



Constraints, nostalgia and North Americans' visits to rural Europe

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

North America is the biggest long haul tourist market to Europe, but the number of tourists has been decreasing over the last years and most of these trips are to cities. In spite of the relevance of this market to Europe it has been understudied by researchers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of travel constraints, nostalgia and travel experience in shaping North American tourists' intentions to revisit rural European destinations.

Objectives

For to achieve the purpose the work the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. What is the definition and scope of nostalgia, and how can this construct be operationalized in the context of North American tourists returning to rural Europe?

Addressing RQ1 required following standard scale development steps as outlined by

DeVellis (2003). To address RQ 1 the following hypotheses were tested:

- ✓ H1: Nostalgia evoked by tourism has four dimensions, namely, personal, intrapersonal, cultural and virtual.
- ✓ H2: Past positive time perception is positively related to nostalgia.

RQ2. To what extent do travel constraints, nostalgia and travel experience influence North American tourists' intentions to revisit rural destinations in Europe?

To address RQ2 the following hypotheses were tested:

- ✓ H3: Nostalgia has a positive direct effect on the intentions to return rural Europe.
- ✓ H4: Travel constraints have a negative direct effect on intentions to return to rural Europe
- ✓ H5: Travel constraints have a positive direct effect on nostalgia.
- ✓ H6: Nostalgia positively mediates the

negative relationship between travel constraints and intentions to return to Europe.

✓ H7: Constraints have a positive direct effect on negotiation.

✓ H8: Negotiation has a positive direct effect on intentions to return to Europe.

✓ H9: Experience in travel has a positive direct effect on intentions to return to rural Europe.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the thesis the methodology used was based on the application of a questionnaire-based survey. The research was done following several steps starting with an exploratory revision of literature. In the beginning the main theme of the thesis was to analyse multi-destination travel patterns of the North American market to Europe. First, the literature review showed that an analysis of the travel patterns of this market to Europe could be difficult, since it is a large territory, and eventually could not give clues to what could make this market to return and make rural holidays. The second step was based in an exploratory study undertake for three months in a region of USA based on a qualitative technique, namely, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. From this study resulted the constructs that were the theoretical basis for the construction of the research framework. After a review of literature and the development of the proposed model the program SPSS (version 19) was used for the univariate analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis, t-tests and the program AMOS (version 19) to develop Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling analysis.

Results

First, the hypothesis regarding the composition of the nostalgia scale was validated and then its mediating effect on the relationship between travel constraints to travel and intention to revisit rural Europe, then the remaining hypotheses were analyzed through their inclusion within the structural equation model. The confirmed hypotheses are H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H8. The rejected hypothesis is H7. Partially accepted hypotheses are:

✓ H6: Was rejected in its separate test, but accepted within the overall model.

✓ H9: This hypothesis is partially accepted, because expertise does not affect travel experience.

Theoretical conclusions

In summary, travel experience, nostalgia and negotiation have a positive relation with the intentions to revisit rural areas in Europe. Individually, nostalgia does not show a mediator effect on the relation between perceived travel constraints and revisit intention, but when the constructs “experience in travel” and “negotiation” are included in the model, it shows a mediation effect, more specifically, in this case a suppression effect. The relationships are presented, in a simplified format, in Figure 1.

Generally, it must be acknowledged that the analysis of the non-users is very relevant in tourism and it is important to identify those non-users that may be potential consumers for better targeted destination marketing. The North-American market is one of the most relevant long-haul markets to Europe, but it has been decreasing and it is known that they typically prefer city destinations. At the same time, a large part of the North American population has a migrant origin, which makes them a possible nostalgic traveller. In this study it was verified that nostalgia could play a relevant role in mitigating perceived travel constraints and increase the motivation to revisit rural areas already visited in Europe. Nostalgia is, interestingly, increased by the existence of perceived travel constraints. It is consequently relevant to use nostalgia appeals in tourism promotion, particularly of rural European destination, especially if they are related in the North American population to a relevant migration group. But nostalgia in the tourism context is multidimensional and is influenced by several factors, as individual experiences, that could be of childhood or of a previous visit. The influence of word of mouth (WOM) is also very relevant in triggering nostalgia, and interpersonal nostalgia is acquired through the influence of friends and family. The culture in which the tourist is integrated plays also a relevant role.

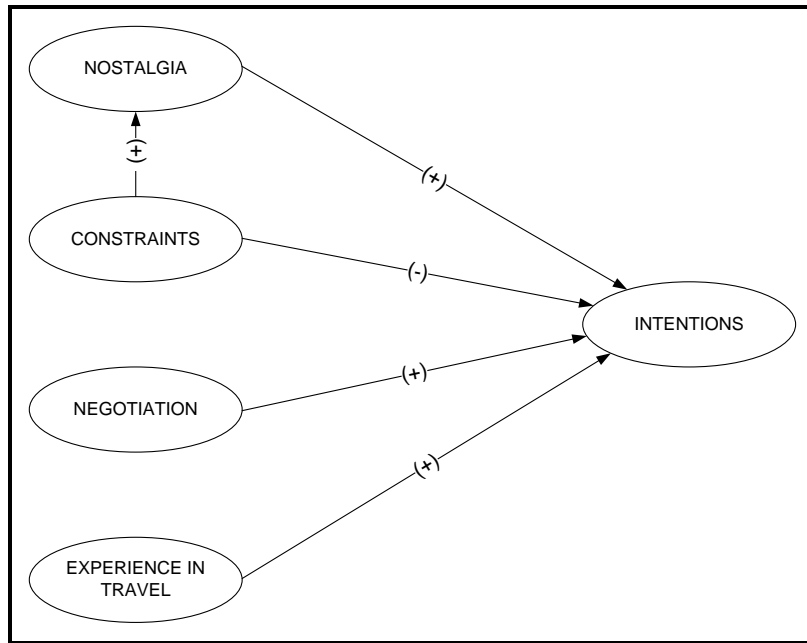


Figure 1. Model of intention to revisit rural Europe based on Nostalgia, travel constraints, negotiation and experience in travel

Cultural identity depends on some degree of continuity with the past – the geography, culture and location. It has its own history which is constructed on the binary of self and other. Boyarin and Boyarin (1993: 693) argue: "Group identity has been constructed traditionally in two ways. It has been figured on the one hand as the product of a common genealogical origin and on the other, as produced by common geographical origins". Last, but not least, virtual nostalgia is triggered through music, films, images and books, which might be relevant to potential tourists, even without any personal migration background. In today's Western Societies, tourists are largely influenced by media products, which might generate imaginary of an idealised way of life, considered appealing and meaningful, and associated to certain places, people start feeling nostalgic about. This phenomenon begins before the tourist leaves home. It starts with the pleasure of forming personal expectations and mental images based on travel guides, post cards, websites, documentaries, films, music and pictures taken by the tourist itself and by other tourists.

Practical application of the dissertation

Based on the results of the study it is recommended that European tourism marketers who are interested in capturing the North American market to visit and revisit European rural destinations should focus on the following points:

✓ *Nostalgia*: in this study the existence of four types of nostalgia is shown, that can be triggered in relation to a (rural) tourist destination. Nostalgia may indeed be a factor that can make a North American tourist overcome the perceived travel constraints or even return to rural Europe. It is now relevant to study specifically what contents, stimuli, symbols, stories, images, and slogans would be most powerful to trigger nostalgia in tourists by tourism marketers. For instance, there are studies that reveal the role of music as a relevant element in evoking nostalgia and in creating attachment to consuming objects and places, which might also be powerful elements in tourism marketing.

✓ *Ancestry*: most of the North Americans are descendants from another country, being a

large number of the population Euro Americans. The ancestry and its meaning for identity creation and consolidation amongst these populations make these consumers a nostalgic market. As shown in this thesis, nostalgia has the capacity to make people overcome travel constraints and effectively travel, even to (less well known) rural places in Europe. In another study conducted by the European Travel Commission (2011) ancestry is recognized as one of the major motivations to travel to Europe, even if this motivation has not been shown as determinant for the majority of its tourists.

✓ *Developing and promoting “roots travel”*: some countries, such as Ireland and Scotland, have already developed sites and different tools related to the search for the ancestry making the “roots travel”, which is by nature nostalgic travel of descendants from these countries, more appealing. Portugal for instance, although being a country with a large Diaspora abroad, does not dispose of these tools, while the nostalgia and ancestry market is still very insipient and not effectively catered to.

✓ *All promotion resources in English*: If catering to the North American traveller market, European countries and even (particularly their rural and less well known regions and places) should present their tourist sites in English and inform that in the promoted region it is possible to find people speaking English. As seen in the exploratory study, for the North American market the awareness of foreign languages and nobody available speaking English, could cause anxiety and be a very relevant structural constraint to travel, starting at the level of searching information about the tourist destination. For instance, the Douro region in Portugal is a very appealing region to the North American market because of the opportunity to have a cruise line operating on the river and organizing all-inclusive trips with English speaking guides and tourism professionals, associated to the popularity of the Port wine in that country, but a few years ago the main constraint that this market was reporting was that the lack of information

about that Portuguese Region in English.

✓ *Personalised and nostalgically enriched interpretation of heritage*: for instance, as Basu (2005) noticed, the Scottish diaspora in the United States of America had different imaginaries about the country's history, based on what is spread in the popular media in the United States of America. When actually travelling to Scotland, these tourists were facing another interpretation of this heritage, creating some dissatisfaction and even conflicting feelings amongst visitors. It is necessary to know and understand the imaginaries of the nostalgic market for creating personalized interpretation formats for specific segments in order to deliver satisfying and meaningful experiences (“authentic experiences”, in Wang's (1999) conceptualization), without however delivering untrue messages, i.e. helping tourists to relate to the places and heritage visited, to live meaningful experiences, but to simultaneously cautiously integrate them into the whole historical and cultural background.

All these results have relevant implications for governments, rural communities and tourism marketers. The findings of the present study present relevant information for academia, rural communities and rural destination marketers who might improve research and action by understanding a bit more a market that has been understudied: the North-American market travelling to rural Europe.

Content of the dissertation

Abstract of chapter one

Introduction: presents the scope of the research. It is introduced the main research objectives, significance of the study and methodology.

Abstract of chapter two

Overview of the study population: North American outbound travel market and rural tourism in Europe. In this chapter a revision of literature about the American market and the rural tourism in Europe it is presented focusing on the most relevant aspects necessary for the study.

Abstract of chapter three

Literature review: review of the literature related to the main constructs, namely nostalgia, time perspective, travel expertise, familiarity, travel constraints and negotiation.

Abstract of chapter four

Proposed framework and research hypothesis: presents the research hypotheses explained with a summarised theoretical background, the research framework and the operationalization of the constructs are also presented

Abstract of chapter five

Methodology: describes the methodology used in the dissertation. Here it is also presented the descriptions of the data collection, sample selection and statistical analysis procedures

Abstract of chapter six

Statistical analysis: presents results of the statistical analysis, specifically descriptive analysis, as well as multivariate analysis (Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modelling).

Abstract of chapter seven

Conclusions and implications: provides a summary and conclusions of the research, a discussion of managerial and theoretical implications, limitations and future research directions.

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