Participants’ Hopes for International Leader -Project Well-being from Nature

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Well-being from Nature is the international LEADER (“Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale”) EU project common to Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK) from South Ostrobothnia, Finland; Gozo Action Group from Gozo, Malta; and the Inishowen Development Partnership from Donegal, Ireland. In Finland the project is funded by LEADER -groups Liiveri ry, Kuudestaan ry and LEADER Suupohja. In addition, the Finnish Forrest Centre participates in the project. In Malta, the project is funded through the LEADER programme of the Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014 -2020, co-financed through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This project will create the know-how for developing village-based tourism based on nature and well-being, creation of product development and marketing channels together based on communication and capacity-building of the local stake holders. In Ireland the project is funded thorough the Local Area Group the Inishowen Development Partnership. They have taken a training approach, bringing together a group of local actors working in well-being and nature helping them cooperate towards common goals.

The main theme of the Well-being from Nature project is knowledge exchange in the area of Green Care and nature induced well-being. In addition, this project will help to find new ways to utilise forests and other nature areas for supporting well-being and tourism and to demonstrate health impact measurement tools for well-being actions. A purpose of the project is to support existing commercial green care activities and to support new actors to enter the green care field. The project will also assist green care actors to create national and International networks.

This paper considers the results from a survey distributed amongst the project participants at the beginning of the project in the three participating countries. It also discusses the concepts of well-being and wellness in connection to tourism. In the survey, there were a total of 81 responses – 18 from Finland, 56 from Ireland and 7 from Malta (n = 81).

Survey for the participants

To begin, participants were asked to fill in a starting survey to understand their hopes for the project. In addition to the background information, a short description of the participants field of activity was requested as well as hopes in general for the project. Responses to a question regarding the ‘most interesting topics for the workshops during the project’ were collected. Participants chose their interests from the following choices, which were, however, presented slightly differently in the three countries: Well-being effects of nature – theoretical and research-based information on the topic; Green care as a concept and actions, theory on the topic; Ways to measure the effects of nature induced well-being actions (presentation of different

measurement tools); Marketing and selling nature induced well-being services; Digital marketing of these services (possibilities of digitalisation); Different procedures of nature induced well-being services (presentations of procedures etc.); Extension of nature induced well-being services (new services and products); Utilisation of forests and other local nature in nature induced well-being services (possibilities and requirements etc.); Cooperation and networking with other actors interested in nature induced well-being services; Cooperation and discussions with international actors in nature induced well-being services; and internationalisation (international aspects, different cultures, international marketing).

The results of the question ‘most interesting topics for the workshops during the project’ are presented in the following figures, Figure 1. presenting results from Finland, Figure 2. presenting results from Ireland and Figure 3 presenting results from Malta. In the results, there were some common interest as well as also some differences.

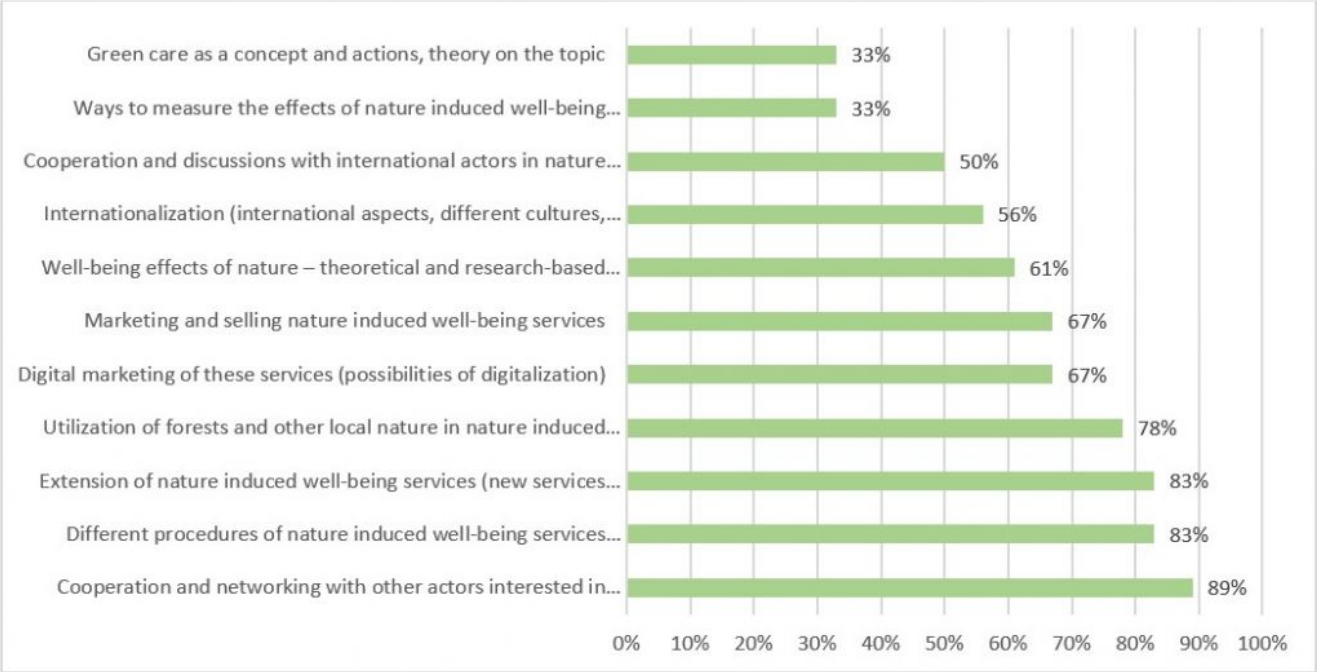


Figure 1. Participants hopes for the project – results from South Ostrobothnia, Finland (n = 18)

In Finland, participants were most interested in the possibilities for cooperation and networking with other actors in the area of nature induced well-being services, different nature related services as such, and also the extension of these services. Of least interest to the participants were the ways to measure the effects of nature induced well-being actions and in the green care as the concept, even though, one third of the participants were interested also in these topics.

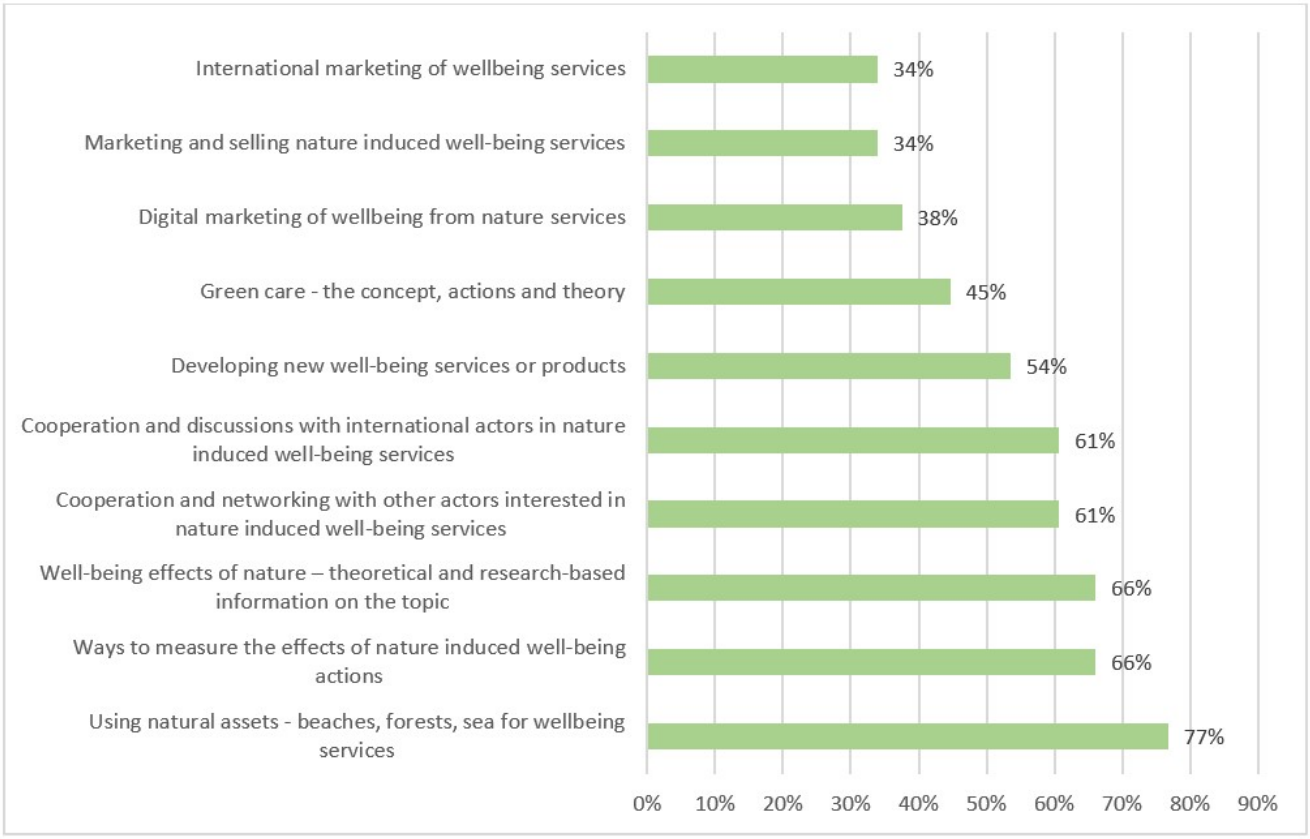


Figure 2. Participants hopes for the project – results from Donegal, Ireland (n = 56)

In contrast to Finland, ‘the ways to measure the effects of nature induced well-being services’ was the second most interesting topic to the participants in Ireland, and the most interesting topic was ‘using natural assets for well-being services’. In Ireland, the participants were least interested in the topics of international marketing and marketing and selling these services as such. In both Finland and Ireland, about half of the participants were interested in the international cooperation aspect of the project.

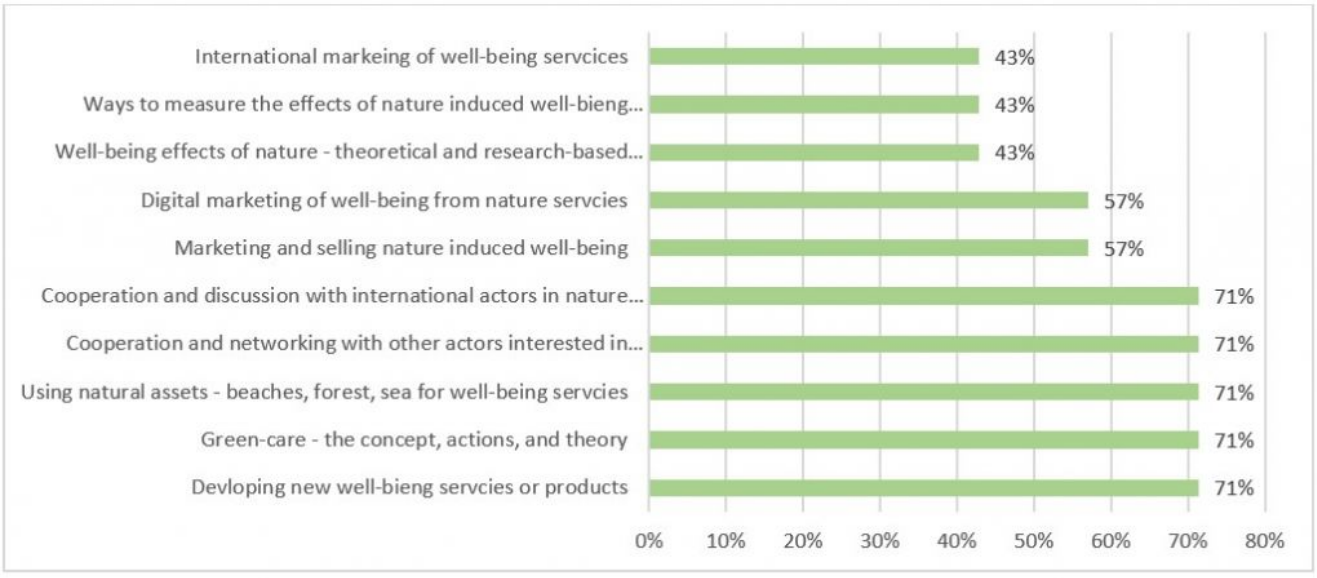


Figure 3. Participants hopes for the project – results from Gozo, Malta (n = 7)

As with participants in Finland, the cooperation and discussion with international actors in nature induced well-being and cooperation and networking with other actors interested in nature induced well-being services,

was of greatest interest to participants in Malta. Additionally, like in Ireland, using natural assets for well-being actions was one of the top interests in Malta. In Malta, the participants also ranked the topic of green-care, its concept, actions, and theory highly, as well as developing new well-being services or products. The least interesting topics, for participants from Malta, were international marketing of well-being services, which was similar to the results from Ireland; ways to measure the effect of nature induced well-being, similar to Finland; and well-being effects of nature – theoretical and research-based information on the topic. However, from seven respondents, the differences were not broad. Figure 4., presents the results from all participants (n = 81) across the three countries.

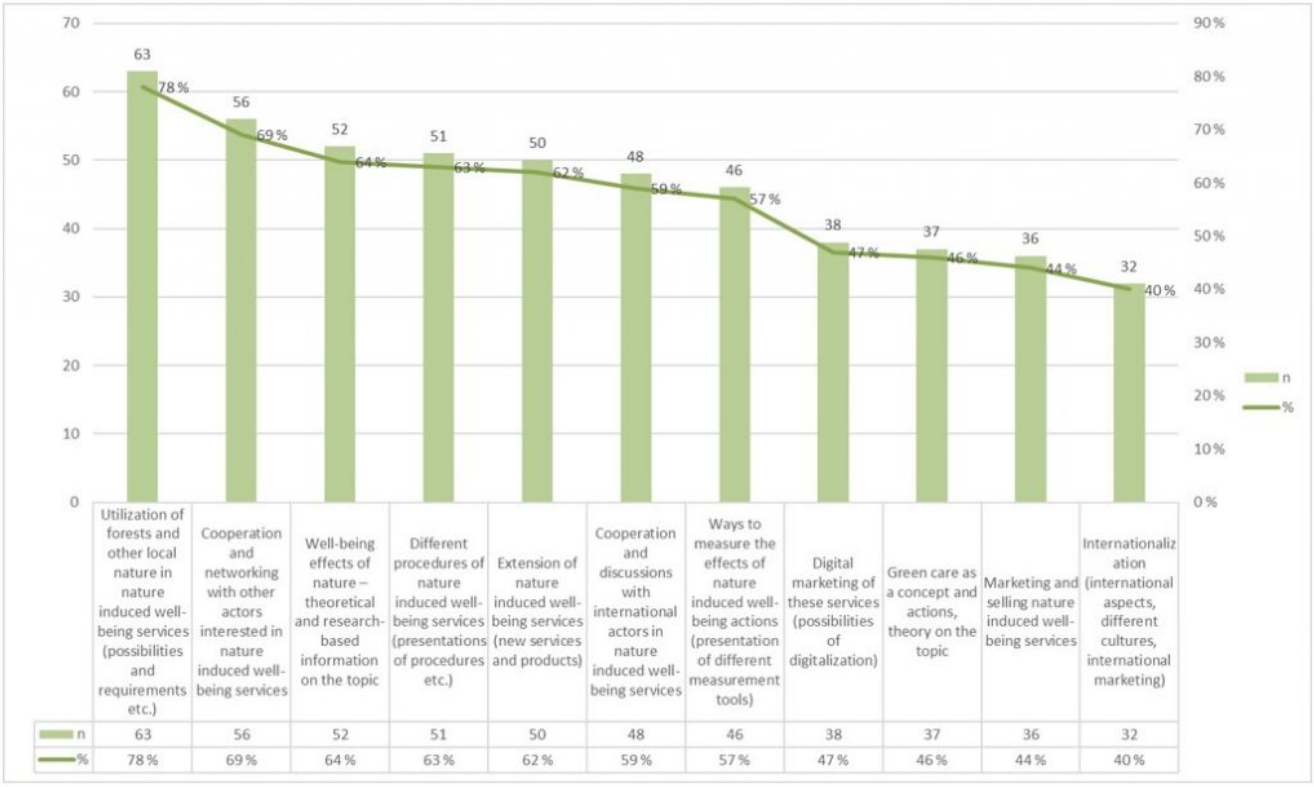


Figure 4. Results from all participants (n = 81)

Well-being, or wellness, and tourism

As discussed in the results section, about half of the participants were interested in the International, that is cooperation and tourism, aspect of the project. The International aspect of the project aims to offer participants insights to the national and international well-being tourism. Individuals' interest in their own health and well-being has increased significantly, and health and well-being have also become important motives for consumption (e.g. Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015; Hjalager et al., 2011). In tourism and leisure research, health and well-being have been widely discussed and investigated (Hjalager et al. 2011; Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015). Consumption has become a culturally accepted means for seeking well-being and a better quality of life (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015). However, one thing to consider, in health and well-being services, is the conceptual confusion related to the use of the key terms, in particular, the concepts of well-being and wellness (Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015). These concepts are often used interchangeably, and they both refer to the balance of physical, mental, and social well-being. However,

the concepts hold also different meanings, and wellness, lacks a clear and commonly accepted definition (Huijbens, 2011; Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015).

According to Grénman and Räikkönen (2015, 8), the "*conceptual confusion is a major challenge to the whole wellness industry*", as wellness seems to have become a marketing gimmick to sell a wide variety of products and services. Moreover, the inconsistent use of the concepts of well-being and wellness among consumers and service providers can lead to misunderstandings, and, especially, to unsuccessful consumption experiences. Well-being, on the other hand, is defined as being subjective in nature and clearly bound to a specific time, place, culture, and context. The resources of well-being are economic, social, human, and natural in nature, and can change over time. Furthermore, the meaning of well-being is often understood differently in different cultures and languages (e.g. Suontausta & Tyni, 2005; Grénman & Räikkönen, 2015). Clarifying these differences and founding a common ground for the project participants in the participating countries, are important aspects of the Well-being from Nature project.

Discussion

In all three countries, more than one third of the participants expressed an interest in all topics that were defined in the survey. The differences in the responses from the different countries are marginal when compared to the size of the data set. As according to the total data, almost 80% (n = 63) of the respondents are interested in the utilisation of the forest and other local nature in nature induced well-being services, and this is in connection with the topic of the project. Local, and also international cooperation is also important for the participants, as well as getting knowledge about the well-being effects of the nature. About half, or little less, of the participants are interested in the different aspects of the marketing of nature induced well-being services. All in all, the results of the survey offer interesting insights for the project implementors, in all three countries.

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