



Exploring well-being as a tourism product resource



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Tourism and public health sectors are merging around the concept of well-being.
- Stakeholder views on using well-being as a tourism product resource are explored.
- Barriers and enablers of implementing well-being into tourism strategy are outlined.
- The potential to transform the identified barriers into enablers is discussed.
- Findings are mapped onto a public health model and applied in a tourism context.

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a qualitative research approach where focus groups ($n = 11$) with key stakeholders were used to understand how tourism investors view the concept of well-being in relation to tourism and the potential to use it as a tourism product resource. Findings validated by a wider group ($n = 50$) exposed the barriers and enablers of implementing well-being in this way. The potential for businesses and policymakers to transform these barriers into enablers was also identified. In addition, study findings were mapped onto a robust model extracted from the public health sector and applied in a tourism context using a systems theory approach. This further highlighted the potential offered to the fields of public health and tourism in the concept of well-being, and demonstrated the well-being value of tourism. Data from this research will aid tourism business practice and development by embedding a well-being philosophy for tourism destinations' strategies.

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1. Introduction

In 1948 The World Health Organization (WHO) originally proposed that, "Health is not the mere absence of diseases but a state of well-being" and from this point onward well-being has become a challenging concept to define (La Placa & Knight, 2014). Notwithstanding, well-being has been described in numerous ways such as an individual's optimistic assessment of their lives including contentment, positive emotion, engagement and purpose (Diener & Seligman, 2004). It has also been explained in terms of developing as a person, being fulfilled and making a contribution to the community (Stoll, Michaelson, & Seaford, 2012). While the WHO's description of health is not a definition of well-being per se; it outlines fundamental principles and demonstrates where the

concept originates. Issues such as the association between health and well-being and whether or not well-being should be considered subjective or objective in nature contribute to the contemporary evaluation of well-being from both an economic and psychological viewpoint. Well-being has been used in a broad sense by philosophers, economists and public health professionals to discuss the general population and has also been understood in a narrow sense regarding an individual's positive functioning. Even so, the concept of well-being extends across a wide range of subject areas including philosophy, public health, economics, policy, academia, research, theory and psychology (Hanlon, Carlisle, & Henderson, 2013); however, it is used sparsely in relation to tourism. It can be conceptualized as resting on a continuum between 'reactive' and 'proactive' anchors. With regard to this research well-being fits within the proactive conceptualization, as tourism can be considered healthful in nature and guided by the individual (Travis & Ryan, 1981).

The positive well-being benefits realized from a holiday

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experience provide opportunities for the visitor economy, as well-being has the potential to be used as a marketing tool to influence consumer's choice of holiday destination. It has been documented in the literature that well-being is a desired feature that consumers are looking to fulfill while engaging in tourism (Voigt & Pforr, 2014). Tourism not only influences well-being however, it also impacts the economy. Tourism contributes to economic development for respective destinations, as consumer spending creates additional employment opportunities, contributes to GDP and therefore positively impacts local businesses (VisitBritain 2014; World Travel & Tourism Council 2014; Deloitte, 2013). The tourism sector affects business development, sustainable growth, social and economic involvement and regeneration which is contained in the wide-spread policy agenda (Deloitte, 2013). By embedding a health and well-being philosophy for tourist destinations, it is hoped that more individuals will potentially engage in tourism and the economic benefits will follow.

Health policy has acknowledged that disease prevention is essential to ensure better population health and contributes to less spending on health care in the long term (Hartwell, Hemingway, Fyall, Filimonau, & Wall, 2012; Wanless, 2002). As well-being has become an important policy goal public health has begun to adopt strategies which focus on well-being across the life course through considering the wider determinants of health and health behaviour. These include the contexts within which people live such as housing, transport, employment and opportunities to change health behaviour. All of which are potentially impacted upon by tourism and public health policy and strategy at a local level coming together. The health of the population is not exclusively an obligation of the health sector; indeed in the UK the recent move of the public health function to local authorities is evidence of the contribution of the local policy context across the wider determinants of health directly influenced by local authority strategy and local action (Hartwell et al. 2012). This change is intended to help planners and politicians engage with their responsibility as laid out in the Health Act 1999 which is to come together to improve the health and well-being of local people. Just as well-being is important to public health officials, it also plays a vital role in tourism, as individuals (particularly in developing countries) aim to achieve well-balanced lives (VisitBritain, 2010). These findings suggest not only are individuals aspiring to have secure careers, strong relationships with family and friends, good health and time for leisure activities, but the desire for rest and relaxation has become particularly important. Resultantly, individuals in developing countries ranked 'having time to relax' as one of their top three priorities in life (VisitBritain, 2010). Holidays are one avenue whereby people can make this priority a reality. It has been suggested that the market for holidays focused on well-being is growing exponentially (Voigt & Pforr, 2014).

Public health and tourism bodies come from different backgrounds and business cultures, have divergent opinions, speak in dissimilar languages and potentially have differing views on the definition of well-being. Regardless of these variances, where the two parties could find common ground is under the well-being effect of tourism. Drawing on the work of Ritchie and Crouch (2003), Hartwell et al. (2012) present a conceptual relationship that demonstrates the fusion of public health and tourism using effective strategy and public policy formation. Furthermore, the principles of sustainable tourism have been used to provide additional evidence on how integrating public health principles into destination management, destination policy, local policy, activities and destination capital can provide positive outcomes (Hartwell et al. 2012).

Further proof of the blending between the sectors of public health and tourism around well-being resides in the ancient Greek

roots of this concept that can be characterized in two ways: eudemonic and hedonic (McMahan & Estes, 2011). Eudemonic well-being occurs when one experiences meaning and self-fulfilment in life while hedonic well-being arises from seeking happiness and pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008). In keeping with this line of reasoning Hartwell et al. (2012) and Easterlin (2013) suggest that as society moves towards a philosophy of reuse, repurpose and greater sustainability, well-being fits better within a eudemonic positioning and provides an opportunity to form a unique, collaborative relationship between tourism and public health. Public health evolves from a preventative, protective perspective and encompasses a life course approach. This outlook closely resembles a eudemonic philosophy. Well-being is not always controlled by the individual and is greatly influenced by environmental factors within the context of an individual's life (Ryff & Singer, 2008). This is where public health and policy can play a vital role by creating supportive environments and establishing policies influenced by issues related to sustainable well-being.

Tourism offers products and services to consumers where one can experience either eudemonic or hedonic well-being. A eudemonic tourism product/service offering focused on human development could be portrayed as more in line with the aims of the public health sector (Hartwell et al. 2012). Other studies reiterate that tourism could offer individuals long-term, sustainable life satisfaction and positive functioning, as well as short-term, extreme pleasure attaining hedonic experiences (McCabe & Johnson, 2013). Controversially, it could be argued that a hedonic tourism product/service offering is categorized by excessive behaviour such as eating and drinking and is less agreeable to society standards and the field of public health. Alternatively, visitors experiencing a eudemonic tourist product such as cycle ways or walking trails can realize benefits to their own health (both mental and physical). In addition, local residents exposed to the physical and cultural provisions associated with eudemonic tourism have the opportunity to experience similar health advantages.

Although the goals of reducing inequalities and promoting sustainability can be encouraged through public health and tourism, it can be argued that as an emerging area of research more work needs to be done (Hartwell et al. 2012). There is momentum and currency developing in this area; however, research has somewhat lagged behind. Hence the focus of this study is to evaluate the relationship between tourism and public health in the emerging lens of well-being from a business perspective.

1.1. *Tourism and consumer behaviour*

Tourism is viewed as a powerful force related to human development and the wider public good (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). As a result, it is critical for tourism researchers, academics and leaders to embrace this vision and give robust evidence for policy development (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in the last five decades, growth of the tourism sector has been exponential and this trend is not expected to change in the future (2014). From a business perspective, the volume matches or exceeds that of powerful industries such as oil, food and automobiles (UNWTO, 2013). The growth and impact of tourism has provided destinations around the globe with many benefits including employment for residents and increases in GDP/economic development (VisitBritain 2014; Deloitte, 2013; World Economic Forum, 2013). With this development also come challenges such as the negative health impacts of hedonic tourism experiences, the potential exploitation of the local work force and degradation of vulnerable local wildlife and beauty spots. In addition, tourism in some areas brings challenges in relation to specific

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