

Activity Based Market Segmentation of Rural Wellbeing Tourists: Comparing Online Information Search

Corresponding author:

Name: Juho Antti Pesonen

Affiliation: University of Eastern Finland, Centre for Tourism Studies

E-mail: juho.pesonen@uef.fi

Phone number: +358 40 184 2698

Address: Kuninkaankartanonkatu 7, P.O. Box 86, 57101 Savonlinna, Finland.

Second author:

Name: Anja Tuohino

Affiliation: University of Eastern Finland, Centre for Tourism Studies

E-mail: anja.tuohino@uef.fi

Phone number: +358 50 554 0659

Address: Kuninkaankartanonkatu 7, P.O. Box 86, 57101 Savonlinna, Finland.

Abstract Wellbeing and wellness are growing trends in tourism. They also have considerable potential for development of tourism in rural areas. The objective of this article is to look at the wellbeing tourists as a heterogeneous rural tourism market segment through activity based segmentation. Online information search behavior of segments is compared to ensure that segments can be targeted online and elaborate information search behavior of activity segments. Using cluster analysis, three tourist segments based on wellbeing activities could be identified among Finnish rural tourists. The results shows the possibilities of activity based segmentation for understanding the preferences for wellbeing services. The study demonstrates that the rural wellbeing activity segments differs from each other regarding their socio-demographics and how they use the internet to search for information, book their holidays and write online reviews. All these differences have managerial implications for development of rural wellbeing products and they also demonstrate the possibilities of activity segmentation of rural wellbeing tourists.

Keywords: market segmentation, rural tourism, Finland, wellbeing, information search, activity segmentation.

This is authors version of the paper without final corrections. Final version of the paper is published in Journal of Vacation Marketing, doi 10.1177/1356766715610163

<http://jvm.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/10/28/1356766715610163.abstract>

1. Introduction

Interest in wellbeing and wellness is growing among tourists. Wellness tourism has become a major trend in the international travel and tourism industry and a fashionable tourist product (Medina-Muños & Medina-Muños, 2013). This can be seen in terms of an increase in medical tourism (Musa et al., 2012), growth in the international demand for wellness services and treatments (Medina-Muños & Medina-Muños, 2013), and an interest in rural wellbeing tourism (Konu et al., 2014). Wellness and wellbeing offer tourism businesses tremendous opportunities to differentiate themselves from their competitors and find new markets (Medina-Muños & Medina-Muños, 2013). However, in order to make better use of these possibilities more information on the customers and their preferences is needed.

Hjalager and Flagestad (2012) call for continuous product development in the Nordic countries with respect to wellbeing services, and they state that, among other things, new marketing strategies will be critical when the unique selling points of a destination are linked with a higher level of customer needs. Some countries have already responded to this call; for example, Finland has developed the Finrelax® marketing strategy, which describes the basic offerings of Finnish wellbeing tourism with particular emphasis placed on the countryside.

In many rural areas around the world, tourism is a major source of income for local people. Tourism offers a great opportunity for rural economic development (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008; Brown, 2012). Halfacree (2006) states that rural change driven by technological and social modernisation and globalisation has intensified since the 1950s. Rural areas are now understood as spaces for consumption, and the countryside has become a tourism landscape that is appreciated for its recreational and aesthetic values (Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010). The appeal of the countryside for tourism comes from its ability to provide settings for safe, peaceful, healthy and even restorative experiences with a variety of different activities (Roberts & Hall, 2004).

Rural tourism is often discussed via the activities tourists participate in during their rural holidays (Roberts & Hall, 2004), but discussion on the role of wellbeing activities as a possible way to develop rural tourism is only just starting (Hjalager et al., 2015). Based on earlier research on rural tourists, it seems clear that even niche segments are heterogeneous in nature (Tkaczynski et al., 2013). This suggests that rural wellbeing tourists also differ from each other. Identifying these differences will provide a basis for developing rural tourism products.

The purpose of this study is to study the interest of Finnish rural tourists in wellbeing products and services. This study profiles rural tourists based on their preferences for rural wellbeing activities using specific applications devised for activity-based segmentation. The heterogeneity of rural wellbeing tourists is examined based on their interest in wellbeing activities, something that could potentially provide actionable knowledge (Kotler & Keller, 2006) regarding the preferences of rural tourists for wellbeing services.

2. Rural wellbeing tourism

The existing literature on rural wellbeing tourism define and debate the meaning of the concepts rural, wellness and wellbeing. However, to understand what is meant by rural wellbeing tourism, it is important to define both rural and wellbeing tourism separately.

Defining what is meant by rural space is crucial for establishing the framework for rural wellbeing tourism as an overarching concept (Hjalager et al., 2015). According to Muilu (2010), despite many attempts defining what is meant by rural areas has proven difficult. Most definitions are based on a three-level division: remote, core and close-to-centre rural areas. The terms are used differently in various studies (Muilu, 2010). Sharpley and Sharpley (1997) in turn defined countryside as consisting of major areas beyond the boundaries of major towns and cities; it therefore stands in opposition to the notion of urban. Shen et al. (2012) similarly argued that countryside is a vast region beyond urban (and suburban) centres, and it often refers to villages. Thus, rural tourism refers to villages beyond a city's metropolitan area. In this study, rural tourism is defined as tourism outside densely populated areas and tourism centres, as this definition has been found to suit the needs of a segmentation study (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010).

Wellness and wellbeing tourism as a field of academic research is relatively new and emphasis has been on the concept of wellness. The first books about health and wellness tourism were published at the end of the 2000s (e.g. Bushell & Sheldon, 2009a; Cohen & Bodeker, 2008; Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puzckó, 2009). Wellness tourism is tourism where the main motive for travel is to promote and maintain one's own health. It aims to highlight holistic wellness, which includes wellbeing of body, soul and mind (e.g. see Müller & Kaufmann, 2001; Smith & Puzckó, 2009, 2014).

In addition to wellness, scholars have also introduced the concept of wellbeing tourism. Many studies have addressed the concepts of wellness tourism and wellbeing tourism sepa-

rately (e.g. Smith & Puczkó 2009). At the same time, others have treated wellbeing tourism and wellness tourism as being synonymous. This article uses the term wellbeing tourism, as the term is used for strategic development purposes in Finland and is also often connected with rural tourism (VisitFinland, 2015). Wellness tourism is more often connected to high-class hotels (e.g. see Kangas & Tuohino, 2008) and the traditional interpretation of luxury. Research on wellness and wellbeing tourism has mainly focused on conceptualisation and constructs as well as on understanding wellness and wellbeing and their links to tourism. In customer research, the focus has largely been on spa tourists and spiritual tourists, while relatively little research has been undertaken on the profiles and motivations of those visiting a site for health-related purposes (Smith & Puczkó, 2009). Segmenting wellness and wellbeing tourists into different groups has become more common in the last few years (Smith & Puczkó, 2014), but there are still gaps in the literature regarding, for example, the information search behaviour of tourists. Chen and Prebensen (2009) argue that there has been a lack of research on those participating in wellness tourism activities and on wellbeing tourism in general.

Wellbeing tourism faces several challenges. For instance, the profiles of potential consumers are unclear, as are the breadth and depth of the customer segments. In addition, wellbeing tourists have increasing expectations that may or may not be met. Wellbeing tourism facilities are diversified and various companies offer products under the wellness and wellbeing theme (Konu et al., 2014; Tuohino, 2012). Therefore, an efficient use of wellbeing tourism as a means of rural tourism development requires explicit knowledge about the market structure. There is a need among the academic community to respond to the changing needs people who now demand more from a holiday than ever before (Kelly & Smith, 2009: 83). So far, research into the profiles of rural wellbeing tourists is almost non-existent.

Hjalager et al. (2015: 14) have summarised the discussion regarding rural wellbeing tourism, stating that 'Rural wellbeing tourism is a form of tourism that takes place in rural settings and that interconnects actively with local nature and community resources. Based on the rural tangible and intangible, openly accessible and commercial ingredients, wellbeing tourism is holistic mode of travel that integrates physical and mental wellness and/or health and contributes to wider positive social and individual life experiences'.

3. Market segmentation in tourism

3.1 Segmenting rural tourists

Market segmentation provides the means for businesses to define their target markets (Cooper, 2009). Therefore, it has often been regarded as one of the cornerstones of marketing. A market segment consists of a group of customers who share a similar set of needs and wants (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Cooper, 2009). Bushell and Sheldon (2009b) state that some tourists, for example, seek hedonistic experiences, while others choose simpler, more relaxing and healthier holidays and lifestyles

Market heterogeneity is receiving more and more attention in rural tourism, and there are many examples of market segmentation research being conducted in the field of tourism (Pesonen, 2013). Such research has been utilised in many different contexts, but one prominent area has been rural tourism. This study adopts a general approach to rural tourism. According to Roberts and Hall (2004), rural tourism consists of many different kinds of tourism, ranging from nature-based tourism to adventure tourism and bird-watching tourism. In this study, rural wellbeing tourism is considered as one sub-type of rural tourism, in which the importance of the countryside to the overall purpose of the trip and tourist satisfaction may range from one end of the scale to the other. The heterogeneity of this market has been examined in the existing literature many different ways. Molera and Albaladejo (2007) segmented tourists in the rural areas of south-eastern Spain using benefit segmentation as a method. Kastenholz, Davis and Paul (1999) also used benefit segmentation to study rural areas in northern and central Portugal, while Frochot (2005) has done so in Scotland. Park and Yoon (2009) used travel motivations as the central criterion, whereas Oh and Schuett (2010) focused on the expenditures of rural tourists to identify segment markets. For an overview of earlier rural tourism segmentation studies, see Appendix 1.

Pesonen (2012) and Pesonen and Komppula (2010) identified rural wellbeing tourists as one specific rural tourism segment. Despite such attention, it is still not known whether this wellbeing segment is homogenous or if it could be further segmented into more actionable segments (Kotler & Keller, 2006). Actionable segments can be effectively targeted with different kinds of marketing messages and channels. Market segments have to be actionable in order to be of benefit for tourism companies, and focusing on online information search behaviour makes it possible for companies to choose the correct online channels and combine them with the most efficient targeting messages. Examining online information channels provides important information especially for tourism management purposes.

3.2 Activity-based segmentation

Activities have been identified as a critical link between travel motivation and destination choice, and the image or reputation of a particular tourist destination image is based upon the activities offered there (Cooper et al., 2005). Thus, activities play a central role in destination marketing and especially in communicating the marketing message. Destination marketers will benefit from knowledge about potential activity preferences prior to travel by identifying what potential tourists perceive as desirable and favourable (Tkaczynski & Prebensen, 2012).

Many studies have found activities to be an efficient segmentation base (Tkaczynski et al., 2013; Mehmetoglu, 2007; Pesonen, 2015). According to McKercher et al. (2002), activity-based segmentation defines groups of tourists by their visitation patterns or travel behaviour. Thus, they suggest that not all rural tourists who favour wellbeing services are similar, but that there are indeed differences between tourists interested in different services. These differences, which can, for example, have to do with travel motivation, information-seeking behaviour and socio-demographic factors, can be used to improve the efficiency of target marketing.

3.3 Targeting market segments

According to Pearce and Schott (2005), research on tourism distribution channels has been dominated by studies on providers and intermediaries. This study, like the study by Pearce and Schott (2005), extends research on the topic of the information channels used by tourists. Grønflaten (2009) states that knowing where and how travellers acquire information when planning their trip is essential for developing marketing strategies. Some people might prefer a large variety of information sources, whereas some may be less active seekers (Murphy & Olaru, 2009). Knowing how tourists interested in different kinds of wellbeing products search for information regarding their holiday is extremely important for companies offering wellbeing products and services or for those that are planning to develop them.

In terms of information-seeking behaviour, this study focuses on the use of social media websites and search engines as the dominant information-seeking modes when travellers use the Internet (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The information-seeking process has been revolutionised as a result of the Internet (Buhalis & Law, 2008). According to Fodness and Murray (1997), information technology reduces uncertainty and perceived risks and also enhances the quality of trips, since the needs of customers can be better met and served when they can find more

information and do more research on a particular topic or destination (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Identifying the information search behaviour of tourists enables more efficient marketing, using the correct message in correct marketing channels.

3.4 Identifying rural wellbeing tourists

Based on the literature review presented in the previous sections, it is clear that rural tourism is a heterogeneous market (Park & Yoon, 2009; Frochot, 2005; Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). People travel to rural areas for various reasons. Identifying these reasons is useful for developing and marketing rural tourism businesses.

Activities have played a role in validating segmentation solutions, but they have seldom been the central focus of segmentation studies. However, Choi and Tsang (2000) state that with a better understanding various types of activities, it is possible to develop more efficient market planning strategies to suit target markets, attract new target markets or increase customer volume in off-peak periods.

Wellbeing activities could provide rural tourism companies with new ways to diversify their offerings and reach new as well as existing markets with profitable products. Based on the literature review, we know that there is a demand for wellbeing services among rural tourists. However, the profiles of rural wellbeing tourists remain unknown. Rural tourists want to relax and enjoy nature as well as find peace and quiet. These are all traditional travel motivations. Even still, little is known about what kinds of wellbeing services rural tourists desire and whether there are different market segments and marketing methods for various wellbeing services. Thus, the research questions for this study are as follows:

- 1) How popular are wellbeing services among rural tourists?
- 2) How do rural tourists differ from each other in terms of their preferences for rural wellbeing activities, and can these differences be used to segment the market?
- 3) How do the market segments differ from each other with respect to travel motivations, socio-demographic profiles, information sources used and the use of online information channels?

This study positions itself in the market segmentation literature as the first study to segment wellbeing tourists based on their wellbeing activity preferences. This should enable tourism

businesses, in this case Finnish companies specialising in rural tourism, to develop more efficient market planning strategies than when just using benefit or motivation based segmentation methods (Choi & Tsang, 2000). This study also focuses on the online information search behaviour of potential travellers, thus studying the actionability (Kotler & Keller, 2006) of rural tourism segments in more detail than previous studies.

4. Methodology

Lomarengas.fi is the largest Finnish consumer website for rural tourism, and its users essentially include everyone searching for information on rural accommodations on the Internet. Lomarengas.fi has extensive visibility on search engines and a large user base. The marketing manager of the company agreed to place a banner for the study questionnaire on the front page of the company's website. Two other smaller rural tourism websites were also contacted to broaden the scope of the study and cover a larger group of rural tourists. The companies included in the study were project partners in the project that the authors worked for. As the largest rural tourism website in Finland, Lomarengas.fi provides a good overview of Finnish rural tourists; likewise, it lends itself to data collection since the target group for this study consist of rural tourists or people interested in rural tourism.

A lottery was set up to increase the response rate, with the winning prize being a 500€ gift certificate for one lucky respondent. A pilot test with 73 users was first conducted to ensure that the data could be used and that respondents found the questionnaire easy to use. Data were collected during a six-month period, from 4 March to 31 August 2011. The goal was to obtain as many answers as possible and to focus on the main tourism season in Finland. Participants clicked on the banner advertisements a total of 3,684 times, resulting in 2,131 responses. After deleting empty responses and duplicated responses from the same user, a total of 1,967 usable questionnaires were obtained. The questionnaire was only in Finnish.

The questionnaire was based on previous studies and recommendations by the Finnish Tourism Board (FTB). The FTB (2005) conducted research on the possibilities of Finnish wellbeing products and services in the main international markets, and this report included various wellbeing services and activities. A content analysis evaluation was conducted on these particular services, and altogether seven different commercial wellbeing services were identified by the researchers. The activities discussed in the study are based on these services. Respondents were asked to pick all of the wellbeing activities they would be interested in during

their rural holiday in order to avoid response style effect (Dolnicar & Grün, 2007). The questionnaire included questions on information channels and socio-demographic factors. To measure online information search behaviour, this study adapted measurements suggested by Jani et al. (2011), including the websites that rural tourists use when searching for information on their next rural holiday and their online purchasing behaviour with respect to travel products. Respondents were also asked to state the most important information channel as well as all the other channels that they used when searching for information regarding their next holiday. For this study, a combined score was calculated for each information channel to represent all of the information channels used. Respondents were also asked to state the importance of 13 travel motivations using the 7-point Likert scale. These motivations are presented in Table 1, and they are based in particular on the segmentation results reported by Pesonen (2012). A rough English version of the questionnaire can be accessed at <https://elomake.uef.fi/lomakkeet/12013/lomake.html>.

In the sample profile, 71.4 per cent of respondents were female. It is unknown whether women plan their holidays more than men and thus visit Internet travel sites more often, or whether they are just more interested in responding to questionnaires than men. The mean and median age among all the respondents was 39 years. Twenty-five per cent of respondents were less than 28 years old. Using an online questionnaire to collect the data means that respondents will more likely be young or middle-aged; there were not many respondents over 65 years of age. Even though 20 per cent of Finns are over 65 years of age, the use of Internet is less frequent in this age category; only 68 per cent of those 65–74 years of age and 28 per cent of those 75–89 years of age have used the Internet during the past three months (Statistics Finland, 2014).

First, the respondents were divided into two categories according to whether they were interested at all in wellbeing services or not. Altogether, 315 respondents (16%) reported that they were not interested in any wellbeing services and were thus excluded from further analysis. Next, the remaining 1,652 rural tourists were segmented into groups using two different clustering methods. According to Hair et al. (2010), cluster analysis and the segmentation of tourists is a descriptive approach, and cluster analysis will always create clusters regardless of the actual existence of any such structure in the data. Thus, the researcher must be critical of the results when using cluster analysis (Pesonen, 2014). To increase the reliability of the study, the data were clustered using two different clustering methods that were both suitable and readily available to the researchers: hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method and

squared Euclidean distances, and the two-step cluster analysis of IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20. Cluster solutions ranging from two to seven when using both methods were compared to find the most logical and usable solution. Both clustering methods suggested that a three-cluster solution was best and that the clusters in both three-cluster solutions were similar. Eventually the cluster membership variable obtained via two-step cluster analysis was used as it yielded more distinctive segments than hierarchical clustering, making the results easier to interpret. The clusters were then validated by comparing travel motivations with independent samples using the Kruskal-Wallis Test. The socio-demographic profiles and online information search behaviour of respondents were compared using chi-square tests.

5. The results

The results are depicted in Tables 1 to 7. Table 1 presents the results of the two-step cluster analysis. Altogether, we identified three clusters. In Cluster A, all of the respondents stated that they are interested only in sports activities. Members of Cluster B reported that they are more or less interested in all wellbeing activities. This is also the only cluster that includes people interested in physical examinations or fitness tests and alternative treatments. They are the most interested in all of the wellbeing activities. Members of Cluster C consist mostly of spa tourists and those reportedly interested in typical spa activities, such as traditional health treatments and massages. Based on this information, we chose to name Cluster A ‘Sporties’, Cluster B ‘Wellbeing Enthusiasts’ and Cluster C ‘Spa Goers’.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

There were differences between the three clusters regarding several travel motivations (Table 2). We used the median and mean scores to interpret the results of the Kruskal-Wallis Test. In most cases, Wellbeing Enthusiasts regarded travel motivations as being more important than did members of the other clusters. However, the opportunity to be physically active was reportedly most important for Sporties.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

The members of the Wellbeing Enthusiasts cluster were the youngest (Table 3), with a mean age of 38.17 years. Wellbeing Enthusiasts also included the most females. Sporties clearly included more males than females. There were no statistical differences regarding household income.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

We did not find many differences between the various segments regarding information channels (Table 4). All participants reported that the Internet is the most important information channel. Wellbeing Enthusiasts reported using magazines, radio and travel agencies more than members of the other clusters. The results also show that brochures and word of mouth are also important information channels.

INSERT TABLE 4HERE

According to the results presented in Table 5, search engines are the most important ways in which wellbeing tourists seek information from the Internet. All of the respondents also stated that they visit affiliate websites, travel agents' websites and destination websites quite often. Sporties reported using DMO websites more than members of the other two segments. According to our findings, Wellbeing Enthusiasts use discussion boards and blogs as well as social media more often than Sporties or Spa Goers.

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

We also found some differences between the three segments in terms of their online buying behaviour. Sporties differed from the other two segments by being more accustomed to purchasing travel products via the Internet. They reported booking accommodations as well as flight tickets most often online, whereas Wellbeing Enthusiasts reportedly are the least likely to have booked accommodations over the Internet. Our findings show that Wellbeing Enthusiasts are more prone to write online reviews than the other two segments (Table 6). Over a

third of Wellbeing Enthusiasts reported that they have written online reviews during the past 12 months, whereas only a quarter of people in the other segments reported having done so.

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

6. Discussion

In this article, we divided Finnish rural tourists into wellbeing segments according to the wellbeing services they reported being interested in during their rural holidays. Based on the results, we identified three types of wellbeing tourists in Finland. The first segment, Sporties, included those only interested in sports activities. This segment was quite small compared to the other two segments. It differed most from the other segments regarding the gender of the segment members: there were proportionally more men in this segment than in the other two segments. They were mostly middle-aged men. Also, the opportunity to be physically active was reportedly more important for this segment compared to the other two segments. Sporties were also most likely to purchase tourism products online, even though they reported using the Internet just as much as members of the other two segments.

The second segment, Wellbeing Enthusiasts, was almost twice as large as the first segment, and members of this segment were most interested in all of the different types of wellbeing activities. It is clearly the most important segment for rural wellbeing companies. Members of this segment included those who stated that they are interested in alternative treatments, physical examinations or fitness tests, and participating in fitness and wellbeing seminars. This segment was also quite similar to the wellbeing segment found in the study by Pesonen (2012) with respect to their travel motivations. They value pampering, 'once in a lifetime' experiences, different cultures and interactions with other people the most. This was also the youngest segment and it consisted mostly of women. Traditionally, middle-aged women have been the main market for Finnish wellbeing products, but the results suggest that younger age groups should also be targeted. Wellbeing Enthusiasts also reportedly use magazines, radio and travel agencies more than the other two segments, making these channels the more efficient marketing channels for this segment especially compared to the other two segments. Enthusiasts are also reportedly the most likely to write online reviews, making it critical for rural wellbeing companies so have a high quality level right from the start.

The last segment, Spa Goers, was the largest segment. This segment consisted of traditional spa tourists interested in traditional health services, sports activities and massage. Most of the members of this segment reported being interested in visiting health spas. They were also mostly interested in traditional spa offerings. This segment had the oldest members of any of the segments.

The results also show that Wellbeing Enthusiasts can be more efficiently reached using magazines and travel agencies than the other two segments. Wellbeing Enthusiasts also reported using discussion boards, blogs and social media significantly more than the other two segments. This means that rural tourism companies offering wellbeing products should be active on social media and that companies efficiently utilising such opportunities can gain a significant competitive advantage. However, the results also show that rural wellbeing companies will have to focus on how to make lookers into bookers on electronic channels, as Wellbeing Enthusiasts seem to buy fewer tourism products online than members of the two other segments.

The results provide plenty of ideas for developing rural areas. It will probably be difficult to convince Spa Goers to use rural wellbeing services, as there are not that many spas in the countryside and they require considerable investment to build and considerable upkeep. Sports on the other hand are an interesting segment especially for sports centres located in rural areas. Wellbeing Enthusiasts are clearly the main segment for rural wellbeing services. They are interested in all kinds of wellbeing. They are also hungry for information and use various information sources more than other rural wellbeing tourists, but at the same time they are less likely to buy tourism products online.

Only 16 per cent of the rural tourists in this study reported that they are not interested in any kind of wellbeing products or services, meaning that there is indeed a sizeable market for rural wellbeing products. Rural tourism and wellbeing are certainly connected to each other. Understanding this connection through segmentation will provide companies with more information on their potential customer base. The domestic demand for rural wellbeing products is significant and should be able to help rural tourism companies during off-seasons if the companies can provide the correct products for the correct customers.

In this case, all of the respondents were Finns, meaning that more information is needed on how to develop products and services for international markets. However, domestic rural tourists still represent a major market for most of the Finnish rural tourism businesses, and

also domestic needs regarding wellbeing services should be better taken into account. More information is needed on international tourists potentially interested in Finnish rural wellbeing.

Using segmentation to identify customers' needs and wishes will help enterprises group their fragmented service offerings into common themes and easily marketable entities. The knowledge generated by research marketing communications can also be directed at specific target groups with the help of segmentation, or then based on age, gender, travelling companions or even various forms of accommodation. The research findings are extremely useful for those designing product packages for various tourism services and will make it possible to more effectively market offerings to the appropriate target groups. For example, Sporties do not care about pampering; thus, marketing sports and pampering together would not provide an enticing marketing message for any particular segment. Sports and pampering are desired by two quite different segments and they should be targeted as such instead of marketing pampering services for Sporties. This also demonstrates the effectiveness of activity-based segmentation, as it provides actionable knowledge for tourism businesses, confirming the suggestions made by Mehmetoglu (2007).

There has been an increase in the use of social media and especially Facebook. Using Facebook and Twitter will open up new opportunities to intensify the achievements of marketing and reaching the right target group. These segments are actionable, as activity-based segmentation allows companies to devise clear targeting messages based on various activities. Likewise, the various segments are directly connected to products that rural tourism companies can sell, thus providing more actionable segments than, for example, segmentation based purely on travel motivations.

7. Conclusions, limitations and further research

Compared to previous studies, this study contributes to the market segmentation literature by focusing on a specific aspect of activity-based segmentation. In this study, rural wellbeing tourism is treated as one sub-type of rural tourism with its own set of travel activities depending on the destination in question. Activities are the core attributes that come into play when a tourist makes a destination choice (Cooper et al., 2005), and they should also be at the core of destination marketing and tourism research. This point is confirmed in this study, as valu-

able information can be gained through examining preferred activities during a rural wellbeing holiday.

This study also contributes to our understanding of the choice of segmentation variables. The results would be completely different had the segmentation choice been travel motivations (Pesonen, 2010) or general travel activities (Mehmetoglu, 2007). The segments identified in this study are novel with respect to the existing literature and differ significantly from, for example, the results presented by Pesonen et al. (2011). By choosing wellbeing activities as the segmentation base, this study was able to extract detailed information useful for rural travel companies and provide insights on customer preferences as well as define what rural wellbeing is and how tourists experience it.

This study also provides new information by, for example, demonstrating that various sports activities go very well together with wellbeing, as respondents in all the wellbeing segments reported that they at least to some extent participate in various sports activities. Wellbeing tourism is identified as one type of rural holiday focused on enjoying wellbeing activities, thereby contributing to our understanding of how people conceive of wellbeing. Wellbeing is a major motivation for those seeking out in rural tourism (Roberts & Hall, 2004), and rural tourists can be segmented based on the ways in which they pursue wellbeing, as demonstrated in this study.

This study provides insights into ways to target the wellbeing activity segments through examining how people who fall into each segment use electronic information channels, thus providing extremely actionable ways (Kotler & Keller, 2006) to assess the different segments. Grønflaten (2009) states that knowing where and how travellers acquire information when planning their trips is essential for developing marketing strategies; this study provides that information for each of the three wellbeing activity segments. The Internet is by far the most used source for information. However, the Internet can be used in many different ways (Pesonen, 2013), and more detailed information is needed with respect to online marketing. This study shows that different activity segments prefer different websites, but maintaining a highly visible presence on search engines is critical for all rural wellbeing companies. However, when looking at the big picture, the different rural wellbeing tourism segments are quite similar in their information search behaviour. For example, different information foraging styles (Murphy & Olaru, 2009) cannot be identified just by comparing the different segments.

This study also increases our knowledge of wellbeing. It is evident that different people regard wellbeing differently. For some, wellbeing comes from engaging in various sports activities (Sporties), while others derive a sense of wellbeing from various treatments (Wellbeing Enthusiasts) or from relaxing in a spa (Spa Goers). The sources of wellbeing vary for different people and thus segmentation is needed. Rural tourism companies can provide tourists with luxurious experiences without focusing on materialism by regarding luxury as a concept related to fulfilment and by creating opportunities for different customer groups to experience luxury through simple, relaxing and healthier holiday experiences (Bushell and Sheldon, 2009b; Yeoman, 2008).

Rural wellbeing tourism has the potential to considerably stimulate the rural tourism business. For many people, rural areas are sources of wellbeing; they provide healthy, relaxing and restorative experiences (Roberts & Hall, 2004). Wellbeing services could change the abstract concept of wellbeing into actual products that consumers can buy and experience. Wellbeing services support the positive aspects of rural tourism and are interesting for rural tourists. The challenge for rural tourism businesses is to provide these services in rural areas in a profitable manner. This study has found that segment termed Wellbeing Enthusiasts in particular provide a solid demand for rural wellbeing products.

This study does have some limitations. When interpreting the results, it should be noted that a self-selective online questionnaire was used to collect the data, resulting in somewhat skewed data. There were significantly more female respondents in the sample than male respondents. This is not surprising as earlier research has found that females have a dominant role in the household during the early stages of the tourism decision-making process (Mottiar & Quinn, 2004). It is unknown whether women plan the holidays more than men, and thus visit the sites more often, or if they are more interested in responding to questionnaires than men. The marketing manager of the website (Huttunen, 2011) estimates that while more female than male users are represented by the website data, it is not clear how many more women use the site on a regular basis. This study measured the interest of potential rural tourists in wellbeing services. Hence, the actual behaviour of rural tourists is still unknown. Knowing what tourists would like to do is important when developing products and services and could produce different results, as the actual behaviour of tourists is restricted by constraints not measured in this study, such as the resources available to a tourist. Also, the sample size has to be taken into account since a large sample size increases the possibility of finding significant differences.

Nevertheless, the data can be regarded as informative with respect to Finnish rural tourists going online to search for information on their upcoming holidays. Moreover, the segmentation method used in this study will always provide a cluster solution. By examining different clustering solutions with different methods of analysis, it was possible to improve the reliability of the results.

This study also demonstrated the need for further research. One interesting theme should be how the type of wellbeing service affects the distribution channels that people use. The segmentation method used in this study is crude, and using data-driven market segmentation based on preferences for different wellbeing services could produce more in-depth segments of wellbeing-oriented rural tourists. Other interesting aspects for study include the differences between Finnish respondents and non-Finnish respondents.

References

- Brown DM (2012) Rural tourism. In: Seba JA (ed) Tourism and Hospitality Issues and Developments. Toronto & New York: Apple Academic Press, pp. 107–112.
- Buhalis D and Law R (2008) Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet - The state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management* 29(4): 609–623.
- Bushell R and Sheldon PJ (2009a) Wellness and Tourism; Mind, Body, Spirit, Place. New York, Sidney, Tokyo: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Bushell R and Sheldon PJ (2009b) Wellness tourism and the future. In: Bushell R and Sheldon PJ (eds) Wellness and Tourism; Mind, Body, Spirit, Place. New York, Sidney, Tokyo: Cognizant Communication Corporation, pp. 218–230.
- Cai L and Li M (2009) Distance-Segmented Rural Tourists. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 26(8): 751–761.
- Cawley M and Gillmor D (2008) Integrated Rural Tourism: Concepts and Practice. *Annals of Tourism Research* 35(2): 316–337.
- Chen JS and Prebensen N (2009) Wellness as tourist motivation, Case of Taiwan. In: Bushell R and Sheldon PJ (eds) Wellness and Tourism; Mind, Body, Spirit, Place. New York, Sidney, Tokyo: Cognizant Communication Corporation, pp. 231–238.
- Choi W and Tsang C (2000) Activity Based Segmentation on Pleasure Travel Market of Hong Kong Private Housing Residents. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 8(1): 75–97.

- Cohen M and Bodeker G (2008) Understanding global spa industry: Spa Management. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Cooper C, Fletcher, J, Fyall A, Gilbert D and Wanhill S (2005) Tourism Principles and Practice (3rd ed). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Cooper M (2009) Aspects of Management and Marketing in Health and Wellness Spa Tourism. In: Erfurt-Cooper P and Cooper M (eds) Health and wellness tourism Spas and Hot Springs. Aspects of Tourism. Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications, pp. 207–238.
- Dolnicar S and Grün B (2007) Cross-cultural differences in survey response patterns. *International Marketing Review* 24(2): 127–143.
- Erfurt-Cooper P and Cooper M (2009) Health and wellness tourism Spas and Hot Springs. Aspects of Tourism. Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications.
- Fodness D and Murray B (1997) Tourist information search. *Annals of Tourism Research* 24(3): 503–523.
- Frochot I (2005) A benefit segmentation of tourists in rural areas: a Scottish perspective. *Tourism Management* 26(3): 335–346.
- FTB (2005) *Hyvinvointi- ja wellness – matkailun peruskartoitus* [Mapping of Wellbeing and Wellness Tourism]. Helsinki: Matkailun edistämiskeskus, MEK A:144.
- Grønflaten Ø (2009) The Tourist Information Matrix – Differentiating Between Sources and Channels in the Assessment of Travellers' Information Search. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* 9(1): 39–64.
- Hair J, Black W, Babin B and Anderson R (2010) *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Halfacree K (2006) From dropping out to lading on? British counter-cultural back-to-the-land in a changing rurality. *Progress in Human Geography* 30(3): 309–336.
- Hjalager A-M and Flagestad A (2012) Innovations in well-being tourism in the Nordic countries. *Current Issues in Tourism* 15(8): 725–740.
- Hjalager A-M, Tervo-Kankare K, Tuohino A and Konu H (2015) PROWELL - Towards New Understanding of Rural Wellbeing Tourism. University of Southern Denmark: Danish Centre for Rural Research.
- Huttunen P (2011) Personal interview in 13.9.2011.
- Jani D, Jang J-H and Hwang Y-H (2011) Personality and Tourists' Internet Behaviour. In: Law R, Fuchs M and Ricci F (eds) *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2011*. Germany: Springer.

- Kangas H and Tuohino A (2008) Lake Wellness – Uusi itäsuomalainen innovaatio? *Matkailututkimus*, 4(1): 23–41.
- Kastenholz E, Davis D and Paul G (1999) Segmenting tourism in rural areas: the case of North and Central Portugal. *Journal of Travel Research* 37(4): 353–363.
- Kelly C and Smith M (2009) Holistic tourism: integrating body, mind, spirit. In: Bushell R and Sheldon P (eds) *Wellness Tourism: Mind, Body, Spirit, Place*. Cognizant. New York.
- Konu H (2010) Identifying potential wellbeing tourism segments in Finland. *Tourism Review* 65(2): 41–51.
- Konu H, Tuohino A and Björk P (2014) Wellbeing tourism in Finland. In: Smith M and Puczko L (eds) *Health Tourism and Hospitality. Spas, wellness and medical travel*. New York: Routledge, pp. 345–349.
- Kotler P and Keller K (2006) *Marketing Management* (12th ed). New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- McKercher B, Ho P, Du Cros H and So-Ming B (2002) Activities-Based Segmentation of the Cultural Tourism Market. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 12(1): 23–46.
- Medina-Muños D and Medina-Muños R (2013) Critical issues in health and wellness tourism: an exploratory study of visitors to wellness centres on Gran Canaria. *Current Issues in Tourism* 16(5): 415–435.
- Mehmetoglu M (2007) Typologising nature-based tourists by activity – Theoretical and practical implications. *Tourism Management* 28(3): 651–660.
- Molera L and Albaladejo I (2007) Profiling segments of tourists in rural areas of South-Eastern Spain. *Tourism Management* 28(3): 757–767.
- Mottiar Z and Quinn D (2004) Couple dynamics in household tourism decision making: Women as the gatekeepers? *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 10(2): 149–160.
- Muilu T (2010) Needs for rural research in the northern Finland context. *Journal of Rural Studies* 26(1): 73–80.
- Murphy J and Olaru D (2009) How information foraging styles relate to tourism demographics and behaviours. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 15(4): 299–309.
- Musa G, Thirumoorthi T and Doshi D (2012) Travel behaviour among inbound medical tourists in Kuala Lumpur. *Current Issues in Tourism* 15(6): 525–543.
- Müller H. and Kauffman E (2001) Wellness tourism: market analysis of a special health tourism segment and implications for the hotel industry. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 7(1): 5–17.

- Oh J and Schuett M (2010) Exploring expenditure-based segmentation for rural tourism: overnight stay visitors versus excursionists to fee-fishing sites. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 27(1): 31–50.
- Park D-B and Yoon Y-S (2009) Segmentation by motivation in rural tourism: A Korean case study. *Tourism Management* 30(1): 99–108.
- Pearce D and Schott C (2005) Tourism distribution channels: The visitors' perspective. *Journal of Travel Research* 44: 50–63.
- Pesonen J and Komppula R (2010) Rural Wellbeing Tourism: Motivations and Expectations. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 17(1): 150–157.
- Pesonen J, Laukkanen T and Komppula R (2011) Benefit segmentation of potential wellbeing tourists. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 17(4): 303–314.
- Pesonen J (2012) Segmentation of Rural Tourists: Combining Push and Pull Motivations. *Tourism and Hospitality Management* 18(1): 69–82.
- Pesonen J (2013) Information and communications technology and market segmentation in tourism: a review. *Tourism Review* 68(2): 14–30.
- Pesonen J (2014) Testing segment stability: insights from a rural tourism study. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing* 31(6): 697–711.
- Pesonen J (2015) Targeting Rural Tourists in the Internet: Comparing Travel Motivation and Activity-based Segments. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, forthcoming.
DOI:10.1080/10548408.2014.895695.
- Roberts L and Hall D (2004) Consuming the countryside: Marketing for 'rural tourism'. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 10(3): 253–263.
- Sharpley R and Sharpley J (1997) Rural Tourism: An Introduction. London: International Thomson Business Press.
- Shen H, Wang X and Wang M (2012) Development and Research of Rural Tourism. In: Seba JA (ed) Tourism and Hospitality Issues and Developments. Toronto & New York: Apple Academic Press, pp. 113–119.
- Smith M and Puczko L (2009) Health and wellness tourism. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Smith M and Puczko L (2014) Health, Tourism and Hospitality. Spas, wellness and medical travel. New York: Routledge.
- Statistics Finland (2014) One half of Finnish residents participate in social network services. http://www.stat.fi/til/sutivi/2014/sutivi_2014_2014-11-06_tie_001_en.html. Accessed 27.1.2015.

- Tkaczynski A and Prebensen N (2012) French Nature-Based Tourist Potentials to Norway: Who Are They? *Tourism Analysis* 17(2): 181–193.
- Tkaczynski A, Rundle-Thiele S and Prebensen N (2013) Segmenting Potential Nature-Based Tourists Based on Temporal Factors: The Case of Norway. *Journal of Travel Research*, published online before print.
- Tuohino A (2012) *Löytöretki hyvinvointimatkailuun. Hyvinvointimatkailun nykytilakartoitus ja toimenpide-ehdotukset*.
<http://www.prizz.fi/linkkitiedosto.aspx?taso=5&id=477&sid=302> (accessed 19.3.2013).
- Vepsäläinen K and Pitkänen K (2010) Second home countryside. Representation of the rural in Finnish popular discourses. *Journal of Rural Studies* 26(2): 194–204.
- VisitFinland (2015) Hyvinvointimatkailustrategia kansainvälisille markkinoille 2014–2018. <http://www.visitfinland.fi/library/hyvinvointimatkailustrategia-kansainvalisille-markkinoille-2014-2018/> (accessed 2.2.2015).
- Xiang Z and Gretzel U (2010) Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management* 31(2): 179–188.
- Yeoman I (2008) Tomorrow's Tourist: Scenarios and Trends (Advances in Tourism Research Series). Oxford: Elsevier.

Table 1. Two-step Cluster solution based on wellbeing activities

	Sporties (N=297)	Wellbeing En- thusiasts (N=536)	Spa Goers (N=819)	X ²	Sig.
Participating in fitness and wellbeing seminars	2 (0%)	102 (19%)	0 (0%)	218.28	p<0.001
Physical examination or fitness test	0 (0%)	213 (40%)	0 (0%)	509.13	p<0.001
Visiting health spa (relaxa- tion, special saunas, yoga, treatments etc.)	0 (0%)	364 (68%)	510 (62%)	410.92	p<0.001
Traditional health services (e.g. facial treatments or pedicure)	0 (0%)	312 (58%)	346 (42%)	274.14	p<0.001
Alternative treatments (e.g. <i>reiki</i> or <i>shiatsu</i>)	0 (0%)	378 (71%)	0 (0%)	1020.54	p<0.001
Various sports activities	297 (100%)	294 (55%)	306 (37%)	344.70	p<0.001
Massages	0 (0%)	298 (56%)	409 (50%)	275.14	p<0.001

Table 2. Comparing travel motivation differences between clusters

	Sporties (N=297)		Wellbeing Enthu- siasts (N=536)		Spa Goers (N=819)		Kurskal- Wallis test sig.
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	
I would have a hassle-free vacation	5.48	6	5.64	6	5.60	6	p=0.348
I would like to escape from a busy everyday life	5.65	6	5.75	6	5.76	6	p=0.237
There would be an opportunity to be together as a family	5.52	6	5.66	6	5.69	6	p=0.221
I could visit places my family comes from	3.49	3	3.61	4	3.65	4	p=0.456
I would feel pampered	4.22	4	5.25	5	5.02	5	p<0.001
Opportunity to be physically active	5.07	5	4.85	5	4.65	5	p<0.001
"Once in a lifetime" experience	4.23	4	4.60	5	4.26	4	p<0.001
I would like to relax away from the ordinary routine	6.12	6	6.27	7	6.24	7	p=0.053
I would have some control over the way things turn out	4.00	4	4.01	4	3.88	4	p=0.276
Experiencing a different culture	4.38	4	4.64	5	4.41	5	p=0.028
Experiencing a romantic holiday	4.28	5	5.01	5	4.79	5	p<0.001
Having a romance	2.65	2	3.00	2	2.76	2	p=0.046

A chance to meet interesting people	4.28	4	4.84	5	4.52	5	p<0.001
--	------	---	------	---	------	---	-------------------

Table 3. Comparing differences in socio-demographics between clusters

	Sporties (N=297)	Wellbeing Enthusiasts (N=536)	Spa Goers (N=819)	X ² / F	Sig.
Age				32.47	p<0.001
Less than 20 years	9 (3%)	32 (6%)	34 (5%)		
20-29 years	56 (20%)	129 (26%)	167 (22%)		
30-39 years	88 (32%)	107 (21%)	140 (19%)		
40-49 years	59 (21%)	128 (26%)	216 (29%)		
50-59 years	40 (15%)	67 (13%)	136 (18%)		
At least 60 years	24 (9%)	36 (7%)	58 (8%)		
Mean age	39.4	38.2	40.3	3.741	p=0.024
Gender				5.56	p<0.001
Male	104 (35%)	102 (19%)	202 (25%)		
Female	192 (55%)	427 (81%)	607 (75%)		

Table 4. Comparing differences in information channels used between segments

	Sporties (N=297)	Wellbeing Enthusiasts (N=536)	Spa Goers (N=819)	X ²	Sig.
Magazines	53 (17%)	151 (28%)	160 (20%)	17.76	p<0.001
Radio	1 (0%)	25 (5%)	20 (2%)	13.93	p=0.001
Travel agencies	29 (10%)	86 (16%)	101 (12%)	7.42	p=0.024
Internet	273 (92%)	490 (91%)	762 (93%)	1.280	p=0.527
Newspaper	53 (18%)	126 (24%)	159 (19%)	4.857	p=0.088
Television	14 (5%)	44 (8%)	60 (7%)	3.602	p=0.165
Brochures	145 (49%)	276 (52%)	386 (47%)	2.467	p=0.291
Guidebooks	57 (19%)	121 (23%)	146 (18%)	4.673	p=0.097
Friends and relatives	125 (42%)	225 (42%)	301 (37%)	4.795	p=0.091
Travel fairs	32 (11%)	70 (13%)	82 (10%)	3.088	p=0.213

Table 5. Comparing websites used in information search process between segments

	Sporties (N=297)	Wellbeing Enthusi- asts (N=536)	Spa Goers (N=819)	X ²	Sig.
Affiliate website	197 (66%)	345 (64%)	529 (65%)	0.364	p=0.833
Travel agents' web- sites	110 (37%)	217 (41%)	293 (36%)	3.103	p=0.212
Destination website	113 (38%)	208 (39%)	273 (33%)	4.901	p=0.086
Search engine	245 (83%)	461 (86%)	665 (81%)	5.376	p=0.068
DMO website	59 (20%)	86 (16%)	110 (13%)	7.138	p=0.028
Portals	42 (14%)	75 (14%)	79 (10%)	7.649	p=0.022
Newspaper and magazine website	39 (13%)	87 (16%)	123 (15%)	1.438	p=0.487
Discussion boards / blogs	51 (17%)	113 (21%)	125 (15%)	7.628	p=0.022
Social media	28 (9%)	98 (18%)	108 (13%)	13.605	p=0.001

Table 6. Comparing online buying behavior and review writing between segments

	Sporties (N=297)	Wellbeing Enthusiasts (N=536)	Spa Goers (N=819)	X ²	Sig.
Which of the following services have you purchased from the internet during the last 12 months?					
Accommodation	168 (57%)	250 (47%)	423 (52%)	7.887	p=0.019
Flight tickets	122 (41%)	197 (37%)	296 (36%)	2.349	p=0.309
Package holiday	57 (19%)	126 (24%)	156 (19%)	4.343	p=0.114
Car rental	23 (8%)	44 (8%)	36 (4%)	9.469	p=0.009
Ticket to an event or tourism destination	54 (18%)	91 (17%)	126 (15%)	1.434	p=0.488
Travel service	12 (4%)	18 (3%)	30 (4%)	0.259	p=0.879
None of the above	68 (23%)	176 (33%)	244 (30%)	9.122	p=0.010
Have you written online reviews during the past 12 months?				19.411	p<0.001
Yes	70 (24 %)	184 (35%)	200 (25 %)		
No	226 (76 %)	347 (65%)	616 (76%)		

Appendix 1

Earlier rural tourism segmentation studies

Segmentation variables	Validation variables	Country/city/region	Tourism market	Number of segments	Authors
Benefits sought	Socio-demographics, renting of accommodations, knowledge about destination, traveling companions, daily expenses, frequency of travel to rural areas	Spain, Murcia	Tourists staying in rural accommodations	5	Molera & Albaladejo, 2007
Benefits sought	Activities, socio-demographics, traveling companions, expenditure, type of lodging, why they chose the destination	North and centre of Portugal	All tourists staying at least one night in the area.	4	Kastenholz et al., 1999
Benefits sought	Activities, socio-demographics, accommodation preferences, traveling companions, frequency of travel to rural areas	Scotland: Glencoe, Dumfries & Galloway, farmhouse scheme	All tourists staying at least one night in the area; limited to English-speaking visitors.	4	Frochot, 2005
Benefits sought	Socio-demographics, economic cluster attractiveness	Madeira	Rural home visitors	4	Almeida et al., 2013
Travel motivations	Benefits sought, socio-demographics,	Finland	Visitors to a rural tourism website	4	Pesonen, 2012

Travel motivations	travel behaviour Socio-demographics, activities, travel and spending behaviour	Korea	Rural tourism village visitors	4	Park & Yoon, 2009
Length of stay & activity preferences	Expenditure, socio-demographics, travel behaviour, desired experiences, activities	West Virginia, USA	Fee-fishers	2 & 3	Oh & Schuett, 2010
Travel distance	Socio-demographics, trip-related characteristics, destination activities	US Midwest	Visitors to a rural tourism destinations	5	Cai & Li, 2009
