

Editorial

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Studies analysing the links with human health, well-being and the geographical context we live in have a very long history. Usually Hippocrates (c. 460–377 B.C.) is referred as the first person who noted (in writing) that the geographical context matters to human health and wellbeing. Now that, at least in industrialised countries, the occurrence of many infectious diseases has become rare, the non-communicable diseases, which have no specific aetiology, have emerged as major threat for human health and wellbeing. In addition, the fast pace of everyday life and symptoms of stress, for example, have led humans to increasingly search wellbeing from the natural environment. Hence, also geographical studies of health and wellbeing have seized to study the biological, cultural, social and environmental factors pertinent to human wellbeing, with the help of theories about society and cultural behaviour. In this year's Nordica Geographical Publications Yearbook 2016, we see a variety of studies addressing the health and wellbeing of individuals and populations in the Northern areas from different perspectives, all acknowledging also the (human-)geographical context.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region is inhabited by ca. 5 million people and involves the northernmost frontiers of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. As Emelyanova and Rautio illustrate in their

article, there is a substantial variability in many indicators of geographical inequality and wellbeing (e.g. depopulation, aging, fertility, mortality, human capital, environmental contamination, food security and housing) across the region. The variation and changes in these indicators have implications for the strategies, planning and policies that aim to support the sustainability and wellbeing of the area in the future.

On a more local scale, environmental governance may have implications for local wellbeing as well. In Kilpisjärvi case, as discussed by Jokinen, Sarkki and Heikkinen it was found that wellbeing and governance are closely tied, and issues such as the ability to self-determination, social relationships, trust and the sense of being respected that also have close links to wellbeing, can be enhanced by good governance. Environmental governance is also closely linked with ecosystem services, the studies of which have increased enormously in recent years. It is acknowledged that nature can have both positive and negative implication to individuals' physical and mental wellbeing. An important issue in these ecosystem (dis)services-health studies is the spatial relationship of the service providing units and the location of people. Kesälä's short article demonstrates how spatial relationship can be modelled by using geographical information system

(GIS) methods. The ecosystem (dis)services studies can, at best, be used for example in conservation efforts and in producing geographical health knowledge. In this time of climate change, the monitoring of the environment is also crucial. In a short article by Björk, the mountain snow depth is modelled with local scale terrain and vegetation surrogates. As mountain snow is a subject of high economic interest because it provides drinking and irrigation water and propulsion for the hydropower, the changes in it may in a long run impact also on the well-being of people.

In studies of rural and urban health differences, the rural areas are often seen, in many respects, as somehow more disadvantageous to human well-being and health as urban areas. However, there are also many aspects in rural areas, such as tranquillity, low pollution levels and closeness to nature, that are regarded to be beneficial to people's health and wellbeing. At the same time, there are many different 'rurals' in Northern Europe, and finding one all-encompassing definition to rural can be a demanding task, as the article by Tervo-Kankare and Tuohino shows. People are more and more conscious about feeling better, managing stress and slowing the pace of life, so there has been growing demand for wellbeing tourism in rural areas as nature is often used as a source of wellbeing. The (wellbeing)tourism can

also have other important implications to people living in rural areas and be essential for the vitality of the rural areas in the North. On the other hand an interesting study subject is the wellbeing and health benefits of the various wilderness areas to the visitors of these areas. Veteläinen, in her short article, sums the results of a study aiming to measure these impacts. There is some indication that different wilderness areas might affect differently to visitors experiences of health and wellbeing, though still much more research is needed on this topic.

Besides studying the issues relating with health and well-being in different geographical context, the gained information should be put in use. How to actually use the information we have, to benefit or enhance, for example, land use planning and communities' public health. Rönkkö's article presents a recent example of a development project of where knowledge was used to develop good quality living environments. The outcomes of these kinds of participatory projects may help to sustain and support human health and well-being in the North.

This said, we hope that the readers of this Yearbook will have thought-provoking time, and fresh new ideas will further inspire and enhance health and wellbeing in the North.