip based learning experiences were also enhanced and reinforced through the process of critical reflection.
 - Brookfield (1995) indicated learning in travel is the genre of reflection, evaluation or critical reflection.



Implications for Practice

- This study shows how much qualified tour guides play an important role in providing quality experiences for educational travelers.
 - A high quality of experience in educational travel programs combines the participants, the tour leader and the programmers (Bodger, 1998).
 - Educational travel programmers need to manage experiences quality in two contexts- the quality of the experiences and the quality of the education.

- Studying for the trip and their interest before and after their trips seems to make their travel experiences more meaningful and valuable.
 - It is recommended that such tours provide participants with relevant reading sources to help them prepare



Questions?

Thank you for your attention!