

Wellness Tourism in an Active Life System and Promotion of social Cohesion: The Case of Senior Universities

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Abstract: Recognition of the potential of wellness and quality of life for tourism was manifested by deepening knowledge of this market in the face of the cultural and tourist dynamics developed, but also through the creation of new tourism products specific to this sector and an active lifestyle system. Senior universities, for example, have been playing an increasingly important role in this dynamic of well-being and active life. It has not only promoted activities aimed at the cultural and tourist practice of an active life of well-being but also contributed to the social cohesion of the territory. In this study, carried out geographically in the Centre of Portugal, the aim is to present a case study related to the practice of well-being and active life through the senior university in its relationship with tourism education and the enhancement of the cultural experience. The main objectives of this study are, therefore, the approach to wellness tourism in an active life system and the promotion of social cohesion and by verifying the importance of guaranteeing a healthy life in tourist places that lead people to experience aspects of a healthy lifestyle committed to growing cultural and tourist knowledge. To achieve both objectives, a quantitative analysis was carried out, and from the preliminary results, it is identified that senior universities should, therefore, be understood as social intervention devices. Innovative didactic approaches to teaching end up accompanying the availability of information that facilitates access to knowledge, not least because the new reality contributed by the aging of the population, associated with the process of globalization and the economic and social situation, poses new challenges to the present-day education of well-being, being and quality of life. The conclusions point to favoring the quality of life and social inclusion of those who actively participate in the activities provided by the senior university(s), as active life strategies linked to cultural, wellness, and tourism quality of life, reinforcing the role of social cohesion in the territory in which it operates.

Keywords: Wellness tourism, Cultural tourism, Social cohesion, Senior university, Active life

1. Introduction

The senior tourism sector is related to the aging of the world population, representing an economic and social potential for the tourism industry. Social institutions and companies create products aimed at this tourist sector, which constitutes new opportunities for this segment.

Tourism, being an activity for all ages, has created new opportunities from studies and approaches that fall on the aging of European society, to contribute to a better interpretation and economic and social analysis of the senior tourist.

The impact that tourism in general, and senior tourism, has on the individual dynamism of citizenship, on the occupation of free time, on autonomy, on well-being, on leisure, on self-knowledge, and on combating isolation itself is a reality that is not alienated in the context of the economic and social development of the European Union.

The World Health Organization characterizes active and healthy aging as the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security, for improving the quality of life as people age, as well as the process of developing and maintaining functional capacity, which contributes to the well-being of seniors, with functional capacity being the result of the interaction of the person's intrinsic capacities (physical and mental) with the environment (WHO, 2015).

It is understood that this is a process of optimizing opportunities to improve the quality of life. Tourism, as a service and resource, can therefore be used as a strategy to promote healthy and active aging and prevent situations of isolation and dependency.

In terms of active and healthy aging, Portugal is committed to the WHO Strategy and Global Action Plan for Healthy Aging and to the fundamental values and objectives of the European Union (EU), which include the

promotion of active aging, reflected in initiatives such as the EU Action Proposals for the promotion of Active and Healthy Aging and Solidarity between Generations (Decision no. 940/2011/U, of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 14 September).

The creation and development of tourist products centered on the person and that provide memorable experiences, has not yet reached the desired planning, due to the particularity and heterogeneity of the senior tourist. This context may mean that the tourist offer aimed at this segment is small, and one should invest in innovative strategies that improve the tourist offer in this market segment.

As Lohmann & Danielson (2004: 76) refer, senior tourism is a dynamic market, where the characteristics and consumption patterns of individuals vary over time and are different today and tend to be different in the coming decades. Regarding the motivational factors for the search for wellness tourism products, Boćkus Vento, Tammi, Kompula, and Kolesnikova (2023) point to the existence of six motivational factors: status, beauty and appearance, personal development, nature and outdoor activities, socialization, and rest and relaxation (being the main factor, regardless of the nationality of the tourists).

Continuing to develop transversal policies and multidisciplinary, flexible, and proximity action strategies that allow all seniors to enjoy an active and healthy life is an ethical imperative. It is also important to give substance and coherence to action within the scope of promoting active and healthy aging, in line with the commitments assumed by the WHO and the European Union, namely about the adoption of common strategies and indicators that allow international comparison and interregional.

Increasing the functional capacity of seniors is a point of reference for formulating a guiding model of intervention that defines priorities, parameters for monitoring and evaluation, and imprints dynamics and cooperation synergies between different institutions within the scope of different health programs and projects, including partners committed to improving standards of health, participation, safety, and research.

Thus, in an interministerial and intersectoral partnership, Order No. 12427/2016, of October 17, plans a National Strategy for Active and Healthy Aging (ENEAS).

This strategy is based on the work carried out by the General Directorate of Health (DGS), within the scope of disease prevention, health promotion, and National Health Plan (PNS) programs, with the collaboration of the National Network for Integrated Continuous Care (RNCCI), the Institute of Social Security, I.P., the General Directorate of Social Security, I.P., the António Sérgio Cooperative for the Social Economy (CASES), the General Directorate of Local Authorities, the Commission for Citizenship and Equality of Gender, the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities and the National Association of Parishes.

It is imperative that organizations, institutions, and public and private agents develop innovative tourism products so that tourism continues to meet the demands of the senior segment. The impact of population aging on society will depend, in part, on the nature of the policies that will respond to this new reality (Bloom, 2015).

In turn, "healthy aging" refers to the process of developing and maintaining functional capacity, which contributes to people's well-being, with functional capacity being the result of the interaction of the person's intrinsic capacities (physical and mental) with the medium.

The main objective is well-being, a holistic concept that contemplates all the elements and components of life valued by the person. More than the result of success and individual motivation, healthy aging reflects life habits, support, and opportunities guaranteed by society (WHO, 2015).

As Cabral (2013: 45) points out, quality of life is clearly the dominant tonic of active aging, which can be defined as the individual's perception of their position in life, in the cultural context and values in which they live, and in relation to your goals, expectations, standards, and concerns.

The cultural and tourist dynamics developed and oriented towards the practice of senior tourism through senior universities reflect a paradigm shift that is in line with the National Strategy for Active and Healthy Aging (ENEAS).

This strategic document, whose guiding principles are anchored in a vision of society that envisages aging throughout life with health and well-being, with participation, inclusion, and security, was the bases that reaffirmed the main objective of this study. Also, the bibliographic review carried out on the central focus of this work contributed to a better perception of the importance of senior universities in terms of promoting social and territorial cohesion.

2. Creation of Spaces That Enhance Integration and Participation: Tourism And Senior University

Spaces still impose many barriers that limit the functional capacity and participation of seniors in society. Some of these are physical, for example, inadequate buildings or inaccessible transport. Many barriers can result simply from the way in which aging is approached (WHO, 2015).

The Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities serves as an excellent starting point in promoting active and healthy aging.

The guidelines contained in the Global Guide to Cities Friendly to the Elderly (Table 1), edited by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, in a joint translation and technical revision with the Directorate-General for Health (DGS), serve as the basis for establishing guidelines for the creation of physical and social environments that enhance the integration, protection, and participation of people, either by removing barriers to participation or by compensating for the loss of abilities, however applying to all ages.

Table 1: Global Guide to Age-Friendly Cities

Pleasant and clean environment	The natural surroundings of a city are spontaneously referred to as being an age-friendly feature.
The importance of green spaces	The existence of green spaces is one of the most frequently mentioned environmentally friendly features. However, in many cities, there are obstacles that prevent seniors from using green spaces.
A place to rest	Having areas where people can sit is generally considered a necessary urban feature.
Age-friendly rides	The conditions in which the sidewalks are found have an obvious impact on the possibility for people to walking in their area of residence. Narrow, uneven sidewalks, with high curbs or obstacles, pose potential hazards and affect mobility ability.
Safe pedestrian crossings	The possibility of crossing the street safely is a frequently mentioned concern, and it should be noted that several cities have taken measures to improve conditions for people to cross the road.
Accessibility	Barriers to physical access are mentioned, which can discourage seniors from leaving home.
A safe environment	Feeling safe in the environment they live in greatly affects people's willingness to move around in the local community, which in turn affects their independence, physical health, social integration, and emotional well-being.
Pedestrian paths and cycle paths	Pedestrian paths and cycle paths are part of a health-promoting and people-friendly environment, although they are also associated with hazards.
Age-friendly buildings	In general terms, the characteristics considered necessary for buildings to be age-friendly are the following: elevators; escalators; ramps; wide doors and passages; adequate stairs (not too high or too steep), with handrails; non-slip floors, rest areas with comfortable benches; adequate signage; Public bathrooms with access for people with disabilities.
Adequate public toilets	The existence of clean toilets, conveniently located, well-signposted, and accessible to people with disabilities is normally considered an important feature.
Elderly customers	Good customer service, sensitive to people's needs.

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from DGS (2021).

In the context of intergenerational relationships and solidarities, the inclusion of seniors in everyday life and in the transmission of knowledge, stimuli, values, and traditions is an added value for younger generations. The established interaction enhances well-being, integration, and social recognition.

Experiencing innovative opportunities and a life cycle learning culture can be accomplished either through structured activities (workshops, short courses, or seminars) or on your own initiative at home, work, or in social activities recreation (Lopes, Simões & Nunes, 2020; Loureiro, Ferreira & Simões, 2021a, b).

Senior universities are privileged spaces for the development of these activities. Even more so when one understands that the cultural diversity of populations, i.e., the “multiplicity of means by which the culture of social groups and societies is expressed” (UNESCO, 2005: 5), of senior people (integrated into the demographic structure), are peculiar and subject to analysis. The heterogeneity of participants in senior universities is representative of the cultural diversity of society.

Thus, these senior universities must be prepared to deal with a variety of cultures, especially regarding the motivations that operate as resources for explaining different social representations. Aging is an achievement, both for individuals and for societies, being a consequence of economic, social, and biomedical progress.

It is worth analyzing the challenges that emerge from this achievement and the adaptation needs of societies (Cabral, 2013). Seniors' ongoing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic life is defined as the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security, to improve their quality of life as people age (WHO, 2002).

A multidimensional phenomenon, population aging has an impact on all ages, and crosses different frontiers and themes of human life, intersecting with other global trends (Table 2).

Table 2: Global Aging Trends

1	Urbanization and the increasing proportion of urban dwellers aged 60 and over pose security risks. At the same time, the phenomenon of the rural exodus of the younger population results in the increase and isolation of the elderly in the most depopulated areas.
2	Globalization and technological evolution, if, on the one hand, they facilitate social networks, on the other hand, they make it possible to increase exclusion and stereotypes in relation to the elderly, devaluing capacity and experience to the detriment of new knowledge. In terms of health, access to the benefits of technology is unequal, even though they expand the potential for disease prevention, home care, autonomy, and independence.
3	The migration of older people in search of a better life, and those who age in adoptive countries, and the migration of adult children can leave parents with less support.
4	The epidemiological transitions translated by the reduction of risks for infectious diseases, with chronic diseases becoming the main cause of death and disability, intersect aging as people start to live long enough for chronic diseases to develop.
5	Inequality between men and women, namely regarding the unbalanced division of care work that continues to be borne mainly by women, generating disadvantages throughout their professional lives, such as lower wages, segregation, difficulties in reconciling, interruptions, and fewer opportunities for career advancement, resulting in higher rates of poverty, particularly in old age.
6	Recognition of ageism as a form of discrimination, through legislation (anti-discrimination law), other public policy measures, and training and awareness actions.

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from WHO (2020).

In recent decades, the social economy has been asserting its ability to collaborate effectively to resolve new challenges and social problems, strengthening its position in sustainable and stable economic development. It is in this context that the Portuguese Government signed the Cooperation Commitment for the Social and Solidarity Sector (Biennium 2019-2020) with various social partners.

As a strategic instrument for the social and solidarity sector, emphasis should be placed on the development of an integrated social support network, the purpose of which would be to contribute to equitable coverage of the country in social services and facilities.

Recognition of the importance of the social economy has been increasing for various reasons, among which stands out the relevant contribution to the creation of stable and lasting employment, as well as its strong contribution to sustainable development, social and environmental innovation, technology and strengthening social, economic, and regional cohesion.

Thus, the social economy could detect new needs, mobilize, and mobilize forces and create the most diverse and numerous networks, as well as foster what is called “social capital”, the result of its own social interaction,

promoting citizenship activity, solidarity, and a type of economy with democratic values that put people first (ENEAS, 2017-2025: 13.).

ENEAS is in line with the National Health Plan (Ministry of Health, Portugal, Directorate General for Health, 2015) and with the European Union Action Proposals for the Promotion of Active and Healthy Aging and Solidarity between Generations (Table 3), and with the 2030 Agenda in its sustainable development goals.

Table 3: Global Action Plan for Healthy Aging: 4 Strategic Principles

Health	Participation
Promotion of initiatives and practices aimed at reducing the prevalence, postponing the onset, and controlling the aggravation and impact of chronic diseases and the reduction of physical and mental capacities in the elderly and enhancing their autonomy.	Promotion of education and training throughout the life cycle, including strategies to promote health literacy and encourage the creation of physical and social environments that protect and enhance the integration and participation of older people in society and in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.
Safety	Measurement, monitoring and investigation
Support for initiatives and practices aimed at minimizing risks and promoting the well-being and safety of elderly people.	Promotion of scientific research in the area of active and healthy aging, enhancing the assessment of needs, the development, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions, and the dissemination of good practices and innovation

Source: Own elaboration. Adapted from European Union Action for the Promotion of Active and Healthy Aging and Solidarity between Generations, 2021.

A society where the aging process throughout the life cycle, which will confer high levels of health, well-being, quality of life, and personal fulfillment to the active, dignified, and healthy senior population (ENEAS, 2017-2025: 18), is the purpose of the action of the European Union, where senior universities assume a preponderant role in this mission.

The creation of spaces that enhance integration and participation, as is the case presented here, based on the dynamic established between tourism and senior university, adds strategic value in terms of tourism and in terms of cultural enrichment in this segment of senior tourism.

At the local level, it represents the preservation of local culture, values, and identity, capable of promoting territorial development, in a cumulative attitude of cultural and touristic experience, and of promoting social and territorial cohesion.

3. Tourism Education for Sustainable Territorial Development

Tourism is a leisure activity that presupposes organization as a separate and regulated sphere of social practice in contemporary societies (Urry, 2002: 2).

It emerges as a significant leisure practice from the perspective of occupying free time, linking itself to a cultural and social activity. Tourism promotes socialization, and cultural integration, and drives new experiences, making a crucial contribution to building new habits, customs, and social inclusion.

The elaboration of a tourism strategy that invites the consumption of senior tourists is decisive for the success and sustainability of the senior market, within which travel represents a unique experience highly valued by this segment.

As Zniadek (2006: 103) points out, traveling can be an enriching experience for seniors, as it provides a change in the daily routine through moving to places different from the place of residence, interaction with the environment, intercultural contact, and social interaction and benefits from new experiences.

The Senior Tourism Lisbon Charter (OMT and INATEL, 1999) refers to some of the basic factors that senior tourists value during a tourism experience in a tourist destination (Table 4).

Table 4: Basic Quality Factors for Senior Tourism

1	Safety
2	Hygiene and Health

3	Environmental issues
4	Independence
5	Accessibility to services and facilities
6	Consumer protection standards

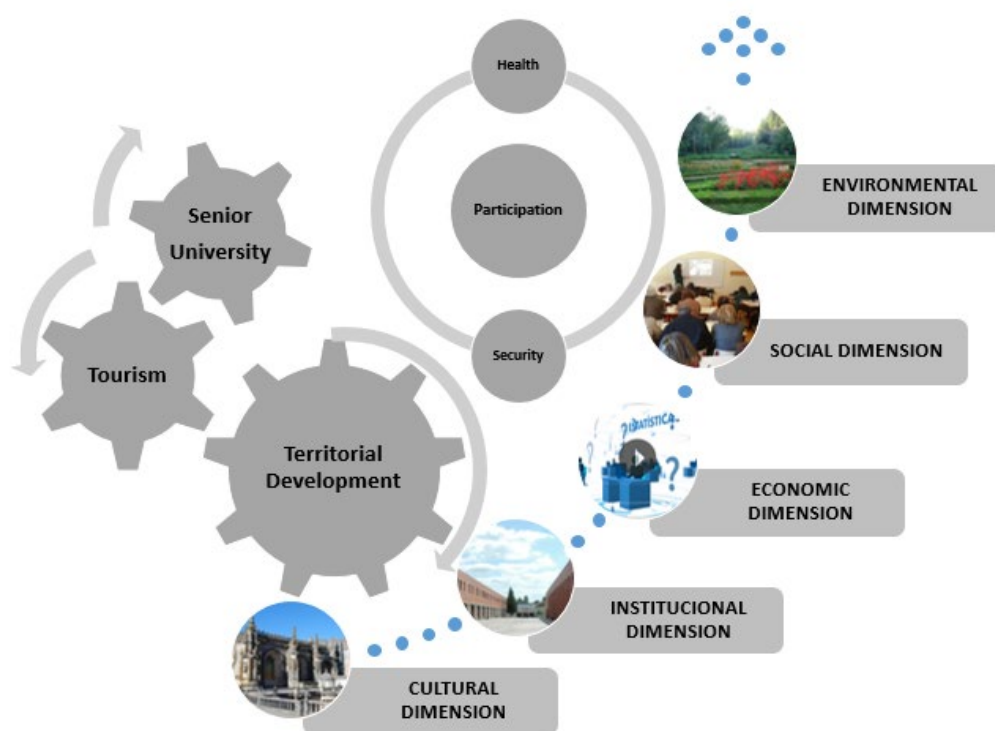
Source: Lopes (2017). Adapted from OMT and INATEL (1999)

Currently, almost all countries in the western world feel the need to implement an economic, social, and family policy that can change the social balance in a crisis. In this sense, senior universities play an increasingly significant role in society.

Senior universities should be understood as social intervention organizations, providing individuals with active and participatory aging, stimulating them not only psychologically and physically, but also at a cognitive level, in addition to improving their integration and active participation in society.

The dynamics of social and territorial development are constantly under construction, however, there is a general understanding that, in this dynamic, the participation of citizens/actors will be a condition of social durability (Deffontaines & Prod'homme, 2001: 32).

The territorial development process of different dimensions (environmental, social, cultural, economic, institutional) seeks to highlight the importance of linking senior universities with tourism in deepening knowledge, appreciation, and reactivation of local resources (Figure 1).



Source: Lopes (2017)

Figure 1: Territorial Development Dynamics

The development of the territory and its social and territorial cohesion depends on how the population organizes and transforms its territory, in which civic participation has an important role to play (Deffontaines & Prod'homme, 2001).

This connection is significant since individuals transact meaning, or more specifically, attribute meaning to an object-as-sign, interpreting it, according to their matrix of interpretation collected through education and cultural knowledge, which the object has (Almeida, 2018: 21).

A plural society should allow for civic involvement, which is essential to ensure the construction of citizenship, social innovation, and creative diversity in the territory (Lopes & Rosa, 2016).

Tourism education, when centered on cultural heritage (material and immaterial) becomes the main source of knowledge and enrichment for individuals and communities. Tourism education contributed to the cultural process and based on its manifestations, may awaken in seniors an interest in resolving significant issues for their own personal and collective lives.

The historical heritage and the environment in which it is inserted offer opportunities to provoke feelings of curiosity, leading them to want to know more about the existing heritage resources (Costa & Lopes, 2017: 48).

An individual who knows the heritage objects that surround him, consequently, better recognizes their importance, and will naturally have a greater propensity for actions related to their preservation and conservation (Lopes & Rego, 2017: 344).

Portugal 2020 references strategic axes that ensure consistency with interventions of a sub-regional or local nature, where the promotion of social inclusion, in a context of concerted mobilization of the existing social network in the territory, is particularly highlighted (Integrated Strategies for Territorial Development-EIDT).

In this sense, the convergence of actions between senior tourists, senior universities, municipalities, and other actors in the local territory, is fundamental for the fulfillment of tourism education, with a view to the sustainable development of the territories in which all these actors operate.

The maintenance of this process of contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of seniors who are an integral part of the territory and of a constant shared participation deepens territorial vocations and social and cultural organizations aligned with sustainable development and social and territorial cohesion.

4. Methodology

In this work on tourism and the importance of the senior university in promoting social and territorial cohesion, associated with the enhancement of the tourist and cultural experience, we sought to understand how seniors understand the practice of attending a senior university and, at the same time, one can also perceive in the dynamics of tourism and senior university, the latter's contribution, both to the cultural and tourist appropriation of the territory, as well as to tourist education and enhancement of the cultural experience.

The methodology followed a general perception of the contexts of education, aging, learning, and spaces for integration and participation. The present study is based on research that was carried out based on quantitative methods.

A questionnaire survey was used to collect the opinions of seniors residing in a city in Central Portugal and attending a senior university. The questionnaires were applied in the 2017-2018 school year, to a non-probabilistic sample of 168 seniors. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 21.0).

The research was divided into three parts, aiming to analyze the importance of the senior university for those who attend it, to analyze the importance they give to their practice of attending the senior university, and, to understand the degree of relevance that they establish between tourism and the university senior in the reaffirmation of tourism education for sustainable development and social and territorial cohesion.

Based on these objectives, the questionnaire was divided into three main sections: 1) Identification of citizens who attend the senior university; 2) Consideration of the importance of the senior university for tourism education; 3) Senior university contribution to sustainable territorial development.

5. Analysis and Discussion of Results

The information contained in this part of the study concerns the interpretation of the results collected through the analysis of the answers to the questionnaire applied to citizens who attend a senior university.

The main results are a) female [68%] and male [32%] senior students; b) the age range is between [57-78]; c) the highest level of education is secondary education [58%] and basic education [42%]. This characterization is in line with the global aging trends presented by the OMS (2020), namely in terms of age range and gender issues.

Most d) attend senior university motivated by socialization [59%]; to increase knowledge [31%] and occupation [10%]. These factors are identified by UNESCO (2005) and Cabral (2013) which refer us to the need for active aging. This promotes these people's quality of life (OMS, 2020).

They e) found out about the senior university, through friends [73%] and through information from the municipality [27%].

f) The majority of those attending the senior university are satisfied [64%]; g) and consider that attending a senior university contributes to the cultural and tourist education of the territory where they are integrated [73%]. In other words, as argued by Zniadek (2006) respondents consider that the relationship with tourism is positive. Their participation allows social dynamics to be created (Deffontaines & Prond'homme, 2001), as well as ensuring greater creative diversity in the territory (Lopes & Rosa, 2016).

Finally, h) there is unanimity in considering that attending a senior university has high benefits, both personally and socially, contributing to greater integration and cohesion of the territory. This tends to happen due to the dynamics of senior universities that promote interaction with heritage (Costa & Lopes, 2017; Lopes & Rego, 2017).

They also reinforce that the activities developed at the senior university allow them to visit tourist destinations and cultural and tourist experiences that, otherwise, they would never know, considering that this is also a very important contribution of the senior university to sustainable development and territorial cohesion.

Open questions answered by the senior participants reinforce the role of the senior university for more in-depth learning about the understanding of the territory where they are integrated.

They also attribute high importance to tourist and cultural education in terms of contributing to their enriching experiences in terms of knowledge, leisure, and socialization. The respondents' answers are consistent with what is advocated by the authors, who indicate that tourism education promotes sustainable territorial development, where seniors assume a relevant role due to their ability to collaborate in what is understood as the social economy and also (ENEAS, 2017).

6. Conclusions

The integration of the senior population in the existing senior university in the territory, understood as a privileged space for the process of development and involvement of local inhabitants, promotes the quality of life of those who actively participate in the activities provided by the senior university.

The growing number of senior citizens who attend senior universities demonstrates the relevance of these institutions for the active participation of seniors in the social and cultural life of the territories.

The present study allows the identification of the citizens who attend this senior university, being mostly female, aged between 57 and 78 years old, and tend to have secondary education.

It should also be noted that according to them, senior universality is important for tourism education. They also consider that this type of university contributes to sustainable territorial development.

As a future line of research, the same structural design of the questionnaire survey will be considered, but from the perspective of the interpretation of tourism education.

In future research, it is intended to develop the practice(s) of tourism education in a more focused way, highlighting this practice through this case study on the importance of senior universities in the context of social and territorial cohesion touched upon in this study.

As a line of future research, the same structural design of the questionnaire survey will be considered, but from the perspective of the interpretation of tourism education.

The main relevance of this study leads to the conclusion that tourism, cultural diversity and the benefits arising from the practice of attending senior universities instigate and motivate them more easily for cultural and tourist programs in the city.

It encourages them to get to know the territory better, instills them with new insights, allowing them to deepen their knowledge in a more intense way and associate with the territory.

It is concluded that in the dynamics of tourism and senior university, tourism education is promoted, and cultural experience is valued, in a context of mobilization, integration, and participation, where all social actors play a leading role in the logic of social cohesion and territorial development.

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