

Future prospects of nature-based recreation and tourism in Finland

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Introduction

Recent changes in tourism and recreation have been driven by socio-demographic shifts, increases in disposable time and incomes, technological changes, transport developments, and emerging systems of policy and governance (Williams & Shaw 2009). In addition, population growth, urbanization and decreasing environmental quality have been identified as megatrends in tourism, recreation and leisure (Gartner & Lime 2000).

In developed, western countries populations are aging, younger generations are welleducated, and middle-classes are dominating population groups. Increase in recreation demand is associated with higher education level and middle-age (Manning 2011). In regard to the demand of outdoor recreation, changes in socioeconomic structure of society can be detrimental: population concentrates in urban areas, and countryside communities suffer from aging dwellers and lack of job opportunities. However, e.g. in Finland, visits to countryside cottages and recreational areas has been increasing (Hiltunen & Rehunen 2014).

There is a general tendency for decreasing amount of areas with natural vegetation in urban proximity, and also areas which provide access for recreation. Use of natural resources and land use is intensifying in many ways. Warming climate, deteriorated water quality, visual landscape poverty, loss of natural and cultural heritage and biodiversity are central issues of environmental quality. All these aspects of environmental quality and amount of resources for recreation are seen to be threatened in the future.

Changes in our everyday lives, in social and physical environment and resources available, put pressure for agencies which provide recreational services, and finance and administrate the sector, to better understand the on-going changes and also to anticipate better what the future will be and what kind of demands are expected. The future is unknown, but broad general directions can be predicted and reasonably dealt with.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to identify societal driving forces and trends of outdoor recreation, and to capture the insights and understanding of alternative futures among the actors working in research and practice in the field of nature-based recreation and tourism in Finland.

Data and methods

Experts in recreation resources management, sport, land use and forestry planning were invited to discuss about the future of nature-based recreation and tourism (n=39). Three workshops were organized in 2015. The workshop material consisted of pre-materials and structured discussions including the use of future table technics. The pre-materials included two web-surveys. The first survey focused on state of art concerning how knowledge is implemented and the needs for new information. Second survey was a 'mindmap' -type of survey, which invited the participant to suggest driving forces and important items related to future of outdoor recreation.

Results and conclusions

The three workshops produced nine different alternative and possible descriptions of futures for nature-based recreation and tourism (Table 1). The time perspective was 2030.

Table 1. Alternative futures of outdoor recreation.

Name of alternative future	A short description of content
Polarised society	Population groups are more separated in terms of time and money available for recreation, which is reflected in selection of activities and participation frequencies.
Finns close to nature	Neighbourhood nature strengthens the nature relationship of young people and immigrants
Immigrants close to nature	Nature and outdoor recreation activities can act as a tool for integration of immigrants in the Finnish society, which is supported by voluntary work.
Nature for everyone	Neighbourhood nature helps senior citizens to get health benefits from nature and exercise. Equality, good environmental awareness, responsibility, sense of community and principles of sharing economy are realised in recreational use of nature.
Nature for the elite	This dystopia needs to be prevented.
Supermarket of recreation	Urbanized population desire to get back to nature. Multiple subcultures of outdoor recreation appear, more activities are subject to charge, and productisation of nature increases.
Neighbourhood nature	Neighbourhood nature maintains our well-being enabling at least with short neighbourhood visits, edible parks, i.e. the increase in urban farming. Recreational services maintained by the municipalities and the state are important, but the question is whether or not maintaining them is possible.
Nature-based economy	Willingness to pay for recreational use of nature is increasing, offering new livelihood opportunities for landowners in the countryside.
Diversifying Finland	Multiculturalism and internationality have an ever stronger role. There are more demands placed on the service network.
Polarised future	There is great variation in recreational use of nature between the crowded southern Finland and the large sparsely populated area. People must be prepared to pay for the use of nature.

Most of the alternative futures were described to have positive development for outdoor recreation and representing changes, which were suggested to be supported by society. Only one of the futures was clearly interpreted as dystopia, which should be prevented. The most important means to support equality of access to nature and, as a consequence a fair distribution of health and wellbeing benefits from nature to all, were land use planning, which secure the neighbourhood nature, and the provision of recreational service close to home offered by municipalities and society in general.

In Finland, the prospects for future relying on the policy and practice of today, which suggests that society, the state and municipalities, pay a major role for provision on recreational services, even that the needs for recreation are going to be more diversified and population is polarized in terms of time and money available for recreation.



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