

Papers

Travels and Transformation of the Existential Condition: Narratives and Representations in Films Starring the Elderly

Viagens que Transformam a Condição Existencial: Narrativas e Representações em Filmes Protagonizados por Idosos

Viajes que Transforman la Condición Existencial: Narrativas y Representaciones en Películas Protagonizadas por Ancianos

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Keywords:

Transformative travels.
Consumption.
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Abstract

Tourism acts as a catalyst for positive changes in the elderly lives by providing possibilities for socialization, escape from routine, knowledge of new realities and cultures. This paper investigates aging representations and narratives of transformation processes in cinema screenplays focused on travel experiences. Analyzing cultural texts such as music, books, advertisements, television programs and films contributes to an understanding of standards and social norms. This kind of research is quite unexplored on the tourism studies, but it is a fact that cinema has become a universal art capable of revealing deep and intimate aspects of society through its narratives and representations. We have selected four films which links elderly, travel and transformation for content analysis: "The Bucket List (2008)", "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011)", "Last Vegas (2013)", and "A Walk in the Woods (2015)". Right after, we built three categories of analysis: 1) motivation and choice of experiences; 2) consumption; 3) aging and stigma. The final discussion is based on existential philosophy to identify the transformative role of travelling on the elderly lives presented on the movies. Travelling is shown as possibilities to create existential authenticity, as it is capable of decrease negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, and physical and psychic isolation.

Palavras-chave:

Viagens transformadoras.
Consumo.
Idosos.
Cinema.
Filosofia existencial.

Resumo

O turismo pode figurar como uma atividade catalisadora para mudanças positivas na vida dos idosos ao proporcionar possibilidades de socialização, fuga da rotina, conhecimento de novas realidades e culturas. O presente trabalho utiliza o cinema para investigar representações dos idosos e narrativas sobre processos de transformação em filmes com roteiros centrados em experiências de viagens. A análise de textos culturais tais como músicas, livros, propagandas, programas de televisão e filmes contribui para o entendimento de normas e padrões sociais existentes. Esse tipo de pesquisa ainda é pouco explorado no campo do turismo, mas sabe-se que o cinema se tornou uma arte universal capaz de revelar profundos e íntimos aspectos da sociedade através de suas narrativas e representações. Para análise de conteúdo foram selecionados quatro filmes que ligavam idosos, viagens e transformação: "Antes de Partir (2008)", "O Exótico Hotel Marigold (2011)", "Última Viagem a

Vegas (2013)” e “Por Aqui e por Ali (2015)”. Posteriormente, foram construídas três categorias de análise: 1) motivação e escolha das experiências; 2) consumo; 3) envelhecimento e estigma. A discussão final está apoiada na lente da filosofia existencial para indicar nas narrativas dos filmes o papel transformador das viagens na vida dos idosos. As viagens são apresentadas como possibilidades de construir uma autenticidade existencial, pois são capazes de diluir sentimentos negativos tais como ansiedade, depressão e isolamento físico e psíquico.

Resumen

Turismo puede ser un catalizador de cambios positivos en la vida de los ancianos al proporcionar posibilidades de socialización, escapar de la rutina, conocimiento de nuevas realidades y culturas. El presente artículo utiliza películas para investigar representaciones de ancianos y narraciones sobre procesos de transformación en guiones centrados en experiencias de viaje. El análisis de textos culturales como músicas, libros, anuncios, programas de televisión y películas contribuye a la comprensión de las normas y estándares sociales existentes. Este tipo de investigación todavía se explora poco en el campo del turismo, pero se sabe que el cine se ha convertido en un arte universal capaz de revelar aspectos profundos e íntimos de la sociedad a través de sus narrativas y representaciones. Para el análisis de contenido seleccionamos cuatro películas que vinculaban a los ancianos, los viajes y la transformación: “The Bucket List (2008)”, “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011)”, “Last Vegas (2013)” and “A Walk in the Woods (2015)”. Posteriormente, se construyeron tres categorías de análisis: 1) motivación y elección de experiencias; 2) consumo; 3) envejecimiento y estigma. La discusión final se basa en la lente de la filosofía existencial para indicar en las narraciones de la película el papel transformador de los viajes en la vida de los ancianos. El viaje se presenta como posibilidades para construir autenticidad existencial, ya que es capaz de diluir los sentimientos negativos como la ansiedad, la depresión y el aislamiento físico y psíquico.

Palabras clave:

Viajes transformadores.
Consumo.
Ancianos.
Cine.
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1 INTRODUCTION

World population numbers show the highest growth rates for the over-60 age groups which can amount to more than 41 million people in 2030 (IBGE, 2015). Thus, the specialization of services, products, market innovations, and public policies aimed at older adults are essential. With this new global demographic scenario, concerns about problems such as depression, loneliness, and feelings of incapacity are characteristic of this moment in the life cycle, but not limited to this age group, in view of the increasing number of children and young people struggling with these issues (United Nations, 2015).

Kottler (1997) – although he was not specifically referring to the elderly – observed that travel experiences, by providing new perspectives, developing resilience, and other coping skills, can be effective in addressing several problems linked to individual routine. Araújo (2000) refers to tourism as an ally in the social integration of the elderly, as it offers options for interaction, cultural exchanges, entertainment, in addition to bringing the possibility of new friendships, thus reducing loneliness. According to the same author, tourism is a leisure time activity, contributing to the maintenance of mental and physical health. Kottler (1997) and Araújo (2000) suggest that the consumption of tourism experiences can promote individuals’ transformation.

Changes in relationships, death of a close other, family issues, health, career, and technological development problems have different impacts – positive or negative – on the lives of individuals. These events, inherent to the human condition, can lead to existential reflections and the need for transformation (Saunders, Laing & Weiler, 2013). According to Coghlan and Weiler (2015), transformation is an individual process in which there is a critical understanding of the old “me” and the construction of a new self-concept. Transformative experiences are events that, in addition to triggering emotional responses, provide self-exploration, lead to intrapersonal changes that contribute to a better quality of life (Brown, 2013; Kirillova, Lehto & Cai, 2017a).

Travel is among the experiences that can trigger thoughts, changes, and transformations. The travel and transformation theme has been discussed in different contexts, such as backpacker travel (Noy, 2004), pil-

grimage journeys (Devereux & Carnegie, 2006), long-distance walking (Saunders et al., 2013), student exchange trips in foreign countries (Brown, 2009), and also the transformations from sustainable tourism experiences (Pope, 2018) and volunteer tourism (Pan, 2017; Almeida & Casotti, 2015).

Hung and Lu (2016) associated the themes of aging and tourism in a review of studies. They found 16 articles in the first 15 years analyzed (1983-1998) and 36 articles in the next 15 years (1999-2013). The authors analyzed articles published in leading tourism and hospitality journals (“Annals of Tourism Research”, “Journal of Travel Research”, “Tourism Management”, “Cornell Hospitality Quarterly”, “International Journal of Hospitality Management” and “Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research”). They note that the total number of articles on aging can be considered scarce compared to investigations regarding the phenomenon of aging in other fields such as gerontology, psychology, sociology, and medicine.

In reviews of studies on the elderly, the following themes stand out: segmentation (Moschis, Curasi, & Belenger, 2003; Nimrod, 2008; Jang, Kim, & Yang, 2011; Chen, Liu & Chang, 2013), decision-making factors (Baloglu & Shoemaker, 2001; Fleischer & Pizam, 2002; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Jang, Ham & Hong, 2007); consumer behavior (Jang & Ham, 2009; Hughes & Deutsch, 2010); satisfaction (Wuest, Tas & Emenheiser, 1996; Hsu, 2000); travel motivations (Hsu, Cai & Wong, 2007; Viallon, 2012); restrictions (Blazey, 1992; Gladwell & Bedini, 2004), well-being and benefits of tourism (Milman, Mitas, Yarnal, & Chick, 2012; Chen et al., 2013). Hung and Lu (2016) also examined the techniques of data collection and found that quantitative methods were used in most of the studies identified. They advocate qualitative or mixed methods for a better understanding of the relationship between aging and tourism.

The analysis of cultural texts such as books, music, films, advertisements, and television programs can help to understand extant social norms and standards that guide consumption practices (Hirschman & Stern, 1994). In the field of tourism, it was possible to identify recent research – Brazilian and international – investigating different cultural texts such as advertising leaflets (Moreira & Campos, 2019), Brazilian tourism promotional brochures distributed in France and Germany (Silveira & Baptista, 2019), the influence of Brazilian soap operas on outbound tourism (Dutra, Faria & Miranda, 2015), fictional stories like that of Count Dracula to attract tourists to Transylvania (Reijnders, 2011), and books read by tourists and how these readings influence the experience of travel (Laing & Frost, 2012). Also, we found studies examining representations and narratives that link travel and personal transformation in films (Frost, 2010) and in books written by women traveling to Italy (Laing & Frost, 2017).

No studies were found combining the themes of older adults, travel, and self-transformation. The present work explores this combination by analyzing films starring the elderly in contexts of travel experiences where they undergo transformative processes. To achieve this goal, four films were analyzed in detail from an initial selection of 181 films about older adults in general. The content analysis was inspired by the work of Hirschman, Scott and Wells (1998) and the categories of analysis were derived from Bardin (2016).

The transformative process of elderly characters in their travels in film narratives was discussed and examined through the lens of existential philosophy. The phenomenon of transformative tourism experiences has already been studied (Brown, 2013; Kirillova et al., 2017a), but no studies have been found that have addressed transformative processes of older adults in travel experiences. This study using texts constructed from culture is an invitation for other empirical works to investigate the elderly, their travels, and the transformative process experienced by them.

2 SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ELDERLY: “OLD IS ALWAYS THE OTHER”

The representation of older people plays an important role in building the image and a cultural model to serve increasing numbers of elderly in society (Caradec, 2016). From the moment the number of elderly people increases in the population, negative stereotypes result in discrimination (Bytheway, 2005). Films and television programs, because they have limited time to tell a story, use stereotypes to portray characters and reinforce prejudiced representations of older adults (Signorielli, 2001).

Philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1970/1990), one of the pioneers in addressing aging and questioning the social images related to the elderly in different places, speaks of how society demands that older adults be

a model of virtues and serenity, at the same time as it condemns them for manifestations of sexuality, feelings and desires such as love and jealousy. She speaks openly of repudiation, scandal, and violence suffered in old age. Simone de Beauvoir presents in her book several representations of older adults as delusional and obsolete. She mentions the difficulty of individuals to perceive themselves as old, i.e., the elderly are the other, or old age is perceived in the other. Individuals do not recognize themselves as old and "for the outsider it is a dialectic relationship between my being as he defines it objectively and the awareness of myself that I acquire by means of him" (Beauvoir, 1970/1990 p. 348).

Gatling (2013), decades after Simone de Beauvoir, points out the negative and unrealistic representations of aging in cultural texts in general. The author, who investigated representations of old age in comedy films, says that older characters appear less frequently than younger ones and when it comes to female characters, representation is even lower. Gatling (2013) also notes how older adults are often portrayed as caricatures in comedy films, for example, with hearing problems, urinary incontinence or ridiculed from situations related to sexuality because, according to the author, sexual activity is seen as incongruent with elderly individuals.

Other researchers noted the scarcity of strong roles in cinema for actresses over 50 years old, forcing them to resort to aesthetic surgical procedures to prolong their professional careers (Chivers, 2011). Some studies sought to understand the most frequent stereotypes of older people that appeared in different cultural texts, whether positive or negative (Gatling, 2013; Hummert & Levy, 2002; Magoffin, 2007). Gatling (2013) summarize in the following the negative stereotypes – which can be divided into four groups – and the positive stereotypes – which can be divided into three groups.

- Negative:

- 1) Grumpy – greedy, complaining, inflexible, and nosy;
- 2) Despondent – lonely, neglected, sad, tired, and fragile;
- 3) Severely-impaired – senile, slow-moving and thinking, sexless, sick, and feeble;
- 4) Recluse – quiet, timid, dependent, and forgetful.

- Positive:

- 1) Golden Ager – healthy, active, adventurous, and well-traveled;
- 2) The Perfect Grandparent – intelligent, loving, and family-oriented;
- 3) Conservative – patriots, religious, tough, proud, and wealthy.

The study by anthropologist Guita Debert (2003), examines representations of the elderly in Brazilian advertising from the 1970s to the 1990s. The author identified that old age was represented in three different ways during this period. Until the 1970s, negative stereotypes predominated, standing out images associated with passivity, arrogance, dependence, or loss of skills. On the contrary, as of the 1980s, representations of old age depicting the elderly in a position of power, wealth, prestige, and beauty increased. The research also identified images of the elderly linked to transgressions of social standards hitherto established when dealing with issues related to the use of new technologies, sexuality and family life associated with new meanings such as protest, rebellion, and hedonism at this point in the life cycle.

Brazilian anthropologist Miriam Goldenberg, a leading researcher in the field of aging, addresses this issue in the Brazilian context. With senescence and physical decline, women experience a phase of absences and losses since the woman's body is also her capital. The author begins her work with the words of Gilberto Freire: "as brasileiras não ficam velhas, ficam loiras [Brazilians women don't get old, they just become blond]" (Goldenberg, 2006, p. 116). Based on this, in order to break the pattern of predominant studies, the author works with old age from a positive perspective, moving away from stigmatized and stereotyped approaches to this moment of the life cycle. The researcher starts a movement of studies encouraging an optimistic look on aging by coining expressions like "old is beautiful" and "beautiful old age" inspired by Simone de Beauvoir (Goldenberg, 2013; 2016). She points out that people who age while maintaining their existential projects do not get old. The continuity of playful and pleasurable activities such as dancing and singing and the search

for pleasure and happiness propitiates the transgression of taboos and existing rules. Thus, a new category appears, the ageless, free, and visible people in society (Goldenberg, 2011).

3 EXPERIENCING CONSUMPTION AND AGING: THE INVISIBILITY OF THE MATURE CONSUMER

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) consider experience as a personal event, often loaded with emotional meaning that happens through the interaction of stimuli from the consumption of products or services. Carù and Cova (2003) examine the trajectory of studies on experience consumption, which has become a key element in understanding consumer behavior. Here we highlight the importance of the experience marketing concept for tourism. The authors explain that the experience arises from the growth of the service sector and they define it as a subjective episode with an emphasis on the senses and emotions experienced when they contribute to the transformation and construction of the individual.

Although experience marketing has a close connection with the tourist experience, this field of knowledge has neglected studies on the older consumer, focusing on the younger ones (Szmigin & Carrigan, 2001). According to Moschis (2003), studies on consumers over the age of 50 remain underdeveloped, indicating the invisibility of the mature consumer in academic research in the field.

When we speak about the elderly, we can see a trend in consumption towards leisure and travel experiences (e.g. Patterson & Pegg, 2009), fashion, and financial and family independence (e.g. Birtwistle & Tsim, 2005; Myers & Lumbers, 2008) and use of the internet for purchasing decisions (e.g. Moura, Gosling, Christino & Macedo, 2017). These examples are opposite from the studies that suggest negative associations regarding elderly consumption, indicating that they lose the ability to make their own choices and autonomy in purchasing decision-making. In addition, the elderly are seen as unable to consume independently, lacking assistance for basic consumption activities such as shopping, preparing meals, using the phone, leaving the house, taking medication, doing household chores, and managing money, as shown by Adams, Martinez and Vickerie (2010).

In fact, elderly consumers are included in the group of those considered to be vulnerable consumers such as the disabled, children, illiterates, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, immigrants (Andreasen & Manning, 1990). The concept of vulnerability is associated with a lack of control over exchange transactions due to its limiting characteristics and experiences.

According to Jones and Middleton (2007), vulnerability is not a feature that the consumer can choose. According to Baker, Gentry and Rittenburg (2005), vulnerability occurs when the individual loses control of the situation and transaction fairness depends on external factors, presenting itself as a state of weakness on the part of the consumer from imbalance consumption of marketing messages, products, or market transactions.

However, the study by Barnhart and Peñaloza (2012) shows that old age does not necessarily affect individual consumption behavior. The authors identified that even though the consumption behavior of older people is affected by the influence of their reference group – and in the cases of dependent elderly people, individual consumption becomes group consumption – what happens is a process of identity negotiation, since the family and service providers impose on the subject a position defined by them. What is observed is the elderly still wants to make their own consumption choices and his/her identity construction is reinforced.

When we speak about the relationship between consumption and identity (Ransome, 2005; Belk, 1988) we note that tourism travel expresses both the individual identity and group identity. As consumption is both symbolic, material, or functional, it expresses the individual's place in the world, i.e., the type of travel can express how the individual sees himself and how he/she wants to be seen. Hall (2006) tells us about the sociological subject who builds his or her identity from the relationship with other subjects, from the relationship of "I" with society where tourism experiences can be seen as an important element for the composition of social roles. These experiences can support the construction of identity, as argued by Hall (2006), identity originates in the intertwining of the individual with the socio-cultural structure and as such it is continuously forming and transforming.

4 THE STUDY

Both films and documentaries can be educational and eminently useful research tools in investigating different issues including those related to consumer experiences. The four films – texts originating from culture – were selected to understand representations of older adults in the context of travel experiences that involved transformation processes (Hirschman et al., 1998; Tadjewski & Hamilton, 2014).

Anthropologist Grant McCracken (1988) notes that in linking culture to consumption, quantitative methods neglect relevant aspects such as meanings and experiences associated with human life. McCracken (1988) also speaks of the movement of meanings that are influenced by the diverse texts constructed by culture and transmitted through different media such as television programs, advertisements, books, music, and films that are the text analyzed in this article. These cultural texts help in understanding ideologies, beliefs, contexts, imaginary, standards, and norms that constitute and transform the society in which they are embedded (Hirschman & Stern, 1994).

The selection of films started from an initial screening of different themes involving elderly characters. This search used keywords in Portuguese and English: “idosos”, “envelhecimento”, “terceira idade”, “velho”, “turismo”, “viagem”, “lazer” and “elderly”, “aging”, “old age”, “old”, “tourism”, “travel”, “leisure”, alone and/or combined, on the Brazilian websites “Portal do Envelhecimento” and “I love cinema”. In addition, searches were also carried out on the American Internet Movie Database (IMDB) website with the keywords: “elderly”, “older”, “aging”, “ageing”, “aged”, “retired”, “senior”, “Third age”, “travel”, “leisure”, “tourism”. This first search was performed from March to April 2017.

The search returned 181 films. Subsequently, an analysis of the synopsis of each film was carried out to select those that specifically deal with the experience of elderly people traveling. This second filter yielded 43 titles that had their trailers analyzed. Of these, seven films were considered relevant to the analysis, as they starred elderly people and travel was their central theme, in addition to having been released in the last 10 years. The seven films were watched in full and three were considered outside the scope of the main theme: “elderly” and “transformative travel”. The three excluded films were: the animated film “UP” (2009), because it was difficult to compare with the others; “The Second Best Exotic Marigold” (2015), which did not portray the transformative process, but the routine of a group of elderly people who moved to India; and “Le Week-End” (2013) because it also did not portray the transformative process from the travel experience. Finally, four films were selected as appropriate to the theme: “The Bucket List” (2007), “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel” (2011), “Last Vegas” (2013), and “A Walk in the Woods” (2015). Table 1 shows a synopsis of the films and information about their main characters.

The four films have 15 main elderly characters (see Table 1) being four women and 11 men. Of the 11 men, one character is homosexual and two characters are black and represented by the same actor (Morgan Freeman). Four elderly characters with secondary roles were also identified: women who were girlfriends or wives of the main characters. The little diversity of gender and race in elderly characters has already been observed in the study by Gopaldas and Siebert (2018) about representations in marketing images. They observed that older people are underrepresented in the media and that intersectional studies of age, gender, and race show intersections like older women and older ethnic minorities marginally compared to older men or ethnic majorities, for example (Gopaldas & Siebert, 2018).

For content analysis of films, we draw on the work of Hirschman et al. (1998). First, the scenes in which the elderly characters appeared in situations considered relevant to the study were selected. Subsequently, the dialogues were analyzed together with the contexts, objects, and settings that were part of the scene. All dialogues of the films were transcribed to facilitate the analysis. For the construction of categories of analysis, Bardin’s (2016) guidelines and steps were followed: 1) pre-analysis, 2) material exploration and 3) treatment of results, inference, and interpretation.

Table 1 - Films and Characters analyzed (the authors)

Film	Synopsis	Characters	Gender
The Bucket List (2007, USA)	Two elderly men with different personalities and social class share the same hospital room and the anxieties of diagnosing cancer at an advanced stage. They decide to write a wish list to carry out until the end of their lives. They travel together for approximately three months to various locations around the world with the aim of fulfilling those wishes.	Edward Cole	Male
		Carter Chambers	Male
The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011, United Kingdom)	Seven English elderly people, with different motivations, travel to India to enjoy their retirement in a less expensive place. They are attracted by advertisements for the recently restored Hotel Marigold, which promised a life of great leisure in a lush environment. Upon arriving at Marigold they discover that the hotel does not have the disclosed structure and try to adapt to their new situation.	Evelyn Greenslade	Female
		Graham Dashwood	Male
		Douglas Ainslie	Male
		Jean Ainslie	Female
		Muriel Donnelly	Female
Last Vegas (2013, EUA)	Four elderly friends who have known each other since childhood and who currently live far from each other, travel to Las Vegas for the wedding of the group's bachelor to his forty-year-old girlfriend. They decide to organize a bachelor party in the city and thus relive youth time and escape routine.	Norman Cousins	Male
		Madge Hardcastle	Female
		Sam Harris	Male
A Walk in the Woods (2015, USA)	Bill, a 70-year-old journalist with a creative block, decides to take the Appalachian Trail in the USA, which covers more than three thousand kilometers. Only a youth friend accepts the proposal to travel to an unconventional destination. The two elderly friends make the trip going through several unusual situations.	Archie Clayton	Male
		Paddy Connors	Male
		Billy Gherson	Male
		Bill Bryson	Male
		Stephen Katz	Male

5 MAIN FINDINGS

Initially, the study was to be developed based on the empirical work of Kirillova et al. (2017a) on transformative travel, whose analysis is structured into pre-, during, and post-trip events. However, when reviewing the content of the narratives of the films, we decided to analyze them from three main categories, of which one was divided into three moments similar to Kirillova et al.'s (2017a) analysis. The first category refers to characters' motivations to undertake travel, as well as place selection, and type of experience; the second category refers to characters' consumption at different times: before, during, and after the trip; and, the third category of analysis shows how the characters and their experiences submit or face the stigma of aging.

5.1 Motivation and selection of experiences: "At my age, I don't plan that far ahead"

The first parts of the four films have similar structure and characteristics. All of them presented the characters, their peculiarities, their styles, and ways of life, in addition to the reasons that led them to decide to travel. Travel motivations were varied, which may suggest that the elderly are a heterogeneous population, as suggested by Moschis (2003) who highlights the diversity of the elderly segment.

The films present common motivation triggers for the elderly to travel. They address the relationship of the characters with aging and the approach of death being the trips a possibility for giving new meaning to life. The dialogue between Muriel ("The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel") and the doctor about waiting six months to undergo knee surgery is an example of the perception of time and the clear approach of the end: "at my age, I don't plan that far ahead. I don't even buy green bananas".

In the films, it was possible to find several motivations for the characters to decide to travel as listed below:

- 1) Attempt to relive moments of youth and to revive past feelings and proving the ability to relive past experiences linked to the feeling of nostalgia.
- 2) Search for social ties, alternatives for socialization, and possibilities for affective involvement.

- 3) Possibility to escape routine and everyday problems.
- 4) Financial problems and search for cheaper places to live.
- 5) Search for a destination for health care in a more specialized or cheaper place, which is called “medical tourism”, focus of the study by Connell (2006).
- 6) Search for something different or adventurous in the face of imminent death or death of others.

The motivations took the characters to the trip and to choose different destinations. In the film “A Walk in the Woods”, for example, the wife asks Bill – the elderly protagonist – why he wants to hike the Appalachian Trail and how the choice is linked to the funeral of a colleague. He does not know how to explain, but the dialogue suggests that the desire aroused after the death of his friend is linked to a quest to change something in his daily routine or to seek something different and adventurous that may be linked to past experiences, since Bill used to go hiking when he was young. Other examples are destinations linked to an opportunity and the possibility to relive past moments, such as going to a friend's wedding in the case of “Last Vegas” or getting a good deal and going to a different and eccentric place like India (“The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”). The film “The Bucket List” shows many different places on a trip whose motivation was to fulfill a wish list before dying.

5.2 Consumption at different times: "Trust me, I've still got it"

The analysis of the consumption of the elderly in the different moments of the films helps to understand the protagonists' transformations arising from travel and leisure experiences. According to anthropologist Grant McCracken (2007), consumption is directly related to culture and social values in which one is embedded. Thus, consumption contributes to the definition of individuals' values and culture in a society, assigning meanings to goods and services. Travel has meanings in the films, and, from it, the characters initiate changes in their lifestyles. The changes in consumption can be divided into three moments in the films: before, during, and after the trip.

At the beginning, it was common to find references to the use of medicines, illnesses, health treatments, as well as feelings of sadness, depression, and loneliness. The characters were often depicted inside the home, with few scenes showing social interactions and even consumption of goods and services. Protagonists are depicted engaging in tedious everyday tasks with leisure time filled with passive and peaceful activities, such as reading, watching television, and playing cards.

Also, in the first moment, the elderly characters are shown as lonely, for example, when they appear at home, depressed, and with a feeling of nostalgia for times gone by. One of the characters – Norman – (“The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”) seeks to fill the loneliness by going on “blind dates” in search of a romantic relationship. The character lies about his age, but he is exposed and ignored by a younger woman, but Norman insists and struggles to relate to the younger woman saying: "Trust me, I've still got it".

In the second moment, when the characters decide to travel and go on a trip, the transformations in the elderly characters become visible because of their new experiences. The trips bring adventures and challenges and the routine and peaceful consumption gives way to experiences such as parachuting, getting a tattoo, riding a tuk-tuk (popular means of transport in India), riding a motorcycle, driving luxury cars at high speed, going on safaris, discos and parties, hiking. The consumption of beverages stands out in the scenes in these new places.

In the third and last moment, depicting post-trip scenes, the elderly characters' consumption patterns have changed, as exemplified in the following descriptions:

Case 1: An elderly appears at the beginning of the film with symptoms of depression after his wife's death, shown in pajamas and taking a lot of medicines. He spends about a year alone in the house, avoiding contact with people and spending time watching television. During the trip, he experiences new things as a widower and opens to new possibilities. At the end of the film, he appears happy and vibrant in the company of his new girlfriend and his granddaughter going to an open-air event (“Last Vegas”).

Case 2: A prejudiced and racist character takes a variety of foods from England on their trip to India. During the film, her prejudices end up dissipating and she starts to see the Indians and their food with empathy. At the end of the film, she decides to stay in India where she starts working as the manager of the hotel where she is staying (“The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”).

Case 3: Another case is a character who starts using a laptop as a result of the trip. The character has been a housewife for all her life and dependent on her husband for many things. After her husband's death, she decides to travel to India and record her experiences on a personal blog. For this, she, who had no previous knowledge of technology, acquires a laptop, and posts about her feelings, situations, and experiences in her new stage of life (“The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”).

Socialization and consumption are closely related as other studies have already shown (Ekström, 2006; Moschis, 2007; Setton, 2011). The films show the creation of new social ties during travel. Whether socialization is an initial motivation or not, the narratives suggest that new social ties can encourage older people to live new experiences. Taking a trail, parachuting, riding a roller coaster, night parties, riding a motorcycle were part of the characters' transformation process in a counterpoint to the passive activities shown at the beginning of the films. These adventurous experiences shown are opposite to the stigmatized and ridiculed image of aging shown in the films and which have also been analyzed in other studies (Robinson & Popovich, 2003; Cohen-Shalev & Marcus, 2007; Gatling, 2013). These experiences can be important for the transformative process of characters during the film, since passive consumption activities are replaced by active ones.

5.3 Aging and Stigma: “You’re right, I’m not a child, I’m a grown man”

Gatling's (2013) study shows how comedy films depict older people with laughable aesthetics and behaviors. The characters of the analyzed films are also presented with stigmatized aesthetics characteristic of the elderly, for example, characters who wear a beret/cap, cell phone strapped to their waist, old model sneakers. We can observe scenes showing behaviors that can happen to people of any age, but that are more often associated with the elderly, such as driving poorly, falling over, and dropping objects

Goffman (1963, p. 13) defined stigma as an “attribute that is deeply discrediting”, that is, it assigns to an individual behaviors and expectations associated with failure, flaw, or disadvantage, reducing this individual to an abnormal, strange being, different, and overlooked. Debert (2004, p. 14) states that “old age is treated as a stage of life characterized by physical decay and the absence of social roles”. In some scenes and passages in the films, old age stigma is reinforced. Even considering that changes are inherent to different ages, aging is shown in an ironic way, as a decadent stage of life, with situations that suggest limits of the characters who hardly leave the house and lead a life with rigid routines as in the scene with Bill (“A Walk in the Woods”) described below:

Bill calls friends to invite them to travel with him and do the Appalachian Trail. The answers, although with a funny tone, refer to age-related impossibilities for example, the lack of health and mobility: “I wish I did, but I changed my medication. I can barely get dressed ...”; “Next time, call me for something fun. Like a colonoscopy!”; “Not in this life!”; “Bill, you can see the whole trail on the internet in four minutes.” The disbelief of one of the friends at the invitation made him doubt that the voice of the recording that made the invitation to hike the trail was fake.

Another limiting aspect refers to the attitude of family members towards the trips planned by the elderly protagonists. In the four films, the families do not accept the fact that the elderly are planning to travel abroad and they are called “crazy”. Evelyn's son (“The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”) expresses his estrangement at the fact that she travels after her husband's death; Carter's wife (“The Bucket List”) does not accept that he travels with a friend, Bill's wife and son (“A Walk in the Woods”) try to convince him not to travel; Archie (“Last Vegas”) lies to his son about going on a trip.

During and after the trips, however, the characters are shown in situations that do not fit the stereotype such as, for example, romantic involvement, consumption of alcoholic drinks, and having different and challenging experiences. After the trip, the transformation become even clearer and the negative and sometimes ridiculed representation of the characters changes in the four films. The transformations are diverse and involve,

for example, aesthetic aspects and more social situations that show new people and settings. Thus, aging acquires more positive and less stigmatized characteristics.

The transformation can be exemplified from the relationship between Archie and his son (“Last Vegas”). He lies to his son about his trip to Las Vegas, but the son installs a tracker on his father's cell phone, goes to his destination and scolds his father. The dialogue between them begins with an inversion of roles, i.e., the son scolding and “infantilizing” the father: “You cannot do this type of thing. You’re no longer a child”. But the father's answer shows that he wants to be considered “alive”:

“You're right. I'm not a child. I am an adult man who was at the bachelor party of a great friend. To begin with, I shouldn't have to lie (...) I'm not a debilitated old man. I've got a lot of life left in me and I want to live it doing the things I like to do. One is dancing and the other is having a drink. I already danced, and now, if you want to join me, I would love to have a drink with my son.”

The transformative travels narrated in the films struggle with the stigma of aging socially constructed and represented in several images and dialogues from the four films, such as Evelyn's question (“The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”): “Can we be blamed for feeling we're too old to change?” At this point in the life cycle, identity experiences, which were previously predominantly associated with work, give way to paid identity experiences such as transformative leisure travel. Ransome (2005) describes some types of consumption associated with occupational identities of escape from work, such as leisure travel, which represent the characters' escape from the passivity and conformity stigma that accompanies aging.

6 FINAL DISCUSSION

Older people are seen as a lucrative segment of the entertainment market (Patterson, 2006; Glover & Prideaux, 2009). Travel as a transformative experience is a topic that can be studied in different fields of knowledge such as consumer behavior and tourism studies. In tourism, our inspiration came from recent studies (Kirillova et al. 2017a; 2017b) that locate in travel experiences the possibility of positive and lasting changes in the existential authenticity of individuals. Although the contribution of tourism to the well-being of older adults cannot be overlooked, it is known that the elderly may encounter difficulties in their leisure experiences.

Patterson (2006) observed that studies in the field of tourism suggest that older adults are physically able to travel and enjoy activities aimed at younger people, disseminating the idea that travel brings a sense of rejuvenation. This optimistic view excludes those who are not financially, physically, or mentally able to participate in leisure travel, which has given rise to studies that problematize the situation of the elderly as tourists, such as the work by Sedgley et al. (2017) that examine tourism and gerontology from a critical perspective. We looked for transformative travel in the fictional environment and we found four films that portray predominantly optimistic and positive experiences of courageous elderly characters in search of change and adventure. Hall (1997) addresses the idea of trans-coding representations in cinema aiming to reverse stereotypes and neutralize negative images, “that is, taking an existing meaning and re-appropriating it for new meanings” (Hall, 1997, p. 270). The analyzed films allowed interpretations leading to reflections on constructed stereotypes and stigmas, including by cinema, and offers the possibility of new perspectives for this last and challenging stage of the life cycle.

The leisure travel industry offers numerous entertainment possibilities for a wide range of elderly profiles, which opens many avenues for studying transformative experiences. Some areas of knowledge, as well as the film industry, have marveled at the youth for a long time. Although the elderly are gaining social and economic relevance, their representations still seem confused in the different media, which may suggest not only the diversity of the segment, but also the difficulty of companies in understanding the elderly and their increasingly prominent place in society, in cities, and in travel.

We bring the existential philosophy (Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 1966; May, 1977) to inspire and support us in the final discussion of this study based on cultural texts that speak of novelty associated with travel that includes new places, makes it possible to observe new cultures, and participation in out-of-routine activities, thus contributing to a sense of freedom that cannot be achieved in everyday life.

Tourism experiences suggest personal transformations and relate to the search for existential authenticity. The existential situation is considered inherent to all human beings, regardless of age, gender, or social class. Existentialism sees the individual as thrown into a meaningless world, of unconditional freedom, universal alienation, and death in the end. This is a philosophical view called the existential condition (Yalom, 1980) and which appears in the experiences lived by the characters who are in the final stage of the life cycle in the selected films.

The existential condition can cause existential anxiety, which is worry about the meaning of life and death (Weems et al. 2004), more prevalent at the end of the life cycle. Linked to existential anxiety, existential authenticity is another concept brought by this philosophical perspective (Wang, 1999). Authenticity emerges as a state of being where one tries to be true to oneself, as the elderly characters show when undertaking their travels.

In the films, existential anxiety – “an apprehension about the ultimate meaning of life and death” (Weems et al. 2004, p. 383) – makes the elderly face dark and chaotic aspects of life, as well as the certainty of death and seek existential authenticity in their travels. This ideal way of being, originated in philosophy, can be achieved when the individual situates himself or herself in the world according to his/her personal value system, identifies levels of freedom and alienation and accepts the finitude of his/her existence (Wang, 1999).

The elderly represented in the cinema face existential anxiety in their routines permeated by life difficulties, chaos that challenge them daily or even because of the certainty of death. These are favorable conditions for identifying existential authenticity. Traveling appears as a way for characters to find a balance between anxiety and existential authenticity in their social lives. Traveling is an alternative for the elderly characters to give meaning to their existence, even if they accept their finitude. The travels of the elderly represented in the films show an alternative for finding a balance between the characters’ ideals of freedom and alienation as contemplated by existential philosophy (Wang, 1999).

Although this study examines representations – while Kirillova et al. (2017a; 2017b) investigate actual transformative tourist experiences – we believe we can also provide useful insights into the use of the lens of existential philosophy to understand transformations in older adults arising from travel. Kirillova et al. (2017a; 2017b.) in their studies of transformative travel found, for example, that transformative events tend to happen at the end of the trip and evoke intense emotions, there must be a triggering event for the transformation to happen, self-transformation is not a motivation to travel, the transformative potential lies in random events, and tourists do not reflect on existential issues during the trip. The narratives of the films, however, show the transformation as a process that encompasses reflections, events, places, and specific times for each story and character. Would the moment of the life cycle be a differentiator for transformative travel?

Dialogues in the films reveal concerns about existential, physical, intellectual, and spiritual issues such as freedom, alienation, mortality, meaning of life. Traveling awakens the existential anxiety, while enabling the rescue of existential authenticity. The travels make the characters more aware of daily routine limitations, typical of elderly’s life that, to a certain extent, they were subjected to.

The characters of “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel” contacted with a different way of life and culture in India which made them understand that adopting a new lifestyle, far from their routines and places of origin, was more suited to the needs of their stage of life. A better understanding of existence through self-knowledge – as well as the distance from home – lead some characters to perceive a more adequate life in India. During the trip they decide to stay in India, since cultural and social values were better aligned with newly discovered possibilities of existence. The story about the elderly group suggests that travel experiences may be conducive to alternative modes of existence – no longer recognized in their places of origin – that lead to a more authentic lifestyle.

When deciding to travel, the characters were forced to reconcile their ideas and desires to live these experiences with the social expectations associated with stigmatized representations. Some characters were ridiculed or misunderstood by family, friends, and service providers. Such situations caused the characters to reflect on the foundation of their existence, as well as on the freedom to be who they would like to be.

In the last part of the films, after the trip, it was possible to perceive individual transformations of the characters. Upon returning to their daily lives and routine activities, the characters become more respected and better accepted by the people in their relationship network. They become associated with vitality and joy and show a change, when compared to the beginning of the films, in relationships and social roles such as: return to work, love relationships, socialization, active role within the family. Upon returning to the routine environment, the transformed elderly characters do not show interest in adapting to the expectations of society, but seem to have acquired more individuality. Even in the film "The Bucket List", in which the characters die at the end, it is possible to identify a post-trip period where they return to their families and to routine, and face the inevitable death due to their diseases. However, we can identify that there was a reframing of death and their own existence.

During their travels, the elderly characters reflect on their existence and on their identities. It was possible to identify reflections on mortality and finitude of life, in addition to the lack of recognition of their current social position and self-image as old people. In the dialogue between Madge and the group of friends in "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel", after the death of one of the elderly traveling companions, we note an example of reflection: "When someone dies, you think about your own life. And I don't want to grow older. I don't want to be condescended to. To become marginalized and ignored by society. I don't want to be the first person they let off the plane in a hostage crisis". The travels of the elderly are shown as the possibility of making revisions, reinterpretations, and reformulations about themselves and about life at this point in the life cycle.

Hall (2006) presents the postmodern subject as exempt from a partial or totally immaculate or innate identity. In this way, the individual has several identities and should no longer be represented in a unique way, but from different angles and fragments that constitute him, forming "temporary identities" taking into account cultural, social, and biological aspects of the subject. We can observe this in the characters of the films from the moment that the search for a new meaning for life, propitiates the emergence of a new identity consistent with the current aspirations of the characters, but that can change depending on new needs and new desires that may arise. The diversity of the elderly audience was also represented since each character was portrayed differently.

Cinema as a social practice recognizes subjects that materialize as symbolic representations. According to Hall (2016), this social construction is what gives sense and meaning. The elderly are often represented in the cinema in a stereotyped and stigmatized way. The new forms of representation of these subjects identified in the films made it possible to reflect on new signs of aging. As the meanings are not fixed as Hall (2016) reminds us, the new representations brought in the cinema for the elderly who seek transformative travels bring yet another discourse and forceful images to resignify this stage of life.

The films show existential reflections along with transformative travel, but isn't that really one of the roles of cinema? To make one think. According to Uhrig (2005), cinema has a profound impact on society, as its narratives and representations are a unique art form, characterizing itself as an extension of the world and a way of representing it. Like transformative travel, cinema also brings happiness, in addition to being able to reduce anxiety and depression.

The existential philosophy lens made it possible to reflect on the three categories of analysis identified. Although each character has a personal motivation to undertake the journey and to choose the experiences, we observe that these were accomplished by the discomfort caused by existential anxiety and the search for authentic experiences and the resignification of life. Regarding consumption, it was possible to identify changes in the ways of consuming at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the films. What we saw was a transformation in the form of consumption more aligned with the positioning of the characters in the face of new lifestyles provided by the travel experience. The transformation achieved by finding a more authentic way of life led characters to overcome stereotypes and stigmas that somehow prevented them from being free and becoming who they really were or who they would like to be, promoting new forms of representations of themselves.

This study begins with transformative travel for the elderly to select the four films analyzed among those available in commercial circuits. However, we suggest that other media be examined, such as the various streaming series and TV soap operas, to understand meanings, and frames of aging that can influence tourist experiences and/or locate other transformations of the elderly in the context of tourism.

It should be noted that to select films within the scope of the study, we observed that not all approaches to aging used the same lens. Although mass media bring various perspectives on aging, the films about travel and tourism have an optimistic approach opposed to some prejudices associated with old age and, precisely for this reason, they were chosen. The four films depicted situations that featured characters initially stigmatized and that during and after the trip go through a process of transformation breaking stereotypes and prejudices. However, these films represent only a portion of the universe of possible investigative approaches.

The characters' travels provided joy, moments of socialization, cultural exchanges, escape from routine, and redefinition of existence. But a film, like life, has an end, which limits the narrative to a space of time. Little is shown about post-trip events, and this lack of representation of the return is a limitation and an opportunity for future empirical research. We hope that the analysis of these films will be an invitation for further contributions to understand transformative travel for older adults. What happens in their "existential conditions" upon returning home?

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