Perceptions about cultural heritage and recreational sites among older adults in Bahia Blanca, Argentina

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report on a study that was done among older adults in the city of Bahia Blanca, Argentina regarding their awareness and use of cultural heritage and commercial recreational sites.
Design/methodology/approach – This exploratory study among this historically understudied segment of the population used interviews and historical images to analyze their perceptions about such spaces and to establish a link between those perceptions and their civic identity.
Findings – The study found that appreciation of local cultural heritage sites was considerably lower than appreciation of commercial recreational areas and suggests possible interventions to enhance the use and appreciation of cultural heritage sites.
Social implications – This paper about Bahia Blanca derives its relevance from venturing into an analysis of the opinions about such sites among an age segment, the elderly, that has been poorly addressed in other studies, in particular in the Latin American context. The study reported here generated firsthand information that may serve public servants in making decisions in the context of locally developed cultural policies and presents a methodological model and data collection and analysis techniques that may be of interest for development elsewhere.
Originality/value – In Argentina there is a lack of research studies in the "older adults" age bracket. The contribution of this manuscript lies in creating a connectivity among concepts such as recreation/leisure, heritage and lived space, by using new contributions in the geography of leisure that are associated with the geography of everyday life. The concepts are integrated in the study of subjective spaces of individuals.
Keywords Identity, Cultural heritage, Older adults, Urban heritage, Bahía Blanca, Recreational sites
Paper type Case study

Introduction

From a critical perspective, cultural heritage has been referred to as a social construct, defined from the present, with a message and specific purpose by a dominant power (Prats, 1997; Graham *et al.*, 2000; Waitt, 2000). From an etymological perspective however, cultural heritage is associated with concepts such as inheritance, legacy and property. It has both material and immaterial components that were created by a society throughout its history. It becomes relevant when citizens recognize both its formal and symbolic value and when it is properly preserved as a sign of a society's identity. In this context, leisure activities, the activities performed by individuals in their free time, can be regarded as promoters of patrimonial appreciation. The use of heritage sites during leisure activities can contribute to the revitalization of sites in decline, to the maintenance of architectural

heritage, to the spread of the different elements that make up cultural identity, and to raising awareness among residents about the preservation efforts that such sites require. In urban areas, both economic and recreational sites are relevant in public policy planning, and while city planning efforts tend to focus on the physical aspects of a site, they should also incorporate its subjective value and respond to both the needs and shortcomings of the local population.

The objective of the research reported here was to analyze the perceptions among older adults in the city of Bahia Blanca, Argentina about cultural heritage and recreation as components of urban space, and to determine their link to civic identity. The framework that was used to explore the issue was geography of leisure, and the ensuing case study was developed by analyzing the value of cultural heritage and recreational spaces among individuals at the local level. In its conclusion, the paper reflects on the relative value of such places, the role that culture and history play in the perceptions of individuals, and the role of recreation in an urban context, and places the study in a larger interpretative framework.

Conceptual framework: the geography of leisure

For centuries, curiosity has driven individuals to travel and to explore new territories, and although travel and its associated activities have undergone a remarkable transformation, tourism has only been discussed since the nineteenth century (Diaz-Andreu, 2014). While numerous studies in the areas of geography and the earth sciences have explored the various negative impacts of tourism and leisure activities on the lived space (Barretto, 2000, 2007), the object of analysis of the geography of leisure is more comprehensive and complex. The study presented here was contextualized by recent contributions to the geography of leisure, under the paradigm of humanistic geography.

The geography of leisure has seen a shift to new themes and to new forms of treatment in recent years. Leisure, as an object of the study of geography, is regarded as a form of free time and encompasses both tourism and recreation; whereas tourists are those who travel from their normal places of residence to other areas for various reasons, recreationists are residents who utilize leisure spaces within their own city or in nearby locations. In the Anglo-Saxon realm, Hall and Page (2002) noted that there has been a change in the geography of leisure in recent years: first, there has been the qualitative and quantitative growth of scientific production by geographers studying the issue. Second, there has been an attempt to generate conceptual theoretical contributions to the geographical area of study. Third, tourism and recreation geographers have promoted their research and actions related to tourism in both the academic and professional (non-academic) fields (see also Pinassi and Ercolani, 2015).

The "cultural turn" that has occurred in the social sciences recently has also reached the geography of leisure and tourism (Gibson, 2008; Hall, 2013) and has led to research studies with different objectives and to an approach and methodology anchored in the micro-space, away from the purely traditionalist view of geography. Thus reappeared the cultural geography of tourism, as it was described by Hiernaux (2008). The development of this geography:

> […] suggests exploring new directions in the analysis, supported not only in a greater emphasis on the cultural dimension […] but also in the individual and tourism practices in space, in a geography more closely linked to the immediate, everyday or the trivial (lay geography for Anglo-Saxons) and the corporeality of tourism practices (Hiernaux, 2008, p. 178).

Based on this we can lay the groundwork for new contributions to the geography of leisure and link them to the study of individuals and their experiences in their free time. The analysis of frequented spaces, the types of recreational and tourism activities, and individuals' motivation emphasizes the inner being and the subjects' feelings. They have

become relevant in the study of "lived space" or "third space" (Soja, 1996, 1997, 2008; Almirón, 2004). As Kreisel (2004) states:

> Whether "real" or "virtual," the main object of geographic research in leisure and tourism […] remains the "space" and its relationship with humans and their behavior. Over the past 70 years, these relations have been reconceptualized and appreciated. Where before there were only very literal interpretations of spaces based on tangible manifestations, geographers now handle phenomena of leisure and tourism in more abstract spaces. Spaces of action, perception and even virtual spaces (p. 180).

This study examined the place of cultural heritage and recreation sites in the "lived space" of older adults of the city of Bahia Blanca, Argentina. It ventured into the physical exploration of space and its subjective nature (perceived, lived) specific to each individual. This was associated with the notion of place, which has great weight within geographical science, and is understood as a geographical space loaded with meaning and social value. Place is "[…] a key way to understand space from the experience of the subject and the entire burden of meaning that experience brings" (Lindon *et al.*, 2006, p. 12). In this sense we can highlight the concept of *habitus materialis* established by Meskell (2005), who referred to place as the physical and experiental context in which social man operates.

This study is focused more on the analysis of the intangible or the symbolic value that sites contain than on their physical characteristics. As Barretto (2007) states, different "identification processes" (p. 86) come into play, which involve social valorization of local cultural heritage. Nostalgia, as an emotional and rational action, provides subjects with reference to the past of their community and their own living space (Lowenthal, 1985, 1998), and cultural components are links between the past, present and future of a society. These are not to be understood only as objects or events with a passive character that travel back in time as mere messengers of culture (Ballart and Tresserras, 2007); on the contrary, these elements constitute a dynamic social set in a fluctuating contemporary context (Silberman, 2006, 2007). From an archeological perspective, Little (2002) states that they bring public benefits, since they enable a society to know its past and thereby understand its present. Extending this idea to cultural heritage in general, it can be said that the rescue of cultural resources contributes to the process of defining and strengthening the collective identity of a community. Identity is a social construct, which changes over time, but that also contains unchangeable components.

Why did we decide to work with older adults? The answer lies in their experience and the wealth of their lived spaces, i.e., a personal biography enriched from social exchanges in a given space-time dimension, within a political, social and cultural context. Such subjective and rich spaces allow for more profound answers, full of appraisal and feeling, in which cultural heritage has acquired some relevance as an integral part of their life's history and, therefore, of their cultural identity. As Ponce (2007) said: "Seniors are needed drivers of knowledge, strengthening their difficulties and inserting them creatively will get to a time and a place where the past and the inherited legacy will be preserved for future generations" (p. 2).

In the Latin American context there are a few studies that analyze the cultural perceptions of older adults: Ponce (2007) analyzed the development of cultural heritage in the city of Parana (Entre Rios, Argentina) by looking at the perceptions of its elderly residents. Similarly, but on a more limited scale, Castro *et al.* (2012), recreated the intangible value of a building (the former Mercado Abasto de Avellaneda, Argentina) from life stories related to it. Meanwhile, Sanchez-Gonzalez (2008, 2014) deepened the relationship between wealth management and citizen participation in Mexico and developed proposals for tourism management of natural and cultural heritage in rural areas of Tamaulipas (Mexico) based on the knowledge of older adults). Outside the American context, pilot projects in Southeast Asia, specifically in Cambodia, also used the participation of older adults in spreading the value of rural villages in the territory (Nobuo, 2000; Sanchez-Gonzalez, 2014). All these studies agree on certain issues, issues that this study also addresses: the great

knowledge, both in historical and cultural terms, that resides among the elderly segment of the population, the existing interest in citizen participation, and the urgent need to develop a system of activities that makes the elderly feel part of contemporary society.

Methodology

Hernández Sampieri *et al.* (2006) highlight four approaches to research: exploratory, descriptive, correlational and explanatory, ranging from elementary (exploratory) to complex (explanatory). This study took the latter approach, explaining causality perceptions of certain components of urban space and inquiring about the residents' "lived" space. With regard to geographical segmentation, the field work looked at six of the nine districts in Bahia Blanca, based on their location and on the configuration of Bahía Blanca's urban space: Centro, Harding Green, Las Villas, Northwest, North and Villa Rosas (see Figure 1). The remaining three, Ingeniero White, General Daniel Cerri and Cabildo, are areas with a place and a cultural imprint that are different from Bahia Blanca. While these districts exhibit a close socio-spatial relationship with the city, the structure of the lived space in these locations is composed of experiences, social relations and spatiality different from the city proper and therefore they were not included in the study.

The age group that was analyzed was composed of adults 59 and older who lived in the city of Bahia Blanca. This age limit was based on information from sources such as the Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de Chile (2008). Blanco Solís (Dir.) (2009), the Organización Mundial de la Salud (OMS) (2010) and Tarqui Mamani (2013), all state that "older adults" start at the age of 59. The units of analysis were obtained by means of non-probability sampling or directed simple selection, to which a combination of two data collection qualitative instruments was applied:

(1) Semi-structured interviews (see "Interview Questions"): the interviews used a series of basic questions that functioned as thematic triggers. The objective of the questionnaire was to analyze the social value of the city's cultural historical legacy among elderly residents and to gage their perceptions about the city's leisure spaces, in order to determine the place that these elements of the city have in the lived space of elderly Bahians.
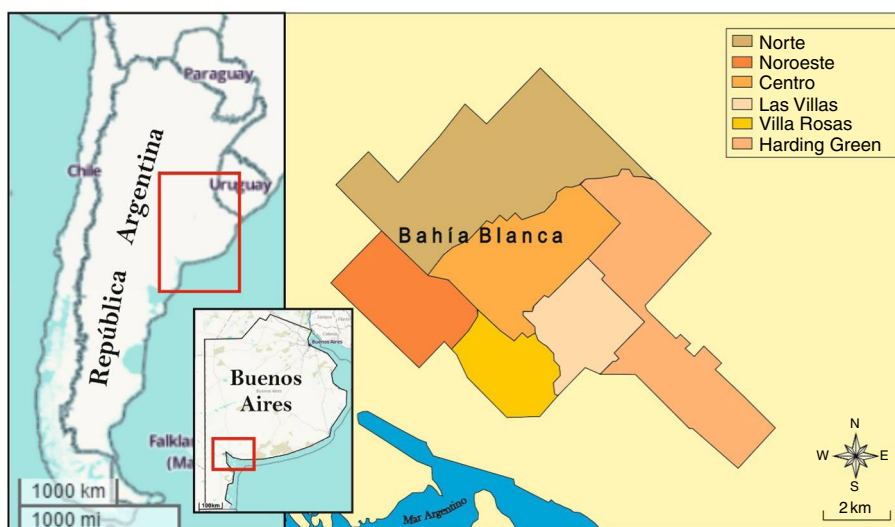

Sources: Developed from Municipality of Bahía Blanca and www.openstreetmap.org/ (2015).
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Figure 1.
Districts under study

(2) Upwelling technical meanings (Paris, 2011; Pinassi, 2013a, b), a tool derived from marketing that, according to Paris (2011) is "a rational approach that seeks meanings that emerge from the unconscious and thus determine the causes of the behavior of individuals" (p. 68). In this case, photographs were used that were representative of the most significant local cultural sites in the city. We recorded what subjects said about them and then compared them to actual character images to enrich the interpretations and the opinions of the interviewees.

Interview of older adults in Bahia Blanca is shown in following list.

Objective: to analyze the valuation of cultural heritage and leisure sites and their relationship with the lived space of older inhabitants in the city of Bahía Blanca.

Questionnaire:

(1) How would you define Bahia Blanca?

(2) How would you define your neighborhood?

(3) If you had to identify certain representative places in the city from a cultural and historical point of view, what would those be?

(4) If you had to cook typical Bahian food for a relative from another country, what would that be? Why?

(5) If you had to take the family member from another country to a traditional party in town, what would that be? Why?

(6) If you had to take the family member for a walk one afternoon, where would you take him/her?

(7) What do you do in your free time?

(8) What places do you visit? Who do you go with?

(9) What do you think about green spaces? Does it match any?

Source: Own calculations (2014).

The field work took place in senior centers in each of the six municipal districts (see Table I), with varying numbers of interviewees, depending on the number of people present in each of the establishments at the time of the visit.
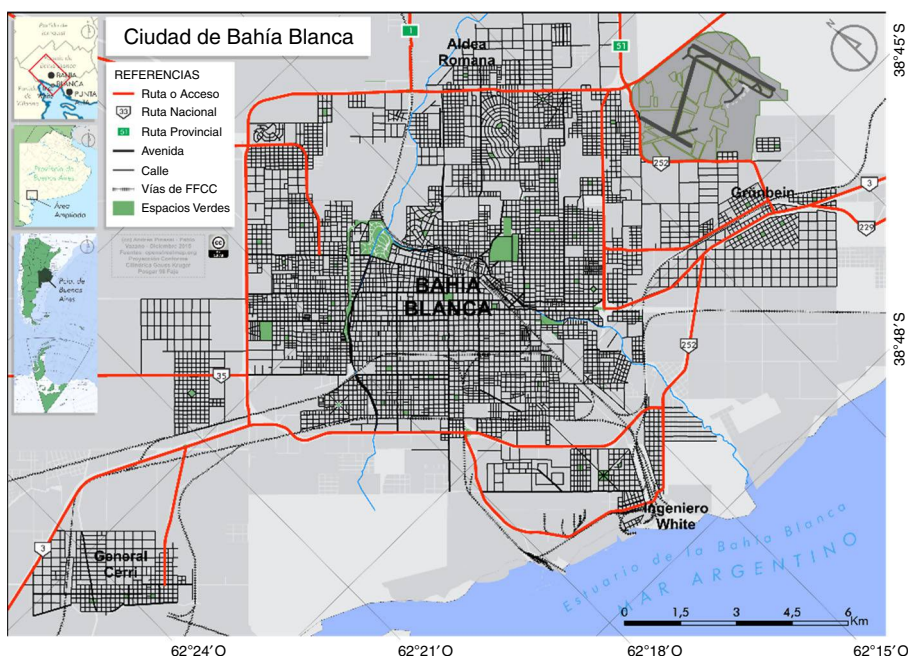
Case study

The city of Bahia Blanca, located in the southwest corner of the province of Buenos Aires (see Figure 2), is characterized as a regional center in the supply of goods and services. It houses a large number of industries associated with petrochemicals and its port, located 5 km from the city center in the Ingeniero White district, functions as a hub for nationwide business transactions. According to the latest official census, Bahia Blanca

Municipal district	Seniors centers	Address
Centro	Centro de Jubilados y Pensionados Club de la Vida	Alvarado 467
Harding Green	Centro de Jubilados y Pensionados de Grünbein	Quinto Astolfi 1255
Las Villas	Centro de Jubilados de Villa Mitre	14 de Julio 443
Noroeste	Centro de Jubilados y Pensionados Ferro-Alma	Juan Molina 1039
Norte	Centro Jubilados y Pensionados Pedro Fernández	Fabián González 362
Villa Rosas	Centro de Jubilados y Pensionados Villa Rosas	Nueva Provincia 2329

Source: Own calculations based on Guía comercial, industrial y profesional (Guía Cores) (2014)

Table I.
Senior centers

Figure 2.
The location of
Bahía Blanca

Sources: Own calculations based on www.openstreetmap.org/ (2015). © OpenStreetMap
contributors

has a total population of 301,531 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos
(INDEC), 2010), representing an increase of 5.55 percent over 2001. This represents
0.75 percent of the population of the country and almost 2 percent of the population
at the provincial level (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC), 2010). The city
was founded in 1828.

In total, 32 interviews were conducted. The highest number of sample units was
concentrated in the Centro District, followed by the Norte District, Las Villas, Villa Rosas
and Villa Harding Green and finally the Noroeste district (see Figure 3).

Among the respondents, 53 percent were women and 47 percent were men. The most
representative segment based on age consisted of respondents who were between 70 and
80 years old.
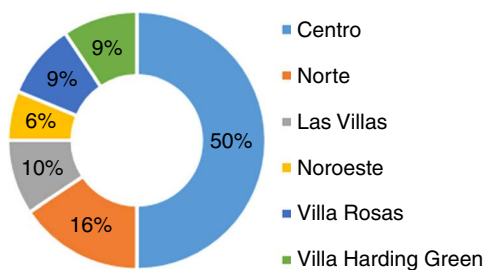
Source: Own calculations (2015)

Figure 3.
Distribution of
residents interviewed
by municipal district

Results

Defining the city and the neighborhood

The first questions in the interview asked the respondents to focus on the definition of Bahia Blanca and on the neighborhood in which they resided. These questions were intended to illicit answers related to the culture and history of the place and to determine the weight of historicity in the configuration of each of the subjective spaces (see Figure 4).

A majority of the responses exhibited a positive bias toward the city, with the variable "beautiful/nice/the best" standing out. Roots and sense of place came up in most of the answers and many respondents shared stories from the time when they were children or when they first came to Bahia Blanca. Mabel 78 years old, from North Delegation, said: "When I got off the train, 52 years ago, I said I'll live here […]." On the other hand, Domingo, from Villa Rosas, 68 years old, noted: "Bahia is not pretty for us, but it is for those coming from the outside […]. I have walked through several provinces and all of them have nice things, but we also have some of our own." In these responses, pride, as a component of the sense of place, became apparent. The emotion and nostalgia that arose among the interviewees helped them to tell the story that united them with the city, and allowed them to make further comments on different issues associated with the urban space, beyond those related to the mere definition of agglomeration. Other responses included: "Bahia is a city that has trust among locals and students. It is a city that can be trusted, but we have to be careful about certain aspects, such as security, which is important" (Cristina, 66 years old, from Villa Mitre). In contrast, there were expressions that were somewhat ironic and that were negative, and that compared the city to the countryside, in the case of Nelson, 77 years old, from Villa Libre South, who said: "Bahía Blanca is a paved farm."

As was the case at the city level, positive connotations prevailed at the district level as well (see Figure 5). The districts of Villa Mitre and Villa Rosas deserve special mention, since respondents from these districts exhibited a strong sense of belonging because of the process of socio-spatial configuration. In the case of Villa Mitre, residents described it as a village in itself and not as a neighborhood within Bahia Blanca. Nelly, 80 years old, said: "Villa Mitre is a city within a city"; and Hector, 82 years old, stated: "I live in the city of Villa Mitre." These statements were expressed with pride and evidence of the life experiences associated with the place. Villa Mitre is one of the districts with its own identity, which leads to this perception that it is an autonomous urban entity; it was seen as a town in itself rather than as a sector of a greater entity.

Knowledge about cultural heritage

The respondents mentioned a number of qualities regarding the historical and cultural places in the city. They not only had knowledge about the buildings but also about their
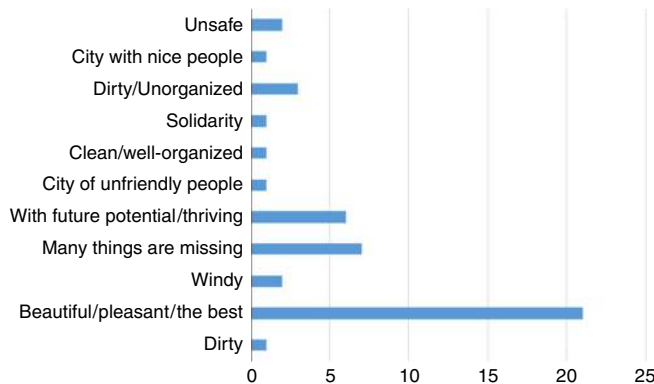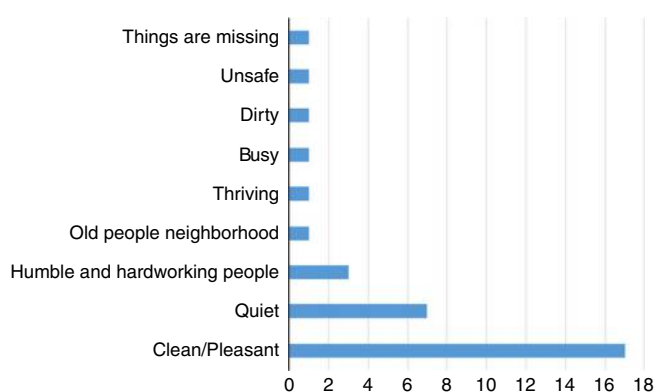

Figure 4.
Definitions of Bahía Blanca by older adults

Source: Own calculations (2015)

Source: Own calculations (2015)

historical uses and functions. They knew about the different processes of urban conversion, the demolition of some historical buildings that had been carried out in recent years, and about the high rise buildings, parking garages and shops that had been constructed. In this context, one of the respondents stated "I like to look up and see the decorations on the buildings, but nowadays everything is destroyed […] and they made those little shops" (Poleana, 67 years old, North Delegation). Among the most prominent heritage sites, buildings with a monumental character and high scenic value, the Municipal Theater prevailed, followed by the Municipal Palace, the National Bank and the former Banco Hipotecario. In the case of the latter a repeated comment was the lack of functionality of the building. The Cathedral, the Bernardino Rivadavia Library and the Universidad Nacional del Sur completed the list. Remarkably, green spaces were not often mentioned; only Rivadavia, Villa Mitre and three parks, Mayo, Independence and the City park were mentioned, and even though they have a perceived historic value, only two of the city's railway stations were mentioned, Rosario Station and South Station (see Figure 6).

Gastronomy and heritage
Another set of questions focused on gastronomy as part of the intangible cultural heritage in Bahia Blanca. Respondents were asked what a typical meal that represented Bahía Blanca to a relative from another country would look like, in order to determine their knowledge about regional products. As part of the process of territorial configuration, local culture is home to components that define a common regional identity. This was the case of the roast (asado) in the gaucho tradition, an important part of the cultural heritage of the region and "the typical dish par excellence of the Pampas" (Nieva, 2006, p. 85). In this study, 51 percent of the respondents indicated they cooked this type of food (see Figure 7), a culture that was also represented in the local pies (empanadas) that were mentioned.

Since gastronomy is the result of immigration processes, it acquires a certain relevance and represents the social and cultural heritage of the inhabitants. Among the various dishes mentioned were pasta, pizza, strudel and potato cake. Respondents also mentioned food derived from the colonial era, such as locro (corn) and stew, but that accounted for only 12 percent of the answers. Interestingly, gastronomy linked to the sea only represented 6 percent of the responses, which is surprising, given the proximity of the city to the sea and its historical and cultural links with the coast. In this context, Cristina, 66, resident of the Villa Mitre neighborhood said: "Bahiense typical food, the meals that we do, are a result of what our parents did […], or we go to pasta, because we are of Italian descent, or we go to a paella, because we come from Spain, or we are Creoles and we make a roast."
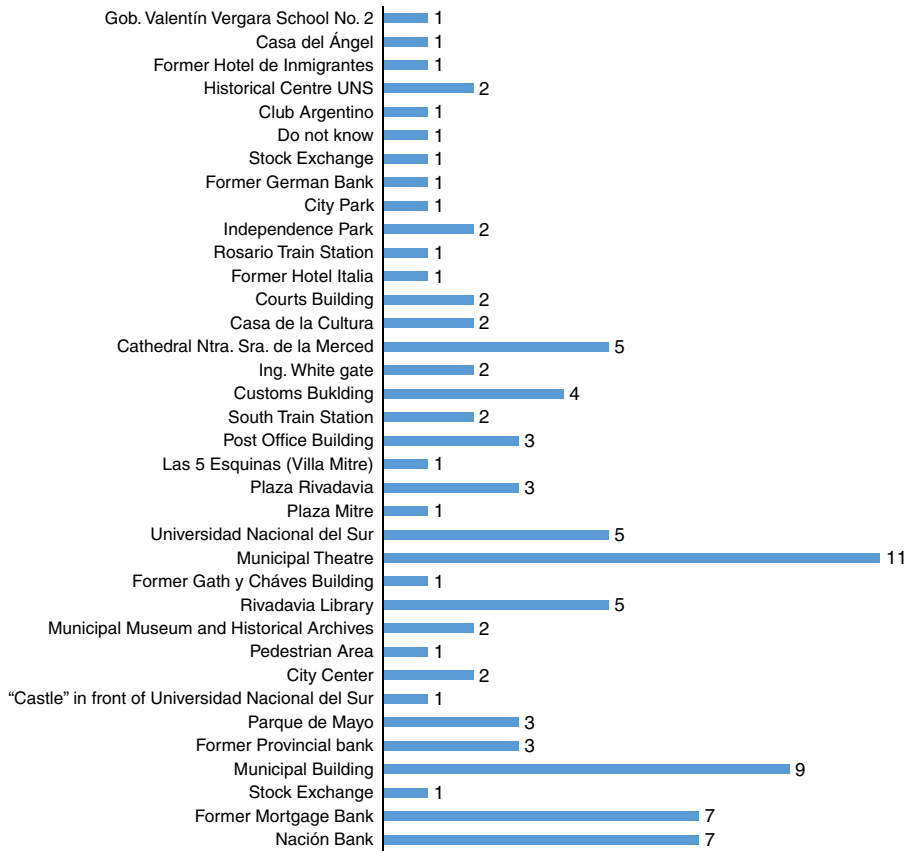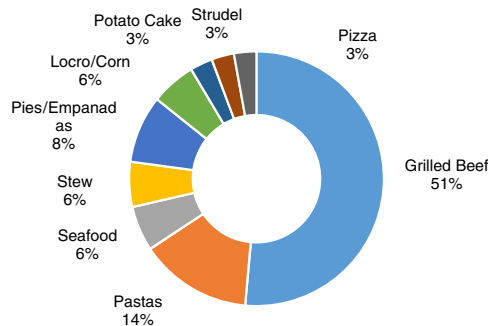
Figure 6.
Representative places in the city as identified by older adults

Source: Own calculations (2015)

Figure 7.
Typical food older adults would cook for family from another country

Source: Own calculations (2015)

This connotation was expressed by various interviewees, where the "atypical" is typical, given the process of construction and configuration of the local geographical area, from a contribution of native cultures to those of the gaucho and the migrants and immigrants from other parts of the country and the world (see Figure 7).

Festivals

Traditional festivals are also associated with intangible cultural heritage. The respondents were asked which festival would they go to if they had to take family from out of town to a traditional festival in Bahia Blanca. A majority of the respondents said that it had to be traditional festivities such as the parades that take place on the anniversary of the city (see Figure 8). At the same time, and equally important, was the "Shrimp and Prawn Festival" that is linked to the port. However, a little more than 10 percent stated that there were no more local historical and cultural events beyond the ones that were previously featured. The people interviewed said that the "Shrimp and Prawn Festival" belonged to the Ingeniero White District and that it did not exist in the city. Joseph, 83 years old, interviewed at the retirement center of Central Delegation said: "Here we have parties but nothing is done as in other villages where there are two hundred people and they feast on goat, fried cake, locro […]." Joseph stated that the city lacked a festival that was linked to an identity product that could be positioned in the minds of residents and visitors and become a benchmark of local cultural heritage. Although there are some attempts to make this happen, such as making "cubanitos" (stuffed pastry) into a local gastronomic product, those attempts have failed to materialize so far.

Places for them and places for us

When asked about the places where they would take family from out of town for a walk (see Figure 9), Ingeniero White stood out, with its port and associated cuisine. Rule, 82 years old, from Villa Mitre, noted: "I would like to walk to the port, because it is the most traditional […], this is where Bahia Blanca has more identity." Several respondents also highlighted the possibility to eat seafood at the port. The Parque de Mayo was also mentioned, and a large proportion of the responses were related to green spaces in the city, such as the Independence Park, the City Park and Plaza Rivadavia. The mall (shopping) also appeared in the answers. Remarkably, to some elderly residents this was the only option to visit, it was the "only nice place to go for a walk." Finally, places of great historical value, such as the downtown area and Alem Avenue, were among the least mentioned recreational sites. The option of taking visitors to a place to get know the history of the city and the region clearly was not very popular, despite the fact that the city and the nearby town of Ingeniero White have the potential for such leisure and recreational activities.
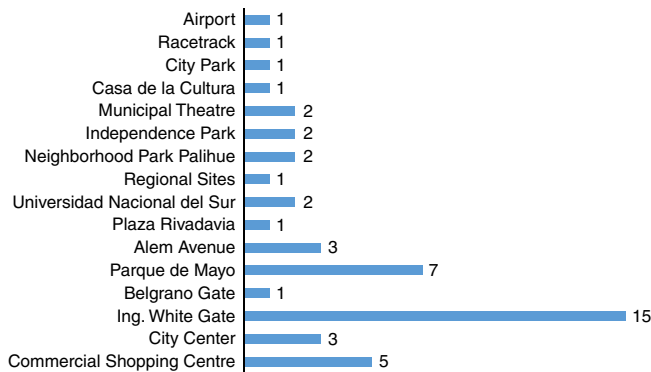
With regard to places frequented by the older adults in their own free time (see Figure 10), the Parque de Mayo was most important. The frequency of visits during the week was not high and most visits happened during the weekend, especially on Sundays.
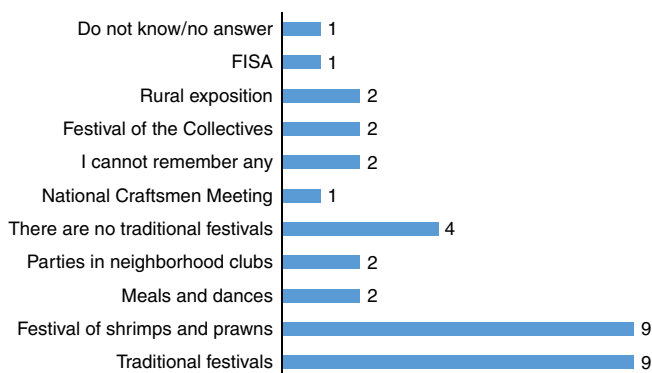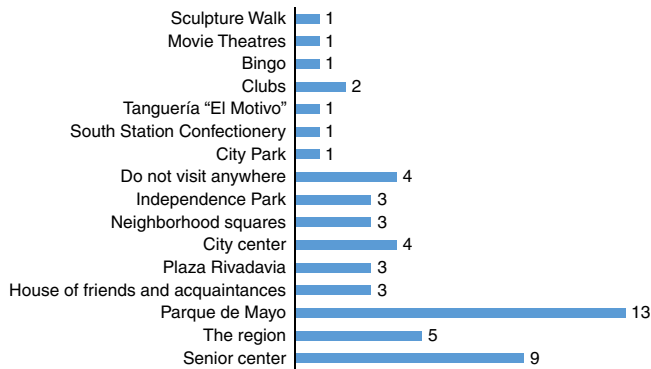

Source: Own calculations (2015)

Figure 8.
Traditional parties older adults would bring family from another country
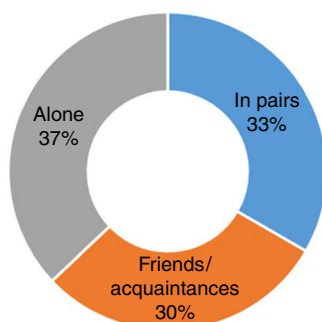
Source: Own calculations (2015)

Source: Own calculations (2015)

Repondents also reflected on the retirement centers as spaces for recreation and leisure. It was noteworthy that there was a range of different activities: gymnastics, craft workshops, games, or simply meet and talk. Some of the retirement centers also functioned as community centers where different health professionals visited every week. The rest of the places frequented were once again the green spaces in the city, such as the Independence Park, Plaza Rivadavia, the City Park or the Sculpture Walk. Non-public recreational áreas such as pubs, cinemas and bingo parlors made up the remaining answers.

Respondents said that they visited such sites alone (37 percent), with friends (33 percent) or with family/friends (30 percent) (see Figure 11). Among free-time activities, those inside the household sphere, such as watching TV, listening to music, doing crossword puzzles, spending time on the computer and raising pets prevailed (23 percent) (see Figure 12).

Green spaces in the city
Respondents were then asked specifically what they thought about the green spaces in the city. The Parque de Mayo ranked first by a wide margin (nearly half of the responses). At the other extreme, several respondents stressed that they did not frequent any (23 percent), in direct correlation with the characteristics of the activities in the home environment that prevailed over those that require displacement in the urban space.

Source: Own calculations (2015)

Figure 11.
With whom do older
adults attend?
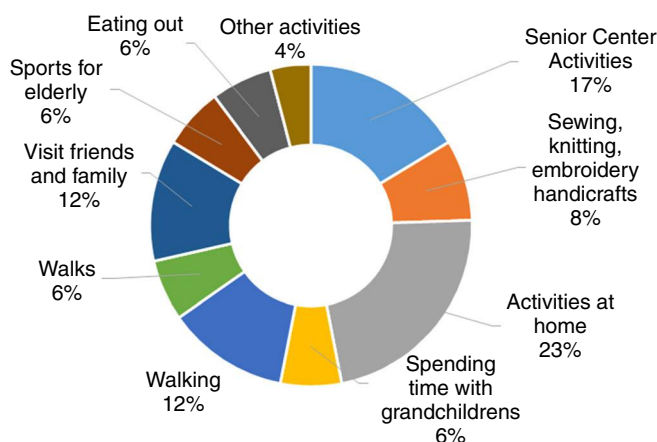
Source: Own calculations (2015)

Figure 12.
Activities older
adults perform
during leisure time

Mentioned also were the Independence Park, followed by the Plaza Rivadavia, the City Park, the Sculpture Walk and Plaza de Villa Mitre (see Figure 13).

In total, 42 percent of the respondents said they were in good condition, although they had certain shortcomings: "Some are good but lack maintenance [...], especially in the districts, there are places that I no longer recognize or know what they are" (Maria Ines, 76 years old, from Grünbein). In this context, a majority stated that both the Parque de Mayo and the Independence Park needed to be improved, yet 29 percent said they were in good condition (see Figure 14).

Identifying historical places
Finally, respondents were presented with five photos of different historical areas in the city of Bahia Blanca during the first decades of the twentieth century (see Figure 15). After that, they were shown the current situation from the same photographic angle and asked whether they recognized the sites. The interviewer recorded their opinions or expressions as either emotional or rational. In some retirement centers that methodology was performed individually while in others it was done by the respondents together. The latter was more beneficial, since respondents began to talk about and remember the history
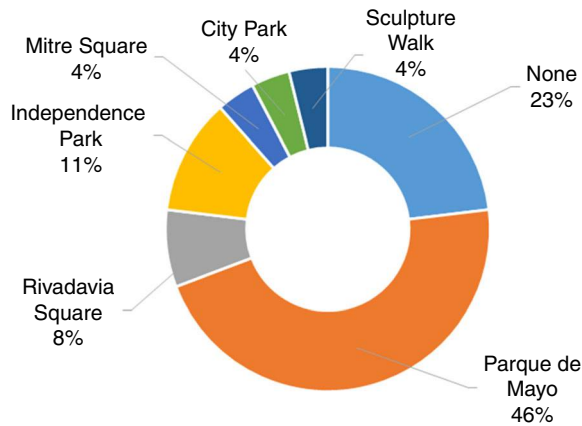
Source: Own calculations (2015)
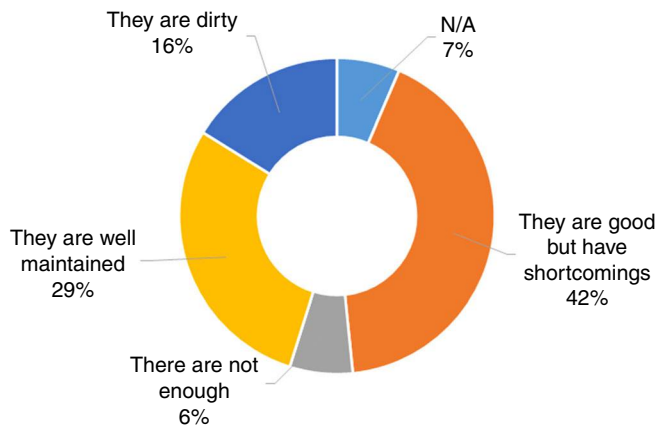
Source: Own calculations (2015)

associated with certain places. Norma, 82 years old, from Villa Mitre, said about one of the pictures:

> In this corner (referring to the historic building that was in O'Higgins and Chiclana) I worked, and witnessed the marriage of a friend from work, then she married and moved from Bahia, I never saw her again […]; a few years ago, she called me on the phone; she had returned to the city and wanted to find me […] and she said: "Do not tell me that we are everywhere, we are in the corner where we worked" […].

This life story reflects the intangible value that a heritage site can have and demonstrates the link between object and subject, provided by the subjective valuation of an individual and representing a part of his/her living space.

In most cases, however, the respondents did not recognize the buildings that were shown to them, even when they were presented with contemporary images. The only building that could be identified correctly was the former South American Hotel, located on Colon Avenue and Brown Street. The stories about it related to social gatherings and meetings held there,

Notes: (1) Old London Hotel. (2) Customs Office. (3) Corner of Chiclana and
O'Higgins. (4) Old Sud Americano Hotel. (5) National Bank. Historical
photographs: Dozo and Ginóbili (1999). Contemporary photographs: Own
Record (2015)
Source: Own calculations (2015)

Figure 15.
Analysis of
historical images

and emphasized the importance it had in the social context of the city. These results confirm
research conducted several years ago in the field of urban and property management in
Bahia Blanca (Pinassi, 2012). Despite the difficulty of identifying the buildings in the
pictures, very helpful comments for this analysis were made by the respondents.

For example, Martha, 69-year-old, from Grunbein said: "What happens […] is that we have to look up and not down, always look where we walk or a little to the side, but never up and you have to look around," an assessment that shows the potential interest that exists among this age segment to get to know more about the cultural historical areas of the city.

Conclusion

Heritage and recreational sites are an important part of the living space of individuals; they are part of the cultural identity of a society and they function as spaces for community exchange and personal development. This paper about Bahia Blanca derives its relevance from venturing into an analysis of the opinions about such sites among an age segment, the elderly, that has been poorly addressed in other studies, in particular in the Latin American context. The study reported here generated firsthand information that may serve public servants in making decisions in the context of locally developed cultural policies and presents a methodological model and data collection and analysis techniques that may be of interest for development elsewhere.

In its findngs, this study largely agrees with much of the literature referenced in the text (Lowenthal, 1985; Little, 2002; Barretto, 2000; Ballart and Tresserras, 2007; Diaz-Andreu, 2014) in that the preservation and recovery of historical spaces needs to occur through social use and thereby contribute to the rescue and promotion of the local cultural identity.

This field study found that appreciation of heritage sites among the older population of the city of Bahia Blanca is scarce and biased; they played only a small part in the lived spaces of these older residents. In many ways, these spaces are lost to recreation, a statement that is based on the following observations that emerged from the field work (see Table II).

Although the respondents exhibited a sense of place with respect to the city and its neighborhoods, it was on the basis of its contemporary components rather than on components of a historical nature, the main cultural heritage sites were recognized less that sites such as the university, the theater, and the church, among others, even by older adults. This call for the development of strategies and actions by urban management that are necessary in order to define heritage and recreational spaces, to achieve a better understanding and use of the city and its resources and to accomplish a strengthening of the cultural identity of the city and its inhabitants in the long run (Figure 16).

| What is the place of cultural heritage and recreation in the lived space of older adults?	The historical-cultural variable is not reflected in the definitions of the city and neighborhoods
	Among the places (sites, buildings) the most representative were those of monumental character in the downtown area of Bahia Blanca and to the detriment of the more modest architecture
	Among gastronomy, a gaucho identity as typical of the Pampas prevailed over a gastronomy that is linked to the port and its resources
	Reduced appreciation of festivities associated with local culture
	There was only superficial knowledge of heritage; the existing knowledge lacked depth and detail. Respondents were encouraged to identify locations, but in most cases failed to do so
	While regard to recreational spaces, only an appreciation of the green space as a site ot walk or relax was found, rather than an appreciation of its historical and cultural components
	With the greater availability of free time in the age bracket analyzed as compared to other population groups, their usage of leisure spaces was not higher than other groups. A majority of the respondents said that the home was an environment conducive to recreation

Table II.
Summary of conclusions

Source: Own calculations (2015)
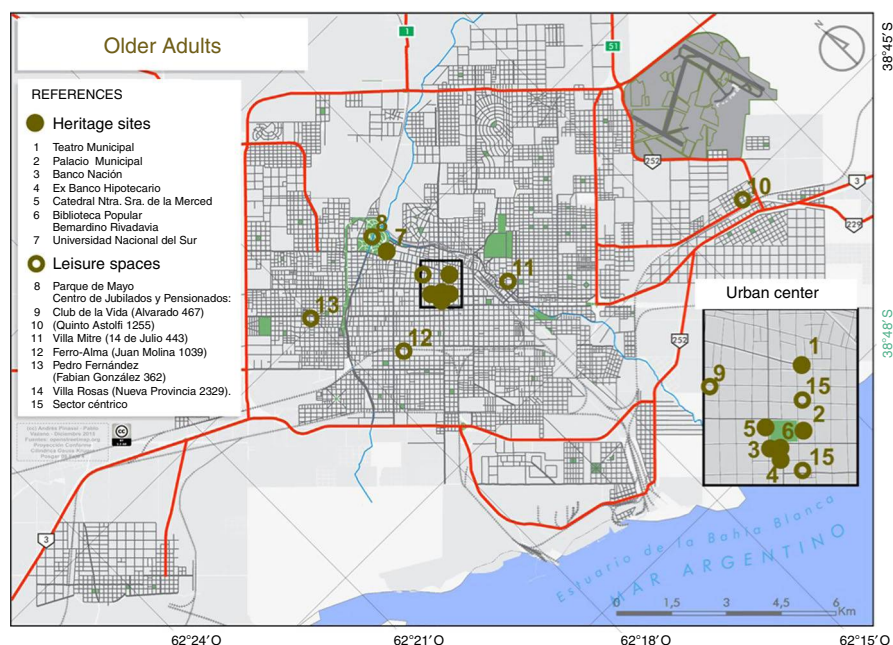
Sources: Own calculations, based on www.openstreetmap.org/ (2015). © OpenStreetMap
contributors

The elderly have a relevant personal history to share, yet they are not valued as such in the current Latin American society, and in some cases are completely excluded. This paper contributes to the spread of the life stories, the opinions and the feelings of this population group, creating a space of social participation and openness to sharing experiences related to recreation and cultural identity. As Soja (2008) states:

> In all these "life stories" it´s impossible to get perfect or complete knowledge. There are too many things unknown and perhaps unknowable, that lie beneath the surface as possible to tell a complete story. The best we can do is to selectively investigate the most subtle way possible, the infinite complexity of life through its spatial, social and intrinsic historical dimensions, and its spatiality, historicity sociability and interrelatedness (pp. 40-41).

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