

Tourism and wellbeing



Melanie Kay Smith^{a,b,c,*}, Anya Diekmann^d

^a Budapest Metropolitan University, School of Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality, Nagy Lajos kiraly utja 1-9, 1148 Budapest, Hungary

^b Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary

^c University of Tartu Pärnu College, Estonia

^d Université libre de Bruxelles, av. Franklin Roosevelt 50, CP 130/02, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

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ABSTRACT

Wellbeing has been a philosophical and sociological concern since the beginning of time, and research has extended over time to disciplines such as psychology, health sciences and economics to name just a few. Tourism studies has also become more focused on wellbeing in the last few decades, both from a theoretical and methodological perspective. After examining the philosophical background of wellbeing from different perspectives, the paper takes a closer look at how these frameworks can inform tourism research and practices. It explores the relationship between diverse terminologies and perspectives as well as the ways in which hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing can be derived through tourism experiences. A spectrum and a model are proposed which outline the relationship between various types of wellbeing, tourism and activities.

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Introduction

Wellbeing is one of the buzzwords of the decade and is omnipresent in almost all discourse relating to human daily life and activities. A keyword search for the word wellbeing will generate over a million articles in any common academic search engine. Alexandrova (2012) estimated that wellbeing has become one of the most popular keywords in all psychological articles, not to mention being thoroughly entrenched in social and medical science. Wellbeing has been a philosophical and sociological concern since the beginning of time, especially for key thinkers and academics. Philosophers throughout history have examined human life satisfaction and the meaning of happiness. This search for an understanding of human wellbeing has extended over time to disciplines such as psychology, health sciences and economics to name just a few. Being by nature multidisciplinary, tourism studies has also become more focused on wellbeing in the last few decades, both from a theoretical and methodological perspective.

Tourism studies began to focus on wellbeing through a broad range of terms partially inspired by philosophy as well as psychology, such as 'quality of life' and 'life satisfaction' (e.g. de Bloom et al., 2010; Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Hoopes & Lounsbury, 1989; Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999; Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 2004; Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007; Pearce, Filep, & Ross, 2010; Richards, 1999; Sirgy, 2010; Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Yu, 2011; Uysal, Perdue, & Sirgy, 2012), 'happiness' (e.g. Filep & Deery, 2010; Nawijn, Marchand, Veenhoven, & Vingerhoets, 2010, and Nawijn, 2011a; 2011b),

* Corresponding author at: Budapest Metropolitan University, School of Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality, Nagy Lajos kiraly utja 1-9, 1148 Budapest, Hungary.

E-mail addresses: msmith@metropolitan.hu (M. Kay Smith), anya.diekmann@ulb.ac.be (A. Diekmann).

and 'wellness' (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009; Kelly, 2010; Kelly, 2012; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Smith & Puczkó, 2009; Voigt, Brown, & Howat, 2011; Voigt & Pforr, 2013). However, research in this field is still in its relative infancy. For example, in their extensive literature review of the health and wellness benefits of travel experiences, Chen and Petrick (2013) identified only 98 resources which were considered theoretically, empirically and practically relevant, and the majority of these were fairly recent. Pyke, Hartwell, Blake, and Hemingway (2016) note that the concept of wellbeing has been used sparsely in relation to tourism. Debates are still ongoing about how best to define the ways in which tourism contributes to the positive experience of both tourists and local residents alike. An examination of the philosophical understandings underpinning wellbeing can contribute to a deeper understanding of tourism as a phenomenon, especially insofar as it relates to motivation for, and participation in more meaningful, transformational or eudaimonic tourist experiences.

The aim of the paper is to look critically at the different concepts of wellbeing and how they inform tourism research and practices without however, pretending to be exhaustive. For example, this study does not integrate extensive research from public health and medical sciences which examine the benefits of travel for people with health problems (e.g. Gump & Matthews, 2000; Pols & Kroon, 2007; Strauss-Blasche, Reithofer, Schobersberger, Ekmekcioglu, & Marktl, 2005). Pyke et al. (2016) already explored in some detail the relationship between wellbeing and public health in the context of tourism.

Recognising the complexity and the various perspectives and approaches of wellbeing, the authors choose to focus in this paper on the impacts of tourist experiences on both the short-term and long-term mental or physical wellbeing of tourists. Other relevant topics such as the impacts of tourism on the wellbeing of local residents has been explored far more extensively in the tourism field. Sharpley (2014) dates the 'host-guest' literature back to the 1960s and suggests that it has been one of the most researched subjects in tourism studies, and more recently, authors have placed emphasis on the 'host gaze' and 'happy hosts' (e.g. Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012; Ivlevs, 2016; Moufakkir & Reisinger, 2012; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Reisinger, 2015; Sharpley, 2014; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015).

Moreover, the extensive literature on sustainable tourism and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) has not been included, despite recognising their great significance for developing ethical and responsible forms of tourism which enhance the wellbeing of destinations and their residents. It is also acknowledged that there is an emerging body of literature on (Cultural) Ecosystem Services which is partly focused on human wellbeing, but the connections to tourism have so far been under-explored with a couple of exceptions (e.g. Smith & Ram, 2016; Willis, 2015).

It is also important to note that the approach to wellbeing studies in this paper is predominantly western-centric. It traces theories of wellbeing back to Ancient Greek and European philosophy and American humanistic and positive psychology. This is perhaps inevitable given the (still) essentially western-centric nature of tourism, but it is recognised that wellbeing could, for example, also be approached through the notions of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sufism as discussed by Joshanloo (2014). In the future, research may focus more on the tourism experiences of Asian travellers with regard to wellbeing generating very different perspectives and approaches. At present, the emphasis in wellness tourism, for example, is still very much centred on western tourists' experience of Eastern holistic (body, mind, spirit) experiences (e.g. Kelly, 2012; Kelly & Smith, 2016; Reisinger, 2013; Smith, 2013; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Smith & Puczkó, 2013).

In summary, the paper examines the inter-relationships between wellbeing and tourism including philosophical and psychological approaches drawing on multi-disciplinary literature, definitional and research challenges, and proposes a spectrum and a model which outline the relationship between various types of wellbeing, destinations and tourism experiences.

The philosophy of wellbeing and its relationship to tourism

Although there exists something like a science of wellbeing, which is mainly informed by research in psychology and economics, there is no unanimous definition of wellbeing (Carlisle, Henderson, & Hanlon, 2009) and the multiplicity of theory has led to a blurred and overly broad definition (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012). Crisp (2016) defines wellbeing in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy as being used to describe what is non-instrumentally good for a person. Carlisle et al. (2009) see wellbeing as a collateral causality of many social, cultural and economic changes associated with the period roughly recognised as high, late or liquid modernity connecting it to the moral value system of modern society. Crisp (2016) considers that the question of wellbeing is of independent interest, but is also of great importance in moral philosophy, especially in the case of utilitarianism. Utilitarian philosophers, such as Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell agreed with Aristotle that subjective feelings of happiness are not the ultimate target (Ryff & Singer, 2008). They would maintain that the greatest number of people should benefit from, or derive happiness from a morally good action (Bentham, 1789; Mill, 1863). The relevance of utilitarian philosophy to tourism development, especially quality of life research is perhaps self-evident, in that it should advocate creating the maximum benefits for the greatest number of people. Theories of sustainability increasingly attempt to embrace notions of utilitarianism in wellbeing which mean developing destinations which create the greatest number of benefits for the greatest number of people within the limits of the earth's resources. The ideal form of tourism development would be a utilitarian one which does not compromise the wellbeing of local people. Philosophy may not be a convincing enough argument for many tourists to act altruistically, but Aristotle believed that he could defend the virtuous choice as always being in the interest of the individual. For him, virtue both tends to advance the good of others, and (at least when acted on) advances one's own good.

Hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives

Across millennia, philosophers have debated what constitutes wellbeing or 'the good life'. In that time, five central philosophical views of wellbeing have emerged: hedonic, life satisfaction, eudaimonic, desire fulfilment, and non-eudaimonic objective list (Armenta, Ruberton, & Lyubomirsky, 2015). Originally, the concept of wellbeing evolved around two philosophies: the hedonic and the eudaimonic view that eventually broadened to integrate concepts such as life satisfaction and desire fulfilment. The hedonic view is based on 4th century Greek philosopher Aristippus who considered that the goal of life is to experience as much pleasure as possible and the avoidance of pain (Carlisle et al., 2009). Happiness is the totality of one's hedonic moments (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This perception has been followed by Hobbes, Bentham and hedonic or positive psychologists who understand wellbeing as subjective happiness and the experience of pleasures (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This view of 'psychological hedonism' was first, and perhaps most famously, expressed by Socrates and Protagoras in the Platonic dialogue and later Jeremy Bentham (Crisp, 2016). Whereas simple hedonism places all pleasures on a par (e.g. sex and drinking are as pleasurable as artistic appreciation), Mill (1863) later argued that some pleasures, by their very nature, are more valuable than others, and that intellectual, moral, and aesthetic pleasures, for example, have 'a much higher value' than bodily pleasures of equal intensity and duration (Heathwood, 2014). Of course, such views have been mainly discarded by postmodern theorists, but elements of this debate are still evident, however covertly, in the context of tourism (i.e. cultural tourism is often perceived as being of 'greater value' than sun-sea-sand holidays). It is also important to consider the short-term versus long-term health consequences of behaviour.

Cloninger (2004) claims that hedonism is an incoherent concept of happiness, because the insatiability of desire conflicts with the limitations of our physical capacities and mental powers. Moreover, the opposition of pleasure against pain and reward against punishment has been increasingly criticised, and hedonic psychologists recognise that the perception of wellbeing is highly idiosyncratic and culturally specific (Ryan & Deci, 2001). It is important here to note that theories of hedonism have become popular mainly in contemporary Western cultures (Joshianloo, 2014). Culture clearly affects perceptions of happiness and the activities which are deemed important for enhancing it. For example, according to Walker and Kavedzija (2015) the cross-cultural comparison to date has been overwhelmingly structured around the contrast between the so-called 'individualistic' and 'collectivistic' cultures. According to cultural psychologists, Asian cultures tend to be more collective and community-orientated and social opinion might matter more (Hofstede, 2001). Independent backpacking or solo travel might therefore not seem so appealing and may not even be socially acceptable. Of course, those from deprived backgrounds may travel infrequently or not at all. This does not imply that they do not derive wellbeing from other leisure activities.

The eudaimonic view, connected to Aristotle, means 'to have a happy, true spirit' and is connoted to what Aristotle called the 'good life' and Augustine a 'happy life' (Cloninger, 2004). Eudaimonia relates essentially to the realisation of human potential focussing on psychological wellbeing connected to meaningful and valuable actions (or activities) in opposition to 'vulgar' pleasure seeking (Boniwell, 2008; Boniwell, 2016). One important distinction from the hedonic view is that in contrast to the hedonic pleasure-seeking activity providing instant wellbeing, the eudaimonic effects can result also from rather unpleasant activities at the time, but having delayed positive effects (Knobloch, Roberston, & Aitken, 2016). An example of this may include going to holistic or wellness retreats for self-development workshops which are psychologically or emotionally painful at the time but have cathartic effects and can lead to transformation later (Lea, 2008; Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015; Heintzmann, 2013; Reisinger, 2013; Smith, 2013).

The eudaimonic approach is therefore connected to personal growth, self-fulfilment and self-development, full engagement and optimal performance of meaningful behaviour (Cloninger, 2004). These underlying objectives can be connected to several types of tourism, such as volunteer tourism or even slum tourism. Research indeed evidenced, that visitors after a slum tour gain a deep gratitude and life satisfaction for their own situation and condition (Diekmann & Hannam, 2012). Coghlan (2010) explored how charity challenges in the context of tourism enhance participant wellbeing through being active, doing something meaningful, giving and connecting to others. In a later paper, Coghlan (2015) emphasises how volunteer tourism can have a strong impact on participants' sense of self, their identity and how they view themselves in relation to others.

There have been an increasing number of articles in tourism studies which touch on 'hedonic' and 'eudaimonic' paradigms of wellbeing (e.g. Hartwell, Hemingway, Fyall, Filimonau, & Wall, 2012; McCabe, Joldersma, & Li, 2010; Pyke et al., 2016). For example, Voigt, Howat and Brown (2011) suggest that in the context of wellness tourism, more hedonic wellbeing experiences might take place in a beauty spa whereas more eudaimonic experiences can be gained from spiritual retreats. A medical tourism experience might fall closer to the eudaimonic end of the spectrum too. The focus is on the healing of the physical body which can eventually induce greater happiness, but it can be painful at the time. The fear of mortality when ill can also prompt existential questions as highlighted later in the paper.

The complexity of understanding the notion of wellbeing for an individual lies however in what is 'good for' a person and what is not. It should however again be underlined, that satisfaction with life and wellbeing depend largely on the cultural background as perceptions of what is 'good' and what will bring 'bad luck' can be antagonistic depending on the culture (Christopher, 1999). Human beings tend to act in pursuit of what they think will give them more pleasure and the greatest balance of pleasure over pain. Yet it is debatable in many circumstances as to whether what *seems* good to a person is actually good for a person, especially in the context of health and even tourism (e.g. health and safety-compromising sun-sea-sand holidays).

Tourism as a tool for fulfilling desires

For [Heathwood \(2014\)](#) wellbeing is connected not to actual desires but to satisfying idealized desires. Tourism is very much a business of fulfilling idealized desires. [Bonniwell \(2016\)](#) suggests that life satisfaction is nothing more than a congruence between the present and an ideal situation, both of which are a reflection of the person's own subjective appreciation of life. Desires also change over time, a fact that has been recognised increasingly by tourism academics studying the different preferences of generational or lifestyle segments e.g. older travellers ([Milman, 1998](#); [Wei & Milman, 2002](#)) or younger ones (e.g. [Eusebio & Carneiro, 2014](#)). It is interesting to ponder for a moment the concept of idealised desire in the context of travel, as travel is frequently romanticised. [Whiting and Hannam \(2014\)](#) note that despite their frequent 'anti-tourism' stance, Romantic writers and poets in the 19th Century became key inscriptors of new meanings of 'sublime' landscape which were distilled into the guide books of the emergent tourism industry. [Smith and Puczkó \(2009\)](#) quotes the contemporary philosopher Alain de Botton (2002) who suggested that travel rarely lives up to expectations because images are idealised and romanticised in literature, art and media, but these depictions can be a far cry from reality. De Botton expands these ideas in a later book (2009), reiterating his earlier point that romanticising and then being disappointed by travel stems from the fact that travellers must always take their 'existential issues' present in their moods, anxieties and problems with them wherever they go. Hedonism and pleasure arguably provide only a form of 'temporary forgetting' and a release from existential issues.

The objective – Subjective divide

In addition to the above, in the mid-nineties researchers differentiated between objective and subjective definitions of wellbeing introducing a distinctive approach to how lives are being evaluated ([Diener, Lucas, Schimmeck, & Helliwell, 2009](#)). [Alexandrova \(2012\)](#) suggests that the main divide in theories of wellbeing are centred on the debate between subjectivists and objectivists. Objective list theories are usually understood as theories which list items constituting wellbeing that consist neither merely in pleasurable experience nor in desire-satisfaction. Such items might include, for example, knowledge or friendship. Subjectivists maintain that something can benefit a person only if he or she wants it, likes it, cares about it, or it otherwise connects up in some important way with his or her positive attitude. Objectivists deny this, holding that at least some of the things that make peoples' lives better do so independently of their particular interests, likes, and cares ([Heathwood, 2014](#)). A good example of this might lie in what people eat on holiday, e.g. holiday-makers may choose to consume those foods which give instant satisfaction and pleasure rather than those which lead to long-term health. One common objection to objective list theories is that they are elitist, since they appear to be claiming that certain things are good for people, even if those people will not enjoy them, and do not even want them ([Crisp, 2016](#)). Simplistic examples might include trying to force someone to enjoy a cultural tourism holiday for its educational benefits when the individual would much rather lie on a beach, or encouraging someone to cut down their holiday drinking for health reasons while they argue that this is an integral part of holiday enjoyment.

Positive psychological theories of wellbeing and their relationship to tourism

Most of the concepts of wellbeing mentioned above can be related to a positive philosophical vision of the world and focus on the individual and what makes people happy. The American humanistic psychology movement emerged in the 1960s and the positive psychology movement developed in the 1990s, both of which focused more on the individual and their happiness or subjective wellbeing. Such preoccupations are arguably typical of western societies.

Subjective wellbeing and tourism

[Bonniwell \(2016\)](#) states that some positive psychologists often considered happiness to be synonymous with 'subjective wellbeing'. For instance, [Diener et al. \(2009, p.11\)](#) note that "people have well-being only when they believe that their life is going well, regardless of whether that life has pleasure, material comforts, a sense of meaning, or any other objective feature that has been specified as essential for wellbeing". However, [Meseroll \(2016\)](#) states that before the last few decades, philosophers mostly used the terms 'happiness' and 'wellbeing' interchangeably. [Rodogno \(2014\)](#) also discusses how 'happiness' is sometimes used as a synonym for 'wellbeing'. He states that this confusion most famously occurs in the translation of the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* as happiness. [Bonniwell \(2016\)](#) suggests that Aristotle actually deemed happiness to be a vulgar idea, stressing that not all desires are worth pursuing as even though some of them may yield pleasure, they do not necessarily enhance wellbeing. Aristotle thought that true happiness is found by leading a virtuous life and doing what is worth doing. He argued that realising human potential is the ultimate human goal. [Meseroll \(2016\)](#) also notes the rich history of moral philosophy behind wellbeing, and distinguishes between the psychological state (e.g. smiles, cheerful feelings, enjoyment), and the evaluative state of wellbeing. This leads back to the idea that being happy may not necessarily be good for one (especially long-term). It also re-emphasises the idea that wellbeing should be ethical and not only self-serving. According to [Raibley \(2012\)](#) happiness expresses a psychological property: the property of feeling happy at a time also known as '*hedonia*' in psychology and is connected to people who are in high spirits and feeling good. Indeed, for him

happiness is episodic based on [Feldman's \(2008\)](#) concept, meaning short-timed. In a tourism context, there may be few long-term wellbeing benefits from hedonic holidays where the tourist is 'happy' but oblivious or indifferent to the impacts of his or her behaviour. On the other hand, eudaimonic experiences where tourists engage with local residents and even help them through volunteer work or charity may lead to self-development and transformation. However, although some forms of tourism may offer more eudaimonic or long-term benefits (e.g. retreat tourism, volunteer tourism, charity-supporting activities, slum tourism), the majority of tourism experiences will not.

[Seligman \(2002\)](#) introduced an authentic happiness model, in which he distinguishes between the pleasant life, good life and meaningful life in an attempt to work out what wellbeing really is and how these three different 'lives' contribute to life satisfaction. Research outcomes showed that the good and the meaningful life, both related to *eudaimonia* lead to greater satisfaction than the pleasure life which is considered as the 'cherry on the cake' ([Seligman, 2002](#)). In the context of tourism, these three elements might translate into holidays which provide a combination of pleasure and hedonism (i.e. having fun), altruistic activities (e.g. being environmentally-friendly or benefitting local communities), and meaningful experiences (e.g. education, self-development). One example could be ecotourism in its true form as "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" ([TIES, 1990](#)).

It must be acknowledged, therefore, that happiness is a somewhat complex concept which goes beyond positive, subjective experiences and perceptions. There are hedonistic but also eudaimonic dimensions, not to mention ethical and moral ones. [Helliwell and Putnam \(2004\)](#) propose that the optimum notion of happiness or living life well should include both perspectives. The implications for tourism research call for a deepening of understanding of these elements, especially in the context of tourism development and management. Hedonic, 'happy' holidays may not encompass enough of the philosophical and especially Aristotelian ethical dimensions of more eudaimonic approaches.

The positive psychology movement has also influenced tourism research ([Pearce, 2009](#)). [Nawijn and Filep \(2016\)](#) suggest that positive psychology is a useful framework for tourism research, however, they caution that it is important not to focus only on the hedonic aspects of tourism, and to avoid over-estimating the impact of vacationing on subjective wellbeing. [Nawijn \(2010\)](#) suggested that tourism only contributes to short-term wellbeing and that vacationers' happiness does not increase long-term wellbeing. [Nawijn \(2010\)](#) and [Corvo \(2011\)](#) even stated that in some cases, individual trips can create greater pre-trip than post-trip happiness. Although [Chen, Lehto, and Cai \(2013\)](#) noted a boost in happiness immediately following a vacation, [Kirillova and Lehto \(2015\)](#) suggest that many tourists experience lower levels of happiness after returning from a trip than before they went. [Nawijn, De Bloom, and Geurts \(2013\)](#) even show that pre-trip workload and homeload may negatively impact health and wellbeing prior to vacation. They note that this is especially true of women, who also experience a quicker fade-out of the positive effects of a vacation than men do. [Kelly and Smith \(2016\)](#) examine the specific needs of women in terms of their wellbeing, explaining why middle aged women are the core market for retreat tourism, for example.

[Mitas, Nawijn, and Jongsma \(2016\)](#) confirmed that while holidays generally improve positive emotions during a tourism experience, and tourism events and circumstances may affect wellbeing, how long and how often individuals travel for holidays over the course of a single year does not affect their wellbeing in the months that follow. [Corvo \(2011\)](#) observes that it is a fragile, unsatisfied self that often waits all year for a holiday and focuses on it with great expectations and hope. However, [Kirillova and Lehto \(2015\)](#) reject the idea that tourists are not satisfied and happy with their daily lives and that it is only or mainly on holiday that they can truly find an outlet to recover and feel truly happy. However, there may be some benefits to including tourism in one's so-called 'leisure life'. McCabe and Johnson's (2013) research supported the idea that holidays can offer more than short-term hedonic experiences and can contribute to longer-term life satisfaction. As most tourism takes place during peoples' leisure time, tourism forms part of this so-called leisure life and can therefore influence leisure wellbeing. It has been argued that satisfaction with leisure life (or the sense of leisure wellbeing) contributes directly to subjective wellbeing ([Kruger, Sirgy, Lee, & Yu, 2015](#); [Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014](#)). [Uysal, Sirgy, Woo and Kim \(2015\)](#) argue that the impact of vacation experience on subjective wellbeing can depend very much on the importance attributed to tourism by individuals, as well as differences in gender, age, income level, marital status, etc. For example, some recent research focuses specifically on the wellbeing of older travellers (e.g. [Kim, Woo, & Uysal, 2015](#); [Moal-Ulvoas & Taylor, 2014](#); [Morgan, Pritchard, & Sedgley, 2015](#); [Shaw et al., 2016](#)) or younger ones (e.g. [Eusebio & Carneiro, 2014](#)). Although the health impacts of tourism are not a major focus of this paper, research by [Eusébio, Carneiro, Kastenholz, and Alvelos \(2010\)](#) showed that the benefits of holidays for seniors lasted for at least two months or longer. They measured the reduction of health treatments and medication.

Quality of life and tourism

[Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, and Kim \(2016\)](#) suggest that scholars tend to use the terms 'quality of life' (or QoL) and wellbeing interchangeably. However, they also note that researchers usually refer to objective or subjective measures, which then might be termed subjective wellbeing, happiness, life satisfaction, perceived QoL, etc. [Kruger \(2012\)](#) stated that life satisfaction is influenced by satisfaction with family, social life, leisure and recreation, health, work, finances, and travel. Quality of life researchers (e.g. [Sirgy, 2012](#)) argue that subjective wellbeing means satisfaction with life domains and life overall.

Philosophers tend to ask such questions as 'what makes a good life' or 'what makes life worth living'? A quality of life or wellbeing researcher would question whether travel and tourism are essential or important when creating a so-called 'good life'. [Puczko and Smith's \(2010\)](#) research showed that tourism is not usually mentioned by respondents in quality of life

surveys unless prompted, and that family, health, love, security and other important QoL domains feature more prominently. However, when tourism is mentioned by researchers, it generates considerable enthusiasm amongst respondents. Nevertheless, in [Caunt, Franklin, Brodaty, and Brodaty's \(2013\)](#) research on long-term happiness, travel and holidays were the twentieth most frequently mentioned happiness category out of a possible twenty-nine. In [Smith, Puczkó, Michalkó, Kiss, and Sziva's \(2015\)](#) wellbeing research based on 11,000 questionnaires in eleven Balkan countries, travel was only ranked 17 out of 18 wellbeing factors.

It is common in wellbeing-focused tourism research to concentrate on a number of domains. For example, [Dolnicar et al. \(2012\)](#) captured tourists' subjective wellbeing through the life domains of physical health wellbeing, psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing. Smith and Puczkó (2012) applied Rahman et al.'s (2005) Quality of Life domains to tourism (these include health, work and productivity, material wellbeing, feeling part of one's local community, personal safety, quality of environment, emotional wellbeing, and relationship with family and friends) and they also added spiritual wellbeing and social wellbeing to this list. They argue that tourism can contribute to most of the domains, but in particular health, work and productivity, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and relationship with family and friends.

The relationship between tourism and the self

Humanistic psychology focuses on the notion that people have a free will and make choices that influence their wellbeing. Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self Determination Theory (SDT) adds three psychological needs which determine wellbeing: autonomy, competence and relatedness. These could relate to forms of tourism that respectively involve self-development, mastering a skill, or interacting with or helping others. What also makes it very different from other perspectives in psychology is the belief in the *actualising tendency* – a fundamental motivation towards growth. Personal development is related to striving for change, striving to understand oneself and the world better, striving to grow as a person, to become better in one's chosen fields and domains of life. Transcendence is related to dedication and commitment to something or somebody else but oneself. Although much of this section focuses on the western preoccupation with self-development, it is recognised that “psychological theories of mental well-being in the East may consider measuring self-transcendence as an important ingredient of well-being” ([Joshanloo, 2014: 483](#)). [Wong \(2016\)](#) argues that self-transcendence is essential for wellbeing and that continual self-improvement is essential if a person is to realize his or her full potential. One major question is how far this can be achieved through the time and space-constrained phenomenon that is tourism. It is perhaps through those forms of spiritual tourism of extended duration e.g. pilgrimages or ashram-stays that tourists may move towards a sense of self-transcendence.

There are numerous articles and quotations which attempt to capture the relationship between travel and wellbeing, and especially the relationship to the self. Although it is thought that Michel de Montaigne ([Rigolot, 1992](#)) partly travelled to find relief from kidney stones in the thermal waters of Germany, he is also widely quoted as having said of travel that “Travelling through the world produces a marvellous clarity in the judgment of men. We are all of us confined and enclosed within ourselves, and see no farther than the end of our nose. This great world is a mirror where we must see ourselves in order to know ourselves”. German writer Wolfgang von Goethe described a ‘wellness-trip’ in thermal towns as having a ‘holistic’ (ganzheitlichen) character serving his health, his social pleasure (through the encounter with numerous interesting men and women), political discussions and negotiations, and writing ([Nahrstedt, 2004, p.39](#)). [Iyer \(2000\)](#) suggests that people travel in search of both self and anonymity, to lose themselves first and then to find themselves again. This notion implies that the desire for escapism and hedonism somehow precedes the need or desire for self-development, eudaimonia or transcendence. The length or nature of the trip or frequency of trips may determine this. In [Santayana's \(1964, p.1\)](#) often-quoted article on The Philosophy of Travel he states that “the possibility of travel (. . . .) lends a meaning to the images of the eye and the mind, which otherwise would be mere feelings and a dull state of oneself”. This implies that one not only sees the world differently but might also enhance the sense of self. The French existentialist writer Albert [Camus \(1962\)](#) did not believe that people mainly travelled for pleasure, but instead as an occasion for testing the spirit. Whereas pleasure takes people away from themselves and from God, travel – and the fear it creates – brings them back again.

Existential philosophers like Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre were somewhat preoccupied with fear or dread and anxiety and their impacts on understandings of the self. Existential philosophy was thought to have developed as a response to the rapid expansion of industrialisation and technology in Europe in the 19th and 20th Century which led to the alienation of humans from nature and natural living ([IEP, 2017](#)). Existentialism focuses on human concepts of personal freedom, pursuit of meaning and purpose, but also suffering and death. Central to this philosophy is the structure of human experience and understanding of self at the level of being. The theory of hedonic adaptation proposes that good and bad events may temporarily affect happiness, but most people eventually return to their so-called ‘setpoint’ ([Diener et al., 2009](#)). However, they may encounter periods of their life when there is a need to address existential issues, and within this, tourism may play a role. Good examples include spiritual (but not necessarily religious) pilgrimages, as well as visits to retreat centres, which focus on healing and personal development. [Nawijn and Filep \(2016\)](#) also emphasise that even dark tourism can be meaningful in the context of wellbeing. An example of this might include Jewish tourists who re-trace their ancestry from the Holocaust, a deeply meaningful but painful ‘pilgrimage’. [Kirillova and Lehto \(2015\)](#) provide a comprehensive analysis of existential authenticity in the context of wellbeing building on Wang's (1999), [Steiner and Reisinger's \(2006\)](#) and [Brown's \(2013\)](#) work. Through travel, one (re)discovers one's true nature or essence, but it also means confronting anxiety or dread and the inevitability of death ([Brown, 2013; Heidegger, 1999](#)). It certainly involves more than hedonic or

pleasure-seeking experiences and tends to be more eudaimonic, however, it is generally thought to be momentary or temporary (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Kirillova and Lehto (2015, p.121) conclude that the fade-out effect (i.e. the rate at which the benefits of tourism wear-off once a tourist returns home) which has been researched increasingly in tourism studies could be viewed as “a gradual descent in existential authenticity and an ascent in normal anxiety as induced by the lack of existential courage and tranquilization of normal anxiety. These mechanisms are postulated to be the driving forces behind the changes in wellbeing. Pleasure-seeking and hedonic activities first of all ‘tranquelize’ existential anxiety in the short-term. This goes back to Alain De Botton’s (2009) idea that hedonism and pleasure only provide a form of ‘temporary forgetting’ and a release from existential issues. However, those who engage in more meaningful or eudaimonic activities are likely to move closer to existential authenticity. As stated by Kirillova and Lehto (2015, p.122) “some vacation experiences offer a boost in existential authenticity of lesser magnitude while others may promote truly transformative changes”. Critical questions could be asked about whether the existential side of tourism experiences such as dark tourism really belong in the category of ‘wellbeing.’ Joshanloo (2014) argues that the Western approach to wellbeing tends to stress the maximisation of subjective wellbeing and the absence of negative emotions, whereas hardship, suffering and pain are seen as unavoidable in Eastern cultures. Coming to terms with ageing, illness, mortality or death is part of life’s challenge, but whether a holiday is the best place to engage with these thoughts, is perhaps where the debate lies. There may be times when eudaimonic experiences gained through tourism are unpleasant at the time, but can have delayed positive effects (Knobloch et al., 2016).

Constructing and re-defining the self may be an integral part of wellbeing. Again, it is important to note that cultures define self quite differently, and it is mainly in Western cultures that the self is connected to ideals of individualism rather than collectivism (Christopher, 1999; Walker & Kavedzija, 2015). Gazley and Watling (2015) disagree with the idea that tourists somehow ‘find themselves’ when travelling, but argue instead that self is created using symbolic products and experiences when abroad. The ‘tourist self’ is not considered to be a fixed entity. Sirgy and Su’s (2000) categorisations of the self would all apply here to varying degrees, including: actual self-image (how people actually see themselves); ideal self (how they would like to see themselves); social self (how they think others see them); and ideal social self (how they would like others to see them). However, transformational literature might argue that there is a ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ self which is revealed or emerges through travel (Reisinger, 2013; Smith, 2013). Brown (2013) suggests that tourism offers spaces for individuals to get in touch with their true selves, embracing freedom, lowering anxiety and facilitating an authentic lifestyle. Reisinger’s (2015, p. 5) work also supports this, arguing that

Travel can offer physical, psychological, cognitive affective and spiritual experiences that can change one’s assumptions, expectations, world views and fundamental structures of the self. Travel can offer a journey to a new awareness, development and growth. This journey creates new meaning, offers fulfilment of unsatisfied needs and develops new authentic experiences.

However, she also argues that only some types of tourism lead to transformation. Wellness tourism is a good case in point because it not only enhances the self but also groups and communities too. Smith (2013) also outlines the potentially transformative power of wellness tourism in terms of physical, emotional/psychological, existential, spiritual, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. It should be noted here that the term ‘wellness’ is used increasingly in the context of tourism (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009; Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009, 2013; Voigt & Pforr, 2013; Voigt et al., 2011). Nahrstedt (2008) argues that wellness is the path to achieving wellbeing. Smith and Puczkó (2013) suggest that wellness includes domains such as physical, mental and spiritual health, self-responsibility, social harmony, environmental sensitivity, intellectual development, emotional wellbeing, and occupational satisfaction. They go on to state that wellness addresses human health in a holistic sense and assumes that each person will actively participate in protecting their health, in preventing diseases and will not leave all this to medication. Increasingly, wellness has become more closely associated with spas, and especially those spas which offer lifestyle-orientated services rather than medical treatments. It arguably includes few of the objective factors (e.g. politics, economics, freedom) which feature in broader quality of life or wellbeing measurements (e.g. Eurofound, 2013; Gallup, 2013).

Connecting to or discovering the ‘true self’ may be negative and uncomfortable, however healing it may be (Lea, 2008). Reisinger (2013), Reisinger (2015) emphasises the challenges of transformation in terms of feelings of insecurity, risk or even trauma. Fu et al. (2015)’s study of online reviews of retreat guests revealed that many of them were driven to visit retreats because of physical, work or existential challenges, and Heintzmann (2013) describes how some tourists visit retreat centres to deal with or overcome negative or life events, such as serious illnesses, relationship break ups or the death of a loved one. Health and especially medical tourism are very much centred on healing and recovery. This returns once again to the existential argument that wellbeing and travel are also about the confrontation of anxiety and death, as well as engaging in pleasurable and hedonic experiences.

Again, however, whether these aspects of tourism experience really belong within the category of ‘wellbeing’ is debatable. It should be emphasised that for the majority of tourists, their tourism experiences would ideally fall into a pleasant or good life category. Most tourists travel with the hope and intention of having a good time and usually a better time than at home. The importance of fun and enjoyment should not be under-estimated and rest and relaxation are perhaps the most important aspect of a holiday. It could be said that lying on a beach offers as much of a meditative experience as yoga, just perhaps in a less ‘mindful’ way. Care must be taken not to fall into the trap of assuming (like Bentham, 1789 and Mill, 1863) that some activities are more ‘valuable’ than others, especially if one takes a subjectivist rather than objectivist approach to wellbeing

studies. On the other hand, a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic experiences is more likely to have long(er) term benefits. [Filep \(2012\)](#) advocates that tourism research should focus on authentic happiness ([Seligman, 2002](#)) rather than subjective wellbeing, as this notion integrates a good and pleasant life with its meaning. He also postulates that eudaimonic happiness (emphasising engagement and meaning) is similar to the concept of existential authenticity.

[Mitas et al. \(2016\)](#) suggest that little is known about how behavioural choices affect tourists' subjective wellbeing, and which types of holidays may be best for tourists and at what moment. Indeed, it can be argued that the timing and choice of a specific destination, type of holiday or even activity affect wellbeing outcomes differently. It should also be emphasised that the chosen activities undertaken during the holiday influence the wellbeing of tourists to a large extent. One example would be volunteer tourism: the traveller deliberately chooses a destination (often in the developing world) with the aim of helping the local community either through work for the community (construction and renovation aid, looking after animals), or through work with the community (teaching, working in an orphanage, looking after children etc.). The main benefit is less for the community than for the personal self-fulfilment of the traveller who has a meaningful experience leading to eudaimonic wellbeing. However, a volunteer trip is not necessarily only eudaimonic, but can integrate hedonic activities (such as partying with fellow volunteers or having a beach holiday after or during the volunteering). One of the major foci of this type of trip is however to improve the self ([McGehee & Santos, 2005](#); [Wearing, 2001](#)) and in consequence mental or emotional wellbeing. Other forms of tourism, such as cultural trips represent a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic experiences, depending largely on the type of activities. For example, a tourist visiting India might choose to visit the slums. Research has shown that visitors are uncomfortable before actually going to the slums for their own security and they often feel like voyeurs etc. ([Diekmann & Hannam, 2012](#)). However, they later consider the experience of visiting the slum as being the most meaningful of their entire trip, partly because they feel gratitude for their own situation (compared to the people living in the slums). This importance related by visitors even after several months shows that activities that require a certain effort on the part of the visitor and challenge his or her comfort zone as highlighted by [Knobloch et al. \(2016\)](#), eventually lead to a more enduring form of eudaimonic wellbeing. Another type of tourism is nature or landscape-based tourism. It is relatively well known that many Romantic poets, painters and artists were drawn to mountain landscapes, lakes and the light and colours of Southern Europe. Suicide levels tend to be much higher in those countries which suffer from dark, cold winters with sunshine and light deficit for long periods of the year.

Tourism practices and wellbeing

Increasing research has evidenced that tourism is beneficial for mental and physical wellbeing, but certain types of tourism have been researched more than others. One example is nature tourism where particular natural resources and climate can clearly influence wellbeing levels. For example, the benefits of 'blue spaces' are well-documented. [Kruizinga \(2016\)](#) examines the health benefits of being by the coast and at the seaside (especially those destinations which do not offer typical sun-sea-sand holidays). [Konu, Tuohino, and Komppula \(2010\)](#) also researched the concept of 'lake wellness'. [Smith and Puczkó \(2016a, 2016b\)](#) summarise the evidence-base for balneology and the use of thermal waters for health, and [Frost and Laing \(2016\)](#) and [McCarthy \(2016\)](#) discuss the wellbeing benefits of spas. [Konu \(2015\)](#) and [Lee and Kim \(2016\)](#) have researched the healing benefits of being in forests. [Steckenbauer, Tischler, Hartl, and Pichler \(2016\)](#) outline the medically-proven effects of natural resources such as landscape, climate and water (including waterfalls), especially in the Alpine region. Indeed, many authors in the recent *Routledge Handbook of Health Tourism* ([Smith & Puczkó, 2016a](#); [Smith & Puczkó, 2016b](#)) extol the virtues of natural and so-called 'therapeutic' landscapes.

Another type of tourism where the impacts of holidays on wellbeing are rather extensively studied is in social tourism research ([Diekmann & McCabe, 2016](#)). Focussing on the impact of holidays on wellbeing of specific target groups, for example, various authors observed an improvement in the wellbeing of children in low-income families ([Hazel, 2005](#); [Quinn, Griffin, & Stacey, 2008](#)). [McCabe and Johnson \(2013\)](#) detected changes in subjective wellbeing assessments amongst low income families before and after a social tourism holiday. Other social tourism research found that social tourism initiatives led to improved self-reported health amongst disabled people ([Bergier, Bergier, & Kubińska, 2010](#)) or improved the subjective wellbeing of senior citizens ([Kim et al., 2015](#)).

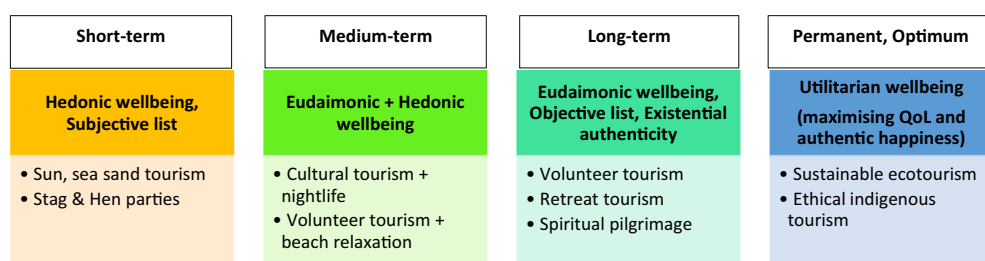
Although research connecting wellbeing and other types of tourism or specific activities during a holiday is still scarce, the theoretical concepts and philosophical approaches to wellbeing highlighted above can be connected to different tourism practices, such as types of tourism or specific activities undertaken on holiday. In the context of the development of new tourism (niche) products which can impact at different levels on the wellbeing of tourists, the long or short term impact on wellbeing can be of interest to tourism policy makers as well as tourism developers. There are indeed a growing number of travel companies that are trying to combine their products and packages in such a way that tourists enjoy a meaningful experience (e.g. volunteering) with a cultural experience as well as some relaxation and/or purely hedonic experiences. Such packages are also promoted as being sustainable and improving the wellbeing of local people too. Moreover, with an increasing concern and need in Western societies for more eudaimonic tourism experiences, new tourism products are constantly being developed which fulfil tourists' needs in this direction (but not necessarily taking into account the impact on the host community). [Table 1](#) attempts to link tourism practices to wellbeing concepts.

As explained earlier, certain concepts of wellbeing, such as eudaimonic experiences relate to a long-term impact as opposed to short term hedonistic experiences (see [Fig. 1](#)). However, the difference between long, medium and short term is difficult to determine time-wise. The length of impact of a tourist experience depends, of course, on myriad variables

Table 1

Wellbeing concepts and tourism practices.

	Main Proponents	Tourism practices
Utilitarianism (creating the greatest good for the greatest number of people)	Bentham Mill	Sustainable, responsible and ethical tourism which produces positive benefits for local residents while keeping tourists satisfied
Hedonic wellbeing (to experience as much pleasure as possible)	Aristippus Socrates and Protagoras in the Platonic dialogue Hobbes Bentham Ryan & Deci	Forms of tourism with benefits of fun and entertainment but which may have few health benefits (e.g. excessive partying and drinking)
Eudaimonic wellbeing (undertaking good and meaningful actions; self-realisation)	Aristotle Boniwell	Ethical and altruistic forms of tourism (e.g. volunteer work, charity treks). Adventure tourism and extreme sports where tourists fulfil a lifelong ambition or push their body and mind to the limit. Forms of tourism involving self-development and transformation (e.g. holistic retreat tourism) Forms of tourism that cause tourists to come to terms with or appreciate their own lives better (e.g. slum tourism, Jewish heritage tours)
Objective list theories of wellbeing (some of the elements that make peoples' lives better do so independently of their particular interests, likes, and cares).		Certain forms of health tourism involving medical treatments that make people feel better in the end but which are not pleasurable at the time (see also Eudaimonic Wellbeing)
Subjective list theories of wellbeing (something can benefit a person only if he or she wants it, likes it, cares about it)		Only engaging in those activities on holiday which one enjoys and which give desire satisfaction and maximum pleasure at the time (see also Hedonic Wellbeing)
Positive psychology (happiness or subjective wellbeing)	Pearce Deery Filep Nawijn Mitas Chen Sirgy Uysal	In theory, all forms of tourism can contribute to happiness and subjective wellbeing, either short-term or long-term
Quality of life		All forms of tourism can contribute to improving the quality of life of tourists. Some improve health with evidence to prove it (e.g. many forms of nature-based tourism)
Authentic happiness model (pleasant life, good life and meaningful life)	Seligman	Forms of tourism that provide pleasure and meaning for the tourist but can also benefit the environment and local people (e.g. ecotourism, indigenous cultural tourism)
Existential authenticity	Heidegger Sartre	Tourism which helps tourists to discover their true selves (e.g. wellness tourism, spiritual tourism)

**Fig. 1.** A Spectrum of Wellbeing and Examples of Types of Tourism [Fig. 2:](#) A Model of Integrative Wellbeing Tourism Experience [Table 1](#) Wellbeing concepts and tourism practices.

and is different for each individual person. Moreover, short and long term are not mutually exclusive. It should also be repeated that the paper's focus is on the tourists and not on the host community, who may not have benefited from the improved wellbeing of the tourists, particularly when considering certain tourism practices (extensive partying, socially or culturally disrespectful tourist behaviour, etc).

Based on [Table 1](#), a spectrum of wellbeing and examples of types of tourism is suggested as follows.

It could be argued that the 'optimum' form of wellbeing-inducing tourism would combine many of the dimensions and domains of wellbeing as discussed throughout this paper. [Fig. 2](#) suggests a model of integrative wellbeing tourism experiences. However, it is always important to question whether one can define a product or practices as being 'wellbeing

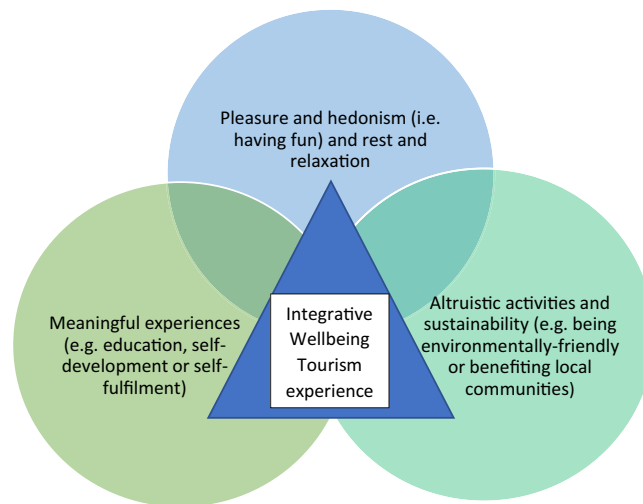


Fig. 2. A Model of Integrative Wellbeing Tourism Experience.

tourism', or merely to suggest that a given form of tourism can induce wellbeing in the participant. In addition, wellbeing may not even be a conscious motivation of a tourist or produce easily measurable outcomes.

This model suggests that the 'optimum' form of wellbeing-enhancing tourism would combine all of the dimensions contained within the concentric circles. However, it is recognised that this is relatively unlikely within one trip, although not impossible with careful planning or by selecting a pre-or co-created package. Tourists have different needs at different times which are dependent on numerous factors, not least time and money as well as culture, life-stage, etc.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the relationship between wellbeing and tourism is a complex one involving something of a spectrum of experiences embodied in episodic, hedonic forms of tourism (e.g. sun-sea-sand or 'stag and hen' parties) through to educational cultural tourism which may include some hedonic elements (e.g. shopping, nightlife) to retreat or spiritual pilgrimage trips which enhance a sense of existential authenticity, or those forms of tourism which also include altruistic or ethical dimensions (e.g. volunteer tourism). It could be argued that most people need a chance to escape, relax and recuperate on holiday and episodic happiness and hedonic pleasures are an integral part of this, but a time might come when more long-term, self-development or transformation outcomes are desired. This may happen as part of a personal quest or even accidentally or spontaneously. In terms of tourism development, it could be argued that destination planners need to adopt a utilitarian approach in order to ensure the wellbeing of the place and its people, as well as providing wellbeing-enhancing experiences for tourists. If Aristotle is to be believed, only eudaimonic happiness can provide the path to true and lasting wellbeing. Hedonism and pleasure are short-lived, even for the tourists themselves, whatever their subjective list or desire fulfilment tells them. Although eudaimonic and existentially authentic experiences may also only provide temporary wellbeing on holiday, the take-home effects that are created through these experiences may help to develop 'optimum' wellbeing being in everyday life.

However, more research is needed on the ideal duration, frequency, nature and location of tourism in order to explore these notions further. It is also important to consider how far gender, age, income level, marital status or culture influence the impacts of vacation experiences on subjective wellbeing. There is a need to consider wellbeing from an Eastern rather than a Western perspective especially as Asian tourism markets continue to grow. Policymakers and tourism developers will surely be interested in how different tourism practices (e.g. destinations, activities) inform different concepts of wellbeing. Research would also ideally be needed to verify how far tour providers' claims of maximising tourists' or residents' wellbeing are truly being met.

Future directions for research might include examining the links between wellbeing, sustainable tourism and CSR. This could also include further examination of tourism, wellbeing and (cultural) ecosystem services. The benefits of tourism for people with short and long-term health problems could also become an extensive field of study. In addition, although it could be argued that all forms of tourism contribute to wellbeing in some way, it is important to provide specific evidence of this claim, especially if long-term or repeated benefit is desired. For this, researchers may need to draw on the skills of medical scientists and not only psychologists to obtain the most reliable data. Indeed, an even more comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach to the study of wellbeing is clearly a prerequisite for any future studies.

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Melanie Smith is co-author of the book *Health, Tourism and Hospitality: Spas, Wellness and Medical Travel* (2013) with Dr László Puczkó. She has worked for over ten years on health tourism, including research, lecturing and the publication of several journal articles and book chapters. She has been an invited Keynote Speaker at many international Conferences, and has undertaken health tourism consultancy work in a range of countries, including for ETC and UNWTO. She has most recently been working on Baltic Health Tourism and Balkan Wellbeing concepts, as well as an EU COST project on Tourism, Wellbeing and Ecosystem Services. Her most recent teaching and research focuses on evidence-based healing resources and therapies.

Anya Diekmann is head of the tourism department at the ULB. Her research and publications focus on cultural and social tourism with a particular focus on social tourism systems, benefits and tourism rights. She has worked in various research projects on social tourism for governmental agencies and ISTO (International Organisation of Social tourism) and has recently participated in the COST Action Tobewell. Amongst others, she co-edited with Scott McCabe and Lynn Minnaert the book 'Social Tourism in Europe: Theory and Practice' (2011) and with Louis Jolin 'Social Tourism: International Perspectives. The Contribution of Research' (2013).