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Assumptions about later life travel and their implications: pushing people around?

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ABSTRACT

Taking four assumptions in turn, this review article considers some of the lenses through which researchers might look at later life leisure travel and the implications of adopting each of them. First, we consider the 'active ageing' agenda and what this means for how leisure travel may be thought about in academia and beyond. Second, we turn to studies underpinned by worries about the appetite for significant consumption thought to typify the 'baby boomer' generation and question whether these studies could inadvertently be promoting the very future they hope to avoid. Third, we explore how research on the benefits of everyday 'mobility' in later life may have morphed into a more general belief about the value of travel in older age. Finally, we reflect on how relevant studies of tourism are often underpinned by an argument about the financial rewards that now await those ready to target the older traveller. Our overall contention is that, though for different reasons, all four could be serving to encourage more later life travel. Whilst for some this prospect is not at all troubling, the spectre of adverse energy demand consequences leads us to explore a more critical view.

Keywords

Tourism, mobility, active ageing, baby boomers, energy demand

A range of relevant lenses

Taking four assumptions in turn, this review article considers some of the lenses through which researchers might look at later life leisure travel and the implications of adopting each of them. Our overall contention is that, though for very different reasons and intentionally or not, all four assumptions could be serving to encourage more later life leisure travel. Whilst for many this is not at all troubling, the spectre of adverse consequences in terms of energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions leads us to explore a more critical view. In conclusion, and with particular reference to the increased resource consumption linked to a future of more mobile older people, we reflect on the broader implications of this situation, identify a series of empirical topics that may warrant further study, and consider the role of gerontological research in this endeavour. More specifically, we argue for greater attention to the ways in which older people themselves respond to our four assumptions, for a more detailed examination of the difference made by distance in the experience of later life leisure travel, and for critical gerontologists of mobility to look more often beyond the locality.

Assumption 1: Ageing should be active

The belief that 'active ageing' brings a suite of wellbeing, independence, health and quality of life benefits is now firmly established in both official discourses (Department of Health 2005; World Health Organisation 2002) and funding initiatives (Clarke and Warren 2007; Hennessy and Walker 2010). Whilst the European concept of active ageing centres on the link between activity and health, the original American idea began with economic beliefs about the value of extending production and consumption into later life (Bass, Caro and Chen, 1993; Gilleard and Higgs 2000; Jones *et al.* 2008). Either way, the goal of this work has generally been one of encouraging older people to stay active and independent for as long as possible as studies

exploring the connections between activity, mobility, productivity and health have coalesced into a compelling research agenda (Katz 2003; Walker 2002; Walker 2009).

In view of its popularity, we should be unsurprised to see the promotion of 'active ageing' has been subject to some critical scrutiny. Some commentators have been at pains to emphasise how such a broad agenda necessarily obscures a diversity of individual circumstances and the constraining and enabling everyday life contexts through which active ageing is potentially realised (Katz 2000; Boudiny 2013). Whilst it is undeniably true that people are generally remaining healthier for longer in a way that presents new opportunities for ageing 'actively', such critics highlight how an 'overly idealistic' (Boudiny 2013 1077) vision may also put older people under undue pressure (Walker 2002) by downplaying the inevitability of physiological senescence and overlooking variability in access to necessary services (Katz 2003; Walker 2006). Nevertheless, it remains the case that 'active' ageing is now often positioned as the obvious solution to a problem about fighting unhelpful ageist assumptions about later life being a time to submit to inevitable decline (for gerontologists) and cutting the costs of dependency (for economists) (Katz 2003; Walker 1990).

Whilst it is easy to see why beliefs about the value of active ageing have become so entrenched, our first suggestion is that the effect may be to put those hoping to age 'well' on a treadmill of constant activity without a clear sense of how much they will like it there. In other words, we want to consider whether this agenda is now so popular that older people feel obliged to be active whether they want to or not (Bowling 2008). We have recently seen how older Scandinavians who publicly endorse the value of later life activity may adopt a more confessional tone when discussing the private pleasures of doing less (Lundgren 2012). Such reticence may be understandable when, as Pike suggests, the 'inactive' older person may now be something of a societal 'folk devil' (Pike 2011) to be vilified for reproducing a stigmatised and 'unsuccessful' response to later life (Bowling 1993; Doman *et al.* 2006; Katz 2003).

Our interest is in what this means for travel. In this respect, McHugh (2003) has wondered whether gerontologists are themselves perpetuating a wider societal ageism by encouraging older people to maintain 'youthfulness' through active ageing activities that include travel. Equally, in a similar result to that of the above Scandinavian study, Nimrod (2008) finds active older Americans feeling compelled to justify any desires for travelling less. Could it therefore be that many older people now feel a pressure to demonstrate themselves as 'busy travellers' (Gibson 2002) as part of the wider 'busy ethic' promoted by the 'active' ageing discourse (Ekerdt 1986; Katz 2000)? Whilst the active ageing lens has no doubt done much to counter a wider societal ageism that attaches all older people to ideas of incapability (Walker 2002, 2009), there is more to say about how it has seeped into wider society and with what effects on how and where older people feel they should be travelling.

The picture is currently mixed in terms of what the societal embrace of active ageing means for travel. If we sift through the most relevant studies, Bowling suggests older people most often imagine active ageing to happen closer to home, but some also believe it happens further afield (Bowling 1993; 2008) - though how trips provide 'activity' opportunities goes unexplored. In any case, whilst a core objective of this agenda is about providing older people with the 'opportunity' to engage in 'meaningful pursuits' (Walker 2002; 2006), we worry about how easily aspirations for 'opportunity' become expectations about activity in ways that might feasibly entail more travel than is individually or societally desirable. So whilst the active ageing agenda may have a positive impact in giving older people a new sense of entitlement about access to certain activities, there may also be downsides to this. Our first point is therefore that, though we do not yet know for sure, an assumption born of an understandable and largely laudable fusion of research and policy objectives might feasibly be serving to push older people around by compelling them to travel because successful ageing is apparently now demonstrated by 'activities' such as this. In fairness, active ageing was always

recognised to be about balancing rights and obligations (Walker 2006). But we worry that one unanticipated result could be a strengthening sense of travel obligation.

Assumption 2: The boomers are on the move

Our second assumption is born of a very different set of concerns as the mobile older person now morphs from a virtuous individual doing what they can to stay healthy and independent to a potentially self-indulgent environmental burden (Elkington 2011; Willetts 2010; Wright and Lund 2000). Rather than starting with the individual and collective benefits believed to accrue from 'active ageing', the spotlight has now been turned onto the later life hopes, dreams and expectations thought to prevail within a specific generational cohort. These are the 'baby boomers' (those generally taken to have been born between 1946 and 1964), the majority of whom are now either approaching retirement or in early retirement.

Although ideas of a generationally uniform disposition have, as with the blanket suggestion that older people should be active, received understandable criticism (Morgan 1998), Biggs *et al.* (2007) nevertheless suggest the baby boomers represent a unique cultural shift towards later life consumerism by virtue of their significant post retirement incomes and how they never needed to embrace the virtues of thrift. Accordingly they have come under fire in both academic and media discussion (Biggs *et. al* 2007; Elkington, 2011; McCarthy 2013; Willetts, 2010) for consuming more than earlier and later generations alike (Haq, Brown and Hards 2010; Wright and Lund 2009). As a consequence, and in stark contrast to the concerns sustaining the active ageing agenda, we are now presented with worries about the 'selfish' or 'greedy' generation (Karisto 2007; Street and Crossman 2006) whose quest for a 'self-actualizing' (Giddens 1991) life of enjoyable experiences after retirement stands to entail significant consumption irrespective of environmental cost (Harkin and Huber 2004; Karisto 2007; Willetts 2010). Though in some respects, and as some gerontologists have

rightly pointed out, the boomers may be commendable in their blithe indifference to repressive but still societally entrenched ideas about 'old-age-appropriate' lifestyles (Blaikie 1999; Tulle 2004), equally common in this discussion are anxieties about the excesses likely to result from the arrival of new ideas about what fulfilling post retirement lives should rightly encompass (Gabriel and Bowling 2004; Thompson *et al.* 2010).

Whichever view you take, the changing norms of later life travel consumption linked to the 'boomers' have so far gone relatively unexplored. There is a consensus that those now approaching retirement will likely be more active than previous generations of older people in all areas of life - physically, politically and also as consumers. Yet the detailed analysis of consumption after retirement has tended to focus on income and everyday expenditure (Hurd and Rohwedder 2006), partly because relevant data are more readily available (Gilleard *et al.* 2005) (though see Hynes 2015 for a recent analysis of travel). This leaves us with a limited appreciation of what could be significant amounts of travel related spending, how this came about, and whether generationally distinct approaches to travel can actually be discerned. Despite claims that the 'boomers' are travelling widely (Bonvalet and Ogg 2011), as it stands we know little of the detail. If our newest generation of retirees are all about consumption, it is easy to see travel fulfilment playing a big part in this. This may be especially so if later life consumption desires are more about 'experience' than 'acquisition' because the appeal of possessions starts to wane when the time left to enjoy them is understood as limited (Major and McLeay 2013). However, we should also remember how some in this generation have determinedly distanced themselves from 'excessive' consumption as they 'bridge' the frugality of their parents and the self-indulgent desires of their offspring (Leach *et al.* 2013). The trouble is that such counter narratives are often obscured by worries about the horde of older 'consumption junkies' (Venn et al, 2016) that seems to be amassing on the horizon.

Only rarely in gerontology has consideration been given to the gap between aspiration and actuality in ‘baby boomer’ travel, partly because they have only just started to embark on their later life travel careers. Goodwin and O’Connor (2014), however, provide a compelling exception by studying the ‘fantasies and realities’ associated with how those in this group face up to retirement. They show us how unknown futures can engender idealised constructions as, lacking any clear sense of their post retirement lives ahead, respondents reached for comforting visions of lifestyles that included long holidays to ‘exotic’ destinations. What is especially interesting here is how even those without the necessary financial means seemed to cherish the ‘fantasy’ of travel. Could it therefore be that the notion of post-retirement travel ‘self actualisation’ is now so firmly entrenched that some in this generation cannot help but ignore the less exciting realities that actually await them? We know there is evidence that post retirement travel can be seen as a ‘right’ after many years of work (Staats and Pierfelice 2003) and that the retirement transition can be seen as a gateway to lifestyles hopefully associated with ‘celebration’ - as in those planning to tick off ‘bucket list’ experiences or embark on ‘round-the-world’ trips (Hillman 2013; White and White, 2004). Yet whilst a post retirement ‘life of sunshine’ (Unikowski 1996 in Mann 2001, p. 92) may be hoped for, there may be a more sober story to tell about those who, when it comes to it, lack the money.

Here we support Gilleard and Higgs’ (2007) suggestion that we should consider the implications of badging those born between 1945 and 1964 as ‘boomers’ in the first place. For them, attributing identifiable characteristics to those within an invented generational grouping is contentious, and a reflection of ‘not so much the power of cohorts as structuring influences on the ‘conscience collective’ as the market and the media conspire to sculpt our older identities’ (2007 p. 13). We worry that embedded within this ‘conscience collective’ are assumed characteristics which encompass, among other things, mass consumption and significant travel. This then begs the question of whether, by starting with a demonisation of

the consuming boomers, researchers in this field are themselves feeding a discourse of ever increasing travel that imaginatively deposits older people on a second treadmill of activity. Ironically in view of how this work is often voicing concerns about escalating consumption, by making assumptions about the likely consumption of our new or soon-to-be retirees, it may itself have a hand in fostering the very future it hopes to avoid.

As Siren and Haustein (2013: 143) emphasise, although the 'boomers' are 'expected' to continue being mobile and independent as they move into later life, it is wrong to assume this just because they are now. Similarly, though Gilleard and Higgs contend 'those who grew up spending freely earlier in life are more likely to continue to spend freely later in life' (2005: 153), we don't yet know how the boomers will really age. So whilst the story of the 'lucky generation' with hitherto unheard of levels of wealth and power (Broomfield 2010 in Leach *et al*. 2013) is compelling, we should handle this caricature with care. As the exasperated tone of those determined to debunk the myth of a generation constantly on cruises (Ready for Aging Alliance 2015) would suggest, the consuming boomer may have become another 'folk devil' akin to that of the dangerously inactive older person. In short, whilst the prospect of increasing expenditure and resource use amongst this group makes a powerful case for the study of consumption across cohorts, this same vision may obscure the financial difficulties faced by some (Goodwin and Connor 2014) and bolster the idea that more travel is coming. In this respect, whether we see the boomers as selfish consumers or the pioneers of a positive new approach to ageing is itself irrelevant because both starting points might, once again, serve to push older people around by fuelling expectations about increasing travel.

Assumption 3: Mobility is more generally marvellous

Though the volume of work associated with our first two assumptions is sizeable, even greater is the amount sustained by the third. The focus in this is 'mobility' where the contention is

generally that this should be encouraged as mobility, independence and wellbeing have become closely entwined as topics of gerontological study. In this sense, the third body of work has much in common with the active ageing agenda. The difference is that the authors discussed here start with this specific empirical topic rather than the more general benefits of activity. In this body of work the core objective is often about understanding how later life 'mobility' can combat the challenges of declining health, disablement and diminished autonomy (Metz 2000; Peace, Holland and Kellaher 2011; Schwanen and Ziegler 2011).

In their review, Schwanen and Ziegler (2011) underline how the links between later life mobility and wellbeing are complex, still only partially understood, and should be examined in terms of the 'imaginative mobility' of connecting to distant people and places as much as those of actual movement (see also Nordbakke and Schwanen, 2014). Yet they nonetheless come out in support of the most common framing of mobility since 'out of home mobility is widely believed and has been shown to be positively correlated to wellbeing in old age' (p759). Similarly, whilst Metz (2000, p149) argues that 'because of the lack of an established relationship between mobility and quality of life, the efficacy of interventions aimed at enhancing mobility are hard to assess' this has not stopped 'mobility' becoming something of an axiomatically assumed good. Goins *et al.* (2015), for example, state that "optimal mobility is an important element of healthy ageing' such that the objective naturally becomes one of helping older people 'out of the home' to provide 'social contact, exercise and social stimulation (Mollenkopf *et al*. 2005; Schwanen, Banister and Bowling 2012).

Such objectives are entirely reasonable if the problem is defined as one of staving off physical decline and a retreat towards a 'fourth age' of isolation at home (Laslett 1989; Gilleard and Higgs 2013) and, to be clear, we do not want to argue against the many mobility benefits revealed by this work. Our point is rather that it may be worth reflecting on the kinds of mobility being imagined here. Metz (2000) argues that 'mobility' implies being able to

physically move, and is therefore most often linked to disability and its relationship with independence and well being, whereas ‘travel’ research is associated with leisure activities and modal choice. Nonetheless is it true that the gerontological discussion has tended to centre on the former (Ziegler and Schwanen 2011) and that may have cemented a certain set of ideas about what older person mobility is and how it should be engaged with. Our third research tradition generally sees ‘mobility’ as a local matter associated with a powerful triad of independence, wellbeing and quality of life benefits (Breheny and Stephens 2009; Gabriel and Bowling 2004). What is accordingly relatively absent in gerontologically informed mobility research is a consideration of how longer distance leisure travel compares to the shorter journeys that do seem to make ‘everyday life’ more enjoyable and healthy. The question that follows is whether this kind of longer distance mobility is equally beneficial.

Occasionally we are provided with glimpses of how longer journeys complicate this picture. Musselwhite and Haddad (2010), for example, have usefully shown how some older people feel that, if they are to achieve ‘quality of life’ through mobility, this mobility should be precisely about ‘going beyond’ daily need by ‘viewing scenery, discovering new places, and having chance encounters’. Similarly, Toepoel’s study suggests that some older cohorts may be finding that temporary holiday encounters are just as good as local activities in fighting feelings of loneliness and isolation (Toepoel 2013). In a sense this ‘mobility’ is also delivering on its promise through a similar series of interlinked wellbeing benefits. Yet this is a mobility quite apart from that which is the focus of the sizeable volume of work on the ‘local’ activities that take older lives ‘out-of-the-home’.

Less positively, it is also true that frequent holidays further afield can impact negatively on the ability of older people to create and maintain local community connections (Nimrod 2008). Despite hopes about ‘giving back’ in later life, ‘hedonistic’ travel could therefore be supplanting any nascent altruism in the retirement plans of those who are now getting older.

Distracted from 'productive ageing' projects nearer home (Timmer et al. 2003), we can imagine older people being lured towards a life of 'elastic adolescence' (Mackay 1997) and significant travel. In this regard, the blanket view that mobility is generally a good thing might benefit from more critical scrutiny. If this work ends up positioning mobility, irrespective of distance, as fundamentally positive it could easily be taken to imply that longer trips, which may not always be desirable, beneficial or financially feasible, are also part of the package. In other words, when taken as a whole, individual studies that start with the justifiable aim of fostering 'out-of-home' activity could also collectively be serving to push older people towards travel of greater distances when we do not yet know whether this will provide comparable benefits or what is gained and lost in the process.

Assumption 4 – There is money to be made here

For the fourth and final assumption, we turn to another literature that is generally hoping to encourage later life mobility. This is, however, at quite a different range of distances and for quite a different set of reasons. For those in travel and tourism studies (for a review, see Patterson 2006) the goal of researching this topic is commonly a clearer understanding of what older travellers want so that relevant travel businesses can better provide it (Furling 2007). Excited by the business opportunities associated with ageing societies, Muller and O'Cass (2001), for example, claim the 'future for vacation retirement travel looks particularly bright' (286) whilst Hudson (2010), with reference to what has been called the 'zoomers' ('baby boomers with zip') is confident enough to claim that 'tourism businesses targeting this ageing population with an effective mature marketing strategy are going to be monetarily rewarded' (p445). There is no doubt that, partly because this final group of scholars are often affiliated with marketing agendas and departments, they have taken a particular interest in understanding how the industry might best take advantage of societal ageing by 'enticing' us (Viant 1993) to make travel the 'essence of retirement' (Weiss 2005).

Many of them also perpetuate (though this time more hopefully) the idea that baby boomers are reinventing post retirement travel. Hudson (2010) trumpets this view particularly loudly, claiming they are determined to ‘squeeze every last drop out of their time here on Earth rather than settling for indolent retirement’ (p445). Muller and O’Cass (2001) also see the potential in responding to how the ‘young at heart’ ((Ylänne-McEwen 1999) want many new experiences whilst they still can (see also Patterson 2006). In this respect, the implicit ageism of tourist marketers who are reluctant to target older people because they find the idea of ageing unpalatable (Hudson 2010) might inadvertently prove better at enticing those older people who share their distaste (Tulle-Winton 1998). Either way, what we are often presented with here is a relatively cheery vision of the money that now stands to be made from more later life travel as, though the concept was never intended to apply specifically to holidays (Walker and Maltby 2012), the active ageing discourse is co-opted by tourist marketers.

The lived reality, however, is obviously not so straightforward. These are older people nonetheless, and, in this respect, we should recognise that all the mobility difficulties identified by gerontologists should also have a place in our understanding of tourism. One way in which this emerges is through the currently mixed picture regarding the extent to which older people want ‘challenging’ holidays. Whilst Hudson (2010) and Howe and Strauss (2007) both argue that older people increasingly look for adventure (what we might expect from the dauntless ‘zoomers’), on closer inspection we see how this must be reconciled with the risk aversion associated with older age. One result has been the rise of ‘soft adventure tourism’ (Patterson and Pegg 2009) as a rather oxymoronic idea that neatly captures the pressures of reconciling ‘zooming’ ambitions and worries about the attendant physical strains. In this respect, Kazeminia, Del Chiappa and Jafari (2014) provide a useful corrective to all the upbeat marketing talk about daring boomers through their analysis of senior online advice sharing fora. Though we should be cautious about extrapolation when the ‘young at heart’

will likely shun such discussion boards because they do not identify with the idea of being old, this study provides us with a rare insight into the travel anxieties that evidently remain among some older people. The trouble is that, as it was with the predominant ‘consumption junkie’ caricature, such counter narratives are often drowned out in this work by a happy alignment of academic and industry objectives.

The reality of how these tensions are lived out is also unclear partly because, as others have noted (Patterson, 2006; Sedgely, Pritchard and Morgan 2010), the quantitative approaches that continue to prevail in this field put the accounts of older people out of reach. The aim in tourism research has often been a clearer picture of ‘the market’ by identifying what older people want so this can be better provided to the economic gain of those ‘in the industry’. To these ends, several authors have made typologies of older travellers. For example, Morgan and Levy (1993) in distinguishing between attitudes and motivations identify ‘pampered relaxers,’ ‘highway wanderers,’ ‘global explorers,’ ‘independent adventurers’ and ‘anxious travellers.’ Likewise, Moschis (1996) sees ‘healthy indulgers,’ ‘healthy hermits,’ ‘ailing out goers’ and ‘frail reclusers’. What is also clear here is the unabashed interest in encouraging travel, nicely embodied in You and O’Leary’s (1999) ‘inert traveller’ categorisation – an older person who currently chooses not to travel but on whom the authors are nonetheless unwilling to give up. Such terms come and go in this field as researchers badge imagined groups with handy marketing monikers (Sedgely, Pritchard and Morgan 2011). We are left with much less sense of how older people themselves would relate to these segmentations, how they came to inhabit one category or another, or indeed if they feel they can be categorised at all.

For those more interested in the lived experience of tourist promotion, Ylänne-McEwen presents a rare exploration of the construction of ageing identities during travel agency interactions (1999; 2000). As we might expect, this reveals a determined attempt to promote

norms of retirement as a time when ‘sun, sea and youthfulness are awaiting’ (McHugh 2003: 171). Similarly scrutiny of brochures targeting seniors shows marketers treading a careful line between assumed desires for hotel relaxation and active ageing activities outside (Dann 2001) as they negotiate a similar tension to that embodied in the ‘soft adventure’ idea. Clearly there are many ways in which gerontologists might explore holidays since they offer opportunities to experiment with previously untried identities and retirement may be a point of particular reflection about which are most attractive as people transform from ‘workers’ to (travelling?) ‘retirees’. There could be moments here when older people are open to a range of influences, though how they reflect on them and with what implications for their travel has largely gone without investigation (Thompson *et al*. 2010). Here we note recent worries about older people ‘cashing in’ their pensions to pay for activities like travel irrespective, of the consequences afterwards (ILC 2015) as the ‘grey-haired globe trotter’ idea rears up again in relevant policy discourses (International Transport Forum, 2015). But what will come to pass is another matter entirely such that the processes through which these visions are potentially realised could be usefully examined through in-depth work with those involved.

An obvious question to pose at this point is how exactly does holiday travel feature in older lives today. Some argue that newer generations of older people are more likely to talk about their travel as a means of demonstrating their adventurousness, and (returning to our earlier discussion) presumably their ‘active ageing’ abilities, in ways that could subtly feed a wider expectation about later life travel (Weiss 2005, cited in Hudson 2010). But we do not yet know because how travel aspirations come to infiltrate identified groups of older people, and how they are lived with thereafter, remains largely unexplored in our final field of research. Because the vision is of an emergent market, any suggestion of travel ambivalence is generally downplayed as, in our fourth body of work more than in the other three, the assumption is often that more later life leisure travel is both coming and to be encouraged.

Pushing people around… and pulling it all together

This review article belongs to a wider study of how people in the UK move into later life and how their experiences of, and expectations for, leisure travel may change in the process. It is motivated by an interest in how older people come to move around in more or less energy intensive ways, drawing on previous work concerned with how older people may respond differently to environmental agendas depending on the activity at hand (Hitchings, Collins and Day 2015), how a focus on the lifecourse can help us understand how patterns of consumption come about (Venn *et al.* 2015) and how leisure travel can sometimes be experienced as a pressure as much as a pleasure (Hibbert *et al.* 2015). It also belongs to a centre of social science energy research that questions how hot spots of future demand are both imagined and encouraged (Shove and Walker 2014). To these ends, we have been interested here in how relevant bodies of work see the processes involved and the implications of applying some of their core assumptions to the topic of later life leisure travel.

We began with the concept of 'active ageing' and suggested that, whilst it may represent a valuable framework for empowering older people to remain independent and well, in longer distance leisure travel terms the implications of unreflexively embracing the assumptions underpinning this agenda are as yet unclear. Then we highlighted the apparent specificity of the 'baby boomer' generation about whom, in spite of a set of suggestions about their worrying appetite for post retirement consumption, comparatively little is yet known about how this feeds into relevant travel practices, what draws them to more or less energy consumptive leisure travel, or how this will change as they age. After that we moved to how the idea of older person 'mobility' is more generally portrayed, paying particular attention to the spatial implications in terms of whether ideas derived from the locality also apply elsewhere. Finally, we saw scholars in tourism studies hoping to understand the business

opportunities represented by older consumers who are healthier and wealthier than ever, working under the assumption of a significant market opportunity.

Some very different pictures of the travelling older person came and went as we did so. According to the guiding objectives and starting principles associated with each group of scholars, we saw an active and responsible citizen defying decline through travel, a self-indulgent generation set on making the most of retirement irrespective of environmental cost, a declining older person whose mobility should be encouraged to maintain wellbeing and independence, and a potential source of profit. Some of these bodies of work are evidently quite keen on more later life travel whilst others are motivated by anxieties about this prospect. Nonetheless, and despite their evident differences, it could still be said that all four might be serving to encourage more travel after retirement in the sense that they either begin with the idea that it is a good thing or that it is probably happening. From our point of view, there are concerns about how this work could itself be complicit in feeding future energy demand as relevant assumptions spill out into wider society. More positively, however, this exercise also points towards certain topics and research questions that might feasibly help us to reconcile sustainability and social wellbeing objectives. It is with this in mind, and as a means of continuing the conversation, that we end with three questions for future work in this area:

1. How do older people respond to being 'pushed around'? Older people will themselves move in and out of all the above four roles as, in everyday life just as in academic debate, ideas about the goods and bads of later life travel circulate in society. In this respect, we firstly want to ask whether we, as researchers, have sometimes uncritically promoted the benefits of mobility without understanding what this means to older people. By equating independent mobility with successful living, we could feasibly be encouraging them to strive to be mobile above and beyond what they would like and are able to achieve. Admittedly, in conducting the above review, instances of travel

resistance or indifference were infrequently reported. But this could partly stem from how researchers have defined the topic and what they have looked for in their studies. It is equally possible that older people may now be reluctant to reveal it in view of the inactivity stigma already discussed. Yet exploring how and whether forms of travel resistance exist amongst different groups of older people could provide valuable insights for those hoping to minimise environmental impacts without depriving older people of experiences they find fulfilling.

2. What difference does distance make? Not withstanding how the overall energy consumption associated with later life leisure travel also depends on matters of frequency, mode and purpose, this review particularly leaves us with questions about distance. One of the obvious tensions emerging from our examination of the above four bodies of work relates to whether later life leisure travel should be understood as fundamentally good or bad. Can we, for example, have it both ways in terms of encouraging more everyday mobility because of the associated benefits whilst also criticising those who travel far and frequently because of the energy demand? The question that naturally follows from any attempt to square these two very different stances is at what point, and under what circumstances, does mobility switch from a matter of active ageing and healthy social functioning to selfish travel and sustainability indifference? One way of starting to answer it would be to evaluate the activities implied in existing visions. In this sense it may be worth avoiding any starting assumptions about the rights and wrongs of later life mobility to question the perceived functions of moving around and how these functions become associated with trips of different distances. How, for example, are positive relations with friends and family now being sustained through ‘quality time’ on holiday instead of the more frequent interactions nearer home with which they have more traditionally been

associated? How far does longer distance leisure travel go in providing the range of benefits that mobility researchers have discerned in the locality? Equally how might the enjoyable challenges and personal rewards of travel adventure in later life be provided in less far-flung places? Answering such questions could provide a new appreciation of how distance leisure travel may have gradually started to supplant other activities as the means by which older people feel they should be achieving wellbeing and fulfilment. Doing so could also help us understand how these processes could be most effectively influenced to positive social and environmental ends.

3. What happens if a gerontological approach to mobility itself looks more often further afield? For gerontologists to play their part in answering the above questions, this will likely entail going beyond the locality that has often been the assumed focus of their work on this topic. This should logically require a greater engagement with tourism studies than has hitherto often been the case but, as we have indicated, the result could be a useful injection of critical perspectives and qualitative approaches into a field where they still remain relatively uncommon with regard to the older traveller. Many are working hard to grow the market for older person travel, though the degree to which doing so is always beneficial or enjoyable for older people themselves in terms that surpass immediate holiday needs and desires is unclear. In view of the escalating energy demand, intergenerational justice issues, and personal stresses that could follow in the wake of a later life travel boom, we end with the suggestion that this might be an excellent time for critical gerontologists of mobility to venture more frequently outside the local comfort zone to see what their approaches have to tell us about leisure travel to a range of contexts further away.

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