Identifying Health and Well-being Benefits Perceived by Visitors in Finnish Protected areas

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Pertti Itkonen
Natural Heritage Services, NHS

Based on presentation by Joel Erkkonen in MMV7 seminar
Working group

Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services
Veikko Virkkunen
Joel Erkkonen
Liisa Kajala
Martti Aarnio
Riikka Mansikkaviita
Tapio Lepikkö

Oulu Deaconess Institute
Hannu Kaikkonen
Raija Korpelainen
Contents of the Presentation

• Protected areas in Finland
• Development of the health and well-being benefit metrics
• Results
• Conclusions
NHS Manages All the State-owned PAs in Finland

- 37 national parks
- 19 strict nature reserves
- 7 national hiking areas
- 12 wilderness areas
- almost 500 other PAs
- public water areas

- Altogether over 7 million hectares of protected areas
- 2.3 million visits to National Parks (2013)
We protect and manage the natural treasures of Finland
- for the benefit of nature and people
Increasing evidence shows that contact with nature
• affects mental health
• prevents chronic diseases
• helps to recover from stress and illness
• improves perceived quality of life
• promotes positive attitudes towards life
• enhances the sense of belongingness
Healthy Parks – Healthy People

Environment

Social & cultural

Health & Well-being

Economic
Contents of the Presentation

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Description of the Study

- This study describes the benefits for health and well-being **perceived by visitors** to four Finnish nature conservation areas.

- The study also includes an assessment of the usability and reliability of the health and well-being benefit metrics used in this study, and the development needs related to the study methodology.
Methods

Natural Heritage Services

• Development of the survey instruments in 2012
• Modified on-site visitor surveys in four protected areas (n=2052) with a small set of health and well-being questions in summer 2013.
• Extensive WEB based questionnaire for those visitors who were willing to participate the health & well-being survey and who gave their e-mail address.
• The health & well-being questionnaire link was sent to 1 197 respondents appr. 1-3 weeks after the on-site survey.

Oulu Deaconess Institute

• Data analysis and reporting (2014).
## Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protected Area</th>
<th>Visits 2013</th>
<th>On-site survey respondents</th>
<th>Agreed to WEB survey</th>
<th>WEB survey respondents</th>
<th>Response rate, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kevo Strict Nature Reserve</td>
<td>5 100</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurjenrahka NP</td>
<td>32 100</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repovesi NP</td>
<td>93 200</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patvinsuo NP</td>
<td>12 900</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>143 300</td>
<td>2 052</td>
<td>1 197</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16. How did this visit to Kevo Strict Nature Reserve influence the state of your health and well-being in the following sectors?
(Answer, please, each point and choose the alternative, which describes your feeling the best.)
5 = totally agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = no opinion, 2 = somewhat disagree, 1 = totally disagree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased social social well-being (f. ex. strengthened social relations, improved working capacity, enjoyed doing things alone or together)</th>
<th>totally agree</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1 totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased psychological well-being (f. ex. satisfaction with life, improved mood, recovery from mental stress, learned something new)</th>
<th>totally agree</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1 totally disagree</th>
</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased physical well-being (f. ex. enjoyed sensing the nature, maintained the fitness, learned new skills, physical well-being)</th>
<th>totally agree</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1 totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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</table>
Perceived Health and Well-being Benefits
- Extensive WEB survey

Comprehensive questions on
- Relationship with nature
- **Psychological well-being**: life satisfaction (background variables), the mood during the visit, experience of recovery, cognitive skills
- **Social well-being**: the impact on social well-being of the visit
- **Physical well-being**: general health (background variables), the experience of sensations and physical presence during the visit, physical activity, height and weight (background variables)
- **Duration of health and well-being impacts**
- **Financial evaluation of health and well-being impacts**
- **Children's health and well-being**
- Open ended questions
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Results of the On-site Visitor Survey 2013

- It is possible to calculate an average for social, psychological and physical well-being
- It is possible to calculate a health benefit index for one specific area or a nation wide health benefit index (scale 1 – 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Evaluation, %</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>totally disagree</td>
<td>somewhat disagree</td>
<td>no opinion</td>
<td>somewhat agree</td>
<td>totally agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased social well-being</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased psychological well-being</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased physical well-being</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Results of the Extensive WEB Survey

National Parks move people!

An average hiking distance on a typical National Park trip was about 15 km.

- It can be estimated that visitors annually walk about 34 million kilometers in Finland's national parks.
Key Results of the Extensive WEB Survey

National Parks promote mental well-being

Park visits
- improve the mood and enhance the psychological well-being
- help recovery from stress

Psychological well-being benefits last the longest, especially in the study areas where visitors stayed more than one day.
Key Results of the Extensive WEB Survey

Nature is the best playground for children!

According to the adults’ evaluations, children
• enjoyed being in nature
• spending time together
• felt the joy of being on the move
• learned new skills
• gained positive experiences of self-expression, using their imagination and developing their creativity
Key Results of the Extensive WEB Survey

National Parks promote public health for millions of euros!

Park visitors estimated a health & well-being impact value for their visit.
- The average value perceived by visitors was 208 EUR (median 100 EUR).
- The estimated total value of all national park visits was 226 million EUR in 2013.
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The Work Continues...

• Standardized health & well-being indicators as part of on-site visitor surveys (→ 7 visitor surveys in 2014)
• Harmonizing methods and indicators (→ extensive WEB survey)
• Communicating of importance of national parks and protected areas for public health and well-being
• Further develop measurement of health and well-being benefits in monetary terms
• Continue development of recreation services in order to involve new target groups
“Excursions to National Parks create a significant economic opportunity from health care and public health point of view. For example, mental health problems, obesity and inactivity cause remarkable cost for Finland. Health benefits of nature can help to manage these costs and to increase the happiness of the Finnish people.”

- Rauno Väisänen, Director, Natural Heritage Services
Thank you!

pertti.itkonen@metsa.fi
joel.erkkonen@metsa.fi