



## Aged people and tourism

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### **Abstract.**

*The increase in the elderly population is a phenomenon of growing importance with various repercussions on the economic side, both in terms of costs that society has to bear from a social and health care point of view, and in terms of opportunities for the various economic sectors that can see the third age as a possible market. The change in attitudes towards ageing has led to an increase in the proportion of older people who are actively living in the third age. Travelling, visiting new places and/or spending time away from home, even abroad, are activities that are now part of the lives of older people, at least those with an adequate income level. Consequently, the elderly have become potential users of the tourism sector: this article attempts to outline the dimensions and characteristics of this phenomenon.*

**Keywords: ageing, tourism, ageing tourism.**

### **1. Introduction**

Thanks to improved living conditions and medical breakthroughs, life expectancy has increased, leading to an increase in the number of people over 64 compared to other age groups, partly due to a reduction in the birth rate. This phenomenon is global, affecting all continents, and is accompanied by a progressive decrease in population except in Africa. Globally, the over-64s represent 9.4% of the population in 2021, i.e. just over 740 million inhabitants, not distributed equally across the various continents (Fig. 1): Europe (19.3%) and North America (17.1%) have the highest concentration of elderly people, while in Africa only 3.6% are over 64.

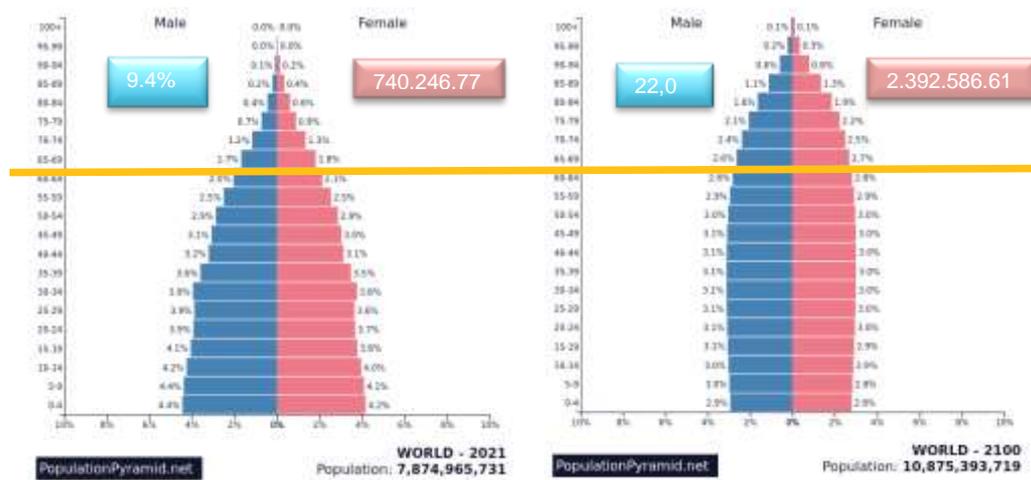


Figure 1: World population ageing 2021-2100 (Source: PopulationPyramid.net)

This picture is destined to change dramatically by the end of the century, when the over-64s will reach 22%, i.e. 2,392,586,618 individuals worldwide, and there will be an approximation, in percentage terms, between the various continents (Figure 1). In Asia the over-64s will triple, in Africa they will quadruple, while in Europe and North America they will account for almost a third of the respective populations, which will, however, be smaller in absolute terms than the giants Asia and Africa (Fig. 2 and 3).

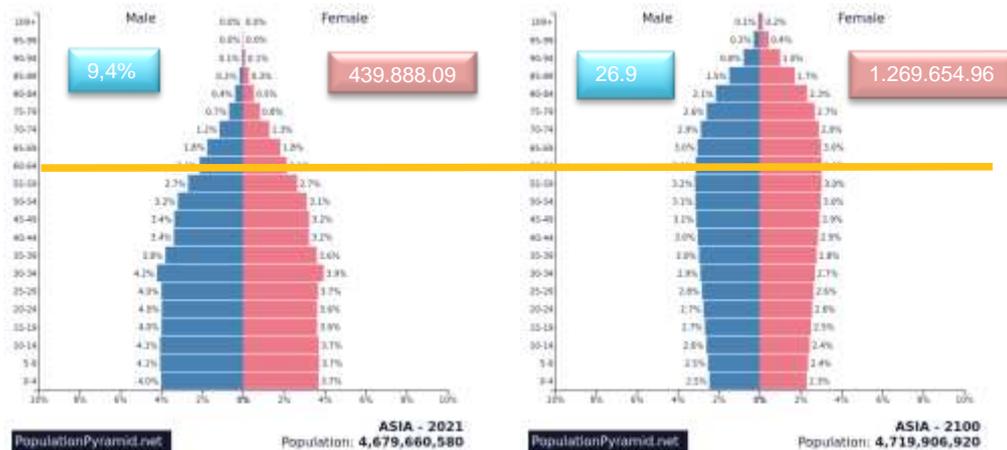


Fig. 2: Asian population ageing 2021-2100 (Source: PopulationPyramid.net)

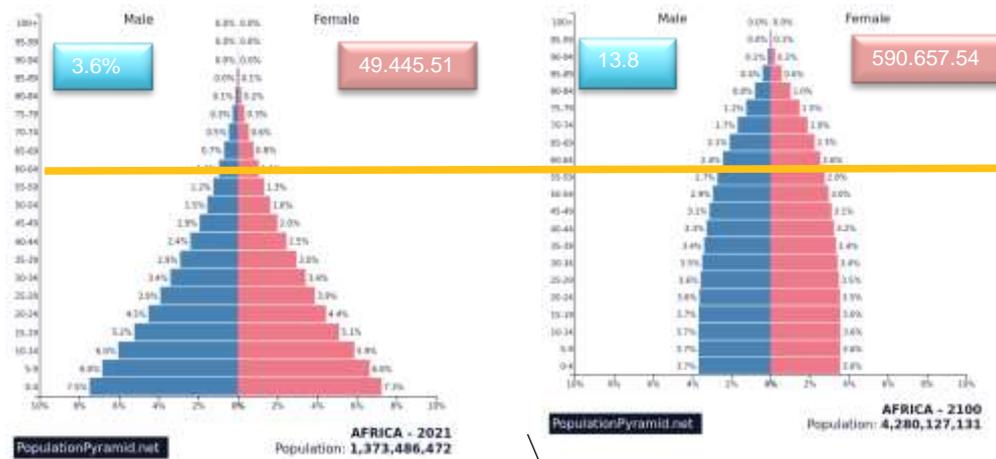


Fig. 3: African population ageing 2021-2100 (Source: PopulationPyramid.net)

The ageing of the population will be a major challenge for social and health systems, especially for developing countries if they fail to meet the expected economic targets. But, at the same time, it will represent an increasingly large market not only for health and service providers but also for other sectors, at least in advanced developing countries. The tourism sector, among others, has for some time been preparing offers aimed at the elderly, trying to meet the needs of this particular type of tourist and taking advantage of the different attitude towards ageing that is spreading not only in developed countries.

## 2. The evolution of the concept of the elderly

Attitudes towards old age have changed dramatically over the last century. This change first occurred in the advanced developing countries where the increase in the elderly population was first observed. These are the countries in which technological development and the availability of better living conditions, increasingly effective drugs and adequate health care systems have led to a lengthening of average life expectancy with a consequent increase in the elderly population (helped by the concomitant reduction in births). The growth in life expectancy has not only increased the number of elderly people and, consequently, the need for social and health services, but has also implemented the number of healthy, retired individuals with a lot of free time on their hands and still willing to do something for themselves and/or others. The approach to old age has therefore changed from a relatively short period between the end of productive tasks and the individual's death to a period of at least 20-25 years on average, most of which are characterised by a good quality of life and the possession of substantial residual resources.

These changes have attracted the attention of the WHO, which in recent decades has stimulated the spread of the concept of active ageing, a label that suggests a

proactive attitude even in this period of life: carrying out activities and keeping intellectually and physically active are behaviours that have a positive impact on health and quality of life to the extent that they positively influence the level of self-sufficiency of individuals (WHO, 2002)

In this perspective, older people are encouraged to remain active, to commit their resources both to the benefit of their families (e.g. by helping to care for their grandchildren) and to the benefit of the community (e.g. by engaging in voluntary work) but also to devote time to themselves, to their interests, cultivating hobbies and passions (Paul, Ribeiro, Teixeira, 2012).

Even though the WHO has abandoned the centrality of the concept of activity and introduced the vision of healthy ageing, activity has been included in the broader concept of healthy ageing and is considered inseparable from the possibility of having a self-sufficient and satisfying old age (WHO, 2021)

### **3. Possible attitudes when entering the third age**

People over 64 do not cope in the same way with the fairly long period of life that remains to them. Different attitudes to coping with old age depend on one's life story and personality characteristics. We can identify, albeit somewhat crudely, four different ways of dealing with old age after retirement which are mostly attributable to groups of people with certain characteristics and experiences.

- Resignment
  - people who show this attitude have frequently had a long working life, a basic education, few non-working interests, and have no family members to care for. They struggle to make sense of retirement years and, after a sense of freedom from work, they set up routines in search of socialization.
- Reconversion
  - this type of approach to old age is typical of medium-high profile workers, for whom work has been central to their life, leisure time can be distressing and nursing/caregiving activities are not satisfactory. If possible, they continue to work as consultants or engage themselves in voluntary work.
- Displacement
  - This is an example of effective coping. The retiree directs his or her resources towards volunteering, nursing/caregiving or activities that meet his or her desire to do, learn about, and deepen. Usually those who adopt this approach have a good cultural background and have cultivated hobbies/interests during their working life.
- Reinvestment
  - Reinvestment is another type of effective coping. The re-investors have cultivated interests relatively far removed from their main job and see retirement as an opportunity to make sense of those interests

dedicating the time now free from work commitments to deepening and developing interests that have been sacrificed to work for too long.

In all cases the importance of personality characteristics and level of education emerges.

Of the four typologies indicated above, the last two seem to have the most interesting cultural and motivational characteristics for those involved in the construction of tourism offers and are frequently associated, at least in developed countries, with economic availability such as to be able to consider travel, inside and outside national borders, as a way of spending part of the time available once the work cycle is over.

The prerequisites for being a potential leisure/cultural enrichment traveller are:

- having quotas of free time and not having undertaken (or having done so in moderation) caregiving commitments;
- have a propensity for discovery;
- be curious about the world;
- have a fair level of self-sufficiency;
- have an economic level that allows them to spend on recreational activities.

As we have seen, retirement frees up a substantial part of one's time, time that has to be somehow 'filled with content': if the elderly person does not let himself be swallowed up by looking after his grandchildren to help his/her own children, he/she has at his/her disposal substantial amounts of time that allow him to engage in various types of social, cultural and hobby activities but also allow him to undertake trips to get to know unfamiliar parts of the world or to spend periods of relaxation and health care in tourist resorts.

#### **4. Motivations and needs of the elderly tourist**

The increase in the elderly population and the arrival on the markets of large numbers of people with time to spare and a fair amount of money have not escaped the attention of commercial operators in general and tourism operators in particular. Since the 1960s, with the explosion of mass tourism and the increase in attention to social issues, the elderly population, which was numerically much smaller than it is today, has been able to take advantage of facilities for access to climatic stays partially or totally paid for by the municipalities where they live. Their function was to improve the health conditions of the elderly to whom they were offered. The increase in the elderly population was not matched by an increase in the public resources available and, consequently, it was necessary to introduce restrictions on access to these benefits (e.g., by granting them only to those with a very low income). This

meant that more and more elderly people were excluded from the possibility of taking advantage of climatic stays and, moreover, the resorts that generally hosted the elderly were relatively close to their municipalities of residence (today, after the pandemic experience, we would call it proximity tourism) and the host structures chosen tended to be among the cheapest in order to allow public authorities to satisfy as many potential users as possible. Taking advantage of this change, many international tour operators have designed tourist packages for the elderly, offering destinations and locations that are more attractive than the climate holidays offered by the public authorities at accessible costs that are much lower than those usually charged. This has been possible, if we consider, for example, third age tourism in Northern European countries, by choosing distant destinations and medium-high level locations in low season periods. This strategic choice met on the one hand the demand of the elderly for climatic stays in more attractive and high-level locations, and on the other hand the need of hoteliers to avoid periods of closure of facilities in the low season. In order to avoid this risk, stays in 4/5-star structures were proposed, at lower category prices, guaranteeing the same quality of services as the category to which the structures belong.

As the proportion of elderly people in developed countries increased, this form of climate tourism gradually lost its purely socio-healthcare character, becoming a form of tourism aimed at people with no time constraints to enjoy a holiday, as is the case for the elderly. The success of these senior stays did not replace the climatic stays financed or co-financed by the municipalities, at least in Italy, but helped to redistribute demand.

But the elderly has different needs from the rest of the population and the tourist offer must take this into account (Šimková., Holzner, 2014). The organisation of charter flights, the provision of services to and from the hotel, the presence of dedicated services, health facilities and the possibility of keeping active are now part of the tourist packages dedicated to the third age.

##### **5. What can we say about elderly tourists?**

The elderly tourist has different behaviours, preferences, and attitudes from younger tourist, and this partially directs the elderly's choice of destinations, period, locations. This partly depends on greater economic availability (the average holiday duration values are calculated on data referring to tourists whose incomes have a rather wide range), and also on a lesser propensity to move around during the holiday which would induce the elderly to stay in the same

place for the whole duration of the trip. Although affordable, the tourism offer for the elderly, with the exception of climatic stays co-financed by municipalities, is aimed at people with a fair amount of money. Although income frequently depends on the level of education, knowledge of languages other than the mother tongue is not widespread among the elderly, which seems to be the reason why this particular subpopulation of tourists prefers national destinations. The awareness of being in a phase of life more prone to fragility and potential health problems, does not seem to influence the preference for autonomous housing solutions, owned by oneself or by relatives and friends as opposed to rented locations. When the elderly person chooses an accommodation facility, he/she is motivated by the intention of spending a period without having to worry about looking after a house and preparing food and having the certainty of being able to count on immediate help in case of illness. Even if the elderly travel mainly to visit relatives and friends, there is no shortage of holidays in places famous for their natural beauty or in cities of art: the elderly tourist perceives the holiday as a chance to have fun and satisfy their curiosity. Compared to the average tourist, the elderly makes fewer trips during the year, but their stays are longer: this is probably due to the combination of two factors, the wide availability of free time that allows no external limits, apart from economic resources to the duration of the holiday and the stress that is associated with a trip. It is precisely the wide availability of time that makes the elderly travel throughout the year, not only to take advantage of the low costs of the low season but also to avoid the frenetic pace of the usual holiday periods, the crowding of tourist resorts, the greater difficulties in using public or private transport, due to the masses of tourists who move around the world in realistically restricted periods of the year. It would be wrong to imagine that old age is a carefree period in which everyone can indulge their desires and travel the world: in addition to economic availability, physical and mental health also has an impact on mobility for tourism. In fact, more than 50% of over-65s do not travel for health reasons or lack of motivation frequently caused by health problems.

All accommodation facilities are now equipped with facilities for people with disabilities, but those that are proposing themselves as venues for third age tourism are also implementing personal services to make it easier for people over 60 to enjoy a holiday.

But the interest in third age tourism also stems from a cross-cutting characteristic of elderly tourists in different countries: the tendency to spend more on holidays than younger people do. Although, as mentioned, not all the

elderly population is able to afford a holiday, those who can are more inclined to spend on services and entertainment, increasing interest in this particular segment of tourism.

## 6. Conclusions

The elderly represents a steadily increasing share of the population, a part that represents not only potential social and health problems but also a resource in several respects, not least from an economic point of view. In advanced developing countries, most elderly people enjoy a good quality of life, have 15-20 years of active life after retirement ahead of them, and some of them have income levels that make them attractive consumers for various business sectors. Among these, tourism can, considering the elderly as potential customers, invest in dedicated tourism offers that take advantage of low season periods, offer dedicated services and attract the spending capacity and propensity to spend of this particular age group. The possibility of spending holidays even in low season favours the process of deseasonalisation, making it possible to reduce/eliminate the closure of resorts and, at the same time, offers high quality holidays at relatively low costs, accessible even to the elderly with a low average retirement income.

The changed attitude towards old age has changed the way of living the final phase of existence and implies a similar change on the part of the market, which must meet new needs and new expectations on the part of the elderly that are therefore a valuable resource for the tourism industry.

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