Rural Wellbeing
definitions and contents

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Wellbeing or Wellness?
or Something else?
Introduction/background

Rural wellbeing tourism is related to wellness and health tourism, for example as defined by Sheldon and Bushell (2009), but it has a broader stance, and it might be seen as a further development of historical trends, too.

Over the past decades spa and wellness tourism has increased in popularity, and there is a mushrooming of concepts; spiritual tourism, thalasso tourism, occupational wellness tourism, yoga and meditation tourism, and many forms of sauna.
The development of the traditional spa and wellness resorts towards a more holistic paradigm is prevalent.

According to García-Altés (2005) diverse demographic, economic and lifestyle related factors have enhanced this.

Many people are stressed by living in work-obsessed, time-pressured, material-listic and over-individualistic societies.

In addition, the aging population, changes in lifestyle and alternatives in tourism. Where experienced travellers seek new experiences, this adds to the increased emphasis on more holistically oriented wellness products.
Wellness – passive?

Wellbeing – active?
In ProWell the aim is to clarify the understanding of wellbeing tourism, as the use and the understanding of terminologies vary from country to country.

As Smith and Puczkó (2014) state, there are different historic, cultural and linguistic understandings of health and wellness but wellbeing encompasses both and its meaning is even wider than that.

Thus, wellbeing tourism may include pampering, various (sports and fitness) activities and experiences of luxury but also more primitive facilities and outdoor activities (Kangas & Tuohino, 2008).
Rural wellbeing?
Why ”rural” and what is it in rural wellbeing tourism?

Rural development, but also:

- well-being tourism may include pampering, various activities and experiences of luxury but also more primitive facilities and outdoor activities
- main motivating push factors in the wellbeing and wellness tourism sector seem to be relaxation, escape, pampering, physical activity, avoiding burn out and mental wellbeing

Different understandings of the term in the participating countries, among different stakeholders, no universal definition exists

Production and reproduction of the ideas of rural and rural ways (constant change)
Theory: Rural as approached by Halfacree (2006) and Woods (2011)

- Rural space
  - Rural locality: distinctive spatial practices (e.g. production of food, forestry)
  - (Formal) Representations of the rural: the commodification of the rural in exchange value terms, academics’ ideas
  - Lives of the rural: everyday lives

+ The sense of rurality!
Administrative definitions

population density
   E.g. in Lithuania: small towns with total population under 3000 people

distance to larger cities

socio-economic data (rural areas economically or socially disfavoured regions?)

areas that are eligible for various types of development support
Pragmatic approach needed

In tourism, images and perceptions matter

It is the comparison between the tourist’s home (and usually urban) environment and the characteristics of the destination that mark something as rural

"Sense of rurality"

Related to certain locations or specific kinds of activities, symbols of the rural and the resources for tourism
Norway Tourist Association:

*By and large, all the ingredients of the major rural trend are present: a turn towards rural consumption, the rural idyll, ‘‘local’’ qualities, and what is perceived as genuine.*

**The rural becomes a refuge from the hectic urban life.**

However, even if the tourist gaze is dominated by the visual nature of the experience, the qualities required extend beyond scenery at a distance. The array of perceptions is extended to more than ‘‘spectacularization’’. Silence in the soundscape is appreciated—which primarily means an absence of urban noise. The appreciation of local food at its cabins discussed above marks a focus on taste; to taste the genuine.
Rural as opposing the urban?
Or something not available in an urban environment?

- Rural idyll
- Diverse, beautiful nature
- Untouched, pure environment
- Fresh, clean air and nature
- Quietness
- Birthplace, homeland
- Childhood reminiscences
- Warbling of birds
- Forests
- Springs, water
- Space, solitude (in a good way)

- Closeness of nature /easy access to wilderness
- Tranquillity and silence
- Remoteness (distance to major growth center XXkm?)
- Presence of primary industries (agriculture, forestry, fisheries,)
- Waterscape/aquatic environment
- Landscapes without urban remarks?
- Heritage and culture alive
- Authenticity
- Little traffic, no traffic jams
- Role of the wilderness?
How to (re-)create and market rural?

Representations, narrating the rural
- Special places/locations
- Local events
- Food products

Built on own features: particular landscapes, cultures, traditions
- look into your own environment
- what makes it rural and special?
Has to connect with the rural environment!
- Multi-sense! (visual and physical, and audio)
Landscape studies (Carneiro et al. 2015)

Vegetation (type, intensity...)
Slopes (openness)
Water
Built heritage
Smells
Sounds
Tastes
People contact
Nature
Past
Elements of rural for wellbeing tourism: connecting with nature and its resources

Wellbeing based on rural flora (including food)
Wellbeing based on rural fauna (including food)
Wellbeing based on the geology
Wellbeing based on remoteness, distance
Wellbeing based on the urge for mobility
Wellbeing based on climatic and weather particularities
Wellbeing based on connectivity between earth and water
Wellbeing based on and derived from the cultural landscape and rural traditions
Different "levels" of rurality have different resources to offer.

- Wilderness
- Abandoned rural areas and wildernesses
- Extensive culturalised areas
- Stable agricultural areas
- Idyllised rustic
- Ruralised urban
- Cultivated rural zones
“Rural wellbeing tourism should be realized on the basis (resources and needs) of the local community, therefore benefitting mostly the local community (give added value to the local community). It should offer access to nature, provide local food and other local ingredients, including staff, and the owner/host/provider should show a personal attitude in his/her operations (personal meeting with staff is important). All these should take place in a rural setting.”
In short, these characteristics can be summarized under three Ls, all taking place in a rural setting; or under four Rs:

1. Rural (Local) community,
2. Rural (Local) providers,
3. Rural (Local) products in a Rural setting.

When each country’s national definitions are applied to this definition, in addition to the definition of wellbeing tourism, the general definition of rural wellbeing tourism in each country can be created.
Thank you!
For more information, go to www.uef.fi/mot/prowell

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