

Defining ‘rurality’ for rural wellbeing tourism - Halfacree’s conceptual triad of the production of rural space in practical-level tourism development in Northern Europe

Kaarina Tervo-Kankare*, Anja Tuohino**

* Geography Research Unit, University of Oulu. e-mail: kaarina.tervo-kankare@oulu.fi

** Centre for Tourism Studies, University of Eastern Finland

Abstract: The developers in Northern Europe are increasingly looking into tourism as a potential livelihood and contributor to employment and local economies, especially in rural (and peripheral) areas. One potential form of tourism to be further developed in these areas is wellbeing tourism that has started to gain increasing attention in rural areas. In addition, the development of the common rural wellbeing tourism market has started to increase in Northern Europe, and especially around the Baltic Sea. However, the nonexistence of shared understanding of the central concepts, ‘rural’ and ‘wellbeing tourism’ hinders international, collaborative development activities among the various tourism stakeholders operating in the area. Therefore, it is essential to construct a common conception in order to progress in the development of the common rural wellbeing tourism market.

In this article we describe one construction process of a commonly accepted, over-arching definition for ‘rural tourism’ or ‘rurality’ in a transnational and multi-stakeholder development project. Our aim is to examine the applicability of the well-known triad understanding of the ‘rural’, originally introduced by Halfacree, in this context. The triad has been utilised in different tourism-related contexts, but its practicality and potential for use in tourism development has been studied less. The definition process we describe in this article shows that the triad cannot be directly utilised for practical-level tourism development purposes. The results indicate that a more critical approach or even deconstruction of Halfacree’s triad could give more fresh and new angles to the development of rural tourism products.

Keywords: rural tourism, wellbeing tourism, tourism development, Halfacree, rurality



Introduction

Tourism in Northern Europe is not a new phenomenon. It has, however, been a destination considered less accessible and attractive than the traditional (mass) tourism destinations in southern Europe (Hall & Müller 2008). Lately, this perception has been changing, both due

to a stronger emphasis among northern tourism actors, e.g. governments, regional authorities and developers; but also due to the changing appetite and preferences among tourists (Lane & Kastenholtz 2015). Many populations and developers in Northern Europe welcome tourism as a new contributor to the economy and employment, especially in peripheral (rural)

areas where sources of income are scarce (Baldacchino *et al.* 2015). One potential form of tourism to be further developed in these areas is wellbeing tourism that has started to gain increasing attention and a foothold in rural areas. In addition, the development of the common rural wellbeing tourism market has started to increase in Northern Europe, and especially around the Baltic Sea. This growth strongly relies on the use of nature as a source of wellbeing (e.g. Hjalager *et al.* 2011; Konu *et al.* 2014; Smith & Puczko 2010), of which the 'Nordic Wellbeing' concept is a good example (e.g. Konu *et al.* 2014; Tuohino *et al.* 2013).

The growing demand for wellbeing tourism arises from consumers' needs: the people of today want to feel better, to slow the effects of aging, to manage their stress, and to prevent age-related illnesses (Kandampully 2014). In addition, as Kandampully (2014) discusses, present health services consumers increasingly assume decision-making roles and thus control over these services. Currently, the wellbeing tourism sector is responding to this paradigm shift, and wellness and wellbeing tourism services can also be found in an increasing number of rural areas. In addition, many of the wellbeing tourism products are based on natural resources, which are abundant in rural areas. Nevertheless, despite the growing importance of wellbeing tourism services located in rural areas, no overarching definition exists for the concept 'rural wellbeing tourism' while 'wellbeing tourism' is already a somewhat well-known term (Hjalager *et al.* 2015; Smith and Puczko 2014). Therefore, the following questions

arise: What does the term 'rural' add to this specific form of tourism? How do the various tourism stakeholders understand the concept, and what kind of 'rural' as a phenomenon, image and environment may be the source of wellbeing in this context?

'Rural' and 'rurality' are concepts that have been extensively examined in the European context (Dong *et al.*, 2013). Nonetheless, despite the eminent importance of 'rural tourism', the definition for it has remained unclear and contested, not just in Northern Europe, the focal region of this article, but also in general. Lane's (1994) simplified definition, for example, suggests that rural tourism is tourism that happens in the countryside. As noted by Lane himself, this simplistic definition does not bring us any closer to the core idea(s) of rural tourism as it leads to the question: What then is countryside? Moreover, in their incisive summary about the essence of rural tourism, Jepson and Sharpley (2015: 1, see also Lane and Kastenholz 2015) state: "Rural tourism is a diverse activity. Occurring in both natural and built rural environments, it takes numerous forms and, as a consequence, the reasons or motivations for participating in rural tourism are equally numerous." On this basis, it is clear that it is difficult to get a grip of the essence of 'rural' in rural tourism, let alone in rural wellbeing tourism.

This inaccuracy in the meaning of the central concepts makes the development of tourism more difficult. Diverse destination marketing and development organisations as well tourism operators, often consisting of micro and small enterprises, may need help in developing understanding(s) of these concepts in order for them to appeal

to consumers (the tourists) as well. In this article, we introduce, as a case study, a transnational and multi-stakeholder research and development project that, among others, tackles the abovementioned issue – the definition of the ‘rural’ for the development of rural wellbeing tourism in Northern Europe. The overall objective of the project was to innovate, enhance, develop and promote tangible, sustainable thematic rural wellbeing tourism products in Baltic and Nordic Countries, in close collaboration with tourism stakeholders; micro and small tourism enterprises (SMTEs), destination marketing organisations (DMOs), and research institutes from five countries. Our aim in this article is to describe the definition process, where we used the well-known conceptual triad understanding of the production of rural spaces as the centre of our theoretical framework. This theory, introduced by Halfacree (2006) and Woods (2011) has been utilised in different tourism-related contexts, and we wanted to evaluate the practicality and potential of this tool for use in tourism development. Therefore, in this article we, besides describing the definition process of the project, critically evaluate the suitability of the theory in this specific context.

‘Rural tourism’ and the essence of ‘rural’

Rural tourism

Tourism in rural areas is considered to have an increasingly important role in rural development plans throughout the world. This includes Europe, where rural areas are estimated to cover 80 to 90 percent of

the land area (within the European Union), and host over half of the population (European Citizens’ Panel 2008; European Commission 2014). Lately, the role of tourism and recreation as agents of change and control in these areas has become more evident (Butler, Hall & Jenkins 1998; Daugstad 2008). While rural areas have been used for touristic (recreation and leisure) purposes for centuries, it was not until after the Second World War that this kind of development started to increase significantly. In the early phase, rural tourism mainly consisted of landscape viewing, and occasionally also hunting and fishing (Butler 2011), but presently, rural tourism is a highly diversified form of tourism for which several definitions exist (Jepson & Sharpley 2015; Lane & Kastenholtz 2015). Moreover, besides being an agent of change, rural tourism is nowadays also considered an applicable method for the presentation and preservation of natural and cultural heritage objects such as landscapes, traditions and customs (Cawley & Gillmor 2008; Daugstad 2008; Baležentis *et al.* 2012). Therefore, the relationship between rural and tourism is complex and has multiple meanings.

In Northern Europe, rural tourism is considered a mechanism that makes an essential contribution to the vitality of rural areas (e.g. Daugstad 2008; Bell *et al.* 2009a). It has been a common trend in the Nordic countries that the decline of traditional livelihoods (e.g. agriculture and reindeer husbandry) in rural and peripheral regions has increased the importance of tourism in providing job opportunities and maintaining services in these areas (Heberlein, Fredman & Vuorio 2002; Fredman & Tyrväinen 2010). The same

applies to the Baltic countries Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, or more generally the former Soviet republics, even though the development of agriculture in these countries has been somewhat different and the decrease of agricultural employment has been more dramatic than in the Nordic countries (Halfacree 2007, Herslund 2007; Juska 2007; Baležentis *et al.* 2012).

As Lane and Kastenholz (2015: 1150) state in their article summarising the development of rural tourism, new generation tourism development is needed in order to maintain the vitality of rural tourism. They also mention that what has been common for rural tourism is that it has involved numerous entrepreneurs, all having their own understanding of the 'rural' as an environment for tourism. The phenomenon has been studied only little, and collaboration between researchers and operational/managerial stakeholders has been limited. Therefore, there is a need for new approaches that integrate operational and academic views, and where research findings may lead to faster development(s) and more radical innovations.

What is 'rural'?

The definition of the rural space is a crucial question that sets the framework for the concept of rural wellbeing tourism. While the term 'rural' was originally a term used to refer to areas outside cities, nowadays it is a much contested term and varying definitions for it exist. Rural space can, for example, be related to certain locations or certain activities, as is often the case when referring to rural tourism (Sharpley & Sharpley 1997). It is often

connected to agriculture and food supply, but often, especially in official documents, it is defined via population density, landscapes and remoteness, and sometimes also via the share of agricultural employment (European Citizens' Panel 2008). Also, the size of the settlement may be an important marker for 'rurality', as well as land use and structure of the economy, the presence of traditional social structures or certain backwardness and physical isolation from economic, social and cultural networks (see Bramwell & Lane 1994; Butler, Hall & Jenkins 1998; Juska 2007).

However, there are no universal measures that can be broadly applied, rather, there is high local (national) variation in definitions concerning 'rurality' according to the specific characteristics such as population density. According to the standards in more densely populated areas in Europe, for example, most parts of the Nordic and Baltic countries are categorised as 'rural' when examining the population density or settlement (or town) size (according to European Commission's typology from year 2013, based on population density, only 1.2% of the territory in Denmark is urban, 2.8% in Finland, 16.2% in Latvia 16.2%, and 14.9% in Lithuania). However, this does not necessarily follow the abovementioned countries' and their citizens' views about 'rurality' and rural life (e.g. Anderson 2004) (and also the tourists' views/perceptions on 'rurality' matter!). In Denmark, for example, the rural areas are comprised of several types of areas, differing in their distance to growth centres, in population density and demographics, in income levels, etc. (Kristensen 2004); there is no typical example of rural space. In Lithuania, on the

other hand, a rather exact definition exists for rural tourism, on the basis of which a definition for 'rural' can be developed: "rural areas and small towns with a total population under 3000 people" (Turizmo įstatymas, translation by Zabaliunas, 2015). Even though this kind of definition is very clear, it cannot be applied everywhere. 'Rural', especially in the tourism context, is something more than the numbers referring to population density, the distance from growth centres and the share of agricultural employment.

One approach to 'rurality' has been introduced by Halfacree (2006, 2007) and later modified by Woods (2011). They treat rural space from three different, yet interacting, angles, all focusing on the different perspectives on 'rurality': those of spatial practices (rural localities), representations of space (formal representation of the 'rural') and lived spaces (everyday lives of the 'rural'). In short, these ideas refer to the production, reproduction and employment of 'rurality' and rural space (Woods 2011: 12). As Woods points out, the 'rural' is an imagined space – the juxtaposition of the countryside and the city is artificial by nature. Therefore, it is this artificiality and imagination that needs to be studied more closely. In a sense, this approach also follows the idea of Mormont (1990, cited in Woods 2011: 16) when he says that "the 'rural' is first imagined, then represented, then takes on material form as places, landscapes and ways of life are shaped to conform to the expectations that the idea of the 'rural' embodied". The value of this approach lies in the ideas it can give to rural tourism businesses, who are struggling to

identify, develop and market the 'rurality' in their wellbeing tourism products.

Halfacree and Woods' ideas about 'rurality' have been used in diverse tourism-related contexts such as Grimsrud's (2011) study on rural migration and gender relations, Rye and Berg's (2011) examination of the second home phenomenon in Norway and Yarwood's (2015) ethnographic study on the outdoors. In addition, Frisvoll (2012), in his study on power in the production of rural spaces, heavily critiqued Halfacree's views. However, there seems to be no examples of the triad being used in practical-level tourism development. Therefore it is interesting to see to what extent the three perspectives can contribute to rural wellbeing tourism development.

Method and description of the case study project

As said, the aim of the project was to create a comprehensive understanding of 'rural' and 'rurality' with wellbeing tourism as a guiding concept. Methodologically, the definition process discussed in this article can be treated as a face-to-face Delphi method (see Graefe & Armstrong 2011) or focus groups. The process consisted of two face-to-face meetings between which an academic desk job took place. As a result, the final definition for 'rural tourism' in the study area was formed, and then applied in practice at the local level for wellbeing tourism development and marketing.

The process started with gathering together representatives of five rural tourism destinations, rural tourism associations or destination marketing organisations,

located in Norway, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Denmark. Also three academic members of two tourism departments focusing on rural tourism from Finland and Denmark attended the meeting, as well as a representative of the Finnish Tourism Board. Thus, altogether ten rural wellbeing tourism experts were present at the first workshop held in June 2014. The purpose of the first workshop was to set goals for the transnational research and development actions and to discuss the understanding of the definitions of 'wellbeing tourism', 'rural', 'rurality', and 'rural tourism'. Defining 'rural tourism' proved to be a difficult task, which encouraged the idea to share the process with the academic audience. Instead of reaching a consensus about 'rural', the participants presented critically differing understanding of both 'rural' and 'wellbeing tourism'. Therefore, the project members agreed on getting back to the topic in the second project meeting, five months later. During the break, the academics were given the task to develop the definition more, and to bring their findings to the 2nd workshop for discussion.

The second phase, including three academics, focused on gathering existing scientific and political information about the term and their understanding, especially in the project countries. This was done by implementing a comprehensive literature review guided by Halfacree's framework. Methodologically, the work mainly consisted of a desk job. The phase was supported by collaborators, e.g. by providing researchers with national/local information.

The third phase, as part of the second project management meeting, was the summarising workshop in November 2014,

where researchers presented the findings and they were discussed with collaborators with the aim to construct and agree on the shared transnational definition for 'rural'. In this second, more structured face-to-face meeting, the participants reflected and commented on the mainly theory-based outcomes presented by the academics. The participants of this session included four researchers, two co-researchers and ten practitioners (3 developers, 1 entrepreneur, 1 national tourism organisation representative and 5 sales and/or marketing persons). The outcomes of the whole process and the initial framing of 'rural tourism' form the results of this article. They will be presented next.

Results

Defining the 'rural' based on academic and political literature: Three perspectives on 'rurality' in Northern Europe

Representation of the rural ways

The formal representations of the 'rural' are, in a sense, the most accessible definitions of the 'rural': documentation is often available in public forums, and guided by international agreements about 'rurality' and rural development. In this context, also local communities' marketing material and media representations can be considered as examples of the formal representations. One very central form of formal representations is the ideas brought out in development papers. The OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) classification from year 1993 (presented in Lane 2009:

355; see also European Commission 2013), for example, divides the rural areas into three categories based on distance – the geographical, economic and socio-cultural – from urban areas.

In another source, by the Nordic Council (2000), the rural areas in the Nordic and Baltic countries are discussed from the national point of view. Even though differences exist in reference to the importance of diverse sectors, agriculture and forestry (and occasionally fisheries) are the focus areas and dominating livelihoods, on the basis of which the understanding of the countryside is formed in all countries. The diversification of rural livelihoods is another important issue, as development is mainly directed towards it. It can be said that the main rural development objectives in the five countries are very similar on a national scale.

In summary, the national rural development plans of the project countries have very much in common. The understandings of the ‘rural’ in the participating countries include the following connective characteristics:

- ‘Rural’ as a space dominated by agriculture and forestry.
- ‘Rural’ as a space having specific characteristics, such as landscapes modified by agricultural processes or ways of living that need to be maintained.
- ‘Rural’ as a space where the quality of life needs to be improved (or at least sustained).
- ‘Rural’ as a space where diversification and modernisation of the livelihoods is essential.

Rural locality – distinctive spatial areas, resources or practices linked to either production or consumption

The term ‘rural locality’ refers to rural space as something distinctive from other areas. It is through the resources or practices taking place therein that this distinctiveness is created (Woods 2011). As the formal representations show, agriculture is considered to have a central role as an agent modifying the rural space. The physical state and development of rural areas have not been equal throughout the study area, nor have the agricultural practices been identical (Herslund 2007, Turner 2007). Therefore, it is clear that the localities of ‘rural’ are based on practices relating to production and consumption and are not identical either even though certain characteristics can be identified in all areas.

Lately, the rural space has been increasingly turning into an area of both consumption and production (instead of only production of food and raw material) (Ilbery & Kneafsey 2000). This change has affected and continues to affect the rural localities considerably. Besides the traditional modes of production and consumption of the countryside, such as agriculture, the rural areas are increasingly taken over by second homes. Even though the ‘consumption’ of second homes (see Halfacree 2012) modifies the rural space in many ways, they are, nonetheless, considered the “last fortresses of the traditional and real countryside” which promote “connection to wild nature, counter-balance to urban life, family togetherness and the possibility to engage in various nature-based

activities" (Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen 2010: 202–203, Rye & Berg, 2011). The constant change of the 'rural', trends such as counter urbanisation and commuting-practices, are very much different than the ones attached to the rural idyll. However, these practices can remain unobserved by the tourists and have less impact on the 'rural' (landscape) as shown to tourists. Thus, the rural locality as seen by tourists' eyes remains the one modified mostly by agricultural and forestry practices rather than these newer practices.

Traditionally, the 'rural' as a location for leisure and recreation has been consumed by pleasure-seekers: hunting, playing, strolling, bathing and escaping the pressures of urban life are central elements of rural tourism (Woods 2011: 92). From the perspective of tourism consumption, the distinctive features of 'rural' revolved around visual issues. Thus sightseeing and consuming landscapes formed the basis of recreational use. Also in walking/strolling/tramping the visual element held a central role (Butler 2011; Woods 2011). The landscapes admired were and continue to be landscapes that have been modified by humans, either by agriculture, forestry, fishing industry, sometimes also extracting industries, and other human actions (see Frisvoll 2012). Sometimes tourists prefer the environment and landscape modified by humans over landscapes in a natural state. Therefore, it is not maybe a wonder that documents about rural tourism in the study area mostly refer to areas where human presence can be seen. Much less, if any, references are made to (natural) forests or to wilderness, even though these areas are also part of the 'rural'. This notion is parallel to Butler's definition (2011:

16) of rural areas being "those areas that are beyond urban areas but which have permanent human presence and may or may not be under agricultural production". The image of the traditional or archetypal Latvian landscape, for example, is "one with a farmstead with thatched roofs set in an orchard with hayfields and a bathhouse, not far from the forest edge. Oak and lime trees, a pond, storks nesting and haycocks in the fields set off this bucolic scene" (Bell *et al.* 2009a: 304). The wilderness, the untouched nature, is present but often stays in the background. However, in the context of wellbeing tourism especially, this character may have unforeseen potential (see Hall & Boyd 2005; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen 2010; Pesonen 2012; Martins *et al.*, 2014).

The importance of landscapes becomes clear in all studies focusing on rural tourism (Daugstad 2008; Baležentis *et al.* 2012; Bell *et al.* 2009b; Carneiro *et al.* 2015). Also, the engagement with the landscape is an important aspect (Daugstad 2008), and the consuming the landscape (also atmosphere, fresh air, etc.). Scenery, nature, tranquillity, safety, and heritage are the attributes of the 'rural' that are being commoditised and sold in all the countries, often based on the ideas of rural idylls (see Bell 2006, Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen 2010). Also, the FinRelax study (Eronen *et al.* 2015) analysing the Finnish wellbeing tourism in rural areas rides on these attributes: the core of 'rurality' is formed by nature and related matters, e.g. lakes, coasts, archipelago, sea, forests, hills, fields, tundra, wilderness, natural phenomenon (northern lights, seasons), landscapes, clean air, water, resources (berries, mushroom), topography, food, peace and quietness,

safety, freedom, uncrowdedness, diversity of activities (ice swimming, rowing, taking courses, familiarising oneself with forms of agriculture), traditions and cultural experiences.

An interesting issue worth-mentioning is the accessibility of rural space in the participating countries. The everyman's right, or the right of the public to access rural (or forest) areas is one aspect affecting the consumption of rural areas, but the legislation concerning it in the five countries varies. In Norway and Finland, especially, the public has free access to natural and forested areas, no matter the ownership, and holds certain rights such as berry picking and mushroom collecting, swimming, etc. In Lithuania and Latvia, the free access is more limited, concerning only state or publicly owned forests, whereas private lands have limited access (Bell *et al.* 2009b). This has a profound impact on the utilisation of the rural areas for the purposes of wellbeing tourism.

Rural living

The final aspect of the rural space, rural lives, completes the understandings of 'rurality'. Interestingly, in the context of tourism, the characteristics of the 'rural' (or countryside) often differ from other contexts (such as land-use planning, development): tourism focuses on issues such as nature, cleanliness, idyllic landscapes and nostalgia, while in rural development the discussions revolve around different issues such as backwardness, (un)employment, number of tractors per farm, etc. (Juska 2007). The characterisation of rural development describes the reality in which the rural

people live; it is the local people who are, for example, struggling with unemployment, commuting to growth centres for work, or earning their living in these surroundings. Even though these lived lives may take place in surroundings that hold the characteristics of rural idylls, they may be something very different from the tourists' understanding. As Frisvoll (2012) states, the lives of the rural may mostly include the locals' everyday chores – in relation to their livelihoods (e.g. farming, fishing, tourism services, commuting to work to urban areas, etc.) and home. Interestingly, as Herslund (2007: 55) in his study concerning Estonia and Latvia mentions, it is possible that the everyday chores of rural tourism entrepreneurs sometimes do not include many practical chores with the tourists, but rather consist of the challenge to run a profitable business.

Moreover, as at least agriculture, fishing and tourism often utilise a seasonal workforce, the seasonal workers' activities may also hold a remarkable role – that is, during the high season, of course. In regions, where second home tourism is an important activity, also these tourists' visits may become an integral part of rural living. However, the seasonal variations in this sense may be remarkable – the 'rural' during the high season may have a completely different face than the 'rural' during the low season.

These lived localities influence the understanding of the rural space – both by affecting the landscapes and daily rhythms of the 'rural', but also via local peoples' views about life in the 'rural'. In addition, the activities (their nature and amount, tourists' and locals' participation in them,

their consumptiveness, etc.) produced for the tourists and/or the branding of tourism destinations may also impact rural lives and living.

The researchers' desk job attested to the understanding that there is no one specific 'rurality': the rural space, when approached in Halfacree's threefold framework is something unique, and constantly changing. Moreover, the discourses about 'rural' and 'rurality' continue to change over time (Svendsen 2004; Juska 2007). Rather than aiming to develop an overarching definition for rural space, it is therefore wiser to focus on certain unifying characteristics that can be linked to rural spaces throughout the countries participating in the study. One approach can be to assess the 'rural' from the above-discussed viewpoints in pursuit of finding the most interesting potential resources for rural wellbeing tourism, especially from the transnational perspective.

Defining the 'rural': developers' and practitioners' inputs

At this stage, the project participants' roles became crucial – they have the utmost knowledge about the understanding(s) of 'rurality' in the countries they represent. The same applies to the concept of wellbeing tourism – different understandings about it exist, and one is not better than the other. However, in order to promote international rural wellbeing tourism, these understandings need to be shared and combined. During the second project meeting, the construction of a shared definition was started with the researchers'

introduction on the abovementioned triad approach.

After the academics' presentation the topic was discussed. Participants exchanged views and understandings, sometimes as a heated debate. It is important to note that even though the case study countries are geographically relatively similar, their cultural backgrounds and histories differ, which affects their understandings of 'rural'. In addition, the local resources available differ and can impact the understanding of 'rural', but also of 'wellbeing'. Therefore, the participants had difficulties in understanding and agreeing with others' views and ideas. Also, the objective expressed by the academics, the listing of shared 'rural' characteristics on the basis of the presented threefold framework, proved an impossible task.

Finally, rather than providing a list of characteristics that should be used as markers for 'rurality', the participants created a definition for 'rural' that was directly situated in the wellbeing tourism context. In order to reach a consensus, the definition had to be simplified. Even though the researchers' desk job showed the difficulty in forming an absolute concept for 'rural', they were supportive for including descriptive characteristics in the definition. The industry representatives were more prone to keep the definition very general, leaving space for regional specialities to be added when needed. Therefore, the final definition was formed by listing keywords and then including the ones that all participants could somehow agree with. The final definition is as follows:

“Rural wellbeing tourism should be realised on the basis (resources and needs) of the local community, therefore benefitting mostly the local community (give added value to the local community). It should offer access to nature, provide local food and other local ingredients, including staff, and the owner/host/provider should show a personal attitude in his/her operations (personal meeting with staff is important). All these should take place in a rural setting.”

In short, these characteristics can be summarised under three **Ls**, all taking place **in a rural setting**; or under four **Rs**: Rural (Local) community, Rural (Local) providers, Rural (Local) products in a Rural setting. When each country’s national definitions are applied to this definition, in addition to the definition of wellbeing tourism, the general definition of rural wellbeing tourism in each country can be created.

Furthermore, the participants reminded that it is possible, for marketing purposes, to utilise certain common characteristics that are considered to be valued by the potential wellbeing tourists as well. These characteristics may include allusions to healing environments, beauty, cleanliness, safety, tranquillity [“escape from the urban misery” (Daugstad 2008: 403); see also Sharpley & Jepson 2011], green elements, etc., as well as the often utilised opposites to urban life. In this sense, the focus can be set on the ‘rural idyll’ rather than ‘rural’ per se, the aim of which is to portray a positive and appealing image of the rural environment, lifestyle, community and landscapes. Some issues that need to be taken into consideration are: ‘rural’ characteristics

should be based on reality and existing issues. Rural wellbeing tourism should aim toward and help in supporting/protecting the specific characteristics of ‘rurality’ (e.g. cultural heritage based on fishing; certain agricultural manners and the landscapes they provide; wildlife; tranquillity; etc.) that are the foundation of the unique attractiveness of each destination.

Discussion

This article has described the construction process of a commonly accepted, overarching definition for ‘rural tourism’ or ‘rurality’ in a transnational and multi-stakeholder development project. The main achievement at a conceptual level is that the project managed to develop a common understanding of the term, both transnationally and nationally in each partner country. Even though the final outcome was not especially innovative or new, the process was considered fruitful: According to the project’s internal self-evaluation, the partners agreed that the process opened their eyes to see things in different ways, especially in understanding the variation and potential of ‘rural’ (and wellbeing tourism) in a transnational context, but also the need for cooperation between academic and various stakeholders. Despite the different starting points, the project seems to be a good example of beneficial cooperation between academics and practical-level stakeholders. Also, the follow-up of the project has showed that the definition process and knowledge exchange, as well as the whole project, have had the desired impact: As an outcome,

the project partners have developed new wellbeing tourism products in rural areas.

This case study showed that the process of creating a definition for one certain purpose can be a difficult task. Even though rural tourism was a somewhat common phenomenon throughout the study region, it became evident that the understandings concerning 'rural' were different among project participants. The inclusion of all the viewpoints in an aim to reach consensus may lead to an overtly vague and lame definition. Therefore, these kinds of representations or definitions do not work solemnly, but the creation of unique, authentic and attractive rural spaces also calls for the understanding of rural localities and lives. While shared characteristics are of importance in the definition and development of rural (wellbeing) tourism, it is worth citing the idea of Woods (2011: 141) about the new mode(s) of rural development where the emphasis is put on developing the resources found within a rural region, as a bottom-up model, and integrated, rather than sectoral development and locked with prejudices. This type of development model appreciates the rural regions as having unique social, cultural and environmental resources that can be harnessed in individual and divergent development paths. This means that also the localities have unique characteristics, affected by the diversification measures realised in each destination.

The definition process showed that Halfacree's triad cannot be directly utilised for practical-level tourism development purposes. The results indicate that a more critical approach or even deconstruction of Halfacree's triad could better give

fresh and new angles to the development of rural tourism products. For example, the representations, spatial practices and the lived lives, spiced with metaphorical understandings and images of the 'rural' can contribute better to the creation of the 'rural' used for touristic purposes. In addition, following the critique by Frisvoll (2012), the utilisation of formal representations is a power issue. By including also less formal representations of the 'rural', such as regional and local, or even individual-level documentation, the 'rural' becomes more versatile, which gives more potential for development. The representations should not be a privilege of the formal quarters of society: also people living in both rural and urban surroundings construct their own representations of the rural in their everyday lives. In addition, the tourists' representations of the 'rural' may also hold value, that was mostly understudied in this project (only a general market study was realised as part of the activities). In addition, it could be beneficial for rural tourism businesses and for the tourism developers and marketers to understand and treat the consumers, the tourists, as a segment of rural people searching for rural experiences. This might lead to fresh ideas and new angles to the development of rural tourism products.

Considering this, it is worth looking back to the article by Frisvoll (2012), where he discusses the power relations in the construction of 'rurality'. The 'rural' should not only follow the ideas presented by the formal officials, but also informal stakeholders should be included in the processes like this. As argued by Tuohino and Konu (2014), the powerful regional

or local organisations can take a leading role and silence the voices of smaller and weaker organisations. In this case study, the researchers could have better brought forward the voices of tourists, for example, rather than giving so much emphasis to the place-bound developers and in the final stage, the producers of rural wellbeing tourism products. Hopefully, these aspects will be considered in future tourism development projects.

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