

Article

Age Simulation Suits in Education and Training of Staff for the Nautical Tourism Sector

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Abstract: Education can be the first step towards sustainable tourism. This article discusses the use of age simulation suits to educate university students majoring in nautical tourism. The research goal was to verify whether using such suits in the process can sensitize students to problems that may be faced by the elderly in marinas. The goal of the research has been achieved through a pilot study carried out on a group of students. In the experiment, two Sakamoto suits were used that simulate a number of ailments characteristic of old age. The participants found the classes using the suits to be helpful in both their private lives and future careers, when they will face problems resulting from an aging society. After the experiment, the participants declared a greater understanding of the elderly and were able to identify more problems that senior tourists might encounter while visiting marinas. Therefore, in the future, they may make decisions to implement solutions that accommodate the needs of senior tourists in marinas. This is the first step toward fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals and creating accessible, sustainable tourism.

Keywords: sustainable tourism; university education; nautical tourism; teaching tools; aging society; marina staff education; social inclusion



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1. Introduction

Aging populations have been observed in many countries, including most of the European Union (EU). United Nations (UN) forecasts predict that by 2030, the share of Europe's population over 65 years old will amount to 23.8% [1]. According to Eurostat forecasts, Poland will become one of the European countries with the most quickly aging population by 2050. As predicted, the EU's population will expand by 3.6% by 2050, while, in Poland, it will shrink by around 10% [2]. The basic causes of an aging society include later motherhood, changing consumer needs, increased life expectancy, the level of societal wealth, the rise in the number of working women, the level of social welfare and health protections, the educational level of the population, and government social policies [3,4].

Demographic aging has many consequences in the social, cultural, and economic spheres. It is also necessary to take this trend into account in tourism, including nautical tourism. A report on the Polish sailing market indicates that in 2016, 27% of Polish sailors were 55 and older [5]. The case is similar in Germany, where, according to the *Wassertourismus in Deutschland* report, as many as 31% of yacht sailors are aged 50 to 70, while, for motor sailing, this proportion is 28% [6]. Germans comprise the largest group of foreign sailors visiting Polish yacht ports in the West Pomeranian and Pomeranian provinces, which makes these data especially important for Poland. Given current demographic trends, the group of the oldest sailors will likely expand in the coming years. It will become necessary to adapt what marinas can offer to the specific needs of the elderly. Sailors moor their yachts in yacht harbors, which are the starting points in exploring nearby towns. Their features may be decisive for the selection of a cruise route, which in turn may impact the number of tourists in a given region.

Adaptation of marina facilities to seniors' needs is also required in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals and accessible and inclusive tourism.

This article deals with the training of university students of a nautical-tourism-related specialization and focuses on preparation for serving senior citizens, whose efficiency is reduced due to their age and natural processes occurring in the body. It is important to make customer service staff aware of seniors' importance. In addition, it is vital to sensitize employees to older tourists' needs, to present the problems that they tend to encounter during tourism activities, and to learn how to help them and not limit their freedom, which may cause a feeling of discomfort [7].

In the case of marinas, such training should apply to management staff who make decisions (inter alia) on infrastructure investments and procedures, as well as port employees who have direct contact with customers on a daily basis.

The aim of this article is to explore the possibility of using age simulation suits to educate university students who, in the future, may be employed in the nautical tourism industry and possibly might become yacht port workers.

A research question has been formulated regarding whether the use of an age simulation suit in the process of education and training can contribute to sensitizing students to problems that may be faced by senior tourists in marinas.

The simple structure of this paper serves the purpose of presenting the research results in a clear manner. The theoretical background for the research is described in Section 2. Section 3 looks at the methodology. The research results and an analysis of the same are included in Section 4. Section 5 provides the discussion, and the final part of the manuscript, Section 6, provides conclusions.

The development of sustainable nautical tourism is underrepresented in the literature, and the sources available focus mainly on environmental issues. Social aspects are left unexplored, as is the training of staff for the nautical tourism sector [8–10]. Education to assist older adults at marinas is a new concept, aimed at drawing attention to its social and economic importance. In this context, the study can be considered to be filling a research gap.

Given the large (and still growing) size of senior citizens as a group, prohibiting older adults from taking part in tourism activities due to not adjusting services to meet their needs would be very economically disadvantageous [11]. It is important to make customer service staff aware of seniors' importance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Senior Tourism as Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals—SDGs

The concept of sustainable development was first defined in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development. The *Our Common Future* report, which summarizes the work of the Commission, includes considerations of sustainable development in the context of the world's economy and politics, and a statement of ability to influence and shape the commitment towards sustainable development among policy makers. Sustainable development was defined as one that *meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* [12,13]. Based on economic and environmental integration, environmental protection, inter-generational equity, and non-discrimination, it is to ensure that everyone has appropriate life quality and the right to self-determination [14]. Three pillars of sustainable development have been distinguished: economic, environmental, and social. The concept of sustainable development was discussed during the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and 2012 and in Johannesburg in 2002. The 2012 Earth Summit witnessed a vigorous debate among world leaders and thousands of attendees representing the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and other groups on how to combat poverty, promote social equality, and secure environmental protection. During the conference, the three-year process of determination of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was initiated. The goals were ultimately adopted in 2015 by 193 UN countries and described in detail in *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* [15]. One of the tasks formulated in Objective 10 is that it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities and reduce inequalities, inter alia,

by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies, and actions in this field. If we place this task within the context of tourism, it must be equally accessible to everyone, without restrictions resulting from sex, age, or health status [16,17].

The concept of sustainable tourism is based on respect for and the protection of human rights. It should be shaped in such a way as to accommodate the needs of all individuals in terms of, e.g., infrastructure facilitation or the preparedness of the staff to assist persons with special needs [18]. True social inclusion can only happen if we manage to achieve these goals. We can conclude, therefore, that taking action to remove barriers that hinder or even prevent the elderly from using various tourist facilities (including marinas) falls within the implementation of the SDGs.

A natural outcome of such action would be the support of accessible tourism, i.e., tourism that enables people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing, and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equality and dignity, through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services, and environments [19].

However, older individuals with disabilities are still restricted in their ability to participate in adventure tourism [20], in spite of the widening awareness of the fact that traveling is beneficial to physical and mental wellbeing and the perception of life quality [21–23]. Making tourism more accessible to seniors can also help to grow the economy. Well-off and free of financial burdens, as many seniors are, they have a great deal of free time and are ready to spend it traveling, including during the low season. This can help to level off the effect of the seasonality of tourism [11]. Considering the above, we cannot underestimate the importance of adjusting tourist services to senior customers. Accessibility and the removal of barriers lay the foundation for sustainable tourism. The prevailing demographic trends and aging of the population are bound to drive up the number of senior tourists in the forthcoming years [23–25]. The increase is expected in various forms of tourism, including the active tourism [26,27].

Being of key importance to the development of nautical tourism [28], yacht ports (marinas) should accommodate the needs of older clients. Senior tourists already constitute a large group of marina customers, and their number is bound to increase. Customizing services to suit their needs is not only an act of benevolence on the part of marina authorities, but is also in line with the principles of sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals—SDGs.

2.2. Education of Marina Personnel

Education of staff for the tourist sector is one of the factors supporting the development of tourism. Training should cover an update on the current market situation and the related challenges [29]. Tourist services are based on customer relations. Therefore, customer service is being continuously improved to increase customer satisfaction. Improvements are achieved through the use of new technologies [30–32] and the development of the interpersonal skills of personnel [33,34]. Staff in the tourist sector must show a great deal of patience and understanding on a daily basis; therefore, the role of communication skills and empathy cannot be overrated [35]. Facing many restrictions posed by health conditions, such as hindered communication or the use of standard infrastructure solutions, elderly tourists can be demanding. Therefore, personnel in the tourist sector should be qualified to deal with this growing group of customers with special needs [36].

The increase in the number of sailing enthusiasts in many European countries in recent years has been driving the importance of sailing tourism in local economies [37–39]. Many new marinas have been built and those already existing have been upgraded, especially in the Mediterranean [40] and the Baltic Sea [41]. Sustainable development in sailing tourism has become a topic of interest among an increasing number of researchers [42–44]. However, most of the research is focused on environmental and economic aspects, such as waste generated on boats, which contaminates waters of high natural value [45,46],

or the disposal of this waste [47–49]. Some researchers investigate the sustainability of sailing tourism from the point of view of cost-effective land development that conserves nature and sustains the wellbeing of local communities [50–52]. There is also a number of publications on the management of financial resources in marinas [53–55], relating to the economic pillar of sustainable development.

However, there is a research gap regarding the social aspects of the sustainability of marinas, including the necessity to tailor services to suit the needs of senior tourists. Some aspects of seniors and people with disabilities in water-based leisure activities are discussed in the context of adapting watercraft to their special needs [56]. We must not forget, however, that yachts and pleasure boats carrying senior tourists call at marinas, and these too should be adapted to the special needs of these groups. The research literature on marina management offers little on the education and training of marina personnel, and authors who do deal with the topic focus mostly on upgrading the skills of the existing staff [8,57,58]. No literature is available that would support education in this field in a more comprehensive manner, including the tutoring and training of prospective staff. Meanwhile, the demand for qualified staff, well prepared to perform management roles in marinas, is bound to skyrocket, in line with the surging interest in sailing and the growth of the network of marinas.

2.3. *The Age Simulation Suit as a Teaching Tool*

Age simulation suits (also referred to as geriatric suits) are modern didactic tools that simulate the physical and sensory problems associated with old age. Their use is rarely addressed in scientific research, which may be due to the fact that they are innovative and still not often used.

The few studies described in the literature show that young people who had the opportunity to use an age simulation suit began to express greater understanding toward seniors [59–61].

Most authors that have examined this issue describe the use of age simulation suits in educating people who are going to take care of, or provide medical assistance to, older adults in the future [62–64]. In this case, age simulation suits are considered helpful in shaping appropriate attitudes toward elderly patients. Some studies indicate that the experience can influence the behavior of students long after the end of the experiment [65,66]. For example, having taken part in an experiment with age simulation suits, students of medical faculties and pharmacy showed more empathy towards the elderly [67,68]. This result of the experiment is even more meaningful considering that we live in a time of widespread indifference towards others.

Age simulation suits are also helpful in educating architects and engineers responsible for designing and building public utilities, as well as designers of everyday products [69,70]. After taking classes with age simulation suits, they understand that some objects and architectural elements are troublesome for seniors. The experience makes them aware of the need to modify designs to make them more senior-friendly. In view of the increase in the elderly population, the tool is ever more appreciated by public security professionals [71], and valued even in the financial sector, where the accessibility of bank services is of the utmost importance [72].

However, the use of age simulation suits in the education and training of staff for the tourism sector, including for such highly specialized facilities as marinas, has not yet been explored in research.

3. Materials and Methods

The article's structure is subordinated to implement the assumed goal. A mixed method combining the experimental method (a quasi-experimental design type) with a simulation and survey has been used.

In quasi-experimental research, the researcher manipulates an independent variable but does not randomly assign participants to conditions or orders of conditions [73,74].

Quasi-experiments have been used in psychology and other social sciences for many years by many researchers, e.g., to evaluate activities and tools that may affect the empathy of experiments' participants [75–77]

Figure 1 outlines the individual stages of the research process.

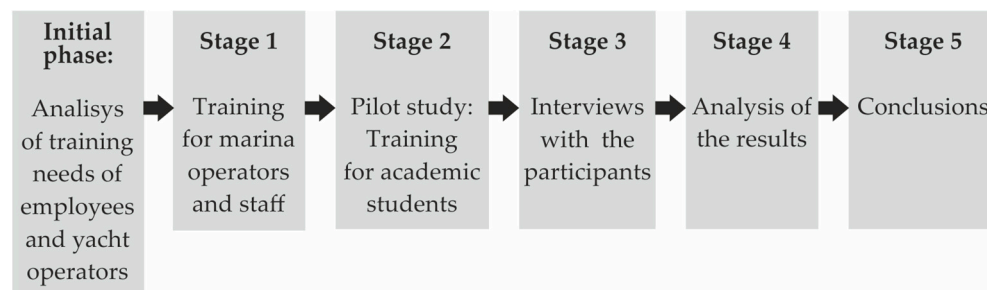


Figure 1. Research framework.

A research question has been formulated regarding whether the use of an age simulation suit in the process of education and training can contribute to sensitizing students to problems that may be faced by senior tourists in marinas. To answer it, a pilot study was performed that involved training a group of students from the Maritime University of Szczecin on the use of age simulation suits.

3.1. Initial Phase

The activities were inspired by a survey on the training needs of the marina staff, which was carried out in 2017 to implement the *South Coast Baltic: Establishing Durable Cross-Border Boating Destination Management Based on the MARRIAGE Cooperation Network Project* (hereinafter referred to as SCB), in which the Maritime University of Szczecin was one of the partners. A project was funded by the EU (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)) within the Interreg South Baltic Programme (2014–2020) and involved 14 partners, including Denmark (1), Germany (4), Poland (7), and Lithuania (2), as well as 10 associated partners covering all five countries in the program. The partnership consisted of local authorities, universities, tourist and sports organizations, and marina management. The core partners were supported by 8 associated partners, such as tourism organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the tourism sector, harbors, marinas, and local authorities. The goal of the project was to make the cross-border boating region durably attractive by establishing comprehensive cross-border destination management. It included combined joint marketing (the aim of which was South Coast Baltic brand development) with improvements in boating services and infrastructure.

The team members of the Maritime University of Szczecin—which was a partner in the project, responsible for training employees and marina operators—prepared a survey in which they asked about training needs. The Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) was used, i.e., an online survey. The survey was addressed to SCB project partners, affiliates, and entities associated with nautical tourism in the Southern Baltic region. The survey contained a list of 8 thematic areas that had previously been agreed upon during a project meeting. The respondents were asked to rank (on a scale of 1 to 5) the suitability of the proposed topics for marina employees, where 1 indicated that the subject area was of little use, and 5 implied that it was extremely useful. The online survey resulted in 18 responses. Most of them were provided by entities representing marinas from Poland, Germany, and Lithuania.

The respondents included representatives from the Local Tourist Organization of the West Pomeranian Sailing Route and the Association of Sea Cities and Municipalities (ZMiGM) based in Gdańsk. The first of these organizations encompasses a network of approximately 40 ports and marinas in the West Pomeranian region [78]. ZMiGM is an association of around 30 coastal self-governments in Poland [79]; hence, the responses obtained may reflect training needs for marinas. However, when analyzing the results of

the survey, it was assumed that each of the responses carried the same weight, so as not to underestimate the opinions of German and Lithuanian respondents. The examination of the findings involved the overall assessment assigned to the proposed thematic areas by the respondents, as well as the distribution of scores within each area individually and in comparison to others. The evaluated thematic areas were ordered in accordance with the assessment of all points obtained. The maximum number of points was 90, assuming that all respondents appraised a given topic as the most necessary (out of 5) [8].

One of the proposed topics concerned the adaptation of the marina's services for various groups of users, including the needs of the elderly. This topic received the highest number of points from the respondents (71) and was considered the most interesting (Table 1). In several cases, the respondents specified that they would be most interested in the group of older adults and people with disabilities.

The outcomes indicated that the people responsible for the services offered by the marina are aware of the demographic changes taking place and the subsequent necessity to adapt port services and infrastructure to the needs of various user groups, and that staff need to acquire knowledge in this field.

Table 1. Topics proposed for marina employees and operators and the results of the survey.

No.	Topic	Points
1	Marketing in marinas: What to do alone at a marina? What to do together with others at a destination? The importance of social media for the development of nautical tourism (how it works, how it can be used, who the users are).	66
2	Trends in nautical tourism	69
3	Yacht ports for everyone: How can they be adapted to the needs of elderly sailors, the disabled, and families with children?	71
4	Information and its importance, i.e., how to organise a tourist information point in the port, how to train staff, but also information flow in the port and between SCB ports, specifically what information should look like and why.	69
5	Review of selected sailing regulations in Poland, Germany, Denmark, and Lithuania (e.g., when a person can board a yacht, when to call for services, what data can be requested from sailors)	68
6	How to welcome a tourist ('Savoir faire' of sailing, basic phrases, how to safely moor a yacht)	69
7	How to deal with a difficult client?	63
8	Building a yacht	50
9	Review of selected sailing regulations in Poland, Germany, Denmark, and Lithuania (e.g., when a person can board a yacht, when to call for services, what data can be requested from sailors)	68

Source: The author's own study on the basis of [8].

3.2. Stage 1

The training session was delivered on 20–22 November 2018, according to an agenda based on the results of a training needs survey. The three-day session was attended by employees of marinas in Poland and Latvia. This was due to the fact that, ultimately, people from these countries were willing to take part in the training and took part in the recruitment procedure. The language of the training was English, and, for many potential participants (especially from German marinas), it was an obstacle due to the lack of English language skills.

The training on seniors' needs was delivered on day two. An introductory presentation of 'good practices' in place in German marinas, which improve the comfort of senior sailors, was followed by a discussion of the process and mechanisms of aging, delivered by an

expert from the Pomeranian Medical University. At this point, the attendees could use an age simulation suit to better understand the problems that older persons might face (see Figures 2 and 3). This part of the training scored highest in the questionnaire survey that the attendees filled in on the final day.



Figure 2. A participant of a training course for marina employees and operators, in an age simulation suit. Photo by A. Łapko.

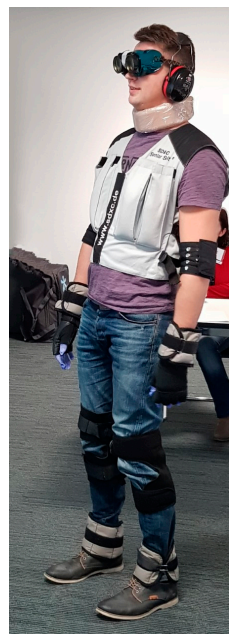


Figure 3. A participant of a training course for marina employees and operators, in an age simulation suit. Photo by A. Łapko.

3.3. Stage 2

Findings in the questionnaire survey became inspiration to include attendance to older sailors at marinas in the syllabus of Water Tourism Logistics, a degree program at the Maritime University of Szczecin. The program was established in 2019 in response to the demand for qualified staff reported by the participants of the SCB project. It prepares graduates for work in the water tourism sector, including marinas. As a one-of-a-kind degree program in Poland and in Europe, it is co-funded under the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014–2020, financed by the European Social Fund (as a part of the *Academy of the Future project* under the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014–2020, co-financed by the European Fund). The teaching aids

purchased with the EU funds include age simulation suits. In view of the large interest in attendance to senior sailors, the participants of the training session were offered an opportunity to take part in experimental classes with the use of age simulation suits to facilitate a better understanding of the ailments characteristic of seniors. Considering the social importance of young people understanding the needs of the elderly, students of other programs were also invited to participate in the experiment.

The quasi-experimental study was conducted. The inclusion criteria covered volunteers who had internships at yacht harbors, wrote their diploma theses in the field of nautical tourism, or were active sailors. The idea was to include individuals who had insights into the specifics of marinas. The exclusion criteria covered students who had no experience in nautical tourism and yacht harbor operation. The inclusion criteria significantly narrowed the number of prospective participants, yet it was necessary to obtain reliable feedback on the functioning of water tourism and the related challenges that might be faced by the elderly. The Water Tourism Logistics degree program is a niche and is chosen by only a few candidates each academic year. Few students take up sailing as a hobby as well. The study encompassed all the students who fulfilled this criterion. None of them refused to participate, which makes the study representative for the relevant sample.

Two age simulation suits produced by the Japanese company Sakamoto were used in the research. Table 2 depicts the accessories included in the suits and their functionalities.

The suits simulate both physical and sensory problems associated with old age.

Table 2. The functionality of the Sakamoto age simulation suit.

Accessories	Simulated Physical Problem(s)	Simulated Sensory Problem(s)
Goggles	-	Deterioration in visual quality: narrowing of the viewing angle, impaired color recognition, impaired visual acuity
Knee and wrist weights	Knee and wrist weights	-
Neck, knee, and elbow restraints	Joint stiffness, the stooped posture of an elderly person	-
Earplugs	-	Deterioration of hearing quality
Neck collar	Neck stiffness, limited neck movement	-
Gloves	Decreased hand dexterity	-
Slippers	Cautious gait pattern	-

Source: The author's own study on the basis of [80].

Twelve students (5 women and 7 men aged 20 to 23) from the Maritime University of Szczecin participated in the experiment, which was carried out in May of 2022. They had all expressed their willingness to take part. They did not have any complaints or physical limitations that could disrupt the course of the experiment. Since only two suits were available, the participants took part in the study at different times. However, classes were held in the same building (the Faculty of Engineering and Economics of Transport) and in the same rooms. Due to the safety of the respondents, it was decided to not use suits on yachts and in marinas during the experiment.

Wearing of the suits was always preceded by a short theoretical introduction to the physical aging process.

During the experiment, a focus was placed on simple, everyday activities, assuming that carrying them out would make the young participants aware of the problems facing seniors.

The participants were asked to perform the following tasks:

1. Open and close the door with a key;

2. Go down and up the stairs;
3. Go down and take the lift;
4. Read an informative text;
5. Count coins and choose the correct amount;
6. Get up from a lying position.

The participants took ca. 15 min to perform all the tasks, including the donning of the suit.

Figures 4–7 show the performance of selected tasks.

3.4. Stages 3–5

The participants were requested to present their ideas about challenges that, in their opinion, senior tourists might encounter during a stay at a marina. The answers provided before the experiment could be completed after the experiment, in which each participant performed the six tasks assigned. The participants did not discuss or exchange opinions with other participants before, during, or after the experiment. After collecting answers from all participants, the findings were analyzed and conclusions were drawn (Stages 4 and 5), which is described in the further parts of the article.



Figure 4. The participant carries out Task 1: opening the door with a key.



Figure 5. The participants carry out Task 2: go down and up the stairs.



Figure 6. The participant carries out Task 4: reading an informative text.



Figure 7. The participant carries out Task 6: getting up from a lying position.

4. Results

All the participants were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to take part in the experiment, and they all expressed a positive opinion on the impact of the classes involving the age simulation suits on their understanding of the problems facing the elderly. They found the experiment helpful both in terms of their future careers and private lives. Having taken off the suit, they willingly shared their experiences, encouraged others to take their turn, and declared that, from then on, they would have more empathy for older individuals, having a better understanding of why they behave in certain ways.

When asked what caused them the greatest inconvenience while wearing the suit, most participants stated that the most severe problem was walking (in this case, the respondents could indicate only one answer) (Figure 8).

After all the participants had taken their turn in the experiment, the answers provided in the questionnaire on the challenges that older individuals might encounter at marinas were analyzed once again.

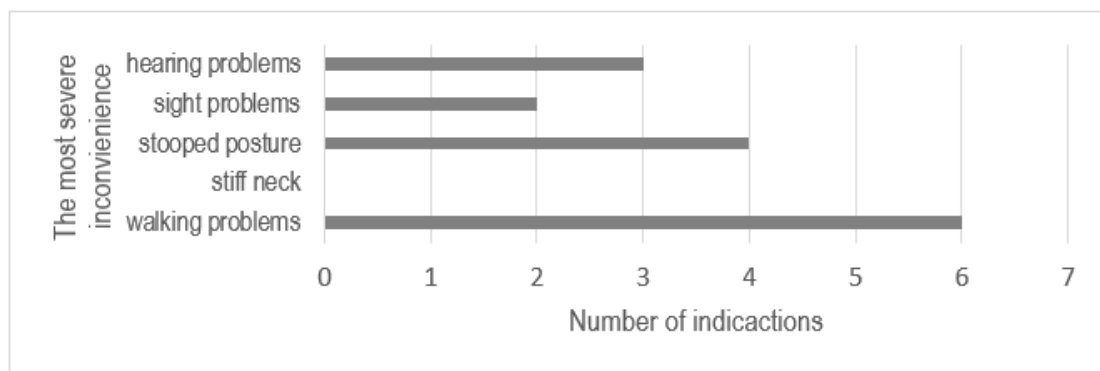


Figure 8. Respondents' answers to the main question: what was the most severe inconvenience for you while wearing the age simulation suit?

Before the experiment, the participants mentioned a total of five problem areas, namely:

1. Difficulties in embarking and disembarking from a boat (I);
2. Mooring (O);
3. Overcoming a difference in levels (e.g., when moving from the wharf to the pier or climbing stairs) (I);
4. Long distances to sanitary facilities (O);
5. Problems with the use of utilities (e.g., electricity, water); handling utility stands (I).

Having taken part in the experiment, the respondents were able to indicate other difficulties that senior tourists might face. Interestingly, the number of new areas in which they saw challenges for older sailors was higher than the total number of initially mentioned problems (six vs. five, respectively). The newly noted challenges included the following:

1. Uneven surfaces (e.g., holes in the pavement and other damage) (I);
2. Problems with moving around the port at night (poor vision in the dark) (A);
3. Walking on narrow platforms (I);
4. Slippery surfaces (I);
5. Carrying things to the yacht (e.g., when mooring or leaving the yacht) (A);
6. Problems with traveling to the city (poor accessibility of public transport) (I).

Eleven problem areas were mentioned in total. The responses have been broken down into three categories: infrastructure-related (I), action-related (A), and organization-related (O). Infrastructure-related challenges for the elderly can be eliminated through the implementation of certain technical and structural solutions in marinas. Action-related challenges mainly correspond to the ailments and physical limitations that seniors experience and that marina staff should be aware of and able to offer assistance with. Organization-related problems can be overcome through introducing certain provisions into the port rules and regulations.

Most of the problems indicated by the respondents were infrastructure-related. Interestingly, no action-related challenges were mentioned before the experiment; both of the action-related challenges listed in Table 3 above were added to the list after the respondents had had an opportunity to experience how older tourists might feel, having donned the age simulation suit.

Table 3. Difficulties mentioned by the participants, by category.

Infrastructure-Related (I)		Action-Related (A)	Organization-Related (O)
1.	Embarking and disembarking from a boat		
2.	Overcoming a difference in levels (e.g., when moving from the wharf to the pier or climbing stairs)		
3.	Problems with the use of utilities (e.g., electricity, water); handling utility stands	1. Moving around the port at night (poor vision in the dark)	3. Mooring
4.	Uneven surfaces (e.g., holes in the pavement and other damage)	2. Carrying things to the yacht (e.g., when mooring or leaving the yacht)	4. Long distances to sanitary facilities
5.	Walking on narrow platforms		
6.	Slippery surfaces		
7.	Problems with traveling to the city (poor accessibility of public transport)		

The findings indicate that the experience of ailments characteristic of old age sensitized the respondents and allowed them to experience more of the potential difficulties faced by seniors. Sensitizing, in this case, means being able to anticipate what may be troublesome for older people when using marina services.

5. Discussion

The demographic changes driven by the aging of population force many countries to implement solutions that will help to keep seniors active. This is directly related to the achievement of the sustainable development of societies, aimed at ensuring that all members of a society have equal access and ability to participate in the activities of their choice [81]. Tourism is no exception here—an upward trend in the number of traveling seniors has been observed in numerous countries for many years [82]. Surprisingly, although making traveling more accessible to older tourists is in the interest of society [21,83] as well as the economy, there are still various obstacles that senior tourists face [11]. These obstacles are also seen in water tourism. Changes should be introduced based on a deeper understanding of the objectives of educational activities in this respect [84,85]. Education should encompass present and future staff in the tourism sector, who are or will be in direct contact with senior tourists and make or will make decisions concerning the development of the related infrastructure. Thus, educational activities consisting of sensitizing the existing or prospective personnel to needs of the elderly constitute part of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the development of accessible and inclusive nautical tourism. This challenging task requires the use of appropriate tools.

The functioning of marinas as part of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is a rare topic of scientific research, and the sources available focus mainly on the environmental and economic aspects of this [46–49]. For the purpose of this paper, a research question was formulated regarding whether the use of an age simulation suit in the process of education and training can contribute to sensitizing students to problems that may be faced by senior tourists in marinas. It has been shown previously that age simulation suits may be useful in the education and training of medical professionals [64,65]. Individuals who participated in experiments with age simulation suits developed empathy and understanding for older people [65,66]. These soft skills are of crucial importance in the work of medical professionals and are difficult to acquire [86].

For the purpose of this paper, this type of experiment was performed for the first time on a sample of students who, considering their chosen degree program and interests, were likely to seek employment in marinas after graduation.

Having taken part in an experiment consisting of wearing an age simulation suit and performing a few activities, the participants expanded their awareness and sensitivity, and

were able to identify more challenges that the elderly may encounter in a marina than before the experiment. Survey questions focused on problems that the elderly may encounter in marina areas, but the location is, in this case, of secondary importance. The most important aspect is that participants stated that the suits helped them to understand the ailments characteristic of old age. They claimed that they would now be more understanding of the seniors that they met.

In addition, the participants were able to easily indicate which elements of the infrastructure, equipment, and activities performed by tourists while staying at yacht harbors may be challenging for the elderly; this is the first step toward finding solutions.

Thus, an affirmative answer has been obtained to the research question formulated. Indeed, the use of an age simulation suit in the process of education and training can contribute to sensitizing students to the problems that may be faced by senior tourists in marinas.

Poor marina infrastructure, not suited to the special needs of senior tourists, can be held accountable for most of the problems identified. We can expect that if, in the future, any of the experiment's participants take management roles in marinas or entities managing marinas, they will take into account the needs of older tourists in the decision-making process concerning the infrastructure of the facility.

Until now, studies have not described how classes using age simulation suits can be helpful in educating students of tourism-related specializations, who, in the future, might serve senior tourists, so the present article is innovative in this context. The experiment outlined in the article indicates that those who may become responsible (or are already responsible) for serving the elderly in yacht harbors (i.e., university students during their internships) can gain a great deal from classes using this tool. In the future, it will be easier for them to understand the needs of older adults, relate to their behavior (e.g., problems with mooring the yacht or with traveling to the quay or boarding a yacht, requests to repeat messages, or counting money for a longer period), and provide help in an appropriate manner. It is critical for people to understand that seniors' behavior (which might seem surprising or annoying) is not due to ill will, but is rather the outcome of natural bodily processes. Moreover, an essential element of the experiment was that it made the participants aware that youth does not last forever, and that they might experience similar ailments themselves. They may have identified with older adults for a period and felt relieved when taking off the suit, but the experience remained and affected their sensitivity. In the future, as port managers responsible for the development of infrastructure, the participants will understand the need to modify it and introduce solutions that are helpful to seniors, thus effecting the removal of barriers, the development of accessible tourism, and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the literature, there are few examples related to education in the nautical tourism field. The innovative nature of the article is that it draws attention to the need to educate this professional group in serving senior tourists—in particular, sailors, whose numbers will grow in the coming years. The research also highlights the benefits of using age simulation suits in this regard, which effectively shapes young people's empathic attitudes toward the elderly. Understanding the problems affecting the elderly is essential because it is the first step to eliminating the barriers and difficulties that they face. In the case of senior sailors, the introduction of certain solutions and amenities at yacht ports may provide them with greater comfort when using ports and help to maintain robust tourist activity.

In an ideal scenario, neither the elderly nor people with disabilities would need to plan their holidays bearing in mind the accessibility of infrastructure or the organization of tourist facilities. The decision to embark on a tour or voyage should be based on what brings us joy and happiness, with equal opportunities to a variety of holidays for everyone, regardless of age or physical fitness. Both active and leisure activities should be equally available to people of all ages and physical conditions.

The idea of using age simulation suits in university classes allows for fulfilling the duty and mission of higher education—namely that it should take up social challenges and help to create a sustainable society.

6. Conclusions

The results indicated that the use of an age simulation suit in the process of education and training can contribute to sensitizing students to problems that may be faced by senior tourists in marinas.

The study has its limitations. First and foremost, it is a pilot study conducted on a small sample of students from one university. For the safety of the participants, it was not conducted in a marina, where a greater number of tasks could have been accomplished by the participants and more feedback could have been obtained.

Considering the high social importance of the topic, the research will be continued on a larger sample, possibly including students from other universities. It is also intended to extend the research to broader aspects related to tourism, beyond marina services.

The results obtained can bring the importance of the training of personnel at marinas regarding the needs of the elderly to the attention of decision-makers responsible for the development of nautical tourism. Age simulation suits, with proven usefulness in this type of training, can be utilized by universities whose graduates will seek employment in the tourism sector, as well as by enterprises in staff training.

The age simulation suits can be helpful in training both employees who have direct contact with the elderly and managers. The suits can contribute to improving the level of customer service and facilitate infrastructure decisions. Consequently, this will help to increase the number of guests in marinas and prevent social exclusion, which is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

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