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Leisure travel as process: Understanding the relationship between leisure travel and subjective well-being among older adults

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Abstract

This exploratory paper contributes to a theorization of the relationship between leisure travels and subjective well-being among older adults. Although it is generally agreed that leisure travel contributes to one's mental well-being, the processes that lead to various forms of well-being are often understudied. It is argued that a more nuanced understanding of these processes can lead to better appreciation of the meanings of travel for the older adults. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 30 older travellers to garner their thoughts on how leisure travels have contributed to their subjective well-being. Through a thematic analysis of travel narratives, four recurring themes, namely 1) Reminiscing the past; 2) Bonding with family members; 3) Rediscovering self; and 4) Forming informal networks of care (RBRiC) were identified as processes leading to various elements of subjective well-being among older adults. Although non-exhaustive, these processes reveal the embodied meanings and experiences of travel for the individual and can potentially lead to more meaningful discussions on how various aspects of subjective well-being are attained.

Keywords: Leisure travel; subjective well-being; older adults; informal networks of care; mental wellness; senior tourism

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Introduction

Leisure travel amongst older adults is becoming an important segment in the tourism industry. This relatively new segment has been referred to in a variety of ways ranging from ‘senior tourism’ (e.g. Utama, 2017) to ‘silver tourism’ (e.g. Zsarnóczky, 2016) and ‘mature tourism’ (Smith et al., 2010). Existing literature mostly adopt market-driven approaches and quantitative methodologies. Due to the lucrative potential of the so called ‘silver market’, tourism studies concentrated on exploring issues such as travel motivations, preferences, behavior, satisfaction, and marketing strategies (see for example, Utama, 2017; Vigolo, 2017). Such studies assume an increase in purchasing power and free time for traveling amongst the older travellers who are increasingly represented by the baby boomer generation. These market-centric studies give insufficient attention to individuals’ traveling experiences and are ‘distanced and quantitative’ (Nimrod, 2008). Moreover, as Morgan et al. (2015) lamented, ‘Such scrutinizing of older people’s tourism motivation presupposes that it is possible and desirable to generalize their travel behaviour and can actually confirm stereotypes’ (p. 2). To address this dearth, there have been calls for more critical interventions that give priority to a qualitative, person-centred perspective to allow for ‘...a better and more in-depth recollection and understanding of the actual trip experience’ (Patterson 2006, p. 40).

Tourism studies’ foray into leisure travel and well-being is an answer to such calls. This genre of research is partly influenced by philosophy and psychology (Smith & Diekmann, 2017) and engages with concepts like ‘quality of life’ (e.g. Dolnicar et al., 2012; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2002; Uysal et al., 2016), ‘wellness’ (e.g. Kelly, 2012; Voigt et al., 2011; Voigt & Pforr, 2014), and ‘happiness’ (e.g. Filep & Deery, 2010; McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Nawijn,

2011). Indeed, ‘emotional and psychological well-being are vital to ageing well’ (Morgan et al., 2015, p. 3). Leisure travel provides a platform for ageing individuals to interact with others and stimulates their memories when they reminisce about past experiences (Coleman, 2005; Mullins, 2011). Studies also showed that tourism activities can promote senior travellers’ well-being by instilling ‘a renewed sense of purpose’, thus facilitating their work-retirement transition (Hawes, 1988; Wearing & Wearing, 1996). Relatedly, tourism is also believed to be able to assist ageing individuals in ‘reaffirming self and developing a new identity... in later years’ (Grant & Kluge 2012, p. 130).

This paper contributes to the above-mentioned genre of research by attempting to stimulate discussion towards theorizing the *relationship* between leisure travel and subjective well-being. Although it is generally agreed that leisure travel contributes to one’s mental well-being, the processes that lead to various forms of well-being are often neglected. In other words, the causal relationship between leisure travels and an improved state of being are taken for granted. Discussions are focused on the various aspects of subjective well-being brought about by travels. However, what happens *between* the leisure activity of traveling (i.e. action) and the outcome remains understudied. As research on senior tourism metamorphosed from concentrating on the “why” (motivation) to one that celebrates the “what” (outcomes/effects) of tourism experiences, there seems to be a vacuum of neglect on the “how”. Discussions on the *processes* that link actions to outcomes – i.e. the relationship between leisure travels and well-being – are lacking. This is where this exploratory piece seeks to intervene. It is hoped that the collection and qualitative analysis of older adults’ travel narratives can pave the way for a person-centred approach and more meaningful discussion of leisure travel and well-being. Moreover, an in-depth understanding of the underlying mechanisms of emotional well-being related to leisure travels will have profound

implications for tour operators and planners as they gear themselves up for a post-COVID-19 travel and tourism world.

Subjective well-being and leisure (travel)

The study of subjective well-being has always been complex, with the term being used interchangeably with ‘happiness’, ‘quality of life’, ‘life satisfaction’, ‘positive feelings’ and ‘negative feelings’ (or the lack of it) among others. Despite its complexities, literature on the topic has grown significantly over the years. An early piece of work by Wilson (1967) describes the happy person as a “young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and of a wide range of intelligence” (cited in Diener et al., 1999, p. 276). However, Diener and colleagues (1999) note that researchers with increased knowledge about the correlates of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) are no longer content with ‘simply describing the demographic characteristics that correlate with it’ (p. 276). Instead, effort has been directed to ‘understanding the processes that underlie happiness’. For instance, Diener (1984) examines the psychological causes of happiness and proposes a tripartite model of SWB defined as a preponderance of positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and subjective cognitive evaluations such as life satisfaction (Diener & Suh, 1997). Kahneman and colleagues (2003, cited in Steptoe et al., 2015) echoed this by suggesting three approaches to measuring psychological well-being: life evaluation, hedonic well-being, and eudaimonic well-being:

Life evaluation refers to peoples’ thoughts about the quality or goodness of their lives, their overall life satisfaction or sometimes how happy they are with their lives. Hedonic well-being refers to everyday feelings or moods such as experienced happiness (the mood), sadness, anger and stress, and Eudemonic

well-being focuses on judgments about the meaning and purpose of one's life.

(Steptoe et al., 2015, pp. 2-3)

Similarly, the CEO of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen, Meik Wiking (2017), refers to these as the “Three Dimensions of Happiness”, namely the “cognitive” dimension (overall life satisfaction), “affective” (or hedonic – emotions on an everyday basis) dimension, and “eudaimonia” (meaningful and purposeful life) dimension. From a positive psychology perspective, Seligman (2011) also examined well-being and theorized that it had several contributing elements and was ‘essentially a theory of uncoerced choice, comprising five elements that free people will choose for their own sake’ (pp. 16-25). The elements are Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment, making up the PERMA model. Seligman’s (2018) PERMA model, Diener’s SWB and Wiking’s Three Dimensions of Happiness are important forays in the theorization of well-being and will be pertinent in understanding the processes undergirding leisure travel and subjective well-being among older adults in this paper.

In the context of leisure and well-being among older adults, a longitudinal study in the Swedish context found that changes in levels of participation in leisure activities influenced how older Swedes retrospectively evaluated their Quality of Life (QOL) (Silverstein & Parker, 2002). Additionally, Nimrod (2007) found that participating in leisure activities was a dominant factor that contributed to life satisfaction in earlier stages of retirement. In her study with Israeli retirees, she reported that six out of 13 groups of leisure activities identified were found to have significant influences on retirees’ life satisfaction. These are: high culture and ‘dolce-vita’ (e.g. vacations abroad), free outdoor activities (e.g. day travels), spirituality and

enrichment (e.g. religious activities), popular culture (e.g. popular music concerts), following generation (e.g. grandchildren), and independent home activities (e.g. listening to music at home). Over in the Croatian context, engagement in leisure activities also contributed to subjective well-being, with patterns of important leisure activities differing across age groups and gender (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2011). Furthermore, Kuykendall et al. (2015) argue that it is through leisure satisfaction that leisure engagement influences SWB. They posit:

Leisure is important for well-being across a wide range of cultures and life stages and that leisure oriented toward fulfilling psychological needs and compensating for needs or values that are not fulfilled in other domains is particularly important for SWB. (Kuykendall et al., 2018, p. 10)

In another quantitative study on 124 senior travellers participating in several seven-day North American guided tours, Milman (1998) concluded that although travel itself may not change the level of happiness of the older traveller, the activities related to the travel experience could affect one's psychological well-being.

In the Asian context, similar studies were conducted with Korean and Japanese older adults (Kim et al., 2015; L. Zhang & J. Zhang, 2018). For example, Kim and colleagues (2015) examined the travel behaviors of older Korean tourists and found that 'travel experience played an important role in affecting leisure life satisfaction and overall quality of life' (p. 472). In a separate study, L. Zhang and J. Zhang (2018) found that leisure travel behaviour and experiences contributed to maintaining QOL in the domains of leisure life and intimacy for older people in Japanese. Additionally, Uysal and colleagues (2016) conducted a review of 35 studies about QOL and tourism and reported that while 'tourism experiences and activities affected tourists' overall QOL, the impact of the experience may depend on

different life stages and other background variables that may influence the importance of travel' (p. 13). This could explain why 93 percent of Korean older adults surveyed in a study indicated a desire to continue traveling in the future, with more than 90 percent of them expressing agreement that traveling improved their QOL (Lee & Tideswell, 2005). To further explain, it was found that people anticipating going on holiday were happier with their lives and experienced less unpleasant feelings than those who were not (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2002).

This paper draws inspiration from existing literature on leisure travel and subjective well-being and addresses some of its limitations. Firstly, as Alén et al. (2012) admit, research on the older tourist segment is still relatively new; existing empirical data is European- and American-centric. Taking inspiration from the Asian context reviewed earlier, the Singapore case study would continue to address this bias and present a unique platform to discuss philosophical and cultural understandings of 'ageing well'. Conversely, there is an apparent lack of research in Singapore that seeks to explain the links between leisure travel and older people's well-being. It is envisaged that findings from this study will have important implications for the (re)formulations of social policies for the aged residing in the city state.

Secondly, as the literature review shows, research on leisure travel and well-being among seniors has garnered traction among scholars given the global phenomenon of an ageing population. However, a closer look at the literature reveals the relationship between leisure travel and well-being remains under-theorized as studies tend to be outcome orientated. That is, they focus on the effects of travel (e.g., improved hedonic well-being; renewed sense of purpose) rather than attempting to interrogate the *processes* that led to the outcome. As such,

an epistemological shift is required to see *leisure travel as process* rather than merely a means to an end so as to establish a better understanding of the relationship between leisure travel and older adult's well-being. In order to fill the gap in the theorization of what goes between the act of leisure travel and the outcome, more attention needs to be paid to the intimate encounters and subtle emotional experiences of the older traveller. It is hoped that the themes discussed in the subsequent sections could offer a glimpse of a possible conceptual framework for understanding leisure travel as process.

Thirdly, most of the existing research on leisure travel and well-being are based on quantitative analysis. This applies to research on older adults in Singapore, too (Cheng et al., 2021; Lim & Kua, 2011; Mathews & Straughan, 2014). Although nationwide baseline studies are important in establishing certain generalizations, qualitative analysis that focuses on in-depth travel narratives is necessary to gain a more intimate understanding of the leisure travel experiences of older adults.

Researching leisure travel and well-being among older adults in Singapore

The empirical site for this study is Singapore. With a population of around 5.7 million, Singapore is one of the most rapidly ageing nation in the Asia Pacific region. By 2050, almost half of the population is expected to be above 65 years old (Siau, 2017). Other than the provision of care services and financial assistance by the government, paradigms like 'ageing in place', 'active ageing' and 'successful ageing' have also been promoted to encourage best practices amongst the older adults and their family. Facilities like Senior Activity Centres were specifically set up to encourage seniors to participate in 'active ageing activities' such as karaoke, arts & craft, and exercise sessions. These centres also act as 'a

communal space for elderly to socialise with their peers and find social support' (Agency for Integrated Care, n.d.).

However, such 'active ageing activities' are primarily on-site/in situ. Older adults have called for more governmental support in promoting leisure travels among seniors, lamenting that yoga and cooking classes 'did not add quality and joy' to their lives (The Straits Times, 2015). Indeed, views to engage with leisure travels in retirement years were echoed in Mathews and Straughan's (2014) study. They found that close to half (48 percent) of Singaporean senior respondents surveyed indicated that they would like to pursue travelling for an extended period. So, an empirical study to better understand the relationship between leisure travel and well-being could not only make theoretical contributions, but also provide evidence-based justifications for more governmental support to facilitate leisure travels for seniors.

For this study, 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted either in Mandarin or English with older adults aged 60-82 years old (mean = 68.67; median = 68). 17 females and 13 males participated in the research. Informed consent was garnered from research participants before the start of each interview. Interview questions focused on one's most memorable travel experiences and their perceptions on how leisure travel brings about subjective well-being. Primary data for this research was collected from September 2019 to June 2021. Each interview session lasted for about one hour. Quotations from interviewees were cited as verbatims. All necessary ethics approvals have been obtained from the author's University Institutional Review Board (IRB-2019-05-025).

Themes and Findings

A thematic analysis of the travel narratives reveals four recurring themes pertaining and unique to the respondents' travel experiences. The themes were derived from codes that have emerged from the interviews through "analytic induction" (Crang, 2005). More specifically, "emic" codes used by interviewees were first identified before "etic" codes were assigned. The latter underwent an "iterative process of developing then redefining, categorising and re-categorising" to ensure that the resultant themes are "coherent and supportable" (Crang, 2005: 225). These interrelated themes offer a glimpse of the processes involved in affecting the subjective well-being of older adult travellers and may serve as preliminary nodes and starting points for the attempt to theorize the relationship between leisure travel and perceived well-being.

Reminiscing the Past

One of the most common travel narratives relates to feelings of nostalgia, and how the older adults would reminisce the "good old days" of their childhood when certain places they encountered while traveling reminded them of a past era in their home country. By way of illustration, the following sample quotes encapsulate the process of reminiscing the past and the emotions evoked by such encounters.

If you want to look at how Singapore was like in the 70s or 80s, you got to go to Penang now. Penang is exactly like Singapore in the 70s and 80s... at the roadside you have [food] stalls and pushcarts, that kind of environment our government will not allow because it is unhygienic. (ELD02, 66 years old)

Yes, it does bring back feelings of nostalgia. When I was young, I had a wish to visit Penang, and now it has been fulfilled... .. Felt very optimistic after coming back. (ELD03, 82 years old)

It reminds me of the old Singapore, like 40-50 years ago when I was a kid. Back in those days, you find exactly the same kind of environment, like what you can see now in Ho Chi Minh or... the kind of houses and the kind of street conditions... .. just a kind of nostalgic feeling. But at times, you think of your younger days where you are in this kind of environment. (ELD05, 66 years old)

It is apparent that overseas travels not only allow one to escape the mundane, but also to reminisce a nostalgic past. Other seniors revealed that they travel to return to those places they have lived before. For this group of travellers, emotional wellness came in the form of narrating stories of their experiences of the place they once called home with their travel partners. This was a multi-sensuous experience as reliving the moments they once had involved not only sightseeing and remembering the past, but also other senses like smelling and tasting some of the delicacies not available back in Singapore.

Bonding with family members

The next process is that of bonding with family members. Respondents would often reflect on how their relationship with certain members of the families improved and how the travel process created opportunities for them to better understand each other. For ELD24, he sees leisure travels as a way to wind down, relax and spend time with family members:

To me, at my silver age, it makes my second part of my life more meaningful and enjoyable with my family... .. when we reach this age, it's not so much about money, but to spend more time with your family. (ELD24, 69 years old)

Indeed, leisure travels provided the space and time for older adults to engage with their family members and such quality engagement then brings about an enhanced relationship.

ELD10 opined:

Last December, we traveled to Taiwan with the whole family. We went with my daughter, son, daughter-in-law, my 2 grandchildren and my in-laws. ... We did a range of activities, like activities for the children, then there were activities for us adults also. ... Personally, I felt that this was a chance for the family to communicate more. Because we are busy with our own things on normal days, there are some things that we can't see. But when we go out together, you can get a better sense of them and their personalities. Like my grandchildren, how they are like. (ELD10, 79 years old)

ELD10 recognised the benefits of leisure travels in providing the family with a break from their 'normal days' and busy schedules. This extraordinary space-time allows for some quality inter-generational bonding.

Another form of engagement that is unique among the older adults is the re-establishment of familial relationships with distant relatives from one's ancestral hometown. This group of travellers place a strong emphasis on retracing one's roots in places where their migrant parents originated from. Their joy came from being able to 'return' to their ancestral

hometowns and reconnect with relatives they have long heard of, but never got a chance to meet. For example, ELD01 was born in Singapore to migrant parents from Kinmen, Taiwan. The death of her father motivated her to accompany her mother to revisit Kinmen in 1990. ELD01 has never visited Kinmen herself and would meet her extended relatives for the first time. ELD01 recollected:

We went to Kinmen to visit relatives... .. It was about the strengthening of bonds with the relatives there. Each time we went, we became closer. Because during our very first visit there in 1990... .. the relationship with our relatives was very distant.

Yup, I felt it was a different feeling now. It was not like traveling... they don't see you as traveling or as travellers. They will ask 'when are you coming back?'It felt like I was going home... .. It felt like we had more interactions, and reinforced connections with them. Quite happy when we returned after each trip.

We don't mind going to Kinmen every year. Besides having relatives, we also made friends there so we can go back to visit them as well. (ELD01, 62 years old)

For ELD01, happiness came not only from the accomplishment of being able to accompany her mother back to her place of birth while she is still mobile, but also the re-establishment of familial ties with her extended relatives. The improved rapport with them over the years was something she was extremely proud of during our interview. The process of home-coming

and being treated as part of the family were what contributed to ELD01's subjective well-being whenever she visits Kinmen.

Rediscovering Self: Taking on new challenges

Other than reminiscing the past and bonding with family members, older travellers sometimes find happiness in accomplishing tasks they have never done before during their younger days. For these older adults, leisure travels provide them with an avenue to re-discover themselves and make them 'feel younger' (ELD30, 68 years old). The process of re-discovery and renegotiating new identities provided them with a profound sense of accomplishment. For example, ELD12 shared enthusiastically about her forays into self-organised holidays:

To me, the most memorable [travel] is the one that I organised myself. I planned by myself... ..I organised one, four years ago to Japan (free and easy) with my sister and two other friends... .. Because I planned it by myself, the sense of excitement, sense of adventure, that kind of thing. When everything turned out well, it was so wonderful. Kyushu, the whole of Kyushu. To go alone, being an organizer and leading it at my age, I am already 70. Few years ago, I was 66, 67, I thought it was very fulfilling. What you planned come into fruition... .. Greater satisfaction, you know the memories will stay on for a long time, as compared with those that I went with tour groups... .. So, you know experience of being lost, went into the wrong train, being helped by people who were so friendly, you know. Then you get to understand better. It has more lasting memories in you. (ELD12, 70 years old)

ELD12 continued:

So actually, I [am] looking forward to traveling on my own... .. I am thinking to challenge myself, I go solo Yes, I want to stretch myself before it is too late for me... Like hey, I travel [by] myself!

Last time, I didn't have this kind of thoughts, nobody advised me to go on my own. Maybe not so brave also. Most of the time it was guided tour and was long-haul.

Correct, that's why I tell myself, end of this year if nobody wants to go with me, it is fine. I am going to stretch myself, and before I pass on, I can tell people that I traveled [by] myself before. (ELD12)

As is apparent, there was a progression involved in ELD12's attempt to 'up the challenge' over her years of leisure travels: from joining group tours to attempting a free-and-easy tour albeit following a suggested itinerary, to her self-organised trip, and ultimately her challenge to 'go solo'. In a similar vein, ELD27 sets his mind on embarking on a challenge to shave his head bald to experience the life of a monk for up to a week in a Thai monastery:

I want to do it one day. If you don't do it, to me, in life if you just say and don't do it, you won't feel it. The feeling is just coming from the mouth. The actual feeling, the true feelings, you have to do it then you will understand. (ELD27, 66 years old).

Indeed, the ‘Do it while I still can’ mentality surfaced in several respondents’ narratives, and it is such mentality that affords older adult travellers to rediscover themselves in the process of doing things they have not done before.

Caring for others: informal networks of care

It is important to note that happiness for older adult travellers comes in the form of caring for others too. Leisure travels helped to create a community of friends who are concerned about each other’s welfare. Older adult interviewees often shared their experiences with travel buddies who are not their family members or service providers they met during their travels. These fellow travellers often form informal networks of care that operate beyond the boundaries of leisure travels. Not only do they offer each other friendship and companionship during their travels, but they also look out for, and check on each other on a regular basis. For this group of older people, leisure travels with like-minded people brought about much hedonic well-being. Yet, they found purpose and meaning in life beyond leisure travel itself when the travel community they are a part of doubled up as an informal network of care that provides ‘all this kind of kindness’ (ELD13, 68 years old) and ensures each other’s well-being.

Moreover, contrary to popular belief, subjective well-being might not be exclusively related to happiness. As the interviews confirm, informal networks of care formed by travel buddies can also be an enabler of their psychosocial well-being when these networks serve as an emotional safety net for them to share their everyday qualms. As ELD20 (72 years old) shared, ‘It feels good to have friends to do things with, because you have someone to talk to about problems faced also.’ Beyond formal and institutional forms of support for the ageing

population, informal networks of care are equally important when it comes to the well-being of older adults.

Such informal networks of care were at times extended overseas. Senior travellers interviewed found a renewed purpose and meaning in life through reaching out to the less privileged when on holiday. ELD11 (69 years old) shared at length:

I think what I find I am doing more is that I learned to reach out to the locals where I go to. ... So, what I do is that I get to know them personally and especially if I stayed at a place long enough, we started to make friends. Like say people at the hotel, or even like I go for services like massage or food. We get to know the people. I make an effort because I feel that this is the time of our life where we are not rushing. I don't go for those short trips like two-three days, we go as long as a week sometimes, just to really take it easy. Yeah, so I find that when I get to know the locals I get to know and I feel that they also start to appreciate us, not just as a once off kind, you know, like just a customer... I find that even if one year later, I go back, they recognize me. You know, there is that kind of a special relationship.

Since our stays are usually about six to seven days. We usually will at least have one occasion to attend the church there. I know that during Christmas time, they have a special, like a little bazaar there. Then there are a lot of little things to buy like some of them are home-made goodies or cooked food, handmade decorations for Christmas and all that... I planned the trip to go during the period when they have the bazaar, so we will buy all these goodies

and bring home as gifts for our family... I even managed to WhatsApp them to tell them in advance that I am going, and actually pre-book or pre-buy certain things It makes it more meaningful; you don't just go there for leisure. In a rush, just to eat, enjoy and then leave. To me, I feel that this is more memorable. I really make friends with them. Even if I am not there, we can still communicate, you know that's very important.

We got to know this driver. He is not just providing a service. I got to understand that he has a family, three kids... They're not earning a lot. Yeah, so we do our part. We invite him to join us for all our meals. And then we will let him dabao [pack] some things back for his family. And to me, I think it's not a lot. I can't do for the whole year. But if I can touch him and his family there for that period, to me that is very important. (ELD11, Interview)

According to ELD11, leisure travel is a process during which she 'learned to reach out to the locals'. She acknowledged her stage in life where she and her travel partners have more free time and can afford to go slow and stay at a destination for a longer duration. Therefore, they were able to establish more meaningful relationships with the locals, many of whom have become their friends. The ability to touch the lives of less-privileged locals, albeit in simple ways, gave these older travellers a renewed purpose in life and could contribute to eudaimonic well-being.

Discussion

The findings highlighted above showcased a range of subjective well-being experienced by senior travellers. The different aspects of happiness captured in their travel narratives can

generally be classified using Seligman's PERMA model, Diener's model of SWB or Wiking's Three Dimensions of Happiness. For example, it is obvious that the process of reminiscing the past on the move brings about emotional wellness. Here, subjective well-being comes in both affective and cognitive dimensions. On one hand, senior travellers experienced positive emotions when encountering places that evoked fond memories. The opportunity to savour delicacies of the past also brought about joy among them. Happiness is also experienced at the cognitive level as it is often through reminiscing the past when one starts to adopt a more reflective stance in terms of their living conditions then and now, dreams when they were young and overall life satisfaction.

The process of bonding with family members during one's leisure travel also led to subjective well-being among senior travellers, such as meaningful engagement ('Engagement' under the PERMA model) with family members whom they hardly interact with due to everyone's busy schedule on 'normal days' according to ELD10. For ELD01, it was the re-establishment of familial relationship ('Relationship' under the PERMA model) with her extended family from trips back to her mother's ancestral hometown in Kinmen that brought about happiness.

For older adults like ELD12, leisure travels constitute a platform for them to go out of their comfort zones and try new things. Their openness to new experiences reaps excitement, satisfaction, and motivation to engage with new challenges. Apart from the hedonic aspect of well-being in the form of excitement and thrill from self-organized trips, the process of pushing her limits led to an overall sense of accomplishment ('Accomplishment' under the PERMA model) and life satisfaction. This constituted to her cognitive well-being and could potentially enhance one's mental resilience. For ELD27, his intention to shave his head bald

to experience the ‘true feelings’ of being a monk in a Thai monastery shows the importance of existential authenticity in his engagement with leisure travel at this stage of his life.

Furthermore, several travel narratives showed that older adults experienced not only hedonic well-being but also eudaimonic well-being when they found a renewed purpose and meaning in life by reaching out to less-privileged locals at holiday destinations. Many were happy that they were able to touch the lives of others through simple gestures of kindness during their leisure travels. In addition, there were also travel buddies who formed informal networks of care amongst themselves. When they were not traveling, they will come together to either keep each other company or plan for the next trip. Some would even look out for and take care of each other. Unlike an inward orientation of happiness that focuses predominantly on the self/ individual (prevalent in ‘Western’ case studies), these older travellers’ subjective well-being is more outward oriented; they found happiness by giving to and caring for others. Such informal networks of care not only operate within the boundaries of leisure travels, but also flows into the everyday lives of the older travellers and contribute to their well-being on an everyday basis. It is also important to note that emotional wellness is not only about the pursuit of happiness. The informal care networks also provide a platform for older adults to share their problems and worries and can prove to be crucial in contributing to their emotional resilience.

The examination of travel narratives for intimate meanings and experiences offers an opportunity to understand what it means for the senior travellers to be on the move. Indeed, there is increasing interest in the “embodied, interactive and emotional experience of mobility” rather than its “molecular or atomist visions” (Söderström 2017, p. 198). The four recurring themes of Reminiscing, Bonding, Rediscovering Self and forming informal

networks of Care (RBRiC) constitute a set of processes unique to leisure travel experiences among older adults. RBRiC serves as a starting point for a better theorization of the relationship between leisure travel and subjective well-being. Through explicating these processes, one begins to embark on an epistemological shift that moves beyond merely describing the different types of subjective well-being brought about by leisure travels to engage with the processes involved in attaining them. In other words, instead of merely asking the ‘what’ questions, one should probe further and engage with the ‘how’ when it comes to studying leisure travel and well-being. It is hoped that RBRiC could act as a rubric or a framework to explore the various processes that are unique to senior travellers’ experience, and as an introductory commentary to the importance of theorizing what happens between the act of traveling and its outcome. Nevertheless, it is by no means exhaustive. A deeper interrogation of the RBRiC framework will have implications for research on emotional resilience and sustainable mental well-being amongst older travellers.

To illustrate, the adaptation of the concept of ‘liminality’ in critical tourism studies (see for example Zhang, 2017) could offer a platform to understand the psychological state under which leisure travels are experienced. As Turner (1979) explains, ‘liminality’ literally means ‘being-on-a-threshold’ – a state of neither here nor there (p. 465). Leisure travels facilitate the formation of such liminal spaces such that the travellers’ ‘everyday lives [and worries] are temporarily kept in suspension’ (Zhang 2018, p. 153), offering them an escape from their usual social structure. It can be argued that such liminal states facilitated processes like Reminiscing the Past and Rediscovering Self. Yet, as Turner and Turner (1978) reminds us, ‘Liminality is not only transition, but also potentiality, not only “going to be”, but also “what may be”’ (p. 3). One example of such potentiality is the formation of ‘communitas’. Wagner (1977) argues that tourists form ‘spontaneous communitas’ and interact with each other based

on ‘the spirit of the holiday’ rather than ‘the home life social hierarchical system’. The encounters with locals at tourist destinations shared by ELD11 seems to resonate with such ‘communitas’ as far as ‘spontaneity’ or ‘spirit of the holiday’ is concerned. However, unlike the short-lived nature of ‘spontaneous communitas’, the relationship forged seems to be more long-lasting, and goes beyond the liminal state. Nevertheless, the ‘potentiality’ of the liminal sits well with the endeavour to see travel as process and could facilitate further discussion on how older adults renegotiate new identities and find renewed purpose and meaning in life through leisure travels. Furthermore, it would be useful to think of relational geographies of leisure travel among the seniors to better understand the processes underlying the formation and sustainability of their travel networks and philosophies, and how different forms of well-being were generated and maintained.

Despite its potentials, this paper does have limitations. For one, its scale is limited. As such, it might be rather ambitious for findings to speak to philosophical and cultural understandings of ‘ageing well’ in the Asian context. Subsequent research could adopt a comparative approach and look at cities or countries like Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in order to gather a larger inventory of travel narratives from which to draw meaningful themes. Furthermore, although it is beyond the scope of this paper to unpack the heterogeneity of research participants, it is important to note that ‘senior travellers’ is not a homogeneous group. The interviewees hailed from a variety of backgrounds. Future research should acknowledge the diversity and delve into specific groups of older adults - such as the singles, divorced, disabled, under-privileged, widowed, etc. - to identify potential differences in how leisure travel could affect the well-being of older people in differing life circumstances. As such, the themes discussed above are not an exhaustive list. More research is needed to unravel processes that could be relevant to specific individuals. One example

could be the mourning of the death of a partner or family member via leisure travel. Such a mourning process might evoke sad/fond memories but might ultimately be beneficial for the mental wellness of the older traveller.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to contribute to existing knowledge on senior leisure travel by advocating for the importance of going beyond merely describing subjective well-being to engaging with the processes leading to mental wellness. It has presented a preliminary conceptual framework (RBRiC - Reminiscing, Bonding, Rediscovering self and forming informal networks of Care) for future work to take reference from in the continual pursuit to theorize the relationship between leisure travel and subjective well-being. In doing so, the paper has taken the first steps in filling a lacuna in studies on the processes that link the leisure activity of travelling to subjective well-being of older adults.

Other than conceptual and empirical contributions, this paper also seeks to call for a more person-centred approach to the study of leisure for older adults. If the unravelling of ‘embodied, interactive and emotional experience of mobility’ is worth the effort, there is a need to engage with qualitative methods that provide deep insights into travel experiences. Moreover, listening to older adults narrate their travel stories is itself a process to bring the respondents closer to the project. The method not only places value on their travel experiences; the process of narrating and reflecting on the notion of happiness or well-being is therapeutic and contributes to emotional wellness too.

In conclusion, social-scientific research that pays attention to senior mobility and its associated experiences and health effects is urgently needed as findings will not only inform

the general public of the relationships between leisure travel and subjective well-being, but also bear implications for policy makers and the private sector. A fundamental understanding of how mobility operates in the minds and hearts of the senior traveller might lay the cornerstones to a more embodied understanding of ageing well, not necessarily ‘in place’, but *through* places. Therefore, as explicated at the outset, it is crucial to treat leisure travel as process rather than merely as activity – as something that is becoming rather than being. To do this, one needs to analyse what leisure travel *does* to older adults and *how*, rather than just treating it as something they do.

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