Wellbeing tourism

and its potential in case regions of the South Baltic

Lithuania - Poland - Sweden

Lindell, L. (ed.),
Dziadkiewicz, A.,
Sattari, S.,
Misiune, I.,
Pereira, P.,
Granbom, A.,
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Linnæus University
Sweden

EDITOR:
Lindell, L.[1]

AUTHORS:
Lindell, L.[1], Dziadkiewicz, A.[2], Sattari, S.[1], Misiune, I.[3], Pereira, P.[4], and, Granbom, A.[1]

[1] Linnaeus University, Sweden.
[2] Gdansk University, Poland.
[3] Vilnius University, Lithuania.
[4] Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania.

Main author contribution for each theme:
Introduction: Lindell, L.
Wellbeing tourism concept: Lindell, L.
Lithuania: Dziadkiewicz, A., Misiune, I., & Pereira, P.
Poland: Dziadkiewicz, A.
Sweden: Sattari, S.

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351 95 Växjö
Tel.: +46 0772-28 80 00
E-mail: registrator@lnu.se
Web: www.lnu.se

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

This report was produced as a collaborative effort between three partners, Linnaeus University in Sweden, Gdansk University in Poland, and Mykolas Romeris University in Lithuania. The study was made possible by generous support from the Swedish Institute to the project PRE SBWELL – a preparatory study for the planned project *Sustainable tourism for wellbeing in the South Baltic region,* with additional co-financing from all partners. The funding was used to review literature on sustainable tourism and wellbeing tourism; to make study visits to natural areas and to small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) offering products or services in the wellbeing sector in the selected case regions; and, to keep one workshop in each participating country (case region) together with local private and public actors in tourism. In this report is presented a selection of the results and experiences gained from these listed activities. Note that the content of this report is the view of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Swedish Institute. We would like to thank SI and all collaborative partners and tourism actors who have supported and contributed to this project.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background – tourism, health and the environment

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries. We travel as never before and future projections show a continuous increase (UNWTO, 2011). In 2015 international tourist arrivals reached an all-time high of 1.2 billion (UNWTO, 2017). For 2030 UNWTO estimate 1.8 billion of arrivals with the largest share (over 0.7 billion) in Europe (UNWTO, 2011). The increase may become even larger in the northern parts of Europe, such as the South Baltic region, when e.g. tourists usually visiting the Mediterranean region redirect to temperate regions due to temperature increase (EEA, 2014). The trend of increasing travel is in many regions, such as overall in the European Union (EU) further supported by a political will to increase tourism turnover. In Sweden for example, the national strategy for growth is set for tourism to be the new base industry of the country and that the turnover is doubled over in 10 years (2020; Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, 2016). The ever-increasing number of tourists makes a large impact on the environment and highlights the importance of addressing environmental sustainability in the tourism sector. To highlight this UNWTO selected the year 2017 to be the international year of sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2016). Further, the United Nations has adopted a number of development goals to be reached by 2030 to ensure progress towards sustainability (UN, 2014). Many of these goals can be associated directly or indirectly to tourism, although in particular the goals number 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 12b (Responsible Consumption and Production), and 14 (Life Below Water; UNWTO, 2015). Many tourism actors, however, assess that this is no way near what is required to reach a healthier travel industry. Some of these actors came together agreeing on the so-called "Berlin declaration on transforming tourism" (2017) where they called for a fundamental change in how travel and tourism is approached (see http://www.transforming-tourism.org/).

In parallel to the increased pressure on the environment from intense travel and tourism there is a trend of decreasing health. Within the European union, stress and depression have become major challenges for both adults and children. These conditions are significant contributors to disease and loss of life quality among the population. In fact, mental health issues and stress-related imbalances are the main causes of early death in the EU (WHO, 2001). The current lifestyle with increasing workloads, more stationary work and spending less time outdoors are contributing factors. The population is experiencing an increase in overweight with one third of the 11-year old children being obese (OECD, 2016). Childhood obesity is strongly associated with e.g. increased risk for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, orthopedic imbalances, mental discomforts, low self-esteem and underachievement in school (Dietz, 1998). For adults, the share of obese individuals was one-ninth the year 2000 and only 14 years later it had increased to one-sixth (OECD, 2016). It is thus of uppermost importance for the welfare of our society that the governing bodies take actions that redirect this currently experienced negative trend in health.

The healing power of nature is well known and well documented. Nature and the services it provides are a key aspect for human wellbeing (Sandifer et al., 2015). A large number of recent studies have showed that a regular contact with nature is very beneficial for both psychological and physiological aspects of life. It has for example shown to result in a decrease in illness and mortality rates related to stress and obesity (Chang et al. 2016; Cleary et al. 2017; White et al., 2017; among others). Individuals that visit urban parks during longer

periods have a lower rate of depression and lower blood pressure than those that do not (Shanahan et al., 2016). People that visit nature areas frequently feel happier and that their lives are of more value (White et al., 2017). Environmental volunteering can also increase wellbeing. It can increase health of the participants and improve the connection with the nature and rural communities (Molsher & Townsend, 2016). Other activities where human interaction with nature have shown to produce wellbeing are e.g. farmers participation in agro-environmental programs (Saxby et al., 2017), nature conservation and gardening (Mumaw et al., 2017). Leisure activities and tourism have shown to benefit individual wellbeing, independently of the age, gender and social status (Brajsa-Zganek et al., 2011). There is thus an opportunity to contribute to higher life quality through tourism activities.

At present tourism has become one of the fastest growing industry globally and its future projections are to continue in the same direction (UNWTO, 2017). Since the growth rate of tourism is enormous, on an average 43 million international arrivals per year, and because travel involves various transport systems and a large number of people, it is one of the key factors that can improve sustainability (UNWTO, 2011). How we travel has an enormous effect on the sustainability of our development. Thus, even smaller changes in how we choose to travel can create substantial improvements on our path towards sustainability. In fact, sustainability has nowadays become a driver of growth (European Commission, 2014a). One of the sectors highlighted as having the highest potential to drive sustainability is Coastal tourism. It is the second highest after short-sea shipping (European Commission, 2014a).

Although awareness among the general public varies geographically people are becoming more and more conscious about the environmental effects of traveling and overall consumption. This, together with an increased awareness on personal health, has caused people to request products and services that promote health and wellbeing. Health, wellness and wellbeing in tourism are trends directly attributed to the changes in values and lifestyles of modern society including economic prosperity (Hjalager et al. 2011). There is an increased interest in health, beauty, prevention of disease and aging, self-improvement etc. all which are associated with a desired high quality of life, self-fulfillment and enjoyment of experiences (Hjalager et al., 2011).

The increase in environmental awareness and aspiration to lead a healthier lifestyle can for example be seen in the increased demand of ecological and locally produced products. In Sweden, since the year 2012 the turnover of ecological foods has more than doubled, and in some areas the demand is larger than the supply (Ekoweb, 2015 & 2016). There is also a growing interest in spending leisure time that involves physical exercise, mental relaxation (e.g. spa, meditation retreats) and most recently recreations where one can experience dark skies and an environment free from electronic noise from the society. More consumers are now travelling with the specific purpose of improving their general wellness and health and this particular tourism segment shows considerable potential for future growth and prosperity (Hjalager et al., 2011).

Aim

The aim of this study is to develop an understanding of the concept of wellbeing tourism and propose a definition suitable for the South Baltic region. The purpose is also to gain a comprehensive view on the current state of wellbeing tourism, and its potential for development, in selected coastal or near coastal regions of the South Baltic.

Methodology

To achieve the stated aim literature on sustainable tourism, wellbeing tourism and related concepts such as wellness tourism and sustainable tourism was reviewed. In each participant country (Lithuania, Poland and Sweden), a certain region of study was selected for in depth studies. These so-called case regions are the complete coastal stretch in Lithuania, Pomerania county in northern Poland, and the island of Öland in southeastern Sweden. Study visits to areas of natural heritage were made including Färjestaden (Talludden and Granudden beaches) and Köpingsvik (Köpingsviksbaden beach) on Öland, Sweden; Skanör-Falsterbo region with Ljunghusen and Skanör beaches, Sweden; Curonian Spit with the city of Nida and the Naglis dune, Lithuania; the cities of Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot, Kashubian region with Rekowo Górne and Pobrzeże Koszalińskie, Poland. Study visits to small to medium sized companies (SMEs) offerings products and services related to wellbeing tourism included Ekerum Golf and resort, Ölandschoklad, Hotel Skansen, Öland, Sweden; Balneo Hospital (that offer e.g. sodic-iodide-bromide salt spring baths, carbonic acid baths, inhalation therapy, cryotherapy, therapeutic mud), Mera Spa Hotel (since then acquired by Marriott International), and Quadrille Conference & Spa and hotel, Poland; Vanagupe hotel with Golden Spa, Lithuania. In associated projects, we previously also visited Hotel Wieniawa and Dolina Charlotty spa hotels in Pomerania region, Poland. We further held three workshops together with private and public actors in tourism, one in each country and selected case region, Öland in Sweden, Palanga in Lithuania and Gdansk in Poland.

2. THE WELLBEING TOURISM CONCEPT

Overall concept

Despite wellbeing tourism being a relatively new concept there are many definitions on wellbeing tourism and there are also several related concepts. Commonly the term wellbeing tourism may primarily be associated with tourism that promotes personal health. This type of tourism is frequently better known as wellness tourism and/or medical tourism. Wellness is a term more familiar in Scandinavia while Medical tourism is a well-established concept and product in the Baltic States and Poland. A study by the Finnish tourist board defines wellbeing tourism as a specific type of health tourism that should be considered independently from medical tourism (2005). Another more recent Finnish study confirms this opinion and recommends that wellbeing tourism should be branded as a unique form of tourism and not equaled to other concepts such as wellness or health tourism (Konu et al., 2011). A fundamental difference between wellbeing tourism and medical tourism is that the latter is focused on the cure or relieve of an individual's disease or discomfort, usually rather specific functions or parts of the physical body. Wellbeing tourism on the other hand is intended to promote and maintain a state of holistic wellbeing (Konu et al., 2011). This view is supported by The World Health Organization and Global Wellness Institute (2006; 2013): health is "not merely the absence of disease of infirmity" but "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being" emphasizing proactive maintenance and improvement. Further, holistic wellbeing refers to the wellbeing of the body, as well as of the mind and the soul (Konu et al., 2011). Here wellbeing can be understood as a state of balance (Dodge et al., 2012), and thus wellbeing creates and sustains a balanced state of the being (body, mind and soul).

Commonly the term wellbeing tourism is associated with tourism that concerns personal health. However, wellbeing tourism can only truly bring a state of comprehensive wellbeing if it is developed and carried out in harmony with the environment and the community it draws upon. This can be understood contemplating the more widespread and well-known concept of sustainable tourism. For this study we apply UNWTOs definition of sustainable tourism; "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO, 2013). According to UNWTO, for tourism to be sustainable it should (rephrased) "make optimal use of environmental resource, maintain essential ecological processes and help to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity, respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve and respect the built and living cultural heritage and traditional values of the host communities and ensure viable, long-term economic operations providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed".

Hjalager and Flagestads (2012) definition of wellbeing tourism agrees well with the one described above (based on Konu et al. 2011) with the following addition: "Wellbeing is an individual issue but is manifest only in congruence with the wellbeing of the surrounding environment and community." Natural resources are at the core of the wellbeing tourism product and wellbeing tourism builds upon a perspective that is not only holistic but also long-term (Konu et al. 2011 & 2015). Wellbeing tourism can thus be perceived as an extension of the sustainable tourism concept. It is thus implicit that wellbeing tourism is sustainable. A

product or service can only bring wellbeing in its true sense if it is created and carried out in a way that is in line with a sustainable development. Thus, it is suggested for wellbeing tourism to be developed with the specific intention to bring wellbeing to the individual tourist as well as to the place the product or service draws upon. The latter implies sustainable interaction with the external environment including both the community and nature.

Based on this discussion on wellbeing tourism, we suggest the following definition for wellbeing tourism to be applied: “a specific type of tourism intended to promote and maintain a positive state of health of the body, mind and soul, and that is composed of products and services drawn upon a sustainable and harmonious interaction with the surrounding environment and community.“ Thus, according to our definition of wellbeing tourism, it is a comprehensive concept that implies sustainability. It comprises tourism services and products that bring wellbeing to the visitor as well as to the host destination (community and nature). More briefly it could be stated: “a specific type of tourism intended to promote and maintain a continuous state of balance and harmony”.

There are numerous products and services that could be considered as potentially being encompassed within wellbeing tourism. The Finnish tourist board (Renfors, 2010 in Konu et al., 2011) suggests a model where high-quality wellness products and services make up the main content of wellbeing tourism. These are for example baths, sauna, beauty treatments, refreshing and natural treatments, physical exercise, and places for silence and relaxation. Many of these are traditionally provided by spa facilities however wellbeing is a much wider concept and also importantly include natural areas such as the coastline and forest, infrastructure to enable access and activity in the nature such as paths for biking and trekking and beaches, as well as healthy nutritious food products.

Lithuania

In Lithuania the concept of wellbeing tourism is not well established, there is no perception of an integral wellbeing that comprises both the tourist and the host community. Among the general public and tourism actors there is a widespread notion of sustainable tourism, with the main focus on the environment and community, and of wellness tourism, with main focus on health and enjoyment of customers. In recent years however, an increasingly larger number of Lithuanian researchers are engaged in the discourse of wellbeing, both in tourism-related areas as well as in relation to medicine, psychology and other health related sciences (see for example: Juozulynas et al., 2009; Gataūlinas, 2014; Servetkienė, 2013; Degutis & Urbonavicius, 2013; Vaznonienė, 2014).

Sustainable tourism

In Lithuania, sustainable tourism is a more commonly used concept compared to wellbeing tourism (Hopeniene, 2009). The most common definition of sustainability in Lithuania is “development which meets the needs of the present time and allows the coming generations to meet theirs” (Grundey, 2008). The concept includes economic, environmental, and social aspects of development, or economical, ecological, and social dimensions of sustainability. The focus of sustainable tourism is providing better conditions for both the tourists and for the local society, while simultaneously preserving the natural environment (Grundey, 2008). Four

principles of sustainable tourism to facilitate visualizing the concept and its introduction to the Lithuanian tourism sector has been proposed by Grundey (2008):

- Ecological sustainability: tourism development must be carried out with the objective to preserve the ecological systems, the variety and uniqueness of landscape and natural resources.
- Economic sustainability: tourism development must be effective and beneficial economically, and all resources must be controlled in order to preserve them for future generations.
- Local sustainability: tourism development must be beneficial for local communities and must guarantee economic benefit for the local regions.
- Cultural sustainability: tourism development must be in line with local culture and cultural values. It must also help to preserve and strengthen the cultural identity.

Wellness tourism

The closest concept to wellbeing tourism that currently is used in Lithuania is wellness tourism, although the term health tourism is also used. Lithuanian researchers (such as Hopenienė & Bagdonienė, 2013) apply the definition of wellness provided by the World Health Organization, which states "wellness is the extent to which an individual or a group is able to realize aspirations and satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment" (WHO, 2016).

The concept of wellness in Lithuania has been used and spread in the last few years. Wellness is by academics recognized not only as not being ill, but also as a holistic harmony of a body, mind and spirit, which is defined as high-level wellness or optimal wellbeing (Langviniene & Sekliuckiene, 2009; Mueller & Lanz Kaufman, 2001; Supapol et al., 2007). Mueller and Lanz-Kaufmann (2001) emphasize that wellness is a state of health characterized by the harmony of body, mind and spirit with self-responsibility, physical fitness, beauty care, healthy nutrition/diet, relaxation, meditation, mental activity and environmental sensitivity and maintaining good human relations. According to Smith & Puczkó (2006) wellness in Lithuania is belived to create harmony on the mental, physical and spiritual level and/or improve biological health in general, and it is more related to leading a healthy lifestyle than to treating a specific disease.

An analysis of the segments of wellness service customers in Lithuania allows identifying the main motives of the wellness service customers (Langviniene & Sekliuckiene, 2009). The motives of the Lithuanian wellness service customers as well as the activities and the locations that supply them can be divided into four main groups:

- Medical/cosmetic: Customers possessing these motives most frequently have a clear goal to cure certain diseases or to undergo cosmetic surgery. These motives are met in hospitals, beauty clinics, and sanatoriums.
- Physical/hedonistic: These motives are held by customers wishing to experience pleasures, engage in physical activity and relaxation with the aim to reduce tension caused by routine. These customers have their needs met in spas (massage, water procedures in swimming pools, saunas, mud baths), as well sport and fitness clubs, yoga and pilates studios etc.

- Escapism/psychological: Customers with these motives most frequently choose to engage in active or passive activities in the open country, attend holistic centres focused on self-development or philosophical contemplation.
- Spiritual/community oriented: These motives are held by customers that want to be completely disconnected from the routine like daily life. They search for possibilities to balance their spiritual, mental and physical health by going on pilgrimages, engage in meditation exercises and spiritual healing often according to eastern cultures, do voluntary or charity work, or spend time in holistic centres.

Poland

Similar to in Lithuania, in Poland the concept of wellbeing is not yet well established. A few researchers have turned their attention to wellbeing, but the research field is still relatively new. There is a growing interest however in the topic and it may be the result of an increasing awareness on environmental issues among entrepreneurs and tourists. Some researchers treat wellbeing tourism as a specific type of wellness tourism while others use the terms interchangeably (Sheldon & Park, 2009; Majewski, 2014).

Sustainable tourism

The concept of sustainable tourism, building upon a sustainable development (Niezgoda, 2004) is more well-known in Poland compared to wellbeing tourism. Sustainable development is one of the national constitutional principles, that was included in the new national constitution in 1997. It states: “The Republic of Poland shall safeguard the independence and integrity of its territory and ensure the freedoms and rights of persons and citizens, the security of the citizens, safeguard the national heritage and shall ensure the protection of the natural environment pursuant to the principles of sustainable development” (Sejm.gov.pl, 2016). Implementation of this regulation by tourism services providers can be manifested in different activities like sustainable use of natural resources, reduction of harmful emissions, rational waste management, training of staff, use of eco-friendly office supplies, and use of environmentally friendly heating systems (Dembińska-Cyran, 2005). It is further stated that tourists should be actively involved in this process.

Sustainable tourism is a tourism that takes into account “the durability and flexibility of natural environments which depends in considerable part on the intensity of human activities” (Poskrobko, 2005). Further, “it should be tied to economies and fit the ethical norms of a given community” (Dudek & Kowalczyk, 2003). Sustainable tourism optimizes durability through long-term development objectives and through efforts to achieve balance between the economy and environmental conservation. Polish researchers have specified criteria that should be met in order for tourism to be assessed as being sustainable. These criteria are related to compatibility with nature, as well as include social, economic, technical and material conditions (Mirowski, 2002; Niezgoda, 2004). According to Zaręba (2000) sustainable tourism should include the following characteristics:

- Promote a healthy and productive model of life
- Promote openness and tolerance for other nationalities
- Contribute to preservation of natural resources and to protection of local cultural heritage

- Involve local people already at the planning stage
- Provide new quality employment to local residents
- Minimize waste, energy and water consumption, eliminate use of harmful substances, and motivate employees, customers and local communities to pro-ecological actions

Despite the popularity of the term sustainable tourism there are many other associate terms that also are used in Poland, wellbeing is however not one of them (Niezgoda, 2004).

- Green tourism – emphasizing protection of the natural environment
- Soft tourism – as opposed to "hard tourism" that may cause damage to the environment
- Responsible tourism – highlighting responsibility for not affecting the environment in a way that has negative consequences on its ecological functions
- Environmentally friendly tourism – where the emphasis is placed on the biological environment and on the social and cultural environments
- Agrotourism – a form of rural tourism based on agricultural farms, which provide lodging and are in themselves the main attraction
- Alternative tourism – as opposed to mass tourism, this concept emerged to counteract industrial civilization and consumerism
- Ecotourism - a form of active and profound travel learning experience that involves visiting destinations where the flora, fauna and cultural heritage are intact, a tourism that does not damage the fragile balance of biological ecosystems, sustains the cultural integrity of local people and, provides financial means to uphold the preservation of those features

Wellness tourism

In Poland there is a long tradition of curing physical health through medical spa in so call sanatoriums. The main motivation for foreign tourists to visit Poland is in fact wellness recreation to enhance their health and state of being (Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, 2017). To achieve that, they undertake activities such as physical fitness, medical treatments and beauty care, water-based therapies, meditation, relaxation, and they enjoy the exploration of a different culture.

Over the past years there has been a vast development in the wellness industry, including a growth in the number of spas and wellness hotels in Poland. Wellness has become a megatrend. It is apparent that words like mindfulness, wellbeing and wellness are associated with the desired lifestyle, stressed individuals from the city-scene seek new ways of living healthy and full lives. Polish literature views spas and health resorts as popular destinations with a number of protected natural on-site natural resources such as mineral or thermal water, offering a contact with nature contributing to health and wellbeing. Polish spas tend to be functional, utilitarian and regimented in their delivery; where 'improving health' is achieved through basic, traditional treatments, connected with a special venue. There is also a belief that just staying within the spa environment is beneficial, that improvements in health and a state of wellbeing occur simply 'being there' (Smith & Poczkó, 2014).

Worth to notice is that most of the Polish health resorts offer their services to people who need treatment due to different diseases and are thus branded as medical spas. These would thus classify as part of medical tourism and not wellness or wellbeing tourism. Further, a large number of these resorts are available (and adapted) only for Polish citizens since they

are financed by the state government and would thus be regarded as being the Polish health establishment rather than being part of the tourism industry.

Sweden

The concept of wellbeing tourism in Sweden is, similar to other countries, a more recent development within the tourism sector, and a relatively new niche segment within the global travel and tourism industry (Global Wellness Institute, 2013). The concepts of wellness and wellbeing have long been intertwined with several aspects of day-to-day life such as the aspiration to minimize the risks of disease, increase life expectancy and a desire to lead more fulfilling lives. The concept of wellbeing tourism has until now generally been regarded as a subset to sustainable tourism where focus is shifted from the wellbeing of society to the consumer's internal wellbeing. In terms of terminology tourism has been used in numerous different concepts where sustainable tourism ("hållbar turism") and eco-tourism are two of the most well-known. There are some variations to these such as responsible tourism ("ansvarsfull turism").

Although the Swedish society has experienced an increase in the perceived importance, interest, and value of living longer and minimizing the risks of disease and health problems among the general public, there is a general lack of existing literature related specifically to wellbeing tourism (Omma, 2013). Several governmental institutions have taken it to themselves to investigate the possible outcomes and benefits of the expansion of wellbeing tourism in Sweden, either individually or in conjunction with other Nordic and Scandinavian institutes. Studies within wellbeing tourism in the Scandinavian and Nordic countries tend to be primarily conducted as a joint effort between countries including Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland and stem in part as research conducted by universities, corporations or governmental institutions. As an example, a report on Nordic wellbeing tourism from 2011 by the Nordic Innovation Centre presents such a cooperation encompassing various researchers across the countries.

In Sweden, the concept of physical, mental and social wellbeing is commonly abbreviated as FMS ("Fysiskt, Mentalt och Socialt välbefinnande") whose methodology is based on the definition provided by the World Health Organization (2006) and has given rise to national initiatives such as Svenska Institutet FMS, which promotes schools across the nation to implement targeted physical, health and lifestyle activities to increase general wellbeing for students (Svenska Institutet FMS, 2017). Governmental institutions, such as the Swedish Tourist Board promote the concepts, and also ideologies of wellbeing and wellness tourism destinations to visitors across the country (Visit Sweden, 2017a & 2017b). The Swedish Tourist Board regularly publishes informational articles on eco/green travel destinations, spa destinations and other wellness related areas or companies (Visit Sweden, 2017a & 2017b).

Sustainable tourism

In terms of terminology within tourism; sustainable tourism ("hållbar turism") is one of the most used concepts for environmentally conscious tourism in Sweden. Sustainable tourism is defined in Sweden as a tourist that considers the social, environmental and economic impacts of travelling, i.e. a tourism that promotes the people and environment, and which

benefits all involved at the tourist destination (Globalportalen, 2016). It is about using tourism as a means of creating positive change in society; ensuring meaningful, responsible experiences for travelers and raising their awareness of sustainability issues (Reform Travel, 2018). This is in line with the World Tourism Organization's definition of sustainable tourism: "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (Qian et al., 2017; UNWTO, 2018). Sustainable tourism implies reducing environmental impacts while simultaneously ensuring social and economic benefits for local communities and the support of cultural heritage.

Wellness tourism

With the rise in obesity in Swedish society, e.g. the World Health Organization estimates that one in four Swedish males will suffer from overweight by 2030, health and wellness have become an increasingly popular trend in Sweden (SVT Nyheter, 2013; WHO, 2013). This increase in wellness ideology has transcended into the choice of vacation destination as more and more Swedish consumers search for active vacations rather than leisure (Sporthälsa, 2016; Dagens Industri, 2015). Similarly, the concepts of individual physical and mental wellbeing have given rise to newer forms of tourism such as spa-tourism. Wellness tourism in Sweden has experienced a peak in consumer interest (Olsson & Stark 2013). As a result, a number of municipalities have turned to wellness and sports activities to increase their number of visitors and accommodate this new trend (Olsson & Stark, 2013).

In some cases, wellness tourism is also referred to as medical tourism ("medicinsk turism") and generally involves the recent trend of migration of tourists from wealthy countries to less wealthy ones for the purpose of treatment of disease where it is less costly (Dagens Nyheter, 2003; Donnström & Hifawi, 2013).

3. WELLBEING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

Lithuanian coastline

Lithuania is partly promoted as "The Land of Health and Care". This marketing idea is based on the principle that Lithuania is considered to be a country with a rich culture and tradition of health tourism (Smith & Poczkó, 2013). Foreign visitors constitute approximately 24% of the health tourists in Lithuanian spas (Kazlauskiené, 2013). This high number may be due both to high quality treatments and to competitive prices. In 2009, Lithuania was assessed as the 10th best country in the world for medical tourism (Knufken, 2009). Some of the treatments are unique to Lithuania, or the Baltic Region, such as the use of Amber, a material that has healing properties (Smith & Poczkó, 2013; European Commission, 2014b). Amber therapy includes diversified breathing exercises, bioactive points massage, which produce regeneration and healing. The clients lie on mattress covered with small amber pieces, smelling the aroma of herbs and amber.

Since 1995 the total number of international visitors to Lithuania has gradually increased. In 1995 Lithuania received 650 000 international tourists while in 2011 the number was 1 775 000. Most of the international visitors originated in neighboring countries with the largest number of tourists from Belarus (19 %), Russia (15 %), Poland (12 %), Latvia (10 %), and Germany (9 %). Only 3% of the visitors came from Sweden (Spiriajevas, 2013). For most of them the main purpose to visit is leisure. This is the reason why they often choose to stay for a weekend or two to three days only. Almost one quarter of tourists choose to stay in spa resorts or sanatoriums (Langviniene & Sekliuckiene, 2014). Most of the visits are medically orientated and the main objective is to cure disease. c). Mineral waters, therapeutic mud baths and associated treatments are very popular. The majority of the visitors concentrate in the largest cities and resort areas. The most popular destinations for foreigners are the capital Vilnius as well as Kaunas, Klaipeda and other spa resorts (also referred to as “sanatoriums”) such as Druskininkai, Palanga, Birštonas and Trakai (Langviniene & Sekliuckiene, 2014). The ones in focus of this study are those located along the coast of Lithuania, Palanga and Klaipeda.

The Coastal region of Lithuania, including Klaipeda city and district, Palanga city, Kretinga district, Neringa and Silute district municipalities, is one of the regions of highest priority for tourism development in the country (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2014). The aim of this development is to improve the private and public infrastructure for green (ecological) tourism and to promote it as such.

The Coastal region of Lithuania is stretching for 92km along the western border of Lithuania. The area is composed of different parent materials from terrestrial and marine origin, such as moraine cliffs, sandy beaches, fens, inshore waters and an underwater slope (Dailidiene et al., 2006). The vegetation is mainly composed of Pinus trees (Kutorga et al., 2012). The Curonian Spit is composed of a 98 km long sandy swath. Inhabitants from more than 5000 years created the spit. The Curiónian spit is divided between Lithuania and Russia's Kaliningrad province and extends south from the Lithuanian seaport of Klaipėda. The most important cities in this area are Palanga and Sventoji that both have a high number of tourists during summer season. Since 2000, the Curonian spit is included in UNESCO world heritage list because of the forested dunes and the cultural landscape (Povilanskas, 2009). The park hosts the largest moving sand dunes in Europe, such as the Parnidis dune in Nida. Visitors can enjoy high quality facilities, such as spas, restaurants, walking and biking paths. Despite the existence of good facilities, tourism is seasonal and the local authorities are promoting the region, inviting investors to create more attractions during the low season. Other important locations in this region are Nida and Juodkrante, a mountain of witches drawing upon Lithuanian mythology, (on the Curonian spit), and Nemunas Delta Regional Park. The latter is the host of Ventės Ragas Ornithological Station. It is a fragile and peaceful ecosystem of pine groves and sand dunes. The park also experiences the effects of seasonality in tourism although it has a lot to offer during the colder part of the year, e.g. relaxation therapy given its beautiful nature and low number of inhabitants.

Palanga is a large seaside resort in western Lithuania, famous for its parks and pinewoods. Palanga’s goals presented in “Palanga city strategic development plan until 2020”, states that the main aims are to promote the resort internationally in the Baltic Sea Region and to develop a sustainable wellbeing tourism with and its associated services. Palangas climate is marine, characterized by small temperature changes over the year, warm summers and

rather soft winters. The movement of air masses between the sea and coast creates natural ventilation of the seaside, which is welcome in the summer. There are a variety of treatments offered by the spas in Palanga. Most of them are standard spa treatments, and many using Asian cosmeceuticals and therapies. In Palanga there is a musical fountain, the largest dancing fountain in Lithuania where 260 water nozzles and 48 different color lights produce a spectacular show. In the summer, the fountain entertains visitors with the dance of music, light and water. Anyone can select favorite melody from a special playlist for a fountain to dance to by sending a text message (see muzikosjura.lt). Next to the Tyszkiewicz's Palace, currently the museum of amber, are beautiful palatial gardens. Towards the coast the garden changes smoothly into pine forest over sandy dunes. Historically the park was divided into two parts: a small palatial garden and an area for SPA clients. One of the lanes in the park leads to the legendary Biruta Mountain, from which the madly in love Kestutis was said to kidnap his lady Birute. Till present there is a small chapel and a Baltic Sea viewpoint from the mountain. Another lane in the park leads to the beach, which combined with the coastal pines, creates a picturesque scenery.

Klaipeda is a port city in Lithuania. The city has a long and difficult history, partially due to the combined regional importance of the ice-free port of Klaipėda. It was ruled by successive German states until the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Thus, Klaipėda's Old Town is prominent among other towns in Lithuania for its German and Scandinavian type of architecture. Currently, the city has high quality infrastructure: the port of Klaipeda that accepts cruise ships, Palanga's airport at a distance of 34 km, and, is well connected through the main national network of roads. The city has had a constantly growing numbers of visitors in the last 10 years. According Klaipeda Tourism and Culture Information Centre the majority of the foreign visitors are from Germany, USA, Latvia, England, and, Russia (2016). Despite that the city's main industries are shipbuilding and offshore structures, chemicals and plastics, food, beverages and tobacco tourism have their niches as well. The development of tourism marketing tools and certification of beaches are among the priorities of Klaipeda city (Klaipeda City, 2013). The city has several sandy beaches and there is a wellness trail (in Smiltyne). There are several high-quality bike paths in the Giruliai forest for relaxation or active sports and there are plenty of SPA centers, which provide massages and other services.

Poland/ Pomerania

Pomerania is a region on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea. The largest Pomeranian city is Gdańsk. Pomerania is characterized by farmland, dotted with numerous lakes, forests, and towns. It is a glacial land and therefore rich in picturesque hills, lakes and rivers, ideal for canoeing. The hilly cultural region of Kashiubian has a distinct culture, etno-language, cuisine and customs compared to the rest of the country. It is surrounded by forests, lakes, and a long stretch of coastline including the exceptional Hel peninsula. The main attraction in the Pomerania region however is the Sea and adjacent environments. There are sand dunes, especially magnificent are those of Słowiński National Park, vast beaches, and forests in which you can find wonderful bike and walking trails. Gdansk-Gdynia-Sopot is the metropolitan area in Pomerania. It is called Tricity because the infrastructure of the three cities is fully inter-connected. The oldest and the greatest part is Gdansk. Gdansk is a unique city of more than one thousand years with an extraordinary atmosphere. In 2017, it was chosen as one of the European Best Destinations (ranked third), which is a European tourist organization situated in Brussels aiming at tourist and culture promotion in Europe. In the summer of 2016, more

than 770 000 tourists from all over the world visited Gdansk. Gdansk is considered to be a safe destination; it is recognized as a tourism brand in itself and has become a popular destination most notably after Euro 2012 European Football Championship. Gdynia is one of the largest seaports in Poland. At the beginning of the 20th century it became a seaside resort town and started to experience an inflow of tourists, which also triggered an increase in local population. In 2013, it was ranked as Poland's best city to live in and topped the rankings in life quality category. Sopot is wedged between Gdynia and Gdańsk and is a major health-spa and tourist resort destination. It offers beautiful beaches and interesting and unique architecture. It has the longest wooden pier in Europe stretching out into the Bay of Gdańsk.

The Pomerania region is receiving the highest number of short-term arrivals in Poland. Weekend stays lasting 2-4 days accounted for 74% of total arrivals. The longest stays occur on the Hel Peninsula and on other coastal strips. According to a study by the Polish Tourism Organisation, the Pomerania region is the most attractive in Poland according to Poles themselves (Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, 2013). They mainly associate it with relaxation and recreation on the local beaches. Nearly half of the respondents stated that Pomerania is more attractive in terms of tourism and recreation than any other Polish region. Almost all (94%) informed that their stay in Pomerania met their expectations, and more than half of them said that it was characterized by high quality of products and services. The most important features of the Pomerania province as reported by the native tourists, is the access to the sea and beaches, but also the diversity of the landscape, and the friendly and hospitable atmosphere.

Poland has numerous health resorts, spas, medical spas, wellness hotels and medical clinics. They offer high quality products, drawing upon the natural and cultural heritage. Hydrotherapy has been known in Poland since the XVIII century. Salt springs inhalation and bathing, therapeutic mud, using honey and herbs are very popular products. The official Polish definition of a health resort is contained in the Act on spa treatment, health resorts and protection zones of health resorts and health resort municipalities (Journal of Laws, 2005). It is defined as an area where spa therapy is provided, dedicated for the use and the protection of its natural medicinal resources, such as waters and peat with specific qualities. In order for a municipality to be recognized as a health resort, a health resort study has to be prepared. This document allows ascertaining whether or not a given area meets the requirements listed in the Spa Act. Subsequently, at the request of the Minister of Health, the Council of Ministers grants the municipality the status of a health resort. The status of a health resort or a spa protection zone creates the legal and organizational grounds for providing spa treatment in the given area and to offer recreation and other tourist activities. The Ministry distinguishes three types of health resorts, determined by the presence of natural medicinal resources (Mz.gov.pl., 2016); a spa is a health resort with medicinal waters, a health resort is a resort that uses medical peat; a mixed health resort is a health resort with access to both medicinal waters and peat bog.

One of the health promoting resources available in Poland is the occurrence of therapeutic waters of which a large part are brines, i.e. waters with a naturally high concentration of salt. According to data provided by the Ministry of Health, there are 45 statutory health resorts in Poland. Seven of them are located on the Baltic Sea coast: Dabki, Kolobrzeg, Kamien Pomorski, Swinoujscie and Polczyn-Zdroj in the West Pomeranian region and Ustka and Sopot in Pomeranian region. Their location is conditioned by the presence of

the maritime climate and the natural healing sources such as therapeutic waters (Krawiec, 2012).

In the Pomeranian region, Ustka and Sopot are locations that provide the largest variety of medical spa treatments. Their main purpose is to cure disease yet tourist who look to relax and prevent disease are however also welcome. In Ustka there are three sanatoriums (Medi-tour.pl, 2016). The main advantages of this location are the maritime climate, an abundance of pine forests and sandy beaches, as well as natural resources that can be used for treatments such as mud, peat and brine. The sanatoriums offer e.g. hydrotherapy, thermotherapy, phototherapy, therapeutic massage, electro- and magnetotherapy, laser therapy, kinesiotherapy and cryotherapy treatments. Sopot has been known as a medical resort since the beginning of the XIX century. In Sopot there are three health resorts available for tourists. There is also a rheumatological hospital, Lesnik Sanatorium that treats rheumatologic and heart illnesses and the sanatorium of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration that treats illnesses of the vascular system. These sanatoriums however are available only for Polish patients. Nevertheless, there are many private medical and spa centres, which offer a wide range of treatments available also for international guests. In the center of Sopot, near the beach and the pier, there is an inhalation “mushroom” that allows for inhalation of salt spring air and there is also a salt spring drinking room. Although international visitors are welcome it can be challenging to visit since all information is in Polish.

The above listed resorts are regarded as providing products and services in the medical tourism sector. In Poland, similar treatments are also offered by spa and wellness resorts. These are more attractive from an international wellbeing tourism perspective. In Pomerania there are 105 spa facilities (here defined as objects offering two or more different spa treatments; Bieluszko & Grobelna, 2015). Of these, 40 used the term spa or spa & wellness as a part of their name and 53 offered their customers’ spa services packages. Moreover, 40% of them offered a wide variety of spa services, which include swimming pool, sauna, hydro-massage, fitness and gym facilities, as well as beauty treatments. Many of them also offer relaxation rooms, emphasizing the psychological aspect of wellbeing. Two of the objects offer beer spa, i.e. treatments based on beer instead of water (Bieluszko and Grobelna, 2015).

Many researchers have noticed the positive influence of maritime climate on health, which, combined with the use of seawater and sea natural products is called thalassotherapy. Iodine-saturated air is considered a remedy for allergies, asthma, hypothyroidism and cardiovascular illnesses (Makała, 2016). Besides stays with focus on therapeutic treatments to cure diseases, more and more people visit sanatoriums to prevent illnesses or just to relax and have a change of setting. Out of Polish and foreign visitors to sanatoriums, the majority women aged between 45 and 65 years, 69% visit to stay healthy and 68% to relax (Niemiec & Trzcińska, 2011).

Over 35% of the spa & wellness facilities in the Pomerania are located in Tricity. In this region, there is a subregion - the East Pomeranian Lakeland and the surroundings of the Tricity, with an abundance of spa facilities. In this sub-region, 17 facilities have received spa sector awards, but only a few of them inform customers on their websites. Thus, they do not use the full marketing opportunities offered by building the image of the spa facilities on the basis of recognized awards (Bieluszko & Grobelna, 2015). Most popular treatments in the spa hotels are massages, sauna, and beauty treatments for face and body (Wojdakowski &

Dróżdż, 2008). According to a public survey conducted among spa visitors in Poland, 10% of the citizens visit spa facilities on a regular basis. Their main aim is to relax and unwind, and to a lesser degree also improve their appearance (Grochal, 2015).

A major challenge in identifying authentic spa and wellness resorts in Poland is that some facilities contain in their names the terms spa and wellness while they do not offer any associated treatments. For instance, they may offer the use of a swimming pool or a jacuzzi and apply the term spa only for promotional purposes. The misuse of this term is possibly due to lack of legal regulations that could create standards of services in the sector. In Poland, there is no proper national spa association, which would set accurate criteria for spa services and introduce a system of spa hotel certification (Dryglas, 2013). According to research conducted by Comfortum, a company that owns two websites regarding the spa sector in Poland, only 50% of the facilities that uses spa & wellness in their name complies with standards customary to the sector (Rapacz & Jaremen, 2013).

In recent years new trends are appearing in the Polish spa & wellness sector (Dawidowski, 2015). More and more resorts include sport activities in their offers as well as typical relaxation treatments, focusing on both the body and the spirit. More and more customers demand high quality services as opposed to a wide choice of treatments. Some Polish spas are introducing the “lifestanation” rule, invented by American futurologist, Edie Weiner, which means that people look for things that are compatible with their lifestyle and when they find such place, it becomes a part of their everyday life (Dawidowski, 2015).

Another more recently developed facility is Lavender stomping grounds, “Lawendowa osada”. The Lawendowa osada is a holiday farm surrounded by forests and lavender fields located in Przywidz. Lawendowa osada is the first and largest lavender field in Northern Poland. There is a Spa village with hydrotherapy, salt cave with halotherapy, chromotherapy and music therapy, and different kinds of hot tubs. While relaxing in one of the treatment rooms, customers inhale dry, salt-enriched air into the lungs. The salt loosens and clears mucus, inflammation is reduced, and symptoms subside, sometimes for up to 12 months. Meals are prepared from local products including lavender. Lavender cosmetics are offered as well however surprisingly there are so far no treatments drawing on lavender.

The Słowiński National Park is a precious protected natural area shared between two administrative districts: Słupsk and Lębork. The park is unique due to moving sand dunes, the highest being 40m tall. Depending on the weather, mostly on the strength of the wind, the landscape changes dramatically. Because of the vast open space, the amount of sand and its weather created patterns, the landscape resembles that of a desert. Here however, the sand is next to the freshness of the Baltic Sea.

In Poland, there is a growing popularity of agrotourism as a form of sustainable tourism. Agrotourism consist of provision of tourist services on rural farms. Tourists are attracted to such destinations due to the following: landscape, nature, culture of the local inhabitants, cuisine and local events (Majewski, 2014). Such type of tourism is also trendy, especially among young city residents. Many of the farm owners provide sports and fishing equipment, bicycles, and opportunities for mushroom picking, horse riding and other outdoor activities. It is also popular to have the ability to interact with domestic and farm animals and they have a calming influence. It is worth noticing that some of these farms do not grant access to Internet

or television, assuming that someone who is looking to relax on the countryside does not need technological advances (Puciato et al., 2010). Among the reasons for choosing agrotouristic environment as holiday destinations are the opportunities to relax and reduce stress, spend time outdoors and improve health, as well as enjoy natural food and relatively low costs of stay (Prochorowicz & Stankiewicz, 2011).

Sweden/ Kalmar/ Öland

Sweden is one of the most environmentally conscious countries in the world (Visit Sweden, 2010:4), and research shows how a close-to-nature lifestyle affects wellbeing positively (Visit Sweden 2018b). In marketing Sweden internationally, brochures and websites highlight the availability and beauty of its untouched nature and local traditions, accessible to all (Visit Sweden, 2018a). Through the Outdoor Access Rights ("Allemansrätten") in Sweden everyone has the same rights and opportunities to enjoy nature´s resources. This Outdoor Access Rights gives visitors the right to walk, cycle, ride, ski and camp on any land with the exception of private gardens, which attracts international adventurers. To many, hiking and cycling are considered wellbeing activities. Municipalities in Sweden have created many cycling- and hiking trails that are accessible for free. In addition, shelters are available for sleeping with access to firewood.

Sweden attracts many foreign visitors because it is sparsely populated, with the natural resources of vast forests, mountain scenery, numerous lakes and islands along the coasts. In 2017, the total number overnight stays in Sweden were 16.2million (Tillväxtverket, 2018a). Most visitors from outside Sweden come from Norway, Germany and Denmark. However, guest nights from long-distance visitors are increasing at a faster pace than from the Nordic countries. The visitors from overseas amount to 24% of all foreign overnight stays, which has increased from 13% since 2010 (Tillväxtverket, 2018a). Americans dominate the number of long-distance visitors, but the number of Chinese tourists is strongly increasing (Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2018). Although Stockholm is the destination that attracts most visitors, the activities that include cultural and natural resources also attracts foreigners to visit Sweden which, in turn, contributes to the consumption by visitors in other sectors, such as accommodation and restaurant (Tillväxtverket, 2018a:13; Utrikespolitiska Institutet, 2018). It is also within this concept of beautiful nature and healthy lifestyle accessible to anyone that Visit Sweden[1] markets Sweden (Visit Sweden, 2018b). In a survey by leading stress researchers on how nature affects people's wellbeing, the result revealed how a "close-to-nature" lifestyle reduces blood pressure, stress levels and heart rate by 70% after only 72 hours (Visit Sweden, 2018a). Sweden has vast expanses of nature resources. The national park Sarek, often called the "last true wilderness of Europe", is located in the northern part of Sweden, and Kungsleden, located in the same area is one of the most popular hiking trails.

Along with the other Nordic countries, the perception of wellbeing in Sweden is oriented towards nature: "outdoor experience and enjoyment combined with healthy local gastronomy, local culture and cleanliness of air, nature and water" (Hjalager et al., 2011). With the international demand for experiences in nature, it has become popular in Sweden to develop

[1] Visit Sweden is half owned by the Swedish government and the other half of the Swedish tourist industry.

concepts in new nature-based activities. Enterprises are creating nature and wildlife expeditions combined with exotic activities and “close-to-nature” facilities with good food. Examples of sustainable tourism for nature lovers and those tourists searching for unique experiences include lodging in the ice hotel above the Arctic Circle, or experiencing a floating sauna while staying in a forest hut and cooking the local food over an open fire or staying in a wooden cabin adjusted for photographing bears, wolves, moose or other wildlife. Other close to nature adventures can be dog sledding, watching the fantastic Aurora borealis, meeting with the indigenous Sami people and becoming familiar with their culture and traditions, meeting reindeer and experiencing the Midnight sun in the summer.

Though not the main reason for foreign tourist to visit Sweden, spa health has become increasingly popular among Swedes. Therefore, the quality of spa treatments has improved, and many new spa facilities have been established throughout the country. Wellbeing spas cultivate personal stillness with simple but luxurious treatments following the health traditions of Swedish that are reflected in the Nordic design of the facilities. Many of the highest quality spa facilities are located along the coasts that offer beauty treatments, massage, and yoga in relaxing and beautiful environments with local gastronomy.

Kalmar County (“Kalmar län”) is part of the Småland province and is located in the southeastern part of Sweden. The population is almost 244 200 with a density of 22 individuals/km^2 (2018). The county holds an abundance of unique nature such as Alvaret on the island of Öland, Kalmarsund's coastal meadow, two national parks (Blå Jungfrun and Norra Kvill), and more than 100 nature reserves. The total area of Kalmar County is over 11 200 km^2 and the 4 750 km long eastern part stretches along the Baltic Sea where the island Öland is located that is part of the county (this island is described more in detail below).

There are numerous free outdoor activities available for anyone who enjoys nature. Kalmarsundsleden on the mainland is a well-maintained hiking and biking trail that passes many bathing sites and attractive places along the seaside. In the northern part of the County there are lakes and picturesque old villages. The number of spa facilities has increased significantly in recent decades, which can be said to be a renaissance for the spas with health wells that were popular during the turn of the 20th century in Kalmar County, (although the crucial importance of localization at that time was due to special wellbeing of spring water). The number of retreat centers with yoga and meditation are increasing. Local bakeries with bread baked on organic ingredients has become a sought-after asset.

The seat of residence and administration of Kalmar County is located in the city of Kalmar. In 2018, Kalmar was chosen as Sweden’s summer city of the year for the fourth time in a row. The city is surrounded by water, and the center itself is situated on its own island. Beaches are located in the city of Kalmar, as well as along the county´s border to the seaside, and there are many long and smaller beaches on the island Öland. The first IRONMAN event in Scandinavia was held in Kalmar in 2012 and has been organized in the city annually since with almost 3 000 participants yearly that in 2018 arrived from 46 countries. The event has become a festival of people that attracts a large audience of spectators to cheer on the participants when they swim in the Baltic Sea, bike over the long bridge to the island Öland to cycle 180 km, and finally run a marathon through the central parts of Kalmar.

Major efforts have been made to sponsor beach volleyball tournaments on both the mainland of Kalmar county and the island Öland, which attracts interested players from different locations. Several private actors have invested in activities for children, such as youth camps with outdoor activates and pig-safari for the little ones. With a rich nature and environmentally friendly surroundings tourism has an excellent potential of developing concepts for the consumer's internal wellbeing in Kalmar County.

Öland is a long-stretched island of 1 350 km^2 located in south-eastern Sweden. The island can be reached by road over the six-kilometer long Öland Bridge that connects the island to the city of Kalmar on the mainland of Sweden. It is also possible during the summer to reach the island by boat. Byxelkrok located on the northern part of the island is reached by the car ferry (June to August) departing from the city of Oskarshamn (north of Kalmar), and during April to September the bicycle ferry run between Kalmar and Färjestaden, which is located on the southern part of Öland. At current, it is not possible to go by bike or walk over the bridge. Biking around Öland has been popular for decades, and there are a variety of hiking trails, which one can walk - with or without a tour guide. The island hosts a diverse landscape and is one of the most popular destinations among tourists in Sweden. Two administrations run the island, Mörbylånga in the south and Borgholm in the north.

There are already SMEs using ecological and local food as part of their branding and mainly on the eastern side of the island ecological production is in focus. The Agricultural Landscape Öland makes up most of the southern part of the island and is a UNESCO world heritage. Öland contains the largest area of Alvar on Earth. The Alvar is a flat and vast limestone pavement with nutrient poor shallow soils. This has created a habitat extremely rich in flora, including rare, endangered and endemic species. Other main features of the island attracting tourists are numerous beaches (nearly 50); natural reserves (over 70); abundant bird life; population of harbor seals; rare flora including wild orchids; rich cultural heritage including castles, forts, hundreds of wooden windmills scattered over the island, thousands of off coast shipwrecks, a great artist community and the summer residence of the royal family (Lindell et al., 2017).

4. SUPPORT AND CHALLENGES FOR WELLBEING TOURISM

Lithuania

The idea and practice of a healthier lifestyle is becoming more and more apparent in Lithuania. People pay increasing attention to health, organic food and physical activity. Many people wish to change their lifestyle to become healthier. The main tendencies that influence the tourism sector are similar. The Lithuanian wellness services consumers are motivated by the desire to live healthy, disease prevention, rejuvenation and relaxation, authentic experiences, reduce stress and manage lifestyle habits, personal growth, spa and beauty, and healthy eating Langvinienė & Sekliuckienė, 2014).

Lithuania has a long tradition of medical spa resorts. The main difference in using the wellbeing and medical services is that the wellbeing services are treated as a voluntary activity,

proactive, non-invasive, and non-medical in nature. The wellbeing services industry is attributed to one of the niche tourism industries, such as sport tourism, eco/ sustainable tourism, culinary tourism or cultural tourism, agricultural tourism, and, adventure tourism. The wellbeing industry includes various categories of service providers, such as lodging in resort places, healthy food and nutrition, healthy excursions and activities, buying healthy products, internal transportation, other services (not directly related to wellbeing, but acting as supporting activity, for example, insurance, transportation, telecommunication companies). The specific places which can be visited for wellbeing services could be spa saloons, resort wellness centres, retreats, Ashrams, thermal or mineral baths, and cruises (Langvinienė & Sekliuckienė, 2012).

The Lithuanian tourism market has great potential. A number of factors that may be perceived as to positively and negatively influence tourism development, tourists' choices, and Lithuania's potential as a wellbeing destination, has been identified by Spiriajevas (2013). On the positive side Lithuania is a small country with a low population density (ca. 49 individuals/ km²). It is rather homogenous in terms of culture, language, tradition and cuisine, devoid of political and religious tensions. It is situated between East and West on the Eastern border of the EU region with a great history and authenticity (reflections of Polish, Belarusian, Russian and German history and cultures). There are vast forests, and numerous wetlands, lakes, coastal zones and a dense network of protected areas, which can contribute to tourism development such as vital rural lifestyle and rural traditions, surround Lithuania. Reasonable prices, a well-developed national tourism information system, and good quality of tourism services in relation to western standards in the context of hospitality services (food, drinks and entertainment) are also positive aspects, that influences wellbeing tourism growth. According to Ligeikienė & Vosyliūte (2009), the most important current conditions for development of wellbeing tourism and sustainable tourism in Lithuania are:

- The abundance and diversity of Lithuanian natural and cultural resources that allow for development of sustainable tourism products (ecotourism, ethical, responsible, "green" tourism)
- The diverse variety of geographical landscapes in Lithuania (22 geographically isolated types of landscape)
- The general legal requirements of tourism business comply with international standards
- Ecological, water (sea and river), and rural tourism development are identified as priority areas in The Tourism Development Strategy

Among factors which could be limitations to establishment of wellbeing tourism is insufficient tourist infrastructure e.g., lack of campsites, of integrated tourist routes with Latvia and Estonia for gaining the Baltic Region experience, lack of tourist and social information and communication between Lithuania, Poland and the Kaliningrad region as well as undeveloped winter activities, which include a short tourist season and a specific climate (quite cold and humid) are not preferable for foreign tourists to practice wellbeing (Spiriajevas, 2013). Additionally, lack of regional cooperation between the neighboring countries for tourism marketing and dissemination of tourist information, lack of clear tourism strategy for Eastern markets (Russia, Belarus and other CIS countries). Insufficient internal cooperation between public, entrepreneurship and the research sector, the so-called Triple Helix model. There is also an external barrier concerning foreigners outside EU e.g., from Russia, Belarus and other

CIS countries due to visa requirements. The main challenges for the development of sustainable tourism and wellbeing tourism are (Ligeikienė & Vosyliūte, 2012):

- A low level of awareness of the concept of sustainability and wellbeing among the owners and managers of tourism enterprises
- An approach purely based on demand is used for the development of the accommodation sector, the environmental impact of development is largely ignored
- A lack of legal measures to regulate tourist flows into protected areas despite of the fact that the system of protected areas in Lithuania includes all types of geographical landscapes and covers 11.4% of the country (e.g. Curonian spit)
- That the development of "green" products and services is regarded time-consuming and require the performance of complex pre-project research
- A lack of harmonization of interests between different economic entities and various state governments as well as self-government institutions

Poland

There is a challenge introducing sustainable tourism practices in the Polish economic environment. There are general issues related to systemic solutions and to the state of the country and society, and specific issues concerning tourism development based on the principles of sustainable development (Niezgoda, 2004). There is a lack of coherence in the sustainable development policy held by the government. Past years of centrally planned economy in Poland resulted in a reluctance to ratify long-term development plans and strategies, just because of negative associations connected with those terms (Niezgoda, 2004). Hence, it is necessary to create clear principles of sustainable tourism as well as wellbeing tourism that would be accepted and understood by all business entities as well as administration and governmental bodies. In Poland sustainable tourism, and thus likely wellbeing tourism as well, is further associated with pretentiousness among the general public, which significantly hinders its development (Niezgoda, 2004). Business based on ecological principles is also perceived as less profitable compared to "normal" business (Niezgoda, 2004).

Adequate spatial planning and introduction of foreign architectural ideas to the local environment are well-known challenges. Causing spatial chaos and violating ecological principles is common. The local culture is of major importance in the creation of the image of a tourist destination and it influences the local tourism market. This is why the creation of tourism products and services should be coordinated on the local, as well as on the national level. Some researchers suggest that Poland should exchange experiences with other countries to evaluate existing achievements in this area (Butowski, 2004; Dziadkiewicz & Nieżurawska, 2015; Komorowski, 2000; Szromnik, 2012). There is also a suggestion to create "a strong lobby that would require ecologically and culturally friendly policies" (Niezgoda, 2004). Thus, it is advisable to disseminate sustainable tourism as well as wellbeing tourism among government and local authorities, that can be driving forces for a development of new and more sound tourism directions.

Another noteworthy challenge in Poland is the low level of ecological awareness among the general public. According to the TNS report based on results obtained from social survey on this topic, commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment in 2014, only 46% of the

respondents are familiar with the term “sustainable development”. The research shows that people pay low attention to acquiring knowledge on ecology-related topics. Of the respondents 72% reported that they never searched for any information about environment protection. The Poles are also reluctant to renewable energy. Of the respondents 64% declared that they would not use renewable sources. However, it was the fourth consecutive year of the survey and in comparison, to previous years there was a tendency of increasing ecological awareness (Ministry of the Environment, 2014), and with awareness an increased acceptance and openness to green initiatives and technology is likely.

In Europe, there are numerous eco-labeling systems but in Poland it is not yet a well-established practice. In recent years, however, a growing interest in the topic can be observed. A study commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism and Sport (European Commission, 2014c) allowed making a diagnosis of the conditions in the tourism sector. The results were to be used for creation of a sustainable tourism labeling system. The Ministry focuses mainly on rural environment, planning to create a certification system specifically for farm tourism. The quality systems in rural tourism in Poland are currently limited to a voluntary system of categorization of accommodation facilities maintained by the Polish Federation of Rural Tourism of Hospitable Farms (“Gospodarstwa Gościnne”). The main challenge is that the label takes into consideration only the standard of accommodation, ignoring the issues of environmental awareness among the owners of the facilities as well as the use of natural resources to encourage people to visit their places.

In a study identifying potential benefits and challenges that may be the result of introducing eco-labeling system in Poland it was shown that in the northern part of the country, the most commonly indicated benefits from being awarded with a label were: possibility to acquire new clients, increased attractiveness compared to other companies offering similar services or products, following ecotourism trend, regaining credibility of visitors, raising environmental awareness among the employees and visitors, and financial benefits (Manthey, 2015). Among the most common noticed limitations and challenges were: difficulties in creating a recognizable brand and maintaining high quality, no guarantee that increased investments will bring tangible benefits, fear of inspection, frequency of inspections and the necessity of fulfilling some additional requirements, bureaucracy, and high costs of certification. Initial steps to create an eco-labeling system were already taken by the Ministry of Tourism and Sport but there is still a long way to go (Starowiejska, 2014). However, past experiences show the need to create eco-certificates on a wider geographical range than national such as for the Baltic Sea region (Kamieniecka et al., 2014).

Sweden/ Öland

Internationally, Sweden has come quite far in progressing sustainable tourism e.g. Sweden has pursued sustainability issues within the European Travel Commission, is a member of the UN Global Compact to implement universal sustainability principles, and in 2009 was the host country for the international conference "Travel & Tourism in the Green Economy". Swedish tourism industry has good conditions for attractive sustainable development, and many companies and organizations, such as Scandic, ICEHOTEL, Naturens Bästa and STF have worked strategically and purposefully with environmental issues and sustainability (Visit Sweden, 2010). Nationwide, entrepreneurs have begun organizing

tours with focus on wildlife far away from touristic areas. Sweden is often associated with nature, not least because of the Right of Public Access ("Allemansrätt"), that gives the right to pick wild berries, hike, walk, cycle, and camp on any land. In 2019, Sweden hosted an international conference on sustainable nature tourism. The reason that Sweden was selected as host for this event is the proximity to nature, even in the cities (Tillväxtverket, 2018b). Swedes also pay an increasing attention to healthy food, physical activities, retreats and activities that mitigate stress. With an increased need and the demand for wellbeing activities municipalities have invested in wellness and sport activities (Olsson & Stark, 2013). Through Sweden's rich natural and cultural values, and the increasing demand in activities and products that support a healthy lifestyle, the country has a great potential to embrace the concept of wellbeing, but clear guidelines on what it entails are needed.

In order to take advantage of the resources of wildlife in Sweden and the cultural heritage of sustainable tourism development, greater cooperation between different municipalities in terms of sustainability and development opportunities is necessary (Wall-Reinius, 2014). Further, although the concept of sustainable tourism is well implemented in Sweden, improvements need to be made of sustainable solutions in destinations and companies. For example, so far the cities' tourism organizations have not encouraged and facilitated specific sustainability efforts, instead the companies need to develop their environmental goals and measures themselves (Visit Sweden, 2010).

Both the authorities and the businesses on the island of Öland are becoming increasingly aware of the importance as well as potential of tourism for regional development and they are also becoming more interested in sustainable tourism (Laneborg & Lindström, 2012). This makes it likely that tourism will have a clearer position in the coming regional development plans and thus more political support for SMEs to go in that direction. The Kalmar County administrative Board (of which Öland is part of) has taken initiative for a network with participants working towards sustainable tourism, including SMEs. They wish to collect all the regional resources into one forum. It supports experience exchange and knowledge building among those that have the possibility to act in the direction of sustainable tourism.

One of the challenges the tourism sector is facing on Öland is water scarcity. It is an increasing risk to tourism, industry and daily life on Öland. This risk brings increasing awareness on the importance of innovative and sustainable solutions in tourism SMEs. It pushes the region to put more attention and funding into aspects of sustainability (such as water management) and to do it promptly. Another challenge for tourism SMEs on Öland is the short high season. It attracts the occurrence of "pop-up businesses" that may not care so much about the wellbeing of the local community and local environment, and commonly are highly profit oriented. Further challenge is the increase in car traffic on Öland that has led to the need for constructing more bicycle roads to prevent traffic accidents. In promoting sustainable tourism on Öland, when this report was written, there was no clear strategy, vision or goals (or no strategy at all) on municipal level, on tourism development and sustainable tourism development.

Despite the importance of the tourism sector its attention in the regional and local development plans is highly limited (personal communication: Linnarsson, 2017). This is expected to increase in the forthcoming plans however at current the visions and goals regarding tourism are limited. Furthermore, in municipalities there is commonly not enough

staff focusing on tourism development or sustainability in tourism. Limited time or resources are allocated to this theme despite its importance. Lack of established guidelines on sustainable tourism practices is another challenge for tourism SMEs who want to move towards sustainable development. Government support as well as community support was pointed as facilitators of sustainable tourism development (Sattari et al., unpublished). Accordingly, a cross-border network, a guide on sustainable tourism and joint marketing tools on how to promote their business to the right market are highly needed and helpful in the survival as well as development of sustainable business practices.

An interview study performed on Öland reveal that the majority of the local SMEs wish to build a positive image for their sustainable activities, spread the word and knowledge about themselves, and attract more visitors and communicate their brand to them (Sattari et al., unpublished). However, they are concerned that they either do not know how to or lack the resources to do that. They were concerned that even if they were to take large steps towards sustainability, the target customers would not be aware of it due to lack of proper promotion and marketing activities. Hence, a challenge for them is that despite of their efforts they are not visible enough to the target market since they do not have enough resources and money to spend on expensive marketing tools and activities as large tourism organizations do. They perceived that even when they are working on becoming more sustainable the tourists and potential customers are little aware of their sustainable practices and efforts. They commonly communicate a need for help with building their brand, strengthening their sustainable profile and promoting and marketing it to the appropriate audience and market. Moreover, although many tourism SMEs are eager to support local products, they state the production of ecological food locally/regionally is insufficient to meet the demand.

Investment opportunities and funds (both private and public) for companies that lead the sustainability transformation seems to be available. However, many times, despite possibilities of applying for funding for support, SMEs that wish to take action towards sustainability have to do this on their own. Thus, they need to have the courage and possibility to risk the funding, time, and energy to be invested in the new approach. This can e.g. be because it takes too long time to have a response on whether the funding is granted or not. Usually e.g. it is not allowed to have started the project before the decision of being granted funding is taken.

5. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As of yet wellbeing tourism has not yet found its own fixed definition amongst Lithuanian, Polish or Swedish tourism actors, tourists or even academics. For example, the majority of research does not clearly define wellbeing tourism within a certain national or regional context and alter between applying the term wellness tourism, wellbeing tourism, health tourism, and medical tourism. Our work has shown that a clear definition of wellbeing tourism that is adapted by business entities as well as administration and governmental bodies is important as well as clear, long-term strategies and goals for its implementation. Drawing on an extensive desk study of academic literature on wellbeing tourism, wellness tourism and sustainable tourism in the Nordic, European and global setting, the following definition for wellbeing tourism is proposed: “a specific type of tourism intended to promote and maintain a positive state of health of the body, mind and soul, and that is composed of products and

services drawn upon a sustainable and harmonious interaction with the surrounding environment and community.“ According to this definition, wellbeing tourism is a holistic concept that implies sustainability. It comprises tourism services and products that bring wellbeing to the visitor as well as to the host destination (community and nature). In its essence it is “a specific type of tourism intended to promote and maintain a continuous state of balance and harmony”.

It is possible to use the enormous interest in travel and tourism to create positive changes both for individual health and for the state of the environment. There is a potential to transform tourism from being a stressor, in particular for the environment, to being a driver for sustainability and health. This view is shared by UNWTO that when speaking on 2017 being the international year of sustainable tourism expressing that tourism “is a unique opportunity to build a more responsible and committed tourism sector that can capitalize its immense potential in terms of economic prosperity, social inclusion, peace and understanding, cultural and environmental preservation” (Statement by secretary-general of UNWTO in 2016). The South Baltic Region has the potential to become an active part of this process. The region is renowned for its vast natural, fresh and clean spaces and there is a rich tradition within the wellness and wellbeing sectors to draw upon (e.g. spa, sauna, and active outdoor leisure such as swimming, biking and trekking). The region has great potential for providing high quality products and services in tourism that fulfills the increasing need and demand for intact natural environments, fresh air, clean beaches, silent forests etc. The potential of the South Baltic region in wellbeing tourism is reflected in the selection of “Increased development of the South Baltic area’s natural and cultural heritage assets into sustainable tourist destinations” as a priority in the Interreg South Baltic funding program (2014-2020).

Given the rich natural resources and relatively clean and pristine setting of the South Baltic region, as well as a long wellness tradition creating health from nature, tourism companies have a good potential to develop concepts that contributes to visitors’ wellbeing. As pointed out by Hjalager et al. (2011), the term wellbeing can be geographically segmented and thus the concept used for marketing on both local and international markets. This should be explored further, in particular for Lithuania and Poland that may have a slightly different character to its wellbeing essence, products and services compared to Sweden. The results of this study are in accordance with previous studies that correlates wellbeing tourism in a Swedish setting mainly with nature and outdoor experiences, local food and cultural heritage and a clean, fresh and accessible environment (Hjalager et al., 2011). Lithuania and Poland have an opportunity to a larger extent to draw upon their long and qualitative tradition (that contributed to an accumulated profound knowledge and great experience) of spa and health resorts while Sweden could also build upon their related heritage but here more in terms of cold bath houses, saunas and use of spring waters for health. For the former two countries it is particularly important to separate the wellbeing tourism offers that focus on relaxation, maintenance and enhancement of health (prevention) and pleasure from the pure medical offers (cure and e.g. surgery) that has well established and largely different target groups. It is also suggested to identify and strengthen the cultural heritage that may contribute to wellbeing tourism offers such as the tradition in Lithuania and Poland of using salt, mud and amber as part of creating wellbeing.

It is however, according to the concept of wellbeing presented in this report, essential to embrace the need for sustainability and to ensure that the requirements to fulfill sustainability

are met as a base for the wellbeing offers. In particular in Lithuania and Poland, but also present in Sweden, is a widespread perception among SMEs that sustainable tourism and measures to achieve it is associated with increased and high costs as well as substantial time investments. Increasing the awareness and knowledge on sustainability as well as on wellbeing among SMEs is important and necessary to increase the implementation of these practices. Our interactions with tourism SMEs revealed that that many SMEs do want to be identified with sustainability and wellbeing, but many are unsure of how this can be carried out in a way that works for them. Thus, companies, in particular the smaller ones are in the need of receiving support in the form of knowledge and facilitation on practical solutions that are tailored to them. Experience exchange among tourism SMEs and documentation and sharing of good practices would also provide support.

Further, small entrepreneurs struggle with how to market their companies in a way that makes customers willing to pay for sustainable products or services, they also find marketing troublesome and costly. It is thus recommended to introduce measures that assist marketing efforts for tourism companies that are in line with sustainability and wellbeing. This could be in the form of digital marketing such as in the form of joint marketing on thematic platforms. Common guidelines could be developed (both nationally and internationally), that outline the requirements for companies to be categorized within wellbeing tourism. Fulfilling the criteria of such guidelines and using the wellbeing concept as a framework for marketing of tourism offers may support the attractiveness of SMEs and may be advantageous in particular on the countryside and in smaller towns, which also has the potential to bring prosperity to the local economy. Mapping of companies that fulfil a baseline of wellbeing criteria can also facilitate the appropriate customer segments to recognize such companies. A greater demand for sustainable and wellbeing products and services in peripheral locations can contribute to an increasing amount of locally produced products and foods, lead to the establishment of new small businesses, or to the expansion and development of existing companies. However, this would also need to be supported by appropriate infrastructure, regional collaborations, and long-term strategic development plans.

The size of the tourism industry and its intimate relation to the natural environment makes it essential for the management of the sector to be included and emphasized in local, regional and national development plans, and that there is staff at governmental agencies such as municipalities and tourism offices that have responsibility and expertise in the theme of sustainability related to tourism.

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