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Senior tourism constraints in Mexico: a sociocultural approach

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Abstract: Research on senior tourism has been developed mainly in countries of the Global North and has considerably ignored the sociocultural contexts in which tourism constraints are configured. From a sociocultural perspective, this study explores senior tourism constraints in Mexico. Through in-depth interviews with 16 older people, it was revealed that interpersonal constraints are deeply associated with the meanings and cultural value of family in Mexico. Due to its centrality in Mexican culture, family functions as a fundamental factor in tourism motivations, experiences, constraints, and facilitators. It is concluded, on the one hand, that a chronological criterion is too restrictive to understand the tourist experiences of the elderly and, on the other, that sociocultural factors can play a central role in constraints on senior tourism.

Keywords: senior tourism; senior tourism constraints; tourism constraints; tourism motivations; tourism experience; tourism facilitators; senior tourism in Mexico; senior tourism in the Global South; tourism and family in Mexico; tourism in Mexico.

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1 Introduction

The population of older adults in the world has been increasing in recent years and will continue to grow in the coming decades. By 2020, the population of people aged 65 or over was estimated at 727 million worldwide, and an increase in the population is expected from 9.3% in 2020 to 16.0% in 2050 (UN, 2020). Although the aging of the population (i.e., distribution of the population towards more advanced ages) began in rich countries, currently the most significant changes are experienced in poor countries, estimating that by 2050 two thirds of the world's population over 60 years of age will live in low – and middle-income countries (WHO, 2022). Therefore, the greatest difficulties in caring for the elderly population will be experienced mainly in poor countries, including Latin America, where the phenomenon of population aging is advancing rapidly (UN, 2019).

Tourism and other forms of leisure play an important role in the older adult population. Tourism is a means of relaxation, access to culture and a way of individual and collective fulfillment (UNWTO, 1999). However, for older adults, tourism, and leisure in general, have particular relevance; it is a viable means that contributes to raising their quality of life (Kim et al., 2015) and it provides older people with meaning or a sense of purpose and therefore enhances sentiments of self-identity and self-worth (Dann, 2002). Furthermore, leisure in general and tourism in particular can potentially contribute to reduce depression among aged population (Mukherjee, 2021). At the institutional level, the importance of leisure activities is recognised and promoted. In 1991, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the principles in favour of the elderly and urges countries to introduce the principle of self-fulfilment in their national programmes, which contemplates access to society's recreational resources (UN, nd).

However, older people's access to leisure and tourism is limited in some countries. The elderly population is one of the vulnerable populations, and their vulnerability and living conditions in general are largely defined by the economic and sociocultural conditions of each context (Inapam, 2019). Much of the research on senior tourism constraints in developed countries has focused on chronological, biological or physiological factors (i.e., age and health) (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002). However, old age is also a sociocultural construct that influences the experiences of older people. As López Gómez and Marín Baena (2016) point out, the ideas, beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices, attitudes, and social and family relationships held on the constructs of aging and old age will shape the social reality in which older adults operate. Therefore, the conception of tourism for older adults as a sociocultural construct – rather than as a market segment – can lead to a broader understanding of their tourist experiences. However, sociocultural approaches to the study of senior tourism are very scarce in the international literature.

The vast majority of research on senior tourism has been developed in the context of industrialised countries, particularly in North America, Australia and Europe, implying

little representation of senior tourism in Latin America and other regions of the world (Hung and Lu, 2016). The structural, economic and social conditions that developed countries offer in favour of the elderly are different from those of developing countries (Santhalingam et al., 2022); for example, the fact that older adults in Western cultures are released from family responsibilities (children) at an early age facilitates their participation in tourism (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002). This situation is not general in Latin American countries, specifically Mexico, where older adults frequently assume the social role of caregivers for grandchildren (Méndez, 2022). Therefore, the existing studies and conclusions regarding the experiences and constraints of tourism of the elderly generated in countries of the Global North cannot be representative of the contexts of the South. In Mexico, research on tourism for the elderly is practically non-existent (Tovar Cabañas and Vázquez Espinosa, 2023). Therefore, the justification of this study lies in the need to generate knowledge on senior tourism derived specifically from a country of the Global South.

From a sociocultural perspective, this study aimed to explore the motivations, constraints, and experiences of senior tourists in Mexico, a socioeconomic and cultural context that has been scarcely incorporated in the Anglo-Saxon literature. The main research questions that guided the study were: What are the main tourism and travel motivations and constraints of Mexican senior tourists? How are senior tourists' motivations, experiences and constraints associated with the broader sociocultural context of Mexico? In this vein, the goal of this research is to advance the development of social scientific knowledge on senior tourism in general, and its motivations, experiences and restrictions in Mexico in particular.

Bearing in mind that the significance of travel and tourism on the well-being of older tourists has received limited attention not only within leisure and tourism studies, but also within the aging research agenda in general (Patterson and Balderas, 2020), this study contributes to international research on the travel experiences of senior tourists, evidencing the relevance of the sociocultural context in the definition of tourist constraints. Likewise, it makes visible the tourism constraints as experienced by older adults in countries of the Global South.

2 Senior tourism and tourist constraints

Tourism by older adults has been commonly referred to as senior tourism (Santos and Santos, 2021), gerontological tourism (Tovar Cabañas and Vázquez Espinosa, 2023), elderly tourism (Kim et al., 2015), silver traveller (Silver Travel Advisor, 2021), among others. However, these concepts have been poorly clarified (Alén González et al., 2010). Many conceptions of old age are based on different chronological ages and on retirement without considering the sociocultural context in which these ages are configured, as well as the condition of retirement and its meaning. Senior tourism has been reported for decades as one of the growing sectors within the global tourism industry (Alén González et al., 2010; Cleaver et al., 1999). The tourism potential of this segment of the population is due not only to the accelerated aging of the world population, but also to the supposed availability of more free time, reduced family obligations and the purchasing power associated with a retirement pension (Ward, 2014). According to Steeves (2021), it is estimated that older adults travel an average of 4 to 5 times per year, and this segment of

the population is expected to reach 2 billion trips per year by 2050. This, of course, is only a partial representation of the older adult population in the world.

The generalisation of these conditions to the older adult population in the context of poor countries should be done with great caution. Many of the studies on the senior tourism market have been based on the conditions of retired people (Cleaver et al., 1999; Filipe et al., 2021). Retirement and the pension as a consequence is a final result of formal employment. In this way, in many poor countries, retirement and pension are a benefit that only people with a formal job have access to. However, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2008), almost 70% of the population in developing countries are employed in the informal economy, which restricts their access to a pension. In addition, the quality of the pension systems in the world shows significant inequality; while countries like Iceland, the Netherlands and Denmark have a retirement with a robust and first-class income system, countries such as Indonesia, India and Thailand have pension systems with great weaknesses (Mercer, 2022). Given the need to continue working, for many older people in poor countries the availability of time and income is a fallacy. As a result, while for some countries the availability of time and pension are a facilitator of senior tourism, for others it is a structural constraint. Therefore, the economic and social conditions experienced by the elderly population in poor and rich countries define their participation in tourism differently.

Having said this, senior tourism has been understood as ‘one of the biggest growth and most important markets in the tourism industry, turning it into the engine of growth for tourism’ [Alén et al., (2016), p.304]. The economic importance of senior tourism has particularly been associated with its potential to reduce the disadvantages of the typical seasonality of tourism (Filipe et al., 2021). In this type of conceptions, it is notable that senior tourism has been understood and studied from an economic and market perspective (Cleaver et al., 1999; Santos and Santos, 2021); to a large extent, senior tourism has been seen mainly as a population group for leisure consumption. However, it has been postulated that the senior tourism market demands unrealistic ideals of successful aging and has negative repercussions for those who are unable to adhere to active and productive lifestyles (Stončikaitė, 2022). Thus, to understand the psychological, emotional and social importance of tourism for the elderly, senior tourism, like old age, needs to be understood as a phenomenon that builds and is built socially and culturally (Hung and Lu, 2016).

Due to its relevance in some countries of the world, senior tourism has become an important research topic. Several topics have been studied, including, for example, market segmentation (Ward, 2014), senior tourism and successful aging (Stončikaitė, 2022), memorable experiences and life satisfaction (Sic et al., 2021), quality of life (Kim et al., 2015), psychological well-being (Milman, 1998), senior tourist behaviour (Nielsen, 2014) and travel constraints and coping strategies (Kazeminia et al., 2013). Recognising the heterogeneity of the population, some studies have focused on specific groups of senior tourism such as older gay men (Hughes and Deutsch, 2010) and, from feminist perspectives, older women (Small, 2003). The study of tourist motivations and constraints in particular have made up a significant part of the research on senior tourism. Existing research has revealed that the senior tourist motivations are varied, including rest, relaxation, seeing new places, escape, learning, exploration, spiritual and social enrichment, entertainment, family and friends, physical exercise and self-fulfillment (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002; Guinn, 1980; Ward, 2014).

Using quantitative methods, and based on travel motivations, some studies have identified groups within retired senior tourism, including nostalgics, friendlies, learners, and escapists (Cleaver et al., 1999), or enthusiasts, cultural explorers, escapists and spiritual travellers (Ward, 2014). This suggests that the population of older adults is a heterogeneous group (Santos and Santos, 2021). In this regard, Fleischer and Pizam (2002) argue that the motivations and experiences of senior tourism are varied and depend to a large extent on age, gender and state of health and, as we argue in this study, on the specific sociocultural context, hence the need to study senior tourism in diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

Social research has shown that the participation of individuals in tourism, and leisure in general, is influenced by constraining factors. In the field of tourism, constraints not only determine the probability of travelling, but also the way in which individuals travel, the choice and avoidance of destinations, and the participation in activities during the trip (Kazeminia et al., 2013). According to Crawford and Godbey (1987), these restrictions are classified as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. These authors claim that intrapersonal constraints involve psychological states and individual characteristics, such as fear, anxiety, stress, depression, and beliefs, to name a few. For their part, interpersonal restrictions are the result of travellers' interactions with other people; the lack of a travel companion is an example of an interpersonal constraint that significantly influences travel and leisure activities (Gilbert and Hudson, 2000). Structural constraints comprise the factors that are located in the broader context of individuals and, therefore, are factors that individuals cannot directly influence; lack of money and limited time, as well as travel costs and destination characteristics (Nyaupane and Andereck, 2008) are examples of this type of constraints.

Tourism constraints are experienced differently depending on the social group. Gao and Kerstetter (2016) argue that constraints are based on factors such as age, gender, and race. Social minorities and vulnerable groups tend to experience constraints on tourism more seriously (Monterrubio et al., 2020; Shores et al., 2007). Thus, as a social group with specific conditions and characteristics, older adults experience their own constraints. Tourism constraints have been one of the topics frequently addressed in senior tourism studies (Hsu and Kang, 2009; Kazeminia et al., 2013). Although retirement can act as a facilitator (Hsu and Kang, 2009), structural factors such as health and income associated with age tend to significantly influence the tourism activities of older adults (Fleischer and Pizam, 2002). Unlike structural constraints, intrapersonal and interpersonal factors have been largely ignored (Kazeminia et al., 2013). Limited research has revealed that interpersonal factors such as lack of partners and friends and related barriers to spouse preferences or widowhood also influence the participation of older adults in tourism (Kazeminia et al., 2013). While existing research has led to an understanding of senior tourism constraints in developed nations, social, economic and cultural variations in other contexts call for further research in less developed countries (Hung and Lu, 2016).

3 The elderly population in Mexico

By 2022, the population of people aged 60 and over in Mexico was estimated at almost 18 million, representing 14% of the country's total population (INEGI, 2022). By the year 2050, it is estimated that one third of the Mexican population will be made up of older adults (Tapia, 2018). A little more than 6 million (approximately 30%) of older

adults make up the economically active population of the country. However, of the total economically active older adult population, 70% works in the informal sector (INEGI, 2022). The informal economy places older adults in a condition of greater vulnerability, since informal work places them in a situation of social disadvantage, lack of protection and recognition, as well as exclusion from the benefits of national public policies (Monterrubio, 2022).

In Mexico there is considerable inequality among the older adult population in terms of pensions. Only a third of the people aged 65 or over have access to a contributory pension (i.e., an economic benefit as a protective action of social security) while a little more than half (55.7%) of the same population segment have pension from social programmes. Although these figures suggest that most of the elderly population in Mexico enjoy a pension, the economic value of such pensions is significantly limited in most cases; while older adults with a contributory pension receive an average of approximately \$7,362 MXN (416 USD) per month, the rest of the pensioners receive \$1,292 (73 USD) in the same period as a non-contributory pension (Coneval, 2020). Economic and social inequality within this population group is also defined by gender; of the economically active population, men have higher incomes, more women than men do domestic work, but more men receive a pension income compared to women (INEGI, 2022).

In this way, the older adult population in Mexico faces not only health problems associated with old age (chronic degenerative diseases, communicable diseases and malnutrition), but also difficulties associated with gender, poverty, scarce institutional protection and deep inequalities, both in urban and rural spaces (INSP, 2010). Likewise, it is a population that experiences a significant educational gap and limited access to social security (Coneval, 2020), and they are frequently victims of physical, psychological and economic violence and abandonment (Tapia, 2018).

Many factors that constrain the active participation of older adults in society are the result of how these people perceive their own health as well as other inhibitions of social origin, including social perception and approval (Tovar and Vázquez, 2023). Although old age is associated with experience, being an older adult in Mexico also means a stage of loss and illness; the social image of old age in the country is mostly negative and implies discriminatory practices, which puts older people in a state of vulnerability (Inapam, 2019). On the other hand, at the family level, reciprocal relationships of care and economic and emotional support play an important role in older adults' lives (Cervantes, 2013).

Despite these conditions, tourism for the elderly has been seen by some as a potential and growing market in Mexico. The older adult population in the country is perceived as a population segment with relative purchasing power, in addition to the fact that many of the trips made by older adults in the country are supported as part of social tourism (Tovar Cabañas and Vázquez Espinosa, 2023). The inclusion of older adults within social tourism is not exclusive of Mexico, as social tourism has become a way to democratise the tourism experience for older adults – as well as other social minorities – in other socioeconomic and cultural contexts (Amaral et al., 2020). Its socioeconomic relevance has been recognised and different tourist destinations have been promoted for this sector within Mexico (Mazo Quevedo and Cortés Puya, 2020). However, to the researchers' knowledge, until now there is no study that analyses the structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal constraints that influence the participation of older adults in tourism in the country.

4 Methodology

From a sociocultural perspective, this study aimed to explore senior tourism constraints in Mexico. In this study, we adopted a qualitative methodology. Qualitative approaches not only allow an in-depth understanding of participants' reality, subjectivity and meanings, but also emphasise understanding the realities as a result of the interaction and interpretation of its participants (Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). From gerontological approaches, qualitative approaches allow us to understand how older adults perceive themselves in relation to aging and provide holistic views of their age condition (Carrizo et al., 2013). This study adopted the qualitative interview as a research technique, since it allows recovering the personal interpretation, subjectivity and social construction that older adults have of their reality (González et al., 2013).

To achieve the study's aim, we conducted 16 in-depth interviews with older adults at the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023 in Mexico. We interviewed nine Mexican men and seven women aged 60 or over who had at least one travel experience in this stage of their lives. The participants were residents of the centre of the country and were contacted mainly through snowball and convenience sampling. The sampling techniques adopted limit the representativeness of the selected group and makes it impossible to generalise the results because some members of the population were more likely to be selected than others (Bryman, 2004). In contrast, the exploratory and qualitative scope of this research made it possible to incorporate various profiles to try to encapsulate a diversity of socioeconomic conditions and experiences associated with travel, since the older adult population has been recognised as a heterogeneous group (Hung and Lu, 2016); therefore, participants with profiles differentiated by gender, age, educational level, occupation, income, health, marital status, and retirement situation were incorporated. The sample was determined through theoretical saturation. The selection of the participants was gradual and constantly monitored; the research team had several meetings to monitor which profiles were already considered and which were not, in order to define the characteristics of the following participants.

The research instrument was an interview guide that included open questions about sociodemographic data, motivations, preferences, and travel experiences. The questions were drawn from two sources mainly: the literature on senior tourism (constraints) in general and the scarce literature on gerontological tourism in Mexico in particular; With regard to the former, the works of Gao and Kerstetter (2016), Hsu and Kang (2009) and Kazeminia et al., (2013) served as very helpful sources to define questions that, from global perspectives, explored constraining factors in the senior tourism as well as the sociocultural dimensions associated with such factors. Regarding the latter, Tovar Cabañas and Vázquez Espinosa's (2023) research was useful to design questions that explored the association of the participants' experiences with their social condition in Mexico.

In particular, the factors that constrain the participation of older adults in travel and tourism were also identified. The objective of the study and the confidentiality of the information were informed to the participants and all the interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' consent. In order to protect participants' identity, the interviewees' real names have been replaced by pseudonyms in this study.

The research team paid particular attention to following a careful process of analysing the interviews. During the interview period, the research team met on a regular basis (every two weeks) to discuss the interviews conducted up to that point. This procedure

made it possible to collectively analyse each case and was part of a continuous process of information analysis. Additionally, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, each one was scrutinised to identify cases, descriptions and examples of tourist constraints based on specialised literature; later, these were grouped into categories that corresponded to intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints. We paid special attention to the relationship between sociocultural factors and constraints. The active participation of the researchers in all stages of the research project, including the analysis, allowed the triangulation of researchers, which is adopted 'to balance out the subjective influences of individuals' [Flick, (2004), p.178].

5 Findings

5.1 *Participants' profile*

Participants' age range was from 61 to 85 years, allowing to document diverse experiences according to the different stages of old age (Alén et al., 2016). Considering that educational level is a factor that can influence participation in senior tourism (McGuire, 1984), we looked for participants with diverse educational profiles; therefore, we incorporated individuals without any type of formal education, but also people with a postgraduate degree. As for their occupations there was also variety; six participants were retired, although some of them were still working and therefore had double income at the time of the study. The occupational profile of the participants included vendors, a bricklayer, a housewife, a taxi driver, a teacher, a researcher, to name a few. As for their marital status there was also variety; one single, seven married, four divorced, and four widowed participated.

Almost all the participants had their own income. However, it is important to note that the income of five of them also depended on other members of their family, specifically their children and husband. Few also received non-contributory pensions; that is, economic support from the Mexican government. Unlike many other countries, the family in Mexico is the centre of Mexican culture and, therefore, a widely shared value (González, 2017). Thus, in Mexican culture it is not surprising that older adults share a home with their children and grandchildren. While five interviewees reported living alone, nine of them live with their children and/or grandchildren in the same house. As we will show later, the role of the family, particularly children and grandchildren, is very important in the tourist experiences of older adults in Mexico.

5.2 *Motivations and tourist experiences*

Although very few have had the opportunity to travel abroad, all have had at least one experience of tourist travel within the country during their old age. Their travel motivations are very diverse; our participants' travel reasons included, but were not limited to, getting to know new natural and cultural places, discovering new cultures, resting and escaping from routine. Specific motivations such as religion, gastronomy and architecture were also reported. Local food, nature, landscapes, traditional ways of life, among others, were valued by some as important pull motivational factors.

In particular, family relationships emerged as a significant travel motivation. But as will be seen in turn, the family not only acts as a motivational factor or as part of the

travel experience itself, but also as constraints on senior travel. As a motivating factor, many of them travel to visit relatives. Mónica, 66, for example, said: '[I travel] to visit my family in Querétaro, I have had family in Querétaro and its surroundings for more than 25 years, my mother and sisters live there, so all my family'. Similarly, Felix, a married man, reported: 'many times [I travel] because I have relatives abroad, so I have to go visit them, [I travel] with my wife and my daughters', while Ana, 85, indicated that she travels to visit her children who live in USA. These extracts suggest not only that the family plays an important role as a reason for travel, but specifically that children, siblings and parents become important motivations in tourism for the elderly in Mexico. In this way, these findings coincide with previous studies that have revealed that the tourist motivations of older adults are closely associated with the visit of family and friends (Alén et al., 2016).

Travelling with the family was also a constant experience in most cases. However, travelling with the family does not mean only travelling together; travelling with a family member becomes a significant part of the travel experience for senior tourists. When answering about the importance that travel has for them, the older adults indicated that travel is very significant for family union, family visits and spending time with the family. Javier, a 66-year-old PhD who does academic research, for example, always travels with his family, specifically his wife and children, and admits that he cannot imagine his travels without them. For him, the pleasure of travelling lies in being with his family in a different place. The participant narrated:

"I cannot imagine travelling alone, I always see myself with the family, with one or two of my children... currently a sister-in-law accompanies me on my trips, we take our suitcases and leave, but generally I travel with my family... I travel to know places, but also to feel the pleasure of being with the family in a different place; it is something so simple, for many years it has been religious for me to go out with the family for coffee every Friday, take the children out and have coffee on Friday to break the monotony. So one of the reasons for travelling is to break monotony, it is nice to meet and spend time with other people... and with the family".

Participants recognise the importance of their family in their travel experiences. Travelling or not with the family can even determine the importance and enjoyment of the trip. When asked if travelling is important in his life, Luis, a 68-year-old bricklayer, for example, replied: 'yes, because [travel] makes me be more united with my family, I enjoy my family [when we travel]'. For her part, Irma, a divorced retired woman, almost always travels accompanied and does so with her sisters or her daughter. She acknowledges that travelling alone is not the same:

"Currently, I [travel] with two of my sisters who are retired, one is a teacher and my neighbour, and the other is a nurse. But this year I travelled three times with my daughter who lives in Veracruz, but I usually travel accompanied, I rarely do it alone, as I feel that [the trips] are not enjoyed as much".

The importance of the family in the travel experience of the elderly is closely associated with the role that the family plays in Mexican societies. Although there is diversity in Mexican families, as well as in their forms of expression and dynamics in the different social classes, the modern family is by far the most important element in the lives of many Mexicans (González, 2017). Trips for older adults, therefore, become an opportunity where the importance of the family becomes visible and legitimised.

In addition to parents, siblings and children, grandchildren can also be an important part of travel experiences. Travelling with children and grandchildren can even become one of the most memorable experiences for older adults. When asked about a trip that he remembers in a very special way, Camilo, a 61-year-old divorced man, recounted, ‘once I went to Cancun, I went with my daughter and my grandson, we had a great time together, we went everywhere ... it was something very nice.’ The quality of the tourist experience associated with grandchildren in particular seems to be associated with the family context of Mexican societies and culture, since children and grandchildren play a very important role of reciprocal care and economic and emotional support in the lives of older adults in Mexico (Cervantes, 2013).

5.3 *Intrapersonal constraints*

One of the major interests of this study was to explore the diversity of tourism constraints experienced by older adults in Mexico. The research revealed that there are intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural constraints that limit the participation of these people in tourism in the country. As evidenced in the following sections, the sociocultural context – specifically the value and meaning of the family – largely defines how such constraints are experienced.

According to Crawford and Godbey (1987), intrapersonal restrictions contemplate psychological states or characteristics that interact with leisure (and tourism) preferences rather than with participation. In this sense, fear and risk perception functioned as two relevant intrapersonal restrictions in older adults’ lives. Specifically, the fear of contracting COVID-19 was a factor that significantly – albeit temporarily – restricted tourist travel. The interviews for this study were conducted after the pandemic, so the risk of travelling was very present in participants’ minds. The older adult population was one of the population segments with the greatest physical, emotional, cognitive, and financial vulnerability during the pandemic (González-González et al., 2021), and our participants were well aware of this. For this reason, at the time of the study, the fear of contagion from COVID-19 turned out to be a significant constraint that determined the desire to travel for many older adults. Adriana, a 77-year-old widowed participant, recounted,

“I did not travel because I was afraid of catching [COVID-19] again, although I had been infected before, people said that I could catch it again, it was not until the pandemic calmed down that I travelled again to visit my sisters”.

In the same vein, Homero, a 75-year-old street vendor, restricted his travels for fear of catching the virus; in fact, the participant decided not to travel to attend the funeral of his sister who died of COVID-19 in southern Mexico: ‘I would have liked to attend my sister’s funeral, I wanted to say my last goodbye, but I ran the risk of getting infected’, he said. Homero is a gay man who, from a young age, had to distance himself from his family due to family and social rejection derived from his sexual orientation. Since then he has lived in the city away from his family. In this sense, the fear of getting sick and losing his life significantly restricted the few possibilities that Homero had of travelling to reunite with the family, even if it was to say goodbye forever.

Similarly, for older adults who have a chronic or temporary health condition, intrapersonal constraints are associated with the fear of having some medical complication during their travels. Homero, for example, avoids travelling for fear of

having a prostate complication again, since the destination he visits to see his relatives does not have the urologist medical services he needs.

According to Crawford et al. (1991), constraints are experienced – and overcome – in a hierarchical way; only when the intrapersonal barriers have been overcome can the interpersonal and structural barriers be addressed. From this perspective, the fear of contagion from a disease such as COVID-19, which for many was fatal, or the fear of having some medical difficulty during their trips, are an issue that can be a determining factor in interviewees' tourism (non)participation.

From leisure studies, the findings of this research are consistent with recent existing literature. Previous studies have revealed that one of the implications of confinement due to the pandemic is the fear of uncertainty, of going out for leisure activities outside the home and contracting or transmitting the disease, and eventually losing one's life (Tavares and Marinho, 2021). Non-participation in tourism and the fear experienced have negative implications on the emotional health and quality of life of older adults.

5.4 *Interpersonal constraints*

This study revealed that interpersonal constraints play a particular role in senior tourism in Mexico. Interpersonal constraints are those that emerge from interaction with other people and can influence both preferences and participation in tourism. In the case study, the interpersonal dimension of tourism constraints was largely associated with relationships with family, and not so much with friends. For participating older adults, children and a partner may act as a factor that constrains their participation in tourism travel.

As noted above, the family plays an important role in senior travel in Mexico. Unlike some cultures where only travel by older adults seems to be a common practice (Kazemini et al., 2013), in Mexico it is not common for older adults to travel alone. Adriana, a 77-year-old widow, commented: 'I have never travelled alone, I always used to travel with my husband, and now I do it with my mother or my sister, but I never travel alone'. In some cases, the lack of a companion means fear and insecurity that restrain the possibility of travelling. Laura, a 70-year-old widow, said:

"I do not know if it is due to age, sometimes one says: 'I think the older, the more fearful', I would go out with insecurity, I would walk insecurely, I do not want to use a cane because I do not like it... when I was with him [partner], we went out holding hands..., more than anything I felt protected because I knew that he was taking care of me and I always told him: 'I feel very protected with you'".

For this reason, the lack of availability of the spouse, children or siblings considerably constrains the participation of older individuals in travel. In cases where the person decides to travel alone, it is because none of their relatives is available, but they need to travel. Ana, an 85-year-old housewife, for example, who must travel to the USA to visit her children, admits that although she is travelling alone, she would like to do it with her children or grandchildren, 'I would like someone to accompany me, but everyone works, I would like one of my grandchildren to accompany me but he goes to school, so I would travel alone'.

On the other hand, it is not only family members' availability that can limit participation in tourism. The ideas that family members have about the capacity of the

elderly and, as a result, the overprotection of the elderly also have a considerable influence. Adriana, a 77-year-old widow, narrated her experience this way:

“I get desperate because sometimes I want to go see my sisters, but [my daughters] do not let me go out, one of my daughters has to take me... they do not let me be alone, and... it is okay because it is hard for me to get on to public transport, there are some transport units that are very high and I can only get on kneeling, and to get off I have to sit down... [my daughters] scold me”.

As the previous case suggests, it is not always about physical or psychological limitations; the sociocultural representations that the family has about old age and the protection roles that children must assume with their older adults in Mexico (Cervantes, 2013) end up being interpersonal factors that significantly restrict older adults' travel and leisure participation and experiences. As Tovar Cabañas and Vázquez Espinosa (2023) suggest, many limitations of adults are not necessarily a chronological matter; the constraints are usually a result of how older people perceive their own health and how others, including the family, perceive and approve of their physical and social condition.

In a similar sense, older adults, mostly women, restrict their trips because they want to stay with their children and do not want to leave their family obligations. Ana, who has seven children and an income of 20,000 MXN (\$1,170 USD) per month, made it very clear the priority her children have in her life and her role with them; she says that all her life she has worked and struggled to give the best to her children and that she is afraid of dying for leaving her children alone. The relationship that Ana has with her children also influences her decision to travel or not, she said: ‘if I do not travel it is because I do not want to... I do not want to leave my children alone’. The gender role assigned to women in relation to their children and the family in Mexico, frequently associated with being a good grandmother, a good mother, a good wife, protector, responsible and loving (de Oca et al., 2013) also influences the travel experiences of older women. Interpersonal relationships work as a constraint by being a priority before many other activities, including tourism.

However, family relationships do not just act as a constraint; they also function as travel facilitators for the elderly. Luis, who is a bricklayer and earns 6,000 MXN (350 USD) a month, reveals that his children can facilitate his travels; he said: ‘I like [to travel], fortunately we have our children's [financial] support to travel... before the pandemic we travelled a few times within the country’. But financial support is not the only facilitative role of the family, their availability of time and skills also facilitate the trips of the elderly. Lulú, a retired nurse, for example, recognises that her daughter works and for that reason she can not accompany her; however, her sisters are also retired, have the time and willingness to travel with her, and one of them speaks English better than her, all this has allowed her to travel to countries whose native language is not Spanish. For some older adults, the diversity of family interpersonal relationships (in this case sisters and daughters) works as a facilitator of their trips.

5.5 Structural constraints

Structural constraints include factors that intervene between preference and participation in tourism. For the older adults interviewed, the structural constraints arise, on the one hand, in individual conditions such as health, physical limitations, the need for medical treatment, and limited economic resources. Félix, a 69-year-old married man,

commented, ‘many times I do not travel because money is not enough, other times because the family is not available, and sometimes due to illness... at my age my health limits me and I have to take more medication to be well’. As this case reveals, travel can be constrained by older adults not only due to the convergence of interpersonal and structural restrictions, but also due to multiple structural factors (economic resources and health) that intersect at the same time.

On the other hand, structural constraints are also imposed by extrinsic factors associated with work or other commitments. For example, Camilo, who is 61 years old and studies law at the university, revealed that along with other factors, his educational commitments limit his possibilities to travel. He commented, ‘[I cannot travel] because of the economic situation I’m going through and because I’m not yet a pensioner, too. I do not have time because I’m studying... that’s what has prevented me from travelling for now’.

According to Crawford et al. (1991), intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints can more easily be overcome through negotiations. However, those of a structural type represent a greater difficulty that can end in non-participation in leisure. For the elderly, interpersonal constraints, for example, can be overcome through relationships with multiple family members (children, siblings, spouse) but the constraints associated with money, time and health are not easily negotiable, especially if multiple structural factors converge at once.

6 Final comments

Due to the accelerated growth of their population, developing countries will face greater challenges in caring for their elderly population (UN, 2019). One of these challenges is to promote the participation of this population segment in tourism. Their involvement in leisure activities is fundamental due to the contribution that these can have in these people’s quality of life (Kim et al., 2015). In this sense, this study explored the factors that constrain older adults’ participation in tourism from a sociocultural perspective in a developing country.

The findings of this study confirm that older adults’ participation in tourism is constrained by intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural factors. However, it reveals that family relationships function as a significant interpersonal constraint – but also a facilitator – in the Mexican social and cultural context. In this way, this study contributes to expanding the investigation of interpersonal restrictions and sociocultural contexts, which have been largely ignored in the international literature on senior tourism (Kazeminia et al., 2013).

The constraints associated with the family emerged as an extremely significant factor that works not only as a motivational factor, but also as a component of the tourist experience itself, as well as a constraining factor and, in turn, a facilitator for tourism. The meaning, role and importance of the family in Mexico are culturally defined. The social and cultural centrality of the family in older adults’ lives in Mexico plays a leading role in understanding the characteristics and dynamics of senior tourism in the country. Additionally, other social constructs such as gender – which defines the social role of mothers, grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers – and the social (self)perception of old age – commonly associated with illness – influence the participation of older adults in tourism. Thus, this study concludes, on the one hand, that understanding the restrictions

of older adult tourists from a chronological perspective is restrictive. On the other hand, it shows and concludes that sociocultural factors can play a central role in tourist experiences and, therefore, should be incorporated more often into the study of tourism constraints.

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The results and postulations of this study are not necessarily applicable to other contexts. Although this study shows originality in senior tourism studies, at least in Mexico, the sociocultural particularities of the context studied as well as the qualitative approach adopted prevent the generalisation of its results even in other countries of the Global South. Therefore, the results and conclusions of this study should be taken with due caution and regarded as applicable to the conditions of the specific social group studied.

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