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# Spirituality and the Travel Motivations of Older Adults

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This research explores the travel motivations of retired adults. The influence of aging is investigated through the impact of the spiritual dimension of the older traveler characterized by his gerotranscendence. The results of 17 depth interviews with retired adults followed by a quantitative survey of 645 respondents lead to the identification of the travel motivations of retired French adults and demonstrate the influence of gerotranscendence. Recommendations are made to help professionals reach this specific segment and answer its needs.

**Key Words:** spirituality, motivation, travel, older adult, aging

## Introduction

Retired adults are the number one clients of numerous tourism professionals including tour operators, cruise operators and luxury hotels. Their number is expected to nearly triple by 2050 (United Nations, 2016), making them a strategic market for the tourism industry. Understanding what motivates them to travel is crucial in this context. Identifying the travel motivations of older travellers requires to take the influence of aging into account (Guiot, 2006; Moschis, 2012). Aging is indeed a challenging process and finding a meaning to it can act as a push factor inducing older adults to travel. Spirituality is a salient characteristic of older adults (Fowler, 1981) which has been suggested to influence consumption motives (Skousgaard, 2006). Our research identifies the travel motivations of French retirees in the context of aging and investigates the link between these motivations and their spirituality. The concept of gerotranscendence (Tornstam, 2005) is used to describe retired adults' experience of aging and their spirituality.

## Literature review

### *The spirituality of older adults*

According to Bergeron (1999), spirituality is what enables individuals to go beyond contingencies and to enquire about the meaning of life. An analysis of definitions of the concept in the fields of psychology, sociology and theology leads us to develop the following definition of spirituality:

*spirituality is the individual construction of the meaning of one's life. Its dimensions are the interior self, alterity<sup>[1]</sup> and the sacred<sup>[2]</sup>.*

It is the interconnection of these dimensions that enables an holistic perspective on life and provides its meaning. Religion is the most common form of spirituality. Spirituality, which is individual, is a broader concept than religion, which is collective. A person's spirituality is characterized by a spiritual identity which can be religious (Christianity, Islam, Judaism . . . ) or non-religious (Atheism, Agnosticism, New Age . . . ), and a level of spiritual commitment which corresponds to the centrality of spiritual principles in one's life.

Spiritual development is a chronological and sequential process which spans over a lifetime (Fowler, 1981). The last quarter of life plays a key role in the spiritual development of an individual. Indeed, the older adult is going to finalise their spiritual development in a context characterised by a greater availability of time and spirit, the gains issued from their maturity and life experience, and the consciousness of their own mortality. In the context of aging, spiritual development is also a mechanism which enables the older adult to cope with the losses associated with old

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1) Alterity should be understood in a broad sense and includes other human beings, nature and the universe (Ulvoas, 2009).

2) The sacred is 'a perception of either a divine being or a sense of ultimate reality or truth' (Larson *et al.*, 1998:30): God, gods, a divine being, the supreme energy, the wholeness of life.

age (losses in physical and intellectual capabilities, in body image, of the usual place of residence) and to defend themselves against age-related aggressions such as ageism (Mattes, 2005; McFadden, 1996). At old age, the increasing consciousness of one's own mortality can generate strong anxiety (Urien, 2003). Spiritual growth can help reduce this, as it involves finding the meaning of one's life and death and a reflection on after life (Ita, 1995).

The spiritual needs of older adults involve: restoring personal dignity and transcending the losses and handicaps of old age; reducing death anxiety, accepting death and preparing for dying; finding the global meaning of one's life, believing in the continuity of life and caring about future generations; establishing positive relationships with others, reducing guilt and reconciling and; establishing an intimate relationship with the sacred (McKinley, 2001; Fry, 2000). Spirituality is thus a salient characteristic of older adults.

The spirituality of older adults can be characterized by the concept of gerotranscendence, a social gerontology theory developed by Tornstam (2005). He asked older people to describe their experience of aging which revealed a perception of continued personal development described as

*a shift from a rational and materialist perspective to an increasing cosmic and transcendent one* (Tornstam, 2005:41).

The gerotranscendent adult develops a growing sense of connection with their human and natural environment, accepts aging, assembles the pieces of the puzzle of their life, and focuses on meaningful relationships. Gerotranscendence usually produces life satisfaction. It has three dimensions: cosmic; self and; social and personal relations. Cosmic is concerned with the changes in the definition of time and space which enable a better holistic approach to life and the world. Self is concerned with the confrontation with the self which leads to a deeper appreciation of one's good and bad. Social and personal relations is concerned with the decreasing of one's self-centeredness and the changed meaning and importance of relationships which become more selective.

### ***The travel motivations of older adults***

The travel motivations of retired adults have mainly been studied in the broader framework of seniors' motivations to travel. The latter include relaxing, socialising, learning, seeking, and escaping (Clever

Sellick, 2004; Jang *et al.*, 2009; Jang and Wu, 2006; Prayag, 2012; Shoemaker, 2000). This approach, which does not enable the specific understanding of retired adults' motivations to travel, relies for the most part on studies conducted outside of Europe and the results of which might not be transferable to the French market because of cultural differences. Because the existing tools do not specifically focus on retired seniors and because the target of our study is the French market which is culturally different from Anglo-Saxon markets for which scales have been developed, we decided to build a travel motivations scale for retired French adults.

## **Methodology**

Our mixed methods research design involves two steps: depth interviews followed by a large scale survey. For the design of the travel motivations scale, 17 depth interviews were conducted with retired French adults aged 60 to 85 who have extensive travel experience (respondents' profiles are presented in Appendix 1). Respondents were interviewed at their home and interviews were recorded with their approval. Thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews was used to identify categories of travel motivations and to design items for each category. The designed scale was then tested on a sample of 306 retired French travellers aged 60 to 85 through a two-step validation process: principal component analysis followed by confirmatory analysis. The influence of gerotranscendence was tested on a sample of 339 respondents of the same profile as for the scale design. Spirituality was measured using a French translation of Cozort's GS-R gerotranscendence scale (Cozort, 2008). Structural equation modelling was performed to test the influence of gerotranscendence on the motivations to travel.

## **Qualitative Results**

Thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews leads to the identification of seven categories of motivations to travel, all of which suggest a link with the quest for meaning in the context of aging. The revealed categories of travel motivations are outlined in the following sections:

### ***Enjoy life***

As they are aware of their aging and increasingly conscious of their own mortality, retired travellers are motivated to enjoy life as much as they can, while they still can.

*We feel it is time to enjoy travelling before we can't travel anymore. Because . . . travelling far away, it's not always easy . . . there is time difference, the long flight . . . and the pace of the trip, it is sometimes tiring. I think when you reach a certain age you can't do it anymore (Marie, 65).*

*Oh and I think it is time. It's simply time . . . Well you need to be aware of that. It can stop tomorrow (Vincent, 72).*

*The holiday project itself . . . where there is a project there is a future. Therefore . . . somewhere . . . there is no aging (Jeanine, 65).*

### **Relax**

Older adults can be worried about their declining health and that of their spouse. They suffer the loss of an increasing number of their age peers. Many of them are also very involved in looking after their own parents and their grand-children, both of which is tiring.

*[Travelling] is like leaving things behind you, emptying your mind . . . it is like a parenthesis in life . . . you leave your little worries (Liliane, 84).*

*Oh well, you see . . . as soon as I have set a foot on the plane, I forget everything. It is a wonderful therapy (Michèle, 74).*

*We met a lot of people while travelling, to whom doctors had recommended to travel (France, 63).*

### **Be stimulated**

Older adults can suffer from their quiet routine sometimes, especially if they had a very active life before retiring. They will then aim at travelling to be stimulated. There needs to be a perceived change compared to their usual environment (climate, geography, language, dress style, eating habits . . . ) so that they feel stimulated.

*For me . . . it is about going to a foreign country, discovering other ways of doing things, other languages (Jeanine, 65).*

They seek adventure, sensations:

*We took the subway on our own, we went to see something which was unplanned . . . we managed . . . we like the New Frontiers spirit because it is . . . adventurous! (France, 63).*

### **Personal enrichment**

Older travellers like to discover other places and peoples:

*There is curiosity also . . . because, even if we traveled a lot, there are many countries we don't know . . . there is Vietnam, Cambodia . . . India (Jeanine, 65).*

They also like to discover nature:

*We are going to go to Equator. We will see the Galapagos Islands. So there, it is nature . . . it is still protected . . . there are species which are . . . really rare (Marie, 65).*

And at last, they further discover themselves when travelling:

*You discover yourself! (Joseph, 61).*

### **Fulfil the need for chosen sociability**

Older travellers enjoy socializing with new people who travel with them:

*Well, there is . . . . A pleasant atmosphere, we make new friends, it is . . . it is pleasant (Michèle, 74).*

They enjoy meeting new people outside their travel group:

*We went to Peru. We remained in contact with our guide (Marie, 65).*

They also enjoy the time spent with their travel companion:

*And there, it enabled us to spend time together because, one week just the two of us . . . the very first days you don't have much to tell one another . . . then after two, three days . . . it all . . . unlocks (Alain, 72, about a trip in Ireland with his daughter).*

*We like being just the two of us (Hervé, 66, who is very involved in volunteer work and whose wife says she never sees him).*

### **Fulfill the need for nostalgia**

*When I was in the navy, my pleasure was to be on the bridge watch when we discovered the land . . . at 5 or 6 in the morning. I went there to discover the land . . . the scents you can smell in the air, that you don't get otherwise (Xavier, 69).*

Today, when he explains his motivations to travel he says:

*Well, for example, arriving in a new country, discovering the land at 5 or 6 in the morning . . . to see the country unfold and lighten up, the scents which arise . . . it really is the impression of an unknown land.*

Travelling gives him the opportunity to reproduce an ancient experience he enjoyed a lot. Monique (78) has the nostalgia of the 1950s, after the war, when people used to share everything. She remembers the human warmth and the desire to help one another. Today, she would like to visit Thailand, to see

*These people who look so kind and all that . . . people's faces . . . well I can see human warmth.*

### **Create reified memories**

People are motivated to create their own set of memories, which they will relive in various forms after the trip.

*We know the world through television, but we . . . we need to see . . . really . . . how it is (Marie, 65).*

*And now, I see (on television) places where I have been. When I see pictures, I can see more than what is being shown to us (France, 63).*

*I made a presentation of the trip we did in 2003, in Iran-Ouzbekistan. I was telling anecdotes . . . (France, 63).*

Many respondents explain that travelling helps them provide meaning to their lives through the experiences they live and how it makes them think about the meaning of life.

*First you get exposed to other lifestyles. You see something completely different. It brings you confirmations and contradictions. So after your sort it out . . . (Michèle, 74).*

*When you visit underdeveloped countries, well I tell you, you don't come back untouched from*

**Table 1 : Travel Motivations Scale (for French Retirees)**

Factor	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Loadings	Joreskog Rhô	Rhô vc
<b>I would like to travel to . . . .</b>					
Enjoy life	Enjoy life to the maximum while I still can	0,90	0,91	0,90	0,68
	Live intensely the remaining years of my life		0,84		
	Enjoy life now because at my stage everything can stop tomorrow		0,79		
	Enjoy life now because I don't know what tomorrow is made of		0,80		
Nostalgia	Go back to places where I have important memories	0,84	0,85	0,84	0,57
	Relive happy moments of the past		0,81		
	Go back to places where I have been happy		0,67		
	See again people who have been part of my life		0,66		
Chosen sociability	Share good times with my travel companion	0,86	0,92	0,87	0,68
	Live special moments with my travel companion		0,75		
	Make my travel companion happy		0,80		
Relax	Get away from the concerns and stress of everyday life	0,73	0,54	0,75	0,50
	Rest and relax physically		0,74		
	Rest and relax mentally		0,82		
Personal enrichment	See the beauty of people and nations	0,64	0,50	0,64	0,39
	Admire the architectural beauty of the places I visit		0,45		
	Create interesting memories I can remember		0,82		
Create reified memories	Have interesting things to say when I return	0,77	0,80	0,79	0,56
	Share my pictures, my memories, my experience when I return		0,62		
	Speak about what I saw when I return		0,79		

*these trips. You wonder, if God exists, how come he allows so many inequalities on Earth?* (Xavier, 69).

Pierre (69) describes a perceived evolution between his couple and other retired couples who travel less, in the sense of lesser materialism and therefore greater spirituality:

*We are much less materialistic than others who never leave their home.*

Travelling helps older adults better understand themselves, better understand others and further their understanding of nature, all three elements of spirituality as we defined it.

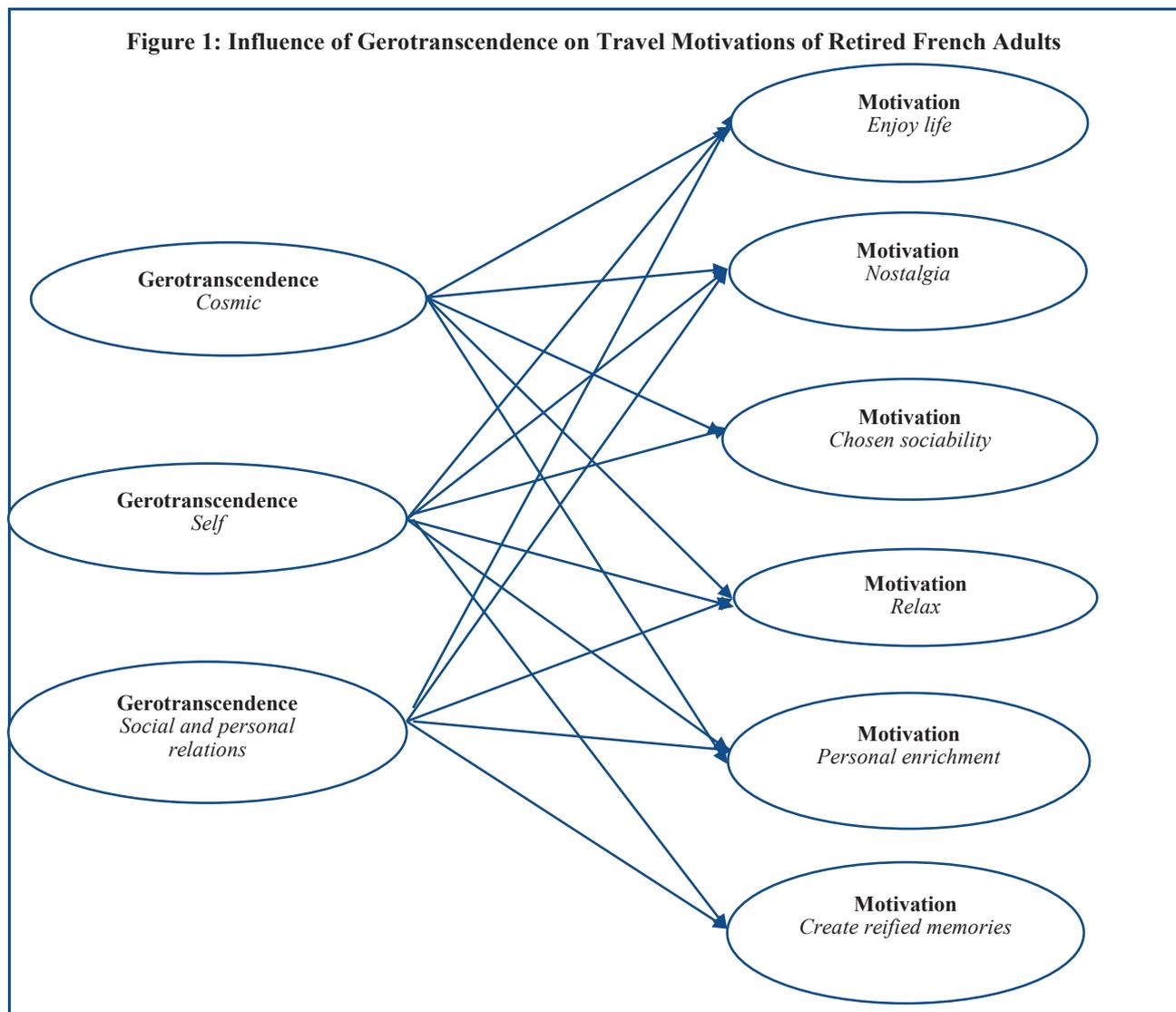
### Quantitative Results

Principal component analysis of the 7 factor scale (150 respondents) followed by confirmatory analysis (156 respondents) led to the confirmation of a 6 factor and 20 item scale (Table 1).

Structural equation modelling and confirmatory factor analysis results showed that the model of influence of gerotranscendence on the travel motivations of retired French adults (Figure 1) had an acceptable fit (EQS: CFI\*=0.89 and RMSEA=0.056). The dimensions of gerotranscendence have a significant influence on the motivations to travel. A set of gerotranscendence dimensions explains up to 22% of a travel motivations category.

### Discussion

This research identifies the travel motivations of retired adults in the context of aging. Its results reveal that these motivations can be partly explained by their spirituality, characterized by their gerotranscendence. The *Cosmic* dimension of gerotranscendence positively influences four categories of motivations. This influence expresses that older adults are conscious of their own mortality and of the limited time span that is available to them. It motivates them to enjoy life and



live intensely its last part (Motivation *Enjoy life*). It also expresses their need to reread part of their life path, which is possible when they revisit places associated with important memories (Motivation *Nostalgia*). This rereading will enable them to obtain part of the meaning of their life which they will aim at making as positive as possible. As a determinant of the *Relax* category of motivations, it expresses the need of older adults to place themselves in the quieter and relaxing environment offered by travelling. This allows them to free their mind of their usual worries and further their spiritual development. Finally, the influence of the *Cosmic* dimension on the *Create reified memories* category of motivations, expresses the feeling to be part of a larger environment, the discovery of which they further while travelling. Generating a capital of tangible memories will enable them to position themselves more solidly in that whole when they remember their trip and share their memories with others.

The *Self* dimension of gerotranscendence positively influences two categories of motivations. Its influence translates the need of older travellers to give a positive meaning to their life by discovering the world surrounding them, the understanding of which generates *Self enrichment*. It also translates their desire to spend time with meaningful others (Motivation *Chosen sociability*). Travelling will provide older adults with opportunities to share good times with people who are important for them and to make them happy.

The *Social and personal relations* dimension of gerotranscendence influences negatively three categories of motivations to travel and positively a fourth one. It expresses the opposed relations between the motivation to *Relax* and the motivations to *Enjoy life*, feel nostalgic (*Nostalgia*) and enrich oneself (*Personal enrichment*). Its influence on the *Chosen sociability* category of motivations expresses the desire to spend quality time with meaningful others.

### Conclusion

As a result of this research, we recommend that travel professionals consider the categories of travel motivations we have identified to segment the large and heterogeneous retired travellers market. Besides, it also appears necessary to adapt travel offers to the needs of older adults in order to enable them to enjoy life as much as they can, and respond to their need for nostalgia, personal enrichment, chosen sociability, relaxation and reified memories creation. The content

of the tour should offer as many opportunities as possible to respond to those needs.

Finally, it is also recommended that travel professionals emphasise these benefits and experiences in relation to the spiritual needs of older adults, while communicating their travel offers, thus shifting from a content based communication to a spiritual benefit based communication.

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### Appendix A : Profile of Qualitative Survey Respondents

	First name	Age	Marital status	Profession before retirement	Place of living
1	Joseph	61	Married	Technician	Brittany
2	France	63	Married	Primary school teacher	Brittany
3	Jeanine	65	Married	Housewife	Brittany
4	Marie	65	Married	Accounting executive	Brittany
5	Hervé	66	Married	Mechanic	Brittany
6	Annie	67	Married	Housewife	Brittany
7	Jacques	68	Married	Wood tradesman	Brittany
8	Pierre	69	Married	Policeman	Brittany
9	Xavier	69	Married	Sales executive	Brittany
10	Vincent	72	Married	Farmer	Bretagne
11	Alain	72	Married	Manager	Brittany
12	Michèle	74	Widowed	Personal Assistant	Brittany
13	Claude	74	Widowed	Photographer	Brittany
14	Nicole	76	Widowed	Retail shop owner	Brittany
15	Monique	78	Widowed	House wife	Brittany
16	Marguerite	84	Widowed	House wife	Paris area
17	Liliane	84	Widowed	Retail shop owner	Brittany