

The role of social tourism in the satisfaction of elderly customers: The case of the *Volto Já* Project

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This research intends to capture the perceived value by the elderly through the participation in social tourism programs, and the link between the social tourism experience and their satisfaction as customers of social welfare services. It aims to: 1) study the perceptions of the interviewees regarding the specificities of the programs; 2) understand the relationship between the participation in social tourism activities and elderly customers' satisfaction.

Method: To accomplish our proposal we used the *Volto Já* Project as the main source of information since it's a research project that implements a social business model through a network of Social Economy institutions and promotes a senior exchange program between these institutions. Data is collected from the participants of social tourism activities provided by *Volto Já* Project regarding their participation in such activities. The study follows a qualitative design with data collected by semi-structured interviews. The sample is composed by 23 elders (14 females, 9 males, average age of 79). The interviews were scrutinized with content analysis procedures.

Findings: We have some evidence that participation in social tourism activities increases the satisfaction of the elderly like a welfare service customer. However, satisfaction with the organization depends on corporate image and for those that link satisfaction with the services provided by the organization the participation in *Volto Já* experience does not interfere with elderly customer satisfaction.

Originality/value: This study allowed us to evaluate the experience of the social tourism program and its effects on customer's satisfaction with the organization. Their very own perception brings unprogrammed topics for this evaluation, enriching our work and enabling its use as a plus for future research.

KEYWORDS: elderly customers satisfaction; management; qualitative methodology; social tourism; *Volto Já* project

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