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## Wellbeing Tourism in Finland - a Wide Perspective

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The aim of this paper is to discuss wellbeing tourism in Finland with reference to destination development, and to contribute to the ongoing discussion of how to conceptualize wellbeing tourism. Wellbeing tourism has been identified by the Finnish Tourism Board as a potential resource area for future tourism development in Finland, a strategic decision to be operationalized in different parts of the country. Findings from three laboratory areas in Finland are presented and analyzed in this article. In light of face-to-face interviews with key tourism actors in the regions of Jyväskylä, Kainuu and Vuokatti, and Vaasa, we conclude that the destinations' host resources, such as nature, culture, knowledge and technology are of importance for wellbeing tourism, and that destination-specific service packages are in the making. Wellbeing tourism policies and development plans, two central dimensions in the wellbeing tourism destination management model presented are still to be developed. Wellbeing tourism may assume different forms and be practiced differently in different parts of Finland. It is therefore suggested that wellbeing tourism in Finland is discussed in a wide, non-exclusive way at this early phase of development.

*Keywords: wellbeing tourism, health tourism, wellness tourism, destination development*

The issue of health and wellness in tourism is not new. For centuries people have traveled to cure illness and maintain health in the form of health tourism, and searched for self-indulgence in spas as a form of wellness tourism. However, there is in many developed countries an extended focus on these tourism forms as a consequence of our modern society. Factors in support of the growth of health, wellness, and wellbeing tourism are many. The two overriding factors provided by researchers

are “stress” and the “desire to live healthier” (Alpshealthcomp, 2008).

Additionally, one can recognize different governmental policies to promote health and wellbeing, increase in media attention, aging population, and different types of tourism industry developments, such as more information, tourism industry coalitions, and improved transport systems, to mention only a few driving forces (Stevens & Associates, 2008). Consequently, nations, regions, and destinations are exploring the possibilities to brand themselves as the number one health, wellness or wellbeing tourism destination.

Finnish tourism strategies identify wellbeing tourism as a unique tourism form, which combines traditional spa-related treatments and physical activities, and as one of four tourism categories which have been given top priority (KTM, 2006; FTB, 2008b). Such a policy commitment has far-reaching consequences on both regional and local level.

Destination development models to be used when planning for and developing wellbeing tourism are conspicuous by their absence in academic writing. There exist a large number of general tourism destination development models, but only few have been adapted to the field of wellness tourism (Ritchie & Crouch, 2005; Sheldon & PARK, 2009), and even fewer so to the wellbeing tourism sector. Furthermore, a literature review of the health, wellness, and wellbeing tourism concepts demonstrates a most diverse set of definitions, a situation not helpful to those who are trying to understand, conceptualize, substantiate, and market this kind of tourism.

Most researchers distinguish between health tourism, form for those traveling to cure illness, and wellness tourism, and leave wellbeing tourism unexplored. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to discuss wellbeing tourism in Finland with reference to destination development, and to contribute to the ongoing discussion of how to conceptualize wellbeing tourism.

The article continues by discussing the wellbeing concept in the next section. First, the definition presented by the Finnish Tourism Board is used as a platform for further elaborations. Second, a wellbeing tourism destination development model based on models proposed by Ritchie and Crouch (2000), and Sheldon and Park (2009), is presented. Section Three discusses wellbeing tourism in Finland from the perspective of the applied development model.

The findings presented in this article are based on personal interviews with key tourism actors in three laboratory areas of Finland: Jyväskylä region, Vuokatti and Kainuu region, and Vaasa region. The research method used is presented in Section Four, and the findings in Section Five. Particular emphasis is placed on discussing wellbeing tourism destination development in Finland. We conclude the discussion by opening up windows to future research areas in the final section.

## Wellbeing tourism defined and a model for development

This section discusses the wellbeing tourism concept to be distinguished from wellness and health tourism, and outlines a model for wellbeing tourism developed to be used as a management tool.

### *Wellbeing tourism defined*

This section attempts to define and interlink health, wellness and wellbeing tourism, three different tourism concepts that have recently attracted the attention of tourism researchers. The concepts have so far not been treated equally in the academic literature. Health and wellness tourism have received most attention, leaving wellbeing tourism largely unexplored. The framework presented in Figure 1 explains how health tourism is directed at those traveling to cure illness, in contrast to those seeking self-indulgence in terms of spa tourism. Wellness and wellbeing tourism are mainly positioned on the positive side of the neutral point on the illness-wellness scale of Travis and Ryan (1988).

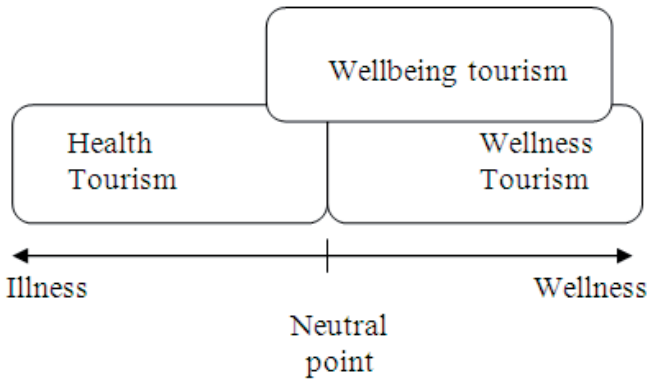


Figure 1. Health, wellness and wellbeing tourism – a framework

Distinguishing wellness tourism from wellbeing tourism has proved difficult, and there are at least two reasons why one might adopt the approach of Huijbens (2011) and Konu, Tuohino and Komppula (2010) and consider wellness and wellbeing tourism synonymous. First, there are linguistic and translation problems (Smith & Puczko, 2009), e.g the Finnish word “hyvinvointi” refers to both wellness and wellbeing. Second, as demonstrated, the same facilities are used by both tourism forms. However, one can argue that it is important from a destination development and marketing perspective that different tourism forms can be separated by definitions (Björk, 1997).

Wellbeing tourism has been defined by the Finnish Tourism Board (FTB, 2005) as *“matkailu joka tuottaa matkailijoille hyvää oloa vielä matkan päätyttyäkin. Hyvinvointimatkailu ei ole sairautta parantavaa eikä kuntoa korjaavaa vaan kulloistakin matkailijan terveydentilaa ylläpitävää ja edistävää sekä vireyttä elämään antavaa. Hyvinvointimatkailu tuottaa asiakkaalle yksilöllistä ja kokonaisvaltaista hyvää oloa, joka voi olla sekä fyysistä että psyykkistä vireyttä antavaa”* [“tourism providing the traveller with wellbeing even after the journey is over. Wellbeing is not for curing sickness or improving fitness but rather maintains and promotes every traveller’s condition and brings fitness to life. Wellbeing provides the client with individual and holistic wellbeing, which may be conducive to both physical and mental wellbeing”

(translation done by authors)], identifying wellbeing tourism as tourism with long term positive effects on body, mind and soul, i.e. wellbeing as a dimension of quality of life (QoL) (Fallowfield, 2009). Combining the essence of the definition presented with the characteristics of tourism we propose wellbeing tourism to be defined as trips taken by people who temporarily relinquish the places where they normally live and work, for reasons of self-indulgence, health retreats, and their personal wellbeing, and the sum of phenomena and relationships arising there from. (Björk, 2011)

#### *Model to manage wellbeing tourism destinations*

Ritchie and Crouch (2000) propose a conceptual model of destination competitiveness. The model is based on a concept of comparative and competitive advantage. The former concerns the endowment resources of the destination and the latter refers to resources deployment. (Cracolici & Nijkamp 2008) The model includes several components. These are the global (macro) environment, the competitive micro environment, core resources and attractions, supporting factors and resources, destination policy, planning and development, destination management, and qualifying and amplifying determinants.

Sheldon and Park (2009) developed the model of destination competitive and sustainability by Ritchie and Crouch to be more appropriate in the wellness tourism context (Figure 2). Sheldon and Park highlight that it is crucial to identify the supporting factors and resources for wellness tourism because it would not be possible to develop wellness products if the destination cannot provide basic infrastructure and guarantee access to the area. In the model by Ritchie and Crouch (2000) branding, awareness and image come under the heading qualifying and amplifying determinants. However, Sheldon and Park (2009) argue that these branding efforts should be situated at the stage at which the core resources of wellness tourism are identified. They explain this by stating that the wellness resources connected to the culture and cultural elements of the host community are a crucial part of the identity/brand of a destination.

Sheldon and Park's (2009) model differs from Ritchie and Crouch's (2000) as they make wellness destination policy and planning the third stage. This is because they believe that wellness tourism cannot be sustainable if it has no clear vision, goals, and positioning on the market. The planning stage is followed by destination development and management. At this stage it is guaranteed that the wellness products provided and offered are of high quality. To realize this, the stage includes elements such as training and education of personnel (human resources) and offering opportunities to join certification programs. (Sheldon & Park, 2009).

The concepts of wellness and wellbeing tourism are closely related, and consequently, as has been discussed, have occasionally been used as synonyms. The Finnish Tourism Board defines wellness tourism as a subcategory of wellbeing tourism (FTB, 2005), and Sheldon and Park (2009) put special emphasis on wellness tourism. We assume that their model for destination development is equally valid for analyzing wellbeing tourism destinations, in the sense that the same resources and structures are in use in both forms of tourism.

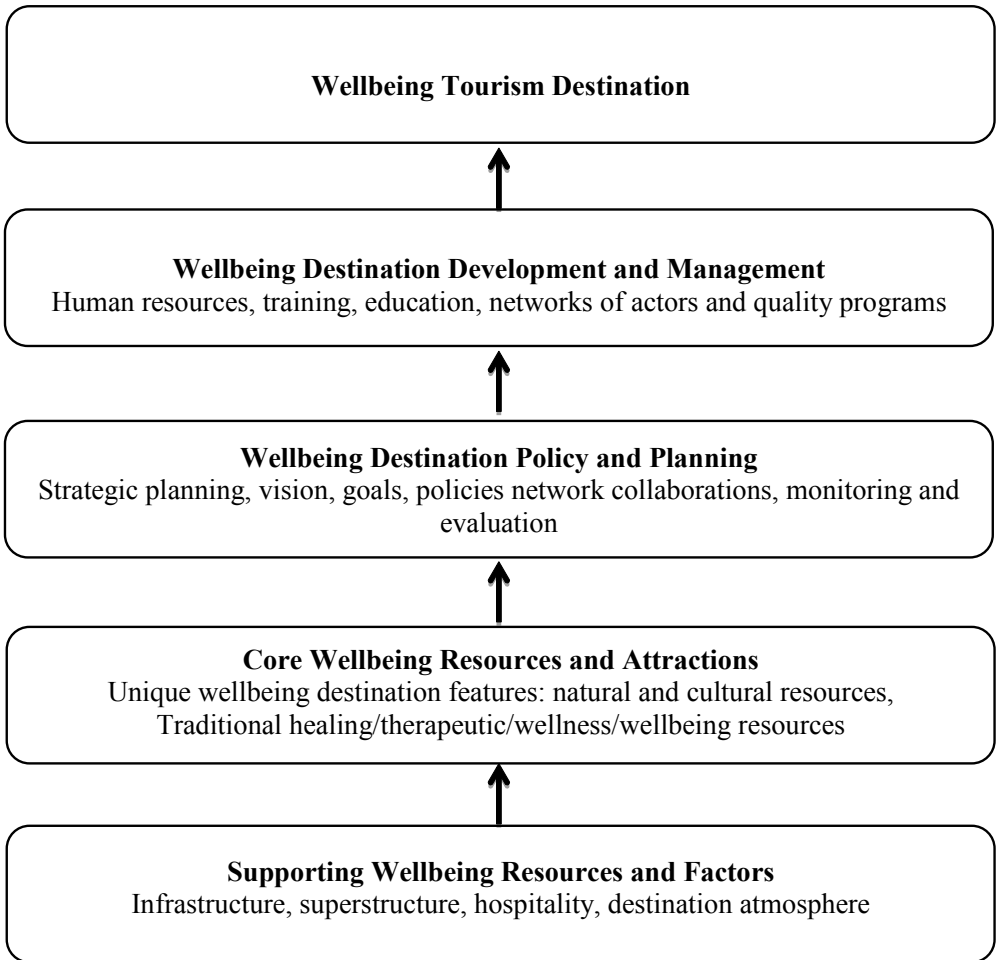


Figure 2. *Managing Wellbeing Tourism Destinations* (Source: Sheldon & Park, 2009, modified)

## Finland as a wellbeing tourism destination

Considering tourism in general, Finland has good basic infrastructure and accessibility is quite good (e.g. airports, roads, railroads, accommodations, restaurants). In addition, the admittedly good service quality and the Nordic service standards strengthen Finland's profile as a high quality destination. It is also stated that Nordic people generally look after their health and recognize the importance of exercise, which can be seen, for instance, in the many fitness activities people are engaged in (e.g. Nordic Walking). (Smith & Puzckó, 2009.)

### *Supporting wellbeing resources and factors*

Finland has many supporting factors and resources for wellbeing tourism. Finland markets itself by cultivating an image of peace and quietness in natural settings (FTB,

2008a) and this creates an image of a relaxing atmosphere for the destination. There is good know-how about different (traditional) healing practices, and the use of natural resources such as berries and using them for health. Technological solutions and innovations can also be included in the wellness and wellbeing tourism sector. One example of this is Polar Electro offering “training computers” for measuring heart rate during exercise. In addition, there are several Finnish cosmetic suppliers (e.g. Lumene, Cutrin and Frantsila) focusing on using natural resources in their products. These businesses use raw materials such as cloudberry, blackcurrant, cranberry, blueberry, lingonberry, birch, linen, heather and peat. These cosmetics suppliers cooperate with several tourism businesses. (Hjalager & Konu, 2011)

### *Core wellbeing resources and attractions*

Finnish wellbeing tourism focuses mainly on nature, peace and quietness, activities, and cultural offerings (Kangas & Tuohino 2008, FTB 2008a; Björk, 2011). The natural core resources are pure natural environment or unspoiled countryside including, for instance, forests, lakes, and other water areas, hills, and vast wilderness areas. Finland also has four distinct seasons that can be utilized in different tourism products. It seems that Finnish people usually pursue wellbeing through physical activities. This can be seen from the supply of Finnish wellbeing tourism companies as their offering of wellbeing is concentrated mainly on activities and sauna (Kangas & Tuohino 2008). Finnish wellbeing innovations are generally known internationally. Sauna and Nordic walking especially have strengthened their position in general knowledge as Finnish products (FTB 2008b). At the moment the problem is that these sauna and Nordic walking products and offerings in Finland are not easy for international tourists to find. As stated above (FTB, 2008b), there are some wellbeing tourism products and services but they are divided under several different headings, such as special interests, accommodation, what to do and activities (see also FTB 2008a).

The Finnish Tourist Board (2008b) has listed the characteristics of a basic wellbeing holiday offering including core wellness factors and attractions connected to natural, cultural, and traditional healing/therapeutic/wellness resources. The basic wellbeing holiday offering includes elements such as getting away from everyday routines, enjoying peace and nature, relaxing, and “recharging one’s batteries”; outdoor recreation, exploring nature, events related to Finnish culture, and retreats; traditional Finnish forms of sauna bathing; a pleasant, esthetically pleasing, and authentic environment; personal service; healthy, preferably locally produced food, with information available to the customer on the origin and nutritional content of the food; attention to the environment and sustainable development in the offering; consideration for the aging customer base and people with impaired mobility; and an esthetically pleasing, well looked-after environment.

In addition to the basic offering, there are two targeted customer and offering groups. These groups are health and fitness exercise, and pampering. Health and fitness activities also utilize Finnish sports equipment and technology. Overall, the characteristics of the health and fitness holiday are defined as follows (Finnish Tourist Board 2008b): activities (Nordic walking, hiking, walking, snowshoeing, skiing, swimming, winter swimming, golf, etc.) – the difference is that the main motive is

not participation in activities but taking care of one's health and fitness; trained and professional instructors, fitness and other tests, and personal training; massage and other restorative treatments; and use of Finnish technology related to the wellness theme and instruction in its use. The health effects of winter swimming can also be achieved by using cryotherapy, which is in use in several wellbeing and wellness facilities in Finland (Smith & Puzckó, 2009).

The pampering theme includes several different spa and beauty treatments. This offering is the closest to international understanding of wellness, but it must be conceded that there is no actual, or very few, wellness offering that fulfills international requirements in Finland. (Finnish Tourist Board 2008b). The Finnish Tourist Board (2008b) has also summarized the characteristics included in pampering. These are a high-quality environment (accommodation, pool, treatment departments, etc.); special attention to delicious (gourmet) food; emphasis on personal, high-quality service; additional programs, such as cultural offerings, shopping, etc.; and a "passive" holiday, in which the customer enjoys the service.

#### *Wellbeing destination policy and planning*

Wellbeing tourism is one product theme to be developed in the Finnish national tourism strategy published by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (KTM, 2006). This led in 2008 to the development of a 'Development strategy for Finnish wellbeing tourism in international markets, 2009-2013'. As the Finnish wellbeing tourism strategy is quite new its implementation is ongoing. There are plans to develop more comprehensive wellbeing tourism products and services for foreign markets.

The vision for Finnish wellbeing tourism defined by the Finnish Tourist Board (2008b) is: "*Finland is known as a country that can offer wellbeing, rest, and relaxation. Its wellbeing offering is clearly defined. The offering has been put together in a manner that is marketable and follows sustainable development. It comprises packages or modules that are easy to purchase and internationally known. Wellbeing tourism is a year-round activity that can extend the tourism season in Finland.*

*Wellbeing tourism has become part of the Finnish tourism brand, one that customers associate with clean air, water, and forests and with de-stressing, relaxing amid stillness, tranquility, and exercising in a naturally beautiful landscape and a high-quality aesthetic environment. There is clear specialization in the sector (menus for special diets, technology, etc.)."*

In Finland some studies have been conducted to support wellness tourism development. Research concentrates on the customer perspective in wellbeing tourism, more specifically on tourists' motivations and experiences (see e.g. Konu & Laukanen, 2009; 2010; Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). This research information can be utilized in development and planning processes.

#### *Wellbeing destination development and management*

In Finland there are so far no official associations in the wellbeing sector, nor governmental organizations supporting the co-operation between the wellness industry and the public sector. However, the government provides support for social holidays that often take place in wellness or wellbeing facilities. In addition, there are rehabilita-



tion programs for war veterans (Aho, 2007).

There are ongoing actions implementing the Finnish Wellbeing Strategy. One of the aims is to create standardized products for international wellness and potential wellbeing markets. In the process new kinds of cooperation and cooperation models between the wellness / wellbeing industry and public sector may take shape. In addition, new criteria and recommendations for wellbeing products have been published.

In Finland there is a fairly good training system for service personnel in the wellbeing sector. In addition, a new full-time polytechnic degree program in Experience and Wellness Management has started (Haaga-Helia 2010). In Turku there is an ongoing project on Innovations and Learning in Spa Management ([www.ilisproject.eu](http://www.ilisproject.eu)). One goal of the project is to create common vocational training and virtual education models (including language and culture skills) in cooperation with higher education, enterprise partners and other associates.

## Research method applied

Insight into the development of wellbeing tourism in Finland was also sought by means of an empirical study of three laboratory areas. Regions were chosen, as the aim was to find diverse regions for wellbeing tourism development. The arguments for choosing Jyväskylä were its geographical location in the middle of Finland surrounded by lakes, which offers an ideal environment for water-based wellbeing tourism development. Vuokatti in turn is an area with a wide range of year-around activities and Vaasa for its coastal location and the context of the archipelago.

Data for this study was gathered by thematic interviews. These interviews were conducted by the authors in three laboratory areas: Jyväskylä region (11 interviews), Vuokatti/Kainuu region (11 interviews), and Vaasa region (10 interviews). The interviews were conducted in fall 2009 and in spring and summer 2010. The interviewees were chosen in different ways: some were identified by the authors, some by following the suggestions of regional developers and some by representatives of the laboratory partners. The interviewees were tourism and wellbeing professionals, such as tourism entrepreneurs, experts and regional developers. The framework for the semi-structured questions was made jointly by the Nordic researchers participating in the Nordic Wellbeing Project (see Hjalager et al. 2011). The Nordic wellbeing team undertook study visits to the laboratory areas, and the interviews were closely connected to the specific environments and the local future potentials. Thus the interviews were semi-structured also in the sense that issues could be raised during the visit. Throughout the study, the local actors were extremely willing to share their views, and to add information during follow-up interviews and during workshops. The interviews took from 40 minutes to two hours. The interviews were taped and later transcribed. Interviews were analyzed using content analysis.

Content analysis is deemed an accepted method for textual investigations (Silverman, 2006) and a suitable analysis method for any material that is in written form, including transcribed interviews (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). There are two ways to implement content analysis: quantitative and qualitative. In quantitative content ana-



lysis, the researcher defines a set of different categories and then counts the number of words or phrases falling into each category. In qualitative content analysis, instead of making frequency counts, extracts illustrating particular categories are used. (Silverman, 2006) In this kind of content analysis different “mentions” are noted and quotations under different categories are provided (Wilkinson, 2004).

In this study, (qualitative) deductive content analysis is used. This means that the framework of the analysis is based on existing theory (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). It was assumed that the content of the interviews could be categorized according to the model of sustainable wellness destination (Sheldon & Park, 2009). First, the framework of the analysis is established on the basis of the existing theory. Second, diverse categories derived inductively from the data are defined to fit the framework, and the data is resolved into the categories formed. (See e.g. Tuomi and Sarajärvi, 2002.)

Resource categories identified in the data included, for example, nature, culture, and activities including sub-categories such as service quality and pampering. Categories linked to destination policy, planning and management were also sought after. However, they were not as obvious and easy to identify as the resources discussed, which can be recognized in the empirical findings presented next.

## Empirical findings from three laboratory areas

The findings presented in this section are based on face-to-face interviews with key tourism actors in three laboratory areas of Finland: Jyväskylä region, Vuokatti and Kainuu region, and Vaasa region, and emulate the structure of the development model presented in Section Two. However, the focus will be on the two first levels in the model (Figure 2) due to non-existing, weak or just recently introduced policy and planning measures.

### *Jyväskylä – from know-how to successful tourism products*

According to the interviews conducted in the Jyväskylä region, the main resources and strengths of Jyväskylä region are high-level education (e.g. the University of Jyväskylä, the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences), know-how in technology, wellbeing and sports, and industrial activity (e.g. the forest industry). It was emphasized that the combination of all these fields would bring added value for wellbeing product development processes.

From the tourism point of view, Jyväskylä was seen as a venue for congresses, meetings and trade fairs with a major emphasis on work related travel. On the other hand, the region was seen as an up-and-coming wellbeing and leisure tourism destination. Four distinct seasons, good skiing areas, a pleasant atmosphere, service and infrastructure were reported as resources to benefit from, likewise nature and culture. Attributes connected to nature and environment were peacefulness and quiet. Regarding the local culture and other issues connected to localization only one person was mentioned – Alvar Aalto. Jyväskylä is the birthplace of the famous Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. There are also several buildings in the town designed by him.

In relation to wellbeing tourism and wellbeing tourism development some themes were stronger than others – namely sauna, wellbeing technology and watersports.

Sauna was mentioned several times as a key resource. Sauna was connected to the concept of the *Sauna from Finland*, which is under development in the area. The aim of the process is to connect businesses in the sauna industry, tourism, wellbeing/wellness and service sectors. New hydrotherapy activities for wellbeing services are being developed in the region. The Finnish Institute of Aquatics, located in Jyväskylä region, is developing new water activities and equipment for water activities. The Institute is also in charge of educating fitness instructors for various watersports such as water running (with a water running belt), using submerged trampolines, and aerobics and training in water.

It was noted that the region has three clear tourism networks. One functions in the city of Jyväskylä and concentrates on organizing congresses and events. Another functions in the Himos ski resort area and was described as more of a winter activity network. Finally, the network in Peurunka was seen to provide different tourism services all year round. It was also noted that there is other co-operation in the area, too, but at the time of the research the co-operation was not yet organized into networks. According a study by the Jyväskylä Regional Development Company Ltd. (JYKES), businesses in the area believe that the sauna theme can create a more positive image of the region. In addition, the theme was seen as a chance to improve the competitiveness of the area by motivating business and product development. The Sauna from Finland theme was also seen as an umbrella for marketing. The interviewees mentioned the sauna manufacturers when talking about the area as a sauna region. For instance, the sauna stove manufacturer Harvia has its facilities in the area. The interviewees found that the concept of Sauna from Finland can be either a supporting or a key factor in product development processes. To conclude with the words of one interviewee (F2J) *“in Jyväskylä region the transformation from (the) traditional tourism development led by marketing organizations and development companies into (the) business-led development work is in process”*.

#### *Vuokatti and Kainuu region – a wide range of possibilities for activities*

In Vuokatti and Kainuu region the basic supporting resources of the area were recognized and it was evident that the focus was on natural and topographical resources. In addition, the opportunity to participate in diverse activities in the area was seen as one of the unique selling points. Vuokatti area was also seen to be profiled around “sports culture” which has partly been built around the success of sports clubs of the area. The most visible “landmarks” and/or main actors in Vuokatti are Vuokatti Sports Institute, Katinkulta Spa and Vuokatti Slopes.

The value creating attributes or key resources in tourism were seen to be mainly connected to nature, a wide range of activities, availability and good quality of products and services. Additionally, the most important tourism resources are connected to the natural elements and infrastructure of the area. Natural geographical features were seen as one important profiling feature in the area. Attributes used to describe nature and natural elements were silence and quiet, space and tranquility, as well as the four seasons.

In addition to natural resources, the area also has unique features and infrastructure that support winter sports and the profile of Vuokatti as a ski resort. These are a

ski tunnel and a snowboarding tunnel that can also be used for training in summertime. In addition to winter activities other activities and services are provided all year round. These activities include fishing, golf and diverse indoor activities such as spa services, indoor swimming and indoor sports. The local atmosphere and mentality of the local people (mentality of Kainuu/people of Northern Finland) give customers a feeling of tranquility; there is no haste and they get a hospitable feeling. In one case a representative of the businesses mentioned that they had locally produced food on their (wellness) menus. Otherwise the local culture of the locality was not mentioned. On the other hand, the international atmosphere was seen as one possible pull factor to the area. The internationality comes from the presence of world class athletes who come to train in Vuokatti.

Considering the area from the wellbeing tourism point of view, the wellbeing tourism in Vuokatti region centers mainly around the activities provided and hence the customers and tourists have to take an active role to enhance their wellbeing. The activities include diverse indoor and outdoor sports and exercises. In addition, there is a spa, Katinkulta, in Vuokatti. The spa is one of the landmarks of the area and it can also be assumed that it attracts a particular kind of visitors.

In light of the interviews the area clearly has several diverse actors and stakeholders who have partly different goals. However, the development processes and organization in the area are fairly well rationalized. This often depends on the business or the network the business is a part of. In some cases businesses could also recognize and analyze unsuccessful innovations and they have learned from these. As mentioned above, some individual businesses have good know-how in product development and commodification and the role of creativity was deemed very important in the development processes. In Vuokatti region traditional marketing channels had a very powerful role. This was seen both positively and negatively. The product know-how in product development was seen to be fairly good. However, the problem was in many cases that the development processes were concentrated on individual businesses and the development work was rarely done in networks. In addition, the role of customer information was highlighted but its use was not visible in practice; *“the mystery is how to realize it [the customer’s point of view] and you also have enough knowledge and competence so that you can observe things through certain [customer’s] eyes”* (M3V) and all in all, it was reported that the product development needs new ideas and viewpoints so that businesses can develop products and services that attract new target groups. There was criticism that it seemed at the time that the development was focused more on quantity (e.g. increasing the number of beds) instead of improving quality.

#### *Vaasa region – wellbeing tourism in the archipelago*

Vaasa region presented through the lens of the interviews reveals a mosaic of actors, activities and resources positioned in two different types of geographical contexts. The archipelago, sea, seashore and the beach, and the adjoining land constitute a unique and particular context with influence on wellbeing tourism being developed. Another context for wellbeing tourism to germinate from can be found one step inland from the seashore. Here, a typical Ostrobothnian rural milieu dominates the content

of wellbeing tourism developments, i.e. an area where historical heritage and regional culture echo between the traditional red farmhouses with white corners encircled by arable and pasture land - proof of active farming.

Discussing wellbeing tourism with the interviewees revealed that there is no single perspective on what wellbeing tourism is. Some of the informants explained that wellbeing tourism is about spas and pampering, in contrast to those who stressed that this type of tourism includes different types of physical activities. A third group, but a minority, was of the opinion that wellbeing tourism is an “inner journey”, a combination of new experiences and inner harmony, as well as a reasonable level of physical activities. The words used by all informants to describe wellbeing tourism were relaxation, freedom from stress, and “contrast to everyday life”. Very few informants talked explicitly about health and curing illness. It was most obvious that wellbeing tourism is about improving the current health status among the visitors and tourists.

To identify the necessary resources in the Vaasa region to be used in wellbeing tourism development is not an issue according to the interviewees. There are at least three core resource dimensions that have to be successfully merged. These are the environment (context) in general, and the archipelago and the maritime milieu in particular, service quality, and locally produced food. The environmental resources mentioned most often by the informants were silence, clean air, four seasons, ice, winter and unspoiled countryside. The archipelago was presented as a unique basic resource of which its UNESCO World Heritage status is a proof. However, discussing the Kvarken World heritage site with the informants elicited mixed responses due to the question of how to balance development with conservation.

Wellbeing tourism in the region has to be unique, stand out, and be marketable. All informants agree on this, and add cultural aspects to nature as a unique selling proposition. Local dishes and locally produced food were mentioned especially as core resources in wellbeing tourism offerings. The food and the dishes have to reflect the cultural heritage, be full of flavor, and nutritious, i.e. healthy. Core activities discussed regarding wellbeing tourism in the Vaasa region were of three different types. Sauna and sauna bathing were presented as an absolutely essential dimension in the local wellbeing concept. Spa treatments, massage and meditation were discussed in terms of pampering. The last category of activities was related to exercise, fitness and working out.

The infrastructure in the region is perceived as good, except for the car ferry traffic between Finland (Vaasa) and Sweden (Umeå). The current situation is most often compared to a time period called the “tax-free period” which ended in 1995 when Finland joined the European Union. Tourism facilities are also well developed to meet the current demand, but should probably be updated if the region should wholeheartedly opt for wellbeing tourism. In the Southern part of Ostrobothnia there are already some pilot projects focusing on the conceptualization and packaging of wellbeing tourism. Another type of resources, the wealth of second homes in the area, was also discussed by some of the informants. How the tourism sector could benefit from this large amount of unused capacity has long been an issue. The occupancy rate of these second homes is very low, even in high season. To rent these privately owned cottages is not a high priority among the owners.

Wellbeing tourism development in the Vaasa region is in an initial phase. There are currently no regional policies or planning instruments to support a regional wellbeing tourism strategy. Wellbeing tourism is discussed and the few initiatives that can be identified are scattered, and take place only in certain designated areas. Most initiatives are project based (for example the Wellbeing tourism project “Hyvinvointimatkailu, HYMA 1 & 2”) and coordinated by external actors. These initiatives also benefit from external funding (for example European Regional Development Funds). The outcomes of these initiatives are packages of wellbeing services and joint marketing programs. The informants explained how the area hosts most of the resources needed for developing wellbeing tourism. What seem to be lacking are appropriate networks and cooperation initiatives, because no single tourist firm can produce a total wellbeing tourism package on its own.

## Conclusions and further studies

Wellbeing tourism as a unique tourism form is under way and supported by the growing number of tourists looking beyond mere hedonic tourist experiences. Wellbeing tourism defined as trips taken by people who temporarily relinquish the places where they normally live and work for reasons of self-indulgence, health retreats, and their personal wellbeing, and the sum of phenomena and relationships arising therefrom (Björk, 2011) assumes a holistic and long-term perspective. Wellbeing tourism is to be packaged as a fine blend of services appealing to body, mind, and soul. The aim of this article is to discuss wellbeing tourism in Finland with reference to destination development, and to contribute to the ongoing discussion of how to conceptualize wellbeing tourism. This is done through the lens of a modified destination development model, which was based on the model presented by Sheldon and Parker (2009).

Three laboratory areas in Finland were analyzed for this study, Jyväskylä, Kainuu and Vuokatti, and Vaasa, and the dimensions of interest were core resources, supporting resources, destination policies, and destination development and management. Findings based on face-to-face interviews with key tourism actors in the laboratory areas support an increased focus on wellbeing tourism in Finland, as proposed by the Finnish Tourism Board. It is not difficult to identify core and supporting resources to be used in wellbeing tourism packages. However, most of the resources are very basic and undeveloped, and might not fit into the wellbeing tourism concept as such. It is therefore suggested that wellbeing tourism service development be given top priority, not least because wellbeing services are found in different service sectors. The theoretical framework used for this study was based on a destination development model consisting of five levels (Sheldon & Parker, 2009). In light of the empirical findings presented, we argue that there is an emerging structure in support of the two first levels (supporting and core resources) of the model. Regional embedded wellbeing tourism policies and development plans, the next two levels of the development model of Sheldon and Parker (2009), are still to be developed and implemented.

The Finnish Tourism Board advocates wellbeing tourism as one main future area of tourism. How this policy statement unfolds in different parts of Finland is still to

be seen. The findings presented in this article, and in the more comprehensive report “Wellbeing Tourism in Finland” (Konu, Tuohino & Björk, 2011), indicate an urgent need for vigorous efforts to set up regional wellbeing destination policies for destination management organizations to act upon. The risk is that wellbeing tourism in Finland will be most amorphous, thereby jeopardizing joint marketing and branding initiatives. The wellbeing destination development model discussed and used in this article is neither claimed to be exclusive nor exhaustive, but is presented as a tool to be further developed, but also as a management tool to get the wellbeing tourism development in Finland going.

Wellbeing tourism as a fairly novel concept, still suffers from a more extensive elaboration. Discussions about how wellbeing tourism can be linked to more general concepts such as quality-of-life, happiness, and wellbeing are particularly welcomed. Another window into future research on wellbeing tourism is to focus on how small and middle-sized tourism firms manage to reconfigure their business culture, settings, and mindsets to meet the expectations of those visitors looking for wellbeing tourism experiences.

The managerial implications offered at this stage pertaining destination development fall into two categories; 1) Resource scanning and service development, and 2) Networking and learning.

Wellbeing tourism as a unique form of tourism is not context specific, as, for example, alpine tourism or fishing tourism. Wellbeing tourism has its focus on the perceived wellbeing of the visitors, a state which can be achieved in the sauna landscape of Eastern Finland, just as well as on a small island in the archipelago of Ostrobothnia. A critical issue in the resource reconnaissance and service development process is to identify region specific and unique resources to be packaged into service offerings of value. Nature, culture, knowledge and technology were identified as critical resource categories in the laboratory areas studied.

Wellbeing tourism in Finland is in the process of formalization. It still lacks structure, a good reason for all actors interested in wellbeing tourism to closely monitor, as a learning process, how the wellbeing tourism concept is conceptualized. It is also recommended that the development process should adopt a bottom-up approach and acknowledge the importance of co-operation and networking, not least due to the many small tourism firms which will be involved in the development of wellbeing tourism in Finland.

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