

# Editorial to the Special Issue 'Health, Sport and Tourism: Searching for Future Synergies'

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Tourism has become a significant modality through which our social life is organized. While more and more research has been undertaken on sport tourism and well-being tourism, there is still a strong need to enrich tourism studies with social and cultural theories, providing an alternative to the 'existing positivist and managerially oriented material which predominates in the current literature in tourism' (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p. 20). This Special Issue with the title 'Health, Sport and Tourism: Searching for Future Synergies' thus approaches tourism as a social phenomenon and sets out to examine the relationship between tourism and related fields of social inquiry, those of health and sport, investigating what wider ramifications they carry for each other under today's unsettling circumstances. Similar to participation in tourism, health promotion and sport engagements are nowadays facing many significant challenges that are reflected in rising socio-economic inequalities, epidemiological pressures, and changes in patterns of communication and technological development, as well as in the shifting expectations, motivations and attitudes of local communities and tourists alike. By addressing these topics, the Special Issue seeks to broaden the existing knowledge and challenge the dominant views in order to enrich our understandings of (future) junctures of tourist practices, physical activity, and health and well-being.

The idea for this Special Issue grew from the fruitful discussions at the Bet on Health online interna-

tional conference 2020, organized by the Faculty of Tourism University of Maribor, which offered a forum for leading researchers and experts to share their experiences and research results on sports, well-being and health issues and the role of local communities in planning, implementing and evaluating public health policies and practices.

*Academica Turistica: Tourism and Innovation Journal* (AT-TIJ) kindly welcomed our initiative for inviting the most high-impact and compelling conference papers, in terms of theoretical richness and methodological rigorousness, to be considered for publication, whilst extending the call for papers and hoping to gather a few additional innovative contributions on the topic in order to put together a coherent issue. To this end, the Faculty of Tourism University of Maribor teamed up with the Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica University of Primorska in editorial efforts and brought together the present issue.

Mobilities scholars have been amongst the most convincing in suggesting that mobility is the defining feature of contemporary societies (Urry, 2000; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Larsen et al., 2016). Diverse mobilities are becoming of crucial significance in negotiating the growing complexity of modern living and thus in understanding one's relation to the world. As such, these are essentially indicative of material reconstruction of the 'social as society' into the 'social as mobility', as suggested by Urry (2000, p. 2). According to Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 2181), the progressive blur-

ring of boundaries between different types of mobilities has provoked a de-differentiation of the domain of tourism from other mobilities, such as for example commuting, labour or retirement or lifestyle migration, second home visits, volunteering, and also sporting activities. These accounts destabilize conventional tourism scholarship by generating constructive insights into the complexities and variations of movements in contemporary societies. What is more, the basic dichotomies on which the sociological theories of tourism have been so far unreflectively formed have been amply problematized to the very promotion of radical ideas about the 'end of tourism' (Hannam 2009). However, in their cutting polemic, Doering & Duncan (2016) argue that a more nuanced re-reading of philosophical assumptions of the new mobilities paradigm ultimately signals a return to tourism studies rather than moving beyond it. According to them, thinking through the mobilities paradigm means a critical return to tourism studies, this time by multiplying the meanings, uses, functions and movements of tourism(s).

Tourism scholars have been used to demarcating tourism as the opposite to 'everydayness.' Yet, many tourist endeavours are mundane and informed by everyday habits, thus not particularly dissimilar to our everyday life. Or, to echo Larsen (2019), much tourism is strikingly ordinary, no longer antithetical to routines and everyday life, as tourism practices are actually, in part, fuelled by our daily practices and everyday socialities. In general, the advanced blurring of boundaries between tourist practices and everyday practices has been likewise widely discussed. In this context, Franklin and Crang (2001, p. 10) note 'the routinization of touristic sensibilities in everyday life' in a globalizing society where people are becoming more routinely mobile, while Craik (1997, p. 125), in her discussion of the culture of tourism, points out the trend towards de-differentiation among all sorts of social and cultural spheres, resulting also in 'a convergence or blurring between tourist and everyday leisure activities' (p. 125). This implies that tourism scholars should also become more sensitive to how tourism intersects with everyday leisure and sport activities as well as omnipresent concerns for one's health

and wellbeing. Therefore, this Special Issue reiterates arguments about the de-differentiation of social life and the weakening of the conventional boundaries between distinct domains, such as work and leisure, study and entertainment, ordinary life and extraordinary holidays (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). The main aim is to present current insights into the fields of tourism, health and sports, and address their significant intersections at the background of complex cultural and social processes.

Current profound cultural, social, economic, and technological transformations undeniably bring about weighty implications for travel and tourism as well. It is the research that can help us make sense of these transformations for the likely future of scarcity and insecurity, not necessarily by allowing us to foresee the future prospects in their totality but by equipping us with analytical tools to comprehend the complexity of the processes taking place. As emphasized by Caletrío (2019), in light of the growing awareness about our impact on climate, significant segments of the population in western societies are relocating their activities around their home, which certainly also implies the resetting of coordinates of what is considered ordinary and extraordinary in tourism, leading to a re-discovery of holidays near home (the so-called staycation phenomenon). What is more, with flight shaming discourse or the so-called Greta Thunberg effect, the normative discourses of what constitutes a legitimate (low-carbon) holiday that stands as a green credential are changing, while desires to slow down the accelerated pace of life, or 'the culture of speed' (Tomlinson, 2007) we live in, spill over to our travel styles and vacation habits. According to Euronews Travel (2020), the point-to-point holiday, whereby travellers fly to a single location and then return home, will be rivalled by an emerging trend for trips that take in multiple domestic locations, occur at a slower pace, and are as much about the journey and the immersive experience as the ultimate destination. Such analyses of profound redefinitions of holidays and tourism today are thus of growing importance as (im)mobility becomes increasingly significant to various ways of life.

Within this context, we argue for the acknowledgment of the transformative role of tourism in global

society. Unlike what the prevailing marketing logic sustains, by designing the offer the providers not only address the already existing needs and motives of tourists, but also co-create or construct them. Through tourism products, practices and travel styles that promote sustainable and healthy living, well-being and mindfulness, we as tourists practice sustainability, reinforce our environmental awareness and embody the so called 'return to nature.' From this perspective of imagining tourism with its regenerative potency, we support a wider conceptualisation of tourism as a social force and its role in today's global community that goes beyond the hegemonic discourse of tourism as an industry only (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). It is thus urgent to revive and reinforce not only the idea of the restorative function of tourism for an individual (in terms of purposeful and meaningful activities restoring our well-being), but also its broader transformative role in today's society. The reason that such an agenda is vital and promising might be seen in the power of tourism practices making important contributions to the values of social and environmental justice, rebuilding the renewed framework of our future society. This, in turn, assumes that it is imperative, to borrow the concluding remarks of Hosta and Plevnik from their contribution, 'to support the efforts of the industry to realign its trends to the service of humanity and nature as joint venture.'

Divided into 3 thematic sections below, the contributions in this Special Issue, authored by scholars from diverse scientific and geographical backgrounds (from Europe, Asia and North America), take different starting points to consider the interactions of tourist practices, health issues, and physical activity or sport engagement. This in turn allows each paper to uniquely contribute to the broadening understanding of these intersections, providing comprehensive and rigorous examinations of many related issues and concepts, whether on the micro level of individuals, mezzo level of local communities or providers, or macro level of destinations. Grounded in the perspective that tourism today is performed and not experienced antithetically to our everyday life, and should thus be understood through a variety of temporal and spatial frames, the different papers in this issue begin

to articulate the dynamic nature of intersections between everyday sport/leisure activities, health issues and tourist practices, with special attention being paid to the promising synergies resulting from these intersections. Whilst at times they may not be able to provide the full answer to the pressing questions posed, they, nevertheless, do offer alternative lenses and less conventional methods through which to consider the complexities of travel and tourism in relation to well-being, sport and health issues today.

### **Complexity of Tourism's Impacts on Well-Being and Health**

Most tourism research has not sufficiently grasped the complexity of tourism's impacts on health and well-being. The contributions in this first section address the urgent need to confront the matter more subtly and within a number of different contexts to reveal rather more nuanced understandings of the interweaving of tourism practices, health and well-being. In their compelling and insightful conceptual paper that is grounded within the current cultural debates in praise of slowness in the otherwise accelerated pace of life, Farkić, Isailović, and Lesjak argue that places of *otium*, where 'doing nothing' is encouraged, may in many ways enhance tourist well-being. By employing in tourism studies the so-far neglected concept of idleness, they discuss spatial, temporal, and existential dimensions of tourist idleness, and ultimately expose the potential for the development of a new well-being experiential tourism product in a natural environment based on the benefits of being idle. In this manner they unsettle predominant conceptualisations of an active holiday in nature, arguing that 'doing less, not more' can be an equally meaningful and restorative tourist activity. Their reflection on the topic is in line with the above argument about the transformative role of tourism in today's accelerated society governed by the dictate of time and the imperative of being always active and performance orientated, and for that reason is of immeasurable value in thinking about the redefined ways of being and living in the future society.

Related to this, the next article similarly acknowledges the rising interest in nature-based experiences as an antidote to modern urban life, claiming that the

quest for well-being and therapeutic tourism will essentially open new opportunities, especially for rural areas. In her in-depth discussion of forest well-being and forest therapy tourism, based on an extensive review of literature and an overview of global good practices, Cvikl proposes responsible use of socio-cultural forest values in tourism for therapeutic and well-being purposes, indicating high prospects for implementation of forest therapeutic tourism in Slovenia. According to Cvikl, the main problem in the practice of forest therapeutic tourism that still remains is how to capture 'empirical knowledge and horizontal integration in the field of different professions such as health, tourism, environment, and social sciences with research groups from different disciplines and professions, such as forestry, psychology, and landscaping.'

Reverting the focus to local communities, Godovykh, Fyall, Pizam and Ridderstaat's study aims to explore the direct and indirect effects of tourism development on residents' health through income and environmental pollution in the case of three neighbouring European countries: Slovenia, Croatia, and Hungary. The article clearly and convincingly proves that the effects of tourism on residents' health might have different valence and power in the short term and the long run. In addition to its significant contribution in the development of new composite metrics for tourism impacts on residents' health and well-being that is based on the secondary data, the implications of the study are of equal importance and relate in particular to the reflection about determining the balance between the negative short-term impacts and positive long-term impacts of tourism development on residents' health. According to the authors, long-term health impacts should be considered as more important outcomes of tourism development and thus taken into account by tourism statistics, tourism bodies, and destination management organizations.

Embedded in broader debates on scientific production of knowledge, built dominantly around Knorr Cetina's idea (1999) of epistemic cultures, the article of Rančić Demir and Zečević provides a bibliometric analysis of academic research covering the field of wellness tourism. Through understanding of past research undertakings and by mapping the areas that

have been of special importance to researchers over time, they reveal the development of the wellness tourism research field, detecting important patterns and journals in this field. Therewith, Rančić Demir and Zečević problematize the broader issue of knowledge production that often remains unquestioned, and convincingly demonstrate a significant increase in the number of publications in wellness tourism in the last ten years, while detecting four thematic clusters within wellness tourism research. Their contribution highlights the importance of becoming more reflective of the ways and frameworks within which we produce and legitimize scientific knowledge.

### **Meaningful Physical Activity in the Context of Values, Motivations, and Promotions**

The following section brings together discussions on issues related to physical activity, especially with regard to either tourists' perceived barriers inhibiting it on one side or their values informing it on the other, while examining also the role of the tourism sector in promoting it. In their comprehensive conceptual paper, Hartnett and Gorman address the issue of an ageing population and the significance of active leisure. Reflecting on these issues, they develop a framework of meaning-making to active leisure, focusing on perceptions and motivations of a rural based population in Ireland. Although their study is geographically and culturally situated in rural Ireland, their conclusions resonate globally, as they highlight the significant role of various social categories (age groups, gender and rural-urban distinction) in structuring people's activities, amplifying each other's effect also on the perception of freedom in leisure, perceived subjective health and, thus, physical activity. Building on this, they further examine the impact of being physically active on participating in tourism. Finally, at the background of the so-called longevity revolution today, they argue for the necessity of understanding perceived barriers to physical activity (in terms of motivation, social support, and lack of time) having an impact on participation levels in order to develop more effective 'active ageing' strategies that would improve the health and quality of life of people living an ever longer life.

Grounding their research in a prominent concept

of physical literacy as crucial for establishing a healthy lifestyle, Kokot and Turnšek investigate the role of health resorts in increasing the physical literacy of their elderly patients undertaking medical rehabilitation. Employing a qualitative approach, they analyse the experiences of rehabilitation patients in Slovenian health resorts before, during, and after medical rehabilitation. The research opened an important question on how to extend the habits connected to physical activity to the period after the medical rehabilitation and addressed it systematically with reference to what precisely are the factors hindering or promoting this process. Their findings imply that the actions of health resorts target two dimensions of physical literacy in particular (the competence and the knowledge/understanding dimension), while the motivation dimension of physical literacy is ignored and should thus be addressed more in the future.

Addressing the topic of outdoor activities and undertaking a quantitative study of Slovene mountaineer tourists, Špindler, Lesjak and Gorenak investigate the significant differences between groups of respondents of different generations, gender and membership in mountaineering associations in terms of their mountaineering values. On the basis of their results, they conclude that in order to increase the effectiveness of promoting sustainable tourist behaviour in mountains, a different approach for tourists with different characteristics is needed. By providing an in-depth understanding of the values of sports tourists, more precisely active sports tourists in the mountains, their research is of great value. Namely, the findings can certainly help in 'attracting new members to mountaineering organizations, mountaineering pedagogical work, preserving mountaineering culture and sustainable development of tourism in the mountains,' as convincingly put by the authors.

In order to understand the importance of high-performance centres as a support for the development and growth of sports tourism in destinations, the article of Costa et al. takes the case of Portugal. It highlights the importance of infrastructure of recognized quality for international travel and stays of professional athletes (whether for sports internships, the maintenance and/or improvement of their

performances or for participation in sports competitions/events). Costa et al. use qualitative methodology to highlight that, although there is a sport offer in the Central region of Portugal, the number of sports experiences or activities offered is limited, concluding that it is vital for the destination to diversify the types of sports offered to meet the needs of different visitors who seek sport, either as the main motivation for visiting a destination or as a secondary one.

### **Imagining Healthy, Safe and Resilient Tourism Future(s)**

The final three contributions deal specifically with the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for tourism, and from diverse perspectives follow a common central idea of charting a resilient and healthy tourism future. Using the very illustrative analogy of COVID-19 acute respiratory collapse and the concept of hyper-ventilation to describe the hyperinflated mass tourism boom in recent years, Hosta and Plevnik's paper offers an organic interpretation of the crisis that hit the industry in the recent pandemic. Using a case study methodology and reasoning by the analogy, they, in a very unconventional and original manner, discuss a healthy and resilient future of the tourism sector. Proposing resilient solutions for tourism recovery in the post-COVID period (comparable to the recovery of an organ within a living organism – society), their outcomes can be used in designing preventive and post-COVID health regenerative retreats as innovative tourist products, and as a model to support the tourism industry with an organic understanding of sustainable niche-market solutions.

Chersulich Tomino and Perić take a different approach as they deal with predicting future participation in the sport-tourism event industry on which significant restrictions have been imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their empirical study, based on a survey among the running community in Croatia, investigate active runners' intention to attend future running events, and their perception of the importance of safety-related protective measures at those events. The findings suggest that the safety-related measures are not recognised as distinctly important for runners; at the same time there are no major differences in atti-

tudes between the groups of runners, which supports optimism for the future of sport tourism. Nevertheless, the authors reasonably qualify the main findings and carefully place them in the context of safety concerns (for participants and organizers as well as host communities) being of utmost importance in any event planning.

The final contribution discusses public health strategies in Taiwan's hospitality industry, again in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Chang and Kim undertake an extensive empirical study in which they explore the public health strategies that hotel companies have been adopting to restore customer confidence and to protect the hotel staff and customers, and investigate if these strategies differ with respect to hotels' different locations, customers, and performance. The paper concludes with important recommendations for crisis management and crisis preparation for the hospitality industry.

In sum, the collection as such provides a unique and balanced view of both theoretical discussions and empirical studies from different cultural contexts, thus offering a global perspective on issues, while at the same time undertaking very diverse methodological approaches. Overall, the diversity and interdisciplinary nature of the contributions within this issue invite us to re-examine our understandings of tourism in relation to other social domains and, as Larsen argues (2019), encourages us to remain attentive to more mundane, trivial forms of tourism, and relate them to other fields of social inquiry, in our case that of well-being, health and physical activity in particular. Here, we thus maintain that tourism needs to be explored in relation to other types of mobilities as well as to everyday leisure activities and health concerns in general. All of these need to be brought together within research in order to better understand their complex interrelationships and the perplexities arising from it. We strongly believe that, by accentuating the ways in which our tourist choices contribute to, and are representative of, persistent processes of de-differentiation in present-day social life, this collection of papers is valuable reading for students, researchers, and professionals in the fields of tourism, health and well-being, and sport.

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