

The Transformation of Tourism in Ageing Societies: Silver Tourism - The Case of Türkiye

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The rapid demographic transformation experienced across the world has become one of the most significant challenges of the twenty-first century. Declining fertility rates, increasing life expectancy, and improvements in healthcare systems have led to a substantial rise in the proportion of elderly populations in many countries. This demographic shift not only affects labor markets, welfare systems, and healthcare services, but also transforms consumption patterns and tourism demand. Within this context, "silver tourism," which refers to tourism activities targeting individuals aged 60 and above, has emerged as a growing segment of the global tourism industry. As ageing populations increasingly seek active, healthy, and socially connected lifestyles, tourism has become an important tool for enhancing quality of life, social participation, and well-being among older adults.

This study aims to examine the transformation of tourism in ageing societies through the concept of silver tourism, focusing specifically on the case of Türkiye. The study discusses how demographic ageing reshapes tourism demand and evaluates Türkiye's potential to become a competitive destination for elderly tourists. In particular, the research analyzes the opportunities and challenges associated with accessible tourism, health tourism, thermal tourism, sustainable tourism practices, and age-friendly tourism policies within the broader framework of social welfare and demographic transition. The paper argues that ageing should not only be considered a social burden or a challenge for welfare states, but also as a transformative dynamic that creates new economic and social opportunities. In this regard, silver tourism has gained strategic importance for tourism-dependent economies seeking sustainable growth and year-round tourism diversification. Older tourists generally have different travel motivations and expectations compared to younger generations. They tend to prefer longer stays, safer destinations, health-oriented services, accessible infrastructure, and culturally meaningful experiences. Moreover, retired individuals often travel outside peak tourism seasons, contributing to the reduction of seasonality in tourism destinations. Therefore, silver tourism can provide important economic advantages for countries such as Türkiye, where tourism revenues play a critical role in economic development.

Türkiye possesses considerable potential for the development of silver tourism due to its geographical location, rich cultural heritage, favorable climate conditions, thermal resources, and relatively affordable healthcare services. Particularly in regions such as Afyonkarahisar, Yalova, Denizli, and Antalya, thermal and wellness tourism facilities have increasingly attracted older domestic and international visitors. In addition, the expansion of healthcare infrastructure and medical tourism services has strengthened Türkiye's position as a destination for elderly travelers seeking both leisure and health-related services. However, despite these opportunities, the study emphasizes that the current tourism infrastructure and policies remain insufficient in addressing the specific needs of ageing populations. One of the main issues discussed in this paper is accessibility. Accessible transportation systems, age-friendly accommodation facilities, barrier-free urban planning, and inclusive tourism services are essential for the sustainable development of silver tourism. Nevertheless, many tourism destinations in Türkiye continue to face physical, digital, and social accessibility problems that limit the participation of elderly individuals in tourism activities. Furthermore, the rapid digitalization of tourism services, including online booking systems, mobile applications, and AI-supported tourism technologies, may create new forms of exclusion for older adults who experience difficulties in adapting to digital technologies. Thus, while digital

transformation offers important opportunities for the tourism industry, it simultaneously raises concerns regarding digital inequality and social inclusion. The study also addresses silver tourism within the framework of eco-social policies and sustainable development. Climate change and environmental degradation increasingly affect tourism destinations and vulnerable social groups, particularly elderly individuals who are more sensitive to extreme weather conditions and health risks. Therefore, sustainable tourism policies should incorporate age-sensitive approaches that prioritize environmental sustainability alongside social welfare and inclusivity. In this respect, silver tourism should not merely be viewed as a market opportunity, but as part of a broader social policy framework aimed at promoting active ageing, healthy living, and social participation.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative and conceptual approach by reviewing the existing literature on demographic ageing, tourism transformation, and silver tourism policies. Additionally, secondary data related to Türkiye's demographic structure and tourism sector are analyzed to evaluate the country's strengths and limitations in the field of silver tourism.

In conclusion, the paper argues that demographic ageing is transforming the structure of global tourism and creating new demands that require innovative and inclusive tourism policies. Türkiye has significant potential to position itself as a competitive silver tourism destination; however, this requires comprehensive investments in accessible infrastructure, sustainable tourism planning, digital inclusion, and age-friendly social policies. The development of silver tourism in Türkiye can contribute not only to economic growth and tourism diversification, but also to the enhancement of social welfare and quality of life for ageing populations.

Key Words : Silver Tourism, Türkiye Tourism Policies, Demographic Ageing