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Pääkirjoitus – Editorial

Special Issue on Health and Wellbeing in Tourism Destinations

The special theme of this issue is health and wellbeing in tourism destinations. Lately words like “downshifting,” “mindfulness,” “wellbeing” and “wellness” have filled the media, while stressed out people seek new ways of living healthy and full lives. Wellbeing has become a megatrend and health tourism is seen as an area of special interest tourism which accelerates growth in destinations around the globe even faster than “traditional” tourism does. The users of this niche sector can be broadly divided into two segments that both represent unique and important opportunities for businesses, tourism destinations, regions and countries that want to attract this high-yield customer market segment. The first segment is the “primary purpose wellness tourists” whose sole purpose or motivating factor for their trip and destination choice is wellness. Then there is the group of “secondary purpose wellness tourists” who seek to maintain their wellness or participate in wellness experiences while taking any type of trip.

In Finland the discussion around wellbeing tourism has been active for about ten years now. Visit Finland (formerly known as The Finnish Tourism Board) published its first survey on Finnish health and wellbeing service offering in 2005, followed by a survey in 2008 looking into what types of health and well-being services are being marketed to our international travellers at regional and destination level. The use of an umbrella term “Well-being tourism” was recommended in the Finnish health and well-being tourism strategy 2009–2013, and “wellness” as a sub-term for services with especially high quality and personal service, such as 4–5 star hotels and spas. Finally in late 2014 the updated “Wellbeing Tourism Strategy 2014–2018” was launched by Visit Finland. The vision for 2020 is “*to become world’s best destination in natural well-being*” and it is declared that Finland has the best possible conditions for offering tourists well-being products and services related to clean nature, tranquility, and sauna.

This special issue digs into the wellbeing tourism concept, emphasizes a clear distinction to wellness tourism, and chisels out wellbeing tourist types. Furthermore, it opens up a broader interpretation of the wellbeing tourism concept. Second homes as wellbeing resources are discussed, as well as, accessibility for travelers with functional impairments. People are different, travel for different reasons and find pleasure out of different types of activities. Wellbeing tourism is so much more than mere health or wellness tourism. Wellbeing tourism can, in its most wide sense (combining segments one and two), be regarded as all type of tourism enhancing human wellbe-

ing. Following this line of reasoning, wellbeing tourism destinations are places which add to quality-of-life experiences.

Reasons to step-up the discussions about wellbeing tourism in Finland are evident in the paper of Grénman and Rääkkönen, who analyzed interviews of tourism professionals. Their results show how the wellbeing concept renders different interpretations. There are those who mix wellbeing and wellness and use these two concepts interchangeable. Another group of respondents, a minor one, have interpretations in line with how academic researchers position wellbeing tourism, a tourism different from wellness tourism. Finally, the largest group of respondents finds the wellness concept better to use in contrast to the recommendations of the Finnish Tourist Board. The versatility of the wellbeing tourism concept can also be found in the study of Ahtiainen, Piirainen and Vehmas segmenting wellbeing tourists. Based on a hermeneutic content analysis of the qualitative interviews, six wellbeing tourist types were explored, all with different interpretations of the essence of wellbeing tourism. Consequently, perceived value in wellbeing tourism can be derived from individual or communal features being either of tangible or intangible nature.

The Finnish wellbeing tourism brand identity is still weak. Besides more discussions about the essence of wellbeing among Finnish tourism actors, Laiho and Tuominen ask for more distinct external communication, not at least when people with functional impairments are targeted according Huovinen and Jutila. In essence, Renfors and Tuominen suggest further emphasize on Green Care, and Hakkarainen, Jutila and Angeria on cultural aspects. Especially, the option to immerse tourists into everyday life of locals should be further investigated. In this respect, the discussion by Åkerlund, Pitkänen, Hiltunen, Overvåg, Müller and Kahila becomes topical. They offer an extended view on the relationship between second homes, health and wellbeing.

For future research about wellbeing tourism in Finland, we identify, at least, three different, but integrated research avenues. Claiming that the Finnish wellbeing tourism identity is weak indicates that more hard work in companies and tourism organizations has to be done, but also more research on how to organize for wellbeing tourism on destinations is welcomed. Further insight into resource integration in tourism actor-networks and network governance is to be sought. Second, claiming that wellbeing tourism is linked to quality-of-life, we advocate for more research about tourism as a social activity and how tourists seamlessly can be integrated into the life of the locals. Finally, having noticed how difficult it is, in practice, to separate wellbeing tourism from related tourism forms, ongoing studies on how different markets (domestic and international) perceive wellbeing tourism are most necessary. There might be a risk that Finnish wellbeing tourism is not a brand for marketing.

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