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EXTENDING TOURISM'S ROLE IN THE TOURISM - MEDITATION - CREATIVITY-INNOVATION - SUSTAINABILITY TRAJECTORY

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Summary: The present paper attempts to show that global and regional trends, the tourism context's profound influence of certain psychological characteristics and the pressing challenges of sustainability constitute a constellation very favourable for extending tourism's role in the tourism-meditation-creativity-innovation-sustainability trajectory in Hungary. Viewing the trends for meditation (mindfulness) and meditation based tourism products globally and regionally the business rationale for launching these types of products seems obvious for tourism service providers. The challenging issues of sustainability locally, regionally and globally and meditations proven efficiency in boosting creative and innovative performance and sustainable behaviour, however, shift the emphasis from the question „Can more tourism revenues be generated by offering meditation based services?” to the question „Can the tourism context be utilized more to make people more meditative?”.

Keywords: tourism, meditation, creativity, innovation, sustainability

1. Introduction

In spite of the gigantic amount of scientific literature on sustainability issues published in the last few decades, the numerous local, regional and global conferences, green activist projects, government and corporate efforts, according to Global Carbon Budget (CRB) 2014 report humanity is still on track to worst case climate change scenario (Le Quéré et al. 2014). The climate problem is accompanied by growing global inequality, geopolitical tension, biodiversity loss, population growth issues, land system change and dangerously altered biochemical flows of Nitrogen and Phosphorus. Addressing these issues in the long run will probably require a paradigm shift of the overconsuming modern societies leading to drastic transformation of consumption and production patterns (Zsolnai 2010). In the short run strict legislative measures on a national and global scale seem unavoidable (Cullet 2007). Tourism is a growingly significant factor in the consumption basket of the 21st century global citizen. Forecasts for tourist arrivals issued by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) project a 60% increase by 2020. However, these are business as usual (BAU) calculations and may be substantially altered by the possible acceleration of unfavourable socio-ecological processes and climate change, (England et al 2014) warranting much tougher cutbacks than those anticipated this November in Paris (Jacoby and Chen 2014). If tourism is to genuinely contribute to sustainability, de-growth of the sector seems necessary shifting travel patterns from long-haul international travel to more domestic and shorter trips, from quantity to quality (Hall 2014 Clemente et al. 2014). The rising emphasis on quality tourism products fostering self-realization and self-enrichment is a powerful new trend in tourism, especially in its wellness and spa sub-segments. SpaFinder's Trend Report for 2014 refers to mindful (meditative) living as „Über Trend” and the 2015 report's number one trend „Forest bathing” also involves a “mindful” approach.

Innovation is a factor crucial both in the battle and the war against a looming socio-ecological collapse (Motesharrei et al. 2014). Sustainability can be and has to be the main driver of

innovation today. Embracing sustainability as a corporate core value can actually give the organization a solid competitive advantage (Willard 2012). Technological innovation is a crucial factor in stabilizing the global climate (Kriegler et al. 2014). In addition to technological innovation in manufacturing, boosting innovative performance in services sectors (e.g. education) is also vitally important to the cause of sustainability (Ferrari et al. 2009).

Any innovative process presupposes creativity (Chariton 2015). A creative mindset that enables creative thinking and creative action means that one is able to think outside the box (Mason 2006) largely unrestricted and uninfluenced by established patterns of the past. Eric Fromm, German born American psychoanalyst, is quoted to say: „Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.” This description of creativity by Fromm is significant because it involves the notion of „letting go”, a focal point in several eastern meditative techniques (Osho 1977). Breaking from certainties and established patterns is possible only if one does not become identified with these old certainties and patterns, that is, when one is in a meditative state. In addition and prior to the „detachment” or „letting-go” attitude, a meditative (mindful) state is also characterised by a „letting be” position allowing non-judgemental and unrestricted emergence of thoughts (Baer et al. 2006). This attitude is also the basis of divergent thinking closely connected with creative thought processes (Runco and Accar 2012). Meditations positive effect on creativity has been empirically tested and proven (Capurso et al. 2014). Meditation has been used by some of the biggest companies to help unleash creative potential of employees. Google’s SIY (Search Inside Yourself) started in 2007 offering employees free in-house meditation sessions has now grown into a global leadership institute (SIYLI) and worldwide mindfulness service for corporations. One quarter of US companies including Apple, Nike, Procter & Gamble and others have been offering some form of meditation to employees to improve performance. In addition to boosting creativity and innovation, meditation is also positively correlated with sustainable behaviour (Amel et al. 2009). The above referenced studies establishing connection between sustainability and innovation, innovation and creativity, creativity and meditation, meditation and tourism support the idea of the trajectory in the title. In Hungary, however, the vast potential of meditation is not fully recognized yet nor in the corporate world neither in academic circles as an area worth serious research efforts. The present study aims to explore hidden potentials to extend tourism’s role in popularising meditation and in turn boosting creativity and innovation.

Six hypotheses were tested:

H1. Openness to new experience is significantly raised when being a tourist.

H2.1 There is a growing trend globally for Google search terms related to meditation.

H2.2 There is a growing trend for Google search terms related to meditation in connection with the major tourist sending countries of Hungary.

H3.1 According to Google Trends data, online interest shown for meditation is relatively high in Hungary.

H3.2 According to Google Trends data, online interest shown for meditation is relatively high in rival neighbouring country destinations.

H4. In tourists’ view Wellness establishments are the best tourism context to introduce meditation.

H5. The level of mindfulness in the target population of the survey is relatively low.

None of these six issues have previously been the subject of scientific research in Hungary. International literature on H1 is sporadic, with very few empirical research. It has been examined by Jani but on a significantly smaller (n=360) sample (Jani, 2014). The relevance of testing H1 lies in the fact that meditation is basically alien to European culture, hence a

considerable level of openness, receptive feminine attitude is required (Osho, 1977) to be able to understand and experience what it really is.

2. Material and method

2.1 Google trends data

Normalised time series data of the relative search volume of search terms for Google and YouTube searches is made available for scientific analysis and can be downloaded in csv format from the Google Trends homepage (www.google.com/trends). Several studies have explored and proved the reliability and predicting power of Google Trends data (Preis et al. 2013). In order to test H2.1 and H2.2 relative search intensity for 110 English search terms about meditation were analysed by fitting regression models to Google Trends time series data for both Google and YouTube searches. The same analysis was done for the term „meditation” for Hungary’s major tourist sending countries and for Hungary in the countries’ own language to test H3.1 and H3.2.

2.2 Web-based survey

Web-based surveys today are a widely used and trusted instrument of data collection in social sciences. The online survey supporting this study was administered through the online research service of Szent István University between 16 March 2015 and 8 April 2015. The survey contained thirty questions designed to explore connections between tourism, meditation and sustainability. Owing to limitations of length this paper cannot reflect on all of them.

The most probable consumer of meditation-based tourism services in Hungary today is the wellness tourist. As it was unfeasible to take a representative sample of wellness tourists (incoming and domestic) in Hungary, a target population expected to possess demographic characteristics similar to the typical wellness tourist described by the literature (Smith & Puczko 2009) was chosen. The target population consisted of all the leaders (principals, directors) at institutions of primary and secondary education in the country. E-mail addresses were obtained from a publicly accessible database. Following a pre-testing with a small sample to assess comprehensibility and length issues 6218 e-mails containing a link to the site of the survey were sent out to all of the institutional leaders. 1474 questionnaires were returned, 995 fully completed which means a response rate of 24% for all returned surveys and 16 % for the fully completed ones. The sample (n=995) is representative of the examined population at a confidence level $c=99\%$ and margin of error $E=0,037$. In addition to the expected similarities in demographic make-up to the typical wellness tourist, there are two arguments why this particular target group is relevant for the present paper. The first, already referred to earlier, is the growing significance of domestic tourism. Domestic tourism recycles money into the economy, creates jobs, and through its lower demand on fossil fuel will probably fit mitigation requirements better than international travel. The questions about tourism related issues in the survey were focused specifically on domestic tourism and the target population was made up of potential domestic tourists. The second argument concerns creativity. Schools should play a central role in facilitating the acquisition and enrichment of creative skills and creative thinking (Robinson 2009) needed for any innovative process. School directors as decision makers can have a profound influence on supporting curricula that fosters creativity. The question used with the five point Likert type scale to test H1 was the following: „ When you travel in Hungary for leisure purposes, do you become more receptive and open to new experiences than in your everyday life?” H4 was tested with a five-item ranking scale and H5 with five five-point Likert type scales. For H5 three questions were

taken from the FFMQ - Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (Baer et al. 2006) with the author's permission and used in a slightly modified form, one from the MAAS - Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown and Ryan 2003) and one was a personal addition.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Google trends results

Over 90 % of the examined search terms for Google have had an upward trend in relative search intensity in the last four years globally. With YouTube search it is a considerably lower value. However, if we exclude items with no sufficient data the proportion of terms showing an upward trend for YouTube comes close to the value for Google. All six major tourist sending countries of Hungary have had a continuous upward search intensity trend since marked dates both in Google and YouTube for the search term „meditation” (in own language) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Search intensity trends for „meditation” in major tourist sending countries of Hungary

Country/guest night %	Germ. 17%	Aust. 7%	UK 6%	Russ. 6%	Ita. 5%	USA 4%
Google	↑ since Feb. 2010	↑ since Aug. 2012	↑ since Dec. 2010	↑ since Jan. 2012	↑ since Jul. 2013	↑ since Jul. 2011
YouTube	↑ since Jan. 2008	↑ since Jan. 2012	↑ since Nov. 2008	↑ since Mar. 2011	↑ since Apr. 2009	↑ since Jan. 2008

Source: own research

As the target population of the web-based survey for this study was domestic, further research is needed with the participation of actual and potential incoming wellness tourists. Upward trend was discovered for „meditáció” in connection with Hungary too. At the same time Hungary's neighbouring countries (other than Austria) either have no analysable data for „meditation” (in country's own language) or if they do, the search trend has been stagnating. These findings have positive implications for the development of meditation based tourism products for both the domestic and incoming wellness consumers in Hungary. H2.1, H2.2 and H3.1 are supported while H3.2 is rejected based on the results.

3.2. Web-based survey results

More than 80 % of respondents opted for the two most positive points on the openness to new experience scale, which supported hypothesis H1. H4 was rejected because out of the five tourism context types, ten times more respondents favoured outdoors nature-related tourism locations as the most suitable for an introduction to meditation techniques than wellness establishments. As a second choice on the ranking scale wellness establishments fared better than nature-related tourism locations but both were surpassed significantly by village tourism locations. For H5 Mean values of responses for two of the questions taken from widely tested questionnaires referenced above were inconsistent with findings of earlier literature, while three including the personally added one yielded results supporting earlier research findings of researches carried out with similar target populations. Testing H5 is relevant because a relatively high level of mindfulness of the target population would serve as a counter argument to launching more meditation based products in the tourism context.

4. Conclusion

The present pioneering research encourages further exploration in the examined areas in Hungary. Owing to the non-probability sample and the exclusion of incoming tourists limited generalisations are possible. The results, however, suggest that the tourism context ensures a high level of openness necessary to learn meditative techniques and certain tourism forms, destinations or accommodation types can be potentially well-suited for introducing domestic tourists to eastern types of meditation in Hungary. Also, with the increasing popularity of meditation there is demand side business potential for meditation based tourism products. Presently only 26 hotels (approx. 1% of commercial accommodations), two cave locations in Abaliget and Szemlőhegy and the Krisnavölgy in Somogyvámos offer some form of meditation (based on online availability of such offers) leaving a lot of space for further product and market development. A larger scale introduction of meditation based products is also supported by the fact that compared with rival neighbouring country destinations Hungary is more receptive to the notion of meditation. Taking into account the various psychological and somatic health benefits validated by clinical research, its positive effect on sustainable behaviour, creativity and the fact that unlike traditional wellness products meditation based products can be taken home and practiced virtually cost-free, even financial support from the government could be considered to boost the launch and consumption of meditation services in tourism on a broader scale. In this way tourism could genuinely contribute to the creativity, well-being and long-term sustainability of the Hungarian population.

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