Silver tourism

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Abstract
The silver economy is an area of growth. Almost all economic sectors are expected to benefit from the silver economy. Sectors like cosmetics and fashion, smart homes, ITC, health services (including medical devices, pharmaceuticals and eHealth), fitness and wellness, robotics services, finance and insurance, safety, culture, education and skills, entertainment, transport and of course tourism are expected to gain the most from the emerging new field of economy. The elder generation’s enthusiasm for travel is growing rapidly. However, „senior tourism” is not yet a clearly defined segment. The elderly are a heterogeneous population group with different consumption demands that can only be met by a correspondingly differentiated range of products and services. As a result of the growing demand, senior tourists are foreseen to become a powerful consumer group in the near future. According to my research, they have their own preferences whilst travelling, and thus, the good understanding of their needs is becoming extremely important for silver tourism providers, especially because Europe is expected to be the biggest actor in the silver tourism market.

Keywords: age-friendly cities, medical tourism, silver tourism, silver economy, Hungary

JEL Classification: L83

1. Introduction
The population worldwide is showing an ageing tendency, both in developed and developing countries. Modern gerontology research is expected to increase average life expectancy, and as a result, the average standard of living is also foreseen to rise. According to scientific prognoses, the second largest region affected by ageing will be the European Union after Japan. After the grey hair of senior people, European Union experts have named this phenomenon of ageing “silver economy”. Silver economy is expected to affect almost every segment of the world economy in the near future. Of course, many scientists think that the existing economic models will be able to adapt to the upcoming trends, but the results of my research show that fundamental changes will be needed both at economic and social levels.

My study will focus on silver tourism, examining the aspects of tourism, demography, ITC, health sector, gerontology, life coaching and security technology. I have conducted interviews with experts of the field and then analysed their answers and opinions on silver tourism. My primary research consisted of surveys taken in 3 segments of the 50+ age group on their travel habits. As a result of my research, I aim to define the demand side of silver tourism, and I also wish to explore the forecasted trends and special characteristics of senior tourism in the near future.

1.1 The significance of silver economy
Silver economy has different perceptions worldwide. In Japan, the “robotic revolution” is considered as the only possible solution; meanwhile, in the Anglo-Saxon regions of the western hemisphere – in the USA, Australia and New Zealand -, silver economy is planned to be narrowed down to designated and easily controllable zones and city parts. In this aspect, the European Union has a clear and different vision of the possible solution, in line with the
historic principles of solidarity. Based on the fundamentals of social and economic cohesion and by linking generations together, the EU aims to introduce the latest results of gerontology research and innovation technology into the daily life of the elderly.

It is evident that the population of Europe is ageing (L. RÉDEI, 2006). The trend is at the same time a great challenge and a huge possibility for the people of the continent. Based on the analysis of various research results, experts of the European Union has started to develop new programmes that aim to offer new solutions and alternatives for those who are willing to participate in the programmes. The three main programmes: Active and Assistant Living Programme (AAL), Horizon 2020 and European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP AHA) bring together market operators, high level business representatives and experts of the non-profit sector to work together and to get to know each other’s demands better. As the increase in the number of senior people is well predictable, the first step was to name the segment by creating the term “silver economy”. Silver economy includes the total economic activity of the 50+ population with all its expenditure-related products and demands. Actors that wish to fulfil the new market niche had already started experimental projects within the frameworks of the so called Living Lab programme that aims to assess senior consumers’ demands under controlled circumstances and develop the best solutions and services for them. Among EU countries, the most advanced projects are in Lãnsi-Suomi, Finland, but new innovative experimental projects can also be found in Hungary; e.g. the Park Royal Resorts in Parádsasvár, where privately financed new innovative experimental projects targeting senior people are at the beginning of their implementation phase.

Figure 1. Top Ten Ageing Countries 2015-2030

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<tr>
<th>2015</th>
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<td>10. USA</td>
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Source: own edition

1.2 Segments of the silver economy

The next figure shows that the spending willingness of senior people affects almost every economic sector. As indicated by the figure, elderly people represent a huge market segment; however, marketing experts had not yet exploited this possibility.
The age group above 50 cannot be considered as a homogeneous group of elderly people; on the contrary, they can be divided into distinct heterogeneous groups. Age is a main distinctive feature: there can be decades of difference, which means that we can talk about “younger” and “older” senior people. Beyond this, there are other differentiating factors like gender, cultural background, acquired skills, life experience or health status. Taking all the factors in account, we can say that senior people are different.

In response to the challenges of the “greying century”, new scientific fields have emerged. There are important researches going on in order to have a greater understanding of biological processes related to ageing. The science of gerontology examines the chronological changes in human life processes that affect everybody equally. For example, it is a general statement that the ageing of the body is a normal biological process, not necessarily accompanied by pathological lesions or diseases. However, the biological processes of natural ageing increase the vulnerability to diseases and accidents. With ageing, the body mass decreases, the movement ability decreases, cellular loss becomes continuous, the pain threshold becomes lower, blood pressure increases, lung capacity declines and muscular strength decreases; service providers must take all these aspects into account when developing targeted services for the elderly. Hereditary factors, environmental impacts, personal lifestyles developed in younger years, behaviour, social status, emotional and cognitive development, moral and ethical values and the accessibility to quality free time all affect ageing and life expectancy (IMRE, 2007).

The most important results of gerontology research are:

- human life expectancy can be expanded up to 150 years, of which around 30 years can be achieved by healthy lifestyle, genetic modifications and implant technologies;
- intellectual performance can be enhanced by chemical, psychological and psycho-biological methods;
- the defensive-protective operation of the immune system can be influenced and modified by targeted dietetic programmes;
- the role function of elderly age is transforming, but there is no general pattern of ageing, because diseases affect life quality.

Different risk factors can emerge at any stage during the ageing process, but there is a so-called “healthy ageing process” (CZIGLÉR, 2000). According to this, elderly people become ill because they are affected by a disease, and not because they are old. Health issues directly related to ageing are more like movement coordination disorders, lack of stamina or dementia (HALMOS, 2002). I think that elderly people are gradually starting to realise the importance of a healthy lifestyle, and there is a tendency among them to open up towards regular physical activity and physical-emotional-intellectual harmony, and as a result, a higher level of empathy will emerge towards them.

1.3 Senior friendly tourism scene

According to present tendencies, the process of ageing goes on in parallel with today’s trends of urbanisation. As a result, the population “urbanises” from rural and peripheral regions towards central areas (ENYEDI, 2002). City management bodies and urban planners will have to cope with huge challenges in the near future, when the development of senior-friendly spaces becomes a priority. The changes will greatly affect local people, living environments, existing road and pavement systems, utility and transport services, community spaces and parks, workplaces, shopping facilities, doctors’ offices, schools, hospitals, public institutions and the whole settlement area and everyday life (PISKÓTI, 2012). The newly introduced term of senior-friendly accessibility will not only refer to a space developed especially for elderly people, but it will also mean a more user-friendly environment for the whole population. The decreased level of noise and electro-smog, the re-design of allotted passing time at crosswalks, the allocation of covered benches and resting places, the targeted distribution of public toilets and the re-organisation of the crossings of bicycle routes and pavements used by the elderly are all important innovations which will have a positive response from the senior citizens first. Such spaces with a higher level of safety will not only be suitable for the elderly: children, young single women and disabled people will also benefit from the changes. Safety is also a priority when it comes to tourism – as a matter of fact, it is the most important factor of decision making about destinations.

The definition of tourism space requires caution (MICHALKÓ ET AL, 2007). In terms of settlement marketing, the existing image of a destination is extremely hard to change (PISKÓTI, 2000). The implementation of senior friendly tourism scenes is a long-term process where the transformation of urban spaces is only part of the development. According to tourism experts, the possible innovative brand of „designed for older people” will spread only gradually.

Based on my research, the first step in the development of a senior friendly destination should be the quantitative clarification of the following questions:

- To what extent can a local community be senior-friendly?
- To what extent do local actors support senior-friendly development?
- To what extent can a tourism destination be senior-friendly?
- Which one is more probable: senior tourism or senior-friendly tourism?
1.5 Silver tourism

The older generation is getting increasingly more committed to tourism. Members of the “silent generation” (KOTLER ET AL., 2012) have significant spendable income and is interested in exploring the world. A typical group of them is the Baby-boom generation, born between the late 1940s and mid-1960s. They typically buy travel packages, put an emphasis on the length of their stay at the destination, are interested in other cultures and open towards novel gastronomy trends.

From another point of view, senior tourists cannot be defined as a homogenous group. This is partially due to the fact that the age group of senior citizens (generally referring to 50+ people) itself consists of different generations. A two-generation model of parent and child(ren) can easily belong to the same group; in regions with higher life expectancy, even three generations: grandparent-parent-child(ren) can fall into the same category.

Figure 3. Phases of Aging

![Phase of Aging](image)

Source: own edition

In the figure above, five different groups are defined based on their age. Of course, other group definitions are also possible, but my statements below were developed on the basis of this differentiation, where the following conclusions are true in case of every group.

General characteristics of silver tourists:

- they have sufficient spendable income,
- according to demographic statistics, the majority of them are women,
- safety is a priority to them, and they will avoid catastrophe-struck regions,
- because they have a lot of free time, they can travel in any season,
- they are willing to expand their time spent at the destination, even at multiple times,
- they can be considered as “curious” tourists,
- they require more communication,
- they will seek medical and health services,
- they take each other’s opinion and recommendations into account seriously,
- regarding transport, accessibility is more important for them than the means of travel.

The list above clearly shows that senior tourists require personal care and relationships. This indicates that they will prefer the customer-centred services of classic travel agencies over the information dump of internet sites.

Based on the results of my research, the following tourism sectors will be the most popular among silver tourists:

- medical and health tourism,
- visiting friend and relatives,
- luxury trips,
- luxury cruises,
- wellness/recreation/rehabilitation and life coaching,
- milestone tourism focusing on celebrating anniversaries,
- generation trips (grandparents with grandchildren),
- bucket list trips
- sex tourism (DÁVID ET AL, 2008),
- holiday clubs, time-sharing,
- trips including anti-aging services, organ transplantation or genetic therapy

An interesting finding of my result is that none of the interviewees was interested in getting to know other religions and religious habits. Great expectations used to be set for religious tourism related to visits to different holy places; the current scenario is probably a consequence of today’s widespread migration situation that has resulted in a decreased sense of safety among senior people.

1.5 Hungary’s position in the silver tourism market

Hungary has a great potential in the silver economy, and with successful management, the country can break into the world market as a destination. The Hungarian society itself is an ageing population that will force decision makers to act rapidly, resulting in a huge potential where economic sub-sectors, multinational companies will be able to test their developments and innovations in a smaller regional market. In comparison with the neighbouring regions, Hungary has excellent environmental conditions, can serve as a tourism gateway and offers cost-effective solutions. The demographic statistics of former political emigrants and the amount of foreign state pensions paid for alien citizens in Hungary indicates that there is already a significant group of so-called “social senior tourists” living in the national silver economy. This means that Hungary is already a popular destination, where elderly people are willing to habitually spend their income received from another country.

Taking into account the characteristics and niches of the tourism sectors of Hungary, the most significant growth is expected in medical and health tourism among senior visitors. Health tourism has now become a constantly developing tourism product with a great innovation potential. The main attractions of the product are health improvement and general well-being (MICHALKÓ, 2012). Because the market of the product offers services both for healthy consumers and those willing to be healthier, the terms “wellness”, “prevention”, “therapy”, “rehabilitation” and “fitness” have become widespread and common expressions among the
whole population. Regardless of this phenomenon, the two sub-sectors of health tourism still operate unchanged. Medical tourism offers curative services, while wellness tourism attracts visitors who wish to sustain their healthy condition and well-being. In case of senior tourists, both sub-sectors can provide beneficial services to sustain good health and prevent diseases. It is a special Hungarian feature that – to some extent - both sub-sectors of health tourism are connected to the excellent and easily accessible thermal waters. When examining international trends, it is clear that in other countries, these sub-sectors are connected to different factors, both in terms of service providers and consumers.

The newest wellness trends of health tourism do not require on-site thermal water resources, because thanks to modern industrial technologies, the water does not leave the external operational site and the whole water capacity is recycled, in line with the requirements of sustainability. In the frameworks of international health services, the greatest income of spas does not come from entrance fees, but from related services like plastic surgery, cardiovascular health services, ophthalmology, fertility therapies and dental services that can also be obtained separately. Future innovation and development objectives have far overcome the possibilities of today’s health tourism offers; regional services like surrogate mother programmes in India, or genetic therapies in Russia and China are already advertised as health/medical tourism services. These segments raise serious questions about general and medical ethics and initiate sincere professional debates.

2. Conclusion

My research focused one of the most exciting phenomena of today: the ageing of western civilisation and its complex effects on tourism. I have analysed the significance of the silver economy, examined its effects, and as a result it was clarified that it has an impact on almost the whole economy. During the “greying century”, the Living Lab experimental programmes were started in the European Union, implementing complex developments and exemplary models focusing solutions in connection with the ageing process. Finland plays a leading role in the experimental research, but the planning process of Park Royal Resorts in Parádsasvár, Hungary had also been finished, opening the way for the practice-oriented implementation of silver tourism innovation. Marketing experts did not use to consider senior people as a significant market factor; moreover, the group was identified as a homogenous segment. Our research results have shown that based on numerous variants, instead of one large homogenous group, senior people should be divided into various heterogonous groups. Thanks to new scientific fields like gerontology, our knowledge on the process of ageing and its principles is constantly increasing. These results are extremely important for silver tourism professionals because the new findings can prepare them for the upcoming challenges of the market. The market of senior tourists represents a key economic segment that has general characteristics from many aspects. Today’s tourism destinations are not prepared to receive elderly visitors. First, settlement marketing experts should realise the importance of implementing senior-friendly developments. Through tourism, the whole society can benefit from such improvements, and thus, the purpose of general “well-being” will be served. The tourism sector has the potential to strengthen its sectors through development, and the innovation of existing capacities will instantly be able to serve the demands of silver tourism. Based on its characteristics, Hungary can become a regional destination country, especially in the fields of medical and health tourism. Taking into account the existing medical capacities and international trends, further specialisation towards the needs of the elderly will be required in order to keep the country’s competitiveness. As for the possible future trends of silver tourism, I think that the most successful senior tourism products will be those complex
developments that require longer length of stay and consist of health tourism services combined with innovative packages of nursing care and monitoring services.

**References**


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