

Managing Heritage Site Interpretation for Older Adult Visitors

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Abstract

An increasing silver tourists market generates challenges and opportunities for tourist destinations, heritage and tourist attractions that can be exploited by a professional interpretive experience which forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource. In catering for senior visitors, managers of heritage sites at both the European as well as the global level, should not just focus on physical accessibility but also on the intellectual and socio-cultural needs of the older generations around the world. Heritage sites and museums are not necessarily simply spaces in which memories are reconstructed; they are settings where visitors come to negotiate cultural meanings.

Keywords: Older Adults; Interpretation; Cultural Heritage Attraction; Visitor Experience; Global Markets; Global Silver Market

1. Older Adults Tourism Experience

“The world is in the midst of a unique and irreversible process of demographic transition that will result in older populations everywhere” (United Nations, Ageing, online, n.d. in Avellino, 2016. p. 18). One of the main implications of this global demographic growth is an increase in potential demand from the older adult tourism market which is shaped mainly by declining birth-rates in the Western Hemisphere, together with a longer life expectancy. The quality of life of the majority of older persons is set to be enhanced as they have, and will increasingly have, better access to health care together with a propensity to travel. Although seniors may live longer, some may experience a decline in physical, mental and intellectual health, or a loss of purchasing power, or a variety and levels of one or more of any of these restrictions.

Seniors are steadily taking a larger market share of the travel markets (Wang, Ma, Hsu, Jao and Lin, 2013, p. 1021) and as a consequence, that of the cultural heritage sector. This is due to the fact that they visit cultural heritage attractions (CHA) as part of their travel itinerary. Tourism service providers must evaluate the prospect of an increase in the senior tourism segment and the changes that will accompany it, as the new entrants to this demographic, will be more highly educated and experienced travellers. As a consequence managers should be prepared to identify

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and maximise opportunities generated by these new demographic challenges (Lambin and Brondoni, 2000-2001; Brondoni, 2009, 2015; Brondoni, Franzoni, 2016).

Calver and Page note that “*it is only in recent times that an attempt has been made to resolve the apparent conflict of managing a service orientated visitor attraction which provides entertainment and enjoyment, in a context that may have profound intellectual significance*” (2013, pp. 23-24). They also note the tension that plagues CHA managers as they try to balance between a curatorial and a marketing focus. This study does not favour one focus over another but recommends a hybrid approach. It sets out to address one fundamental question: how can site interpretation management improve the visitor experience for older adults? To answer this question a qualitative methodology was used and which included participant observation, interviews, focus groups and site visits. It also collated feedback from industry stakeholders, as well as end users.

Mainstream adult tourists are well catered for by tourism service providers, however the author’s primary research noted that requirements and needs of older adults are not always being met. Avellino’s (2013, 2016) research indicated that once these shortcomings are addressed the older visitor’s experience could be greatly enhanced. From a practical perspective, this study helps site managers and marketers to design and manage CHA so as to provide a higher quality and satisfactory visitor experience and also to increase the potential of being able to host at CHA a larger share of this segment. From an academic perspective, the study opens up the discourses on interpretation which has been largely relegated to the practitioners’ field of expertise.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Silver Tourists

Although a quarter of a century ago Henry Handszuk, of the World Tourism Organisation declared that “*The number of people over 60 in the traditional tourist generating countries of Europe and North America are expected to outnumber ‘pre adults’ by a third in 2025*” (Ing, 1993, p. 4, in Patterson, 2006, p. 2), the tourism and heritage industry has only recently realised the implications of this increase. The challenge for industry is to properly understand the potential and effective demand of the senior tourism market and to respond by delivering products commensurate with its needs” (Ing, 1993, p. 4, in Patterson, 2006). Today, this growth is not only manifested through the increase in the amount of older adult international tourists, but is also visible in the greater number of older persons across the globe who will not only visit attractions and heritage sites when travelling abroad, but will also do so in their home environment.

Senior, older adult, grey or silver tourists are terms given to describe a tourist that is over a certain age (Avellino, 2016). Hossain, Bailry and Lubulwa (2003) use the term “senior” for persons aged 55 or older. For the purposes of this paper, senior and older adult visitor will refer to persons over 50 years of age as these formed to cohort group which participated in the study so as to include the baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) as well as the previous generation. It must be noted that research undertaken between 1996 and 2006, in Pennsylvania, USA by Chen

and Shoemaker does indicate that the cohort is not homogeneous and warns that “*it would be mistaken to treat people ages 55 to 60 today as senior citizens*” and “*and that traditionally defined ‘young seniors’ might not be interested in senior programs*” (2014, p.74).

The population aged 65 and over is increasing in every EU member state, EU candidate state and EFTA Member state and ranges between 5.2% in Malta and 4.0% in Finland to an average of less than 1.0% in Luxembourg and Belgium (Eurostat, June 2016). Regarding the share of persons aged 65 or older in the total population, Italy (21.7 %), Germany (21.0 %) and Greece (20.9 %) had the highest shares, while Ireland had the lowest share (13.0 %) (Eurostat, June 2016). The significance of this growth was acknowledged when the European Union designated 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, and launched the Senior Tourism Initiative in May 2012 as a pilot initiative to define the framework conditions for encouraging senior citizens to travel in Europe (Age Platform Europe, n.d.). To promote and support the concept of active ageing as well as travel for senior citizens, several funding projects were initiated, One such programme is the EU Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme called Heritage Interpretation for Senior Audiences (HISA), which aimed to enhance the learning experience of seniors visiting heritage sites, museums and protected areas through the identification of the requirements and needs of this audience and design an interpretive framework which could be accessed by heritage interpreters as well as the institutions and organisations which host these audiences.

“*Globalisation has defined new landscapes of tourism growth and the emergence of a new tourist profile: traditional tourist motivations and behaviours have become outdated while tourism lifestyles have become more inconsistent and contradictory*” (Brondoni, 2016, p. 10). This is especially true in the case of older persons, who, especially if they hail from an affluent background, have spent a substantial time travelling and visiting heritage sites. They also have more disposable income and time to learn about the places they will be visiting, rendering them ‘accomplished travellers’ and persons with high social and cultural capital.

Understanding the mature tourist is vital to the success of any marketing strategy, however it is even more important to the visitor himself who dedicates a lot of time and energy to ensure an excellent travel experience. “*For an increasing number of tourists, a holiday has become an investment instead of a form of consumption*” (Brondoni, 2016, p. 18).

2.1.1 One Profile Fits All?

Not all older persons feel that they fit the stereotypical image of an older person: conservative, homogeneous, frail in mind and spirit, and dependant on others (Avellino, 2016). This profile does not describe the baby boomer (Wilhite, Hamilton and Reilly, 1988; Horneman, Carter, Wei and Ruys, 2002) or even the pre-baby-boomers to some extent. Dann (2007, p. 429) notes that the “*baby boomers, although now in their 40s and 60s, are perceived by marketers as a generational brand which is different from the objectively defined seniors market which, based on seniors membership organisations, starts at age 50*”. She too asserts that a “better understanding of the influence of generational cohorts as opposed to age as a segmentation and positioning variable will result in more effective targeting of this cohort”.

Over 25 years ago, Wilhite, Hamilton and Reilly, (1988) were already advocating a service provision which would be based on meeting individual needs and interests, as well as avoiding making a stress on the 'differentness' of being older than the rest of the tourist population as much as possible. The modern trend towards an active lifestyle coupled with an increased travel propensity creates fertile ground for an active participation in tourism in later life. However Faranda and Schmidt (1999, p. 24 in Wang, 2005, p. 3) suggest that marketers that wish to tap into this market, they should note three critical components: the aging process comprehended from multiple disciplines, the acknowledged 'heterogeneity and dynamic nature' of the mature market and the necessity for 'sound segmentation'. In conjunction with this we are presented with the profile of the 'sensation seeking' tourist as "*an older age group, well-travelled, educated, discerning, demanding, environmentally aware and prepared to pay a premium for high quality products and services*" (Heath, 2001, in Brondoni, 2016, p. 20). This indicates that it is a worthwhile investment to upgrade the service and product delivered at tourist attractions.

Research carried out in the United States indicated that there were significant differences in travel motivations of the 50-64 and the 65+ tourists for four push factors (escape, education, action and relaxation) and three pull factors (natural surroundings, upscale facilities and outdoor recreation opportunities). When the researchers added income and retirement status into the analysis as control variables this mediated the effects of age. They suggest that these findings should serve as a caution to those who believe that age is a sufficient variable for understanding the mature market (Norman et al., 2001).

2.2 Experience

In 1998, Pine and Gilmore published a seminal article in the Harvard Business Review whereby they predicted that as goods and services become more commoditised, the thing which will matter most, will be the experience that is created by companies. They maintained that experiences are a distinct economic offering from services, as different from services as goods are. An experience, according to Pine and Gilmore occurs when a company uses services as the stage and the goods as props, for engaging individuals in a way that creates a memorable event, such as the Walt Disney Company which is the pioneer in experience providers.

The word experience is an all embracing term replete in everyday conversation; from job seekers emphasising their previous work experiences during interviews to holiday makers describing their vacation experiences to family and friends. Indeed, the term is so vague and has received much criticism for being simply a management buzz word (e.g. Carù and Cova, 2003). Although there is a lack of conceptual models that offer "a common terminology and a shared mindset" (Gentile et al., 2007, p. 397), some authors (e.g. Addis and Holbrook, 2001; LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Carù and Cova, 2007) posit that experience originates from a set of complex interactions between the customer and a company or the company's product offerings. Schmitt (1999) suggests that customer experience can be defined in terms of five dimensions: sensory experiences (sense); affective experiences (feel); creative cognitive experiences (think); physical experiences, behaviours and lifestyles (act); and social-identity experiences (relate). In their conceptualisation,

Gentile et al., (2007) add a further component, pragmatic, defined as the practical act of doing something.

Customers can also co-create their own unique experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) in which the company provide artefacts and contexts to enable the consumer to shape his/her own experience (Carù & Cova, 2003). Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggest that there are four types of experiences: entertainment (passive/absorption); educational (active/absorption); escapist (active/immersion); and esthetic (passive/immersion). Visitors as consumers want to be involved in the co-creation of the tourist experience. They become 'prosumers': a consumer and a producer at the same time (Avellino & Avellino, 2015; Wind & Mahaj, 2002).

These dimensions and types of experiences can serve as guidelines for implementing an interpretation programme for the older demographic so that they are provided with a bespoke experience at a visitor attraction.

2.3 Interpretation

Interpretation is derived from Latin "*interpretatio*" for the Greek word "*ermineia*" after Hermes, the gods' messenger. Hermes was the one appointed to translate the divine messages, the language and will of the gods to humans. At visitor attractions, especially in the heritage context, messages and communication are delivered through a process known as interpretation.

The concept of interpretation is not easily defined: traditionally in the tourist sightseeing environment, it was the tour guide or guide books which provided some form of interpretation. Visitors could be accompanied to sites of interest by a guide or ranger (in the case of parks) wherein they would be presented with facts such as names and dates. However, professional interpretation aims to go beyond that, as it is now being incorporated in the function of management of a site. It provides for the means of communicating or explaining to visitors the significance of the place they are visiting so that their visit experience is enhanced. Through professional interpretation visitors, are able to experience a resource or event that they would not be able to experience without it.

According to Weaver (1982), "interpretation originated very early with ancient storytelling by hunters, fishermen, traders and artisans of the Middle East and Asia" (in Timothy & Boyd, 2003, p. 196). Later Greek and Roman philosophers (e.g. Aristotle, Democritus and Socrates) began to explain 'natural causes for supernatural phenomena' to their students. One early predecessor of cultural heritage interpretation was present in the Grand Tour which involved travel within Europe between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, where young men of British and European gentry travelled for educational purposes to experience important and cultural and historic sites including art collections, museums, historic sites and universities. The groups of young social elites (Urry and Rojek, 1997) would be accompanied by their governors and governesses respectively, and who would 'interpret' or explain the cultural sites to their 'protégés'.

Enos Mills is considered to be the "Father of Professional Interpretation." His book, *Adventures of a Nature Guide*, contains the foundations of modern-day interpretation (1920). In 1884, at the age of 14, Mills began to build a cabin at the foot of Long's Peak in Colorado. Mills had a passion for the outdoors, and would spend most of his time climbing mountains, observing natural phenomena, and

attempting to understand the mysterious workings of nature. He trained himself to guide visitors up Long's Peak.

In his *Adventures of a Nature Guide*, Mills distinguished between trail guides and nature guides (1920). According to Mills, trail guides are those individuals that safely lead visitors to a point of interest and back again. In contrast, "*a nature guide is a naturalist who can guide others to the secrets of nature... Touched by a nature guide the wilderness of the outdoors becomes a wonderland*" (Mills, 1920). Mills added that, "*A nature guide is not a guide in the ordinary sense of the word, he is a teacher. At all times however, he has been rightfully associated with information and some form of education. But nature guiding, as we see it, is more inspirational than informational*" (Mills, 1920). By making this distinction, Mills created a field that would later be known as interpretation. Before his death in 1922, he had developed interpretive principles and techniques that would guide the profession of interpretation in the future.

In 1953, Tilden, an experienced author, playwright, newspaper reporter, and observer, was invited to analyse the interpretation occurring in the national parks. After four years of study, he published a landmark book called *Interpreting Our Heritage*, which was the first book to define the interpretation profession. His book defines interpretation as "*an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, or by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information*" (Tilden, 1977).

He admits that definitions are too limiting when trying to describe interpretation, and so offers two concepts that expand upon the overall definition. The first is that "*interpretation is the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact.*" The second is that "*interpretation should capitalize on mere curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit*" (Tilden, 1977). To further overcome the limitations of a single definition, Tilden introduced six principles that have become the guiding foundations of the interpretive profession

There are common threads that wind through the writings of Mills and Tilden. Both had different perspectives about interpretation. Mills was the creator of the profession, while Tilden assessed the profession when it was already 30 years old. However, both described the primary foundations of interpretation that distinguish it from any other profession.

There are two fundamental characteristics that distinguish interpretation. The first is that interpretation exists to inspire and provoke, not to teach information. Leading visitors on a hike through the forest and teaching them the scientific name of every plant is not interpretation. Factual information alone is not interpretation, although it is the foundation upon which true interpretation is built. Interpretation is revealing the meaning behind the factual information. When a naturalist gives his visitors the scientific name of a plant, and then explains or shows why it received that name, interpretation begins to occur. The second characteristic that interpreters must consider is that interpretation involves not just the informational parts of the brain, but also the emotional and sensory aspects.

Building from resources produced by the National Park Service's Interpretive Development Program (IDP), the National Association for Interpretation (NAI) created a new definition for interpretation in 2000. Based on the fundamentals of Tilden and Mills, this definition has been widely accepted within the interpretive profession. It states that interpretation "*is a communication process that forges*

emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meanings in the resource” (Knapp & Benton, 2004, p. 11). This was subsequently modified to define the practice as a communication process that “*forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource*” (NAI, 2006 in Cater, Garrod, & Low, 2015, p. 295).

Interpretation constitutes a communication path, a bridge, which connects audiences with tangible and intangible phenomena. Successful interpretive presentation of attractions and phenomena facilitates individual perception, leading audiences into new and fascinating worlds. It brings “new understanding, new insights, new enthusiasms, and new interests” (Starr-Hurt, 1994, p. 10). The NAI are now using another definition on their material: “Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource” (NAI, 2016).

2.4 The Role of Management

In cultural visitor attractions managers must take on a ‘mediating role’: that of bridging the gap between the resource or phenomenon, and the visitor. A cultural visitor attraction such as a museum or a nature park can be considered as an informal learning institution as well as an entertainment venue. The manager as interpreter will need to take on the role of the ‘informal educator’ and ‘entertainment provider’ for visitors, which in this paper is the senior adult. Through interpretation the resource or phenomenon is transformed into an experience. “*Interpretation is the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact,*” and “*should capitalise mere curiosity for the enrichment of the human mind and spirit.*” Tilden (1977, p. 8). This certainly represents a challenge in the case of older visitors who have extensive life and travel experiences.

It is important to note that historic heritage interpretation should meet the principles of the ICOMOS Ename Interpretation Charter. The charter recognises the fundamental role of Interpretation in heritage conservation, and identifies universal principles of professional ethics, authenticity, intellectual integrity, social responsibility, and respect and sensitivity for cultural uniqueness and local significance. Knowing what older adults expect from their visits allows managers to offer visitor experience opportunities by catering for experience diversity. It also means that interpretative planning has to be visitor centric in a holistic way and should provide visitors with a unique in situ experience.

3. Methodology

Three research projects contribute to the data supporting this paper. The initial ethnographic fieldwork was undertaken by Avellino for her doctorate degree which focused on older British adult tourists. The other two projects are EU funded projects entitled Socialising Tourism (SoTo) and Heritage Interpretation for Senior Audiences (HISA). Extensive qualitative fieldwork by Avellino involved ethnographic data collection through narratives, site visits, and interviews given by older British tourists visiting the island of Malta. She also interviewed site

managers, curators and other stakeholders involved in the Maltese cultural heritage scene.

The SoTo project aimed to provide a much needed European framework for training courses for social tourism service providers. It collected data through focus groups, interviews, examining cultural heritage sites from Malta, Italy, Poland, Great Britain, Greece and Spain. It identified two higher vulnerability subcategories of seniors: the first includes older persons that may also be disabled. The second comprises older persons who are actually poor, or who are at risk of falling into the 'poverty' category due to a diminished income or an increase in medical care expenses. Notwithstanding this, "*data indicates that, after appropriate adjustments of tourism infrastructures, 70 per cent of disabled people could travel under favourable conditions and this is quite relevant in a progressively ageing European society*" (Avellino, 2013, p. 8).

The main objective of HISA was to create a common framework for Interpretation for Senior Audiences. Partners involved in the data collection hailed from the cultural industries sector from Germany, Malta, Poland, Italy and the United Kingdom. All the partners involved organisations such as the British Museum, Clifton Suspension Bridge, SS Great Britain Trust, the National Museum of Krakow and their Friends Association, Malta's University of the Third Age, Heritage Malta, Centro Studi Formazione Orientamento, Italy, the Elztalmuseum in Waldkirch, Germany and other private sites, from within their national networks so as to have a broad base to collect data, examine case studies and gather examples of best practice.

Both EU projects which the researcher was involved in, together with the researcher's PhD thesis, combined onsite research which include focus groups, surveys, visits to heritage sites and tourist attractions, together with the evaluation of use of different modes of transport. The three research projects involved collating feedback from industry stakeholders, as well as end users.

4. Results and Recommendations

The research projects identified five broad sets of needs or characteristics which may or may not distinguish senior visitors from other types of visitors and which need to be given consideration during the planning and implementation stage of the interpretation project. They broadly correlate the Schmitt (1999) and Gentile et al (2007) dimensions. The following section will discuss each key set of characteristics and recommend how they can be addressed by site managers. Good practice examples taken from heritage visitor sites illustrate the practical applications.

4.1 Physical needs

The first set of characteristics refer to the predominant physical changes which take place as one becomes older. These are manifested as a decrease in mobility and energy as well as decreasing aural and visual impairment. This means that provision for 'rest areas' such as increased seating, sustenance provision and toilet facilities have to be located on site, clearly marked and easily accessible.

During the course of this research, it was noted a good number of visitor sites do not provide 'rest areas' or seating. Seniors often commented that they could not enjoy the visit as it was too tiring for them to stand or walk long periods whilst seeing the exhibits. When managers were asked for feedback, the main comment was that seating would detract from the exhibits. In the small Elztalmuseum in the Black Forest town of Waldkirch this was addressed by providing visitors with portable chairs, which they carried with them from exhibit room to the next, as this would allow visitors to sit, relax and listen to the organ music. Managers at the Elztalmuseum explained how even demented or depressed persons would enliven and awaken as they listened to the music as it revived memories of their childhood and younger years. The researcher has also noted that the British Museum in London is now also providing these chairs for the general public.

4.2 Emotional Needs

The second set of characteristics encompass the Emotions category. Older persons exhibit a sense of personal attachment to places especially when they find a link which ties them to their own nationality and heritage. A substantial cross section of older adults are well travelled and have formed bonds with the places they have visited either as tourists or past residents. Just as in the previous example, these visitors reminisced through hearing music, as they felt secure that their physical needs were being catered for. Site managers can include other resources such as historical images or video, and other tactile materials. Many museums offer 'dressing up' chests for children: older visitors too enjoy dressing up in costumes that either are relevant to their personal or national past, but may also be related to a hobby or interest. This practice is beneficial especially for intergenerational bonding as generations consisting of grandparents, parents and children interact through roleplay which is aided by artefacts such as historical costumes, vintage cars and so on. Examples of good practice can be observed at the Royal Kensington Palace, London and Beaulieu, Hampshire. At the National Museum in Krakow, during certain events, not only can visitors enjoy paintings and other unique works of art in a large and imposing, but physically accessible building, but they can also enjoy hands on experience of wearing military costumes.

One of the unique ways of engaging emotionally is through food. Food preparation or food tasting can offer a unique engaging experience which can be taken to a higher level if the activity involves different generations as this will give the older visitors a platform to share knowledge, experience, memories as well as skills with a younger audience.

Opportunities could also be offered to seniors to share their reminiscences by providing materials such as visitor books, feedback forms, or social media platforms for recording their memories. Staff can also interact with these visitors so that they may record this knowledge which could also be incorporated into the interpretation media or as a means of visitor interaction (Lambin, 2014; Bellini and Brondoni, 2016). At various Military-focused visitor attractions in Malta, British older tourists visit because of the colonial and military links with the island. They engage with these sites not just by visiting but by telling the reenactors and guides about their own personal experiences of the site. Through social media or repeat visits they build a repertoire of knowledge which they are eager to share, and do so

to the extent that they also donate memorabilia such as medals and photographs to the attractions.

4.3 Intellectual Needs

The third set of characteristics are linked to intellect and mental needs. Older visitors manifest greater knowledge and experience and an interest in making connections between their lives and the CHA. Some visitors show interest in having detailed and deeper explanations, whilst on the other hand some visitors are challenged due to senility or to a decrease in short term memory. Some participants in the study exhibited prejudice and close-mindedness with the result that they either contested vehemently the information given to them or practised selective hearing. This attitude presents challenges for the interpreter which can be addressed by providing layered interpretation which would range from the provision of an overview to deeper interpretations together with the opportunity for the visitors to engage with the interpreter as well as other resources to explore and extract further detail. A variety of media and resources such as onsite interpretation panels and accessible artefacts, activities to offsite resources such as online links and printed publications (in large fonts) will further enhance the interpretative experience.

The Clifton Suspension Bridge visitor centre in England addressed the intellectual challenges by involving their visitors at the development stage of a new display. They found out their visitors' preferences and in so doing identified key themes with a set of corresponding questions that the visitors wanted to know about the themes. They then layered as well as sequenced the information and this was synthesised so that it could be presented in less than 100 words on each interpretation panel. They also designed interactives which could help explain complicated engineering concepts.

These resources were tested by the visitors who provided feedback which was used to identify issues which were then rectified. This is an excellent example of visitor engagement.

4.4 Social Needs

The fourth set of characteristics are those associated with the social needs of older adults. The most significant is the desire to engage with others. The 'others' range from staff at sites to friends and family. As a result of this need, having spaces and activities where these encounters can be facilitated were frequently mentioned by the older visitors. A café or a seating area with access to a vending machine is the minimum that is requested. This space would not only offer an opportunity for social activities, but is also a place where one can contemplate on the visitor experience as well as being a place for resting physically.

Another way in which persons can satisfy their need for socialisation is through volunteering. Volunteering can also give older persons who are no longer in employment, validity as they feel that they still have an opportunity to contribute to society.

4.5 Cultural Needs and Differences

The final cluster is that related to the cultural needs exhibited by older visitors. The two main topics which were evident from the research are related to the heightened sense of nostalgia brought on by visiting sites or taking part in certain activities or events. Older adults want the site interpretation to be placed in context: be it geographical or historical, but more importantly wanted a link to their own world view, values or belief systems. Site managers should ensure that the interpretation offered takes into consideration cross-cultural and inter-cultural differences and sensitivities as there are multiple perspectives of history, culture, politics and values. If the site has a policy that it wishes to present the interpretation of a site or artefact in a certain way and knows that this perspective may be disputable or controversial it can prepare for reactions by explaining the context to the story or interpretation, whilst acknowledging that there may be other perspectives or perceptions.

A good example of how museums can advocate for a differentiated inter-cultural understanding, comes to us from an exhibition entitled “Ottomania: The Ottoman Orient in the Art of Renaissance” which was on display in Brussels (27 February to 31 May 2015) and in Krakow (26 June to 27 September 2015). The exhibition focused on the power of attraction which the Ottoman Empire exercises on Western artists who were inspired by the Ottoman culture and the pomp and circumstance of the courtly life of the sultans. The mutual fascination brought about a never before seen cultural exchange between East and West, depicting the ambivalent image that the Ottoman Empire left in Renaissance art. (HISA, 2015, p. 18)

Two key recommendations were identified as a result of the research and which could enhance the older visitors’ experience at heritage cultural sites: volunteering and intergenerational activities. These correspond to the social-identity dimension postulate by Schmitt (1999). Respondents as well as site managers who participated in the studies described such an experience as very positive, even though it is not remunerated. As a volunteer at a cultural heritage site, the visitor’s role is reversed with the added bonus that he knows what the older visitor needs and wants, and is in a position to empathise. Being able to tell their story to other visitors and of other generations highlights the volunteers’ self-worth and is also a way of socialising. In the case of intergenerational activities, participants such as grandparents and grandchildren are able to transmit a sense of continuity as well as nurture a relationship as they come to value each other’s life stories, and values. These are also of benefit not just to the seniors themselves but to all humanity.

5. Reflections and Conclusions

Demographic changes bring new opportunities and challenges for tourism and heritage sector. The main consideration is that the senior market is heterogeneous. There are multiple variables with different combinations such as nationality, country of residence, gender, age, health condition, education, status, employment, spare time, money, cultural values and so on. They certainly carry with them a combined set of emotional, physical, mental and social attributes which make each senior to say the least unique (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Among the various activities undertaken by the seniors, there tends to be a predilection for visits to

heritage and cultural attractions both abroad as well as in their own country of residence.

Research for this paper has highlighted two key criteria which contribute to the enhanced older visitor experience: education or learning (both formal and informal) and the link with the life experience of the visitor. Combined with these two criteria is the underlying assumption that there must also be a large element of entertainment and enjoyment. Interpretation should deliver on all of these elements. “Interpretation is not just about facts and figures, it is the way in which the interest, value, significance and meaning of heritage is communicated to people. It is a learning activity which communicates the stories and ideas behind the heritage and provokes the audience to think for themselves, coming to their own understanding about what its subject means to them” (Heritage Lottery Fund, 2013, p. 3). It is the communication which builds a bridge between the resource or the perceivable phenomena and the visitors, their contemporary perception and their past memories. In other words, good interpretation is not just edutainment (education and entertainment) but also a platform for thought provoking discussion and discovery.

“*Planning for visitor experiences is an integral component of general tourism and management plans*” (Earthlines, 1999, pp. 33-36; NPS, 2000, pp. 6-9). The European Commission recommends that “*the interpretative programme must also include the educational element so as to support the EU vision for Lifelong Learning*” (2014).

More significantly the interpretation experience should begin before the visit and continue even afterwards. This is done mainly through social media and online interaction. One must also consider that not all older visitors are IT literate and may have difficulties in accessing these modern media. Those that have embraced social media, enjoy immersing themselves in the new technologies of selfies and Facebook as they socialise online both on a personal level and even at a corporate level as they interact with the attractions and sites online media such as Facebook and Twitter. These electronic platforms give even older visitors, the opportunity to extend their visit enjoyment even after they have physically left the site.

It must be admitted that heritage sites and museums are not necessarily simply spaces in which memories are reconstructed; they are “settings where visitors come to negotiate cultural meaning” (Uzzell, 1998, pp. 14-15). It is the responsibility and even duty, of the site managers of world-wide destinations to provide the necessary resources, be it interpretation panels, handouts, electronic media and even human guides, for a professional interpretative heritage site experience which caters for the steady escalation in the grey global market.

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