

Trends and skills needed in the tourism sector: 'tourism for wellness'

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Wellness has become an expression representing a new way of life. Once used solely for its catchiness, the term – and what it stands for – has become a serious trend and important factor in tourism. Some of the reasons for this are that people are generally more conscious about their health and are defining what quality of life means in new ways. Nevertheless, in tourism there is still a major misunderstanding as far as wellness is concerned.

The danger truly exists that so-called wellness tourism could easily become an empty marketing label, a superficial and passing trend with no content and quality criteria. This contribution attempts to describe what wellness stands for, making clear that wellness can no longer only serve as a marketing tool for tourism. It is essential that tourism must serve the needs of wellness to profit from it.

We are only at the beginning of lasting and major changes in tourism; the megatrend is tourism for wellness and there is significant need for completely new occupational profiles and qualifications to achieve this megatrend in a qualified manner.

1. The wellness trend

1.1. The confusion about wellness

Wellness has become an expression representing a new way of life. Once used solely for its catchiness, the term – and what it stands for – has become a serious trend. Some of the reasons for this are that people are generally more conscious about their health and are defining what quality of life means in new ways. People also have more free time.

But if we take a look at the market, we see the term 'wellness' everywhere we look. As with most new words, we tend – against our better judgement – to assume that this word stands for something concrete every time we see it.

Slowly, however, it has become clear that this is not true at all. The word 'wellness' seems to have drastically reduced meaning because it can mean anything. It seems to be either an empty expression or a hobby. It could be what the difficult hotel boss recommends his guests to do when there is snow in summer or none in winter. It is the word that zealous travel agents

use to lure customers to distant locations where there is nothing to see and even less to do. It is the word used to conceal bad service and lack of imagination.

Wellness does not seem to be connected with any place or time; one can indulge in wellness anywhere, anytime.

Tourism and recreation have taken over wellness. It is in hotels, fitness studios, beauty farms, hot springs, spas and saunas. It comprises massage, vegetarian diets, fresh air, ayurveda and aromatherapy, analogous to the citation of historic architectural styles from all epochs and parts of the world. There's always a touch of *Thousand and one nights* as well as a little *Kneipp*.

Somehow, wellness seems to be the lazy sister of fitness, enriched with a little hedonism and sensuality. If fitness means suffering, sweating and fighting one's sense of inertia, wellness could rightly be called the tender loving care of this inert, sluggish self.

Wellness is, as it were, esotericism in the flesh: the melding of occident and orient, pleasure and nuisance, sport and fun, hot and cold, and old and new. It is amazing that we have managed to get along without wellness for so long.

1.2. The wellness market

But let us put cynicism aside and take a slightly more serious look at the situation. Wellness is now an established term, a word used in everyday speech. It has developed into a megatrend as well as one of the media's favourite terms. It is no longer something which only belongs to a minority.

Today, 'wellness' is generally used in connection with a moderate amount of exercise combined with an enjoyment-oriented lifestyle. The term and label 'wellness' is extremely open and liberal, meaning that the so-called wellness sector has grown quickly in a very short period of time.

In this form, however, my opinion is that wellness as a trend has reached the highest point of its ascendancy. It may well be taking a downturn. The question now is where does wellness go from here?

I believe there is still a major misunderstanding where wellness is concerned. The danger is that wellness could easily become an empty marketing label, a superficial and passing trend with no content or quality criteria.

However, I also believe that the wellness of the future – we could call it 'Wellness II' – holds much realistic promise. Wellness could stand for the path to well-being and health; perhaps even happiness. It could also stand for a high quality of living and a positive lifestyle. It could be the basis for breaking into the next higher level of sustainable products and services for well-being, health and possibly even happiness. It could stand for, as well as convey, the vision of a calculable, sustainable market of the future.

The idea of wellness, as it was originally conceived, could finally be established as a comprehensive answer to the changes and deregulation in our various spheres of life – that is, our jobs, our personal lives, etc. – and serve as the basis of a corresponding philosophy of life. Wellness could be the path to sustained well-being and happiness.

At this point, a few general thoughts on health, life and wellness, as well as a view of their background and what is currently going on in these areas, are of value.

1.3. Health

One of the most well-known advocates of the theory of long waves, and one of the most important mentors of the information society, is Leo A. Nefiodow. He suggests that information technology has now ceased to be the worldwide motor for growth (Nefiodow, 1999). The end of the 5th Kondratieff cycle clearly shows that the new motor for economic growth is the elementary human need for well-being and health, closely followed by – or we might even say, in preparation for – the development of a new age of spirituality. This age will serve as a regulatory element for all aberrations of previous economic cycles and their basic innovations.

Well-being and health are far more than simply the absence of illness. The World Health Organisation defined health as a state of complete mental and physical well-being (WHO, 1986 and 1988). The term ‘health’ was later expanded to include other factors: health as the state of optimal biological, psychological and social well-being. This definition corresponds to a modern, holistically-oriented view of humans as biological systems located within a network of other biological, social and ecological environments.

The balance between body, soul and mind is at the centre of the discourse. Empowerment and self-realisation are new subjects in the health sector. Nutrition, old age and quality of life have become a cult. Health is truly a question of productivity.

1.4. The healthcare system

Unfortunately, we still have not succeeded in making health the basis of medical thinking and action. Every day, doctors treat their patients in hospitals and practices from a sickness-oriented point of view. Preventative measures stand on the sidelines; health-promoting measures are hardly ever spoken of.

Unfortunately, the same is true of naturopathic doctors. Even they think primarily in terms of illness. There is almost an impression that the only difference between them and allopathic MDs (Doctors of Medicine) is that naturopaths substitute so-called natural medications for allopathic ones.

In the public mind as well, the perspective of fostering and maintaining health has nowhere near the significance that treating illness does. Politicians, the media, insurance carriers and patients all use the term ‘health’ to mean the absence of illness. Patients go to their doctors

with their symptoms, expecting these to be eliminated. Doctors cure illnesses or, at the most, worry about early detection. Insurance companies reimburse doctors for treating diseases. Together with regulatory bodies and politicians, what they administrate is much more an ‘illness system’ than a ‘healthcare system.’

Preventing illness and promoting health play hardly any role in Europe. Medical treatment still dominates and the necessary personal initiative for maintaining one’s own health is rarely found. Basically, therapy still dominates (that is, the doctor or therapist steers events). A lifestyle geared to avoiding illness (including personal initiative, and going to a doctor or therapist to learn or get advice) is starting to be seen, but still exists only in the shadows. A health-promoting lifestyle is a rare and tender young plant, even though it should be the other way around. Only a healthy lifestyle can lead directly to well-being and happiness.

1.5. Salutogenesis

Actually, we should worry less about factors which cause illness and turn our attention to those which promote health.

The word ‘salutogenesis’ comes from both Latin and Greek. The Latin word ‘salus’ means healthy; the Greek word ‘genesis’ means creation. Salutogenesis defines health-promoting factors as powers which help people develop and maintain health.

The medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky developed this concept based on numerous empirical studies of the widest possible variety of population groups. Antonovsky wanted to answer the questions: ‘Who gets sick?’ and ‘Who stays healthy?’

According to salutogenesis, individuals and groups, even those under high stress, tend to remain healthy when they have a fundamental trust in the world which expresses itself in the following three characteristics:

- (a) comprehensibility: the events in life are structured, that is, predictable and understandable;
- (b) manageability: resources are available which help meet the requirements for dealing with these events;
- (c) meaningfulness: these requirements are challenges which are worth the time and effort.

These three factors contribute to a person’s sense of coherence, the feeling that he/she lives in an understandable world which he/she is personally able to influence.

As a rule, the more developed a person’s sense of coherence, the greater is their ability to remain healthy or withstand stresses which might tend to make others sick.

A sense of coherence is neither inborn nor determined for the whole of one’s life by early childhood socialisation. Empirical results on perception, attitudes and behaviour, as well as theories of social learning, show much more that coherence and its practical consequences are constantly influenced during the course of a lifetime. This type of thinking is slowly finding

its way into medicine and extending its boundaries, slowly transforming medicine into the science of health.

Salutogenesis is related to today's most important sociopolitical developments, including resource orientation, holism, skill acquisition, accentuation of environmental aspects, criticism of pathology concepts and a positive definition of health.

Salutogenesis, as well as the entire spectrum of social, emotional and mental competences, is continually finding more acceptance in health-based initiatives within enterprises as well as outside of them.

2. Definition of wellness

2.1. Wellness

The term 'wellness' was coined during the 1950s in the US by those in health sciences and medical sociology. They took half of the words 'well-being' and 'fitness' to create 'wellness'. They meant this term as an individual, many-sided, interdisciplinary expression for the human need for health and well-being.

According to this scientific definition, wellness is not a product. It cannot be bought; it is not a branch of the economy. This is precisely what limits wellness as the basis for a superficial marketing concept.

Scientifically defined, wellness stands for a personal, individual lifestyle. Such a lifestyle is based on health-promoting factors and salutogenesis. It requires such core competences as recognising one's own tensions and anxieties as well as proactively dealing with one's mental, emotional, social and physical needs.

These skills, or core competences, can be subdivided into four areas:

- (a) mental competences include learning and growth, creativity and intuition as well as a sense of significance and pursuit of self realisation;
- (b) emotional competences include how one sees oneself, as well as confidence, self respect, self esteem and stress management;
- (c) social competences include how one deals with others, conflict and relationship management and communication skills;
- (d) physical competences include fitness and health, exercise and mobility, breathing and nutrition, pampering oneself and relaxation.

This means that the actual content and goal of wellness is increasing individual and collective quality of life, achieving and maintaining health, and comprehensive well-being and happiness.

Wellness is a response to the needs, desires and values of our customers. These result from the situation in the healthcare system and from current societal developments, which are examined below.

2.2. Wellness and the economy

We know that our well-being has its price, the well-known balance-sheet deficit. Annual reports, balance sheets, profit and loss accounts, classically and conventionally attuned to record hard data, simply do not cope with soft data, i.e. relationships, or what we might call the human factor. But this soft data accounts for at least 70 % of the economic success of any enterprise.

We are all caught up in an industrial, highly communicative, mobile, fast society in which top performance is demanded. Lack of well-being in the individual inevitably leads to disturbances in enterprises and in entire economic systems. Incidents of mobbing are on the increase. In Germany for instance, they cost the economy at least EUR 15 billion per year. Fear costs another EUR 50 billion per year. Every third marriage ends in divorce; 40 % of employees have mentally quit their jobs and only do what is absolutely necessary; 60 % of those in management suffer from neuroses; and every third patient who goes to the doctor has a psychosomatic illness (BMBF, 1997).

At the same time, human talent and lasting creativity and health have become the resources which are the most difficult – and expensive – to find. Human talent and skills decide the fate of many enterprises; motivation and self realisation are decisive for increasing productivity.

The economy is experiencing a paradigm change. Wellness is becoming a key to the corporate culture.

2.3. Wellness and the new essentials

We are becoming a learning society. The ego, the ‘I’ – previously the ideal of the industrial society in its idea of a ‘finished personality,’ that is, the person whose personality was formed and finished by his/her school and college training and marital circumstances – no longer exists.

A new learning paradigm has developed in our knowledge society. A culture of ‘becoming’ has developed, learning has freed itself from the confines of established institutions. It takes place increasingly on the job and in practice, and in one’s private life as well. Performance no longer means solely persistence, but is now interpreted as creative, personal self-transformation.

Thanks to the knowledge society, an evolution in consciousness has developed which focuses on systemic thinking and the ability to understand complex systems. A new ‘win-win’ approach is beginning to penetrate both private relationships and the business world, an approach which starts beyond old antagonisms.

We have evolved from a society of plenty to a society of satiety. Slowing down and simplifying our lives is becoming a very powerful cultural trend. Asceticism has become the new luxury, the restoration of spiritual and material balance. Time is a luxury which is more important than material consumption.

3. Tourism for wellness

3.1. Real wellness tourism is tourism for the wellness

The last few years have seen rapid growth of a highly developed general Wellness II, a real contrast to the wellness misunderstanding.

The Wellness II customer is already a reality and cannot be simply included in any other target group. Both in daily life and on vacation, such customers want support in all wellness areas. They expect and pay for qualified services, associating clear needs, desires and values with wellness.

If service providers in wellness or tourism accept this premise, they can only earn a great deal of money over the long term when they:

- (a) recognise this fact and also have the correct understanding of wellness;
- (b) can offer proven and qualified wellness services;
- (c) help clear up current misunderstandings about wellness as well as the current confusion in the market;
- (d) establish business concepts for wellness based on salutogenesis;
- (e) place the person – i.e. the customer – at the centre of their attention.

It is not the number and type of areas, treatment rooms, devices and furnishings, nor the number of consultants, planners, construction companies, suppliers or marketing concepts which is the measure of all things. It is the development, realisation and establishment of a wellness concept developed solely from the perspective of the customer's needs, desires and values. Especially in regard to the last of these, the service provider must also live the same values as the customer expects.

Wellness can no longer serve as a superficial marketing tool for tourism; tourism must serve the needs of wellness to profit from it. Wellness tourism is no longer the trend. The new megatrend is 'tourism for wellness'.

4. Needed skills

To realise this megatrend in a qualified manner, completely new occupational profiles and qualifications are required.

These must be highly interdisciplinary, because the future of wellness requires cooperation between fields which have, until now, existed on parallel tracks. This includes providers of recreational activities, vacation and sports as well as providers of medical, curative and preventative concepts. Cultural and educational offerings will supplement this mix.

There are significant deficits with regard to occupational profiles and qualifications for wellness and wellness services. These deficits exist in both top management and at the operational level where concrete offers and products are developed and realised.

In recognition of this, work has begun with partners on pilot training projects, two of which are described below.

4.1. MedicWell®Trainer

This course of training, whose graduates are certified by various German States, was developed in cooperation with the Sebastian Kneipp School, my Relax Group and the Association for Physical Therapy, all of whom share responsibility for it. The programme has been designed to give massage therapists, medical bath attendants and physiotherapists additional professional qualifications and to let them attend it alongside their jobs.

After successful completion, the new MedicWell® trainers have well-founded medical knowledge enabling them to use proven wellness treatments and applications within the framework of health promotion and illness prevention.

This programme consists of approximately 600 course-hours and contains the following modules:

- (a) wellness management;
- (b) communication and health;
- (c) massage;
- (d) hydro-balneo and nature;
- (e) psychology;
- (f) relaxation;
- (g) wellness-based fitness;
- (h) wellness through eating and drinking;
- (i) wellness design;
- (j) body care and aesthetics.

Within these, attention is paid to competences in the following areas:

- (a) creating wellness concepts and developing the corresponding marketing strategies;
- (b) assembling meaningful wellness programmes together, carrying out and monitoring treatment;
- (c) critically assessing wellness trends and translating these into suitable offers;

- (d) leading, guiding and training employees;
- (e) advising guests and customers on wellness topics and putting together individual programmes for them.

The content of this course is based on Sebastian Kneipp's holistic health concepts, which revolve around the five elements water, exercise, nutrition, healing plants and lifestyle. Kneipp's thinking, however, is not dogmatically followed.

4.2. Health Management University (HMU)

Another pilot project under way, together with partners at the University of Passau, is establishing a nationally certified private university for the health industry. This entity would serve 500 students who would graduate with a Bachelor of Science in business administration after six semesters and a Master in Business Administration after additional four semesters. Three different tracks are planned:

- (a) health care management;
- (b) wellness and spa management;
- (c) culture and sustainable development management.

The HMU's international claim lies in the worldwide validity and significance of preventative healthcare and sustainable development. Its courses are being designed to foster mutual understanding among peoples, respect for those of different races and religions, and thus, peaceful coexistence in the world.

The high standing of wellness at the HMU lies in the interpretation of the different branches of study. Graduates of the HMU will be able to use what they learn as a maxim in their later activities in the health and wellness industry or medicine.

The HMU's intention is to transmit a concept of service and wellness which focuses on the individual, through course content, campus ambience and cooperation with regional and internationally operating institutions. By the time they are through with their degree, students should have internalised these concepts to the greatest possible extent.

To conclude, in respect to the megatrend 'tourism for wellness', we are only at the very beginning of lasting and major changes in the health and tourism sectors. These are an overdue answer to confusion on wellness and have launched a new drive for innovation and quality in the wellness branch.

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